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The Economics of Administration : on Ownership and Governance

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In its simplest terms, the economic aspect of administration is the collection of taxes, and no discussion of administration is complete without a discussion of taxation and the accompanying issue of ownership and possession.

Administration or governance virtually always involves the extraction or plundering of economically valuable goods and services in a variety of forms. Some writers, including Max Weber, approach the subject in terms of the forms of power. Here, in the framework of the comparative study of civilization, I would like to center the discussion of the economics of administration on the modes of ownership.

In any given society, who owns what—land, labor power, capital — is of enormous significance in considering administration and governance. Yet the concept of "ownership" has a wide range of possible meanings, and it is extremely difficult to define. The concept and its definition vary from era to era and from society to society. Especially in historical inquiries, it is essential to place "ownership" in the context of the conditions of the times. For example, one modern definition of ownership is that someone who owns something has the right to sell it. However, even in modern societies the modes of buying and selling differ, and ownership can take on very different meanings even in contemporary societies.

1. THE CONCEPT OF THE EXCHANGE CHAIN

In one of the papers for this symposium, Harumi Befu has applied the theory of exchange to administrative organization, using the dyadic model of exchange in a particularly rigorous fashion. I believe that we should extend this dyadic model even further, to visualize extended chains of exchange that make an entire society an

“exchange system.”

Let us take one of Befu's examples: the exchange of gifts in a bureaucratic organization, in which a dyadic exchange has taken place between a superior and his subordinate. In fact, the exchange does not stop there. The exchange pattern reaches upward, to the superior's superior, and downward, to the subordinate's subordinate, to cover the entire organization and sometimes to reach beyond it. When it extends beyond the organization, as it does in Japanese politics, it can become a source of corruption.

These gift-exchanging relationships are based on the recognition of what one person possesses and what the other does not. The same principle can be found in other acts of economic burden-sharing (including taxation, plundering, and so on). In other words, the movement of economic goods and services from one owner to another is based on what each present or prospective possessor owns or does not own. This differs from buying and selling in a market, where the goods or services exchanged are equivalent in value. In the chains of exchange that constitute administration or governance, the exchange is dyadic, and economic goods or services are exchanged for social and political services. In such exchanges, evaluation is not based on strict equivalence.

From this point of view, administration or governance is a chain of exchange of non-equivalents. In Dr. Umesao's keynote address, he used the analogy between the study of civilization in the social sciences and ecology in biology. Extending this analogy further, I would argue that the biological model of the “food chain” can serve as a useful model for the exchange chain in the economics of administration. Just as, in the food chain, a large fish eats a small fish, which has itself eaten a still smaller fish, so in an exchange chain a power-holder in an administrative organization exchanges non-equivalent goods with his subordinate, and that subordinate in turn engages in a similar exchange with *his* subordinate, and so on down the hierarchy.

These two concepts—the modes of “ownership” and the view of administrative organization as an “exchange chain”—provide the basic elements of the following approach to administration. The starting point is a small number of case studies from among the societies I have most closely studied, those in Africa, and with this as a base I shall proceed to a comparison with Japanese society.

2. POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW

After World War I, a number of ethnological studies were conducted in various African societies, and as a result we have a fairly clear picture of their political systems. Extensive work has been done to describe and classify the political organization of various African societies, beginning with Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's work, *African Political Systems*, in 1945 and including Eisenstadt's 1950 article on “African Political Systems” and Coleman's 1960 book, *Politics in Developing Society*. My own examination of the characteristics of West

African polities was published in 1982.

Among these African societies, the most interesting was the kingdom or chiefdom, where political power was centralized and a systematic administration structure established. History after the Middle Ages provides many examples of the rise and fall of these black African nations, particularly in the Sudan region. Most of these nations were heavily influenced by Islam, and perhaps for this reason their treatment by Western social scientists has been less than satisfactory. Eisenstadt, for example, limited his investigations to the "primitive" tribal societies of modern Africa and specifically excluded historical nations. Coleman's typology of African societies, however, identified as the first of its four categories "the large-scale centralized nation" as epitomized by the nations of the thirteenth and fourteenth century Sudan and the Hausa in northern Nigeria.

