

## Reviews

urban or higher density rural areas, if minorities are more often located within higher density rural areas, etc. In short, there is a confused connection between theoretical concerns and the evidence proffered. Similar confusion spills over into distinguishing earlier research addressing hypotheses of inequitable exposure from research addressing inequitable prioritization, and in distinguishing direct tests of strong inferential hypotheses from indirect suggestive descriptive findings. In short, the treatment of equity issues is not the authors' strongest contribution nor the most carefully crafted chapter of the work. These concerns, however, are largely limited to one chapter of the text which is arguably a diversion from the principal thrust of the analysis. The authors' central notion - that when evaluating risk population-based measures are appropriate - is acknowledged and distinguished as a specific hypothesis in prior equity research. None of these concerns detract from the central contribution of the text.

In the main, this text concerns the possible methods for a defensible assessment of Superfund site risks and the policy options for integrating such assessments into EPA procedures. There is little question that the authors have contributed in a profound way to this discussion. The authors' critique of EPA's existing policies is a major contribution. While many have questioned Superfund remediation costs, the authors have gone a step beyond others in a careful quantification substantiating these concerns. Their excursions into related issues, such as the role of risk information in housing valuation, raise interesting research questions and challenge existing conceptions of policy import. The simulation and assessment of policy options clearly establishes the salience of the policy options the authors offer. This text makes a clear contribution to Superfund policy research and also deserves serious attention by anyone concerned with the broader questions of society, economy and the environment.

### **Property, Properties, and the Distribution of Wealth, A Review Essay by Stephen Gudeman, Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota.**

### **Property Relations: Renewing the Anthropological Tradition, edited by C. M. Hann. 1998. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. x, 277 pp.**

When landed wealth guaranteed position, and both were part of a predictable world, the conceit of property rights provided a taproot to social reality, because property ensured survival and status. With good reason, an earlier generation of anthropologists embraced the concept. Today, with globalization, the spread of post modernist ideas and the efflorescence of new wealth forms, the idea of property rights seems dated. The contributors to this volume, encouraged by C.M. Hann, are reviving this musty concept, by shifting the focus to property "relations" and bringing it to bear on new ethnography from around the world. Many of the results are interesting, but I found myself expanding their conceptual apparatus to include concepts about local models, the interaction of community and market in economy, distribution from a shared base or commons, and innovation.

What is the traditional wisdom? From Sir Henry Maine to Radcliffe-Brown and after, anthropologists emphasized that property refers to rights over things that people hold in relation to others. Property is not the object itself nor the relationship between person and object; rather, property specifies what a person can and cannot do with an article in relation to the rights held by others. This part of the traditional perspective is well explained in Chris Hann's Introduction and Jack Goody's contribution on dowry. For anthropologists, property is socially and legally

## Reviews

sanctioned, hence the book's title - Property Relations.

We owe to Maine (and Vico) as well the idea that holdings are packages of different rights - tied together for one person or distributed among several possessors. To the same plot of land an owner may hold rights of sale, a renter may possess long-term rights of use, and a tenant or sharecropper may enjoy annual rights to plant and harvest. Such distributed rights may be written in law or observed in practice, and their scope (or relation to one another) is frequently contested, especially in times of transition. The essays by David Anderson on the Evenki in the former Soviet Union and by Katherine Verdery on Romania show how rights from the past and in the present, and how different kinds of rights may be piled one on another, often leading to legal battles and social stratagems.

But this second idea, that rights may be differentiated and separated among holders, places the narrow, legal notion of property within several broader settings and suggests why the traditional "analytical tool" may not provide a special key for understanding social life today. Rights deconstruct a property into uses, and understanding this relation between an entity and its categories of value requires a local, cultural analysis. For example, when the Mexican government some 60 years ago claimed rights to the subsoil (oil), while continuing to recognize surface rights to till, it was asserting nationhood, sovereignty and claims to new wealth as it acknowledged traditional land rights. The received concept of "property rights" provides a legal or jurial view of social life and fits a social structural approach, but property rights are not finalities or explanations of social life. They need to be embedded in a symbolic, semantic, historical and pragmatic perspective, a point underscored by Hann and woven into several of the essays.

