SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP EMBODIED IN SINGING AND DANCING PERFORMANCES AMONG THE BAKA

Daisuke BUNDO Graduate School of Human and Environmental Studies, Kyoto University

ABSTRACT The singing and dancing performances called be among the Baka were studied. The singing and dancing can be classified into two categories: one, informal and playful performances participated by women and children, and the other, formal and dramatic ones directed by men. Three types of performances (zaiko, kpalam, jengi) are described in detail. An analysis is made on Baka participatory behavior and the social relationships embodied in these performances.

Key Words: Baka; Singing and dancing performance; Social gathering; Participatory behavior; Social relationship

INTRODUCTION

I. Pygmy Singing and Dancing

In the ancient Egyptian dynasty, "Pygmies" were referred to as "dancers of God" for their outstanding talent of dancing performances (Gusinde, 1956). Since then, Pygmy singing and dancing have attracted all who chanced to witness them, and evoked a profound religious emotion. The religion of various Pygmy groups was one of the very important issues in the early 20th century when anthropological research on the African Pygmies was started. In these early studies, Pygmies were regarded to have maintained the most primitive life, in which religion was represented by a primordial monotheism (Schmidt, 1933). Their singing and dancing were thought to be entertained with monotheism. In the early 1960's, Turnbull (1961) parted from such a viewpoint of Vienna school cultural history, and gave a vivid account of the Mbuti based on field research. In his study, the religious belief of the Mbuti centered around their reliance on the forest, and their singing and dancing were thought to express their belief in the forest. From the 1970's, the relationship between the Mbuti and their natural environment has been described in detail by ecological anthropologists. They pointed out that the forest was not just an object of worship, but a resource base of the Mbuti subsistence (Harako, 1976). Through such a shift of research interest, Pygmy singing and dancing also came to be treated as something more than a religious expression.

While we have ethnomusiclogical analyses by Arom (1995) and encyclopedic descriptions by Bahuchet and Thomas (1991) on the Aka, we have few ethnography on the Pygmy singing and dancing based on intensive field research. The study

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of the Efe chorus performance by Sawada (1990), and studies on the relationship between ritual and play among the Mbuti by Harako (1984) are an exception. Recent studies by Joiris and Tsuru opened a new approach to the study of the Pygmy singing and dancing. Joiris (1993; 1996) conducted comparative studies of Baka hunting rituals performed in two different areas of southeastern Cameroon. Tsuru (1998) extensively surveyed the diversity of ritual spirit performances of the Baka and analyzed their variation and distribution patterns. Through these studies, the ritual (1) practices of the Baka have been made clear. These studies, however, it lacked a report on how singing and dancing are organized as a form of social gathering in each village, and what the performance meant for the each participant.

The singing and dancing performance is called be in the Baka language. The term be as a noun means both "song" and "dance (Brisson and Boursier, 1978)." Hereafter, I will use the term be, to refer to both the singing and dancing.

When I observed the be, I was amazed at the number of people gathering in one place as well as at their performances themselves. During my investigation, such a large gathering of people was never observed in other occasions than be. This made me to believe that Baka social relationships were embodied in be as social gathering.

In this paper, I will first describe the be. Then, I classify be into two categories, and point out the importance of one category which has not been discussed in the previous studies. Thirdly, I will analyze three types of performances in particular, and discuss the social relationships embodied in the performances.

II. Subject and Method

The so-called "Pygmies" live in the rain forest areas of Central Africa. They are usually grouped by their languages. The Eastern group, the Mbuti and the Efe, live in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and are the most studied. There are other groups living in the Republic of Central Africa, Cameroon and Congo-Brazzaville, numbering between 25,000 and 30,000 individuals (Hewlett, 1996). This Western group is further divided into the Bantu-speaking Aka and the Ubanguian-speaking Baka, the subject of this study (Fig. 1).

Because of the sedentarization promoted in the 1950's (Althabe, 1965), the Baka abandoned the nomadic life in the forest, and now dwell in rectangular houses just as the agriculturists along the road. The Baka in the study area make their village in the neighborhood of the Bantu-speaking Njem agriculturists.

