The Dyadic Contract: A Model for the Social Structure of a Mexican Peasant Village

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The social structures of societies with unilineal descent groups are far better known than those of societies with bilateral kinship systems, and our conceptual models for dealing with them are much more sophisticated. The differences in our relative degrees of knowledge are particularly apparent when we compare African groups with what may be called "classic peasant society," of which the preindustrial European village is the type example. By 1953 Fortes felt "we are now in a position to formulate a number of connected generalizations about the structure of the unilineal descent group, and its place in the total social system . . ." (1953:24). We are still unable to say as much about bilateral systems, as a class, as Fortes said about unilineal descent groups at that time.

Since Fortes wrote, Pitt-Rivers' account of a small Spanish town (1955) and Banfield's description of a poverty-stricken Italian village (1958) have appeared. Both represent classic peasantry. Although the Spanish Alcalá and the Italian Montegrano differ from each other in many ways, and are described by the authors from distinct points of reference, it is clear that in social typology they fall together as compared to African corporate-unit groups. Most, and possibly all, non-Indian Latin American peasant communities, when better described, will be found to fall with the European Mediterranean type. This is important, since collectively the two areas, which share much common culture history and many social structural features, offer an excellent contrast to the African groups which have become the take-off point for so much structural-functional analysis.

This paper represents a preliminary attempt at a structural-functional analysis of the social organization of the Mexican peasant community of Tzintzuntzan. Specifically, I suggest a model—and describe part of the empirical data from which it is drawn—to reconcile the institutionalized roles which can be recognized and described with the underlying principle which gives the social system coherence. The model appears to account for the nature of interaction between people of the same socio-economic status, between people of different statuses, between fellow villagers, between villagers and outsiders, and perhaps between man and supernatural beings as well. Although my analysis deals only with Tzintzuntzan, I think the model will prove useful for other societies with similar structural features.

In Tzintzuntzan, as in Alcalá and Montegrano, the nuclear bilateral family is the basic social unit. And, as in these two communities, both villagers and
the anthropologist recognize and think in terms of the institutions of the wider family, the godparenthood system (*compadrazgo*), neighborhoodship (to use Pitt-Rivers' term), and friendship. Yet a thorough description and a profound understanding of the workings of institutions which are evident enough to be named do not add up, by themselves, to a structural analysis of the social organization of the community. We need to know more than the totality of roles and attendant statuses that tradition recognizes in institutional frameworks. It is not sufficient to conceive of the community as formed by a conventional arrangement of sociological constructs. What is needed is, at an intermediate level of analysis, an integrative principle—here reciprocity—which leads, at a higher level of analysis to a social model—here the dyadic contract.

Briefly, it is hypothesized that every adult organizes his societal contacts outside the nuclear family by means of a special form of contractual relationship. These contracts are informal, or implicit, since they lack ritual or legal basis. They are not based on any idea of law, and they are unenforceable through authority; they exist only at the pleasure of the contractants. The contracts are dyadic in that they occur only between two individuals; three or more people are not brought together. The contracts are noncorporate, since social units such as villages, *barrios*, or extended families are never bound. Even nuclear families cannot truly be said to enter contractual relations with other families, although spouses often honor the obligations inherent in each other's contracts.

The implicit dyadic contract is made between members of a family as close as siblings; it binds *compadres* (co-godparents) beyond the limits of the formally defined relationships of the institution; and it unites neighbors and friends. Contracts are found between social and economic equals within Tzintzuntzan or with similar people in other communities. And they are found between people (or beings) of different status and category, as on those few occasions when outside political leaders or economic patrons have ties with villagers and when a villager invokes the aid of the Virgin Mary or a saint.

It is clear that the contracts fall into two basic types: (1) those made between people of equal socio-economic status; and (2) those made between people (or beings) of different socio-economic statuses (or order of being). The first type of contract operates primarily within the village, but it also ties villagers to the inhabitants of adjacent peasant communities. The second type of contract operates almost exclusively between villagers and nonvillagers (including supernatural beings), since socio-economic differences in Tzintzuntzan are nonfunctional.

In both types the contract implies and is validated by reciprocal obligations. But here the structural similarity ends. The first type of contract can be called symmetrical, in that it binds people of equal status, and its associated reciprocal obligations can be called complementary since, averaged out over time, they are the same for both parties. By the same token, the second type of
contract can be called asymmetrical, since it binds people of different statuses, and its associated reciprocal obligations are noncomplementary, since each partner owes the other different kinds of things. For example, in the symmetrical contract partners exchange similar goods and services of approximately equal value (measured in time and monetary terms) over a period of time. In the asymmetrical contract, partner A owes partner B something quite different from what he receives from the latter, and vice versa. Moreover, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to strike an equivalence in time and monetary values. To illustrate an asymmetrical, noncomplementary contract, a religious supplicant lights candles and hangs a votive offering before an image of the Virgin Mary, and perhaps promises to wear a special habit for a period of time and to crawl on her knees through the churchyard to the Virgin's image. In return, the Virgin is expected to grant the request that led to the supplicant's offering.

The model embraces both types of contract. In this paper, however, I am concerned descriptively only with the first, which, quantitatively at least, plays a far greater role in the lives of villagers and occupies much more of their time and thought. Relationships between villagers and outsiders of higher status, a client-patron contract for which the term *patronasgo* may be coined, are relatively rare, and my field data do not yet justify more complete analysis. The same is true with respect to the contract between a supplicant and the Virgin or a saint. At a later time, when Tzintzuntzan is treated in monograph fashion, I hope to include these data.

In addition to implicit contracts, villagers also recognize formal and explicit contracts, represented by such acts as marriage, the establishment of the godparenthood relationship, and the buying and selling of property. These contracts rest on governmental and religious law, are legally or ritually validated through specific acts, are registered in writing, and are enforceable through the authority of the particular system that validates them. They may be dyadic, but often they bind several people, as when the baptism of an infant brings two parents, two godparents, and a godchild together. However, they are not to be thought of as corporate in nature.

