(Water in Africa) Journey to the village where "fathers" wait (2010 Quarterly "Tohoku Gaku" No.24)_RT_@tiniasobu

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Once you drink African water, you will always return to Africa. It is true. I wrote this article for "Tohoku Gaku" through a relationship with Mr. Norio Akasaka, who came to Yamaguchi Prefectural University to give a lecture. This is a manuscript, so please quote from the original.

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A Journey to the Village Where my Fathers Are Waiting: My Experience in Africa

Ankei Yuji

In 1972, when I was a third-year student in the Faculty of Science at Kyoto University, I felt frustrated with biology, which I had been aiming for, or even with being a university student itself. It was then that I learned of the mobile university movement started by anthropologist Jiro Kawakita and jumped into a two-week camp in the mountains of Tsugaru and Iwaki. In a program where 108 participants studied the region as their textbook, I experienced a great sense of freedom and was drawn to the fieldwork. The next thing I knew, I was a volunteer staff member of the mobile university and was busy preparing for the next year's Kakudahama Mobile University in Makimachi, Niigata Prefecture. I had never been able to read a timetable before, and over the next six months I spent 100 nights on the road, almost evaporating from my home in Kyoto.

When I returned to the university, I found that Dr. Junichiro Itani, a student of Kinji Imanishi, who was the same student as Dr. Kawakita, was promoting African studies there. I wanted to do fieldwork in Africa! With this thought in mind, I took the entrance exam for the graduate school of physical anthropology. I had no idea that I would go on to study the folklore of Okinawa and later become a university teacher of cultural anthropology. Takako, who had worked with me as a staff member at the mobile university, was engaged to be married and was about to change her major from microbiology to plant ecology. We visited Kanokawa Village, an abandoned village in the remote Iriomote Island, under the direction of Dr. Itani, and it became the field of our first joint research.

Dr. Itani accompanied me on three trips to Iriomote Island. Wading chest-deep in a mangrove estuary and camping for self-sufficiency in food were special training programs for me, who had thought that fieldwork was to listen to elderly people seated on the verandah. Bushwalking and stream climbing in the uninhabited mountains and fields was also a rehabilitation program for Dr. Itani, who was tired of meetings and writing manuscripts.

We went to Iriomote Island for three years (30 years after returning from Africa) before our longcherished dream of going to Africa was realized. Iriomote Island became an important place where we learned the basics of the study method, which is to have a close relationship with local people and to conduct joint research in the same field from different viewpoints. During that time, we had the unforgettable opportunity to learn directly from Dr. Tsuneichi Miyamoto at the Daisen Mobile University about the fieldwork ethics (Miyamoto & Ankei, 2006).

As we neared our departure for Africa, Dr. Itani told us,

"No matter how coarse the mesh is, you have to do research that covers a topic as a whole. If we do that, you will find a problem that no one has tried to solve before. When you find it, concentrate on that one spot and dig deep, until you reach bedrock. A good place to start would be the forest east of the Lualaba River. That's where no one has ever done anything before." "Dig deep where you stand!

Underneath lies a fountain!" are the words of Nietzsche (1963, p. 22) and of Iha Fuyu, the father of Okinawan studies, whose pen name was "Kansen (Sweet spring)". The field that Dr. Itani selected for us, based on what he saw of the beautiful forests he had flown over it in an airplane, was about 2,700 km up the ConNgoliver from its mouth, in the middle of the tropical rainforest in the heart of Africa. Would it really be a place where we could "stand"?

Dr. Itani had devised a way to raise travel expenses for the two of us, and for those of us who had never done overseas research before, he arranged for Makoto and Eiko Kakeya who were senior students in our laboratory, to accompany us and guide us until we found a village where we could settle down.

In the forest villages inhabited by the Songola people, the four of us were welcomed with hospitality. We were accommodated in the best rooms, served a feast, and never once asked for a payment. The 10-day walking trip was filled with encouraging nudges from our senior colleagues, such as shaking hands with an old lady who had no fingers at all due to leprosy, or stepping into a swarm of safari ants and getting bitten all over when we looked up when they said in Swahili, "Let's watch the birds." On our last day, we walked 38 kilometers along a forest trail, carrying all of our luggage, including dishes and pans. When we reached the opposite bank of the hotel in the town of Kindu, it was nightfall. We finally caught a wooden boat that would take us across the night river, which was 600 meters wide. However, after they started rowing, the boatmen charged us an exorbitant price, four times what they had promised (100 times the ferry fare in the daytime). They rowed us to a dark sandbar and asked us if we would like to sleep there for the night. "The crocodiles around hear have big bellies" they said. I was furious, but Kakeya, in a calm, coaxing voice, began bargaining, saying, "Tutakubariana (Let's compromise)," and we agreed to pay about one-third of the original price.

Based on this trip, we chose a village called Ngoli having less than 100 people where we were

welcomed with clean beds and a strong local drink. Sometime later, Takako and I returned there and asked if we could stay with them for six months. The conversation was in wobbly Swahili. I was greeted with a warm smile, and the village head gave us his own room. Takako was soon welcomed into the world of the village women, and we began to live under the care of the village chief's two wives, who provided us with food and a bucket of water to bathe in each day. Takako gradually began to speak Swahili, a language she had never learned in Japan. Staying as a couple, the host family seemed to feel at ease with us.

Takako's idea was to not use a camera or tape recorder for the first month until the villagers became accustomed to us. After a couple of weeks, the village head asked if he could build us a house. He must have realized that we were serious about our request to live there for six months. We were overjoyed and decided to have him build us a house. We chose a place on the outskirts of the village. They cut the grass, drove stakes, and shaped the house with ropes, and we were ready to go. The house, including the kitchen and bedroom, was just enough to contain us. However, the construction work did not start. The grass grew back on the planned site and the rope was hidden in it. I couldn't wait any longer and asked the village head why the construction work had not started.

If the reply had been, for example, "We don't have the manpower or materials," or "The procedures for the Housing Loan are in progress," we would have been prepared to compensate for it.

However, the reply came from an unexpected direction. He said, "Many children call me 'father,' but they are all my brothers' children. As a matter of fact, none of them are my own children. Won't you be my son?" I was so taken by the momentum of the conversation that I unintentionally answered in Swahili, "Ndiyo," or "Yes." Then he said, "Then you are my son from today. If you are a son, you should live with your parents. So there is no need to build a new house." Thus, our dream of owning a house vanished.

From then on, we had to call the village head "Baba" (father) or "Asá" in the local Songola language, instead of "Sultani" (village head) in Swahili. Not only that, we were taught that Asá. Elder brothers were "big fathers" and his younger brothers were "little fathers," and that if there is only one chair, for example, I must naturally give it to my father. The youngest father introduced to me was a boy of about six years old at the time.

Some time after I became the son of the village head, a large gathering of neighboring Protestant congregations was to be held in a nearby village. When we approached the venue after a three-hour walk, my father was among the many people waiting to welcome us, and he called out, "My son!" I had no choice. I ran to him, shouting, "Father," and hugged him in public. This was a performance to let the village chief, who had never had a son, know that he finally had a son.

To begin our fieldwork, we decided to make a map of the village. Takako, who has a better sense of direction than Yuji, drew the map. I could hear the villagers whispering, "Wow, the wife does the work that requires a lot of brain power, doesn't she? The villagers' impression of me became definite when I prepared botanical specimens to investigate the relationship between the forest and humans. While Takako collected and sketched the plants, I continued to make dried specimens while stoking the firewood. When I visited a house to interview the family members, I was told, "Your job is to dry leaves, isn't it? You should leave difficult things like writing to your wife," I was told.

Still, I managed to ask one house at a time, and when I came to my own house, I asked my father as I did in other houses." How many children do you have?" He replied, "Just you." We then entered the house across the street of a man with seven wives. He offered me a chair and served me distilled liquor. Since we chose the village for its strong liquors, I took it without hesitation. Then my father's second wife came in and in a harsh voice ordered me to go home immediately because my father was calling for me. I rushed home and found a sermon from my father.