The field research was conducted from November 1996 to March 1997, and from January to December 1999 in the Ndimako village (2) situated along the road from Lomie to Ngoila, in the Eastern Province of Cameroon (Fig. 2),

As most be are held at night, it is difficult to observe their performance without ample moonlight or lamplight. The number of participants could be recorded on rare occasions when the conditions were extremely good. I counted the number of participants in a performance regardless of the duration of each participation and the roles that they played. I also conducted interviews with the participants on their performances in the Baka language.

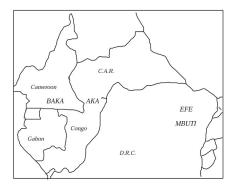


Fig. 1. Location of four African Pygmy groups.

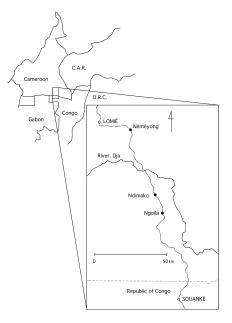


Fig. 2. The study area.

SINGING AND DANCING PERFORMANCES OF THE BAKA

I. Be

The Baka usually start a be after dark. They usually hold it in the open space in front of the houses. Performances are heralded by the beating of drums by boys. People hear the drum and gather one by one. When the women start singing $^{(3)}$, the performance actually starts.

The 18 types of be observed in Ndimako village can be classified into two categories. The be of the first category is usually performed by a dancer. The dancer

	married			unmarried		children	total
	$_{\mathrm{male}}$	female	J	male	female		
non-spirit performance	0.4	2.4		2.8	2.6	8.8	17.0
spirit performance	6.7	13.2		4.4	2.3	11.1	33.7

Table 1. Average number of participants according to age and sex.

Observed instances: 39 cases of non-spirit performance, 7 cases of spirit performance

puts on one of the special costumes. By covering his body, particularly his face with the costume, the dancer becomes unrecognizable by the women, and entertains other participants with his own unique dancing. The dancer in this category of be is said to be dancing with a "spirit," which is called me in Baka. Informants, however, gave me different explanations as to what exactly me is. Reconstructing from the literature, and also from the interviews I conducted, the me seems to be a supernatural existence with some characteristics of human beings or aura ⁽⁴⁾. Within this category, the dancing, costumes, drum beat and songs all differ among the different me.

In the second category of be, by contrast, there is no specific dancer, and participants sing and dance at their will. The Baka themselves discern this category from the first, saying that "Yando, wa me solo (Children, they make a play)," when the second category of be is held. Adult men regard it as something only for children and women.

In this paper, for convenience, I call the performances belonging to the first category, "spirit performance," and the second category, "non-spirit performance."

II. Number of Participants and Frequency of Performances

The number of participants and the frequency of performance are different between the two categories of performance. Table 1 shows the number of participants in each category. The total average number of participants in a spirit performance is twice as large as that in a non-spirit performance. In the spirit performance, the participation ratio of the number of married people is higher as well as that of adult men. The larger number of participants in the spirit performance seems to indicate that it is more important than the other. In fact, previous studies on Baka singing and dancing have only concerned with this type of performances (Joiris, 1996; Tsuru, 1998).

However, the participant ratio of children to adults in the non-spirit performance is comparatively higher than in a spirit performance. I stress this point as the two categories of be seems related to the development of the participants. The Baka do not begin to participate suddenly in be as adolescents, but rather, they start with participation in the non-spirit performance, gradually become accustomed to it, and then take part in the spirit performances.

non-spirit performance		spirit performance		others	
zaiko	19	bambembo	3	buma	16
kaka	12	mauso	3	nganga	1
komba	10	kose	3		
kpalam	7	jengi	2		
beka	5	emboamboa	1		
abale	3	mokondi na ya	1		
mabashi	1	zaiko	1		
mbala	1	elimbo	1		
total	58	total	15	total	17

Table 2. Frequency of each type of performance observed during 60 days.

The non-spirit performance is also important because of its high frequency. Table 2 shows that non-spirit performance is more frequently performed than the spirit performance. During my first research period, all the spirit performances were performed on several successive days, and not practiced at all for the remaining period (Appendix). In contrast, non-spirit performance was observed throughout the research period, and different types of performance were often performed during the same evening (5) (6).

From these comparisons, I conclude that non-spirit performance also deserves special attention in clarifying the whole social meaning of singing and dancing for the Baka.