These formal contracts may be but are not necessarily congruent with the dyadic contracts, since the latter cut across formal institutional boundaries and permeate all aspects of society. For example, two compadres are bound by a formal contract validated in a religious ceremony. This tie may be reinforced and made functional by an implicit dyadic contract, making the two relationships congruent. More often than not, however, compadre bonds are not backed up by implicit contracts.

In the absence of ritual or legal bases for implicit dyadic contracts, what justification is there for saying they exist? (The reader will remember that henceforth, unless otherwise specified, I speak only of the symmetrical, complementary contracts.) How can a villager be sure he is in fact tied to others, and that they similarly recognize the relationship? And what evidence can the anthropologist adduce to substantiate his construct? An outsider in Tzin-
tzuntzan soon learns of an elaborate pattern of complementary reciprocity, almost entirely between pairs of individuals, in which goods and services are continually exchanged. Some of the exchanges are easily visible, as when plates of steaming food are carried by young children from one house to another. Other manifestations of the exchange pattern are not so readily seen, as when a compadre or friend speaks for another in a ceremonial act. But in its totality the system of complementary reciprocity validates, maintains, and gives substance to the implicit contractual networks. The symbolic meaning of exchanges (as contrasted to economic and other functions) is accepted without question by all villagers: as long as a person continues to give to and receive from a partner, he is assured that that particular relationship is in good order. When an exchange pattern between two people terminates, it is overt evidence to both that the contract is dead, regardless of the formal institutional ties or the religious validation which may, in theory, continue to bind the participants.

The implicit dyadic contract accounts for people's behavior to the satisfaction of the anthropologist: it provides him with a model of social structure abstracted from observed behavior. This model also very nearly coincides with the villager's understanding of how his personal world is organized. He is thoroughly conversant with the institutions of family, compadrazgo, neighborhoodship, and friendship, and he can describe the proper role behavior for the several statuses existing in each system. But not far below this level of awareness, he realizes that this picture by no means accounts for his actions, or for those of others. That is, the average Tzintzuntzeño, it seems to me, recognizes that the way he fits into these institutions does not, in fact, explain how his community works. He sees that, quite apart from conventional institutions, he is tied in another way to certain relatives, compadres, neighbors, and friends to the partial or complete exclusion of others occupying the same statuses vis à vis ego, who collectively make his world a workable world. Though he might not put it in so many words, the Tzintzuntzeño recognizes that these contractual ties are the glue that holds his society together and the grease that smooths its running.

Before further exploring the concept of dyadic contract and its validating reciprocity system, more of the characteristics of the village must be outlined. Tzintzuntzan, with 1,800 inhabitants, lies 250 miles west of Mexico City on the shores of Lake Pátzcuaro, in Michoacán state. For many years it has been Spanish-speaking and mestizo in culture, but formerly it was Tarascan Indian and its nearest neighbor villages still are Tarascan. The nuclear bilateral family, as pointed out, is the basic social unit. A majority of families earn their living from pottery-making, but farming is important, and there is some fishing and day laboring on the highway or in the fields of the few farmers with more land than they can cultivate alone. Socially and economically the village is relatively homogeneous. Social classes are absent, and there are no families or individuals of disproportionate power and influence. The importance of the Catholic Church, and the complete absence of minority religious groups,
further emphasize the homogeneous quality of the community. Tzintzuntzan is dependent economically on the local and national markets to sell pottery and fish and to purchase much food, clothing, and other staples. Its political and legal organizations, and its religious system, are directed from outside. In the classic sense of a peasantry, it is a part society existing in a symbiotic relationship with many facets of the nation of which it is a part.⁴

A peasant village of this type differs in many ways from the African lineage-based, segmental tribal societies which Fortes considers in his article on unilineal descent groups. Some of the major ways in which Tzintzuntzan contrasts with these societies are:

1) The primary social unit is based on locality, not descent. The basic, visible, identifiable segment is the village. It is there, a physical reality; it can be mapped; its inhabitants can be counted; one can walk around its limits. There is no question, as in the Balinese example recently described by Geertz (1959), of different planes of interaction which make difficult the isolation of the community.

In Tzintzuntzan there are no corporate, segmentary units. In the absence of lineages, functional extended families, and voluntary associations, the individual's only identification with and allegiance to a corporate body is to Tzintzuntzan itself, a legal entity granted a charter by King Charles V of Spain early in the 16th century. Membership, strictly speaking, stems from birth within the village, although in fact long residence confers legal equality on persons born elsewhere, even though it is always remembered they are not natives. As in Spain, outside the village a Tzintzuntzeño is identified in terms of his community and not as a member of a kinship-based corporate group.

2) As is characteristic of classic peasant societies, in the areas of political organization, of the administration of law and justice, and of religion, local and intervillage autonomy do not exist, and both policy and control rest in the hands of outsiders. The local political and legal systems are truncated, and do not have to cope with major problems. Religious activities are more elaborate than political activities, but they are planned, guided, and in most ways demanded by a hierarchy in no way indigenous to the community.

3) As a consequence of (2), there is little functional need for extended kin groups to play a major role in political, legal, juridical, and religious spheres. To state the matter in another way, much less is demanded of a kinship system in Tzintzuntzan than in many African societies, and a less rigid, more casually organized structure can do all that is required. There is no structural reason why unilineal descent groups could not exist in Tzintzuntzan. The village falls in the “middle range of relatively homogeneous, pre-capitalistic economies in which there is some degree of technological sophistication and value is attached to rights in durable property,” where Fortes (1953:24) finds such groups most in evidence. But history has willed the community another form, one that works at least as well.

4) Tzintzuntzan, as a corporate entity, has no long-standing organic ties with other communities, and within the local area no villages recognize mutual
corporate reciprocal obligations and rights. Intervillage cooperative mechanisms, as in Alcalá (Pitt-Rivers 1953:32) are lacking. Quarrels involving communities as units occur only over the communally-owned lands belonging to the Comunidad Indígena, and the peace-making function for such disputes is vested in state or national law courts rather than with local authorities.

Similarly, there are no long-standing organic ties between groups of people in Tzintzuntzan and parallel groups in other villages. This is not to say there is no intervillage contact; there is a great deal. People marry in towns other than Tzintzuntzan, they form godparenthood bonds, they fight and litigate. The point is that all these contacts are carried out on an individual and not a corporate basis.

