

THEMATIC REVIEW SHEET #4: Ties that Bind - Social Organization

- Political and social orders based on either genealogical ties or patron-client relationships can be found in most regions of the world, including Africa, the Americas (Aztec and Inca), Asia (Mongols, caste system), and Europe (feudalism).
- The Muslim historian Ibn Khaldun concluded that while all civilizations have risen and fallen because of socioeconomic factors, the immediate agents of this cycle were the lineage groups of rural areas, pulled together by a charismatic leader offering a powerful religious ideology. Only armies such as those tied by kinship - the tightest bond of loyalty in society - had the strength to overwhelm the defenses of the centralized state.
- Families have served as vehicles for the accumulation and transfer of property, knowledge, and power.
- In the relatively few matrilineal societies, women held power within the family.
- In most of our examples, the structures of family and household and their relationships to larger social and political orders were shaped by a patriarchy.
- In some cases, marriage itself was largely an economic transaction, marking the transfer of wealth and creating political alliances within families.
- Religion defined and determined the meaning and function of families everywhere:
 - in China, Confucianism provided the cementing ideology for patriarchy
 - in the Muslim world, Islam did
 - European families after about the ninth century were strongly influenced by the Christian Church
- In male-dominated societies, men controlled most of the household's wealth and held greater access to political power than women did.
- Individual women of privilege - by virtue of circumstance, cunning or their spiritual role - could and did circumvent the male-dominated hierarchies of ancient Egypt, Greece, feudal Europe, Andean South America, and Japan → they often acquired economic wealth alongside political power.
- History is but one of the memory systems by which community is defined, and cultural knowledge is transmitted. Among other systems of cultural memory are visual and performing arts, literature, theology and philosophy, and scientific and technical knowledge.
- Some cultures stressed the keeping of formal historical records and transmitted the past in an explicit, conscious fashion through written texts, as the Chinese -- or through oral traditions, as in West Africa.
- Other cultures paid greater attention to the transmission of religious ideas, as those influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism in India and Southeast Asia.
- But ALL CULTURES, whether explicitly or implicitly, found ways to impart a particular understanding of their past through formal and informal means, through institutions and organizations, community rituals and distinctive structures.
- In addition to within cultures, ideas and practices have been transmitted across cultures as well as across time --> such as the Arab transmission of Greek science and philosophy to medieval Europe.

ORDER: IDEAS --> POLITICAL STRUCTURE + ECONOMIC SYSTEM + SOCIAL ORGANIZATION