

**DISSERTATION PROPOSAL:
IN SEARCH OF PONOMICS**

“Many hands make the work light.”

“In sharing there is always enough.”

—Hawaiian proverbs

I. INTRODUCTION/PROBLEM STATEMENT

I began this project with the economics of decolonization in the Pacific Islands, that is, what Pacific Island countries did economically after they became politically independent. I found that what is really needed is the decolonization of economics. As Hooper and James (1994: 1) observed,

Neoclassical economic theory, of the kind that underpins current IMF and World Bank thinking and programs, ... is based on a number of assumptions that are not necessarily valid universally. These assumptions include the concept of ‘economic rationality’ itself as well as the notion that material considerations and individualistic self-interest are the main motivating forces....

Not all of these assumptions apply in Pacific island countries simply because much Pacific economic activity escapes the conceptual framework altogether or runs directly counter to it.

Similarly, Davis and Pollard (1995:9) note that

family, village, island, and cultural interests are well established and, for most people, take preeminence over national interests. Yet these interests are not sufficiently and consistently addressed in the ‘modern,’ aid and capital driven, and bureaucratic approach to Pacific development.

Hooper and James (1994: 1) go on to note that Pacific culture—in particular, communal land tenure and the “lack of an individualistic go-getting spirit”—is often cited as an impediment to economic development. The thinking seems to be that “since the realities of Pacific societies do not fit the model, the societies should be changed to suit the model.” Indeed, there is an

extensive literature on development and social change which takes the marriage of the two for granted. I believe, however, that the model must be changed to suit the society.

The purpose here is to search for clues to a different kind of economics—“Pononomics,” from the Hawaiian word *pono*, meaning goodness, righteousness, balance. Pononomics is a word I invented a few years ago, as a member of the Economics-Hawaii Discussion Group.

What would it mean to maximize *pono* instead of money? Defining *pono* is unfortunately more subjective than scientific. As John Ka'imikaua said, “we need to feel with our *na 'au* [guts] not with our head what is *pono*” (Morioka 2002). Pononomics is based on a different set of values, reiterated throughout the Pacific Islands literature, as shown in Table 1. Apart from being more culturally appropriate, Pononomics seeks ecological sustainability as well.

II. RESEARCH QUESTION

My hypotheses are that: (a) “bottom-up” community-based development is appropriate for a community-based society; (b) community-based project analysis reflects certain values such as caring and sharing, thinking about future generations, and taking care of the land; and (c) an examination of community-based project analysis is useful for developing Pononomics. The research question is: How are community-based development projects analyzed in Hawai'i, and how is that different from conventional cost-benefit analysis? Is there a noticeable difference between analysis by Pacific Islanders and other nationalities?

Table 1. Pacific vs. Western Values

Pacific	Western
Sharing	Accumulation
Communal property	Private property
Long-term view	Short-term view
Community	Individual
Ought – approved by ancestral spirits? Sustainable?	Can – technically possible?
Experience	Science
Success defined in terms of sustainability and adequacy	Success defined in terms of output – efficiency and production
Based primarily on needs and how much is required for sustenance	Not based on needs; no concept of “too much”
Balance	Profit
Spiritual, psychological and physical needs	Physical needs
Humility before natural order	Modernist sense of ability to control natural order
Holistic	Atomistic
Cosmic grid; web of interconnectedness	Core-periphery thinking
Earth as sacred	Earth as profane
Land inalienable	Land as real estate
Mutual aid, reciprocity	Impersonal economy
Cooperation	Competition
Maintenance	Growth
Value leisure	Protestant work ethic
Subsistence, gifts	Cash, commodification
`Olu`olu, Lokahi, Aloha (OLA)	Domination, Individualism, Exclusion (DIE)
Living Economy	Suicide Economy
People-centered	Production-centered
Use-value	Exchange-value
Way of the land	Way of money
Giving	Taking

Sources: Gegeo 1995, Marksbury 1974, Laenui 1994, Korten 2001b, Korten and Carner 1984, Meleisea 1987, Soule and Bera 1991, Turner and Brownhill 2000, Kasuga 1994, Jolly 2000, Sugata 1979, Robertson 1980