In the light of these four points, it is clear that the functional demands placed on a system of interpersonal relations in Tzintzuntzan will differ greatly from those placed on a corresponding system in Africa, where kinship looms so much more important. About all the Tzintzuntzeño asks from his system, and about all he gets, is a modicum of personal, economic, and emotional security which rests primarily on dyadic ties within the village and secondarily on similar ties with people outside the village.

The present analysis, while pointed toward the problem of a model for the total pattern of social ties in Tzintzuntzan, is limited descriptively to the symmetrical, dyadic contract and its validating complementary reciprocity patterns as expressed within the interlocking formal systems of family, compadrazgo, and neighborhoodship-friendship, which collectively provide the institutional framework for organizing most interpersonal relations within the village. Each of these systems, as will be seen, provides norms that define the ideal behavior appropriate to the settings in which people find themselves. With respect to ego, each offers ready-made rules governing his conduct with ever-widening circles of people. Toward all, as defined by the particular system concerned, he owes certain duties and from all he has specific expectations. Obligations toward and expectations from all individuals who stand in the same relation to him theoretically are equal.

But a catalogue of roles and statuses, as earlier pointed out, is not sufficient by itself to explain social structure, because real behavior deviates from ideal behavior. The dyadic contract, I hope to demonstrate, is the key to understanding the patterns found in these deviations. In this presentation the formal characteristics of family, compadrazgo, and neighborhoodship-friendship, and the ideal role behavior inherent in each will be described. The structural stresses and problems inhibiting ideal role behavior will then be considered, and the dyadic contracts and their validating exchanges will be examined.

Family.—In structure and function the Tzintzuntzan family reflects the common Hispanic American particularistic pattern. The nuclear, bilateral unit is simultaneously the ideal and the most common household. Blood descent is traced equally through the father’s and mother’s lines, and this dual affiliation is expressed in the Spanish custom whereby a person’s surname—always compound—is made up of the patronyms of both parents. Thus Juan, the son of
Pedro Morales Rendón and María Estrada Zavala, is Juan Morales Estrada. Patrilineality is evidenced by the priority of the father’s patronym, and by the fact that with each new generation the parents’ matronymics are sloughed off. But the system fulfills the function of identifying every individual in the eyes of the community as a full member of two family lines. The particularistic character of the kinship system is further emphasized by the fact that at marriage a woman does not merge her identity with that of her husband by assuming his patronym, as is done in Mexican cities. She remains María Estrada Zavala and does not become María Estrada de Morales, as she would in more elevated social circles. Throughout her life she continues to be called by her maiden name, and commonly she is identified as the daughter of so-and-so rather than as the wife of so-and-so. She inherits equally (in theory and often in fact) with male siblings; she may register property in her name; and she may buy, sell, or take court action without her husband’s consent.

The extended family is noncorporate, highly informal, and rarely consists of more than three generations. Its most common form, as a residence group, is a married couple, their unmarried children, one or two married children, and grandchildren. More distant relatives in both paternal and maternal lines are recognized, although the degree of acknowledged relationship becomes fuzzier with increasing distance. Beyond primos hermanos (first cousins) and tíos (parents’ siblings), almost all relatives, depending on generation, are lumped as “cousins” or “uncles.” People of the same surname do not form exogamous groups; marriage restrictions apply equally to both lines, and are set by the Church, which is the final arbiter in cases of doubt. A majority of marriages occur within the village, but there are few if any families not bound through the marriage of some members into other communities.

Theoretically, marriage is a family concern, in the sense that parents are supposed to have veto power over their children’s choice of spouse. To some extent, then, marriage might be thought of as representing a contract between two nuclear families. Actually, elopement is the common marriage form, in itself a negation of the idea of a corporate contract between families. Marriage in fact boils down to a dyadic, if formal, contract uniting a man and a woman.

The potential structural chaos resulting from marriage by elopement is not realized, in part at least, because land-ownership is not a major function of the Tzintzuntzan family. Apart from house sites many families are landless, and many more have only small agricultural plots to supplement their major income from the sale of pottery. Most full-time farmers own only part of the land they till, sharecropping other fields to fill their time. Only a handful of men have sufficient land to produce a surplus for sale, and often these holdings have been built up by purchase by the farmer, rather than being inherited from parents. Obviously, in a community with very restricted total land holdings, the goal of keeping large farms together through judiciously planned marriages can scarcely loom large, and consequently elopement poses no threat to this aspect of economic life.

A newly married couple is expected to live in the home of the groom’s
family—less frequently of the bride's family—for a year or so or until the birth of the first child. After this the new family usually goes its own way. Married people's primary economic obligation is toward their spouses and above all toward their children. Provident parents work to leave separate homes for each married son, so that a great many new families become spatially independent early in their existence. Not uncommonly married siblings live in adjacent houses or next to the parents' home, but this pattern derives as much from the practice of the father's subdividing a large lot into inheritance shares as from feelings of fraternal warmth.

Except for obligations toward elderly parents, married couples feel little economic responsibility beyond the nuclear family toward relatives simply because they are relatives. Rather, beyond the nuclear family, the outer world, including relatives, is viewed with great reserve. Villagers, as in many other peasant communities, tend to distrust their neighbors, be suspicious of each other's motives, speak ill of one another, engage in back-biting and petty bickering, try to tear down those who get ahead, and be reluctant to join in cooperative enterprises of any kind.

The nuclear family as a social isolate is consonant with the demands of the productive system. In both pottery-making and farming this unit normally is adequate for all purposes. The father and older sons mine pottery clays and gather firewood which are brought on burro-back to the home where the mother and older girls prepare paste, mold pots, and grind glazes, perhaps with the help of the males. The father builds and tends the fire, and all family members help load and unload the kiln.

In agriculture, an able-bodied man is sufficient for nearly all tasks, especially if he has a son or daughter 10 years of age or more, or a wife willing to help in planting. The light-weight Mediterranean wooden scratch plow is pulled by a single team of oxen and can be managed by one man. Cultivation and harvesting likewise require little or no help beyond that available within the nuclear family. Obviously, members of nuclear families, whether potting or farming, spend a large part of their time in each other's company; they must cooperate as a family group or face economic disaster.

