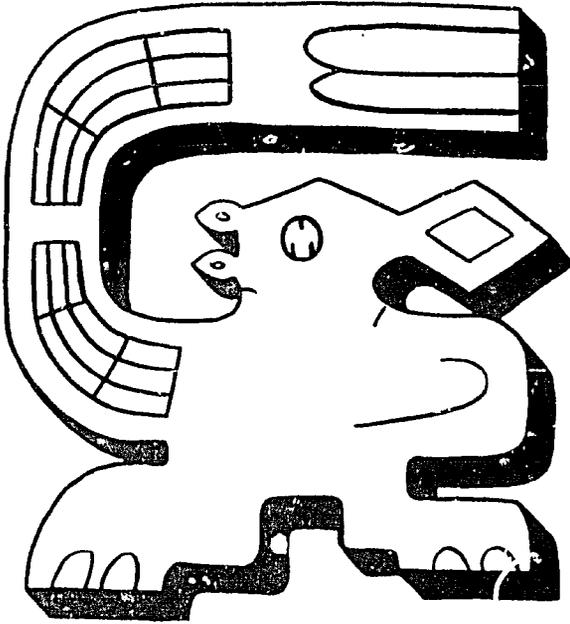


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How Traditional Rural Patrons Lose Legitimacy

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HOW TRADITIONAL RURAL PATRONS LOSE LEGITIMACY :

A Theory with Special Reference to Southeast Asia

By James C. Scott and Benedict J. Kerkvliet

I. INTRODUCTION¹

The French counter-revolutionary peasants of the Vendée, who marched with local curés and shouted « Vive la Noblesse », « Vive le Roi », were no less active politically than revolutionary peasants who murdered nobles and sacked chateaux and abbeys. Filipino tenant farmers in Central Luzon who canvass votes for their landlords are no less active than tenants who canvass votes for advocates of land reform. The crucial question, therefore, is not so much whether peasants act or not, but rather whose side they are on — whether they are mustered out in the faction of some local notable or whether they act, in some sense, on behalf of more strictly peasant interests as opposed to those of agrarian elites. As long as the peasant sees his relation to agrarian elites as one of legitimate dependence — as long as he feels himself part of a vertical community — peasant « class-consciousness » is unlikely. Accounting for the rupture of these vertical ties, where they existed, is thus an integral part of any explanation for the sustained appearance of the peasantry *qua* peasantry on the historical stage.

This paper attempts to understand the process by which the vertical social bonds which often linked peasants to an oligarchic political order have, in certain portions of Southeast Asia, weakened or broken completely. The interpretation of agrarian class relations developed here has both a general and a particular aim. First, it presents a general analytical framework that tries to distinguish between what peasants regard as unjust dependence and what they see as legitimate dependence. Second, we believe the argument is applicable to changes in rural class relations in much of Central

¹We are grateful to the National Institute of Mental Health and the Psychology and Politics Program at Yale University for supporting this research. The argument has benefited greatly from the criticisms of Ed Friedman, Fred Hayward, Frank Weinstein, Lewis Austin, Marvin Rogers, Ricard Merelman, Murray Edelman, Francine Frankel, and Howard Leichter.

Luzon (the Philippines), the Mekong Delta (Viet-nam), and Lower Burma. Without undertaking a detailed application of the framework to these areas, we provide a brief empirical illustration from Central Luzon and outline schematically the broad effects of colonial structural change in Southeast Asia on peasant-elite relations.²

In terms of theory, the general question addressed here is, « What is the basis of patron-client structures of deference and how do they lose their moral force ? » An answer to this question can provide only one segment of an analytical bridge between rural patron-client politics and more « class-based » forms of peasant action. Although older patron-client bonds may lose legitimacy, new vertical links may join peasants to politicians, office-holders, or rural bosses and provide many of the essential services of the older relationship. Where alternative links are not available, a patron class which loses legitimacy may nevertheless force compliance, and the peasantry itself may be fragmented by ethnic, religious, or regional cleavages that prevent the growth of horizontal ties and cooperation. Whether or not the agrarian elite's loss of legitimacy actually leads to peasant class activity thus depends on many facilitating or inhibiting factors which are outside the scope of this paper.

An analysis which stresses the social bonds uniting peasants with their social superiors — landlords, officials, or both — may be termed the patron-client model of social relations. A patron-client link is an exchange relationship or instrumental friendship between two individuals of different status in which the patron uses his own influence and resources to provide for the protection and material welfare of his lower status client and his family who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron.³ Where the patron-

² A companion paper by James C. SCOTT entitled *The Erosion of Patron-Client Bonds and Social Change in Rural Southeast Asia*, is theoretically less elaborate but deals more fully with Southeast Asia (*Journal of Asian Studies*, nov., 1972).

³ There is an extensive literature, mostly anthropological, dealing with patron-client bonds which we have relied on in constructing this definition. Some of the most useful include: George M. FOSTER, *The Dyadic Contract in Tzintzuntzan: Patron-Client Relationship*, *American Anthropologist*, 65, 1963, p. 1280-1294; Eric WOLF, *Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-Client Relations*, in M. BANTON, ed., *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*, New York, Praeger, 1966; J. CAMPBELL, *Honour, Family, and Patronage*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964; John Duncan POWELL, *Peasant Society and Clientelist Politics*,

client form of inter-class linkage predominates, it tends to produce a distinctive pattern of political life. Peasant clients are normally represented (even subsumed) in local and regional politics by their particular patrons;⁴ political competition thereby takes on a factional quality inasmuch as the contending units are patron-client networks quite similar to one another in class structure. For the peasants, the strong social links which tie them to elite patrons tend to act as a barrier to, or to weaken, horizontal ties between peasants *qua* peasants. The overall pattern, one similar to that of Western European feudalism, is that of a disaggregated peasantry attached vertically by bonds of loyalty to agrarian elites who form the active participants in an oligarchic political order. Many interpretations of rural politics in Southeast Asia conform closely to the patron-client-model.⁵

American Political Science Review, LXIV, 2, June, 1970; Carl LANDÉ, *Leaders, Factions and Parties. The Structure of Philippine Politics*, (Monograph No. 6), New Haven, Yale University-Southeast Asian Studies, 1964; and Alex WEINGROD, *Patrons, Patronage, and Political Parties*, Comparative Studies in Society and History, 19, July, 1968, p. 1142-1158. See also James C. SCOTT's *Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia*, American Political Science Review, LXVI, March, 1972, 91-113.

⁴ If clients occasionally switch patrons, they still remain the retainers of higher status figures.

⁵ Carl Landé, the first to explicitly apply the patron-client model to Southeast Asian politics, found it an indispensable tool in explaining the alliances between « big people » and « little people » and the absence of class-based voting which characterize Philippine politics. Cf. LANDÉ, *op. cit.* A careful study of village politics in Upper Burma by Manning Nash concludes that a villager's basic political decision was one of affiliating with a well-to-do patron who could protect him and advance his interests. Cf. *The Golden Road to Modernity. Village Life in Contemporary Burma*, New York, Wiley, 1965. Local politics in Malaysia and Thailand has been explained in comparable terms. Cf. M.G. SWIFT, *Malay Peasant Society in Jelebu*, London, Athlone Press, 1965 and Herbert PHILLIPS, *Thai Peasant Personality*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965. Even in rural Java where party labels might suggest a class based ideological polarization, one major interpretation has emphasized the factional nature of *santri-abangan* cleavages, in which parties are commonly led by rich peasants who bring along their kin, neighbors, and clients. Cf. Robert R. JAY, *Religion and Politics in Rural Central Java*, (Cultural Report Series), New Haven, Yale University-Southeast Asian Studies, 1963, p. 98-99. On this point also see Donald HINDLE, *The Communist Party of Indonesia 1951-1963*, Berkeley, Univ. of California, 1966, Ch. 14; Rex MORTIMER, *Class, Social Cleavage, and Indonesian Communism*, Indonesia, 8, C.C., 1969, p. 1-20; and W.F. WERTHERL, *From Aliran to Class Struggle in the Countryside of Java*, Pacific Viewpoints, 10, 2, Sept. 1969, p. 1-17.

Side by side with such indications of inter-class collaboration there is an equally impressive historical record of peasant defiance of both landholding elites and officials. The peasant movements and rebellions that mark the 20th century history of virtually every Southeast Asian country constitute the most visible portion of that record. Excluding what might be called primary resistance movements to colonial penetration in which *purely* peasant questions were not central, the major early 20th century peasant risings such as the Saya San Rebellion in Burma, peasant societies of Nglie An and Ha Tinh in Vietnam, the Sakdal movement in the Philippines, or the uprisings of 1926-27 in West-Java and Sumatra all involve, to some degree, questions of peasant taxes, access to land, distribution of the harvest, and so forth. The nationalist and religious themes that were also an integral part of these expressions of discontent cannot obscure the core of specifically peasant grievances which generated much of the participation. In each of these cases many of the same grievances provided a basis for the more secularized post-World War II insurrections of the Red Flag and White Flag communists in Burma, the Viet Minh, and the Huks. The continuity in targets of the earlier and later rebellions underscored the continuity of grievances; police and tax officials, large landowners, plantations, moneylenders were most often singled out as enemies of the rebels.

But rebellions were only the most spectacular evidence of a decline in deference; to confine our attention to them is too greatly understate the deterioration in rural class relations in the twentieth century, particularly in the commercialized lowland regions. Alternative linkages and structures of opportunity may make the loss of legitimacy among agrarian elites a rather peaceful affair. Even in the absence of such alternatives, the weight of elite and state power added to the classic organizational disabilities of the peasantry may prevent discontent from taking the form of a substantial rebellion. A more satisfactory barometer of rural unrest would have to include quite disparate expressions of discontent such as increases in arson, the growth of banditry, strikes, emigration, refusals to repay loans, delegations sent to provincial capitals, petitions, qualitative changes in the tone of landlord-tenant relations, and so forth.⁶ For these varied collective and individual indications of peasant discontent, the evidence is even more impressive.

