

GENERATION AND TRANSACTION PROCESSES IN THE SPIRIT RITUAL OF THE BAKA PYGMIES IN SOUTHEAST CAMEROON

Daisaku TSURU
*Center for African Area Studies,
Kyoto University*

ABSTRACT This paper focuses on the diversification process and the socio-cultural background of spirit rituals among the Baka of southeastern Cameroon. Among the Baka, spirit rituals differ between the various subgroups. This diversity is a product of two processes: Firstly, existing spirit rituals are transacted with other subgroups. Secondly, new spirit rituals are continually generated in the process of founding rituals. In both processes the role of individual social actors is important. Among the Baka, rituals belong to individual persons called “father of the spirit.” They transact and even found new rituals for their own subgroup and this promotes the intra-cultural diversity of spirit rituals as a whole.

Spirit rituals are based on the concept of spirit guardianship, which is an exclusive relationship between an individual and a particular spirit. This individual involvement in rituals introduces innovation and changes to ritual practices and its form. A process of diversification is therefore inevitable. However, a relatively homogenous concept of the identity of spirits is maintained despite a strong tendency for spirit rituals to diversify.

Individualism is generally stressed by the nomadic social structure of the Baka because the mobility of individuals is high and permanent communal social identities are never established. The fluidity of the social system and that of the religious system have an interdependent relationship which is mediated by the specific individualism of Baka society.

Key Words: Intra-cultural diversity; Transaction and generation of spirit rituals; Guardianship; Individualism; Fluidity

INTRODUCTION

Several researchers have pointed out that the religious system of African hunter-gatherer societies has flexible characteristics.

For example, Barnard (1988) states in his paper “Structure and fluidity in Khoisan religious ideas” that in these societies, especially in the case of the Bushmen, the assimilation of new ideas is non-problematic. Religious notions have a fluid character, which does not break down the cultural uniformity of the Khoisan religious system as a whole, but creates “intra-cultural diversity” within the Khoisan cultural area. In the Khoisan religious system cultural uniformity and intra-cultural diversity are consistent. So far, descriptions of the cultural frameworks of hunter-gatherer societies have tended to provide only a general account leaving aside intra-cultural diversity. But Barnard states that it is necessary to collect

data through a regional approach, which focuses on the variation between different subgroups within an extensive area as a whole. In Barnard's paper, the "regional approach" is applied only to the structural and formal analysis of religious concepts of Khoisan people.

Joiris (1996) tries to compare rituals among different Baka's subgroups as suggested by Barnard's regional approach in her paper, "A comparative approach to hunting rituals among the Baka Pygmies." In that paper, she tries to clarify the variation of ritual practices and of social background. Among the Baka, various forms of rituals are practiced. The combination of rituals performed by each subgroup also differs. Joiris's contribution points out the social influences on intra-cultural diversity. She points out that the variability of rituals is connected to the social identity of each subgroup. Baka tend to identify subgroups by applying the unique names of spirits which correspond to the rituals of the respective subgroups. On the other hand, the Baka also form fictive "regional bands," groups that bind together several subgroups with different spirit rituals, through the recognition of genealogical kinship ties between the spirits involved. In sum, there are two processes pulling in apparently opposite directions; one leads to the splitting of groups and the other emphasizes their integration at the ideological level. Both moments are maintained and consistent with each other in ritual practices. Such characteristics of ritual practices strongly correlate with particular social factors such as the formation of nomadic groups or a high mobility of the population.

Joiris also points out the difficulty to delimit the scope of the analysis when applying a regional approach to the Baka regional system because of the extreme flexibility of ritual practices. Even at the level of each subgroup, hereditary ritual figures are often missing and there is no ancestor worship. Moreover, there is no regular schedule for ceremonies, that is to say, certain rituals that have not been performed for years may suddenly be organized repeatedly in a short period of time. In addition, there are private rites, which are both difficult to observe and difficult to classify.

Both authors are aware of a particular fluidity in the religious system of hunter-gatherers, a reflection of a general characteristic of hunter-gatherer societies. Although Barnard's study is limited to a structural analysis of the flexible character of Khoisan religious ideas, he also recognizes the importance of an interdependence between the fluidity of the religious system and that of other systematic elements, such as economics, politics or kinship etc. Joiris elaborates Barnard's approach to show the influences of sociological fluidity on the fluidity of religious systems. In sum, Barnard's study focuses on structural aspects of the religious system, and Joiris' study focuses on practical aspects of the religious system.

It is necessary to systematically explain the relation of these two aspects of a religious system in a given socio-cultural system. The comparative study of structural variation observed among local groups (Barnard's approach) and a comparative study on diverse modes of practices observed in local groups (Joiris's approach) should be applied at the same time.

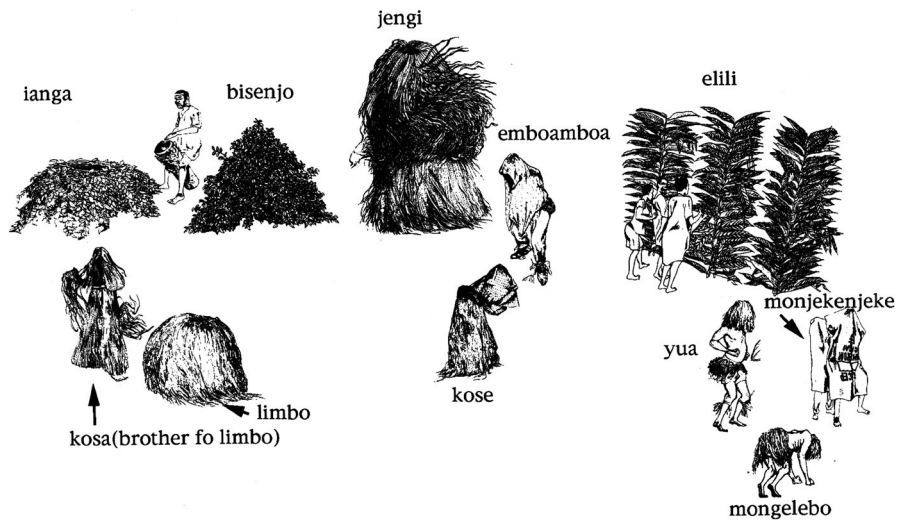


Fig. 1. Costumes of Spirits.

SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND METHOD OF STUDY

In this paper, the fluid characteristics of the spirit ritual among the Baka pygmies are described and analyzed. A first necessary step is to describe the diversity of their religious ideas and practices.

The data on religious ideas and ritual practices were collected among the Baka in the southeastern Cameroon.

The Baka people form residential groups (*ba*), composed of 50 members in average, which can be regarded as subgroups. The subgroups are comprised of groups of nuclear families tied together through patrilineal kinship. Several patrilineal descent groups belong to a group of a higher level called *ye*, which can be regarded as a clan. *Ye* are recognized as exogamous units. Individuals recognize the name of their own *ye* but no *ye* forms a geographical block. Nor is there a legend explaining the genealogical relationship among different *ba* and *ye*. *Ye* only provide individual persons and each subgroup (*ba*) with the base for social identity but not for wider regional groups. However, the subgroup itself is impermanent. Genealogical knowledge covers only the range of alive generations.