The category property rights provides only one focus on the field of wealth. A detailed or close-up shot may reveal how value is created; a long distance picture shows how state power and capital influence the allocation of wealth. In-between, the camera brings property claims into relief. But once property rights are so framed, other analytic categories need to be added, such as distribution versus allocation, stocks versus flows, and tangibles versus intangibles. For example, economists often reserve the term distribution or "endowments" for the possessions that a person brings to the bar of exchange; these wealth claims are then traded with others for their property rights so leading to a new allocation of wealth. What are the patterns and forces behind the initial distribution of property as well as the final allocation? What are the economic, social and cultural conditions that help produce them? The analytical tool of property rights does not itself bring this encompassing and dynamic dimension into play. Still, Julie Scott's account of property shifts in Northern Cyprus, when Turkish Cypriots from the south took over land from fleeing Greek Cypriots, brings some of these larger contexts into play. She shows how state control, markets, social capital, and individual force all affected the transition from an initial distribution to a final allocation of land. Several other essays, such as Paula Wagoner's on land conflicts between Lakotas and non-Indians in South Dakota, also show how state control or governance penetrates into the distribution and allocation of fixed wealth at the local level.

The distributional issue, as well as the distinction between stocks and flows, tangibles and intangibles, and community and market, is well revealed in James Woodburn's study of the Hadza of Tanzania. He recounts how Hadza share meat from big game. In brief, the meat is divided into two parts - god's meat and people's meat. The second portion in turn is four times apportioned: the meat is first taken on demand at the spot of butchering, next it is brought to the camp and divided again, then it is cooked and divided yet again. Finally, the leftovers are themselves distributed. To receive meat, people must claim or demand a share. In contrast, permanent items are differently divided, and Hadza do not practice either reciprocity or barter among themselves. Woodburn links this total property pattern to what he calls an "immediate-return" society. The ethnographic description is clear, the argument is well offered.

But let us reconsider the Hadza ethnography in broader terms. First, the Hadza offer a case in which the community and market dimensions of economy are separated. The Hadza do practice anonymous or socially disembedded exchange but only with non-Hadza; among Hadza themselves

## Reviews

objects are transacted through social relationships, and debts are avoided. Second, the core of this communal dimension of economy is not reciprocity - as so often argued in anthropology - but apportionment from a common or shared "base." For the Hadza, this base is made up of a consumable or flow (meat) not a stock or permanent fund, and it is apportioned in four stages by demand. The right to demand meat is socially established and morally supported, however the apportionment is not determined by set rules that prescribe a particular division, such as social position or gender. The Hadza also have some durable goods or permanent funds that they allot on demand and transfer by gambling, but the focal moment of the community realm is manifest through flows of butchered meat. Finally, outside or at the borders of Hadza community, barter and trade take place but even this trade may be partially converted to a form of sharing as it is assimilated to community.

Analytically, then, there are many kinds of property rights or values among Hadza; and these values are distributed variously by stocks and flows, by transfer rules, and by the objects' and participants' places in community. This distribution pattern has generality: on the inside of any community, division of a common good holds; reciprocity is an act between communities; trade is found at the furthest reaches. Communal exchange rests on shared morality but it implies and is always linked to impersonal trade that it supports. Again, the concept of property rights itself brings into focus only one part of this larger economic structure.

In a well-detailed essay, that draws on his fieldwork in Ponam (a small island in Papua New Guinea) James Carrier distinguishes between inclusive and exclusive rights to property. By inclusive rights, Carrier refers to property that reflects multiple relationships: several people may lay claim to the same object. In contrast, an exclusive property falls under control of a single individual. Carrier argues that we have sorted economies and property systems so that the West seems to be home to exclusive property, whereas Melanesia is the region of inclusive claims (or "gift" economies). But he shows that on Ponam both forms are found. This persuasive argument is close to what I mean by the "community" and "market" realms of economy. All economies are a mix of the two realms; in fact, the market or exclusive form of property is often embedded within and a precipitate of the community or inclusive form that surrounds it.