"My family and the family across the street have an important and serious relationship, as both of us are marrying wives from the other. You must not drink alcohol with them." Thus, I knew that the village was divided into two kinship groups

In cultural anthropology, this is called a "avoidance relationship," the wisdom of cooling down a relationship that might otherwise be easily damaged. The strictest type of avoidance relationship is, the relationship between a man and his wife's mother. For example, it is considered rude even to meet her on the street, and if such a situation arises, the husband is expected to hide in the bushes as an expression of respect, and avoid showing himself to her. Although not as strict as this, there are some relationships where eating from one plate is not allowed. As a result of our being caught up in the weave of village kinship, we have made the choice that we were only allowed to interact in a relaxed, joking manner with

only half of the villagers.

Between father and son, we are allowed to eat from one plate, but there was still something to be avoided. We lived by the principle of not paying rewards in money in the village. For example, I would give my father a few cigarettes, although I did not smoke in case he carried firewood for drying plant specimens to study my knowledge about the forest. I sometimes gave my father cigarettes as a sign of respect, but for the first time he asked me, "Well, when do you smoke?"

I answered, "Dad, I smoke at night, inside the house."

On a day when the rain that had been going on for a while cleared up, I found my father selling cigarettes on a roadside stone, drying them in a row, and I asked him without thinking.

"Father, when do you smoke?" "My son, I smoke at night, inside the house." This was a slightly awkward exchange of avoidance relationship.

The opposite of this is a somewhat strange term, "joking relationship."

From the day I became a child, my father's sisters and aunts began to come to me in turn, insisting that I drink alcohol and buy snuff. I asked my father's wives about this, and they told me that my father's sisters and I, their nephews, were free to beg each other for anything and to freely exchange sexual jokes with each other. The same is true between my grandfather and his grandchildren. This is why oral traditions are sometimes passed down from generation to generation, even to the grandchildren.

When you are in this kind of weave of avoidance and joking relationships, many things can happen. One of the aunts would ask me to go into her son's room to check on him because he seemed to have fallen ill. She could not enter her son's room, but I could.

During the course of my long stay, the food at my father's house gradually became scarcer and scarcer. My grandfather, who lived just across the street, and I had a joking relationship, so it was easy for us to beg for anything, and he was always willing to treat us to a meal, so we often ate there. Then, my father called out to me.

"I thought you guys don't eat at your own house much these days, but I heard you eat at my father's. Why on earth?" I was at a loss for an answer, so I said honestly, "Because my father and my big mama (senior wife) doesn't eat much at home.

But this was taken as an accusation against the village court, which was held every Sunday. In the

blink of an eye, I was the plaintiff and the first wife was the defendant. In the village square, surrounded by the villagers, arguments, speeches, testimonies, proverbs, and songs were repeated. As I watched in amazement, the elders deliberated and passed a verdict: "The children should be fed properly. The plaintiff won the case, saying that the children should be fed properly.

Immediately after the verdict, women around me poured sand on my head. It seemed they held sand in their hands before I knew it. They said, "Good luck should be balanced with bad ones. Don't get arrogant just because you have won." I remembered that a man who had won a small case had been poured by the sand-picking women. Later in my trip, when my father gave birth to his first daughter (my sister) on the same day I arrived in the village, I was also pelted with sand and told, "If it were a boy, you would have received heavier sand storms, congratulations!"

After the first six months of stay, on the day we left the village to return home, we gave away our personal belongings to those who had taken care of us. Immediately after that, I was called into my father's room and was scolded.

"You gave that machete to my father. I wanted it for myself."

"Papa, I gave it to my grandfather because he asked me to give it to him. If you wanted it so badly, you should have told me."

"How can a father ask his son to give him something! It's a shame."

A son should have given things to his father so that his father would not utter what he wanted from his son. Especially, giving gifts in public was to be avoided because the eyes of those who did not receive the gifts would be jealous and bring misfortune. The word for envy in the Congolese Swahili language is kilicho, which also means "big eyes."

Fatherhood

Once adopted, there is no way to terminate the relationship.

We are only allowed to investigate within the pre-determined range of relationships. It was hard work to collect firewood to make over 1000 botanical specimens, and our stay meant asking father's second wife, who had a painful leg, to fetch water for every day. So we decided to hire a boy as an assistant. However, when they saw the boy, both mothers said in unison, "He has a bad character of a thief. If you

need a boy, think of us as your boy and ask us for anything you want, okay?" So they said, and we were back to our old ways.

A young man who seemed to have some free time came to the village, and we walked together for about two hours to the next village and visited a store. Immediately my father called out, "Son, you are going out with that young man. The young man's fathers had all died, and he is an orphan. I am sorry for him, but you should know that he is freed from all the worldly constraints of how he should behave in front of father. Since you are not an orphan, you must not make a mistake of imitating his behaviors."

Having a "little father" who was about 20 years younger than me, I entered a life in which I was probably blessed with "no lack of fathers in life." So when I told the villagers that I had only one father and one mother in Japan, they were badly shocked to hear. They said, "We could not live in such a chilly and lonely place." From their point of view, our one-father-one-mother kinship system was quite strange.

I studied the agricultural systems of the forest village and the fish names of the riverside fishing village, and the barter economy that links different living environments. Takako studied cooking and alcohol brewing and their relationship to the plant world. Father said, "There is a riverside village where my brother's daughter, your sister, is married to a chief of the village, so you can stay there."

For the village chief of that riverside village, I was a member of his extended family who had given his wife in exchange for bride wealth of 10 goats. The relationship between me and the chief was more formal than that between a father and his son.

One day after a rain, I slipped on the wet soil in the courtyard of my sister's husband's house where I was staying and almost fell in front of him. The villagers, seeing this, said to me, "Too bad, we missed a goat!"

In such a case, the husband of my sister should help me up and give me a goat as compensation for the shame I experienced of falling in front of him, and the whole villagers could eat it. Also, although my father and I were in an abject relationship where we were not allowed to say "give me things" to each other, we still could eat from the same plate and were able to eat a chicken together. My sister's husband and I was not allowed to eat together from the same plate. The chicken would be brought to the table in a

pot containing all the parts of a chicken, and a guest would be free to choose what he wanted to eat, after which it would be distributed among the family members. Chickens have hearts, livers, and other tasty parts that are too small to be shared, so this was done to avoid any embarrassing disputes that might complicate the important but delicate relationship between the relatives in marriage.

In the course of my research on the folk knowledge of fish (Ankei Yuji, 1982), I also interviewed my syster's husband. And when I happened to ask him the name of the fish excrement hole, he stammered in embarrassment. Oh, no! Such a question is no problem between two people who are in a joking relationship, but it was not to be uttered between two people who are in an avoidance relationship. Also, when I was learning the knowledge of over 500 forest plants from one of my fathers, I asked him the name of a certain plant, and he did not reply, saying that it was a disgrace. When Takako asked the mothers later, they told her that it was a plant with a sex-related use (Ankei Takako, 2009). Being caught in a kinship knot in the field like this had two sides: one was that the research went smoothly, and the other was that it was restricted in unexpected ways.

My third visit to Congo was in 1983. My son had just been born, so Takako stayed in Japan with our baby. When I arrived at the village, I immediately reported to my father: "Father, your grandson has been born." I realized that I had made a terrible mistake. On asking the name of the baby, my father was so disappointed, listing his three names: "Not Ngoli (free man), Musafiri (traveler), or Luapanya (mythological hero)."

At that moment, heavenly help descended to me.

"We gave him your Momamba (name for the drum language) bobobo bobebo bobo (Luapanya Bunguu Kungwa)!"

Hearing this, my father's reply, with a big smile on his face, was astonishing. "At last you gave birth to me!" From that day on, my name in the village changed and I became "Father of Ngoli"

Mothers also began to say, "Your son calls you," instead of "Your father calls you." In other words, those who share the same name are the same person, and as long as a co-name owner is alive, they have immortal life even if their bodies perish.

Living the Myth

During my third stay, I realized for the first time that there is a long heroic myth in the Songola language. The man in his thirties who told me the myth was a masterful and dramatic storyteller, weaving a series of magical songs that brought forth miracles and wonders into the Hercules-like adventures of the culture hero Kamangú, who was miraculously born as a brother to a chimpanzee. Explored the underworld to the Land of Thunder. As I chanted along with the audience by the fireside at night, I felt that ancient Japanese myths like Kojiki must have been told as a play in this way, with the sung parts being chanted by the audience. I planned a 100-kilometer trip to a village deep in the forest where this tradition is said to still flourish today, and consulted my father about it.

My father's reply was, "I can tell you that too." The myth that my father told me was different from the Kamangú myth, however, in that it began with the story of the smallest squirrel in the forest who overcame all the beasts to win the king's daughter, and the squirrel's child grew up to become a fierce god like Susanoo in the Japanese myths.

He asked me, "Father, why didn't you ever tell me there was such a myth?" I asked him, "Why didn't you ever ask me? My father replied,

He did not tell me the name of the raging god, but a court judge who happened to be in the village, at my request, wrote it down in his notebook and then read it to me. The myth was almost identical to the one my father had told me, except that the repetitions were omitted and the songs were shortened. The only difference was that he told us that the name of the raging god was Luapanya. It was at this point that I realized that the tale of an adventures in the land of the wild boar, which I had heard several times during the nighttime mists of my previous stay, was a fragment of this heroic myth, and I suddenly remembered that only my father had told it in the first person.

The hero of that part of the story was Luapanya, so my father of the same name told the myth in the first person as his own adventure. The heroic deeds in the myth of Luapanya were his own deeds and those of my son, who also bore the name Luapanya. I had felt a certain discomfort in the oral tradition of the Ainu people, told in the first person by a non-human deity Kamui, slowly dissolve within me.

The myths of the Songola people, which are still vividly told today, do not tell of a distant past, but

are directly related to the way we live today, nor was only one version of the myths authorized and written down, nor were only the king's family privileged to be affiliated with the heroes of the myths. These myths are the dreams of the people of the land, which they have maintained through the great hardships of colonization and repeated civil wars. The task of writing down the myths was a challenge with the Songola language, a minority language for which there were no dictionaries or grammar books, and with the unknown Songola culture for which our only previous research was an ethnography published by a colonial administrator in 1909.

The Wish of a Migratory Bird

In 1990, I returned to the forests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where my father lived, for the first time in seven years. It was my fourth trip. After getting off the plane and entering the hotel, I immediately left a letter for the village where my sister lived. A boatman on a dugout canoe heading downstream agreed to carry that letter. However, rumors circulated that a murder had occurred in the village and that the people had been dispersed by avengers and looting by soldiers who took the name of interrogation, leaving the village almost abandoned.

My sister's village was a village that believed in Islam in 1980, but one day converted to Catholicism, and by 1983 the men were drinking distilled liquor in addition to the palm wine they had been accustomed to. Since that liquor was made by the women, a channel was created through which income was transferred from the men to the women, but I feared that there were certain dangerous pitfalls in this change. I had a hunch that perhaps the cause of the abandonment of villages was alcohol drinking.

So, I decided to almost completely abstain from alcohol myself. The first thing I did was to advise the village head, my sister's husband, to either stop drinking or at least to cut down on alcohol consumption. When I arrived in the village, I found that the murder had been the result of a fight over alcohol. People were slowly getting back to normal, but some of the women were drowning in spirits.

When I spoke to the village chief, my sister's husband, I found that he was somewhat depressed and felt that it did not matter where he died. Mr. Bernard, the husband of the chief's sister, was very worried that if the village disappeared, the immigrants might take ownership of the entire forest east of the Lualaba River. So he asked me if I could somehow encourage the village chief to help him revive the

village.

The year before, we had crossed the line as researchers by starting a business of producing and selling pesticide-free rice on Iriomote Island, Okinawa (Miyamoto & Ankei, 2008). This time I decided to start a village revitalization project together with the chief's advisor, Mr. Bernard. Of course, textbooks of anthropology tell us that it is correct for fieldworkers to objectively record such incidents and social changes. However, Mr. Bernard was the pilot who had guided me on a wooden canoe trip of 250 km up the Lualaba River seven years earlier, in 1983, and he had saved my life on that arduous journey. And it is my sister's village that is about to be abandoned.

I spoke to the village chief about the importance of abstaining from alcohol rather than enjoying it, and that he could not persuade people to stop drinking if he himself was drinking. I mentioned that our god Kamangú in the myth of Songola had broken a taboo by getting drunk. I also told him that if the village were to be abandoned during his rule, in the unlikely event that we were to be deprived of our rights to this forest, the story would be passed down to the next generations, saying, "This happened in that chief's generation." After this persuading conversation, I could listen to him say, "We shall manage to try again."