The Baka practice rituals that are based on a specific concept of spirits (*me*). These supernatural beings are believed to live in the forest and sometimes visit the Baka settlements for dancing along with the songs of people. In the ritual, the visit of spirits is expressed either through particular costumes or through vocal performances. Male initiates of the ritual association that is formed in each settlement carry out these spirit performances. Many kinds of such spirit rituals can be found among the Baka. These various spirit rituals differ with regard to the songs and costumes for the spirit dance performance (Fig. 1). Then, the number and combinations of spirit rituals also differ with regard to the *ba* (subgroups).

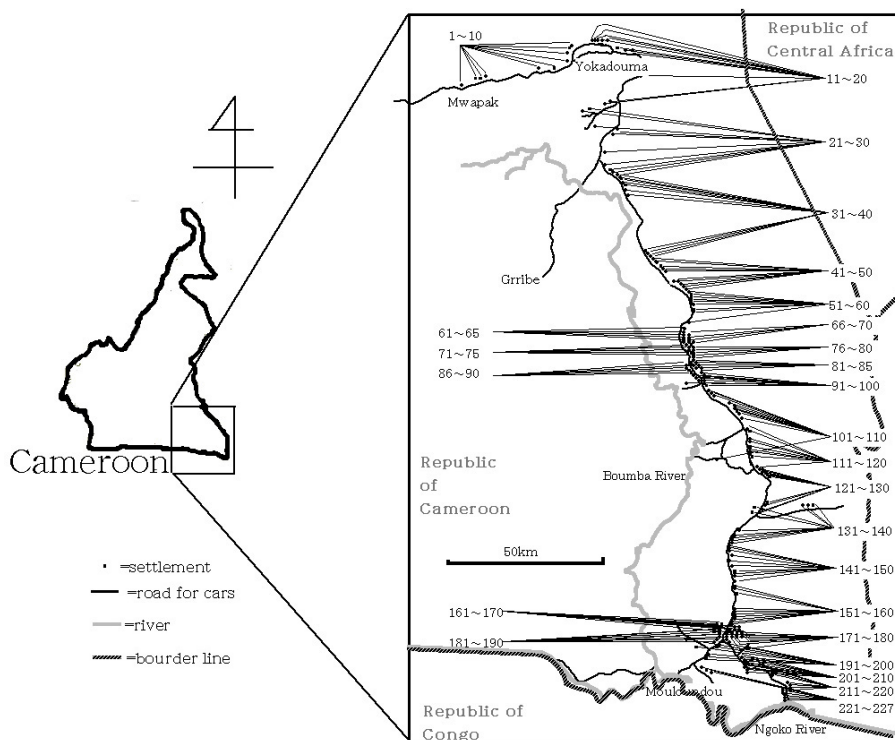


Fig. 2. Research area.

Differences of kind, number and combination of spirit rituals can be observed at the level of subgroups. In this paper, the formation process of these differences and their social background are described and analyzed.

The main data for this report were collected in field research during 1994 and 1995. The study area is situated in the tropical rain forest area of the southeastern part of Cameroon (Fig. 2). 228 Baka subgroups were encountered along the road which is mainly used for timber transportation. Small dots on the map represent respective subgroups. Respective subgroups maintain a symbiotic relationship with neighboring agriculturalists. Intensive research was conducted at a subgroup named Bapame (No. 100 in Fig. 2).

INTRA-CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL UNIFORMITY OBSERVED IN BAKA SPIRIT RITUALS

I. Intra-cultural Diversity: Diversity and Flexibility of Spirit Ritual Practice

Through extensive research on 228 subgroups, 51 kinds of spirit rituals have been identified. The kinds of rituals practiced in each subgroup are flexible in number

Table 1. Shift of rituals in the settlement of Bapame.

	Ritual events Dec. 1994-Apr. 1995 (137 days)		Ritual events Jan. 1998 -Jul. 1998 (89 days)	
<i>abale</i>	11	(2.40)	4	(0.34)
<i>limbo</i>	4	(0.88)	6	(2.00)
<i>emboambo</i>	1	(0.22)	3	(1.01)
<i>elili</i>	3	(0.66)	1	(0.34)
<i>sakoja</i>	1	(0.22)	2	(0.67)
<i>timba</i>	15	(3.30)	0	(0)
<i>monjekenjeke</i>	1	(0.22)	0	(0)
<i>membiasi</i>	0		22	*
<i>wa-mbombo</i>	0		3	**
<i>rindo</i>	0		2	**
<i>kpimbimbi</i>	0		1	**
<i>isolombia, yuko</i>	0		1	**
<i>tindende</i>	0		1	**

* ; ritual transacted from another settlement

** ; ritual generated within the settlement

() ; frequency in 30 days

(from 0 to 7). The average number of spirit rituals practiced in one subgroup is three. These rituals are differentiated by ritual forms in the details of the ritual process and in the shape of costumes of spirits appearing in the rituals (Tsuru, 1998).

The combination of practiced rituals changes over time. Table 1 gives the record of the names of spirit rituals performed in Bapame in a period of 137 days from December 1994 to July 1995 and in a period of 89 days from January to April 1998. Despite the three years in between, five rituals were still practiced without remarkable change, while two were no longer practiced and six rituals were new. These new rituals were introduced through two different processes, transaction and generation.

Timba, which had formally been practiced repeatedly (15 times), was no longer practiced. By contrast, *membiasi* was now repeatedly practiced. The members of the settlements themselves recognize that the new ritual of *membiasi* took the place of the older *timba*. *Membiasi* had spread in this area over several years. It is, therefore, a case of transaction.

Other new rituals apart from *membiasi* have been created by the members of Bapame, and cannot be found among other settlements. As I point out below, similar cases of the generation of new rituals can be observed in many settlements.

II. Cultural Uniformity and Conservatism in the Conceptualization of Spirits

Despite such enormous diversity and flexibility of spirit ritual forms and practices, there is uniformity with regard to ideas about spirits. While the Baka people easily accept religious notions derived from different religious traditions in their ritual practices, they are very conservative with regard to the basic idea of spirit existence itself and have no tendency towards syncretism. For example, among the Baka, the “God” of Christianity is accepted due to influence from missionaries and often rituals imitate the Catholic mass. However, the idea of “God” (called *komba* in the Baka language) is clearly distinguished from the traditional idea of spirit *me*. The idea of *komba* is never brought into spirit ritual practices. Similarly, in the ritual of *nganga*, the idea of witchcraft which originated from Bantu religious traditions is often practiced. However, Baka do not practice *nganga* rituals in the same event with spirit rituals. On the whole, the idea of spirits is never mixed with different religious notions nor substituted by them.

For the idea of spirits, intra-cultural diversity can be observed in the face of enormous diversification of spirit rituals at the level of subgroups while cultural uniformity can be observed with regard to the whole cultural framework. It is necessary to clarify cultural and social factors that promote intra-cultural diversification of spirit ritual and maintain its cultural unification as a whole at the same time.

THE FLUID CHARACTER OF SPIRIT RITUALS

In this section, the social process of diversification of spirit rituals is examined. The process of the creation of a new variation of spirit ritual is described and analyzed. This process can be observed in different subgroups. It is necessary to list the kinds and combinations of spirit rituals practiced in a specific subgroup. The shift of spirit rituals practiced in each subgroup is also important. These shifts bring about new spirit rituals and change the combination of spirit rituals in the subgroup.