On the other hand, there are relatively few economic activities in which extrafamilial cooperation is absolutely essential, or even desirable. Plow agriculture does not lend itself to cooperative work groups, like the African and West Indian Negro dokpoe, which are effective in hoe cultivation, and in the absence of pottery labor specialization beyond the elementary divisions described, more people working together simply bring confusion. Only in fishing, where a minimum crew of four or five able-bodied men is needed for the big nets and canoes, is there a functional demand for a work group, and in Tzintzuntzan there are only three or four such crews. The important point to note here is that there is no economic reason for cooperation involving groups larger than the nuclear family, and hence no premium is placed on social devices to provide such groups. Perhaps there is no other socio-technological level that permits such a high degree of family independence in normal daily
pursuits. Among most simple hunting-fishing-gathering groups communal hunts or game drives are often essential to success. Among irrigation agriculturalists, canal systems force cooperative maintenance devices as well as juridical and legal interaction. At more advanced technological levels division of labor increasingly requires rationally integrated and cooperative organization of work. But Tzintzuntzan (and many other peasant societies) is at a particular technological point which maximizes the need for an effective nuclear family and minimizes the need for larger cooperative groups.

Ideal role behavior within the family is simply stated. The husband is dominant, owed obedience and respect by his wife and children even after the latter reach adulthood. The wife is faithful and submissive and recognizes her place in the home. Siblings are expected to display the fraternal virtues of mutual economic and moral support, both while they live under the same roof and after they set up independent households. Real patterns may deviate widely from these ideals. Children do not always show respect to their father, and wives may be far from submissive. Often children have migrated to cities or to the United States and their parents have lost all contact with them. Among those who remain in the village, friction is not uncommon, with quarrelling over inheritance a particular source of ill feeling. Incompatibility of sisters- and brothers-in-law may lead to tension when families occupy adjacent or joint dwellings, and a slackening off in relations between siblings is the result, often evidenced by one couple’s selling its house or share and moving to a more distant location.

At least some of these tensions stem from the constraints inherent in the family institution. In the consanguineal line ego has no choice with respect to relatives. At birth he is presented with a ready-made extended family, with a multiplicity of expected rights and obligations stemming from his many statuses. Throughout his life he will continue to acquire relatives, with more obligations and rights, and still he has no choice in selection. Ego’s only option is in picking a spouse, and, in an intensely Catholic society, once the decision is made it is as indissoluble as a blood relationship.

Ego’s only real choice is in the degree to which he will in fact honor the obligations inherent in his several roles (and expect a corresponding return), and in the selection of the individuals with whom he will honor them. Thus, through selecting relatively few kinsmen from his total family toward whom he lives up to the behavior forms expected of him by virtue of his roles vis à vis theirs, ego in fact establishes dyadic contracts which determine his actual behavior. His family provides him a panel of candidates. He selects (and is selected by) relatively few with whom the significant working relationships are developed.

Compadrazgo.—The importance of this institution in structuring social relations in Hispanic America is attested by descriptions found in nearly all studies dealing with the area. Tzintzuntzan follows the general pattern. A godfather and a godmother (rarely, only a godmother) sponsor the baptism of a child, thereby becoming spiritual parents. A single godparent of the same sex as the child is named for confirmation and first communion, and a pair of god-
parents, usually a married couple, is named for weddings. Godparents are responsible for moral advice to their godchildren, and for economic and physical care if necessary. Godchildren, in turn, are expected to show absolute obedience and respect to their godparents, if possible even in greater degree than toward parents. This is an asymmetrical relationship in that in the course of a lifetime godparents have greater tangible obligations toward their godchildren than the latter have toward them. In point of fact, however, the relationship between godparents and godchild's parents, who become co-parents, or compadres (a woman is a comadre), is the more important of the two. This is a symmetrical relationship in that the new obligations and expectations usually are between people of equal status and are essentially equal in form and quantity.

Behavior between new compadres becomes more formal. If previously they addressed each other with the familiar second person "tu," now they use the third person formal "Usted." Simultaneously they abandon the use of personal names and address each other as compadre. The compadre relationship in theory is considered to be one of the most sacred of human ties. Compadres must help each other in every possible way, whatever the personal sacrifice and inconvenience may be. The compadrazgo is much like the family in that it has religious sanction, shares the same incest prohibitions, and once established is indissoluble.

These ideal patterns of behavior are expressed on a ritual and, curiously, a commercial level. Major ceremonial occasions in the life cycle are highlighted by the compadres' participation. When a family offers a ritual meal, compadres are the guests of honor who sit at the head of the table, are served the best food and drink, and are treated with exaggerated decorum. Members of the family, if not working in the kitchen, sit at the foot of the table or stand apart, and eat after the compadres are served. Again, if a person is to be honored on the occasion of his saint's day, it is the job of the compadre to organize the early morning mananitas serenade.

At the same time, the compadrazgo can cement commercial ties. In former years muleteers carried pottery on long journeys; they tried to establish compadre relationships in each town where they stayed so as to have a place to pass the night and a support in case of trouble with local authorities. Outsiders who come to Tzintzuntzan to buy often ask to baptize a new child of the man with whom they do business. Long-distance muleteering is past, but the pattern remains. Those who sell pottery wholesale in Pátzcuaro often sell to compadres who have been brought into the ceremonial relationship after establishing the commercial one. Within the village, pottery merchants who sell from stands on the highway buy much of their ware from compadres, and as in the Pátzcuaro example a developing commercial relationship often is bolstered by a baptism. Sometimes the relationship is frankly exploitive: the merchant hopes to obtain a slightly better price. In others, the potter hopes to assure an outlet for his production. In still others there appears to be a mutual feeling that a satisfactory commercial relationship is enhanced by a ceremonial tie.
Whatever the reasons, the compadrazgo often strengthens commercial dealings.

As with the family, real compadrazgo behavior patterns often deviate greatly from ideal patterns. Far from being a close and sacred relationship, compadre ties often are routine in the extreme. They may become tenuous, and sometimes they are broken to the point where compadres do not even speak to one another! By middle age a man usually has acquired many more compadrazgo ties than he can fully maintain, but as with blood relatives, these are lifetime bonds which cannot formally be broken. The solution lies in ignoring completely a few compadres (if matters come to this point), in maintaining superficially correct ties with most, and in developing an effective working relationship with only a few.

