

# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NORMS AND INTERACTIONS IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING-BY-DOING: FROM THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF DAILY WORK, PLAY, AND SCHOOL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN CONTEMPORARY PASTORALIST MAASAI SOCIETY IN SOUTHERN KENYA

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**ABSTRACT** Pastoralist children in East Africa are well known for their early participation and contribution to local subsistence. Recent studies on the pastoralist process of learning-by-doing have investigated the children's daily activities and skill development. However, little attention is paid to the social institutions and interactions during the process of learning-by-doing. Utilizing ethnographic data, this study elaborates the social norms and interactions in children's work and play in contemporary pastoralist Maasai society. In the study area, children actively conduct subsistence-related chores with limited guidance and accompaniment by adults. Instead of step-by-step instruction, adults make implicit requests in keeping with the Maasai gender-age labor divisions and social relations to suit various contexts. The children respectfully respond to the adult requests, but they sometimes negotiate their wants, especially with their parents. In peer interactions, older children give detailed instructions to the younger ones. Such an educational system is distinctive compared with other small-scale societies where children's roles are not related to local subsistence demands. The author emphasizes the importance of social norms and interactions in the knowledge generation process in pastoralist society.

**Key Words:** Pastoralist Maasai; Children; Daily interaction; Social norms; Learning process.

## INTRODUCTION

### I. Children and Knowledge (Re-)Generation in Pastoralist Societies

In pastoral societies, children participate and subsequently contribute to the local subsistence from an early age (on the Pashtu: Casimir, 2010; Maasai: Grandin, 1991 and Spencer, 2003; Ariaal: Fratkin, 1989; Ngoni: Messing, 1985). The daily task routine of children usually starts with the 3-year-old toddlers holding their own herding sticks to separate and unite the juvenile livestock while older children milk the mother livestock. Older boys go herding either alone or with their peers to look after all their fathers' livestock. The process of empirical knowledge generation in such social systems is different from other societies where children do not have access or do not directly take part in subsistence management. The unique features of a pastoral childhood have been highly evaluated especially in anthropological and ethnobiological studies, for the active role of children in the process of socialization, local knowledge generation, and transmission (Lancy, 2008; Spittler, 2012; Tian, 2016).

However, investigation of the socialization of pastoral children is still limited compared to that of other small-scale societies. Moreover, current discussions on pastoralist children's knowledge generation tend to simplify the sociocultural contexts that fundamentally influence the learning by children. Not limited to pastoralist societies, with more children in small-scale societies going to school, many researchers criticized the formal education system, as overlooking or rejecting the inherent reasoning in the local knowledge systems and compromising the children's opportunities and time to access the local knowledge (Bruyere et al., 2016; Quinlan et al., 2016). Consequently, this has been linked with the problem of ineffective indigenous knowledge transmission, and the devaluation of local knowledge systems by the younger generations (Gemedo-Dalle et al., 2006; Ohmagari & Berkes, 1997). These researchers consider the schooling system as an external institution distinct from the local systems of reasoning, with little consideration of the adaptability of the local people to social changes.

Indeed, the issue of perceiving tradition as opposed to modernization has long been discussed in the studies of pastoralists. Ohta (1993) noticed the gap between literature and the actual life of African pastoralists with regard to how they cope with external social changes. Ohta (1993: 4) emphasized that, "local people do not live in isolation from the surrounding society, but are directly involved in the processes of change resulting from the formation of nationhood and the pervasive market economy." He further questioned the dualism of pitting tradition against modernization. He wrote of the necessity to construct "a standpoint that approaches the pastoralists who are going through a period of rapid change not just as passively weathering external influences, but rather, as exercising their own discrete judgement as to how to adapt to the changes." Krätli (2006), who observed the educational system and daily life of youth in Turkana and Karamoja pastoralist societies, contended that the pastoralist ways of living are becoming increasingly diverse and complex, with more and more expanded networks connecting and interacting with external societies. Krätli warned that perceiving the pastoralist culture in opposition to modern life, as most developmental studies have done, may misrepresent this culture, and overlook the historical local interactions with various external elements. His study highlighted the importance of re-assessing the schooling system as one of the many social situations that the pastoralists deal with to improve the contemporary pastoralist way of life. Regarding the formal education and local socialization as dichotomous concepts may bias the understanding of the knowledge generation in contemporary pastoralist societies. The above studies raise the awareness for re-examining the local system of reasoning in pastoralist childhood, as the children experience the entirety of local and formal education in contemporary pastoralist societies. This study investigates the social factors and relations that stimulate children's socialization process for learning-by-doing in current Maasai society.