Eisenstadt's typology of African political organization [EISENSTADT 1950] is as follows:

- I. Types of Segmentary Tribes:
 - A. Band Organization
 - B. "Classical" Segmentary Tribes
 - C. Universalistic (Age-Groups) Segmentary Tribes
 - D. The "Associational" Tribes
 - E. The Ritually Stratified Tribes
 - F. Acephalous, Autonomous Villages
- II. Centralized Chiefdoms
 - G. } Centralized and Federative Monarchies
 - H. }
 - I. Monarchies Based on Associations and Secret Societies

This paper is concerned with the last two categories, which cover "nations" as defined here. Eisenstadt avoids classifying the historical states but cites as his examples of category G both the Zulu and Swazi of southern Africa and Ashanti of Ghana, West Africa, and illustrates category I with the Mende and Temune of Liberia, West Africa.

A major issue in analyzing societies in these two categories is therefore the background of the kingship which was the centralizing focus of political power. The ruler in traditional African organization achieved his status not only through the exercise of power but also because his administrative function was grounded in his role at the center of the society's religious value system. This is epitomized by the system in which the monarch was regarded as a deity, a "divine king" who was priest as well as ruler. The divine king was the spiritual center of political organization and the living symbol of the territory and the unity of his people; this role was the wellspring of the authority of the king, and was often strengthened by the workings of secret societies.

3. THE MONARCHICAL SOCIETY OF THE CAMEROON HIGHLANDS

In order to illuminate the nature of African kingship, I have since 1978 been observing the society of the Mankon, a typical kingdom in the highlands of Cameroon. In Eisenstadt's typology, it belongs to the category of "Monarchies based on Associations and Secret Societies."

Although I shall refrain from presenting a detailed description of the society, I should like to set out the principal features of the role of the ruler in Mankon society. The Mankon kingship exhibits the features of the "divine king" and is closely intertwined with a secret society called the *Kwi-fo*.

The people believe that by following their king, they are following their deities. Mankon's religion is a form of ancestor worship: the ancestors are deities, and all those who die become deities. The king who rules such a society has been given supernatural powers by the ancestors, and he himself is seen as an incarnation of divinity.

The nature of the kingship can best be grasped through two rituals performed by the king each year. One is a ritual called *ngang-fo* in which medicine to keep evil spirit at bay is distributed throughout the Mankon territory. *Ngang* means a traditional medicine man or one with magical healing powers. The king is both the prototype of the medicine man and the leader of all those who play that role in the society. In the ritual, the king summons all the medicine men in the nation to a prescribed part of the palace. There they use herbs which they have brought from all over the country to make a magical medicine. This is then distributed to the medicine men who scatter it at the borders of the roads leading to neighboring states and then give some to all the houses in Mankon. The whole ritual is said to take about one week.

A second annual ritual is called *alanki*. *Alanki* is the name of the site where a palace was once situated. In Mankon society, when a king dies, the body is buried under the floor in the palace, which is a sacred edifice. Therefore *alanki* is the burial place of the royal ancestors. The *alanki* ritual is performed for the king's ancestors and for the deities of Mankon.

As these two rituals clearly illustrate, the king's role is protecting his people from danger and evil spirits and defending his territory. These functions were rooted in the needs of earlier times: until the end of the nineteenth century, kingdoms like Mankon were engaged in virtually unending warfare with neighboring states, triggered primarily by territorial invasions or the abduction of their people (particularly women) into slavery.

These functions are the basic political and social services performed by the king of Mankon. How can this be interpreted in terms of economic inputs and outlays, of the exchange of nonequivalent value between king and subject? The land itself is fundamentally the possession of the king. However, the king recognizes ownership by the heads of the principal clans and lineages. Cultivators receive permission to use the land from the heads of their clan. Mankon has, in other words, a

dual system of latent ownership by the king and actual ownership by the clan or lineage head.

This describes the contemporary situation. However, given the incessant wars between the kingdoms of the Cameroon highlands before the end of the nineteenth century, it has been for slightly less than a century that Mankon society has settled into its present location and its stable social patterns. The structure of ownership in Mankon society should not be regarded as primitive or traditional, but as very much a product of modern times.