The compadrazgo presents a curious anomaly. The relationship is initiated on the basis of an explicit, formal, contract in which two people agree to be compadres. Yet the system contributes to social stability only when the implicit contract follows—when compadres do in fact cooperate with each other through a system of continuing exchanges. It is clear that the compadrazgo can never be the basis for any kind of a group. No two people have the same combination of compadres. The system represents a net in which ego, represented by a knot, is formally linked to a great many other people, also represented by knots, but in only a few cases are the strands between the knots viable, capable of bearing the load theoretically placed on them by the ideal functioning of the institution.

Neighborhoodship-friendship.—The mere fact of geographical propinquity establishes ties between villagers and creates, if only on a low level, bonds of common interest. A suspicious character in the street is a matter of concern to all, as is a householder’s vicious and dangerous dog, or an arroyo made impassable by a flash flood, thus preventing passage to a maize mill. Neighborhood interaction is often the basis for friendship, but not all neighbors are friends, and not all friends are found in ego’s neighborhood. Lacking the formal structure and religious sanctions of family and compadrazgo, the institutions of neighborhoodship and friendship are of a somewhat different order. Only in the bonds between pairs of adolescent boys, and to a lesser extent girls, do we find as much as a terminology to identify a relationship. Best friends refer to each other as amigo carnal, signifying that the friend is as close as a brother. An exchange of goods—knives, tops, or gadgets that post-adolescents treasure—usually marks the establishment of this friendship, and continuing exchanges occur as long as the ties are recognized. The relationship may last only a short time, or until one friend is married, at which time it may cease to be functional or, if the unmarried friend is asked to baptize the first child, it can be transformed into the compadrazgo.

Otherwise friendship and neighborhoodship are unstructured institutions. Two people begin to see they have interests in common and they like each other. They drop in at each other’s homes; they offer food; they exchange favors. More often than not such ties are within the same sex line, but not in-
frequently, and with full propriety, they can cross sex lines. Whether between persons of the same or of opposite sexes, reservations seem always to be attached to friendship. It is not wise to reveal all of what one thinks and feels, to give of oneself completely. Even between amigos carnales it is doubtful that confidences are sufficiently complete to justify the word "buddies" to describe the pattern.

Friendship and neighborhoodship obligations are less specific than those of the other two institutions. Friends and neighbors are expected to help each other in time of need, to exchange favors, loan money, keep an eye on the temporarily vacant next-door house, and otherwise support those with whom the relationship is acknowledged. Friendship differs from the other systems in that a long-enduring gap between ideal and real behavior can hardly exist: when friends cease to be friendly, the institution dissolves. Neighbors remain neighbors, but neighborly behavior may, and often does, cease.

Friendship and neighborhoodship, as the most flexible of these institutions, fill the gaps left by the imperfections of the others. They flow into the nooks and crannies, fill the chinks, smooth out the rough points remaining in the social fabric. In a pinch they provide a mechanism for any situation normally provided for by the others, and in actual life they fill a good proportion of the functions theoretically assigned to them. Friends and neighbors help in the kitchen; they go with a young man's father to make peace with the girl's family; they sit at ceremonial tables; they engage in commercial transactions; and they enjoy the same degree of confidence as a relative or compadre. They may, of course, be taken into the latter institution, but surprisingly often they appear not to be. In a situation of increasingly rapid change, friendship is the most versatile of the institutions. It can do almost anything that can be accomplished within the framework of the others, but it makes possible the avoidance of long-range commitments. New friendships can easily be formed, and worn out ones can be dropped and forgotten. No messy ends are left, as when one ceases to speak to a man who continues to be a compadre.

The formal social institutions which structure the ideal behavior of Tzin-tzuntzeños have now been described. It is clear that the theoretical demands of each system far exceed the ability of an individual fully to comply with them. To solve the problem, ego chooses, and is chosen by, comparatively few people from within each system, with whom he develops and maintains implicit dyadic contracts. We will now examine the reciprocal exchange patterns which validate and give substance to these contracts.

Reciprocity is expressed in continuing exchanges of goods and services in ritual and nonritual contexts. The goods and services are tangibles; incorporeal values play little part in the system. Over the long term the reciprocity is complementary, because each partner owes the other the same kinds and quantities of things. Over the short term the exchanges are not necessarily complementary, because a material item or service offered to partner A by partner B does not require subsequent return of the same thing to cancel the obligation (and it may in fact require something different, as pointed out in
the following paragraph). Rather, it is a question of long-range equivalence of value, not formally calculated yet somehow weighed so that in the end both partners balance contributions and receipts. In the usual situation each member of the dyad simultaneously counts a number of credits and debits which are kept, over time, in approximate balance.

Within the long-term complementary pattern there are short-term exchanges, often noncomplementary, in which a particular act elicits a particular return. For example, a friend fixes a bride’s hair for the wedding; the friend must be invited to the wedding feast, or, if for any reason she cannot come, food must be sent her from the feast. One compadre organizes a saint’s day mananitas predawn serenade for another compadre, providing guitar players, a chorus, and a tray, or “crown” of fruit and flowers. The honored compadre reciprocates by inviting the serenaders in for an alcoholic ponche and the hominy-like pork posole expected at many ceremonial meals. But these specific, noncomplementary exchanges are merely minor oscillations within the long-term, major dyadic patterns which bind partners over years and decades. The noncomplementary saint’s day exchange probably will be made complementary later in the year, when the second compadre returns the favor.

A functional requirement of the system is that an exactly even balance between two partners never be struck. This would jeopardize the whole relationship, since if all credits and debits somehow could be balanced off at a point in time, the contract would cease to exist. At the very least a new contract would have to be gotten under way, and this would involve uncertainty and possibly distress if one partner seemed reluctant to continue. The dyadic contract is effective precisely because partners are never quite sure of their relative positions at a given moment. As long as they know that goods and services are flowing both ways in roughly equal amounts over time, they know their relationship is solidly based.