## II. Teaching, Learning and Education in Small-Scale Societies

Anthropologists have investigated the local knowledge acquisition practices in the daily life of children, and have perceived learning as what ties the children's

individual knowledge development to their socialization. In contrast, the evaluation of teaching has remained elusive especially within anthropological research. One problem concerning teaching is that it is difficult to give it a general definition to fit the diverse situations in different societies. According to Lancy (2010: 97), the notion of teaching tends to be based on the educational system in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) societies as a behavior that is “nuanced, student-centered, developmentally appropriate instruction by dedicated adults.” Lancy further argued that such a teaching concept tends to be absent in most small-scale societies. In these societies instead, social relations that stimulate learning in the local knowledge generation process exist in diverse forms. Accordingly, social behaviors that directly influence or guide the learning of children are not limited to parents-to-son-and-daughter relationships or are always correct or good, but may be superfluous or uncommon. Thus, teaching, according to the WEIRD standards, has been commonly perceived as absent, especially among anthropologists who work in small-scale societies (Lancy & Grove, 2010; Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). Among the few studies of pastoral childhood, similar thinking can be found in Casimir’s (2010) study of the Pashtu children in western Afghanistan. Casimir differentiated between local socialization and formal education, and criticized the latter for formalizing and limiting cultural learning in a way that was “typically for ‘developed’ societies, with literacy, an elaborate division of labour, and a broad range of role specializations aiming at a basic consensus related to the norms of the ‘burger’ and ‘citizenship’” (Casimir, 2010: 2–3).

These criticisms of school-orientated education stimulated further investigation of social learning and teaching embedded in the interactions of adults and children, and the day-to-day practices of children outside the school contexts. Hewlett and Roulette (2016) studied teaching behavior in the Baka hunter-gatherer society, and reviewed how teaching was discussed in different disciplines, including social-cultural anthropology, cognitive psychology, and evolutionary biology. According to them, the Western-centric notion of teaching limited the investigation of behaviors outside formal schooling that function to stimulate and guide the learning behavior of children. They defined teaching as a process whereby, “an individual modifies her/his behavior to enhance learning in another ... [which] cannot be a by-product of another activity” (Hewlett & Roulette, 2016: 5). With this definition, they observed the daily interactions of infant Baka with their caregivers and discussed the various forms of teaching during the infancy of Baka children. This included natural pedagogy (Csibra & Gergely, 2011), which were non-verbal body instructions through intentional eye contact and pointing, and verbal instructions. Other forms of teaching they confirmed included feedback, redirection, opportunity scaffolding, demonstration, task assignment, body language, verbal instructions, and distribution of attention (i.e., caregiver faces the infant towards other members). Similar to the Hewlett and Roulette study, several researchers have illustrated the importance of social learning and the necessity of examining children’s companions and social institutions when discussing local knowledge generation and transformation (Rogoff, 2003; Hewlett & Lamb eds., 2005; Corsaro, 2015).

Takada (2016) questioned the dichotomous approach to social learning and individual learning among G|ui and G||ana hunter-gatherer. Through analysis of the microlevel daily interactions of G|ui and G||ana hunter-gatherer children with peers or mothers in daily life, he proposed three abstraction levels, namely: institution, activity, and action, for further analysis of knowledge generation in children. According to him, institutions were the social norms that participants heed during their interactions, action was the behaviors of participants during the interactional sequences that included body movements and conversations, and activity was the “intermediate level of abstraction between action and institution” (Takada, 2016: 99). The institutions that stimulate social interactions and local educational system preproduction play the fundamental role supporting both the social and individual learning in the society. Thus, the participants’ interactions with others, during a local dance for example, all reflected the action of agency and creatively performed skills. Takada argued that social learning and individual learning were an inseparable social process, where “one achieves socialization through accumulating actions that are appropriate at a certain place and time” (Takada, 2016: 109).

Based on previous literature and with the aim to investigate the contextualized educational system in current Maasai society, this study adopts Takada’s three analytical levels of institution, activity, and action to analyze the daily interactions of children with their companions. In particular, the author pays attention to the social institutions and its relationship with the activity and action abstraction levels of daily interactions between adults and children.