In societies like Mankon, the usual mode of taxation is the provision of labor. The subject provides labor for the cultivation of the royal lands (those owned by the king or the king's family). In African agricultural societies, the productivity of the land is dependent on the labor force, and therefore one of the recurring challenges has been the maintenance of labor power, either through natural population increase or the capture of slaves.

In Max Weber's typology of authority, this kind of kingship would be described as charismatic rule, the assumption being that such control is based on the ownership of human beings or of the rights to their labor power. However useful this may be for descriptive purposes, it does not provide a useful viewpoint for the comparative study of civilization.

4. A FRAMEWORK OF ECOLOGICAL COMPARISON

I would like to propose a new framework for comparison, based on the case studies of various African societies. In contrast to the social and anthropological perspective of the classical categorizations, this framework is fundamentally ecological. The basic criteria for comparison are the products of the land.

Table 1 employs some of the indicators of civilization that I have used previously to compare the historical characteristics of Guinea and the interior of the Sudan [HATA 1982]. It looks at the differences between the two regions in their civilization and the development of their polity in terms of the basic conditions of the physical

Table 1. Comparisons of the Historical Civilizations of the Sudan and Guinea

	Sudan	Guinea
Environment/vegetation	Savanna	Tropical Forest
Crops	Grains	Root crops
Ownership mode	Products	Products
Writing System	○ (Arabic)	×
Urbanization	○	△
State system	○ (Islamic)	△
Currency or money	△	△
Religion	○ (Islam)	×

○, Present; △, Incomplete; ×, Not present

environment, crops, land, and products.

The nature of agriculture and the kinds of staple crops produced are shaped by the climate and the physical environment. In the Sudan this is savanna (open forest), and the staple crops are grains and cereals. Guinea's environment is tropical forest, and the staple agricultural products are root crops, especially yams. Agricultural products are fundamental to our considerations because the cultivators' way of life is determined by the crops they have chosen to raise.

The category of "ownership system" in Table 1 refers to whether the society's production system is premised on the ownership of land or only on the ownership of its products. With a handful of exceptions in each society, both the Sudan and Guinea are societies based on the ownership of products rather than land.

The original purpose of the set of comparisons in Table 1 was to use this array of basic conditions to compare the Sudan in the interior of West Africa and coastal Guinea. However, from our present viewpoint, the questions of why a state developed in the Sudan but not in Guinea and of the relationship between state formation and the other variables of crops and ownership system are the most fundamental to the issues of governance and administrative structures.

From the viewpoint of ownership and governance, land must have an economic value. One mode of evaluation is classifying land by the type of product it generates: for example, the four categories of (a) grain-producing; (b) root crop producing; (c) pasture; (d) other. This classification of course includes the modes of life that the land supports. The first two categories support agriculture, whereas pasture supports cattle breeding and nomadic tribes. The final category, "other," would support hunting and gathering tribes, although the scope of the present discussion precludes further detail on this category.

For the concept of the economic value of a piece of land to have any real meaning, it must be possible to measure that value in some fashion. This makes possible the organization of the society's economy. The two basic categories of agricultural land—grain-producing and root producing—are characterized by different modes of measurement. The grain-producing type is measured by fixed standards, and the root-producing by relative standards. The productivity of land that produces grain is far easier to measure in absolute terms, whereas with crops such as potatoes or plantain such relative measures as the size of the potatoes or plantains are the most common standards for measuring productivity.

A fixed standard for measuring land productivity provides a base for the organization of the society's economy. In other words, products that can be measured by a uniform set of standards can function as a generalized medium of exchange in society, through which the evaluation of land and other forms of economic value can be determined. The economic function of rice in pre-modern Japan is a striking example.

In Mankon society, which I discussed above, the staple crops are taro, macabo, yams and other kinds of potatoes, but these kinds of root crops do not provide the fixed basis for measuring land productivity that can promote the organization of the

economy.

Interestingly enough, the mode of life of cattle-breeding or nomadic tribes may well provide a more stable basis for assessing the productivity of land: that is, the number of cattle it supports. The relationship between this fixed measure of land productivity and the mode of rule and administration is an interesting one, deserving of further exploration.