For expository purposes the nature of exchanges can be considered in terms of services and goods offered and reciprocated in ritual and nonritual settings. It should be remembered, however, that these lines are not hard and fast in the minds of Tzintzuntzeños, and that a material return in a nonritual setting helps counterbalance a service previously offered in a ritual setting, and so on around the circle of logical possibilities.

Services in a ritual context.—These services, which usually have material components as well, are associated with life crises such as baptism, confirmation, marriage, and death. A young man elopes with a girl, and his father must visit her father to ask pardon and arrange the wedding details. His compadre, the boy’s baptismal godfather, accompanies him and speaks for him. Most of the other members of the small party which accompanies him will also be his compadres. At the home of the aggrieved father the group is met by his compadres, one of whom responds to the peace overtures in his name.

When a child dies young, as an angelito, the godfather not only supplies the casket, clothing, and rockets, but he makes the funeral arrangements, sets the time, and otherwise relieves the family of worry.
**Goods in a ritual context.**—A marriage godfather pays most of the heavy costs of the wedding, and there are secondary exchanges as well, such as that in which the groom’s baptismal godfather sends shoes to the bride. A mayordomo (here called carguero), faced with major fiesta expenses, visits the home of relatives, compades, and friends with whom a dyadic contract exists, asking them to “accompany” him, that is, to contribute foodstuffs and money. Emphasizing the ritual character of this transaction, foodstuffs equal to about half that given are returned following the fiesta. At ceremonial meals, such as saint’s day fiestas, weddings, baptisms, and funerals, guests bring pots in which they pour surplus food from the heaping dishes served them. This is taken home to be eaten the following day. At any festive meal some people invited are unable to come, and others not specifically invited must be remembered. After the guests have been served children are sent to their homes with plates of food.

**Services in a nonritual context.**—These take an unlimited number of forms. One helps nurse a sick friend or relative, gives a hypodermic injection without the usual small charge, purchases something on request in Pátzcuaro, sews a dress or makes a picture frame without charge, lends a stud boar, or poses for the anthropologist’s camera. Any one of thousands of helpful acts is considered, and remembered, as a service incurring some form of reciprocal obligation.

**Goods in a nonritual context.**—Neighbors drop in constantly to borrow an egg, a few chiles, or some other food or household item immediately needed. When men go to the United States as braceros (indentured farm laborers) they often borrow money from friends and relatives, returning the money upon completing their contracts and adding as well some item such as nylon stockings or a shirt which serves to keep alive the exchange relationship. A person with heavy medical expenses expects to receive money outright or as a loan, thus simultaneously being repaid for earlier transactions and incurring new obligations.

The continuing informal exchange of food and drink is particularly important. Except on ceremonial occasions invitations to meals never occur. But when someone—a relative, neighbor, compadre, or friend—with whom the exchange pattern is fully developed drops in, he or she often is not allowed to leave without being offered whatever prepared food is available: a tortilla, perhaps with a fried egg or beans, a bit of candied sweet potato, a glass of warm milk, or fresh fruit. Men drinking at a bar feel obligated to invite any exchange partner who enters to drink with them; often but not always the late entrant then stands the next round. The nature of the food or drink is not important, but if they are offered they must be accepted. Failure to accept food or drink seriously jeopardizes an exchange relationship, since it represents a denial of mutual understanding and friendly feelings, which are basic to the dyadic contract.

The food and drink exchange, important within all institutions, is especially so between friends and neighbors. Because they lack a formal structure, unlike the family and the compadrazgo, even greater attention to constant reaffirma-
tion of the relationship is necessary. The offering of food and drink is the quintessence of this reaffirmation, and if someone professes friendship but fails in this informal exchange, he is said to be a "friend with his lips on the outside," that is, not a genuine friend.  

Food also tells us something else about dyadic contracts: they are of differing degrees of intensity; it is not a question of presence or absence. The situation is similar to that of American friendship patterns in which we see, visit, and interact more with some friends than with others, but the friends we see less often are still qualitatively different from mere acquaintances, since we do recognize obligations toward them. High-intensity contracts can be distinguished from low-intensity contracts by the role of food. If we see some people almost always being offered food when they come to a house, we may be sure that a high intensity dyadic contract is operating. If continuing exchanges of various types with other people are noted, but less thought is given to food, then we may be sure the contract is of lesser intensity.

The function and meaning of the goods and services which exchange in Tzintzuntzan cannot be understood if they are thought of as gifts. Disinterested gift-giving is foreign to the minds of Tzintzuntzeños and difficult for them to understand. Any favor, whatever its form, is part of a quid pro quo pattern, the terms of which are recognized and accepted by the participants. The favor or act simultaneously repays a past debt, incurs a future obligation, and reaffirms the continuing validity of the contract binding the partners.

Both linguistic and behavior forms show why the word "gift" is inappropriate to describe the goods and services that exchange in Tzintzuntzan. In Anglo-Saxon society, a gift is thought of as something transferred from one person to another without measurable compensation. That it may, in fact, be part of a continuing exchange pattern is beside the point. A gift is accepted with thanks, verbally expressed, which symbolize something more than the courtesy thanks that accompany commercial transactions, since the words are recognized as striking a conceptual balance with the donor's thoughtfulness. In Spanish, thanks are expressed in two distinct linguistic forms: gracias (literally the plural form of "grace"), usually translated into English as "thank you," and Dios se le pague, meaning "May God (re)pay you for it." The first form serves for casual, informal interchanges of no moment between persons of equal status, or equal status as far as the occasion that calls forth the word is concerned. But Dios se le pague is used in an entirely different sense, in which the thankers acknowledges the great difference in position and the fact that the object or service can never be reciprocated. Generally in Mexico, and in Spain too, beggars acknowledge alms with this expression. Only by asking God's favor can the beggar in any way repay the giver; neither expects any other balance. An item acknowledged with Dios se le pague, then, can properly be considered a gift in the Anglo-Saxon sense. An item or act acknowledged by gracias is something else, for the form is a courtesy and nothing more.