⁶J.S. FURNIVALL has provided probably the best analysis to date linking

The seeming paradox between the patron-client picture of peasant deference and attachment to elites and the evidence of defiance is, in part, a permanent feature of agrarian relations everywhere. Even in pre-colonial Southeast Asian history there is a tradition of class hostility as well as a collaboration. Cultivators, particularly in the lowlands, have hardly been oblivious of the fact that corvee labor, taxes in kind, or conscription might threaten their well-being. The efforts of the traditional rulers to seize as much agricultural « surplus » as possible and the desire of peasants to retain as much as possible provided the basis for potential conflict that was most likely to occur during crop failures, war, or draught when peasant claims of subsistence clashed with the central court's desire for revenue. Peasant resistance at these times was further underwritten by a tenacious « little tradition » which placed local subsistence and ceremonial needs ahead of claims by elites and the state.

While tension over the disposition of any surplus may have been a permanent feature of agrarian relations, this cannot begin to explain how traditionally intermittent class antagonism in rural areas of Southeast Asia came to assume the form of permanent social dynamite in regions such as Central Luzon, Lower Burma, and the Mekong Delta by the 1930's.

Two features of the analytical model to be presented here make it more applicable to some rural settings than to others. First, inasmuch as it focuses on changes in patron-client relations, it is tailored to highly stratified rural societies. It is therefore potentially more relevant to Central Luzon or the Mekong Delta where a sharp stratification based on land ownership developed than to either the Tonkin Delta or East and Central Java where a persistent pattern of small holdings tended to create more modest and fragmented forms of patronage. Second, the emphasis on how *structural change* influences class relations means that the model is best adapted to those directly-ruled, lowland areas where the economic and political impact of colonialism was most pronounced. It is less valuable for the more indirectly-ruled or highland areas (e.g. East Coast Malaya, Upper Burma, and Thailand) where the process of structural change was neither so rapid nor so intense.

criminality to agrarian change in Upper and Lower Burma. See his *Colonial Policy and Practice*, New York, New York University Press, 1956, 2nd ed., p. 131-141.

II. BALANCE OF EXCHANGE BETWEEN PATRON AND CLIENT

Before we can translate structural changes in Southeast Asia into shifts in subjective class relations, however, we need an analytical bridge between the facts of peasant experience and the feelings they produce. Building partly on Barrington Moore, Jr., Arthur Stinchcombe, and Sydel Silberman's insights into agrarian class relations and on Peter Blau's exchange theory, we attempt to provide such a bridge.⁷ The main features of our argument can be summarized briefly.

1. It is instructive to view the relations between peasants and agrarian elites as vertical exchange relationships in which the legitimacy of the elites, both collectively and individually, is directly related both to the balance of all goods and services transferred — the terms of trade — between them and to the comprehensiveness of the exchange. While the balance of exchange is not precisely quantifiable inasmuch as it frequently includes non-equivalent goods and services and indivisible services such as defence, it is generally possible to say over time in which direction the balance of exchange is moving and to distinguish marginal from major shifts.

2. The legitimacy of the patron is not simply a linear function of the balance of exchange; there are certain thresholds or « sticking points » in the balance which produce sharp changes in legitimacy. In particular, the irreducible minimum terms the peasant/client traditionally demands (« expects » is perhaps more appropriate) for his deference are physical security and a subsistence livelihood.

⁷ We are indebted to Barrington MOORE, Jr.'s persuasive argument that exploitation is, for the most part, an objective relationship in which feelings of exploitation bear a relationship to the services an elite offers the peasantry in return for the surplus it extracts. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Boston, Beacon Press, 1966, p. 453-483. His argument was advanced considerably by its successful application to Central Italy by Sydel F. SILVERMAN in which the categories of exchange are carefully analyzed. 'Exploitation' in *Rural Central Italy. Structure and Ideology in Stratification Study*, Comparative Studies in Society and History, 12, 1970, p. 327-339. It is from Moore and Silverman, from Peter BLAU's theoretical work on exchange theory, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, New York, Wiley, 1964, and from observation in Central Luzon that our conceptualization of agrarian relations is drawn. See also Arthur STINCHCOMBE's fine essay on rural class relations in *Agricultural Enterprise and Rural Class Relations*, American Journal of Sociology, 67, 1961-62, particularly the portion on family-sized tenancy.

This expectation is at the root of the peasantry's « paternalist moral economy » — the basis of its conception of justice and equity.⁶ A breach of these minimum terms in the exchange relationship if it occurs on a large scale, serves both to undermine the legitimacy of the patron class and to provide the peasantry with a moral basis for action against agrarian elites.

3. In aggregate terms, the balance of reciprocity seems to depend largely on the relative bargaining position of the two parties; how much more does the client need the patron than the patron needs the client? The relative bargaining position of each party is, in turn, greatly influenced by structural changes such as the scarcity of land, the shift to commercial agriculture, the expansion of state power, and the growth of population.

In brief, the argument presented here is that the feelings of peasants, individually and collectively, about agrarian elites have an important objective dimension and is not simply a matter of consciousness or ideology. Peasants have some implicit notion of the balance of exchange — of what it costs them to get a patron's services — and any substantial objective change in that balance is likely to lead a corresponding change in the legitimacy of the exchange relationship. Although new ideas and values can undoubtedly influence the perceived cost and importance of certain services — especially in the long run — the claim here is that in many contexts, variations in the legitimacy of agrarian elites are traceable more to real shifts in the balance of exchange than to ideology or « rising expectations. »

The Nature of Patron-Client Ties

Before suggesting how patron-client bonds break down and become relationships either of impersonal contract or of purely coercive dependence, it is helpful to specify briefly the distinguishing features of this form of personal dependence. Two characteristics of the patron-client dyad require emphasis in this context: its basis in inequality and its diffuseness. Both factors are most apparent

⁶ The term is that of E.P. THOMPSON who applies it in a similar fashion to the early English working class and their attitude toward the price of bread. See his classic *The Making of the English Working Class*, New York, Vintage, 1966, p. 203.

in feudal vassalage and in the bonds between a high-status landlord and each of his tenants in a *traditional* agrarian economy-- relationships that serve, in a sense, as the prototypes of patron-client ties.

First, patron and client are not equals. The basis of exchange between them both arises from and reflects the disparity in their relative wealth, power, and status. A patron is most often in a position to supply goods and services unilaterally which the potential client and his family need for their survival and well-being.⁹ A locally dominant lord, for example, may be the major source of protection, security, employment, of access to arable land or to education, and to food in bad times. Such services could hardly be more vital and hence the demand for them tends to be highly inelastic; that is, an increase in their effective cost will not diminish demand proportionately. Being a monopolist or at least an oligopolist for critical needs, the patron is in an ideal position to demand compliance from those who wish to share in these scarce commodities.

While a client is hardly on an equal footing with his patron, neither is he entirely a pawn in a one-way relationship. If the patron could simply issue commands, he would have no reason to cultivate a clientele in the first place. His need for a personal following which can be mobilized on his behalf requires some level of reciprocity. Thus, patron-client exchange falls somewhere on the continuum between personal bonds joining equals and purely coercive bonds. Determining exactly where between these two poles a particular patron-client system should be placed, or in which direction it is moving, becomes an important empirical question in any attempt to gauge its legitimacy.

The inequality of patron and client quite often includes a status dimension as well as wealth and power dimensions. As a member of a more exalted stratum, the patron, unlike his client, is as much part of the great tradition as part of the little community -- a representative of the center at the periphery. In fact, an essential part of his local power may come by virtue of the literacy, education, military functions, office-holding or ritual privileges that are directly connected to his status. As the social apex of a local community,

⁹ BLAU, *op. cit.* Blau's discussion of unbalanced exchange, p. 21-25 *et seq.*, and the disparities in power and deference that such imbalance fosters is directly relevant to the basis of patron-client dyads.

a patron often acts as a broker for his clients with outside officials — much as the patron saint in folk Catholicism is expected to help his devotees while also acting as their broker with the Lord.¹⁰

The status dimension of patronage, where it is pronounced, is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it reinforces the patron's claim to position and authority with the sanctions and values of a wider culture. On the other hand, it also imposes certain normative standards of service and performance upon the local patron classes which serve as an ethical basis for judging their behavior. The lower clergy often exemplifies this duality. In the normal course of events, religious values accept and justify both the local stratification and elite behavior. At other times, however, when tax, rent, tribute, or conscription claims jeopardize local security and subsistence, it is the lower clergy — Thomas Münzer in Germany, pongyis and ulamas in the Buddhist and Islamic countries of Southeast Asia — who can often be found at the head of local peasantry as defenders of their rights.

The second distinguishing feature of patron-client dyads is their diffuse, face-to-face, personal character as opposed to the explicit quality of impersonal contracts or of formal relations of authority. As Marc Bloch has shown for the traditional feudal bond, its diffuseness was more an indication of its sweeping strength than of its imprecision. « 'To serve' or... 'to aid', and 'to protect' --- it was in those simple terms that the oldest texts summed up the mutual obligation of the armed retainer and lord. Never was the bond felt to be stronger in the period when its effects were thus stated in the vaguest and, consequently, most comprehensive fashion. When we define something, do we not always impose limitations on it? »¹¹ It is this diffuseness and wide range of reciprocity that is perhaps the most strongly traditional quality of patron-client bonds. Not only is the patron a single comprehensive focus for many of his clients' basic needs but their dependence on him is *personal*. Unlike purely formal authority whose relations with subordinates is regulated by impersonal controls or explicit contractual ties which specify the nature of reciprocal services owed, the patron and client share

¹⁰ George M. FOSTER, *The Dyadic Contract in Tzintzuntzan, II. Patron-Client Relationship*, *American Anthropologist*, 65, 1963, p. 1173-1192.