Alan Macfarlane, developing an earlier argument of his own, shows how individualized, exclusive possession may develop out of a more communal system. He compares England and Japan to suggest that the absence of internal warfare and threat of outside invasion provided the conditions for achieving a balance of rights between rulers and ruled, and the rise of individual rights in property. This unusual argument shows how geography, politics and law all influence a property rights system.

But let us shift the focus from things to people. Just as things are deconstructed by rights, so rights to people deconstruct and reconstruct them. The government's right to draft bodies for armed service provides one view of the whole person. Today the "value" of body "properties," such as semen, eggs and wombs (all of which may be variously combined by separate owners to produce life) are giving rise to new property claims and legal disputes, a point underlined by Marilyn Strathern, who compares some of our developing claims to those traditional in New Guinea.

All the contributors agree that the notion of property rights is an "analytical tool" - emanating from historical experience and texts in European life - and some urge that the cross-cultural concept be complemented by "local models" of property, an impulse that fits my way of thinking. For example, according to one of our local models, property is a connection between a person and thing, and does not refer to social relationships between people as well. Perhaps after Lev'-Strauss (on the "totemic illusion") we might call this conception the "property illusion." But the more general problem is: how are local models to be fitted to the analytical model of property rights? Are local models illusions or constructions of social reality? More pointedly, is the analytical tool itself one local model endowed with the mantle of formality and projected to the domain of universality?

As one example of local models of property rights, Scott shows how very different narratives

## Reviews

justifying land possession developed on Cyprus when Greeks moved south and Turkish residents came to the north. Right by conquest, by original ownership, by improvements added, by purchase and by compensation all were invoked in the competing claims, although ultimately the ability to mobilize state power through personal relationships was a key factor in securing land.

But claims may have less to do with exercising aggrandizement than establishing identity. For example, the way ownership of land as part of the base of community may help establish ethnicity is well shown by Wagoner's study of Lakota. Land is the base for survival, and Lakota see themselves as related to nature, not subjugating it. Entitlement to land is based on claims to "blood," which in turn defines tribal status and signals separation from non-Indians.

In seeking to understand such local models, that seem to fuse people and objects rather than separating them as subjects and objects, we might exploit our own verbal connection of property and properties. If property is a claim, properties are features or characteristics of a person or thing that affect others. One way property is created is through the properties that people exercise and use to transform the world. In one respect, a connection of this sort lies behind the environmental regulations that William Howarth considers in his comparison of Romania and the United Kingdom.

But an especially intriguing local model suggesting a relation between human properties and the establishment of property is presented by Anderson in his ethnography from Arctic Siberia. He shows how the Evenki people legitimate appropriation - let us call it creating property - in their local model. For Evenki, appropriation is a kind of "taking," justified by "knowing the land." On my reading, this knowing might be glossed as "know-how." For Evenki, know-how is locally learned, instrumental activity. Each knowing is separate, such as how to catch reindeer, where to cut trees, or how to survive inclement weather; and knowing has an element of making-do, of being able to adapt and adjust as an event unfolds. For Evenki, having an ability or capacity means that one can cut trees, hunt animals, or use the land in relation to the skill or craft possessed. In this sense, I think, the Evenki model is one form of a labor theory of value that justifies appropriation from the external world. But the Evenki notion is more socially rooted than the Western one which descends from Locke, for knowing-how creates status and commands respect from others; and knowing-how implies a sort of reflexivity with the surrounding world. For example, a hunter must never be boastful or sharpen his butchering knife before stalking game, because animals can hear. The prohibition requires that the hunter see himself as might animals. Similarly, the injunction not to be greedy in using resources is as much a reflection on a person's relation to others as it is on his relation to the environment. Know-how is both an instrumental activity and a performative. Knowing the land legitimates using it for the sake of sustaining one's self and family; but knowing the land is also practiced as an expression of identity, self-realization, and apprenticeship in the heritage of skills. This double instrumental and fulfilling act creates real property through the exercise of human properties.

