

Community-based Conservation of Biocultural Diversity and the Role of Researchers : Examples from Iriomote and Yaku Islands, Japan and Kakamega Forest, West Kenya.

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Abstract :

Iriomote and Yaku are islands of southern Japan, famous for such natural wonders as wildcats and giant cedar trees. Interviews with the inhabitants of these islands revealed that the older generations retain an animistic cosmology, in which deities dwell everywhere, and all the animals and plants live just like humans. Under the influence of this tradition of kinship with wildlife, the younger generations of islanders produce organic rice in order to protect Iriomote wildcats and stop the renewal of roads in the Yaku forests. By doing this, they wish to make the importance of their natural environment known to the world. Their narratives are complimented with the words of a Kenyan forest conservationist during his recent visit to Yaku Island. These local peoples have a pride in their indigenous cultures and feel an identity of being guardians of the biodiversity around them. The author proposes that the rich biodiversity in these islands, maintained by local people's cultural identity, should be termed "biocultural diversity". The islanders warn us of our modern arrogance : the arrogance of scholars over local people, the arrogance of majorities over cultural or ethnic minorities, and the arrogance of humans over all other living things. In order to deal with this arrogance, these local people teach us a lesson. They tell us to place yourself in the web of life and be aware of your responsibility for the future generations who will be part of the biocultural diversity of the Earth.

Introduction

1. "Researchers, go home!"

On my first visit in Iriomote, an island of southernmost Japan, famous for its well-conserved nature with wildcats and coral reefs, a young man of my age (23 that time) asked me (ANKEI, 1992a).

"You've come here for what?"

"Well, a field research of anthropology." I answered.

"Researchers, go home! Several dozens of foolish docs visit this island every year. But they do not respect our local cultures, which are much different from other parts of Japan. They never send us their publications."

Another lad inquired of me,

"Are you *not* a zoologist?"

Unfortunately enough, I was. My post-graduate course was in the department of zoology. He

continued.

"I am determined to kill, with my bush knife, a certain Western zoologist if he visits this island. He insists that the Iriomote inhabitants are recent migrants and that we should all be moved to other islands in order to secure a paradise for Iriomote wildcats. Do you know where do they actually live? They feed mainly around our paddy fields, where their food, birds, frogs, snakes, and so on, is more abundant than in forest zones. Thus, we have fed wildcats and have long conserved them. Most scholars ignore this fact. You are so arrogant, and believe that you have right to manipulate the future of this island."

2. Biocultural diversity

After this first contact, I stayed in Iriomote for a total of 2 years. I found, among others, the following three facts that had been overlooked or neglect-

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ed. 1) More than 1300 place names in Iriomote dialect are found on the island. They prove that people have long used the whole island, whose oldest archeological site is aged about 4000 years. They have managed to live in this island without severely damaging its biodiversity, probably the richest in southern Japan. 2) For several centuries, until 1963, there was severe malaria, and it kept strangers from settling and introducing a modern life style that damages nature on this island. 3) Local people maintained its great biodiversity through wise use of its natural resources. The religious or spiritual background has restricted the arbitrary uses of the commons. Such a background is not easily shared with people coming from outside

Dr. KADA Yukiko of Kyoto Seika University shows us examples in which cultural diversity of a community, games of children for example, decreases when the biodiversity surrounding it is damaged (YOSHIDA, 1997). In this article, I would like to demonstrate some examples of "practicing the green ideas you preach" as BUTTON (1988: 163) defines it. In these examples, local people maintain the biodiversity around them and retain a rich local culture that gives them an identity as guardians of their biodiversity. Recently, the term "biocultural diversity" has become quite popular, and in most cases is used as an abbreviation for "biological and cultural diversity." In this paper I use the term "biocultural diversity" as a set of plants and animals whose diversity has been maintained by local, indigenous cultural values and behaviours, which, in return, have been dependent on their local biodiversity.

Methods and materials

I stayed over two years in Iriomote Island since 1974, and in Yaku Island, 4 months since 1984.

I usually visit these islands with my wife Takako, and our son, after he was born. We have walked around the islands to get acquainted with their biodiversity and have investigated abandoned village sites to understand the history of the inhabit-

ants. After having stayed two years among forest peoples and fishers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), we have made it a rule to participate in the daily activities and rituals of the people we study. In Iriomote, we transplant rice, harvest it, work for its commerce, or dye and weave clothes in which we sing traditional songs and dance during festivals.

Daily chatting with friends is the most fruitful way to arrive at the cosmology of the islanders (ANKEI, 1998: 42-43), and we try to get experience in the ways in which they behave.

We have asked permission of speakers (or their close relatives if now deceased) before publishing their narratives. All of the narratives in this paper are reproduced as quotations from our former publications.

Results

I. Examples of biocultural diversity from Iriomote Island

1. Narratives of senior generations

A. Inaba, an ancient sanctuary of crocodiles

Crocodiles do not live in today's Iriomote, but I have found oral traditions saying that a crocodile once existed in a place called Inaba, an upper stream of the Urauchi River. The place was said to be a sanctuary in the ancient documents. Mr. KABIRA Eibi (born in 1903) knew a rich oral tradition about Iriomote and writes abundant manuscripts. Here I present an extract from his works (KABIRA & ANKEI, 1996).

"Old persons of Kanokawa village told me this story. There was once a *wani sakana* (crocodile fish) in Iriomote. No one knows where it came from. It first lived in Mariyudu, a round pool of a waterfall of the Inaba River. It moved downstream and came to the sea. It left its traces on the sands of the shores of the estuary of the Urauchi River, Hokabanari Island, Amitori village, and the Cape of Nuban. A group of fishermen of Kanokawa village found it in their fishing net when they fished in

a lagoon of coral reefs under the great rock of Pebu. Its shape was that of a wall lizard, but was very huge. They tried to spear it, but its scales were too stiff. Chased by it, they fled on the Pebu Rock. When they were about to be chased off the cliff into the sea, one of the fishermen, Mr. Daiku, knocked it down with a big pole. They were lucky because he was a strong man. When they brought it back to the village, a traveler who was there taught them that its name was *wani* (a crocodile)."

Yaeyama-jima-shokicho, an official document written at least a century ago, holds that there was a huge creature called *Mizusaba* (freshwater shark) in Inaba. According to this document, people were not allowed to enter this particular area on certain days of the traditional calendar. If people violated the restriction, this creature would swim around fiercely, then jump and plunge down. The thundering sound of this jump would blow off all the trees surrounding the pool of Mariyudu, and the people would be killed. *Keraikedagusuku-yuraiki*, another document written by a head of the lineage that had been chosen as officials since two centuries ago, reported some taboos in Inaba. During later stages of paddy growth, people were made to leave their head cloths, lunch, or fire before entering the Inaba region. These things were thought to irritate the deities, and hence destroy the crops. People were afraid of staying there for a long time, and refrained from cutting trees. Inaba continued to be a sanctuary for animals and plants in the center of the island even after the crocodile left there.

Thus, ritual concerns have been associated with avoidance and therefore conservation in Iriomote Island.

B. "An oak tree saved our souls"

This is a narrative of a disaster caused by the destruction of this sanctuary (SHINMORI, 1996). During WWII, the Japanese army regarded this sanctuary Inaba as a rich resource of timber for encampments in Okinawa. Local people and labourers from Taiwan were made to work for the

timber mill.

On 11 Nov. 1944, there was a flood in Inaba, and at least 6 persons were drowned and unknown numbers of people lost. Heavy rain continued for three days and two nights. Since the islanders had never experienced a dangerous flood of the Urauchi River, no one thought of evacuating the hills although they could hear landslides. After the disaster, it was revealed that trunks and branches of trees, left on cutover areas, made up natural barrages filled with rocks, mud, and water. Unexpectedly one of these barrages broke and floodwater caused an abrupt increase of water level, which carried the houses away from the bank of the river. Ms. SHINMORI Nami (born in 1905) experienced this flood with two of her small children and her husband who worked in the timber mill.

"At about 11 o'clock at night, I heard my dog yelp, and found it floating in the entrance of our house. The river was flooding very rapidly and it was no longer possible to get out of the house. We first put all the *tatami* mats on the table, and climbed on the closet. Water level came up, and we climbed on the ceiling. My husband plucked grasses of the thatch, and made an opening. When we got seated on the roof, our house began to move. It whirled as if it were a pair of dancers with a lion mask in our festival. He tried to tie all his family with a cord so that our drowned bodies could be discovered together. He found that the cord was not long enough for us four, but the floating house came to rest on a huge oak tree on the bank, and halted there. He pushed the children, me, and then himself on its branch and we stayed there safe until dawn. If it were not for that oak tree, we would have all been drowned that night. Since then for five years, our family made it a rule to visit the Oak Tree that had saved our souls on the day of the flood. Seated beneath the Oak Tree, we gave offerings and prayed this way. "Thanks to your help we are still alive and healthy as you see us today."

C. "Please look after this young tree, you forest deity"

Iriomote islanders ask permission from deities on a daily basis for the use of natural resources. The following is a narrative of the holy words dedicated to a forest deity. Mr. MATSUYAMA Tadao (born in 1916) told me of the way in which he cut down a big tree in the forest of Iriomote when he was 30 years old (MATSUYAMA, 1995). The following clearly shows that the empowerment of living things as spirits encourages conservation through respect.

“Accompanied by seven or eight men of my village, I performed a ritual to cut a tree for my canoe. First, I nodded in front of the big tree that I had found before, and stood a saw and an axe against its trunk. Then, I was made to ask permission of the *yamanukannumai* or the reputable forest deity in Iriomote dialect.

After this, I poured *awamori* (distilled spirits of rice) at its foot, and all the participants tasted the rest of the liquor. As soon as we felled the tree, I was made to put a shoot of a shrub into the central hole of the stump, and one of the old men prayed.

*Mina kumana bakaki
ubikaioisaba,
bakamiduri sakarashi tooriri,*

Yamanukan tuimashi toori,

Tuudu tuudu.

Now we plant anew
this young tree. So,
in order to make it
flourish in fresh
green,
please look after it,
you forest deity.
Respectfully we pray,
we pray.

We performed this ritual because trees have *inuchi* (lives) just like those of humans. In our beliefs, big trees, rocks, caves and so on are dwellings of *shii* (spirits), to whom we must always pay attention. These practices are based on the wisdom of our ancestors to make us cherish nature where we live. We should appreciate this wisdom in this age when we can destroy nature quite easily.”

2. Narratives and actions of younger generations

This is an example of a movement for the conservation of Iriomote’s biocultural diversity. They decided to produce organic rice in order to co-exist with Iriomote wildcats.

In 1984, the Japanese government and the agricultural cooperatives began a campaign for the use of insecticides in Iriomote and other rice producing islands of Okinawa. Most of the farmers had continued to produce rice without using any biocides (insecticide, fungicide, and herbicide), and this organic rice production, which had continued at least 500 years, was regarded as outdated in the government’s ranking of the quality of rice.

One of the young local leaders was afraid of the destructive results of this campaign. He foresaw three possible damages. Firstly, the health of farmers would be severely damaged because they were not duly informed of the danger of biocides. Secondly, the health of local people would be injured because of the custom of consuming fish, shellfish, and seaweed taken in the sea just beneath their paddy fields. Thirdly, the survival of animal species such as Iriomote wildcats would be severely endangered because they feed around the paddy fields. At his request, I decided to organize a symposium in Iriomote on the use of natural resources and appropriate technology. We found funding, and invited seven scholars, and two hundred persons out of 1500 inhabitants attended the symposium. I stated that the history of Iriomote’s rice cultivation was related with Taiwan and South-east Asian islands and was much different from that of other parts of Japan; I also talked about the possibility of commercializing Iriomote’s organic rice. During a free discussion a young participant stood and spoke to the scholars (ANKEI, 1989).

“My job is fishing. I also hunt wild pigs, and cultivate rice free of all chemical materials. I am fully aware that nature in Iriomote is a world treasure. Please do understand that it is also the basis of the livelihood of us local people. We have many religious festivals, the biggest of which requires all the members of the

community to devote ourselves to it for four successive days and nights. We are trying hard to maintain the riches of our nature and of our culture. If you, scholars, love this island as your second homeland, do your best to help us help ourselves.”