III. Characteristics of Each Type of Be

Among the 18 types of be I observed, I will examine three types in particular. First and second are zaiko and kpalam both of which are non-spirit performances that children participate actively. Third is a spirit performance called jengi.

1. Zaiko

In *zaiko*, participants make a circle and face inward (Fig. 3, 4). One person steps into the circle, dances, and goes towards another person, thus determining the next dancer, then returns to the original position. The appointed person then steps into the circle and dance in a similar way ⁽⁷⁾.

The importance of such a style of performance lies in that it gives children a chance to take part in a performance. I have observed that it is not easy for the Baka children to dance in everyone's company without feeling shy. In one case, a girl was given her turn, but hesitated, and could not dance nor step into the circle. In another case, when a little boy was given his turn, he ran straight through the circle without dancing nor appointing the next dancer. In either case, the reaction of the other participants was tolerant, and they never disparaged the children.

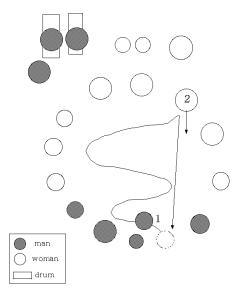


Fig. 3. Spatial pattern of *zaiko* dance. Numbers indicate dancing turns. Arrows indicate the dancing trajectory. Circle size reflects approximate age of participants.



Fig. 4. Zaiko dance.

One important characteristic of zaiko is that dancing turns often alternate between male and female. Boys often perform erotic motions when giving a dancing turn to women and girls. If a boy dances well, the atmosphere becomes excited, and the boy is given a cheer, Mokose (You are a man)! The boy and young men shake hands with each other at times.

The Baka explained to me that *zaiko* provided the young with the opportunity to encounter the opposite sex. Because of this, many youths participate in *zaiko*.

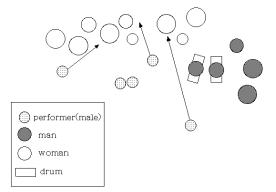


Fig. 5. Spatial pattern of *kpalam* dance. Arrows indicate dancing trajectory. Circle size reflects approximate age of participants.



Fig. 6. Kpalam dance.

Even youths from other villages came to participate in it.

2. Kpalam

In kpalam, young naked boys dance toward women with erotic motions. First, women gather and start singing. When their chorus becomes loud and lively, the naked boys appear. In the beginning, they run to and fro. Then, they flaunt their hips or penis and approach women (Fig. 5, 6). Sometimes they imitate motions of sexual intercourse in front of the women. When approached, the girls sometimes mockingly strike and repel the boys, but often they run away or into a house, laughing and screaming joyfully. Adolescent girls seem to take a great pleasure in the young boys' performances. They sing livelier and clap their hands to cheer the boys. The older boys, who stop performing kpalam as they grow up, are also jubilant and watch the performances. When I asked them why they

did not perform *kpalam*, they answered that "Awa nganga le kobo (Because we are elders)." Thus *kpalam* is a performance only by little boys, who learn how to excite the atmosphere through their erotic motions directed at women. Women respond to a good performance by a lively chorus. Such interaction is common in other types of be.

The kpalam performances resemble some spirit performances. For example, kpalam resembles a nighttime spirit performance called mongelebo performed by naked adolescent and adult men when someone has died. In kpalam, dancers put on costumes at times. The dance and costume used in such cases are similar to those of a spirit performance called emboamboa performed by adolescent men.

3. Jengi

Jengi is a spirit performance widespread throughout the Baka region. Jengi is the greatest spirit beyond comparison.

To perform *jengi*, the Baka men set up a sacred ground called *njanga*, secluded with a raffia screen, in the forest near the village. On this sacred ground, a rite of passage for boys to join the *jengi* association takes place. All men experience this rite in their youth. The initiated Baka boys are allowed to take part in all the *jengi* performances. In the *jengi* performance, the unity of men is clearly demonstrated. The Baka men acquire a strong sense of manhood.

Before the *jengi* performance takes place, an appeal is made from the *njanga* to the women in the village. The appeals are calls of young and adult men regarded as guardians ⁽⁸⁾ of *jengi* to deliver the wish of *jengi* to the Baka women. The women prepare meals for *jengi* and sing heartily in the *be* upon this request. The young men then clean the *njanga*, call to *jengi* in yodel-like voices, and carry in food and water. The children go to make *jengi* clothes in the forest. When *jengi* performance begins at night, a number of young as well as adult men cooperate with the guardians of the *jengi*. Men surround the *jengi* and support his performance with yodeling voices, whistles and clapping of their hands (Fig. 7, 8).

The *jengi* dancer puts on *ndimba*, knit with fibers of young raffia leafstalk, on his head and waist, and covers his whole body. The dancer is always in upright position, and twists his body, fluttering and spreading ndimba clothes in the shape of a cone. By this performance, his size and forcefulness is emphasized. At times men formed a line to prevent the *jengi* dancer from getting too close to the women and children, thereby protecting them from the strong force of *jengi*.

Jengi is performed through the cooperation of different age groups of men. The women play the role of singers and constitute the audience. These are stereotypical behaviors, also observed in other types of spirit performance. In the spirit performance, divisions of sex and age, and the initiates' identity are clearly emphasized.

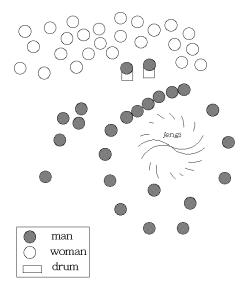


Fig. 7. Spatial pattern of jengi dance.



Fig. 8. Jengi dance.

IV. Characteristics of the Two Categories of Be

In the non-spirit performance (Table 3), any elder, male or female, can take the initiative, and there is no specific place where it is held. Participants can freely choose the type of performance. Even when a be starts, if it doesn't attract enough number of participants, it may cease or be replaced by another. The number of participants in the non-spirit performance is smaller than that of a spirit performance. While women and children participate, adult men seldom do so in non-spirit performance. Thus, the non-spirit performance is principally for women and children. They freely join and play the role of singers and dancers. In this sense, the non-spirit performance is joyful play.

	non-spirit performance	spirit performance
Leader	any group of elders	a particular man who
		guards the spirit
Place	unspecified	specified
Size	small	large
Progress	arbitrary	led by men
Division of Roles	loose	strict
Participatory member-	performed by women and	directed by men
ship	children	
Ambience	playful	dramatic

Table 3. Characteristics of the two categories of performances.

On the other hand, in the spirit performances, there is usually a principal adult man who has a special relationship with the spirit. He is regarded as a guardian of that particular spirit. He has the exclusive right to organize the performance. The performance of this category is held at a specific place, for example, in front of the organizer's house, and it needs a certain number of participants as singers and audience. Before starting the performance, men help a dancer put on his costume. This is done behind the house to keep it secret from the women. When the spirit performance starts, men beat the drums and stimulate the dancer to perform well. The men who support the performance have already experienced the rite of passage which the guardian of that spirit presides. Initiated men direct the performance, while the others and women sing and watch. There is a clear division of roles according to age, sex and initiates/non-initiates. In this sense, the spirit performance is formal and dramatic play.

V. Relationship between the Performances and Participatory Behaviors

While the performances were practiced frequently during the study period, there were times when the Baka did not even beat a drum. They explained the reason for this as cold weather. However, performances were held at times even when it was cold. Sometimes they would tell me that a performance was going to be held, but often did not perform it on that evening. There seems to be no necessary condition for holding or not holding a performance. If sufficient number of participants gather at one place, they may begin.

This uncertainty stood for both the spirit performance and non-spirit performance. In the spirit performance, the costumes are prepared in the afternoon, and the news of the performance to be held is transmitted to the village people beforehand. Nevertheless the performance was not held several times, because the number of participants was so few. Even when they had started a performance, they stopped it at times for the reason that the participants were not enough.

When I asked the participants why other people did not come, they answered it was because the weather was cold, or because people were tired. On such occasions, they returned home soon without showing a sign of a bad temper. The people, who attempted to perform did not revile others who did not participate. Moreover, the people said that the spirit, which was also to participate, also never got angry. Such tolerance held true even for the *jengi* performance. I observed a very short *jengi* performance due to few male adult participants. Even on this occasion, it was explained that *jengi* did not get angry.