¹¹ Marc BLOCH, *Feudal Society*, London, Routledge, Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1961, p. 219, translated by L.A. Manyon.

an open-ended set of obligations to one another. Such a strong « multiplex » relation, as Max Gluckman terms it, covers a wide range of potential exchanges. The patron may very well ask the client's help in preparing a wedding, in cultivating his fields, winning an election campaign, or finding out what his local rivals are up to ; the client may approach the patron for help in paying his son's tuition, in filling out government forms, or for food or medicine when he falls on bad times. The link is a very flexible one in which the needs and resources of the partners, and, hence, the goods and services exchanged, may vary widely over time.

These central features of the patron-client tie distinguish it from other vertical dyadic ties with which it is often confused. It differs in several important respects, for example, from the link joining the « cacique », the bandit leader, or a local « boss » to his men.¹² While such power figures are also personal leaders with private followings, they generally are *nouveaux arrivés* with little claim to higher status, their role is less institutionalized — less culturally sanctioned — than the role of a patron, and their relationship to their men is less diffuse and relies more heavily on coercion and/or material rewards. Patron-client reciprocity must also be distinguished from the kinds of exchange that normally occur between, say, moneylenders and borrowers, officials and citizens, employers and employees. As the functionally specific role categories suggest, such exchange is typically restricted to a single category of reciprocity, it is less durable over time, and the terms of the exchange are governed in large part by impersonal regulations and legal contracts. An employer *may*, of course, also be the patron of his employee, but then the scope and nature of the exchange goes far beyond what the categories « employer » and « employee » connote.

As a social mechanism the patron-client bond is neither modern nor wholly traditional. In one sense, to be sure, the style of the patron-client link, regardless of its context, is distinctively traditional. It is particularistic where (following Parsons) modern links are universal ; it is diffuse and informal where modern ties are specific and contractual ; and it produces vertically-integrated groups with shifting interests rather than horizontally-integrated groups with

¹² We are grateful to Clifford Geertz for convincingly arguing the importance of these distinctions.

durable interests. Despite their traditional style, however, patron-client networks both serve as a formula for bringing together individuals who are not kinsmen and as building-blocks for elaborate chains of vertical integration. They cannot be merely dismissed as vestigial remains of old structures but must be analyzed as a type of social bond that may be dominant under some conditions and marginal under others.

Although we cannot elaborate here on the structural conditions which promote patron-client networks, three should be mentioned: (1) the persistence of marked inequalities in wealth, status, and power which are accorded some legitimacy; (2) the relative absence (or collapse) of effective, impersonal guarantees such as public law for physical security, property, and position — often accompanied by the growth of semi-autonomous local centers of personal power; and (3) the inability of either kinship units or the traditional village to serve as effective vehicles of personal security or advancement.¹³

Elements of Exchange

As a diffuse pattern of reciprocity, the goods and services exchanged by patron and client reflect the evolving needs and resources of each. Some elements of exchange are easily quantifiable while others are not. Any realistic assessment of the balance of exchange must consider both. Although no enumeration of services can do justice to this diversity, what follows is simply an attempt to describe the major categories of exchange in a way that illustrates the scope of reciprocity found in traditional patron-client exchange and, at the same time, the particular exchanges that were often a part of landlord-tenant relations in Southeast Asia early in the twentieth century.

Patron to Client Flows

1. *Basic Means of Subsistence.* This is the central core of the classical patron-client bond. In many agrarian settings this service boils down to the granting of access to land for cultivation and it

¹³ BLOCH, *Feudal Society*, p. 146, cites comparable circumstances for the Merovingian period in explaining the growth of the distinctive ties of personal dependence characteristic of French feudalism.

may include the provision of seed equipment, marketing services, technical advice, and so forth. In the case of office-based patronage, it may mean the provision of steady employment or opportunities for gain, thereby guaranteeing subsistence.

2. *Subsistence Crisis Insurance.* Typically, the patron is expected to be a friend in need. One of his most valued services in his willingness — and obligation — to give loans in time of economic distress, to help in case of sickness or accident, or to carry his client through the year following a poor harvest. As a generalized relief agency of first resort, the patron often guarantees a subsistence « floor » for his clients by absorbing losses (in agriculture or income) which might otherwise jeopardize their livelihood.

3. *Protection.* The need for physical security was a central feature of the feudal bond in Europe. It is especially prominent in office-based patronage but common in land-based patronage as well. Protection may mean building fortifications and maintaining an armed band or the promise to take revenge on the client's behalf. It means shielding the client both from private dangers (banditry, personal enemies) and from public dangers (soldiers, outside officials, courts, tax collectors).

4. *Brokerage and Influence.* If the patron protects his clients from outside depredations, he also uses his power and influence to extract rewards from the outside for the benefit of his clients. Protection is his defensive role vis-a-vis the outside; brokerage is his aggressive role. In the case of the warrior-patron the relationship with the outside is as often one of plundering as of bargaining. The interests of patron and client coincide in relations with the outside since it is not a question of distribution of resources within the network but of wresting resources from the outside which increase the pool available for distribution among the following — and perhaps expanding the clientele.

Collective Patron Service. Patrons as a group may perform services for the community as a whole which are counted valuable benefits but are not easily divisible into dyadic exchanges. In the same way that an individual patron subsumes his clients and « represents » them, so the group from whom patrons are recruited often represent the community itself.

Internally, patrons are often responsible for many *collective economic functions* of the village. They may subsidize local charity and

relief, donate land for communal use, support local public services (such as schools, small roads, and community buildings), host visiting officials, and sponsor village festivals and celebrations. Quite apart from providing tangible resources to the community, patrons in most stratified villages are seen to supply much of its *organization and leadership*. That is, they may not only subsidize celebrations, small public works, and village marketing arrangements, but they also furnish the initiative and mobilizing potential for these activities. Finally, the patrons collectively may be valued also for their capacity to mediate disputes and preserve local order.

In dealing with the outside world, patrons may do together for the village what a particular patron is expected to do for his client. That is, they may *protect the community* from outside forces — whether the state or private marauders — and they *advance the community's* interests by securing works and services, administrative favor, community loans, agricultural assistance, and so on.

Client to Patron Flows

Flows of goods and services from client to patron are particularly hard to characterize because a client is usually his patron's « man » — and his services consist in lending his labor and talents to his patron's designs, whatever they might be. Some typical elements of this overall compliance include :

1. *Basic Labor Service*. An employer-employee relationship, though not at all of the impersonal contract kind, is at the core of the dependence nexus in most strong and durable patron-client bonds. The client contributes his labor and other specialized skills to the farm, office, or enterprise. Such services range all the way from bearing arms as a member of the patron's band to daily manual labor in the patron's fields.

2. *Supplementary Labor and Goods*. Clients commonly provide several subsidiary services to their patron which become an anticipated part of the exchange. These may include supplying water and firewood to the patron's household, personal domestic services, food offerings, and so forth. Some of these services are substantial, some are mainly of symbolic value as expressions of deference, and, in more commercialized settings, some have been discontinued in lieu of cash equivalents.

3. *Promoting the Patron's Interests.* This catch-all category signifies the client's membership in his patron's faction and the contribution he is expected to make to the success of his leader and, indirectly, his own prosperity. A typical client protects his superior's reputation, acts as his eyes and ears, campaigns for him if he should stand for office, and generally uses his skills and resources to advance his patron over other patrons.

III. DEPENDENCE AND LEGITIMACY

A crucial question for rural class relations in patron-client systems is whether the relationship of dependence is seen by clients as primarily collaborative and legitimate or as primarily exploitative. Here the issues of compliance and legitimacy are analytically distinct.¹⁴ By virtue of his control over critical goods and services which peasants need, the patron is often in a position to require compliance with many of his demands. Whether that compliance is accompanied with approval or disapproval, with legitimacy or simply with resignation, however, depends on the client's subjective evaluation of the relationship.

Accepting Barrington Moore's interpretation of exploitation as a more or less objective phenomenon, it is possible, in a given agrarian context, to view changes in the legitimacy or approval given a class of patrons as largely a function of changes in the objective balance of goods and services changed individually and collectively between the strata.¹⁵ The notion of balance is somewhat complex because we are dealing here with a balance within a context of unequal exchanges. The question, however, is not whether the exchange is lopsided, but rather *how* lopsided it is.¹⁶

¹⁴ Empirically, of course, disapproving submission may be difficult to distinguish from approving submission if there are no means for the expression of discontent.

¹⁵ This is not to deny that norms of equity in the balance of exchange do not vary from culture to culture. They most certainly do. For this reason it would be dangerous, in the absence of gross differences, to draw conclusions about the relative legitimacy of agrarian elites in two different cultural and historical settings on the basis that the comparative balance of exchange between elites and peasants in each setting. Within a *particular* cultural and historical context, however, *shifts* in the balance of exchange are likely to be reflected in shifts in the legitimacy with which subordination is viewed.

¹⁶ This remains the case so long as the clientele is linked individually to

For the client, the key element of evaluation is the ratio of services he receives to the services he provides. The greater the value of what he receives from his patron compared with the cost of what he must reciprocate, the more likely he is to see the bond as legitimate. For the patron, on the other hand, the level of satisfaction with the bond depends on the ratio of the value of his client's services to the costs of retaining him. The two ratios are not mirror images and the patron's gain is thus not necessarily the client's loss. For example, the opening of a new school may make it easier (less costly) for the patron to help his client's children get an education while not necessarily reducing the value of that service to clients. The patron's position is improved and the client's is not worsened. Under other circumstances, though, patron and client are at loggerheads, a landlord who previously took 50 % of the harvest and now takes 60 % is gaining at the direct expense of his client.