Then, there was the matter of receiving out the imprisoned people, paying the fines for the confiscated guns, and x-rays and treatment for the village chief himself, who had a cough that would not stop. I had never given money in such situations before, but now that I had spoken up, I also decided to give the money needed for the village's recovery. So I followed the pattern of behavior at Wildcat-Brand Iriomote Island's Organic Rice in Okinawa.

I went further to my father's village in the forest. My father, whom I had not seen for a long time, was blind in one eye from an illness and looked old and feeble. He had wondered why I did not come to see him for as long as seven years. "Whenever I saw the moon in the sky, I could not help thinking of you. Come, let's eat from one plate," he said. However, my village was in a great turmoil. I am not at liberty to tell you about our family troubles, but one of my younger brothers was making a big fuss every day, yelling and screaming that he was going to take his case to the town court. He was the most relied upon by my father, and it seemed certain that he would inherit the position of village chief from my father in the next generation. It all started when his father hid his quarreling partner from him. The village chief's

unyielding rule as a refuge was that "those who escape into the hands of the village chief would never die."

The younger brother, angered by this, sued his father to the town court. As a result, the father was imprisoned and had to give up both money and goats in order to be released. The father said that he could not allow a fool to take over the position of village headman, who would lose his property that would normally be his in the form of bride wealth for his own weddings. So, my father appointed a former slave who had been deprived of knowledge of his roots and his native language as the deputy village chief. The younger brother, angry at the choice, tried to sue the deputy chief. My sister's village was almost abandoned, and my own village was in such a turmoil. If left unchecked, even my own village might be abandoned. I was so worried that I called my younger brother to talk to him. I asked him, "Do you know why father insisted on a former slave to take over as village chief?" I asked. "Because, although I feel sorry for him, nobody would believe his choice to be serious. In Songola, there is a saying in our mythology that teaches us that "mo.kota támone takui" (a village chief neither sees nor hears), that is, to remain calm and not to be distracted by trivial matters. You were once a deputy chief of a village, don't you know that the more you fuss about every little thing like a trial, the more your father will be disgusted with you? The position of village chief is like an oil palm tree that grows abundantly in this village. If you stay quiet, the seed will fall under the tree and grow back there. If we create a storm, the seeds will fly away and grow far away from the trunk." After talking for a while, he said, "I understand now, brother. I'm sorry. I will apologize to our father."

The next day, my elder brother (the son of my father's brother), whom Takako and I trusted the most, arrive on foot to see us from a town about 30 kilometers away. That evening, as I was talking to my elder brother and father, it occurred to me to tell them this impromptu story in Swahili. It was raining outside, and wives staying indoors could not listen.

I told them a story.

"Once upon a time, there was a forest of oil palms just like this village. There was a tall palm tree in the forest, and birds would come even from far to nest in it. One day, however, the leaves and roots of the palm had a conflict. The leaves insisted on not casting shadows on the roots, and the roots insisted on not sending water to the leaves. In the meantime, the trunk began to wither and rot. One night, there was a

storm, and the mighty oil palm suddenly snapped in the middle. Then, the next time a migratory bird comes along, where on earth should it nest?"

"This is not an old tale. This is an appeal to the court," my father muttered, and both audience fell silent. I was afraid I had screwed up. Perhaps it was something a son should never say to his father. I withdrew into my room without even saying hello.

The next morning, however, my elder brother came to me. He said, "I was really impressed you're your story of last night. My father is thankful for you, citing the proverb, 'A son from afar has filial piety. You are the very person of this village. Your body may have been born in faraway Japan, but you are originally from this village. Your parable was like a sharp spear penetrating our hearts, and neither my father nor I had a word to say in reply. We will call all our family together next time, so please let them hear it again.

More than 20 years have passed since then without me being able to stand in my home village. Now that I have sent my parents off in Japan, I long for the warmth and nostalgia of a large African family. During my stay in Kenya in 1998, my family and I tried to visit the village where my father and his family were waiting for us, but we had to give up the idea two days before our departure from Nairobi due to the outbreak of civil war. Since then, we has spent our days visiting countries with forests, such as Kenya, Uganda, and Gabon in West Africa, hoping that peace will come to the people in the forests of my second homeland.

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