When the people gather for the be, they do not always sing and dance. Often, men talk with each other or just watch at a distance, smoking tobacco. While women sing and dance, clapping their hands at times, they sometimes sit down and talk to or groom each other. Children are often observed playing tag in the vicinity.

However, there are compulsory parts to play in a performance. Women are told by other women and men to stand up and sing forcefully. Men also are asked to beat the drums firmly. These requests are sometimes met, but at other times are not. Moreover, the participants join and leave the *be* freely in the middle of the performance. Many participants retire and go home before the *be* finishes. The participants are not forced by anyone, and take part at their own will.

DISCUSSION

In the previous studies of singing and dancing among the Baka, only the characteristics of the spirit performances were analyzed, probably because of their "formal" characteristics. In this study, both the spirit and non-spirit performance was examined.

As shown in Table 1 and 2, many women and children participated in non-spirit performance, which took place frequently. They participated for amusement. Baka women often participated in a performance with infants on their backs. Even when the children are shaken on the back of dancing women, they do not cry, but fall soundly asleep. It is not an unpleasant experience for the children to be surrounded with big sound of drums and chorus, or to be shaken on the back of their mothers. Instead, they seem to feel comfortable. Such experiences in early infancy surely provide the children with a preparatory stage for taking a part in the be later.

As observed in the zaiko and kpalam, children can play a part in a performance. The boys can even stimulate an excited reaction through their performance. Moreover, they find pleasure in performing among other excited participants, and learn how to impress and be cheered by the elders. The girls enjoy the boy's performances with the older women, and also learn that they can help build rapport with the performers, as they sing louder and livelier. Thus, children learn their roles in the non-spirit performance. The roles are not imposed upon them by any authority, but acquired voluntarily through enjoying the performances. Such element and reinforcement of enjoyment through spontaneity cannot be overlooked when considering the singing and dancing among the Baka.

The analysis of the two categories of be performance made clear the social components of age, sex and initiates/non-initiates demarcated in these performances. The social relationships among the Baka society are thus embodied in the performances. However, to say so does not explain the vividness of performances. If participation in be was solely compulsory to reflect the social orders, the Baka may not dance and sing so lively or often and at length.

I tend to consider that when people partake in a collective act, the participants behave with propriety and affinity to the group or social gathering. Throughout the Baka society, however, in the collective act such as the holding and participation of be are arbitrary. It can be said that the will of the individual is socially protected and maintained.

The significance of the be characteristic does not end with the Baka. I find that similarities among singing and dancing of hunter-gatherer societies provide an important clue the characteristics of hunter-gatherer social relationship. For example, the San is one of the hunter-gatherer groups living in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, in the Republic of Botswana. In the gemsbok dance ⁽⁹⁾, one of San's most important rituals, there is little social pressure to prompt an individual to participate in it. It lacks any device for forcefully inducing the people to be enthusiastic. The San do not mold their pleasure upon a demand for ideological consistency (Sugawara, 1990).

In the present day, the Baka no longer hunt in-groups. In other words, Baka people have lost the opportunity to organize a social gathering through hunting activities. Consequently, singing and dancing are the only occasions when people gather on any sizable scale. For that reason, be is the main occasion where social relationships manifest themselves. The Baka learn their identities as members of the community through participating in be.

During my investigation, I asked many people why they sang and danced. In many cases, they answered simply "Awa joko (Because it is a good thing)." One man answered "Awa e nde we (Because there is no problem)" and "Awa e nde ee (Because there is nothing)." Another man said derisively, the Baka is "bo na be (singing and dancing people)." While this expression is extraneous to a conventional image of the Pygmies as "dancers of God," his words resonate with the Baka's close relationship with singing and dancing.

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NOTES

- (1) Joiris and Tsuru call certain types of singing and dancing performances of the Baka "rituals." To refer to singing and dancing performances "ritual" is not relevant to the present study. Therefore, I do not use the term "ritual" in this paper.
- (2) The average number of people of the Baka village is about 50 persons. The population of Ndimako village is about 100 persons.
- (3) Arom Simha (1977), a ethnomusicologist, summarized the characteristics of Pygmy songs as follows: a very dense polyphony, created by the simultaneous execution of several melodic lines, rhythmically independent but controlled by a common periodicity; the use of disjointed intervals, a procedure which consists of alternating chest and head voices as in the yodel; and a very restricted use of words.
- (4) Me appears in other occasions. If a person dies, he or she becomes me. Me stays usually in the forest, and comes out from the forest when a be starts. Me also appears in a dream and teaches the Baka about be and medicine. I consider that me is a general term for an existence that is formless but is felt as aura. In this paper, as a matter of convenience, I call me, "spirit."
- (5) As a consequence, the total number of performances added up to more than 60 times even though observation was limited to 60 days.
- (6) There are other types of performances called nganga and buma. Nganga is a healing ritual, and buma is special in so far as dancers must be trained and must pass a kind of rite.
- (7) This style of performances is widely spread in Baka society. For example, *mabasi* and *mbala* (Table 2) are also performed in the same style of *zaiko*, but the chorus and the rhythm of drums are different.
- (8) It is called *nie* (father) in the Baka language. The Baka people explained *nie* that "bela nqe, a bana me (His work, he guards spirit)."
- (9) The gemsbok (*Oryx gazella*) is the most important of the large game hunted by the San (Sugawara, 1990).

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Appendix. Singing and dancing performances observed during my investigation.

	S Periorina		
Date	Type of be		
1996.11.14	buma		
11.15	mokondi- na - ya		
11.16	zaiko		
11.17 - 11.29	(No research)		
	(' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' '		
11.30			
12.01			
12.02			
12.03			
12.04			
12.05	kose		
12.06	kose		
12.07	NOSE		
12.07			
12.09			
12.10	zaiko		
12.10	kaka	buma	
	кики	ouma	
12.12			
12.13		1 1	
12.14	zaiko	kaka	
12.15	7	1 1	1 1 1
12.16	kose	mbala	bambembo
12.17	bambembo	, ,	, ,
12.18	abale	kaka	komba
12.19	bambembo	zaiko	
12.20			
12.21			
12.22			
12.23			
12.24	beka	kaka	ngaje
12.25	kaka	zaiko	
12.26 - 12.28	(No research)		
12.29			
12.30	buma	komba	zaiko
12.31	jengi		
1997.1.01	abale		
1.02			
1.03	jengi		
1.04	komba	zaiko	buma
1.05			
1.06			
1.07			

D-+-	T			
Date	Type of be			
1.08 1.09	buma			
1.10	komba			
1.10	котич			
1.11				
1.12	h			
1.13 1.14	$egin{aligned} buma \ zaiko \end{aligned}$	komba	kaka	
1.14		zaiko	kaka	
1.16	$kpalam \ kpalam$	zaiko	кака	
1.17	kpalam	beka	mabasi	
1.17	mauso	venu	muousi	
1.19	mauso			
1.19	maaso			
1.20				
1.21 1.22				
1.23				
1.23 1.24	mauso			
1.25	maaso			
1.26	buma			
1.27	zaiko	kpalam	zaiko	kaka
1.28	buma	repararre	20000	rearea
1.29	kaka	beka	komba	zaiko
1.30 - 2.13	(No research)			
2.14	zaiko			
2.15	komba			
2.16	kpalam	zaiko	kaka	zaiko
2.17	abale	zaiko	kaka	
2.18	kpalam	beka		
2.19				
2.20				
2.21	buma	zaiko		
2.22	komba			
2.23	komba			
2.24				
2.25	emboamboa			
2.26	kaka	beka		
2.27				
2.28				
3.01	komba			
3.02	zaiko	kaka	kpalam	
3.03	nganga			
3.04	7			
3.05	buma			
3.06	1			
3.07	buma			

Date	Type of be				
3.08					
3.09					
3.10	buma	zaiko			
3.11	zaiko	kaka	kpalam	zaiko	komba
3.12	buma				
3.13	buma				
3.14	komba	zaiko			
3.15	komba	buma			
3.16	buma				
3.17	buma rite of passage				
3.18					
3.19					
3.20	beka				
3.21	buma				
3.22					
3.23	wanbunja				
3.24					
3.25	buma				
3.26	buma	zaiko	kaka		
3.27					

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Author's Name and Address: Daisuke BUNDO, Center for African Area Studies, Kyoto University, 46 Yoshida-Shimoadachi-cho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8501, JAPAN. E-Mail: bundo@jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp