

due to the indigenous matriarchal system, in which the mother had an upper hand. In some inscriptions genealogy is traced from the mother's line. Generally it was the father who had the upper hand, and the son succeeded his father.

It would indeed seem that in certain periods women had access to higher education, some entering government and palace positions as, for instance, astrologers and even judges, and at a lower level many ran market stalls. Indeed, the high position of women is alluded to by Chou Ta-kuan in the late thirteenth century and by other Chinese chroniclers of the period who visited and wrote on Cambodia; and although after the fall of the Angkor monarchy their position declined somewhat, they still retained property rights. Recent studies of Cambodian villages indicate that women were still dominant in the market place at the end of the monarchy, both as buyers and as sellers.<sup>8</sup> Yet this situation is very similar to that in south-central Thailand, Burma and (traditional) Vietnam, where there is female control of most retail trade and a high degree of activity in other spheres outside the home – and this in societies with patrilineal or cognatic, not matrilineal descent.<sup>9</sup> Thus a fairly high level of economic control by women does not necessarily entail a matrilineal form of descent, let alone a “matriarchal” society.

Some writers have been influenced unduly by the fact that women have always been able to hold and inherit property on virtually the same basis as men in Cambodia. Puri, for example, cites the fact that women “created a number of endowments” in historical times (*ibid.*). This, however, could reflect a cognatic, not a matrilineal regime of inheritance, especially since in many societies with the latter, property may be controlled exclusively by men (though as brothers and maternal uncles rather than husbands and fathers). Certainly in later periods of Cambodian history, from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the basic regime of inheritance on the dissolution of the nuclear family by the death of one or other spouse was a cognatic one, for the personal property of each spouse went respectively to the surviving spouse (if still alive) and to the inheritors of the deceased spouse (normally the children of the couple); the communal property of the household was divided equally between the two sides. Today, most property is individually owned, and if brought into the marriage as such it remains so; only property acquired by either spouse after marriage is held jointly by the household. The wife's right to property of her own is thus recognized and she can retain it after her husband's death; her children can only inherit such property after her own death. Thus their eventual inheritance is along cognatic lines, property being divided (where possible) equally between the children, regardless of sex. Orans and some other secondary sources claim that out of the family property sons usually receive land, daughters movables, though in the village where Kalab worked in the 1960s, “women own as much land as men” (1968: 522). In Ebihara's village, in the

<sup>8</sup> See on these matters Sharan 1974: 191–2; Imbert 1961: 31; Malleret 1941: 176; Kalab 1968: 527; Ebihara 1974: 321–2, 337–8.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Bunnag 1973: 14, 17; Spiro 1977: 45 ff., 58–9, 205, 257–8; de Young 1955: 24.