The concept of balance employed here is not directly quantifiable, but both the direction and approximate magnitude of change can often be ascertained. Once the kinds of services and their frequency or volume are specified in both directions, we have a rough picture of the existing balance. If the patron discontinues a service and the client's services remain unchanged, we know the balance has become less favorable for the client. If patrons demand more services from clients without doing more for the clients, we also know that clients are now worse off than before.¹⁷

Beyond changes in the nature and number of reciprocal services themselves, the cost of a given service may shift. In an era when wage labor opportunities are opening up, a patron's demand for free labor service from his clients may seem more onerous (costly) than before and hence affect the balance. The balance may be similarly altered by a change in the value of a given service. Thus, the value

the patron. While his following as a whole may be important to the patron, any particular client is generally expendable. If the clientele dealt with the patron as a unit, of course, the situation would change.

¹⁷ These models, in fact, correspond roughly to two processes of agrarian change. The former is characteristic of a commercializing landowner class which reduces or terminates most services performed by the traditional aristocracy while continuing to squeeze the peasants. The latter resembles the efforts of a declining rural aristocracy to survive by exacting each and every feudal privilege while being unable to maintain, let alone raise, their services for their retainers.

of physical protection was especially high in the chaos of the early feudal period in Western Europe but declined later as banditry and invasions subsided. Variations in the cost or value of a service can, in such cases, lead to a shift in the legitimacy of the exchange while the content of the exchange remains constant.

This conceptualization of reciprocity runs into difficulty, of course, when we want to know *how much* of a shift has taken place and not merely its direction, and also when we try to gauge the net effect of changes which push the balance in different directions. Precise calibration is out of the question, but we can detect gross differences. When a patron, for example, ceases to give subsistence loans prior to harvest, we may be able to infer roughly how large an effect this will have on the balance of exchange from our appreciation of the scarcity of food at that season and from other historical evidence — including protest, banditry, and even starvation. With a series of changes it may similarly be possible to estimate both their net direction and something of their extent. Some cases may prove impossible to judge but in other instances the evidence points clearly one way. In areas such as Central Luzon, the Mekong Delta, and Lower Burma, the unmistakable shift in the balance of exchange against the peasants from 1910-1935 make the calculations hardly necessary.

The *relational* quality of exchange requires emphasis. An analysis of changes in the legitimacy of agrarian elites thus necessarily focuses on changes in the exchange relationship and not on the position of the peasantry taken alone. Although shifts in the relationship and shifts in the peasantry's material well-being may often coincide, they may occasionally diverge as well. It is possible for peasants to experience an improvement in their standard of living — perhaps due to state assistance, high market prices, etc. — while, at the same time, their position in the balance of exchange with landowners is deteriorating as rentier owners revoke past services. A crisis in agrarian class relations may, in such instances, accompany and advance in peasant welfare. The opposite case, in which peasants are materially worse off but enjoy improved terms of trade with landowners is also conceivable.¹⁸ The test, then, is not the level of welfare but the terms of exchange and how they are shifting.

¹⁸ Empirically this might occur in traditional settings when landowners provide rations to their peasant clients following a serious crop failure. Here a slight decline in material welfare might accompany improved class relations.

Any assessment of the balance of exchange must also consider, as peasants themselves do, the entire pattern of reciprocity. The more precommercial the context, the more likely the exchange will involve a great variety of reciprocal services beyond the arrangements for cultivation and crop division. A patron's crisis help, influence, and protection may be more valuable in the peasant's estimation than a five or ten percent increase in the share of the crop he may retain. The disappearance of such services may thus jeopardize the legitimacy of agrarian elites even though landowners take less of the crop and peasant labor requirements are reduced.

The exchange approach to rural class relations helps cast the problems of « false-consciousness » and the role of « outside agitators » in a new perspective. Inasmuch as peasants have a sharp appreciation of their relations with rural elites, they have no difficulty in recognizing when more and more is required of them and less and less is given in return. Peasants are thus not much subject to « mystification » about changes in objective class relations ; they do not need outsiders or a new ideology to help them recognize a pattern of growing exploitation which they experience daily. This does not mean outsiders are inconsequential. On the contrary, they are often critical to peasant movements, not because they convince peasants that they are exploited, but because, in the context of exploitation, they may provide the outside power, assistance, and supra-local organization that helps peasants act.¹⁹ It is thus at the level of collective action that the typically small scale of peasant social life constitutes a disability, not at the level of assessing class relations.

Some Complications and Realities

If the legitimacy of the patron for the client were simply a direct linear function of the balance of exchange, our task would be deceptively simple. The multiplicity of human identifications and the discontinuous character of human needs, however, makes such an easy formula inconceivable. Four basic qualifications—or modifications—seem necessary to create a tool for analysis which, while it may become more unwieldy, begins to reflect more fully

¹⁹ « Outsiders » may often encourage local action merely by winning a victory that destroys the miasma of elite power that had previously served to check peasant power.

the complex relationship it addresses. In particular, the simpler model overlooks (1) the relation of patron and client roles to other social categories; (2) the effect of tradition on legitimacy; (3) the effect of sudden changes in the balance of reciprocity on the legitimacy of patrons; and (4) the existence of physical and cultural thresholds beyond which effects are discontinuous.

Patron-Client and Other Roles. It is important to know whether patron-client roles coincide with, or cut across, other salient social roles. Taking first the case of cross-cutting cleavages, patrons and clients may well share certain social identities — such as kinship, ethnicity, religion, community, region, rural residence — which place them in the same camp along some dimensions of potential social conflict. This is likely to have two major results. First, to the extent that such shared identifications signify moral communities, they may work to guarantee minimum benefits to the client. A landowner may give more consideration to the claims of a tenant who is a co-religionist of the same race than to a tenant with whom he does not share these identities. This consideration is not merely a question of moral obligation but also a *strategic recognition* that he may need to call on racial or religious solidarity in other arenas of conflict. Second, to the degree that other shared interests are salient, they reduce the social significance of the patron-client balance.

Cleavages that coincide with the patron-client division work in precisely the opposite fashion. A client who is of a different race and religion from his patron cannot rely on many claims of a shared community to buttress his claim to consideration. In addition, coinciding cleavages both exacerbate and compound the potential for hostility in patron-client relations. The animosity between Indian landlords and Burmese tenants and laborers in the Irawaddy Delta was simultaneously a patron-client conflict *and* a cultural conflict.²⁰ Each dimension of the conflict served to magnify the other.

In practice, then, coinciding cleavages tend to intensify the dissatisfaction with any given balance of patron-client exchange by infusing it with additional areas of conflict while cross-cutting cleavages tend to reduce the dissatisfaction of any particular balance by creating other shared social interests which diminish its social significance.

²⁰ Cf. Michael ADAS, *Agrarian Development in Lower Burma and the Plural Society*, University of Wisconsin, Ph.D. Thesis, 1971.

Tradition and Stable Exchange. From the standpoint of the client there is obviously a difference between a stable, traditional patron-client relationship and one that is more impermanent and formless. Given similar balances of exchange, the traditional exchange is likely to be viewed as more legitimate. Its greater legitimacy seems to flow *not* simply from its antiquity but rather because its age represents, in effect, a higher probability that the implicit terms will be observed and that the flow of services will continue into the future. The client assumes that his patron will conform, to at least the minimal traditions of service if he can and that local opinion and institutions will help to guarantee the observance of traditional terms. If the client then considers a traditional patron-client contract preferable to less traditional arrangements, his choice has some rational basis. Tradition represents legitimacy because it generally promises a higher level of performance according to expectations, durability, and cultural sanction than less institutionalized forms of security.

Breaches of Stable Exchange. In stable agrarian settings, the power relationships between peasants and elites may have produced a norm of reciprocity -- a standard package of reciprocal rights and obligations -- that acquires a moral force of its own. The resulting norms, so long as they provide basic protection and security to clients, will be jealously defended against breaches which threaten the peasants' existing level of benefits. Sudden efforts to reset these norms will be seen as a violation of traditional obligations which patrons have historically assumed -- a violation that serves as the moral rationale for peasant outrage. Thus any balance of exchange above a certain minimum is likely to take on legitimacy over time and *even small movements* away from the balance that reduce peasant benefits is likely to encounter a fierce resistance that invokes tradition on its behalf.

The peasants' defence of traditional exchange in such cases is no mindless reflex. It is motivated, of course, by the fear that a readjusted balance would work against them. A classic example of this situation is the English agricultural uprising in the 1830's when farm workers, whose bargaining position had weakened, invoked traditional local customs of hiring and employment against the commercial innovations of landowners.²¹ If, on the other hand, the

²¹ E.J. HOBBSAWM & George RUDÉ, *Captain Swing*, New York, Pantheon,

patron class should feel that *its* bargaining power with peasant clients has deteriorated as, for example, the position of the French rural aristocracy vis-a-vis a commercializing peasantry in the 18th century, it is they rather than the peasants who will be found defending tradition. It is because the commercialization of agriculture so frequently works *against* the interests of most peasants that one generally finds the peasantry cast in the role of defending traditional rights and obligations against erosion and demanding the restoration of the *status quo ante*.

Fundamental Social Rights. For the client, the basic purpose of the patron-client contract, and therefore the cornerstone of its legitimacy, is the provision of basic social guarantees of subsistence and security. If and when the terms of trade deteriorate sufficiently to threaten these social rights which were the original basis for attachment and deference, one can anticipate that the bond will quickly lose its legitimacy. The patron may still be able to extract services from the client but clients will increasingly consider the relationship unjust and exploitative. Legitimacy, then, is not a linear function of the balance of exchange. Instead, there are certain thresholds for the client below which the loss of legitimacy is swift and often complete. No doubt these thresholds have a cultural dimension since they depend on what is necessary for the satisfaction of minimum cultural decencies --- e.g., caring for elderly parents, celebrating crucial rituals --- but they also have an objective dimension --- e.g., enough land to feed the family, subsistence help in case of sickness or accident, minimum physical protection against outsiders. A relationship of dependence that supplies these minimal guarantees will retain a core of legitimacy, one that abrogates them transgresses nearly universal standards of obligation.

