The Structure of Villages with Similar Social and Cultural Backgrounds in the Northern Part of Zambia

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Abstract

The structure of a village is strongly related to the society and culture in the surrounding area. This study focuses on villages in Zambia. Zambia is a developing country and the lifestyle of the people is changing rapidly. In the Northern part of Zambia, people fish or farm for their sustenance.

Over the past 100 years, the lives of the people have been affected by explorers, missionaries, and industrialization. Industrialization has changed the structure of the village by influencing lifestyles and patterns of work and forcing greater reliance on cash incomes.

This study investigated the relationship between the structures of the villages and the structure of society, by field survey and by literature documentation. As the social structure of a village matures, the spatial structure of the village, which is centered on blood relationships, becomes weaker. However, in Zambian society, blood relationships are still highly respected, and these relationships must be maintained even as the social structure becomes more complex.

Keywords: Zambia; traditional building; structure of village; sustainability

1. Introduction

For town or urban planning, it is important to consider the history and social structure of those areas. The lifestyles of the Zambian people recently have been changing due to rapid urbanization and industrialization.

Town and urban planning in Zambia has traditionally followed European methodologies. Suitable for Europeans, it is not for Zambians, since their culture, history, and lifestyles are different. This study defined the culture, histories, and social and spatial structures of villages in Zambia. Even today, we can see traditional Zambian ways of life in rural areas.

2. General Information about ZAMBIA

2-1 General data

Colonized by the United Kingdom, the Republic of Zambia achieved independence in 1964. Copper mining during the colonial period was the impetus for the country’s development, but the price of copper has fallen recently and the copper output has dropped. Government policy is sifting from mining to agriculture.

Table 1. Statistics of Zambia and Japan

| Item                        | ZAMBIA | JAPAN |
|-----------------------------|--------|-------|
| Population, total (million) | 10.2   | 127.2 |
| Population growth (annual %)| 1.7    | 0.1   |
| Life expectancy (years)     | 36.9   | 81.6  |
| Surface area (1000sq. km)   | 752.6  | 377.8 |
| GDP (current billion $)     | 3.7    | 4000.0|
| GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US$) | 340,034,010.00 |

Source: World Development Indicators database, August 2003

2-2 Ethnic Groups and Language

Zambia is home to more than 70 ethnic groups, including the Bemba in the Northern, Luapula and Copperbelt provinces, Tonga in the Southern province, and Lozi in the Western province.

Thirteen languages are spoken in Zambia; Bemba is spoken mainly in the Northern, Luapula, Central, and Copperbelt provinces, Nyanja in the Lusaka and Eastern provinces, Tonga in the Southern provinces, and Lozi in the Western province.

2-3 Coming of Chieftainship Groups

In 1400’s, the Bemba groups (Bemba-speaking peoples) arrived here from the western part of Africa and northern part of Angola. They were called the Lunda and they founded the Lunda Empire. Some groups crossed the Luapula River to Luapula and the Northern area of Zambia and formed the Bemba groups. Other groups came to the Northwestern and Copperbelt areas and the Central area of Zambia. Some groups from the Lunda Empire came to the Northwestern and Western region.

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areas of Zambia, and formed the Lozi groups. At that time, there was no chieftainship in the Southern area of Zambia, but after this migration, the Ngoni and Kololo groups came from the Southern part of Africa. Before these chieftainships, the people were hunter-gatherers. It was fortified against raids from neighboring tribes and Arab slavers. (Fig 1, Fig 2)

2-4 Exploration of Missionaries

In the late 15th century, Portuguese explorers discovered an ocean route around the Cape of Good Hope leading to the Orient. In the 17th century, the Netherlands’ East India Company built a supply base for traders at Cape Town in South Africa. In the late 19th century, Livingstone and other explorers from Europe led missionaries to the central part of southern Africa. They organized caravans to the west from Tanzania, and brought Christianity, firearms, schools, and new building techniques, such as the sun-dried bricks called ‘Kimberly’ that are still used in the Luapula and Northern provinces. In the Northern Province, the first missionaries reached the Mambwe, a tribe that was frequently attacked by the Bemba. The Mambwe quickly accepted the missionaries’ new technologies. For the missionaries, the area was a stronghold against Tanzania-Zambia incursions. The first missionaries discovered a group of round brick houses that had been built by the African Lake Company but were never occupied. Before the arrival of the missionaries, this technique of using sun-dried bricks had not been known, thus, it was only in the late 19th century that the use of sun-dried bricks became popular in Zambia.

Christianity spread to the Bemba from Makasa village. These were the first Bemba to accept Christianity.