In Tzintzuntzan both forms are used. The anthropologist hears Dios se le
pague when he has given something considered by the recipient to be far outside the normal patterns of friendship exchange, such as a substantial monetary contribution to help with unusual medical expenses. When he gives lesser items, such as a cut of cloth for a shirt or a dress—something within the normal range of exchanges—he hears gracias, and perhaps more often, nothing at all. He and the recipient know the item given will be reciprocated with pottery, a tule-reed figure, several fish, or something else commanded by the recipient; the cut of cloth is not a gift, nor are the pottery, the figure, or the fish.

Before I appreciated the nature of exchanges in Tzintzuntzan, I was puzzled by the usual absence of verbal thanks, and the near absence of emotional show of any kind when someone gave something to someone else. A “gift,” it seemed to me, ought to be acknowledged with some degree of gratitude. But, to illustrate a common event, a tray of uncooked food would be sent, covered by a cloth, as a contribution to a mayordomo’s fiesta. His wife would accept it unceremoniously at the door, carry it without looking under the cloth to the kitchen, unload the tray, and return tray and cloth to the donor with no more comment than accompanied normal passing the time of day. I was distressed, too, when my more modest “gifts” were accepted with an equal lack of enthusiasm; I feared I was not pleasing. Now, however, it is clear that the Tzintzunteño cannot express thanks on a level of verbal intensity equal to Anglo-Saxon practice, since to do so would be striking the balance which, as pointed out on page 1185, jeopardizes the contract. His way of showing he values the relationship is to accept the offering with minimum show of emotion. To express vehement thanks is the rudest thing he can do, since it suggests he is anxious to call it square and terminate the relationship.

The usual absence of verbal thanks and visible enthusiasm to accompany exchanges does not mean that the transactions are cold, calculated, and emotion-free. People do enjoy these transactions; it is satisfying to know one is living up to his obligations, and that one’s partners continue to value the association. Some of the fundamental values of the culture are expressed in the exchange acts themselves, and people sense and appreciate this fact, even though they would have trouble in verbalizing it.

The functioning of dyadic contracts can now be briefly considered from another viewpoint: the real role behavior versus the ideal role behavior of a specific person in a specific situation. Faustino, aged 40, lives with his wife Pachita and their six children. He has two married brothers and two married sisters living in Tzintzuntzan; she has two married brothers, two married sisters, and both of her parents.

Faustino and Pachita have been godparents to the children of 10 fellow villagers so that, with the godparents of their own six children, they have “primary” compadrazgo ties with 16 couples. Of these 16, two are with Faustino’s siblings and their spouses, two are with Pachita’s siblings and their spouses, and one is with her father and mother, leaving 11 in categories other than that of close relatives. Faustino and Pachita have been marriage godparents only to his niece Chelo. They have also collected an unspecified number
of "secondary" compadrazgo relations on the basis of confirmation, first communion, and a "scapulary" rite.

Faustino’s home is on the edge of town in a small neighborhood slightly set off from the main grouping of village houses. Sixteen neighbor households lie within a block and a half, forming a recognizable unit. Primary compadres are found in four of these households, secondary compadres in two, while a seventh household is that of his married nephew Adolfo, with whom he shares a patio.

Both Faustino and Pachita also have additional friends, but there is no structural device that permits their easy identification. Thus, eliminating friends and the overlap in categories of primary compadres, neighbors, and close relatives, 30 households with recognizable potential exchange relationships remain.

Which of these relationships are recognized and reaffirmed on the occasion of Faustino’s saint’s day predawn serenade and the subsequent pozole-and-ponche breakfast? As in previous years, in 1960 the serenade was organized by his compadre Eusebio, Pachita’s brother-in-law, whose child they had baptized, and who lives outside the neighborhood area. Eusebio, exercising his prerogative, invited two of his friends, one of whom was accompanied by his wife. He also brought two guitar players, who by chance were nephews of Faustino. All these people were given food and drink. In addition, the other guests at this modest entertainment consisted of two of Faustino’s four siblings and their spouses (the pairs who also are baptismal compadres), his niece goddaughter Chelo and her husband, the nephew and wife with whom he shares his patio, and the anthropologist.

When these people had been fed, plates of pozole were sent to the homes of 2 primary comadres, 2 secondary comadres, and 2 friends (all six in the neighborhood), and to the mother and to the baptismal godmother of Chelo’s husband (Faustino’s marriage godson), to a sister and her husband, and to a friend, all living outside the neighborhood.

Thus, of the 30 households which could be placed in one or more of these institutional relationships to Faustino and Pachita, only 11 were invited to participate in his saint’s day breakfast. Or, to look at the problem negatively, and not counting overlapping categories, of 16 primary godparenthood ties, only 6 were recognized; of 16 neighborhood ties, another 6 were recognized; and of 9 sibling-parent ties, 5 were recognized.

This particular example does not mean that only individuals in these households have dyadic contracts with Faustino, since in other settings ties with other people would be recognized and some of these might be overlooked. The illustration does show how the formal social institutions of Tzintzuntzan provide an individual with more potential associates than he can utilize. It would be very difficult for Faustino to live up to the ideal role behavior implicit in the 30 household relationships and impossible for him to do so in all the statuses he occupies in the community. His institutions provide him with outer limits for a circle of associates. By means of the dyadic contract, implemented through reciprocity, he patterns his real behavior.

In summary, the model outlined in the first pages of this paper may be re-
stated. This model rests on the assumption of a structure in which critical social relationships inherent in all institutions beyond the nuclear family are contractual (hence selective) rather than ascribed (hence nonselective). In the absence of corporate units, contracts can occur only between pairs of individuals; they must be dyadic. In the absence of legal or ritual validation, contracts must be considered informal or implicit. Informal or implicit contracts can be validated and maintained only by means of recognized reciprocal obligations, manifest by the continuing exchange of goods and services. The nature of these obligations will depend on the relative statuses of any two partners. When they are functionally equal—when the contract is symmetrical—the obligations and expectations must be complementary; otherwise there would be no purpose to the relationship. When the partners are functionally unequal—when the contract is asymmetrical—the obligations and expectations must be noncomplementary; otherwise there would be no purpose to this relationship. In neither instance can the goods and services which represent obligations and expectations be thought of as gifts. The contractual principle enables an individual to disentangle himself from the weight of ideal role behavior implicit in the totality of ascribed and achieved statuses he occupies in a society and to make functional such relationships as he deems necessary in everyday life.