The claim to basic social rights which might be termed the « right to subsistence » or even the « right to a living » is so widespread in traditional society that it all but constitutes the fundamental social morality of traditional, precapitalist society. Where peasants have lived in largely unstratified communities, it can be seen as the implicit principle behind the social mechanisms of redistribution and reciprocity which tend to guarantee all villagers a livelihood. In

1968). In many respects this account is instructive for an understanding of the peasant relations to breaches of exchange brought about by the « green revolution » in the past decade. Cfr Francine FRANKEL, *India's Green Revolution*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971.

more stratified peasant communities it finds expression in a set of shared norms and social pressures which prescribe a minimum level of performance for local patrons.

Many customary obligations of the traditional patron-client contract were considered subordinate to the basic claims of subsistence and protection. Thus during periods of crop failure or plague in feudal Europe the lord (and the ruler of the kingdom as well) was expected to forego a portion of his normal claims to dues and grain if payment would jeopardize his clients' rights to subsistence. A failure to make these allowances, either wilfully or inadvertently, put tremendous strains on the legitimacy of patron demands.²² That the peasants' subsistence claim received wide social recognition is shown convincingly in Karl Polanyi's moving account of the traditional elite's support for the futile Speenhamland relief system in England, a system constructed to guarantee a minimum food ration to the poor in the face of commercial pressures which had overwhelmed traditional parish relief practices.²³ The Leveller and Digger movements drew their great moral force precisely by appealing to traditional subsistence principles under which the elite must guarantee work and a basic livelihood to all.²⁴ Again and again, the popular paternalist view that the social order should guarantee a man and his family a subsistence is the key to many riots and uprisings in 18th and 19th century Europe — outbreaks which were legitimized in the popular mind by the failure of the ruling class to meet its fundamental obligation of providing for the minimum well-being of their subjects.

In traditional societies where most of the peasantry and lower class are not expected and do not expect to be part of the politically relevant public, the unwritten expectation that preserves these boundaries is that the elite, political class will assure a minimum level of subsistence and protection to the non-participant lower classes. At the center of the system of patron-client reciprocity then,

²² Roland MOUSNIEK, *Peasant Uprisings in Seventeenth-Century France, Russia, and China*, New York, Harper & Row, 1970, p. 305-348, translated by Brian Pearce.

²³ Karl POLANYI, *The Great Transformation*, New York, Farrar & Rinehart, 1944.

²⁴ Harold J. LASKI, *The Rise of European Liberalism*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1936, 1947, p. 113, 2nd ed.

is the exchange of deference and compliance by the client in return for the patron's provision of *minimal social rights*. When these guarantees break down, the structure of exclusion loses a key element of its legitimacy.

So long as the aggregate structure of patronage remains intact, the failure of a single patron does not call into question the domination of the patron class. Structural changes in the economy or state which bring about a widespread collapse of the social guarantees of patronage, however, may threaten the claim to ascendancy of the entire patron class. As the peasantry experiences a collective failure of the elite to meet what are seen as the social obligation of its position, its claim to that position will be increasingly unjustified.^{24a} The consequence, barring repression, may be a burst of peasant activity that simply aims at restoring the old balance of exchange or taking what is needed for subsistence, or it may be a more fundamental attack on the social hierarchy itself.

In understanding the peasant's view of the patron-client relationship, we do well to avoid seeing the peasant as either a fickle, cost-conscious bourgeois, with but fewer alternatives, or as a serf whose loyalty knows no bounds. We do far better to view the peasant as a cultivator who faces a set of continuing existential dilemmas over his economic and physical security which he is often poorly equipped to solve by himself or with other peasants. To the extent that someone of higher status is willing to assist and protect him, and providing the cost is not prohibitive, a relationship of deference may develop that grows in its resilience and closeness as expectations about mutuality and assistance are met. The patron validates his friendship by helping the peasant at times of crisis. It is on that basis that trust and confidence grows; friendship and favor are, for the client, synonymous. When a relationship of patronage fails to protect the peasant, it not only leaves him worse off but it also represents a betrayal of the trust he had placed in a powerful

^{24a} There may be a further progression in consciousness here. The failure of a single patron undermines his claim to position but not that of the patron class. The failure of the patron class undermines its claim to position but, not necessarily, the peasantry's faith in other potential patron classes (e.g. party bosses) who might perform according to expectations. Perhaps it is only the repeated failure of patronage as a system that saps the legitimacy of vertical patronage *per se* rather than the legitimacy of a particular patron class.

friend.²⁵ Pitt-Rivers noted, in this context, how the system of patronage in Andalusia rested on performance. « Patronage is good when the patron is good, but like friendship upon which it is based it has two faces. It can either confirm the superiority of the *senorito* or it can be exploited by the rich man in order to obtain a nefarious advantage over poor people. It covers a range of relationships from noble protection of dependents in accordance with the moral solidarity of the pueblo to the scurrilous coercions of the later period of *caciquismo*. The system is, clearly, only to be judged good insofar as it ensures that people do not go hungry, that injustice is not done. Where the majority of the community can look to the patron in time of need, such a system reinforces the integration of the pueblo as a whole. Where those who enjoy the advantages of patronage are a minority, then they and their patrons are likely to be resented by the remainder.»²⁶

The reverence in which the institution of patronage is held thus ultimately depends upon how well it helps peasants survive the recurrent crises of food supply, defence, and brokerage which mark their life. Its failure as an institution to serve these basic human needs must inevitably tarnish the claim to deference of those patrons who sit astride it.

Relative Bargaining Positions

A particular balance of exchange in patron-client relations reflects the relative bargaining positions of the two parties. One way of assessing the comparative bargaining strength of patron and client is to consider the client as both a buyer of scarce services and a seller of his favor and compliance, and then to ask what his market position is in terms of (1) his demand for the services of the patron and (2) his ability to pay (reciprocate) the supplier. As the discussion below indicates, the aggregate bargaining position of clients depends largely on structural factors such as the concentration of landholding, population growth, and the spread of state power.

²⁵ The amount of anger and moral indignation generated by such a failure probably depends upon how critical the services were and what alternatives the client has.

²⁶ J.A. PITT-RIVERS, *The People of the Sierra*, Chicago, Phoenix Books, University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 204.

Demand. The effective demand for patron services rests in part on whether there are alternative sources for such services. If there is unclaimed arable land, if the peasant can fall back on his kin group for protection and upon professional moneylenders for loans, the peasant's dependence on patrons is somewhat diminished. The more effective and numerous such alternative mechanisms are, the more they serve to establish a baseline below which the terms of patron-client exchange cannot sink. The patron class as a whole thus competes against other social mechanisms for the provision of important needs.²⁷ For patron-controlled services, client demand will hinge primarily on how *vital* and *scarce* these services are. A man who can distribute jobs amidst widespread unemployment can drive a harder bargain with his clients than he could if jobs were plentiful.

Ability to Reciprocate. A particular client with special religious, military, or agricultural skills may find himself in a better bargaining position than most. Collectively, however, the average position of clients vis-a-vis patrons depends on structural factors that either enhance or diminish the importance of creating personal following. A few of the major factors which have historically augmented the value of building a clientele are the need to assure a permanent and reliable labor force where cash wages are inadequate to the task, the need for a substantial supply of manpower to help defend the patron's domain, and the need for an electoral following to win control of local resources. In such circumstances, clients may anticipate a somewhat more favorable balance of exchange.

Assuming that a following is valuable, a shortage of potential clients will also benefit peasants. In feudal Europe as in traditional Southeast Asia, arable land, to which clients could flee, was plentiful while labor was not. Local elites thus measured their wealth and power by the number of people settled within their domain, not

²⁷ The vertical patron-client tie is but one of several social mechanisms that can provide important guarantees for peasants. One way of determining how significant patron-client structures are in a given context is to ask what proportion of the rural populace is tied to patrons. In practice, however, a peasant may rely simultaneously on his neighbors, his kin, village custom, a patron, and perhaps even the law for assistance and protection, and it is thus a matter of gauging the *relative* importance of patron-client ties. The social weight of rural patron-client bonds is, then, a function both of the proportion of the population that is covered by them and their relative importance in satisfying social needs for those who are covered.

the extent of land they held. But as population grew and land became scarce, the client's bargaining position weakened.

Coercion and the Balance of Exchange

The discussion of patron and client bargaining strength has thus far been carried on in terms of market terminology and has ignored the role of coercion. Many patrons, by virtue of their local power, are potentially able to resort to coercion to improve their bargaining power—to require more and give less. One service, however, cannot be extracted at a greater rate by coercion, and that is the client's active loyalty as opposed to his dependence. Reliance on force can increase the client's dependence and even obedience, up to a point, but only at a cost in legitimacy and active loyalty.²⁸

Here legitimacy could be viewed as a service the client can potentially give the patron. The more the patron needs the active loyalty of his clients, the more likely he will avoid using force. Other factors such as collective military tasks, meticulous labor requirements (e.g., viticulture) and, in modern times, elections, may enhance the value of legitimacy for patrons and hence their reluctance to use coercion.

