

A Study on the Religious and Political Functions of Hereditary Officials in the Benba Tribe

Jun Liu

Fuzhou University of International studies and Trade, Fuzhou 350000, Fujian, China

Abstract: Based on ethnographic materials from the Benba tribe, this paper explores the religious and political functions of hereditary officials in a stateless society. Through the monopoly of ritual knowledge by hereditary officials and the performance of three core rituals, the Benba tribe constructed a unique "ritual governance" system, achieving political integration within a matrilineal society. Hereditary officials established their dual "political-religious" pivotal position through a triple monopoly on language, taboos, and space, effectively mitigating the tension between matrilineal succession and political centralization. Faced with colonial impact, this system demonstrated remarkable resilience, adapting to external changes through strategies such as ritual hybridization and cultural resistance. This study, through an analysis of the hereditary official group in the Benba tribe, attempts to provide an empirical case for the application of structural functionalism theory in African social studies and offers reference and insights into the diversity of power structures in matrilineal societies.

Keywords: Benba Tribe; Hereditary Officials; Religious Rituals; Political Integration.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The core concern of political anthropology lies in interpreting the formation and maintenance mechanisms of power order within diverse cultural contexts. Within this macro-framework, research on political integration models in stateless societies constitutes an important branch. This field has long been profoundly influenced by the structural functionalist tradition, emphasizing the function of material factors such as kinship systems, economic reciprocity, and military alliances in maintaining social balance. However, this paradigm relatively neglects the profound role of ritual systems as symbolic power techniques in creating and maintaining political unity.

This paper takes the Benba tribe as its research subject. This social form presents a fascinating theoretical tension: on the one hand, it uses matrilineal succession as its social organizational principle; on the other hand, it has developed a considerable degree of centralized political power. This seemingly contradictory characteristic challenges the simplistic understanding in traditional political anthropology that "matrilineal societies inevitably involve decentralization," providing a valuable case study for exploring the diversity of non-Western political systems.

Through an in-depth analysis of the ritual practices of the Benba tribe's hereditary officials, this paper aims to reveal the essential connection between religious behavior and political integration. This study employs structural functionalism, focusing on how hereditary officials, through monopolizing sacred knowledge, manipulating symbolic representations, and performing specific rituals, successfully activated and maintained political authority in the absence of a standing army and written law. This research not only deepens our understanding of the Benba case but also attempts, through in-depth interpretation of a specific ethnographic case, to propose a more universal theoretical proposition: in pre-state societies and even in broader human political organizations, ritual itself is a powerful governance technique. It achieves a

more profound and lasting effect on political integration than coercion by shaping collective identity, regulating social behavior, and establishing hierarchical order.

1.2. Literature Review

Western academic tradition has established a classic paradigm for interpreting the Bemba political system. Based on Audrey Richards' detailed account in *Political Institutions in Africa*, Fortis and Evans Pritchard, in the introduction to that book, construct a structural functionalist analytical framework that categorizes Bemba society as a "matriarchal society with centralized authority," emphasizing that its political system maintains social balance through mechanisms such as rituals and kinship. However, this classic interpretation has significant limitations: on the one hand, it overemphasizes the chief as a representative of "divine monarchy," simplifying the complex political system into an authority model centered on the chief himself; on the other hand, it is constrained by the static analysis of structural functionalism, viewing rituals as cultural tools for maintaining social balance and neglecting the power struggles and historical dynamics in the ritual practice. As Geertz points out, this functional analysis often overlooks the "deep description" meaning behind cultural symbols and the strategic practices of actors.

In China, although there is no direct research on the Benba case, many scholars have provided valuable theoretical perspectives. Wang Mingming, through an examination of Chinese folk rituals and power relations, proposed the important viewpoint of "ritual as a power technology." He argues that rituals are not only a cultural performance but also "a political language through which power relations can be constructed, reproduced, and altered." This perspective provides theoretical support for understanding how Benba gained political power by monopolizing ritual knowledge. Ma Guoqing, through his analysis of "li" (rites/propriety), reveals how ritualized behavioral norms become an important mechanism for integrating society. He points out that "li," through a set of ritualized practices, naturalizes the hierarchical order of society and internalizes it into the

individual's bodily practice. This perspective aligns closely with the logic of how hereditary officials in Pomba society maintain political order by controlling core rituals such as inauguration, funerals, and rainmaking ceremonies, providing crucial theoretical resonance for this study's approach of "ritual governance." Zhang Hongming, through a systematic examination of the relationship between traditional African political institutions and modern state-building, points out that "traditional African political institutions are not static cultural relics, but rather demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability during the processes of colonialism and modernization. Traditional authority often finds its place in the modern political system by reinterpreting rituals and customs." This viewpoint provides an important theoretical framework for understanding the adaptation strategies of Pomba hereditary officials under colonial impact and offers a valuable perspective for analyzing the continuation and transformation of traditional ritual politics under modern conditions.