The introduction of a new spirit ritual into a subgroup can be divided into two separate movements. One is the process of ritual transaction, by which new rituals spread across groups. Another is the process of generation, by which new rituals are originally generated in certain groups. Generation and transaction are phenomena which are connected to one another. Transacted spirit rituals may have been generated in a certain known subgroup at another point of time in the past. Then, there are spirit rituals which have widely spread, but which have existed since many generations so that the origin is no longer known. They may have been established through a process of generation followed by transaction.

I want to clarify these processes by considering the specific social and cultural background relevant to these two cases.

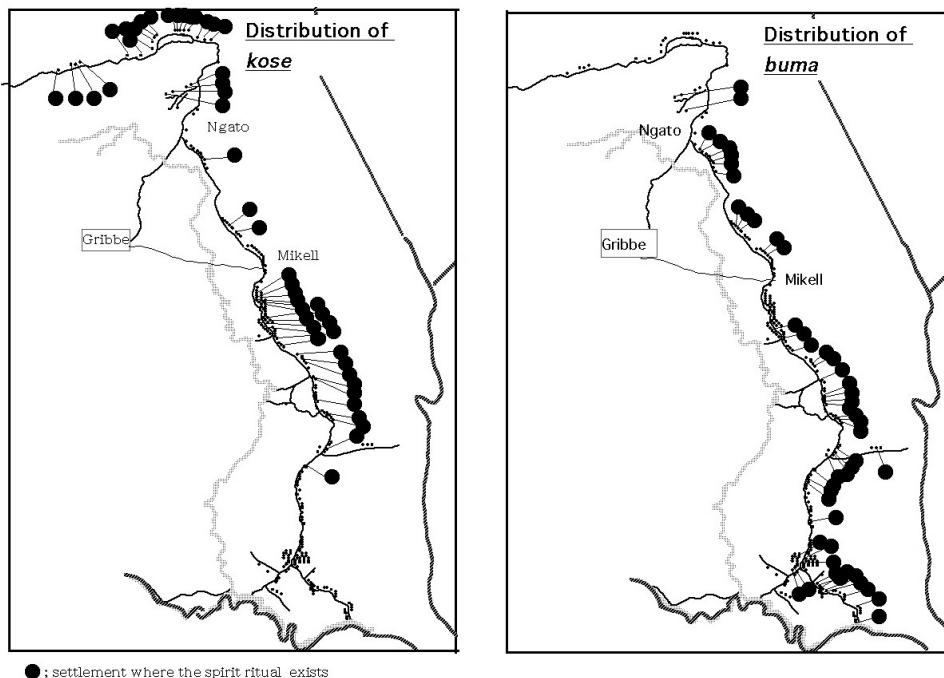


Fig. 3. Distribution of *kose* and *buma*.

I. The Process of Spirit Ritual Transaction

Traces of past ritual transactions are reflected in differences in the distribution of rituals, which suggests that the transaction of spirit rituals is a large-scale phenomenon which occurs in the area as a whole.

For example, there is an oral tradition according to which a certain spirit ritual called *kose* had emerged around the village of Gribbe, an agriculturalists' village in some distance from the main road (Fig. 3). Then *kose* broadly spread in the whole area, taking the place of an older ritual called *awoku*. The distribution of *kose* concentrates around the northern side of the path from the Gribbe settlement to Ngato and the southern side of the path from the Gribbe settlement to Mikell. The distribution of *kose* is in concordance with the oral tradition. Compared with *kose*, *buma* is concentrated in the southern part of the study area, especially near the border area between Cameroon and Congo.

Moreover, the original settlements each *kose* was transacted are mostly situated in the northern part of the research area (Fig. 4), especially, at the village of Gribbe. Original settlements for each *buma* transacts are mostly situated in the southern border area of Congo and Cameroon. The cases reported from a settlement named Mingombe are extraordinarily numerous, the *buma* of Mingombe having been transacted from Congo. An uneven distribution can also be observed in the case of other spirit rituals (Fig. 5). While the distribution of *elili* is concen-

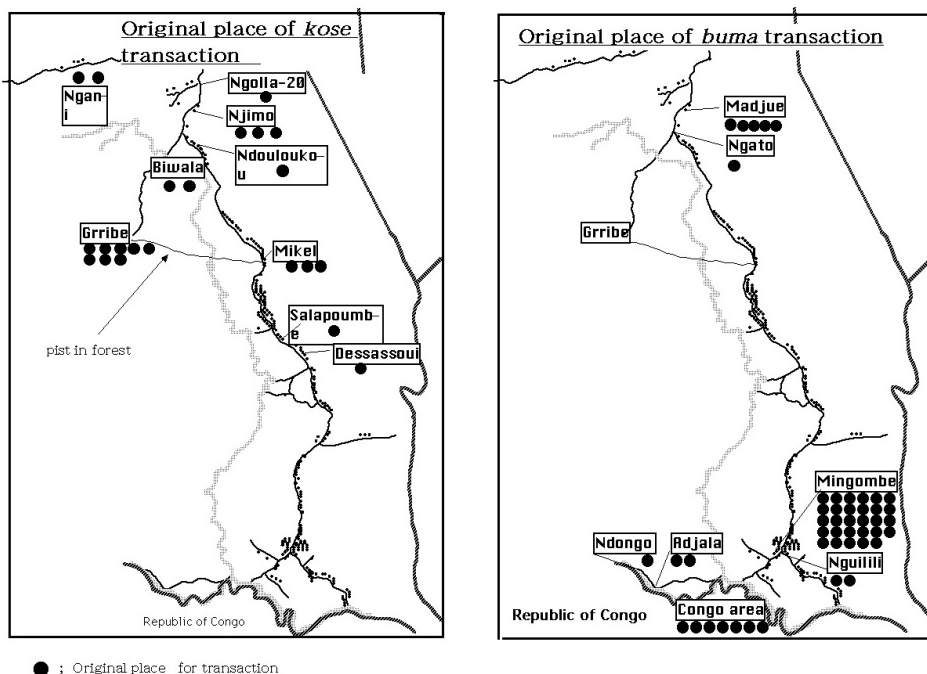


Fig. 4. Original places of *kose* and *buma* transaction.

trated in the southern part of the study area, that of *joboko* is concentrated in the northern part. In the case of *joboko*, there have been several cases of transactions from the Central Africa Republic (Fig. 6), which suggests that this is the area of origin of *joboko*. However, the area of origin of *elili* is not clear.

While there are spirit rituals spread over a wide area, there are disappearing spirit rituals such as *pembe*. There were many subgroups where *pembe* had been practiced at least one generation before but it had ceased at the time of research. *Pembe*, which was perhaps connected with *jengi*, the most propagated spirit ritual among the Baka of this area, may also have been distributed very widely⁽¹⁾. However, it is rarely been practiced among the Baka in recent years. By contrast, *jengi* and *emboamboa* are by far the most common spirit rituals in this area (Fig. 7). Their performances are broadly and densely distributed, showing no clear picture of their transaction.

The characteristics of *jengi* are remarkable and suggestive. *Jengi* is thought to be the most important and supreme spirit by the Baka people. *Jengi* is supposed to be identical with the spirit called *ezengi* among the Aka. (Joiris, 1996). According to Bahuchet (1985: 459), it is possible that the Aka and the Baka emerged as distinct groups about 200 years ago. If this is true, as Bahuchet pointed out, this spirit must have been a part of the ritual and symbolic corpus of an old culture of the common ancestors of the present Baka and Aka (Thomas & Bahuchet, 1991: 281-305). In my research, there is no example of a recent transaction of *jengi*.