Perhaps the best guarantee, however, that a patron will observe terms of exchange that foster his legitimacy among clients is for his power base to rest upon them rather than outside them. If he can depend on outside backing by police, courts, or military to guarantee his domination of local resources, he will be able to use coercion locally at little cost. If, on the other hand, his base of power is local—if he needs a loyal personal following to protect and validate his local domination of patronage resources—he has vested interests in maintaining legitimacy among his local retainers. The growth of central states and colonial regimes, inasmuch as they provided local

²⁸ The resort to coercion by the patron(s) is limited both by the effectiveness of the coercive force at his disposal (often quite limited in fragmented political systems) and the counterbalancing effect of a tradition and capacity for rebellion by the peasantry. Hobsbawm shows convincingly how even unsuccessful peasant uprisings can bring about, for a time, an improvement in the balance of exchange. The agricultural uprisings of the 1830's in Southern England did not sweep away the landowning gentry but they did retard the introduction of threshing machines for more than a decade. *Captain Swing*, Ch. 15.

elites with outside legal and coercive backing, thus greatly strengthened the hand of local patrons.

Signs of Coercive Exchange. The use of the patron's coercive advantage not only makes it possible for him to squeeze more from the peasant, but it also effects the kinds of services he provides. To the extent that he relies on coercion, more of the patron's « services » will be of a negative kind. That is, he will extract compliance from the peasant in return for *not* seizing his land, for *not* jailing him, and so forth. The distinction is essentially between a patron who actually protects his clients from outside dangers and one who organizes essentially a « protection racket » in which clients comply in order to be protected against their « patron ». Clients can easily distinguish between real protection and extortion; the test for them is whether they would be better off without the patron's services. If such negative services outweigh any real benefits, the relationship is less a patron-client bond than a forced dependence which inspires no legitimacy.

Reliance on coercion by the patron is likely to have another effect on the services he offers clients. If we take the patron-client network (a patron together with his clients) as a unit, we can distinguish roughly between the resources the patron either creates or brings from the outside on the one hand, and the resources he monopolizes within the network on the other. Does the patron merely monopolize the available land and its produce or does he organize the clearing of new land, assist with marketing, and otherwise help during the farming cycle? The distinction here is between the patron who makes an obvious and substantial contribution²⁹ to maintenance and expansion of the network's resources and one who extracts a surplus without making any such contribution. In this case, too, clients recognize that the more extractive a patron, the better off they would likely be without him.

²⁹ These are the tests Moore uses for the legitimacy of agrarian elites, though he does not distinguish between external and internal resources, *op. cit.*, p. 471. Knowing how to treat services such as leadership (as distinct from subsidies) in organizing local charity and public works is more of a problem. In the absence of peasant experience in these activities, they are likely to be considered a tangible service. But once peasants have developed an organizational capacity for such tasks, their value is undercut.

IV. DETERIORATING BALANCE OF EXCHANGE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The political and economic transformations which accompanied colonial rule in Southeast Asia tended to systematically erode the bargaining position of the peasant/client and to enhance the control of an ascendent landowning/officeholding class. In directly ruled lowland areas — particularly those which were settled comparatively recently, such as Cochin China and Lower Burma — the transformation was most rapid and traumatic. In peripheral highland areas under indirect rule the same tendencies, while noticeable, were far less pronounced. Where the peasant's position substantially deteriorated, networks of fairly stable and voluntary clientage gave way increasingly to systems of precarious and involuntary dependence. The brief example of changing agrarian conditions which follows will provide an appropriate background for a brief examination later of the broad structural factors responsible for the deterioration of legitime dependence.

The Tinio Rice Hacienda

The social history of a Nueva Ecija (Central Luzon) rice hacienda from 1900 to 1946 reveals in rich detail the declining position of the peasantry.³⁰ The transformation is strikingly evident in the contrasts between the hacienda management of Manuel Tinio from about 1905 till 1924 and that of his son, Manolo, from 1924 until 1940.

Manuel Tinio attracted tenants to his hacienda land by offering each of them two to four hectares and a house lot. In terms of the elements of exchange described earlier, Tinio provided the *means of subsistence* to his tenants in the form of land, capital improvements such as irrigation, the price of seed and transplanting costs, and occasionally the free use of a buffalo. For this he received one half the crop under the *kasama* system of tenancy. Beyond the basic tenancy arrangement, however, Tinio supplied his tenants with a more or less comprehensive *subsistence crisis insurance*. He provided *rasyons* (rice from his granary) at no interest while the land was being cleared and between harvests. He gave cash

³⁰ For a more complete account of peasant reaction to these changes see Ben KERKVLIEET, *Peasant Society and Unrest Prior to the Huk Revolution in the Philippines*, *Asian Studies* (Manila), 9, Aug., 1971, p. 164-213.

loans (at interest) and would carry tenant debts beyond one year, especially after a poor harvest. At times of birth, baptism, marriage, or death in a tenant family, or when illness struck, Tinio could be expected to make a personal contribution to the family. Finally, the landlord permitted gleaning after the harvest. *Protection* services were less significant although the hacienda provided some security from bandits and Tinio would probably vouch for a tenant who ran afoul of the law. Tinio's *brokerage and influence* was important in finding work for the children of tenants who left the hacienda and in assisting those who needed official papers or licenses. As the single dominant landlord in the area, Tinio himself provided services to the community as a whole which ranged from organizing and contributing to local charities, public works, and festivals, settling local disputes, and acting as the representative of local interests with outside authority.³¹

The tenant-client in this arrangement furnished *basic labor services* in the form of clearing the land (also a capital improvement), harrowing, plowing, and harvesting. He also added to the farm's capital equipment by furnishing farm implements and usually a buffalo as well. Expenses for threshing and irrigation maintenance were shared equally with the *hacendera*. Beyond these labor services, the tenant supplied *supplementary goods and services*. He contributed his and his family's labor to the repair and maintenance of the landlord's house and equipment and to various domestic chores whenever asked. Periodic small gifts of eggs, cakes, and so on, were also common. Finally, Manuel Tinio's tenants *promoted their patron's interests* by their loyalty, their personal concern for his property and reputation, and their willingness to be mobilized as voters on his behalf.

The key fact about this exchange relationship is that it was regarded as legitimate --- in retrospect at least --- by tenants. Those old enough to remember him describe Manuel Tinio, for example, as their benefactor and protector.

Manolo Tinio, who succeeded his father, fundamentally altered the balance of exchange. He moved to the provincial capital and managed the hacienda largely through *katiwala* (overseers). The

³¹ At one point Tinio was governor of the province. For another account of collective landlord services in Central Luzon, see John A. LARKIN, *The Evolution of Pampanga Society*, New York University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1966, p. 126-128.

personal attention and intervention that had characterized his father all but disappeared, and tenant families celebrating marriages or baptisms, or struck by death, illness, or other personal disasters were unlikely to receive any assistance. The practice of free chickenfeed was stopped and gleaning was restricted and closely supervised. For the tenants, the most drastic step was the withholding of *razons* between harvests. Manolo Tinio had better uses for his capital, since such loans carried no interest, and his tenants were forced to borrow from professional moneylenders from whom they could expect little mercy. As an impersonal absentee landlord, Manolo provided fewer protective services to his tenants, was less likely to use his influence or contacts on their behalf, and, of course, made fewer contributions as a leader or financial backer of community-wide projects. By any standard there had been a substantial cutback in the goods and services to tenants by the landowner and while tenants may have owed fewer personal labor services to the owner, this could not begin to compensate them for what they had lost.

What they had lost, quite clearly, was the basic economic security that the crisis subsistence guarantee of the traditional hacienda system had provided. The tenants of Manuel Tinio knew that if the crop failed, if their family faced ruin, or if they needed the influence of a powerful man, they could generally rely upon him to help them and give them enough to eat. Their loyalty was, in large part, an investment they were prepared to make to ensure a continued link with a powerful protector.

Manuel Tinio did not furnish these services from an excess of sentiment. He gained a great deal by having his land cleared at little cost, by securing a loyal clientele of tenants at a time when local power was important, and by creating a stable labor force at a time when land was not yet scarce. The tenants of his son Manolo, however, were in a considerably weaker position. The population had grown, creating a surplus of potential tenants and agrarian laborers, while land was increasingly scarce. The colonial state could more effectively guarantee claims to landed property, and the commercialization of the economy meant that tenants who looked elsewhere found increasingly uniform conditions of tenancy.

It was this change in relative bargaining positions that allowed Manolo to « rationalize » his hacienda and revoke much of the subsistence crisis insurance and personal assistance his father's tenants

had enjoyed. The previous ties binding the paternalistic relationship were gradually cut until the only strand remaining was the economic one. Yet even that grew weaker because increasingly the economic relationship was insufficient to meet the peasants' minimum needs. The loss of such vital patron services exposed tenants to the impact of market insecurities and resulted in a radical deterioration of landlord-tenant relations. Discontent took a variety of forms depending on local circumstances but it was almost always directed against the landlords, their agents, or their property.

The history of changing terms of tenancy on the Tinio estate in the 20th century is the history of much of Central Luzon. Within Central Luzon the most heavily commercialized rice areas such as Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, and parts of Bulacan experienced the most traumatic changes while in provinces such as Pangasinan, Tarlac, or Bataan, the tenant's position did not deteriorate so quickly or so completely and in the Bisayan and Bicol regions it deteriorated hardly at all. As late as 1960 it was possible to distinguish between the « tenancy system found in most of Pangasinan » in which « a tenant is allowed to enjoy some measure of self-respect » and the absentee system found in « areas of extreme and insecure tenancy like Nueva Ecija and Pampanga » in which « he is not ». ³² These variations should not, however, obscure the central tendency. Small holders have fallen increasingly into the tenant or labor class while traditional cacique owners have been replaced by an absentee rentier class who hold land for its security and income and who offer little of the protection or material assistance given by their predecessors. Landlord-tenant relations have tended to become « very impersonal and usually limited to economic aspects only ». ³³

³² J.N. ANDERSON, *Some Aspects of Land and Society in a Pangasinan Community*, *Philippine Sociological Review*, 10, 1 and 2, Jan.-Apr. 1962, p. 56.