3. Outline of research

Together with staff from Copperbelt University, fieldwork was performed in Kitwe Zambia from February 26 to March 10, 2003. The Northern and Luapula provinces were selected as target areas. In these areas, the people speak Bemba. They have rich water resources and practice fishing and farming.

4. Building Styles

4-1 Structure of household

Houses in the Northern and Luapula provinces are made of square bricks and have balconies, a standard style that shows the influence of Mission culture. Bemba villages have meeting places called an Insaka. Originally places for men to meet and for educating young boys, the Insaka are now meeting places for all family members.

One household consists of 2–3 buildings and an Insaka. Usually, each household has a large tree. People gather either under the tree or on the balcony during the daytime. This usage of the balcony is similar to that of the Engawa in Japan.

A typical house also has a sitting room, 1 or 2 bedrooms, and some storerooms. The houses have corridors and sometimes a main entrance and a back door. The sitting room is near the main entrance. Very rarely do the houses
have a kitchen or bathroom in the same building.

4-2 Balcony

Many dwellings in the Luapula and Northern province have balconies. The balcony is located at the entrance, within the rectangular floor plan. The balcony is the middle area between the outside and the inside. In Zambia, people spend a major part of the day outside because of the hot, dry climate. It is better to stay outside in the shade with a cool breeze than inside the house. Throughout this research trip, we saw lots of people chatting or resting on their balconies.

The balcony home made with sun-dried bricks was originally developed by the missionaries. This style is appropriate for the hot, dry climate of Zambia.

4-3 Roofing

Dwellings in the Luapula and Northern provinces usually have thatched roofs. Houses with corrugated sheet metal roofs are found only around the provincial capital towns and in comparatively big cities. But people prefer thatched roofs, which are cheaper and made of easily obtainable materials. The roof beams are timbers bound with wood bark and rest directly on the walls of the main structure. On some roofs, the thatch is tied down to keep out the rain, but on others, the thatch is simply placed on the roof. In the northern part of Luapula Province, the manner of tying the thatch to the top of the roof is visible.

4-4 Brickwork

Sun-dried bricks are characteristic of the dwellings in these areas. The floor plans are very simple. People differentiate their dwellings from others by stacking up bricks at the windows or making pillars for the balcony. As a design effect, some people place the bricks at a slant or horizontally to create small but interesting openings and slits. Some people also create windows by placing the bricks vertically. Painted outer walls are also characteristic of these areas.

4-5 Painting

It is customary in the Luapula and Northern provinces to paint the walls of dwellings, often with simple patterns. Generally, the bottom part of the wall up to about 500mm is painted. There are many variations in both the colors and patterns of the wall paintings. The patterns are usually very simple, but some can be more complex, particularly at the corners. Originally the paintings were illustrated stories that served to educate the young, or messages to others. These days, however, paintings seldom have important meanings. Most have only ornamental purposes or incorporate the themes from bible. These paintings have no relationship to traditional stories, making them difficult to understand.

At initiation ceremonies for young people, especially for girls (or boys at Insaka meeting places), geometrical designs are painted on the inner walls of the house. On the outer walls, messages are put behind the paintings. Each geometrical pattern has a particular traditional meaning, but these days the patterns often serve simply as decorations. In Luapula Province, especially along the Luapula River and around Lake Bangwelu, where fishing is common, they paint stories from myths or the bible, such as mermaids (Dona fish). In Northern Province, however, most paintings are geometrical patterns.
In Makasa Village, people still paint geometrical patterns during initiation ceremonies. These patterns illustrate stories.

(1) Kasengele:
The paintings show newly weds how to make the bed. The wife should use only the bed prepared for her by the husband. The wife is strictly forbidden from leaving the husband’s bed and sleeping on other beds. There are men who wet the bed, snore, or steal food in their home, but the woman must keep these a secret.

(2) Chipili:
A wife should not leave her husband to go hide in the hills and do mischief, because once caught, it is no longer a secret but a sign of disrespect.

(3) Nabwalya Chiyombo (husband):
The highest mountain, I climb all mountains but I cannot climb Nabwalya Chiyombo. It helps one to respect her husband and marriage.

(4) Shaloshanya imilyango, imitima tashaloshanya:
If there is animosity in the house, it should not be visible, especially when a visitor comes calling. You are supposed to pretend so that people don’t notice.

5. Structure of Village
Villages in Zambia can be classified into 3 types: 1) fishing village; 2) farming village (mainly cultivation); and 3) farming village (mainly cattle breeding). Type 1 and type 2 villages can be found in the Northern and Luapura provinces, while type 3 villages can be found in Southern Province.

5-1 Fishing village
5-1 a) Mukuku Village
Mukuku village is near the border of the Congo Dem. Rep. and faces the swamp at the southern area of Lake Banguelu. This village extends along the shore of the lake and along the Serenje-Samfya road. There are total of 80-120 houses. Many are temporary houses built of grass and wood, while others are built of sun-dried bricks. The village center consists of stores and a bar built of sun-dried bricks. There was a school but this building now used for other purposes. Fish are sold along the main road and in the stores.
along the road. This type of development stretches for 50 km along this road.

In these areas, the people fish by themselves. There is no fishermen’s cooperative or similar organization. With no need to form groups, the people build their homes along the road at some distance from each other. They live only with relatives.

5-1 c) Kasoma Village
This village lies 2 km from the Samfya town center on a small road extending from the main road to Lake Banguelu. The people in this fishing village sell their fish at the town market and also cultivate maize, cassava melons, pumpkins, okra, etc. for their own consumption.

5-1 d) Kasakarawe village
Kasakalawe Village is 2 km from Mupulungu on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. The villagers are from the Lungu tribe, and their culture has assimilated the Bemba and Tanzanian cultures. Kasakarawe village is large compared to other villages on Lake Tanganyika and now extends about 2 km along the shore and about 700 m inland. There are more than 600 houses in the village. The people eat fish from the lake and sell some in town. Some people have motorboats and sometimes carry passengers or goods as a side business. There are no electricity or water services, and only one well. The people draw water from either this well or the lake.

The village is expanding in an elliptical fashion. People fish in groups and bring their catches to the town market by boat. There is no big road in the town. The tribal culture differs from that of Bomba. The houses are made of sun-dried brick, are square, and have balconies. Cooking stoves are built on the basement around each house. Insaka meeting places are not common, but in those that do exist, the people distill the local spirits. Mango trees serve as Insaka. When a house is built, a mango tree is planted, and the shade of that tree becomes
the household’s place of relaxation. Some houses have grass fences, a style that came from Tanzania. There is only one well in this village. The market takes place around this well, but it is very small, selling casaba melons, millet, vegetables, and dried fish. A school and a church are on the hill. There is a place for men to gather and to repair boats or nets for fishing. The people mainly fish by themselves, but sometimes fish in groups. Because of this cooperation in fishing, the relationship between households, even unrelated households, is very tight.

5-2 Farming village

This village has developed a peculiar technique of agriculture called ‘Chitemene.’ In this slash and burn cultivation system, the branches of the trees are removed, placed in the field, and set on fire to burn the field. The land can be cultivated only for a few years, after which the land lies fallow for 20~30 years while the trees recover. This type of agriculture can provide nourishment only for a small population, so the villages remain small and far apart.

From the late 1970’s, Zambian government implemented a new agricultural policy emphasizing the cultivation of maize on large plantations. The maize is sold for cash. This requires a lot of fertilizer to be put on the fields, but the government provides assistance in buying the fertilizer and purchases the crop at the supported price. This type of plantation is called a ‘farm.’

5-2 a) Loto Village

Loto Village is 3km from the main road that runs 12km between Mwense and Mansa. The center of the village is a church that plays a large role in village life. The village consists of more than a hundred households engaged in ‘farm’ type cultivation of maize. The village is in the shape of a circle spreading outward from the small road. People in this village have strong relationships.

5-2 b) Makasa Village

One of the most important Bemba villages, Makasa Village is 60km north east of Kasama. The village has a railway station (TAZARA), from which mineral water is shipped out. In this village, the people are mainly farmers, some of whom also raise pigs and chickens. The village has a large population served by a school, a church, and a clinic.

This is the first Bemba tribe village to accept Christianity. The houses are square, made of sun-dried bricks, and have balconies, just like the houses in other areas of the Northern and Luapula provinces.

Conclusion

Fishing villages and farm life in Zambia changed under the influence of Christianity at the end of the 19th century and as a result of modernization in the 20th century. Christianity changed the method of construction from wood and soil to brick and people began to reside permanently in one area. A church and a school were built at the center of the village, and the centripetal force created by these structures concentrated the village into...
a single settlement. Modernization produced the road for transporting products, creating a village structure centered on the road.

However, society continues to change, as can be seen in the evolving structures of various villages. These changes are deeply related to the industry of the village, the pattern of work in the village, and the level of maturity of the community structure in Zambia. In immature community structures, individuals handle production. The basic unit of the village is the family, and the relationships between families are weak. As the social structure matures, the nature, scale and composition of the relationships grow and strengthen. The work inside a village becomes systematized and common workplaces and meeting places appear. The village takes the form of an extended line.

Furthermore, as the social structure of a village matures, the spatial structure of the village, which is centered on blood relationships, becomes weaker. In Zambian society, however, blood relationships are still highly respected, and it is very important to maintain the relationship even as the social structure becomes more complex.

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