### III. Re-Assessing the Interactive Learning-by-Doing of Pastoralist Maasai Children

Early discussions of learning in African pastoralist societies can be found in many anthropological studies on the practice and knowledge or reasoning by the pastoralists in relation to their livestock (Galaty, 1989; Ohta, 1987). For example, Ohta (1987) examined the unique livestock classification system of Turkana pastoralists in northwestern Kenya. He found that the identification and classification of livestock among Turkana people was indispensable to their daily livestock management such as milking and herding, as well as to the social relations among people. Similarly, Galaty (1989) examined the livestock identification and classification of Maasai, and emphasized the concrete and practical nature of their knowing what was pertinent. These early studies highlight the roles of institutions, social relations, and interactions among the people in the process of learning-by-doing of pastoralists. However, few researchers have focused on children.

In most pastoralist societies in East Africa, local people engage in subsistence-related activities organized by gender and age. Very young boys participate in daily chores such as day-trip herding and livestock watering. Young girls participate in housework such as cooking and house cleaning with their peers. Peer relations have been highly evaluated as “fruitful for (providing) examples of a graded curriculum in which older siblings serve as role models” (Lancy, 2008: 239). Because adults usually do not accompany the children while they perform

the tasks, the children make their own decisions (Tian, 2016; 2017). Peer relations in pastoralist society can serve as an institution that facilitates education in interactions among children and their companions during different daily activities.

Although labor division in pastoral societies allow the children to practice different daily tasks in social spaces separated from the adults, this does not mean that adults play no role in the education of children. Indeed, in contrast to hunter-gatherers, pastoralist adults distribute the daily tasks to each child (Tian, 2017). Although they may not directly intervene, the adults observe the performance of the children in different activities. Based on these previous observations, the author considers the adults as an important social institution that stimulate the early participation and contribution of children in subsistence activities.

Till now, little attention has been given to the interaction of children and adults in pastoralist societies, and the roles of adults in children's socialization and learning process remain largely uninvestigated. In order to understand the roles of social institutions and actions in the learning-by-doing processes of Maasai children, this paper first investigates the social norms which fundamentally direct the daily activities of children and their interactions with other social members. Then, using ethnographic descriptions, it explores the various social relations within the current local educational system, and how the children interact with others and continue social learning in the current Maasai society.

## STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in a Maasai village in the southern part of Kajiado County, Kenya. The village is located near the border of Kenya and Tanzania next to two national parks, the Chyulu Hills National Park and the Tsavo West National Park. Formal education began in this area in the early 1980s. During the last decade, the percentage of school attendance has risen significantly to over 80%. Compared with many surrounding Maasai villages where land is divided among community members, the land in the study area is still communally managed, which enables the seasonal mobility of livestock, and the mobility of children who herd or engage in other subsistence chores that require long distance moving (Tian, 2018).

In this village, the gender-age division of labor reflects the local age system. The life stages of Maasai differentiate men from women. Men experience three stages (boyhood, *murran*hood and elderhood), and the women, two (girlhood and adulthood). Boys graduate from childhood after receiving circumcision. Becoming *murran*, they form a new generation. According to Spencer (2003), *murran*hood is one of the most distinctive features of Maasai society, a prominent age stage for young men between boyhood and full adulthood. These young men are supervised by the elders but enjoy socially recognized privileges, especially as social idols who will direct the behaviors of younger boys. In the study area, *murran* frequently interacted with herding boys during daily livestock tending. Together with elders and women, they are considered as adults in this study.

Despite attending school, children in the village actively engage in subsistence-related chores, such as livestock tending, herding, and firewood collection, according to gender and age. These daily tasks were adjusted to give priority to school schedules, with more time spent on household tasks during weekends and long vacations, while the adults replaced the children in performing tasks during school days.

Data used in this paper were collected through the author's participant observation of the daily activities of thirteen children during two long school vacations in 2014 and 2015. The author had several sets of unstructured interviews with adults, including the parents of the focal children, the *murrān*, and the elders in the same village during the period of participant observation. Children's daily activities were documented through focal child observation in five-minute intervals. This paper focuses on the companions of the focal children in different daily work and play activities to describe and analyze the interactions among children, and between children and adults.

## RESULTS

### I. Social Norms and Expectations toward Children

According to a local female elder, a highly thought of and respected knowledgeable person of the Maasai is called *eng'en*. The person has the ability to manage livestock, to live and solve the problems of his/her own family and other members in the village. Part of this designation includes skill (*enkariyiano*), the technique people comprehend through conducting different daily tasks in various social contexts, such as at home, in the forest, or in school. *Eng'en* not only has skills, but he/she should know the needs of people around him/her. *Eng'en* should have the ability to use the skill to show respect to the elders, and to serve the family and village. This elder further gave an example: when a woman is skilled in constructing a hut, they may call her *ariya*, a word modified from *enkariyiano*, which describes a skilled person. But she would not be called *eng'en*, if she does not share what she knows with other women. Indeed, *Nang'en*, which is a name with feminine gender prefix added to *eng'en*, is a very common name the local Maasai use to call their children. In the study area, the local Maasasi generally have more than one name. Namesakes of successful but deceased elders are common, expressing the parents' expectations for a rosy prospect for their children, as well as descriptive of the cherished character or personality of that deceased person. The name, *Nang'en*, may reflect the local expectation toward the newborn to have good command of subsistence skills and to care for other members. Such commonly shared expectations can be observed in the children-adults interactions in different social situations.

In the study area, the division in subsistence activities requires the adults and children, men and women to perform different tasks in different spaces. Girls of different ages go collect firewood as a group, occasionally accompanied by women.

Other members of the community would laugh if a boy carried firewood back home. When the adults give instructions to children, they usually are thoughtful of their own roles as well as the gender and age of the children. According to a male elder, fathers would never scold the girls if they do not fetch water nor cook for the family, as such requests or instructions should come from the mothers. When boys go herding, mothers would not instruct the boys on the grazing locations or routes, as such instructions should come from a father or *murran*. When a mother wants to know the condition of the livestock, she may ask her son at mealtime. If the mother senses any problem from the conversation, she would first confirm it with the *murran* or the father, then urge them to check on the problem so that the herding skills of the boy improve. Although adults share the social educational expectations toward children, adults influence the learning-by-doing of children in keeping with their own roles in local gender and age labor divisions. But this does not mean the interactions among peers or between children and adults can be simplified along gender and age differences. This point will be further explained through the details of the children's companions in different daily activities.

## II. Companions that Foster Social Learning during Work and Play

Table 1 shows the different types of companions and frequencies of each companion type within the observed activities during five-minutes intervals of participant observation of the focal children ( $n = 13$ ). Activities include chores (herding and non-herding) and play. Children's companions in this analysis are the social members of the community who shared the same space and were directly involved in the activities with the focal child. The companionship falls under three categories: children only, children accompanied by adults, and adult only. They are further sub-divided, according to gender (same or different, showing as s-g and d-g in Table 1), kinship, and residence in the same or different homestead with the focal child (i.e., s-h and d-h).

All focal children, boys younger than 6 years of age and girls of all ages spent most of their time in and around the homestead. They all participated in daily milking, and sometimes helped each other undertake chores with fewer gender difference. More often, these younger children took care of the juvenile livestock during the day in addition to performing household chores such as cleaning, washing, and cooking when requested by the adults or older siblings. Two girls, Nn (8 years old) and Sd (11 years old), went to collect firewood, the only task where they had to move approximately 5 km away from the village. Two boys, La (4 years old) and Bb (5 years old), took turns with their older brothers in watering the cattle at a water point, approximately 2 km away from home when the livestock returned from the herding camp.

Children who stayed in and around their homestead spent very little time in the company of adults only. During chores, they were either all children or with both children and adults. Mostly, peer companions were both girls and boys from the same homestead. Boys and girls accompanied adults from the same home-

stead more often during their chores. Women from other homesteads who came to visit their mothers also accompanied these children. Moreover, young girls stayed alone conducting chores more often than the boys did.

**Table 1.** Companions observed with a focal child in different activities.

| Activity             | Child<br>(age)        | Alone | With children only |     |     |     | With adults & children |     |     |     | With adults only |     |     |     |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------------------|-----|-----|-----|
|                      |                       |       | s-g                | d-g | s-h | d-h | s-g                    | d-g | s-h | d-h | s-g              | d-g | s-h | d-h |
| Herding              | Herding boys (age)    |       |                    |     |     |     |                        |     |     |     |                  |     |     |     |
|                      | Lm (8)                | 42    | 146                | -   | 131 | 15  | 38                     | -   |     | 38  | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Sn (9)                | 64    | 139                | -   | 51  | 88  | 14                     | -   |     | 14  | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Ky (7)                | 6     | 89                 | -   | -   | 89  | 3                      | -   | -   | 3   | 7                | -   | -   | 7   |
|                      | Md (9)                | 5     | 77                 | -   | 54  | 20  | -                      | -   | -   | -   | 3                | -   | -   | 3   |
|                      | Sy (9)                | 12    | 91                 | -   | -   | 91  | 2                      | -   |     | 2   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | total                 | 129   | 542                | -   | 236 | 303 | 57                     | -   |     | 10  | -                | -   | -   | 10  |
| Non-herding<br>chore | Homestead boys (age)  |       |                    |     |     |     |                        |     |     |     |                  |     |     |     |
|                      | Rm (2)                | -     | -                  | 2   | 2   | -   | -                      | 7   | 7   | -   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Kp (3)                | -     | 1                  | 8   | 9   | -   | -                      | 16  | 13  | 3   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | La (4)                | 11    | 22                 | 3   | 17  | 8   | 11                     | 26  | 12  | 25  | -                | 1   | 1   | -   |
|                      | Bb (5)                | 7     | 21                 | 5   | 8   | 18  | 1                      | 34  | 24  | 11  | -                | 2   | 2   | -   |
|                      | total                 | 18    | 44                 | 18  | 36  | 26  | 12                     | 83  | 56  | 39  | -                | 3   | 3   | -   |
|                      | Homestead girls (age) |       |                    |     |     |     |                        |     |     |     |                  |     |     |     |
|                      | Sh (4)                | 1     | 1                  | 17  | 18  | -   | -                      | 22  | 18  | 4   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Nt (7)                | 8     | 1                  | 28  | 27  | 1   | 2                      | 21  | 20  | 3   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Nn (8)                | 30    | 25                 | 20  | 15  | 30  | -                      | 26  | 26  | -   | 1                | -   | 1   | -   |
|                      | Sd (11)               | 17    | 20                 | 22  | 26  | 16  | 24                     | 11  | 29  | 6   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | total                 | 56    | 47                 | 87  | 86  | 47  | 26                     | 80  | 93  | 13  | 1                | -   | 1   | -   |
| Play                 | Homestead boys (age)  |       |                    |     |     |     |                        |     |     |     |                  |     |     |     |
|                      | Rm (2)                | -     | -                  | 21  | 21  | -   | -                      | 25  | 25  | -   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Kp (3)                | 6     | 23                 | 61  | 83  | 1   | 3                      | 37  | 17  | 23  | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | La (4)                | 21    | 53                 | 29  | 77  | 5   | 1                      | 4   | 5   | -   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Bb (5)                | 14    | 7                  | 33  | 34  | 6   | 1                      | 8   | 2   | 7   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | total                 | 41    | 83                 | 144 | 215 | 12  | 5                      | 74  | 49  | 30  | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Homestead girls (age) |       |                    |     |     |     |                        |     |     |     |                  |     |     |     |
|                      | Sh (4)                | 4     | 2                  | 27  | 18  | 11  | 4                      | 17  | 19  | 2   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Nt (7)                | 9     | 10                 | 91  | 99  | 2   | -                      | 20  | 7   | 13  | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Nn (8)                | 6     | 2                  | 93  | 101 | -   | -                      | -   | -   | -   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | Sd (11)               | 1     | 6                  | 24  | 25  | 5   | -                      |     | 3   | -   | -                | -   | -   | -   |
|                      | total                 | 20    | 20                 | 235 | 243 | 18  | 4                      | 37  | 29  | 15  | -                | -   | -   | -   |

s-g: Companions of the same gender as the focal child.

d-g: Companions of a different gender to the focal child.

s-h: Companions who come from the same homestead as the focal child.

d-h: Companions that are not from the same homestead as the focal child.

Numbers in this table show the observed frequency (bout) of different types of companions during the focal child's daily activities. 1 bout = a five-minute interval. Data presented in this table are selected from a total 2620 bouts of observation.

During play, both girls and boys from the same homestead played together very often. However, no focal child played only with adults. Female adults, either the mother or friends of the mother, together with other children, accompanied

the very young boys, Rm (2 years old) and Kp (3 years old). Male adults, either from the same homestead or otherwise, accompanied the very young girls Sh (4 years old) and Nt (7 years old). These adults usually let the children play by themselves and continue their conversations, but occasionally join in the playing. Some guests asked the children questions or gave suggestions to enhance the playing while the host adults leave them and engage in other tasks.

Herding was conducted only by boys in the study area. During herding, boys frequently accompanied other boys either from the same or different homesteads. These companions included those who shared the herding responsibilities, and others who met up and played together on the way. Sometimes, they were also accompanied by *muran* from other homesteads, whom the boys were usually afraid of as well as admiring.

Above all, the adult companions of children in daily chores and play differed spatiotemporally according to the contents of the activities, the locations where the activities were conducted, and the social relations during the activities in each social space. The social relations here not only refer to the children-parents relationship, but include diverse social relations among all the participants who are involved in the same action. This means that the children-adults relations or peer relations in terms of learning-by-doing in pastoralist Maasai society should be investigated more carefully by looking into the details of the interactions among all the participants in different social moments. This point will be demonstrated in the next sections with ethnographic episodes.

### III. Peer and Children-Adults Interactions during Chores and Play

#### 1. Peer interactions

##### *Boys' herding*

When Bt (6 years old, from a neighboring homestead) started his herding day-trip, his father sent him to go with Lm (8 years old). During the herding, Lm requested Bt to do almost all the tasks. While Bt was tending the livestock, Lm spent more time collecting wild fruits, making new herding sticks, and relaxing under the shade. When calling out requests, Lm usually called Bt's name first, and explained all the details until Bt replied in a loud voice to follow through. The requests from Lm included: stopping the livestock that walk too fast, re-directing the herd to locations with grass, mixing the herd with other boys' herd to play together, leaving the herd to climb trees and chase juvenile giraffe for fun, making new herding sticks for competing in target throwing, and checking where a *muran* was when they heard his voice. Many of these requests were detrimental or ineffective for herding (e.g., going far away from the herd). However, whenever Lm called, Bt answered loudly and ran to every given task immediately.

Ky (7 years old), after losing livestock several times during herding daytrips, was sent by his father to accompany Kb (11 years old), a relative who knew more about herding according to Ky's father. During one of their herding trips, Ky was requested by Kb to do almost all the tasks,<sup>(1)</sup> which included guiding the

herd, searching for lost livestock, confirming the herding routes of other boys, as well as taking care of Kb's clothes when he went for a swim. On the way, Ky misunderstood Kb's request and was lost with the herd inside the dense lava bush. After hearing Ky's call, Kb ran and found them. He then re-directed the herd by himself. Ky kept silent when he found Kb's face had turned serious. Ky helped to keep the herd together, carefully observing Kb's movements. When the boys arrived home, they did not mention any of this to the adults.

### *Joining older girls' chores*

When Nn (8 years old) went collecting firewood with the older girls, she had little experience. Older girls initially let her select and collect the firewood by herself. After packing the firewood with a rope and getting ready to leave, the girls realized Nn packed the wood poorly. They admonished her older sister Tn (13 years old) saying, "Why did you leave your child with her firewood? How could you just leave her without telling her the way?" Hearing these comments, Nn's sister murmured something but put her own bundle of wood on the ground. While repeating, "Watch carefully, I won't do this again," she slowly showed Nn how to tie the wood together and tighten the bundle. When finished, she put the wood on Nn's back, adjusted the wrap and balanced the wood bundle for her. On the way home, the older girls asked Nn to go in front. When wood fell from her back, Tn picked it up and put it on the top of her own wood bundle. These girls told me that they let younger girls walk in front, so that they would know if the younger girls were ok with their bundle without having to turn back and check.

When children work or play together, the experienced children take priority over making decisions and distributing tasks. Younger children show their willingness to be involved and collaboratively follow their requests. Within such peer relations, excluding the younger children from tasks can be understood as a way through which the older children show their attitudes toward the wrong behavior of the younger children. It is also a way through which these older children show how things are done properly to younger peers. Moreover, when friction arises, children usually try to solve the matter themselves, intentionally excluding the involvement of adults.

## 2. Children-Adults interactions

### *Task negotiations: herding*

When his father woke up, Sy (boy, 9 years old) went near him, silently cried and refused to go herding. His mother passed a cup of milk tea to both of them, then explained to the father that because the *murran* had asked the boy to go herd baby calves that were not owned by Sy's family, he had run back home. After his mother's explanation, Sy cried audibly and complained that he did not want to leave his father's livestock to other herding boys. Sensing that this could be an excuse by the boy to not go herding for that day, the father called Sn (boy, 9 years old), the first born of his first wife. Sy's mother served Sn a cup of milk tea, and the father asked Sn to exchange his herding task with Sy's, for

that one day.

### *Task negotiations: shopping*

When mothers give extra housework to girls, they sometimes negotiate. One Sunday morning, Nn (8 years old) went outside the homestead after her routine task of washing dishes. While she was playing, her mother called her back home and passed her the coin purse. The mother asked Nn to count and pick out the coins for buying a kilogram of sugar and tea leaves, explaining that her father would have a guest that day. Nn hesitated to move and told her mother she wanted a lollipop. The mother ignored her request and returned to the kitchen. Sn's father quickly passed her ten shillings. Nn went shopping soon after confirming with her mother the items and the amount she needed to buy.

Negotiations as above are very common between children and adults, especially in close relations including family and other relatives who usually give the children tasks. Successful negotiations should be distinguished from indulging the children to whatever they request. Rather, the adults steward the children into a collaborative position in local subsistence. Negotiations enable the children and the adults to work together and perform their social responsibilities. The relations between adults and children are not always smooth. Especially when tasks are not performed well, punishment follows, but in various forms and contexts.

### *Punishment from murren*

Md (boy, 9 years old) was beaten by a *murren* with a belt when he passed near other homesteads herding his goats and sheep. It was during the dry season. The seeds fallen from the trees surrounding each homestead are important food resources for its juvenile and weak livestock. After being beaten, Md went home with another herding boy, then reported to his mother what had happened. Md's mother checked the boy from head to toe, and soon sent one boy to call the *murren* to their homestead. The *murren* came. The mother greeted him politely. Without being asked, the *murren* explained the detailed reason for the beating: first, the boy did not follow the herding rule in passing other homestead; second, the boy attempted to escape from the *murren* and left the livestock to move in undesirable direction. The mother strictly scolded Md, and at the same time, she told the *murren* to not hit the boy's head next time.

### *Showing attitudes*

When Sd's mother constructed a new hut with the help requested from other mothers, Sd (girl, 11 years old) told her mother that she would prepare milk tea (chai) for them. When these mothers carried wood to Sd's homestead, Sd served them chai she had already prepared. This girl had much experience in this task and frequently prepared chai for adults. She prepared the chai in the same way as usual. However, one mother complained the chai was not hot enough, and returned her cup.<sup>(2)</sup> Noting this, Sd's mother scolded the girl, intentionally in a loud voice. After collecting the unfinished chai from the other mothers, Sd's mother asked her to warm it. Sd quietly returned to the kitchen and very carefully served chai to all the mothers again.

All the episodes above indicate that punishment to a child in Maasai society is perceived by the adults as necessary for its education. But when punishing a child, there are shared considerations such as to avoid injury to the child, and the punishment is done only to change bad behaviors. Moreover, punishment is usually entwined with complex social relations among adults in different social positions and situations.

### *Observing school*

Many adults in the village are supportive of sending their children to school. Although they themselves do not have experience in formal education, the adults pay attention to everything that happened at school. One elder told the author that when the teachers punished his children, he always asked them why and how the child had been punished. He explained, he would only accept the punishment if the teachers had proper reasons, if they only used small twigs as parents do, and if they did not beat the upper body of the child. He added that the children should be punished, if they behaved disrespectfully in school, or if they did not perform the given tasks. When he found his son was beaten on the head, this father went to talk with the teacher and headmaster immediately. He kept the punished boy in school to continue his study because the teacher was a *murran* that listened and respectfully apologized to the father on this issue. Other boys have dropped out of school due to arbitrary beating or preposterous attitudes of the teachers towards the parents.

A *murran* who dropped out of school expressed appreciation of his father who allowed him to leave school when he was beaten quite severely by the teachers. His father trusted his son's ability to learn in a decent environment. To the father, this was more important than whether his son would become a herder or a student. He explained, "the boys who sleep a lot during herding also sleep a lot in the classroom. The eyes that watch livestock carefully in the herding camp can also read books carefully."

## DISCUSSION

### I. Legitimized Learning-Teaching Relations in Daily Gender and Age Labor Divisions

In pastoralist societies where children are involved in different daily tasks with gender and age labor divisions, men and women in different age stages play diverse roles in children's day-to-day learning. Depending on their social relations with the child, the adults use different ways to show their intentional instructions. In general, adults attentively observe the performance of the children. Men, including the elders and *murran*, oversee the livestock tasks of boys, and women, the housework of girls. Parents, other than teaching directly, tend to foster children to access skillful peers. Mothers encourage their young girls to go collect firewood with older girls or women (Tian, 2017). Fathers send their herding boys to follow the senior herding boys or the *murran* in the herding camp. When it

is necessary, the adults use their social network to search for peer companions who are a good match for their children. Adults also are mindful of their relations with other adults during their interaction with children. This is why a female adult guest who sensed inadequacy in a girl's performance of a task would intentionally make it known by her attitude, yet leave the mother to explicitly guide her child.

Besides these adults-children relations, the special roles of the *murran* need to be emphasized. The fathers usually send their boys to follow the senior herding boys, or to the herding camp to stay with the *murran* (Tian, 2016). The mothers defer to the *murran* the privilege to punish the boys if they behave badly during herding. Such trust relations have also been applied in school systems, which provide local logic for the children and elders in interacting with and evaluating the teachers.

The Maasai differs from other small-scale societies where mothers and peers are more involved in the process of daily teaching and social learning (Hewlett & Roulette, 2016; Takada, 2016). The educational institutions in pastoralist Maasai society legitimize the roles of adults in positions to teach, whether women or men, young or old, for the types of tasks children are expected to perform. This means that adults with different social status perform different educational roles in children's daily activities. This is also why adults who are not in an educational position for a certain task to be performed by children treat the children differently. For example, a father indulges his girl while the mother gives her a task. A mother pampers her boy regardless of herding failure. Moreover, adults question each other whether proper instructions have been given to children. children-adults or adult-adult interactions may function in a way to mitigate tension between a child who did not listen and failed, and the adult who sought to teach but overwhelmed the child instead.

## II. Re-Thinking the Roles of Peers in the Process of Being Maasai

As mentioned above, children in pastoralist societies have the potential to provide an authoritative model within a peer guided and graded curriculum to enrich the children's socialization and local knowledge learning (Lancy, 2008; Spittler & Bourdillon eds., 2012). Compared with the diverse relations and interactions between children and adults, peer relations and interaction among the Maasai children tend to be more deliberate, where older or more experienced children are privileged in managing the tasks and their younger siblings. This can be commonly observed especially among the boys who accomplish herding tasks together. As shown above, young boys, particularly the novices, responded to all the requests they received from older or more experienced boys, even when the requests explicitly did not lead to the successful execution of the tasks. Requests such as to mix two families' herds or to abandon the livestock to collect wild fruits would easily cause loss of livestock. Notwithstanding, once requested, young boys usually obliged without hesitation. This evidence illustrates first that the adults' perceptions of the skills of the children strongly influence the peer relations for different tasks, giving the skilled ones more priority and a freehand in the

decision making and labor divisions among peers.

Peer relations in East African pastoralist societies with the age-grade system play significant roles in the later life of the children, especially boys (Galaty, 2016; Spencer, 2003). Together, the boys join the inviolable *murrn*hood and explore their “group-indulgence” (Spencer, 2003: 21). Such a social process of growing up might be one explanation for the circumspect reactions of the younger to the older boys. It may also lead to the socially recognized good manners of expressing respect to elders. Above all, during the peer tasks of pastoralist children, improving individual skills in a certain task has less correlation to the right or wrong of the instruction itself, but more with how the children develop their social relationship through experiencing both right and wrong together.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on the social norms and the interactions between children and other social members during daily work and play, and their roles in the local educational system of children in current pastoralist Maasai society. The learning-by-doing of the children in pastoralist societies is not a simple and individual process, but always intertwined with the institutional and interactive factors in time and space. Distinct from other small-scale societies where children do not engage in local subsistence, pastoralist children share a negotiable relation with the adults during their participation in subsistence-related activities. Especially the parents take children’s opinions or demands into serious consideration, and once necessary, they will work for the solutions to the trouble children may have experienced during the daily tasks. Adults may punish the children for doing things wrong, but in keeping with the social relations they have with other adults in the same space. In contrast with this children-adults relation, the peer interactions have stricter junior and senior divisions, leaving more freedom to the seniors to direct the activities, sometimes according to their personal liking.

Above all, the social interactions during the daily chore and play of pastoralist Maasai children illustrate that learning-by-doing in the pastoralist context is more than a simple and individual skill development process, but involves spatial-temporal social institutions and complex social relations. More attention needs to be paid to the changes in local social norms and the interactions among participants in various daily activities of the children in different regions. The dichotomy of the modern vs traditional is less a productive analytical tool for the pastoralist societies than to pay deliberate attention to the complexities of social relations and the interactions among all the participants in numerous daily activities.

## NOTES

- (1) This episode was selected during the five-minute interval focal observation of Ky’s daily activities (in Table 1, Tian, 2018). During a total of 525 minutes of observation, Ky spent

- only 5% of the total time playing, the shortest compared with four other herding boys.
- (2) The women guests were not happy because serving lukewarm milk tea to a guest is perceived as a bad manner among the Maasai in the study area.

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