The Evenki ethnography raises a final set of issues that are not, I think, sufficiently addressed in this volume. Property, tangible and intangible, is valued and created by humans. Can one discuss property without considering value, how it is created, and who possesses rights to this process and its results? Among the Evenki, for example, individuals create skills and so gain rights to needed "natural resources," but what about the broader and comparative question of how rights to new production processes, goods, designs and medicines are established? Strathern and Hann briefly refer to intellectual property rights, which have assumed signal importance today, but no one explores the connections among innovation or the creation of economic value, communal knowledge (to forest medicines or seed strains), the global spread of capital, and the problem of setting a recompense to innovators. In my view, value creation is always culturally and socially embedded, so formulating rights and just compensation to innovators brings to the fore the undecided relation between free and private rights to intellectual property. Anthropologists are only beginning to prospect this area and need to do more.

If there is a future to the anthropological investigation of property relations, I suspect this

## Reviews

stimulating book, with its reflections, ethnography and helpful introduction will lead us toward embedding the property rights concept in such larger theoretical concerns.

**Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform, by Jean C Oi Berkeley: University of California Press, Berkeley (1999), xvii + 253 pages.**

**Reviewed by David S G Goodman, Director, Institute for International Studies, University of Technology, Sydney, (New South Wales, Australia).**

Time was when field research on China was limited to interviews in Hong Kong and the occasional academic tourist trip round a couple of the then open cities - usually Beijing, Nanjing Shanghai, or Guangzhou. Alternatively, research could be undertaken in Taiwan, and this certainly became a fruitful area of activity for many, especially anthropologists. Interviews within the People's Republic of China [PRC] were quite straightforwardly impossible, and archives were not accessible, most of the time not even to those living there. Though a few barriers to research remain, the situation now for fieldwork is dramatically improved. The archives started to open again during the 1980s, and since the late 1980s it has been possible to undertake interviews on the ground. In the 1990s it has even become possible to interview non-official Chinese, and to discuss previously sensitive issues, without in most cases, there being any problems for either interviewer or interviewee.

Jean Oi has been one of those who has pioneered this dramatic change in social science research within the PRC. Oi is a political scientist and senior fellow of Stanford's Institute for International Studies. Graduate students with an interest in field-work, whether anthropologist, political scientist, or indeed any other kind of social scientist, should be directed immediately to the thoughtful appendix to her study of rural economic reform that deals with 'Research and Documentation.'

In addition to dramatically altering research methods, the introduction of reform since the late 1970s has also necessarily changed the research agenda for social science looking at the PRC. Not too surprisingly, given the economic restructuring and limited political openness of the last two decades, one of the more interesting debates to emerge has been the question of changing state-society relations. In particular, a central set of questions has revolved around whether that changing relationship has been led by the party-state or rural villagers and the urban formerly disadvantaged, and whether continuing changes will lead to either the reinforcement of the Chinese Communist Party's leading position, or to systemic political change. Essentially these questions have become conflated, and debate has begun to polarise around those who stress the continued centrality of the party-state, and those who emphasise the current and future vitality of forces which are external to it. One of the clearest statements of the latter view is provided by Lynn White in talking about rural development in the rural districts of Shanghai:

Rural industries were the most presentable outcome of this entrepreneurialism, and their resources created new local power... the reform syndrome was generally foisted on China's most famous leaders by myriad ex-farmer leaders whose names are not publicly known. When the powerful lack enough resources to stay where they are, as Pareto suggested, the elite changes. This is now happening in China, as the centralist revolutionaries have already done all they can for most people (1998: 151).