Encouraged with such positive responses from local people who attended the symposium, we made up a trademark of the Iriomote wildcat for the organic rice. It took several years to establish the business of organic rice (ANKEI, 1992b). In the past five years, farmers of organic rice have introduced half-wild ducks to their paddy fields in order to decrease the chore of weeding by hand. The introduction seemed to work very well at first. But wildcats began arriving in the paddy fields to catch these ducks. About 70 % were lost out of some 800 ducks people kept in 1995. One of the leading farmers, Mr. NARAI Magoichi (born in 1953) speaks about this problem.

“What we intend by this movement is to hand down our beautiful island and rich culture to the generations of our children and grandchildren. That’s why we chose an Iriomote wildcat as our trademark. It’s not surprising if wildcats come to ask us some royalty for the use of their name and portrait.”

Thus, in spite of many difficulties, organic rice is one of the fruits of the daily endeavours of Iriomote Islanders: endeavours to look for a way to secure their cultural identity as guardians of the biodiversity of Iriomote Island.

II. Examples of biocultural diversity from Yaku Island

1. Narratives of senior generations

A. “Carefully listen to local voices”

Mr. IWAGAWA Teiji (born in 1904) was famous for discovering the biggest *Yaku-sugi* cedar known on this World Heritage Island. Based on his local knowledge and experience in the forest, he warned of the overexploitation of the forest (IWAGAWA,

1992).

“The forest of Yaku Island had been the property of local inhabitants. We had an indigenous forestry system, and we fell only one or two out of ten *Yaku-sugi* cedars. Many seedlings of *Yaku-sugi* grew in the gap produced by such a felling. This is surprising because we never see a young cedar tree in the dense forest of Yaku Island. At the beginning of Meiji era, the government took most of it and began to exploit it. Ten out of ten cedars were cut down. We warned the government unless it stopped overexploitation of the forest, landslides would occur. The result was a disastrous landslide of the Domen River upon Nagata village in 1979. It destroyed houses and killed villagers. No project will be fruitful unless it carefully listens to local voices.”

B. “The daytime is for you humans, the night for us deities”

We can know from the following narratives that the worship of natural deities is still in practice among the islanders. Ms. NAKASHIMA Kiyoko (born in 1903) and Ms. MOTODAMARI Kesa (born in 1907) were close friends, and kindly invited my wife and me to join their daily chat (NAKASHIMA & MOTODAMARI, 1993).

N.K. “When one of my relatives had fallen ill, he was in bed for a very long time. So, we determined to ask an oracle. The reply was like this. ‘This person has behaved as if the fields, the mountains, the oceans, and the rivers are all his domains. He has worked without any regard of the appropriate place and time for his work. Deities will give the severest punishment to such a person if he does not change his life style.’ Then the oracle, an old woman, prayed and apologized for him. The patient could get out of his bed that very afternoon.”

M.K. “The apology was accepted, then. But what did he do before?”

N.K. "As a farmer, he kept cows and horses to feed, and he also worked for his mother who made *tofu* (food made of soybeans). He worked very hard day and night. Even after sunset he sometimes bathed in a stream after his work in the field was over."

M.K. "The water deity, *Shijinsama*, was disturbed and got angry with him. Deities are said to emerge before a person who works in the moonlight. They say, 'Stop your work here at night. The daytime is for you humans, the night for us deities.'"

N.K. "By the way, we make it a rule to give a cough before crossing a stream when we walk outside of the village."

M.K. "It's because there are water deities moving along the streams. We may collide against them if we forget to make a cough. Similarly, every time we enter the forest, we say *gomen, gomen* (excuse me, excuse me) because we will be punished if we surprise deities. People do not understand the meaning of such behaviour any more."

N.K. "Nor the existence of deities whom we have long believed in."

C. "Humankind has become a germ of disease on the Earth"

This is a narrative of a man who has regarded all creatures as his brothers and sisters. Mr. OOISHI Hiroshi (born in 1922) is a farmer. His hobby is local history, gardening, and conversation with animals and plants. He has made up a tiny private shrine in his garden where he worships his *Bambutsu no Kami* or All Creatures' Deity. On the first of January 1992, he recited us one of the poems he made for the New Year (OOISHI, 1992).

Humankind has become a germ of disease on the Earth.

But persons with the ability of sympathetic resonance

Can still witness life in its prime.

Whether our offspring after billions of years to come

Will still enjoy sympathy with blossoms of life,
Or whether we shall be eradicated in ten years
Depends on the mind of today's humankind.

Then, he explained to us what made him to realize this.