From the viewpoint of economics, the sources of the ownership of the fundamental economic resource of land and of the various other economic elements form the substructure of governance and administration. Possession and ownership are the bases for the fundamental differences across societies in the taxation system, which constitutes the major element of control over the land. The crucial factors determining how governance is related to taxation are the presence of fixed standards for evaluating land and the feasibility of using those standards to organize the society's economy. In this context, the grain/root crop classification has this crucially important significance: grain-producing types of societies are conducive to the development of regular taxation systems, whereas root crop-producing types are not.

This insight provides a basis for comparing the civilization of African societies, including what Coleman has classified as the "large-scale centralized state" (such as the medieval state which flourished in the western Sudan from the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries). This large-scale centralized state was able to absorb Islamic civilization because it had the basis for incorporating, albeit in a limited form, a national state taxation system. We should note as an aside that of the major African states, only the Hausa state was capable of adopting a regular national taxation system in its entirety. In contrast, Guinea in West Africa never absorbed Islamic civilization, and the taxation systems of its traditional Black African monarchies, like Mankon society, never developed past the requisition of labor.

5. A COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK OF "OWNERSHIP"

Next I would like to shift the focus of comparison to "ownership," particularly the ownership of land. Given the great variation across societies in ownership patterns, I believe it is best to forego the creation of comprehensive typologies and to focus on whether the cultivators or producers actually own the land they work. "Producer ownership" means that cultivators own the land or have the first right to the products of the land, and comparisons across societies can focus on whether or not producers do indeed have such rights. Where they do not, we can speak of "non-producer ownership." It includes all other forms of land ownership, including possession by the central ruling authority, large-scale private ownership, and so on. "Producer land ownership" refers only to direct and officially approved ownership by the cultivators. This is a very rough distinction, but it provides a means of explaining some of the variation across societies and across eras.

If the categories of the ecological framework are added to this ownership

Table 2. Typology Based on Ecological and Ownership Variables

	(a) Grain-production	(b) Root crop production
(1) Producer land ownership	1-a	1-b
(2) Non-Producer land ownership	2-a	2-b

dichotomy, we can identify four basic categories of societies (Table 2). Some examples of each type will clarify the framework. Given that many African states do not have producer land ownership, most of the medieval monarchies and Islamic states, which were based on slavery, are in category 2-a. The kingdoms of the Cameroon Highlands discussed above are in category 2-b.

Clearly this framework is not very precise. Nevertheless, it is intriguing to compare the African cases with some examples from East Asia. Dr. Kim's article in this volume suggests that pre-modern Korea belonged in category 2-a. Japanese society, in macroscopic terms, belongs in category 1-a.

From very early in its history, Japan has been a grain-producing society; the organization of society around the production of rice began in ancient times. The modes of land ownership have been far less constant: Table 3 summarizes these from ancient times to the present.

The modes of authority in Japanese society have undergone many changes during its long history. The ruling class in the later feudal era (the Tokugawa period), the samurai, were not themselves owners of land. In other words, the rule of the samurai was not based on land ownership as the source of their power. This was made perfectly clear at the time of the Meiji Restoration, when the samurai were not given the ownership titles to their hereditary fiefs; instead, land ownership went to the cultivators of the land. This is a major difference between Japan and European countries, where the ruling class was the landowning class.

What, then, was the source of power in Japan? Was it perhaps armed force, epitomized by Toyotomi Hideyoshi's sword hunt, in which commoners were forced to give up their weapons? When the economic interactions between the rulers and the ruled in the Tokugawa period is examined in their simplest terms, we can con-

Table 3. Modes of Ownership in Japanese Historical Evolution

Land System Ownership Mode	<i>Tonsou</i> (tenant system)	<i>Handen</i> (allotment system)	<i>Shoen</i> (Manorial system)	Feudal (fief system)	Modern
Producer land ownership		*	*	*	*
Non-producer land ownership	*		*		

clude that those in authority—feudal lords and their retainers—provided administrative, police, and judicial services. In this sense, the proportion of their harvest which the peasants paid as tax can be considered as a kind of tax rather than rent for the land. The social system of status divisions can thus be viewed as a kind of functional specialization of roles, and the relationship between ruler and ruled as an exchange chain. In this regard, it is worth noting the continuities between the territorial boundaries of the feudal administrative units and those of the early Meiji local government units. These continuities greatly smoothed the transition between the feudal and the modern administrative systems.

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