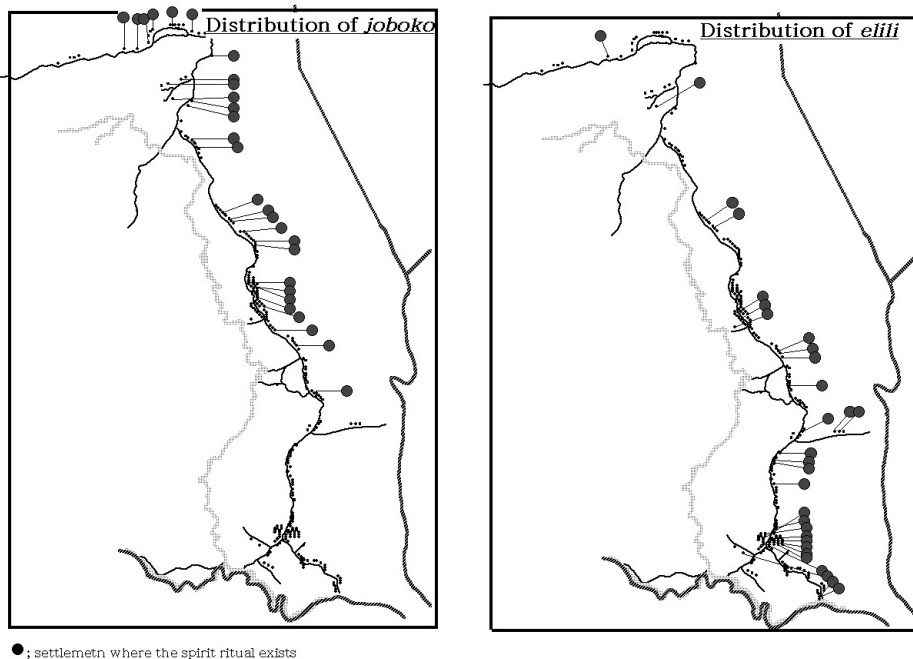


Fig. 5. Distribution of *elili* and *joboko*.

Jengi is well established as a spirit ritual, the propagation process of which may have been over at certain point of time in the past.

I will now examine the practical process of transaction of these rituals between subgroups. This process is performed by two individual persons belonging to the two subgroups involved. Among the Baka, it has been observed that there is one individual person (a man, usually) who is regarded to be the owner of the particular spirit ritual in a subgroup. The owners of the rituals are called “fathers of the spirit” in Baka. “Father of the spirit” has the connotation of a “guardian of spirits”; he is regarded as a man who mediates the will of the spirit to other people and supervises the ritual association authorized by his private relationship with the spirit. Within a subgroup, men can belong to different associations and a single man may be the supervisor in more than one association. In some cases, the position of father of spirit can be transacted to other persons together with the right to guard the same spirit and to perform the specific ritual of the spirit⁽²⁾. In this paper, this specific and complex relationship between the “father of spirit” and a spirit is called “guardianship,” following Joiris’s term (Joiris, 1996). Examining how these men have acquired their guardianship, we can investigate how rituals have been transacted to specific settlements.

Investigating major spirit rituals, I examined whether subgroups had acquired the ritual from other subgroups or not (Table 2). While spirit guardianship is often transacted within a single subgroup (in 189 cases) the cases in which it was acquired

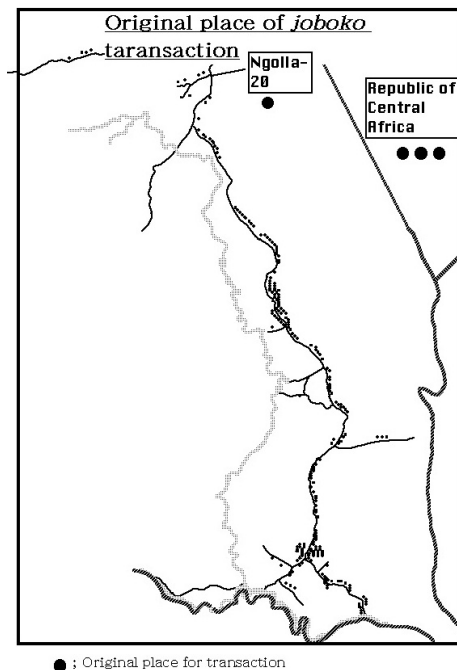


Fig. 6. Original places of *joboko* transaction.

from other subgroups are also numerous (156 cases), especially, for the *emboambo*, *buma*, and *kose* rituals. This suggests that these specific rituals are currently actively transacted. In contrast, guardianship of the most established spirit ritual *jengi* is transacted only through patrilineal succession within the subgroups. Most of the transactions within a single subgroup are those of *jengi*.

Examining closely how the owners gain guardianship from another subgroup (Fig. 8), I categorized cases by their mode of transaction. 65% of all cases were acquired through a transaction by trade. In these cases, the owner of the spirit ritual exchanges with other individuals the right to perform this ritual for money or meat or cloths, but mostly for money. In two cases they were exchanged for bride wealth. Cases of transacting without any reward are still considerable in number, 25%. Most of such transactions are based on the relation of individuals who are tied to one another by maternal kinship or by marriage. All the remaining cases occurred along with the migration of individuals. These data suggest that the transaction of guardianship between different subgroups principally is one of owners who trade the rituals, migration being only secondary. The main social factor promoting the transaction of spirit rituals is the exchange of guardianship as a commodity by the individual “father of spirit”⁽³⁾.

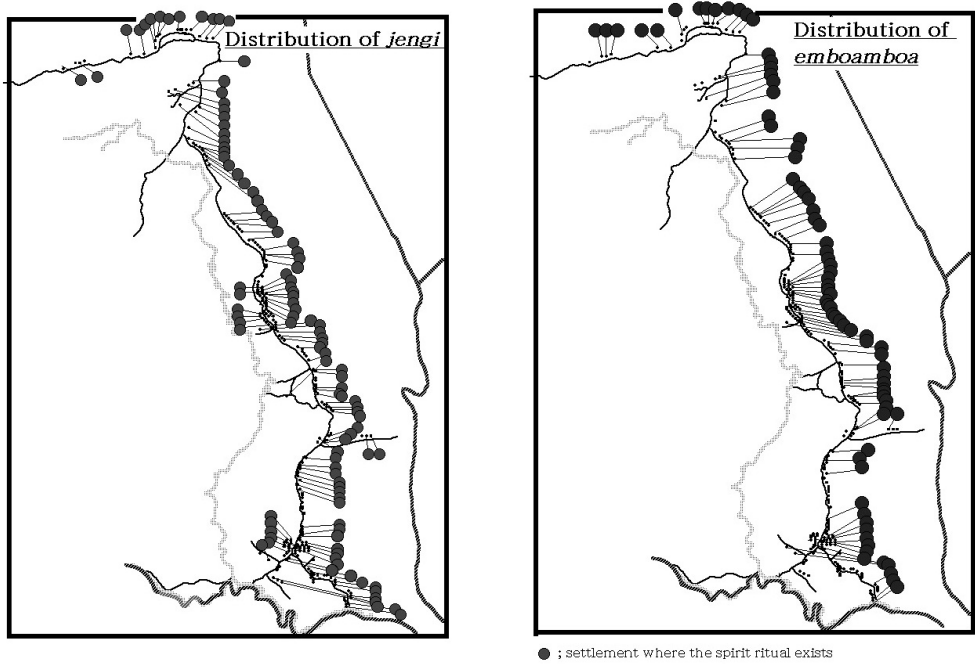


Fig. 7. Distribution of *jengi* and *emboambo*.