Every incident of behavior in Tzintzuntzan, of course, does not fit this model. Friends and neighbors are not always given food when they drop in; neighbors may be unable or unwilling fully to comply with the obligations they recognize toward a particular person; guests outside a contractual relationship may turn up at ego’s saint’s day fiesta. But these, and similar examples, can be described in terms of the model, even though they do not fit it precisely. Again, the model may appear overly elaborate with respect to asymmetrical, non-complementary type contracts in Tzintzuntzan, but this does not detract from its basic utility, since such behavior as does occur in these areas can be described in terms of the model.

Two final, more general questions may be asked about this model:

(1) To what extent, if any, does it help explain other aspects of Tzintzuntzan social structure and personal behavior not previously mentioned?

(2) To what extent, if any, does it serve for other Latin American communities, and perhaps peasant societies in general?

The model appears to account for two noteworthy characteristics of Tzintzuntzan: (a) There are no factions, as, for example, they have been described in India where long-standing, relatively permanent alliances of groups are pitted against each other. (b) Since the first “cultural missions” sent by the Mexican Government in the early 1930’s, Tzintzuntzan has proved resistant to all outside attempts to stimulate cooperative action for community improvement. People consistently are reluctant to work with others toward group goals.

The model suggests that where a society is conceived as a network of social relations based on dyadic contracts, in which no two people have exactly the
same ties, there can be no blocks to serve as the basis for either positive or negative action. Neither is there a unit to serve as base for feuding, nor a unit to serve as base for cooperative work for mutual goals. The model is consonant with the atomistic, or particularistic quality of society which an anthropologist feels so strongly when living in the village.

The second question, the applicability of the model to other societies, can only be answered impressionistically. I suspect it will prove useful in analyzing other Latin American communities. We know that in much of Latin America patronazgo patron-client type ties are more strongly developed than in Tzintzuntzan; the model covers these forms. Again, anthropologists speak of personalism, the relationship between people in which the individual distrusts the system and relies on personal ties, as a distinguishing characteristic of Latin American society. The model of the dyadic contract makes more precise this loose term, for personalismo is nothing more than a contractual tie between two people who feel they can help each other by ignoring in large measure the institutional context in which they meet.

With respect to the possible applicability of the model to other peasant societies, particularly those with bilateral kinship systems, again one can in large measure only speculate. In his description of the Spanish Alcalá, Pitt-Rivers sees the nature of conceptual equality leading to cooperation on the basis of reciprocal service much as I see it in Tzintzuntzan. It seems to me, too, that the Italian Montegrano, as portrayed by Banfield, in considerable degree fits the model drawn for Tzintzuntzan. Perhaps, also, potential for the use of the model in peasant studies lies in the area not described for Tzintzuntzan: relations between people of different statuses, and particularly those of villagers with outsiders. Redfield has pointed out that peasant villages may prove to be so incomplete as systems as to preclude their description as social structures (1956:37). He draws upon Barnes' "territorially-based social field," the "market," and the "network" to place the village in its larger social context. The model of the dyadic contract, it seems to me, offers a more precise way of interpreting these contacts. All of these are questions, however, which must be answered by those with intimate knowledge of peasant communities in other parts of Latin America and the world at large.

NOTES

1 The ideas here presented stem from field work made possible by a National Science Foundation Grant and a grant from the Research Committee of the University of California (Berkeley). I am indebted to May Díaz and Robert F. Murphy for critical comments which were helpful in determining the final form of this paper.

2 In Kroeber's oft-quoted definition, such villages form a class segment of a larger population usually containing urban centers; "they constitute part-societies with part cultures" (1948: 284). Kroeber once told me that in writing these lines he had in mind only European peasant communities and that he had not considered their possible applicability to agricultural communities of distinct historical antecedents and structural characteristics in other parts of the world.

3 In the sense that wealth differences and occupational distinctions have no bearing on the nature of interaction. The poor marry the less poor, the illegitimate marry the legitimate, the
moderately well-to-do farmer and the poorest potter each accept identical *mayordomía* fiesta obligations.

4 A descriptive account of the village is found in Foster (1948).

5 Tzintzuntzan is the *cabecera*, the administrative head, of the *municipio* of the same name, composed of about 20 villages, ranches, and hamlets. People from other villages must come to Tzintzuntzan to register births, marriages, and deaths, and municipio taxes are collected from Tzintzuntzan. But municipio organization is arbitrary, often artificial, and in no sense represents an organic reciprocal union of neighboring communities.

6 The "Indigenous Community," a legal entity composed of all family heads, dates from colonial times, when all village lands were held by community title alone. Most lands now are individually owned, but the Comunidad Indígena still owns the higher hillsides, and in recent years it has bought pasture and marginal agricultural land from private owners outside the village.

7 The *mayordomía* is the only traditional, socially sanctioned way in which a person can compete for status. Success is achieved by the mayordomo who supervises and finances an elaborate fiesta. It is noteworthy that he (and to a lesser extent his wife) alone receives credit for the effort. Unlike other societies in which the credit is shared with all who have contributed, the friends, relatives, and compadres who help do not bask in reflected glory. But they, in their turn, can expect an undiluted glory when, as mayordomo, they are helped in similar fashion.

8 An element of asymmetry obviously is present in food offerings, since, except under duress and in the absence of a woman in the house, a man does not cook. A man could offer fresh fruit or some other ready-to-eat food to a friend, but in practice he does not. Consequently, a woman offers food to both sexes but receives it from only one. Food exchanges therefore involve women more than men. This tendency is apparent, too, when on the occasion of a fiesta food is sent to another house, a woman usually is specified as the recipient. On the other hand, men, by offering alcoholic drinks, express the same thing women do in offering food. There is, however, an important limitation: men normally do not offer drinks to women in public places. But they may do so with full propriety at gatherings in private homes.

9 Viz., the nine close relatives; the 16 "primary" *compadrazgo* relationships which reduce to 11 because five of them are also close relatives; the one marriage godparenthood relationship; the 16 neighbor relationships which reduce to nine because four of them are also primary compadres, two are secondary compadres, and one is a nephew.

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