Therefore, this study aims to combine existing theoretical dialogues both domestically and internationally, delving into the long-neglected key group of hereditary officials to reveal the dynamic process and power nature of ritual integration in Pomba society. This study will demonstrate that the political integration of the Bemba was not simply dependent on the sacred authority of the chief or a static functional balance, but rather achieved through the monopoly of ritual knowledge by hereditary officials, their control over sacred time and space, and their manipulation of ritual processes—a more proactive and strategic form of "ritual governance." This research not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the Bemba political system but also provides a new perspective for a broader understanding of the political integration mechanisms of pre-modern societies.

1.3. Research Methods

First, the documentary research method. This paper primarily analyzes Audrey I. Richards' primary field ethnographic materials on the Bemba tribe in *Political Institutions of Africa*. Through meticulous interpretation of the text's details on rituals, the behavior of hereditary officials, and case records of colonial intervention, the core arguments required for the research are obtained. Second, the historical analysis method. By analyzing how the traditional hereditary official system adapted and changed under the impact of colonial rule, this study explores its resilience, thus examining the continuity and transformation of the research subject within a dynamic historical process.

2. The Political and Religious Context of the Benba Tribe: The Arena of Hereditary Officials

2.1. The Political Structure of a Matriarchal Society

The political structure of the Benba tribe is built upon a unique matriarchal social organization, its core feature being the definition of social identity and political status through matrilineal succession. According to Audrey Isabel Richards' ethnographic record in *Political Institutions in Africa*, Benba society is based on matrilineal clans, with the Crocodile Clan enjoying a special political status as the ruling clan. Each clan consists of multiple matrilineal lineages, which determine

kinship and political subordination by tracing a common female ancestor.

In this political system, a group of hereditary officials plays a crucial institutional role. This group comprises leaders of multiple specific matrilineal lineages, each lineage holding a fixed ceremonial position. According to ethnographic records, these positions include: Banabenba, responsible for the chief's inauguration ceremony; Shimwarul, who manages the sacred fire; and Nkorunfu, who oversees the chief's marriages. Each hereditary official possesses specific ritual functions and political privileges, collectively forming a network of checks and balances.

The supreme chief's power appears centralized but is actually limited. Although his position is passed down through matrilineal succession, typically by a specific branch of the Crocodile Clan, the exercise of power must adhere to ancestral traditions. Any major decision requires consultation with the hereditary official group, particularly concerning land allocation, war and peace, and significant ceremonies. This institutional design makes hereditary officials *de facto* arbiters of power.

Economically, the Benba society practices rotational agriculture, and village organization exhibits significant mobility. Land is collectively owned, allocated by the chief as land trustee. However, actual use rights reside with individual matrilineal lineages. Hereditary officials play a crucial role in this process, not only overseeing land allocation but also maintaining economic activity through controlling agricultural rituals such as rainmaking. This economic model has fostered a unique mechanism among the Benba people that relies on rituals to maintain political identity.

The mechanism of political power succession particularly highlights the central role of hereditary officials. Chieftain succession not only required meeting matrilineal inheritance qualifications but also completing a complex set of inauguration ceremonies. According to Richards, the new chief needed to be baptized by a group of hereditary officials, inherit sacred fire and relics, and gain the approval of all key hereditary officials. This process typically lasted from months to years, during which time the hereditary official group effectively exercised ruling power.

In summary, the political structure of the Benba tribe exhibited three prominent characteristics: first, a social organization framework based on matrilineal clans; second, a unique mechanism for checking and balancing supreme power through a hereditary official system; and third, a special path to political integration relying on religious rituals rather than force. These characteristics make the Benba one of the most representative cases in political anthropology research, providing important reference for understanding the political organization of stateless societies.

2.2. The Core of the Religious System: Ancestral Worship and Ritual Networks

The Benba tribe's religious system was built upon ancestral spirit worship, a belief system that permeated all aspects of social life. According to relevant anthropological studies, the Benba people regard the souls of deceased chiefs as important supernatural beings capable of influencing the real world. These ancestral spirits are believed to control key natural forces such as rainfall, crop yields, and the health of tribal members. In this belief system, while the current chief is given the status of "representative of the ancestral spirits," their ability to communicate with the spirit world is not innate

but requires the ritual services of a hereditary official group.

The political function of the ancestral spirit worship system lies in providing sacred support for the power structure. Anthropological observations show that the hereditary official group, by exclusively possessing the ritual privilege of communicating with ancestral spirits, becomes a special medium connecting the secular and spiritual worlds. This unique religious status makes them play an irreplaceable role in political operations, as all major decisions require the approval of supernatural forces, and this approval must be achieved through specific rituals presided over by hereditary officials.

Within the rich ritual practices, three core rituals constitute the basic framework for maintaining the Benba political order: the chief's inauguration ceremony, the chief's funeral ceremony, and the rain-praying ceremony. The chief's inauguration ceremony is a crucial step in ensuring the legitimate succession of power. According to ethnographic records, this ritual process lasted for a considerable period, during which a group of hereditary officials was responsible for implementing a series of complex ritual procedures, including the passing of sacred fire, the handover of power symbols, and sacred purification. These practices effectively prevented potential political turmoil during the power transition. The rain-seeking ritual closely linked economic activity with political authority. As an agricultural society, rainfall was crucial to the livelihood of the Benba people. By presiding over the rain-seeking rituals, hereditary officials not only demonstrated their special ability to communicate with supernatural forces but also united scattered agricultural production units around the central authority. Communities that refused to participate in these rituals even lost certain rights, fully demonstrating the reinforcing role of religious activities in political integration.

These rituals together constituted a complete ritual system, through which hereditary officials became an indispensable force in the Benba political structure. This ritual network was not only an expression of religious belief but also a vital mechanism for the operation of political power. By regularly holding these rituals, hereditary officials continuously consolidated their central position in the political system while simultaneously reinforcing the political order and values of Benba society.

3. The Role and Political Integration Function of Hereditary Officials in Key Ceremonies

3.1. Chief Inauguration Ceremony: A "Sacred Forging" of Power Legitimacy

In the political life of the Benba tribe, the chief inauguration ceremony constitutes a lengthy and rigorous power transition ceremony. Ethnographic records indicate that this ceremony can last up to eighteen months, during which the hereditary official group undertakes indispensable core functions. The entire ceremony resembles a meticulously designed "sacred forging," shaping the candidate into a qualified ruler through a series of ritual procedures.

The leading role of hereditary officials in the ceremony is manifested in several key aspects. First, they are responsible for the special embalming of the former chief's body, a process that not only shows respect for the deceased but also symbolizes the solemnity of the power succession. Second,

during the inauguration of the new chief, the hereditary officials preside over the relighting of the sacred fire, symbolizing the life and power of the tribe. This step has profound symbolic significance; the relighting of the sacred fire represents the continuation of the tribe's vitality and the rebirth of political power. Most importantly, hereditary officials are responsible for handing over sacred tribal tokens, which are the material embodiment of the legitimacy of power, and the handover process symbolizes the formal transfer of rule. The political function of the ritual is not only reflected in the succession of power but also includes institutional constraints on the chief. According to the ritual, major decisions made by the new chief after taking office require the joint approval of three-quarters of the members of the hereditary official group. This mechanism effectively regulates the abuse of power and ensures that ruling behavior conforms to traditional norms. The symbolic system of the ritual is also worthy of in-depth exploration. Through the "purification with holy water" ritual, hereditary officials endow the new chief with religious purity; while the "conception with sacred fire" symbolizes the supernatural power's recognition of the ruler. The essence of these ritual actions lies in transforming natural forces into political authority, enabling the people to psychologically accept the legitimacy of the rule as "the chief is the will of the ancestral spirit." As political anthropologists have pointed out, this ritual system is actually a cultural mechanism for the legitimization of power.

In short, the chief's inauguration ceremony is not only a procedural activity of power transfer but also a complete system for constructing political legitimacy. Hereditary officials, by leading this process, ensured both the orderly succession of power and the stability of the traditional political system, thereby achieving the deepest level of political integration. This indigenous wisdom of ritual politics provides important insights into the governance logic of traditional societies.

3.2. Chief Funeral Rituals: "Stabilizers of Order" During Power Vacuums

In the political system of the Benba tribe, chief funeral rituals serve a unique and crucial political function. When a chief dies, the entire tribe faces a significant power crisis and political uncertainty. This period is considered the most vulnerable stage of social order, with potential disagreements and even conflicts arising between matrilineal lineages over succession rights. At this critical juncture, the group of hereditary officials plays an irreplaceable role as "stabilizers of order." Hereditary officials bear several key responsibilities in the funeral rituals. Hereditary officials from specific lineages act as "hereditary burialists," responsible for handling the chief's remains according to traditional norms. This process is not only a farewell to the deceased but also a significant symbol of the power transition. Simultaneously, they are responsible for safeguarding sacred objects symbolizing the legitimacy of power, ensuring these sacred items are properly protected during the transition period. The most politically astute approach was for hereditary officials to temporarily appoint a "drinking child," a symbolic figure to perpetuate the deceased chief's social persona until the new chief officially assumed office.

From a political perspective, the deeper meaning of funeral rites lay in ensuring social stability during power vacuums through a set of sanctified procedural arrangements. The

hereditary official group, leveraging the religious authority of the ceremony, temporarily took control of the political system, effectively preventing internal divisions among matrilineal groups over power succession issues. Historical records show that during a significant chief's funeral in the mid-1920s, hereditary officials, by controlling the sacred fire symbolizing the continuation of power, successfully facilitated a compromise among potential power rivals, averting the danger of tribal fragmentation.

The spatial dimension of the ceremony also held profound political significance. Hereditary officials were responsible for constructing shrines at the ruins of the abandoned old capital. This act was not only a commemoration of the deceased chief but, more importantly, strengthened tribal members' sense of identity with their traditional territory through the sacred link of "deceased chief - ancestral spirit - territory." This practice of spatial politics cleverly combined religious belief with territorial identity.

In short, the chief's funeral ceremony in Benba society transcends the realm of mere religious rituals; it is a meticulously designed mechanism for political stability. Hereditary officials, by leading this process, ensure social order during the power transition and maintain the continuity of the traditional political system, demonstrating a deep integration of religious rituals and political governance.

3.3. Rain Prayer Ritual: A "Sacred Link" Between Economy and Politics

In the Benba tribal social system, the rain prayer ritual reveals a profound intrinsic connection between economic needs and political authority. As a society whose primary means of livelihood is rotational agriculture, the Benba people's dependence on rainfall is not only related to the abundance of harvests but also directly to the survival and development of the tribe. In this ecological context, the rain prayer ritual transcends the realm of mere religious activity, becoming a crucial mechanism for maintaining political order. Hereditary officials occupy a central position in the rain prayer ritual, strengthening their political influence by monopolizing the presiding power of the ceremony. According to ethnographic records, hereditary officials were responsible for presiding over all aspects of the rain-praying ceremony, including preparing the sacrificial offerings. These officials also supervised the ritualistic behavior of the chief and his wife, an act symbolizing the "union of heaven and earth," believed to evoke a natural response to rainfall.

From a political economy perspective, the rain-praying ceremony cleverly transformed economic resources into political power. By controlling this core ritual vital to people's livelihoods, hereditary officials converted the scattered agricultural units' need for rain into their recognition and obedience to the central political authority. To secure sufficient rainfall, villages were forced to acknowledge the authority of the chief and his ritual representatives, thus implicitly strengthening the centralized political structure.

The ritual's punishment mechanism further reinforced its political integration function. Villages refusing to participate or openly challenging the rain-praying ceremony not only faced the supernatural risk of angering ancestral spirits and incurring drought but also suffered substantial punishment in real-world political life. For example, these villages might be marginalized in land dispute arbitration, resource allocation, or even lose their eligibility for political asylum. This dual constraint mechanism makes the rain-praying ritual a

powerful bond, closely linking economic survival with political subordination.

In short, the rain-praying ritual serves multiple functions in Benba society: it is both a cultural adaptation strategy to cope with ecological pressures and an important mechanism for maintaining political order. Hereditary officials, by dominating this ritual process, not only consolidated their political status but also achieved a clever combination of economic needs and political authority. This wisdom in integrating natural phenomena, economic activities, and political governance provides important insights into the operating logic of traditional societies.

4. Monopoly of Ritual Knowledge: The Path to Political Elitization for Hereditary Officials

4.1. Three Dimensions of Knowledge Monopoly

In the unique political ecology of the Benba tribe, the hereditary official group constructed a sophisticated power operation system by systematically monopolizing ritual knowledge. This knowledge monopoly not only ensured the stability of their political status but also profoundly shaped the power structure and operating logic of Benba society. This monopoly mechanism is mainly reflected in the following three interrelated dimensions: language monopoly constitutes the core means for hereditary officials to maintain their political privileges. The group uses an ancient variant of Luba, long since relegated to everyday communication, in major political decision-making. This language choice serves a dual political function: on the one hand, it imbues the decision-making process with mystery and sanctity, enhancing the public's awe of the power structure; on the other hand, it constructs a robust knowledge barrier, completely excluding ordinary people from the core political discourse. Under this linguistic segregation mechanism, political participation becomes the privilege of a select few, while ordinary people can only passively accept the results. This linguistic strategy not only guarantees the exclusivity of political decisions but also reinforces the special status of hereditary officials as inheritors of culture. Taboo monopoly forms a crucial mechanism for power discipline. Hereditary officials monopolize the power to interpret and supervise the chief's taboos, which cover all aspects of the chief's life, from daily diet to sexual norms, from daily routines to major decisions. By regularly requiring the chief to report on his private life, especially his sexual life, hereditary officials establish a system of oversight of the highest authority. Even more intimidating was their use of the "ancestral curse" as the ultimate deterrent, claiming that any violation of taboos would incur supernatural punishment, such as the extinguishing of the sacred fire or the onset of drought. This supernatural deterrent effectively constrained the chief's power, preventing abuse and reinforcing the hereditary officials' role as arbitrators within the political system.

Spatial monopoly embodies the material dimension of power operation. Hereditary officials strictly controlled key sacred spaces, such as the drum shrine of the Crocodile Clan and other important religious sites. These spaces were not only venues for ceremonies but also material embodiments of power. Notably, even the chief himself was not permitted to enter these sacred spaces without the permission of a specific

hereditary official. This control of spaces held profound political symbolism: it directly demonstrated the hereditary officials' supreme position in the religious sphere and implied the subordinate relationship between political power and religious authority. Through the exclusive control of these sacred spaces, hereditary officials concretized abstract power relations into a perceptible spatial order.

These three dimensions of monopoly reinforced each other, collectively forming a complete system of power knowledge. Language monopoly ensured the mystique of the decision-making process, taboo monopoly provided a mechanism for power discipline, and spatial monopoly endowed power with a material form. This multi-layered monopoly not only guaranteed the political privileges of hereditary officials but also gave the power structure of the Benba society a unique stability and continuity.

4.2. The Political Consequences of Knowledge Monopoly: The Separation Between Elites and Commoners

The systematic monopoly of ritual knowledge by hereditary officials had profound political consequences, the most significant of which was the formation of a strict social separation between elites and commoners. This separation was not only reflected in political participation but also permeated all areas of social life.

In terms of political participation, knowledge monopoly led to a significant simplification and marginalization of the political role of commoners. The political participation of ordinary people was limited to symbolic actions such as ritualistic "clapping in support," unable to influence substantive political decisions. This mode of participation was essentially a form of "ritualistic democracy"—ostensibly, the people participated in the political process, but in reality, they were excluded from the real final rounds. Related research indicates that this mode of political participation in Benba society formed a unique political culture: the people maintained both awe and distance from political power, leaving political decision-making entirely to the elite group of hereditary officials.

A deeper impact is evident at the level of local governance. Village leaders seeking substantial administrative power had to gain "political prestige" by serving as ritual assistants to hereditary officials. This mechanism created a remarkable fusion between traditional ritual systems and modern governance: on the one hand, it ensured the transmission and continuation of traditional knowledge; on the other hand, it provided a special channel for local elites to enter the power structure. Colonial records show that many local officials appointed by the colonial government were qualified primarily based on their roles and positions within the traditional ritual system. This phenomenon demonstrates that even during colonial rule, traditional ritual knowledge retained significant political value.

From a socio-psychological perspective, this knowledge monopoly also shaped specific patterns of authority perception. The obedience of ordinary people to hereditary officials stemmed not only from political coercion but also from awe of mystical knowledge. This awe granted political authority cultural legitimacy, making it more stable and enduring. This knowledge monopoly system exhibited remarkable adaptability during the colonial period. Despite attempts by colonial governments to introduce new administrative systems, hereditary officials, by maintaining

their monopoly on ritual knowledge, continued to play a crucial role in grassroots governance. Historical records show that a significant proportion of local officials appointed by colonial governments also held positions within the traditional ritual system. This phenomenon indicates that traditional ritual knowledge continues to exert a significant influence during modern political transformation.

Therefore, through the systematic monopoly of ritual knowledge, hereditary officials not only ensured their own elite political status but also shaped the unique political culture of Bomba society. This knowledge monopoly created a strict elite-commoner divide, influenced political participation patterns, shaped local governance structures, and reinforced the legitimacy of political authority at the socio-psychological level. Even when faced with external shocks such as colonial rule, this power system based on knowledge monopoly demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, fully reflecting the adaptability of traditional political institutions under modern conditions.

5. Ritual Politics Transformation Under Colonial Impact: The Adaptation and Resilience of Hereditary Officials

The colonial government systematically transformed the traditional power structure of Bemba through the 1929 Indigenous Authority Act. This institutional impact manifested on two levels: firstly, it stripped the chiefs of their judicial power, particularly transferring cases such as witchcraft trials to colonial courts; secondly, it drastically reduced the salaries of hereditary officials, lowering their annual salaries to a symbolic £1, thus weakening the traditional system both economically and in terms of power. Faced with this institutional pressure, the hereditary official group exhibited remarkable adaptability, developing various coping strategies. Among them, "ritual hybridization" was the most representative adjustment method—hereditary officials incorporated colonial cultural elements such as Christian prayers and cross symbols into traditional rainmaking rituals. Superficially, this conformed to the colonizers' demands for "civilization," but in reality, it preserved the core structure of the ritual and their own ritual authority through this symbolic compromise. Another strategy was direct cultural resistance. For example, in 1935, hereditary officials in the Casama region united to resist the colonial government's judicial reforms, arguing that "white law does not understand ancestral judgments," ultimately successfully retaining their informal right to adjudicate witchcraft cases. This adaptability reveals the deep-seated mechanisms of traditional power structures: colonizers relied on "hard power" based on violent monopolies, while hereditary officials wielded "soft power" centered on cultural identity and symbolic systems. The latter, though lacking coercive force, possessed stronger cultural penetration and historical continuity. In the long run, colonial impact actually strengthened the cultural value of ritual politics. Traditional rituals became an important resource for the Benba people to maintain their cultural identity. Hereditary officials, through ritual performances, not only maintained their authority but also became symbols of national cultural preservation. This case breaks down the binary opposition between tradition and modernity, demonstrating that the two can form new forms of integration through complex interactions. It also corrects the static

tendency of structural functionalism, showcasing the dynamic adaptability of traditional institutions under external shocks and highlighting the enduring value of non-material power in political change—political power not only originates from violent monopolies and institutional arrangements but is also deeply rooted in cultural traditions and systems of meaning.

6. Conclusion

This study, through a systematic analysis of the religious-political functions of hereditary officials in the Benba tribe, reveals the core role of ritual in the political integration of a stateless society. Research indicates that hereditary officials, by monopolizing ritual knowledge and mastering key aspects of ritual practice, constructed a unique "ritual governance technique," achieving political integration in the absence of a standing army and written law. Simultaneously, through a triple monopoly on language, taboos, and space, hereditary officials established their dual "political-religious" pivotal position, successfully resolving the tension between matrilineal succession and political centralization. Faced with colonial impact, the hereditary official system demonstrated remarkable resilience, adapting to external environmental changes through strategies such as "ritual hybridization" and "cultural resistance," proving the enduring vitality of traditional ritual politics under modern conditions. This research not only enriches structural functionalism theory and

challenges the traditional understanding that "matriarchal societies inevitably involve decentralization," but also provides an important case study for understanding the diversity of non-Western political systems, offering insights for reflecting on modern forms of political governance.

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