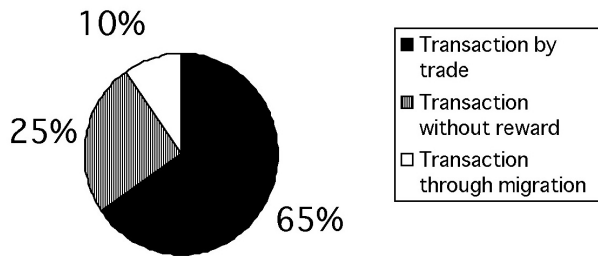


Fig. 8. Spirit ritual transaction from other settlements.

II. The Process of Spirit Ritual Generation

The foundation of new rituals can be observed in many subgroups (Fig. 9). In all cases, it is individual men who carry out the foundation of a new ritual. Several individuals in a single subgroup can found a new spirit ritual. At Bapame, 5 new spirit rituals were founded by different individual persons. But, only one of them, *limbo*, is regarded as the main spirit ritual of Bapame, and the others are regarded as only peripheral ones. *Limbo* is founded by the man who is regarded as the leader (*kokoma*) of Bapame. Young men or adolescent boys who occupy lower

Table 2. Guardianship transaction.

	<i>jengi</i>	<i>emboa- mboa</i>	<i>buma</i>	<i>kose</i>	<i>elili</i>	<i>joboko</i>
From other settlement	8	<u>24</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>36</u>	3	8
Within one settlement	93	27	7	21	6	8
Unclear	8	33	9	0	22	13
Generation	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total	109	85	66	57	31	29

(continued)

	<i>pembe</i>	<i>bokela</i>	<i>monge- lebo</i>	<i>wonga</i>	<i>sonjo</i>	<i>iekele</i>	Total
From other settlement	1	13	0	5	5	3	156
Within one settlement	12	1	8	0	5	1	189
Unclear	13	0	17	0	0	3	118
Generation	0	1	0	1	0	2	5
Total	26	15	25	6	10	9	468

Underlined numbers: Major spirit rituals acquired from other subgroups.

social positions found other rituals. Inside a single subgroup, the same members can participate in many different ritual associations at the same time to perform the respective spirit rituals collectively by taking turns.

Newly founded spirit rituals can be identified through the style of spirit costume or the repertoire of songs for the rite. The founder and other members of ritual associations design particular costume styles. All the subgroup members, including also women, compose particular songs for the spirit ritual ⁽⁴⁾.

After the ritual foundation, the founder acts as the owner of spirit. The new spirit rituals may be propagated through a transaction of guardianship (Fig. 10). In the case of the *bokela*, the ritual founder of *bokela* transacted its guardianship to 5 men belonging to other subgroups. One of these men, a man of subgroup No. 109, transacted it to a man of subgroup 118, and this man transacted it to three other men. In total, *bokela* was transacted to 8 different settlements up to this point. The founder of another ritual, *wonga*, transacted it to 5 men of different subgroups. It is likely that more large-scale transactions of such cases as *buma* and *kose* have developed following the generation in a specific subgroup.

Fluidity of spirit rituals among the Baka is brought about through the process of generation of new rituals and the propagation of the guardianship of spirits. It is individual persons who play the main part in these processes. They operate these processes through acting as founders or owners of spirit guardianship. They bring about new spirit rituals within their own subgroups and change the combination of spirit rituals practiced by other subgroups. As a whole, fluidity of spirit rituals basically depends on individual actions concerning spirit rituals.

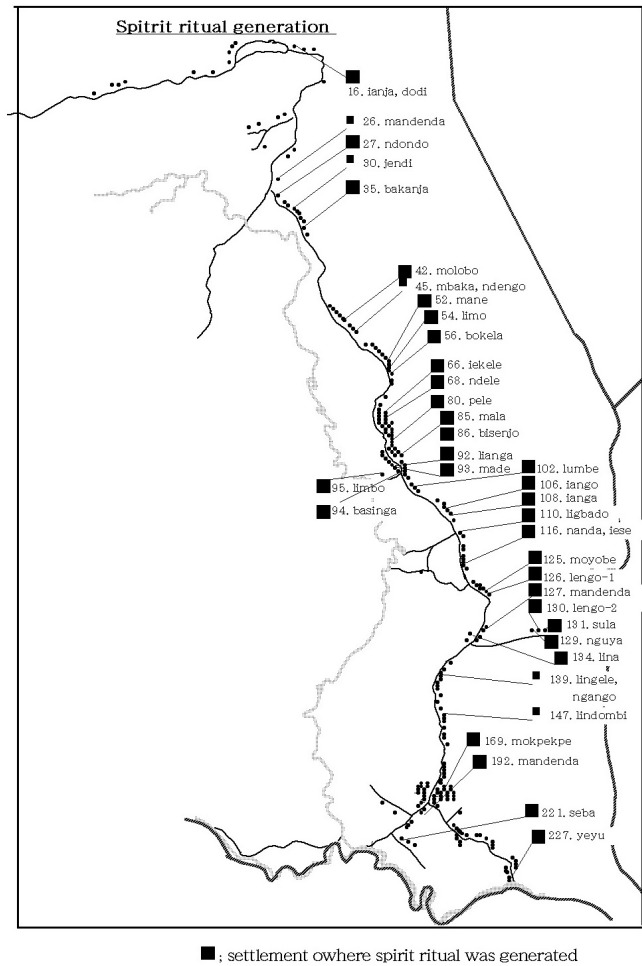


Fig. 9. Spirit ritual generation.

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS OF FLUID CHARACTER OF SPIRIT RITUALS

I. Social Factors with Special Reference to the Idea of Individual Ownership of Spirit

Despite the strong tendency towards diversification, the identity of the idea of spirit rituals as a whole is maintained. It is likely that the original concept of spirit itself allows some internal diversification. Baka religious belief is based on a very individualistic and mystic relationship between man and spirit, which allows the individual operation of spirit rituals. This notion is clearly put forward by individual founders of spirit rituals.