³³ Akira TAKAHASHI, *Land and Peasants in Central Luzon*, Honolulu, East-West Center Press, 1969, p. 117-118. As Takahashi points, the terms of tenancy, even in the Bulacan village he studies, are not as severe as in many other rural areas of Asia. As late as 1950, for example, almost one-third of the tenant class was related to the owner of the land they rented. [Robert T. McMILLAN, *Land Tenure in the Philippines*, *Rural Sociology*, 20, 1, 1955, p. 27.] Although that may have made little difference in the formal conditions of tenancy, it probably improved the security of tenure and the possibility of loans for those concerned. Perhaps the tradition of rebellion and popular elections — which, in a sense, restore local redistributive pressures by requiring officeholders to have a sizeable local following — have also prevented even more extreme conditions from developing.

Sufficiency and the Distribution of Risk

The growing power of landowners to dictate the terms of exchange was reflected both in what they demanded from tenants (and laborers) and what they gave. Tenants typically had to assume more of the costs of cultivation, the crop division often shifted in the landlord's favor, and prospective tenants increasingly had to pay « key money » to rent a plot.

Most of the landlord's growing bargaining strength, however, was manifested in his ability to refuse services that once had been part of tenant's expectations. The accounts of agrarian history which note that the relations between landlords and tenants have become more « rational », « businesslike », « impersonal », « purely financial », and « less feudal » often reflect the disappearance of personal services and material assistance on the part of the landholder.³⁴ While a marginal loss of these services might not have had dramatic effects on the legitimacy of the landlord, the revocation of *rasyons*, loans, and personal brokerage eliminated services that were crucial for the peasantry. However difficult traditional dependence had been, it normally included minimal *social rights* in the form of an elite obligation to provide for their dependents' subsistence. The central basis of the client's attachment was the patron's reliable promise of assistance. As the set of personal services that embodied this social guarantee were eliminated, the client thus lost what was, from his point of view, a service that played a key role in legitimizing his dependence.

The transformation described here can be viewed as a shift in the distribution of risk in agriculture. In effect, the traditional landlord-tenant exchange entitled the landlord to the surplus product only after he had made provision for his tenants' subsistence requirements. This arrangement placed a floor under the real income of peasants and shielded them from the most severe fluctuations in production or prices. With the commercialization of agriculture, an increasing share of the risk is pushed on to the tenant who, being close to the subsistence margin, is least able to absorb these fluctu-

³⁴ For example, H. TEN DAM, *Cooperation and Social Structure in the Village of Chibodas*, in Vol. 6, *Indonesian Economics. The Concept of Dualism in Theory and Policy*, of *Selected Studies of Indonesia by Dutch Scholars*, The Hague, V. van Hoeve, 1961, p. 367, and LARKIN, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

tuations. « Agriculture is always the kind of enterprise with which God has a lot to do. With the commercialization of agriculture, the enterprise is further subject to fluctuation in the gross income for its produce. Rentiers, especially if they are capitalists investing in land rather than aristocrats receiving incomes from a feudal patrimony, shift as much of the risk of failure as possible to the tenant. Whether the rent is share or cash, the variability of the income of the peasantry is almost never less, and is often more than the variability of the rentier's income. This makes the income of the peasantry highly variable, contributing to their political sensitization.»³⁵

Nowhere is the loss of the subsistence guarantee more apparent than in Robert Sansom's account of the agrarian economy of the Mekong Delta in the 20th century.³⁶ Prior to 1930 it appears that some of the elements of personal crisis assistance were present in landlord-tenant relations as this description by an elderly landlord indicates. « In the past, the relationship between the landlord and his tenants was paternalistic. The landlord considered the tenant as an inferior member of his extended family. When the tenant's father died, it was the duty of the landlord to give money to the tenant for the funeral; if his wife was pregnant, the landlord gave money for the birth; if he was in financial ruin the landlord gave assistance; therefore the tenant had to behave as an inferior member of the extended family ».³⁷ While this statement was probably intended to be self-serving, there is little doubt that the incidence of such practices declined dramatically in the 1930's as the demand for land to farm increased and as the concentration of ownership grew. Rents shifted from a share of the crop to a fixed rent in kind established on the basis of what the land would produce in a good year. The tenant thus assumed the burden of risk from crop yields while the landowner's income was stabilized. Owners increasingly rented only to tenants who would cultivate larger parcels and were solvent, so as to minimize demands for loans

³⁵ STINCHCOMBE, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

³⁶ Robert L. SANSOM, *The Economics of Insurgency in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam*, Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press, 1970, ch. 2, p. 18-56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29. Ngo Vinh LONG, *The Colonial Peasants of Viet-Nam, 1900-1945*, p. 10, suggests that this quote overstates the paternalism of landlords in the early 20th century. (forthcoming)

and assistance. « Tolerance », the practice of reducing the rent after a poor harvest, became more infrequent since landlords could insist on high rents even in a bad year as the price of renewing a tenancy. Finally, the security of tenure itself declined as landlords dismissed tenants and replaced them with others who would pay more. The most striking demonstration of landlord power, and its human costs, came during the 1930's when, in spite of a large decline in the export price of rice, the volume of exports was maintained at the cost of the subsistence needs of an expanding peasantry. Paddy available for internal consumption in the 1935-37 period was equivalent only to 127 kg per capita (as compared with 240 kg as a fair subsistence figure) while the real wage of agrarian laborers also declined precipitously.³⁸ Far from protecting the peasantry, the landlords were now, as the aggregate figures show, able to cushion the fluctuation in their own income from the pool of peasant subsistence needs.

Lower Burma was another variant of the same theme. The « customary » 10-15 per cent (circa 1900) share of the harvest due owners had reached 40-50 per cent by 1920 in much of the Delta. « The refusal of many landlords to grant remissions when flooding or insect pests reduced their tenants' outturn was another expression of the growing strength of the landlord class. Remissions had been a fairly widely accepted feature of landlord-tenant relations in the first phase of development but, in the decades of transition, many landlords did not allow them no matter how desperate their tenant's situation ». ³⁹ Tenants were less secure, landlords demanded more services from them (e.g., carting, provision of seed), and even extorted a further fee from those who wished to cultivate the same plot the next year.

The Transformation of Exchange Relationships

For the peasantry Lower Burma, Cochin China, and Central Luzon, the momentous social changes accompanying the rise of

³⁸ SANSOM, *op. cit.*, p. 35-37. This figure assumes an equal distribution of rice and thus understates the gravity of the situation. It should be added that the internal shortage of rice resulted less in actual starvation than in a shift to less desirable food sources such as cassava and sweet potatoes.

³⁹ Michael ADAS, *Agrarian Development in Lower Burma, op. cit.*, p. 411.

a permanent central state and the commercialization of the agrarian economy, telescoped into a century or less, a process that took three centuries in Western Europe. The penetration of colonial rule tended to reduce the political autonomy of local power systems, while the expansion of agricultural production for sale and export broke the economic autonomy of the village by destroying the relative autarky of subsistence agriculture. The impact of these changes on the situation of the peasantry must form the core of any social history of that class and also the key to most of the dramatic changes in rural class relations.

A history of agrarian class relations in Southeast Asia has yet to be written and is probably not even conceivable until after a much greater accretion of local and provincial social histories provides the raw material. It is possible, however, to suggest how some of the major structural changes in colonial Southeast Asia shifted the conditions of dependency against the peasantry and thereby undermined the legitimacy of agrarian elites.

The effects of colonialism on relations of personal dependency must be gauged against pre-colonial forms of the patron-client bond. Any thorough account of pre-colonial dependency would, at a minimum, have to distinguish between inland, seacoast, and highland kingdoms, between areas close to the center of a kingdom and areas at the periphery, and between periods of growing central authority and periods of declining central authority. For our purposes, however, the crucial fact about traditional patron-client relationships in the region is that the bargaining resources of clients generally prevented the balance of exchange from moving radically in favor of the patron.

At least three factors buttressed the client's position. First, the kin group often functioned as a main unit of vengeance thus offering the peasant some primary backing and, more important, village residence gave him some claim on the subsistence resources available to the community if he fell on hard times. The minimal guarantees of kinship and village seldom eliminated the need for patron-client bonds altogether. They did, however, help set sharp limits to the bargaining strength of would-be patrons. As alternative, primary social networks they operated, especially in relatively autonomous communities of subsistence agriculturists, to provide some of the same services of protection and security that a patron might offer and thereby restrict not only the degree of imbalance

in individual patron-client exchanges but also the social significance of clientage in the community as a whole.

Second, the fact that the client could often flee to unoccupied arable land meant that control of manpower was more important than control of land and that the building of a following required more services than simply the provision of land. Although moving from an existing community to new land was hardly without costs to the client -- especially in wet-rice areas -- the existence of unoccupied land was the bedrock of what freedom the peasant enjoyed in pre-colonial Southeast Asia.

The final feature of pre-colonial Southeast Asia which reinforced the client's bargaining position was the *localization of power* which denied patrons access to outside support. What this meant was simply that a local leader in a peasant village could seldom rely on outside force or law to protect him; instead his wealth and position were ultimately validated by the legitimacy he acquired in the local community. Unless a local leader could persuade much of the community that his dominance was no threat or could win enough personal allies to sustain his position, he was in danger.⁴⁰ The frailty of the state forced local leaders to create a loyal local following large enough to sustain their position and made it prudent for them to honor local norms.

The impact of colonial change on patron-client relationships can be described under three somewhat artificial headings: (1) the process of social differentiation, (2) the growth of a permanent state apparatus, and, most important (3) the commercialization of agriculture and the concentration of landownership.

Social Differentiation

The process of social differentiation has perhaps not changed the degree of personal dependence so much as the *distribution* or *concentration* of that dependence; it tends to replace one or a few

⁴⁰ This is true both in settled communities where the requirements of legitimate leadership were culturally fixed and in *djago* (bandit) areas where a leader must share out enough of the loot to retain the loyalty of his gang. Leaders who fail to establish their legitimacy and generosity and have no outside backing are likely to find their clientele switching to other leaders or simply striking out on their own.

strands of comprehensive exchange and dependency with multiple dependencies — each of less intensity and comprehensiveness.⁴¹ This transformation is aptly summarized by Schumpeter's contrast of traditional nobility and new commercial elites. «The Feudal master class was once — and the bourgeoisie was never — the supreme pinnacle of a uniformly constructed social pyramid. The feudal nobility was once lord and master in every sphere of life — which constitutes a difference in prestige that can never be made up».⁴² What had been a more diffuse, whole-person relationship became increasingly a series of separate and more narrow ties. The peasant dealt with one person to rent land, another to adjust his head tax, another for slack season employment, and perhaps still another for loans in time of need. In general, each new patron's effectiveness tended to be specialized to that area of the diversifying social structure in which he had a foothold. Where they did not actually become contractual, the growing narrowness of scope and fragility of such patron-client ties lent them an increasingly contingent and secular tone.

The Growth of the Colonial State. As the colonial state expanded and increasingly breached the administrative isolation of the village, it also created in its wake a host of new patronage roles. Government touched more and more routine local activities, thus increasing the need for peasants to cultivate the favor of officials, or, failing that, friends of officials. The structure of patronage aligned itself with the new structural realities in the village as peasants tried to protect their interests in matters of taxation, land titles, licenses, court litigation, and so forth.

The major effect of colonial rule on local officials, in this context, was to completely transform their relationship to the local community. Since most local officials prior to colonialism had little reliable outside backing, they maintained their local standing by cultivating

⁴¹ Godfrey and Monica WILSON, *The Analysis of Social Change: Based on Observations in Central Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1945, p. 28, 40.

⁴² Joseph SCHUMPETER, *Social Classes in an Ethnically Homogeneous Society*, New York, Meridan, 1955, p. 101-168. In areas like Central Luzon, Lower Burma and Cochin China, the structural pressures tending to narrow the scope of personal dependence were reinforced by the cultural distance (in terms of language, ethnicity, social background) between much of the landlord class and the peasantry. The situation was different in areas like Tonkin or Java.

a substantial local following by observing essential community norms and by minimizing outside claims on community resources. But colonialism decisively broke their dependence on the village. Instead of being largely a creature of the locality who dealt with the center, they became increasingly creatures of the center who dealt with the local community.⁴³ In terms of the balance of exchange between local officials and peasants, therefore, the relative power of the patron was vastly inflated, his need for clients was reduced, and the incentive to serve the community by protecting it against the larger state was broken.⁴⁴

The Commercialization of Agriculture. With the penetration of the cash economy into the countryside, the bargaining power of elites vis-a-vis peasant clients was greatly enhanced. The legal order of the liberal economy as applied to Southeast Asia fostered the growth of a new elite stratum of landowners, whose power rested in their ownership of the very means of subsistence, and a growing subordinate class of tenants and laborers, whose day-to-day livelihood was dependent on the land or work it could get from members of this elite. The dependence entailed in securing access to land was further exacerbated by the fact that the would-be tenant competed with a growing agrarian population for this privilege.⁴⁵ Exposed now to the effects of volatile market prices for crops and necessities, the possibilities for security outside such networks of dependence were small. Finally, of course, the colonial state

⁴³ See, for example, Harry J. BENDA, *The Structure of Southeast Asian History: Some Preliminary Observations*, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 3, 1, March, 1962, p. 126, and Sartono KARTODIRDJO, *The Peasants' Revolt of Banten in 1888*, 's-Gravenhague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1966, Ch. 3.

⁴⁴ The degree of this shift in the balance of exchange and the speed with which it occurred varied widely. On balance, its impact was most pronounced where colonial authority was strongest and where local authorities were outsiders appointed and paid from above. Its impact was slower and less pronounced where colonial power was less firmly established and where local officials were from the community and chosen locally.

⁴⁵ Eric WOLF, in the final chapter of his *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, New York, Harper & Row, 1968, p. 276-286, has a fine discussion of how the commercialization of agriculture created new demographic pressures and allowed landlords to rely on the state to enforce their terms on the peasantry. We have both, it appears, found Karl Polanyi's analysis of the effects of the market economy on traditional society to be seminal.

guaranteed the concentration of landed property which provided the essential foundation for more onerous forms of dependence.⁴⁶

The peasantry in pre-colonial Southeast Asia was often spared the most exploitive forms of personal dependence by the availability of cultivable land, pasturage, fuel, and other subsistence resources that were either free or communally supplied. A combination of growing population pressure, increasing private ownership of what had been essentially public resources, and colonial restrictions on land and forest use worked to narrow this margin of freedom or to eliminate it altogether. This reduction in the peasant's independence and mobility further reduced his capacity to escape more exploitive dependence relations.

The traditional moral economy of the village generated redistributive pressures which worked against the development of large differences in wealth and tended to ensure all villagers a minimum livelihood, insofar as local resources permitted.⁴⁷ Social changes under colonialism did not completely destroy such local redistributive norms. Their effectiveness — their protective capacity for the resident peasantry — was, however, seriously undermined by: (a) the ability of externally-backed elites to ignore local opinion, (b) the fact that local property and wealth were increasingly controlled by outsiders who were less subject to village levelling pressures, and (c) demographic pressures which simply overwhelmed local absorbitative capacity.

Colonial economic policy prompted a crystallization of dependency relations. The peasant's objective of an assured subsistence could increasingly be achieved, if at all, through a position of dependence as the tenant, debtor, or tied laborer of a member of the landowning,

⁴⁶ It clearly makes a difference whether the pattern of landownership becomes one of a few locally dominant landholders as in the Mekong Delta, parts of Central Luzon, and Lower Burma or one of predominantly small holdings as in the Tonkin Delta and in East and Central Java. A pattern of largeholdings tended to more quickly develop into commercial or rentier forms of land exploitation which eliminated most of the links of personal service between patron and client. Smallholdings tended to create more modest and fragmented forms of patronage in which the personal links between the landowner and tenant or laborer were likely to last longer.

⁴⁷ Such norms were, of course, least in evidence in the comparatively new, atomized directly-ruled settlements of Cochin China and Lower Burma, and most apparent in older, more cohesive settlements such as Tonkin and Java.

money-lending class. The commercialization of agriculture also transformed the class composition of the countryside. Smallholders tended to be squeezed out and to fall into the tenant class; secure tenancy tended to give way to insecure tenancy; insecure tenants tended to fall into the laboring class which was itself increasingly made up of shifting day laborers who were unprotected by any social arrangements and exposed to the full effects of fluctuating commodity prices and labor demand. There were three facts to this process. First, the effects of colonial administration and economics had created the elements of a patron class whose services were more desperately needed by the peasantry; rural stratification was increasingly polarized between the independent and the dependent.⁴⁸ Second, as the bargaining position of the peasant worsened, the conditions of his dependence grew more and more onerous as landholders provided fewer services less reliably and/or exacted a growing social and economic price for their assistance. Finally for many who fell to the bottom, particularly agrarian wage laborers, relations of dependence broke down altogether and the subsistence guarantee disappeared. The process of «restratification» did not occur gradually or smoothly; cycles of boom and bust intensified both the instability of the rural class structure in general and the size and composition of the agrarian proletariat in particular.

Rentier tenancy, the most extreme form of imbalance — which developed particularly in portions of Lower Burma, Cochin China, and Central Luzon — meant the elimination of virtually all landowner services save the provision of land — and that at a high and often invariable rent. Gone is the crucial subsistence insurance for the subordinate peasantry; gone is the personal assistance and brokerage of the landowner; gone is any palpable contribution to cultivation itself. Left is a peasant who shoulders almost all the tasks and risks of farming and a landowner who does nothing

⁴⁸ « It will thus be seen that agriculture in Indo-China has gradually evolved into a position in which there are two very distinct elements: on the one hand the large and medium-sized landowners... who exercise their influence through the authority of the mandarins, the local councils and chambers of agriculture, etc., their associations, the press and the credit system; on the other hand, the working masses: smallholders, tenant-farmers, share farmers, wage earners, all more or less subject to the other group ». Jean GOUDAL, *Labour Conditions in Indo-China*, Geneva, International Labour Organization, 1938, p. 193, quoted in SANSOM, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

at all except to collect rents. The owner's monopoly of land can still call forth dependence but not legitimacy, since he contributes nothing to justify his claim to half or more of the crop in the eyes of the peasant. If the owners were to disappear tomorrow, the major, if not the sole, effect their absence would have would be to relieve the peasantry of the necessity of paying rents. It is no wonder, when every other strand of a once diffuse relationship has disintegrated except for the collection of rent, that the class of absentee owners should appear exploitive.

Rural class relations that had once rested, in part, on consent became, under the forces of commercialization and colonial government, increasingly characterized by coercion and exploitation. If the peasant believed himself exploited by landlords, there is no need to resort to theories of « rising expectations » or « outside agitators » to explain this perception. The growth of agrarian unrest followed a real deterioration in the peasant's terms of exchange and the areas most affected were those in which the commercial and political impact of colonial rule had most undermined the peasant's bargaining position. Relations of dependence were no longer meeting basic subsistence needs. This situation provided both the basis for a sense of exploitation and the moral basis for action. The default of the elite-centered, vertical community of dependence was the necessary, though hardly sufficient, condition for new forms of peasant class consciousness, class organization, and class action. Cast adrift in the liberal agrarian economy of colonialism, the peasantry was faced with the alternatives of acting to restore the traditional balance of exchange or of seeking (or creating) new social mechanisms of protection.

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