"When I was twelve, I began helping my father who worked in the forest to fell *Yakusugi* or giant cedar trees. My job was to carry up food for the workers. One day, on my way through the high mountains, I took a rest, tired and exhausted. Just at that time, I saw a tiny flower in full bloom on the trunk of a tree covered with moss. At once I was totally refreshed, physically and mentally, and was strongly attracted by the small cosmos in which the flower stood. Since then, my hope is, if possible, to be reincarnated in that tiny flower.

At the age of 17, I went to Manchuria, persuaded by the government's campaign to send young Japanese to its new colony. Before departure it was preached that Manchurians, Chinese, and Japanese were all brothers and sisters. But the fact was far from it. There, I witnessed Japanese discrimination over local peoples. Chinese and Korean workers were forced with whips to change their cloths outdoors before entering a factory even in winter! Japanese took goods from local shops and rode a cart without paying anything. Only three or four out of ten Japanese there behaved honestly and were gentle to local peoples. When Russian soldiers came in 1945, Chinese gave refuge to those Japanese who had been gentle to them, handed over the rest to Russians, but shot those who had done evil to them. Chinese people of my age never forget the deeds we Japanese did, however often we may apologize. Owing to what I witnessed there, I believe that I must contribute to transform the world in which all humankind can live as true brothers and sisters without any discrimination.

I wonder why I was born and why I am here. My life never existed before my parents. My

parents never existed without their parents, and so on. I find myself on one end of the string of life's history. So, I can conclude that my life is as old as that of the whole of humankind, and consequently as old as all the life that gave birth to humankind. In short, my life is as old as the Earth itself, though my body has a history of only 70 years. I am here now thanks to the long history of mutual aid between different species of life. When we realize this history of life, we arrive at a sense of what I call 'sympathy.' Sympathy, in my term, means 'mutual respect between all lives, plants and animals, as equal and irreplaceable members of Earth's life family.'

I further realize that I will never again have the chance of being me as I am here now. So, I must work for future generations of all lives to ensure that each of them can enjoy a life of 4.5 billion years of age as I do now."

2. Narratives and actions of younger generations

This is a story of a new road project recently stopped to conserve a forest. On the western coast of Yaku Island, there is a well-conserved forest, which stretches from sea level up to 1900 m high, from the sub-tropical to the sub-polar zone. Botanists say that this patch of forest has the greatest biodiversity in this island, a World Heritage.

The Prefectural government of Kagoshima had a project for widening the road running through this forest in order that tourists' buses can pass by each other. There have been opinions for and against this project both in and out of the island. Ecologists and primatologists were against because of the importance of the forest and because many monkeys and deer lived there. Many of the local people were indifferent because they seldom use the route for their daily needs. Some local people insist that only arrogant scholars make objections, and that they need a wide road that surrounds the island. They also expect an income from the construction works and from increasing tourist trade. Nevertheless, a few inhabitants worried sincerely about the future of the forest. A group of young local people

organized a counter project for an outdoor museum. They proposed that the forest be reserved as it is now, so that admirers, who know how to respect this forest, will visit it on foot instead of by buses. Every month, they organized a walk and a seminar of environmental education. Fortunately for the forest, the head and some members of the town assembly of Kamiyaku-cho understood the significance of these proposals.

During an interview of a magazine published in Kamiyaku-cho (northern half of the island) just before the election of its head in April 1996, Mr. SHIBA Yayoshi, a new candidate aged 48, expressed his prospects for the island. Here we can find one of the backgrounds on which a political leader of this island determines his environmental policy (SHIBA, 1996).

"I hope that children of Yaku Island, masters of our next generation, will acknowledge and accept firmly the soul and glory of this island. Be proud of it, believe in yourselves as its inhabitants, and inherit it as a textbook for the symbiosis of humans and the nature. If I had an important sum of money for personal consumption, I would like to use it for the esteem and restoration of each tutelary deity, who has guarded its community and villagers of this island. I feel that this is one of the ways to arrive at a common identity and the pride of being the inhabitants of Yaku Island."

In June 1997, the prefectural government of Kagoshima decided to stop the project. This has become probably the first case, according to the Ministry of Environment, in which a construction project in National Parks is stopped after environmental assessments were over. Reportedly, a budget of four hundred million yens was already used during the research and assessments for this project. Mr. SHIBA Yayoshi, the head of the Town of Kamiyaku-cho that time, commented for this decision as follows.

"I understand that the ecosystem of that zone

has an unfathomed value for a hasty renewal of the road. We should not regard the problem as a superficial dichotomy between an improved road and the conserved nature. Instead, this case asks all the inhabitants to reflect ourselves on how to find a way to co-exist with the unique nature of Yaku Island.”

(Front page of a newspaper, *Minaminihon Shinbun*, 5 Jun. 1997)

III. A message from Kakamega Forest, Kenya

In August 2001, we invited Mr. Wilberforce OKEKA, a Kenyan forest conservationist, to participate in a seminar held in Yaku Island. He welcomed us during our visit to Kakamega Forest in 1998 and 2000 (OKEKA, 1998). He narrated the importance of the forest to Japanese students that participated the seminar (Ankei & Ankei, 2002).

“I first came to know the forest when I got my job as a subordinate staff in the forest department of Kakamega Forest, West Kenya. What I realized first was that trees have been there before we humans appeared. We benefit a lot from the forest: for edible fruits, barks as medicine, timbers for houses, and so on. We can live a better life thanks to the forest. Birds, butterflies, snakes, and primates all depend on the forest. Since ancient times humankind have lived together with other wildlife in the forest and have benefited from it. I learned that the important forest is rapidly disappearing because of growing human population and their activities. For example, Kakamega Forest was once a part of the great tropical rainforest that expanded from the Atlantic Ocean to Uganda and West of Kenya. But now, only 240 square kilometers are left, which is only half of the Yakushima Island. Kakamega Forest has been isolated, got much smaller, and it is losing the continuous canopies that covered the forest. Local people have collected firewood, have burnt charcoal, and have removed bark for medicine, to the effect of consuming more than the forest can produce.

Thus Kakamega Forest is now disappearing, and its wildlife is at the danger of extinction. Now I am convinced that we must do something to conserve the forest. Endemic birds of Kakamega Forest may become extinct. Birds travel from Europe to Kakamega Forest or stop in it for further travelling. They do not tend to come to big cities like Nairobi. It is my hope that the generations of my children and their children will be able to see birds coming from Europe and many other wildlife of Kakamega Forest. We must stand up to assure that the future generations will enjoy the benefits from the forest as we do now.

I believe that we should begin conservation at home. You have learned what is going on in Kenya or in Democratic Republic of Congo. Based on that knowledge as examples, please start something here in Japan. You begin to clean your garden first. Then, you will expand your trial to villages and towns you live in. I tell you youngsters. Don't wait until you get old. Stand up today and encourage others to be in motion. But don't take my words as something like a home task. I hope you will be able to do it as a volunteer, based on your sincere wishes to conserve your environment. Stand up and cooperate with many others: young and old. Feel encouraged to influence younger generations, who will enjoy the environment when our generations will be gone.”

Conclusion and prospects

1. Local culture as a key to the future of biodiversity

I have used the term “local” throughout this text without giving its definition. An episode clearly demonstrates the criteria for being regarded as local. I encountered it during the first meeting held between the inhabitants of Shiraho village and municipal officers of Ishigaki Island in 1988 (ANKEI, 1995b). There was a project of constructing a new airport on the sea of Shiraho by reclaiming the coral reefs having the greatest biodiversity

in Asia, at the same time destroying the best fishing location around Ishigaki and Iriomote Islands. Ninety percent of the 2000 Shiraho villagers were against the project. They claim their common rights on the beautiful and productive coral reefs where they take their daily food and get their cash income. During a free discussion, a man stood and introduced himself.

“I am a new director of the Airline Hotel. Please help me to do my best as a member of the local community.”

In return, the Chief of the Communal Hall of Shiraho stood, and fiercely addressed to the villagers who were there.

“My people, let us never forget the word we have heard just now! A person who arrived here yesterday boasts today that he is a member of the local community. We never count such a person among the local people, a person who profits from destroying our communal sea, our coral reefs that have supported our lives and will support the lives of our future generations.”

This statement taught me that a “local community”, in southern islands of Japan, is a group of people who share the basic notion of the way of life in their communal environments, and take responsibility for the benefits of future generations who will enjoy those communal spaces. Hence, how long a person lived in a certain place and where he or she is from are not the essential questions for being “local”. In this sense, I conclude that local people and their way of life determine the future of their biocultural diversity.

2. Action networks for the biocultural diversity

The narratives of southern Japan islanders (as well as the narratives of a Kenyan conservationist) clearly pointed out our egoistic arrogance as a fundamental cause of today’s destruction of local and global biocultural diversity. According to the

narratives, this arrogance is threefold. First is the arrogance of strangers (scholars for example) over local people and their ways of life. Second is the arrogance of majorities over minorities and their cultures. Third is the arrogance of humans over other species of the Earth (ANKEI, 1991, ANKEI & ANKEI 2000).

The narratives and actions of Iriomote and Yaku Islanders demonstrate that they regard the nature as divine and sacred. Therefore, the great biodiversity of these islands should be understood as a result of the combination of biology and human behaviours. Even if narratives of these islanders may sound strange to people in monotheistic traditions, they are neither exceptional nor absurd in Asia and Africa. Their spiritual and religious attitudes to the nature may deeply influence economic and political decision-making, and sometimes play an indispensable role in conserving the biodiversity surrounding them.

We could add another example from *Ainu mo-shir*, an island erroneously called Hokkaido today. The Ainu, indigenous people of Japanese archipelago represent an indispensable mesh in this network. Mr. KAYANO Shigeru, Ainu elder and a former member of the House of Councilors, quotes an Ainu saying.

“Among all the creatures that were made to descend from the heaven, there is no such a creature deprived of its proper role to perform.”

(From a TV mission entitled “A conversation with trees.”)

3. Some suggestions for the study of biocultural diversity

I believe that such wisdom and knowledge of local peoples can serve as examples for actions to change our arrogant way of life.

In Iriomote and Yaku Islands, Japanese sanctuaries of highest importance, active member of local people endeavour to conserve the biodiversity of their territory and to maintain their cultural identity. Unlike Iriomote or Yaku Islanders, most of us

may not have a privilege of living in a Treasure Island of biocultural diversity. I would like, however, to look for a way to recover the pride as guardians of our biocultural diversity as well as a way to become a part of it, the web of life (BARZAN, 1997). Becoming "local" will be one possible goal, among others, for this quest. This does not mean to move to these islands. We still have many opportunities of becoming "local".

It depends on our choice of where to live and how. Recently, my family had a chance of being allowed to build a house and own a forest of 1 hectare in a local community comprising about 30 families. There we have the same duties and rights with other families. My wife, an ecologist, and I are trying to search for an alternative way of life, *e.g.* planting rice and using firewood for heating, as we learned among our friends in southern Japan islands or in African forests (for example, ANKEI Takako, 1990).

Now I would like to give the following suggestions for scholars and students who intend to do research on biocultural diversity.

1) Pay attention to our responsibility to local communities. Listen to local voices first. 2) Remember that biodiversity, in most cases, should be regarded as biocultural diversity. It can never be conserved unless local people take the initiative for conservation. Forced protection very often ends in a tragic destruction of environment and of cultures. 3) Look for a way to help local people to construct a sustainable social and economic system, which is a background for the conservation of biocultural diversity. In order to accomplish this, we must discover indigenous wisdom and knowledge systems, and use them to make the members of the local community to become fully aware of their responsibility for future generations. 4) Let us explore a new horizon of science in which there will be no distinction between investigators and the investigated (MISAMA, 1998). Scholars and local people will be integrated in research and conservation programs as equal and indispensable members.

We would like to add two more suggestions for persons who sincerely hope to work for the conser-

vation and reconstruction of biocultural diversity around them. 5) Place yourself in a mesh of network of people who endeavour to alter their lifestyle for biocultural diversity, and work to influence local governments and the international world. 6) Be encouraged to make yourself a guardian of biocultural diversity in the area you live. Although we may seem only separated and scattered examples, we find ourselves in a loose network of people and organizations working for our stolen future: biocultural diversity.

Acknowledgments

I am most grateful for our friends in Iriomote and Yaku Islands as well as in African forests. They have so warmly accepted and guided us throughout our stay among them. Toyota Foundation supported our journey to East Africa in 2000 and the journey of African friends to Yaku Island in 2001.

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