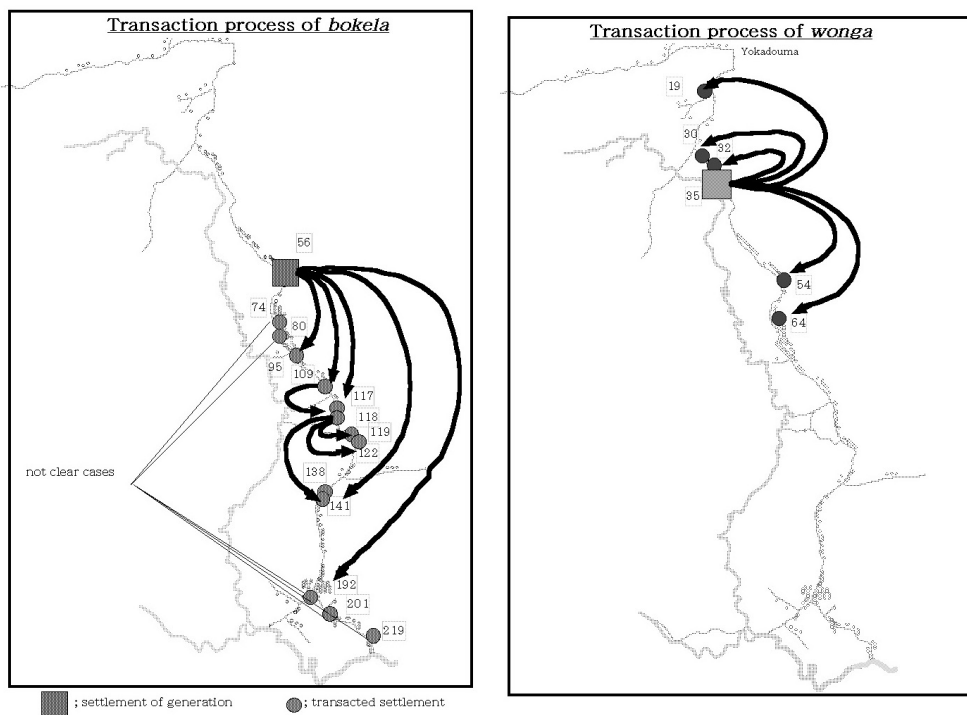


Fig. 10. Transaction process of *bokela* and *wonga*.

Let us consider the example of *limbo*, a spirit ritual founded in Bapame. The founder of *limbo* was not originally a member of Bapame. He had moved from his original subgroup for marriage purposes⁽⁵⁾. Because of social stress with other subgroup members, he became depressed. Such social difficulty of a newcomer is called “*nyomo*” in Baka⁽⁶⁾. At that time, he followed a hunting camp consisting of other Bapame members. One night, members of Bapame camped at the source of a small river in a valley; such a geographical feature is called *limbo* in Baka. When he slept there during the night, he dreamed of a spirit. The spirit told him “Why do you make *nyomo* in such a way?” and it taught a song to him called “*nyomo*” and told him to teach that song when he awoke and to practice the ritual with others. Then, the spirit asked him to guard it as a “father of spirit.” After that, the new spirit ritual started to be practiced in Bapame under the control of the new founder. This new spirit ritual was named *limbo* after the place name of the founder’s first encounter with the new spirit.

This story belongs to a typical type of foundation story. After collecting examples of foundation stories and comparing them with one another, a division into several basic types can be made. However, these story types share a common motif of authorization of a particular person’s privileged and mystical relationship with a particular spirit. The first type of stories are those similar to that of *limbo* in

Table 3. Episodes of encounters with spirits.

	Patterns of episodes	Name of spirits	Settlement number	
Encounter by individual	Encounter in dream	<i>ianja</i>	16	
		<i>bakanja</i>	35	
		<i>emboambo</i>	67	
		<i>limbo</i>	95	
		<i>ligbado</i>	110	
		<i>nanda</i>	116	
		<i>sula</i>	131	
		<i>seba</i>	221	
	Encounter in forest	<i>ndengo</i>	45	
		<i>mane</i>	52	
		<i>bisenjo</i>	86	
		<i>linge</i>	139	
		<i>ngango</i>	139	
		<i>lindombi</i>	147	
Encounter in dream, after that, encounter in forest	<i>mopepe</i>	169		
	<i>iekele</i>	66 and 201		
	<i>nde</i>	68		
	<i>lianga</i>	92		
Encounter in settlement	<i>dikpaje</i>	127		
	<i>iese</i>	116		
Encounter by group	Encounter in dream after that, encounter in ritual	<i>lengo-1</i>	126	
		Spirits appear where children are playing	<i>limo</i>	54
		<i>pele</i>	80	
		<i>mala</i>	85	
		<i>iang</i>	108	
		<i>nguya</i>	129	
		<i>lina</i>	134	
	Unknown cases	<i>yeyu</i>	227	
		<i>dodi</i>	16	
		<i>mandenda</i>	26	
		<i>ndondo</i>	27	
		<i>jendi</i>	30	
	<i>molobo</i>	42		
	<i>mbaka</i>	45		
	<i>limo</i>	54		
	<i>bokela</i>	56		
	<i>made</i>	93		

which a spirit appears in the person's dream during the night and establishes an individual relationship with him. The second type of stories are the ones in which a spirit appears when a certain person is alone in the forest and establishes an individual relationship with him. The third type of stories are the ones in which a spirit appears where children are playing and establishes an individual relationship with one of the adults asked for help by the scared children (Table 3).

It seems to be a contradictory phenomenon that a spirit can be shared among subgroup members while they are treated as individual property at the same time

and even traded like a commodity. These contradictory attitudes come to be consistent because the priority for approaching a spirit is ideally given to individuals. The “father of spirit” receives individual ownership rights to the spirit. His ownership should be respected more than a communal right to the spirit. Therefore, a father of spirit can justify the orientation and exchange of spirit ownership under his own operation, unconcerned with the communal aspect of the spirit ritual.

Then, it is also important that the encounter between individual person and spirit is thought to be an accidental phenomenon among the Baka. Encounters with spirits can happen to everybody, not only to social leaders or religious specialists. It can happen always and everywhere. This characteristic increases the chances of a new spirit ritual foundation. In some cases, the encounter with spirit happens even to a boy situated in a low social position. In the case of the foundation of *lindombi*, it is said that the first encounter with the spirit happened to a 12 year old boy. That boy reported the encounter with the spirit to the leaders of his subgroup. The leaders did not deprive the boy of his right to guardianship of the new spirit but endowed it to the boy. This example suggests that new spirit ritual foundation is regarded as being authentic irrespective of the social position of someone to whom the encounter has happened.

Individual privileges to spirit guardianship can also be observed in the case of the disappearing of certain spirit rituals from certain subgroup. In some cases, after the death of a certain “father of spirit,” the spirit ritual that the man has owned is no longer in his subgroup. Because the “father of spirit” has died, the spirit is said to have canceled the relationship with the subgroup members and “returned to the forest.” In Baka religious belief, the relationships between man and spirit tend to be regarded as individualistic and temporary. It is hard for people to imagine a communal ritual based on a permanent relationship between a spirit and a subgroup. As a whole, spirit rituals are repeatedly changed with the generation shifts among the Baka.

However, the established spirit ritual *jengi* is an exception. Guardianship of *jengi* is transacted only through patrilineal succession generation after generation within single subgroup. However, even in the case of *jengi*, encounter in a dream between the *jengi* and the son of the “father of the *jengi*” is regarded as the basis of *jengi* patrilineal succession. The religious belief of spirit is commonly based upon a particular notion that stresses exclusive relationship between an individual and a spirit. While all of the other spirit rituals (for example *emboamboa* or *kose*) may be transacted through patrilineal succession like *jengi*, they are often abandoned depending on social conditions when the “father of spirit” dies or leaves.

The same inclination towards individuality can be observed in the general social life of the Baka people. Among the Baka, the individual relationship with a subgroup tends to be regarded as only temporary. Subgroups frequently experience fission and fusion through the death of a social leader or due to social conflict among individuals, and they never gain permanent continuity. As frequent joining and parting of members in a subgroup are generally accepted, Baka do not need an ideological basis for the maintenance of communal groups such as ancestor worship or mystical genealogical ties. Such a social structure is more consistent with the relationships between specific individuals and a particular spirit than with

an abstract notion of imagined relationships between a communal group and abstract supernatural beings such as ancestors. In such a situation, it is no problem that the relationship between a supernatural being and human society is newly established and also abandoned within the individual lifecycle. On the whole, the socio-cultural conception that a single person is the effective social unit is at the core of the Baka religious system. A possible contradiction between religious and social systems is effectively avoided.

Among the Baka, solid ancestor worship or a genealogical myth of communal groups such as clans can not be observed (Joiris, 1996). The fluid character of the Baka residential groups and the ritual practices as revealed above influences this tendency. Generally, any belief system shared by people is based on a stable membership to a communal group persisting for some span of time beyond any individual life. This stability provides the people with a ground on which they can imagine the “permanent” existence of the community. It is on this ground that so-called “traditional religious system” can be established. On the other hand, special emphasis on individuality in Baka religious belief closely interrelates with their social system that is best characterized by a high mobility of population and fluidity of group membership. In this sense, the Baka religious system can be designated as a fluid religious system that is quite different from the traditional one.

While individual ownership of spirit rituals is justified by the original religious system, it seems to be promoted and facilitated by modernization processes. For example, the acceptance of the cash economy and the increase in population mobility through the building of roads greatly change Baka society. Especially, the idea of individual ownership of commodities and money came to be consistent with the original idea of the individual ownership of spirit rituals and promotes the exchange of spirit guardianship as a commodity. For example, the founder of *wonga* spread the story that many elephants were hunted after performing the new spirit ritual *wonga* ⁽⁷⁾ and persuaded people of other subgroups of the mystic effect of *wonga*, sold them its guardianships and gained much money. Similarly, a certain owner of *buma* sells its guardianship among many other subgroups members and gains much money.

In some cases, ownership of spirit ritual brings about material benefit and social authority to an individual person in consequence. Accordingly, a particular sort of person actively attempts to obtain new spirit guardianship through planned spirit encounters as a social event. In the case of the *lengo-1* foundation, some of the members of subgroup No.126 in cooperation caused the “encounter with a spirit” as an event. In this case, one of the subgroup members was missed in the forest and most of the subgroup members believed that he had died in the forest. At the funeral, the *nganga* performed an oracle that the missing man had been in company with a spirit in the forest. Immediately after that, the missing man himself appeared from the forest in front of the other subgroup members with a particular noise expressing the spirit’s presence. It is unlikely that so diverse happenings come together only by chance. It is more credible that the process of events was organized through a cooperation between the missing man, *nganga*, and several other subgroup members. This example suggests that in some cases the foundation of new spirit rituals is realized through not only accidental encounter with a spirit but also through an intended “social drama.” It is possible that such an intention is motivated by the expectation of gaining social authority or material benefit through owning and exchanging spirit guardianships.

CULTURAL FACTORS WITH SPECIAL RELEVANT TO THE FREE MODULATION OF SPIRIT COSTUME STYLE BY INDIVIDUALS

The diversity of rite forms is also brought about by the strategy of individuals. A differentiation of spirit ritual forms can be observed in many elements. Particularly, the difference of spirit costume style is remarkable. However, the variation of spirit costumes derives from a combination of a limited number of elements, even though there are many spirits (Fig. 11). The options of material elements for costume formation are very limited. A skirt made of young raffia leaves called *ndimba*, cloths to cover the performer's chest, twigs, and trousers are an almost complete set of materials used for the differentiation spirit costumes. The Baka design spirit costume variation through an arrangement of these limited elements. For *jengi*, two *ndimbas* are combined. For *limbo* and *bokela*, only one *ndimba* is applied. For *kose*, cloths and *ndimba* are used mixed together. For *emboambo*, cloths and trousers are used. For *bisenjo* and *ianga*, roundly plaited twigs are used. The kind of plant used also differs. For *elili*, the long stems of African ginger (*Aframomum* sp.), *njii* are put upright.

These differences of costume form determine the differences in movement of the spirit. For example, in spirit costumes with a round shape the movement of turning round is stressed.

The rearrangement of the given costume elements is easy; new spirit costume designs are made up one after another by individual founders. In the case of Bapame, various styles of spirit costumes were derived in short periods of time through individual invention. The rearrangement of spirit costumes was also observed in two spirit rituals, *limbo* and *yuko*, both of which were newly founded in Bapame.

For *limbo*, only simple costume with one *ndimba* originally existed. However, in recent years, the new style spirit *kosa* was added as the "brother of *limbo*" (Fig. 1 and Fig. 11). The costume of *kosa* is designed using *ndimba*. However, the rearrangement of *ndimba* in *kosa* is remarkable. *Ndimba* is divided to apply to respective body parts of the *kosa* performer, his arms, legs, waist, and head. As a result, in the performance, the movement of *kosa* becomes very different from that of *limbo* despite using same *ndimba*. While *limbo* mainly turns round, *kosa* mainly swings its hands and feet around.

After *limbo*, an adolescent boy founded another new spirit ritual *yuko* (Fig. 11). Perhaps, *yuko* was founded around 1994. The *yuko* spirit costume style is very original, despite using existing costume elements. For the *yuko* costume, only one *ndimba* is used covering a standing performer, which is similar to *jengi*. However, for *yuko*, an accompanying element is added. That is, the performer stretches his hand with a stick from within the *ndimba*. The performer walks around with the help of a stick in humorous ways like an old man. Such *yuko* movement is different from that of *jengi*, which mainly turns around. Furthermore, in *yuko*, an additional spirit *isolombia* exists. In the *isolombia* costume style, the stem of African ginger *njii* is used like that of *elili*. However, while *njii* is put upright in *elili*, it is put around in *isolombia*.

Flexible changes of costume style are facilitated by simplicity of formal elements and frequent rearrangement by individuals. Individual invention contributes fluidity to spirit rituals not only at the level of social practices as shown above, but also at the level of cultural structure such as in spirit costume design.

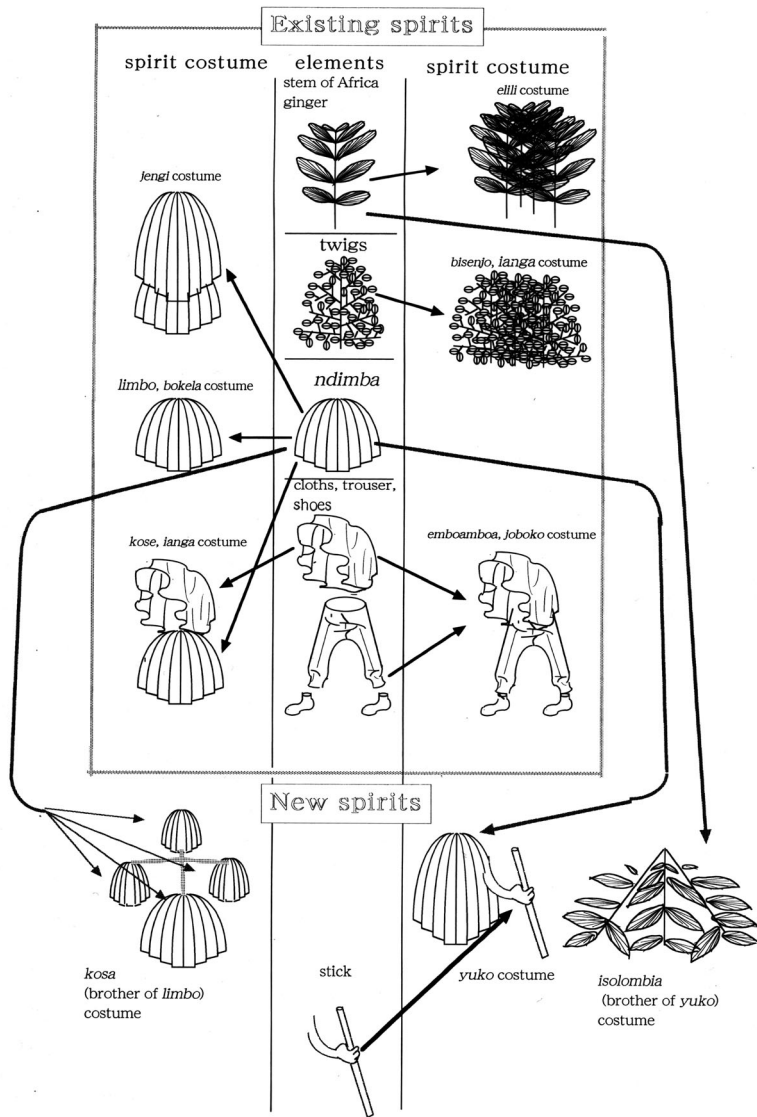


Fig. 11. Rearrangement of elements of spirit costumes.

DISCUSSION

The intra-cultural diversity of spirit rituals can be observed in the variability of spirit rituals at the level of subgroups. This variability is derived from frequent shifts in spirit rituals. The role of individual activity in ritual shift processes is important. Based on the conception of particular guardianship, individuals transact and generate new rituals, which promotes the intra-cultural diversification of spirit

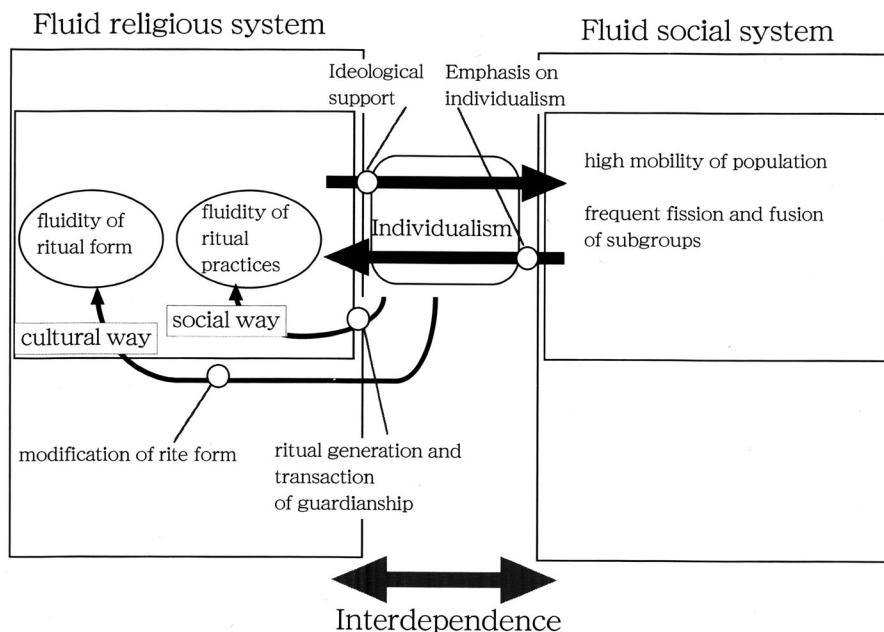


Fig. 12. Complementary relationship between fluid religious system and fluid social system of the Baka.

rituals. As individuals introduce unexpected changes to spirit ritual practices, a diversification process is inevitable.

On the other hand, the tendency towards fluidity and diversification prevents the establishment of large-scale sophisticated religious systems based on the accumulation of knowledge over generations.

As far as the example of spirit rituals is concerned, fluid religious systems and fluid social structures are complementary to one another in Baka socio-cultural structure (Fig. 12). The individualism of the Baka people is important as an intermediate factor, which introduces a fluid character to the religious system in two ways, cultural and social. Socially, individualism brings about fluidity of ritual practices through the frequent generation and transaction of spirit guardianship. Culturally, it brings about the fluidity of ritual forms through frequent modifications of rite forms as a consequence of individual invention.

The individualism is stressed by the nomadic social structure of the Baka. On the other hand, the idea of spirits connected with individuals provides its ideological basis. On the whole, the fluidity of the social system and that of the religious system are interdependent.

Among the Baka, only a certain religious structure is consistent with the nomadic socio-cultural structure. Spirit rituals are selected pushing aside other possible structures (e.g. the *nganga* ritual or Christianity). This situation maintains cultural uniformity with regards to the idea of spirits.

The regional approach proposed by Barnard is useful to analyze intra-cultural diversity. Barnard's aim is limited to a structural analysis. However, a structural analysis cannot answer how and why actual people select only one particular cultural system unless supplementary data on the social background is included.

NOTES

- (1) This spirit ritual is called *pembe* in the northern part of research area, and *nyabula* in the southern part of the research area.
- (2) At the same time, knowledge about medicine is being transacted. In most cases, knowledge about how to make costumes is generally known and need not be transacted at the time of guardianship transaction.
- (3) Turnbull (1961) reported a Mbuti example of individual possession and transaction of the rights to rituals. In this example, the "molimo trumpet," the focus of the *molimo* ritual, was transacted between brothers-in-law.
- (4) They say that the particular spirit appears in people's dreams and teaches songs for the rite.
- (5) Among the Baka patrilineal residence is the rule for men. Out of 1863 marriages, virilocal residence were 1354 (73%), uxorilocal residence were 381 (7%). Uxorilocal residence is chosen for the labor of bride service. The natal subgroup may be split through social conflict. Sometimes, natal subgroups disappear because of accident or the death of a social leader. Furthermore, following him, his relatives move into the same residence group and a complex patrilineal group is formed. In the case of the founder of *limbo*, he moved to Bapame for bride service, and following him, his brother and sisters came to marry his wife's brothers and sisters. As a result, at the time of research, complex patrilineal groups were formed in Bapame.
- (6) The term *nyomo* generally denotes the situation in which certain persons cannot perform correct eye-contact with others because of loss of self-confidence.
- (7) A spirit ritual is often practiced for stimulating hunting success.

REFERENCES

- Bahuchet, S. 1985. *Les Pygmées Aka et Forêt Centrafricaine*. SELAF, Paris.
- Barnard, A. 1988. Structure and fluidity in Khoisan religious ideas. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 18 (3): 216-36.
- Joiris, D. V. 1996. A comparative approach to hunting rituals among the Baka Pygmies. In (S. Kent, ed.) *Cultural Diversity among 20th Century Foragers*, pp.245-275. Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, J. & S. Bahuchet 1991. *Encyclopedie des Pygmées Aka 1(2)*. SELAF 329, Paris.
- Tsuru, D. 1998. Diversity of spirit ritual performances among the Baka Pygmies in south-eastern Cameroon. *African Study Monographs, Supplementary Issue 25*: 47-84.
- Turnbull, C. M. 1961. *The Forest People*. Pan Books Ltd, London.

——— Accepted September 25, 2000

Author's Name and Address: Daisaku TSURU, *Center for African Area Studies, Kyoto University 46 Yoshida Shimoadachi-cho, Sakyo, Kyoto 606-8501, Japan. E-Mail: tsuru@jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp*