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Reorganized Meeting House System: The Focus of Social Life in a Contemporary Village in Tabiteuea South, Kiribati

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I will discuss the reorganization of the meeting house system in a contemporary village in Tabiteuea South, Kiribati. The aim of this paper is to clarify how local people in peripheral society respond to the current global situation. Globalization has been accelerating throughout the twentieth century. This trend admits no exception in the modern world, even the small Pacific Island countries. It is likely that peripheral society is forced to lose its 'tradition' in the process. Dissolution of community and increased individualization may be emphasized in so-called Westernization.

In the case of Tabiteuea atoll, from the historical viewpoint, it might be said that 'traditional' community, once organized by the district meeting house system, has collapsed through Christianization and European domination since the nineteenth century. Some observers have said that individualization has emerged along with the historical change in the atoll. It is certain that villagers recall only a few myths and fragments of knowledge concerning the 'traditional' meeting house in Tabiteuea South today. But in my observation, present-day villagers are integrated into the village community that is centred around the meeting house, and are far from individualized. At meetings in an edifice, the unification of villagers is emphasized and the local egalitarian idea within the social group is symbolically realized under the authority of elderly men. People design their social life within the reorganized meeting house system in the island. Far from vanishing, the meeting house system is actively functioning at present.

I would say that reorganization of the local meeting house system is a flexible adjustment of the peripheral society to the modern situation. In reinventing their 'tradition,' local people in a peripheral society such as Tabiteuea have retained their autonomy in the process of globalization.

Key words: globalization; peripheral society; village autonomy; meeting house system; decision making; Tabiteuea South; Kiribati; Micronesia.

Globalization has been accelerating throughout the twentieth century, especially in recent years (cf. Tomlinson, 1999). The movement of people has become easier with the development of a transport system. Above all, labour migrations and displacement caused by conflicts have been increasing. The current anthropological literature on globalization tends to be concerned with the way production, consumption, communities, politics, and identities become detached from local places—so-called 'deterritorialization.' Anthropological 'regionalism' is also criticized (Lederman, 1998: 427). Some scholars propose to rethink the opposition of centre versus periphery, of urban versus rural spaces (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Kearny, 1995: 552).

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But these arguments pay little attention to the fact that some people return home from foreign countries and that some have difficulty going beyond nation-state boundaries. The social life of rural inhabitants should not be discarded in the anthropological arena. Anthropological works focusing on such local societies can be classified into two opposite attitudes: one is homogenization or assimilation to global uniformity, and the other is heterogenization or invention of 'traditions' or local cultures. According to the former, many ethnographers have repeatedly created metanarratives which tell of 'loss of traditions' in the peripheral societies (Clifford, 1988: 17). But 'traditions' can be compatible with, rather than defeated by or lost to, the global trend (Sahlins, 1999). Local social systems and cultures at the periphery have never homogenized in the global process. It may be said that the cultural production and also the reorganization of social systems at the periphery are in response to political and economic dominance of the core area (Hannerz, 1989: 66).

The global trend admits no exception, even in the small Pacific Island countries, for whom it is quite difficult to extricate themselves from subordinate positions in terms of political economy. Firth (2000) distinguishes two phases of globalization in the Pacific: the first, the era of colonization and Christianization by the Europeans from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century; the second, the current globalization since the 1970s. The society in the remotest island was directly eroded by the first globalization and has been affected indirectly by the second. In this paper, I will not discuss the global trend or the historical process but rather the correspondence of the microscopic social system today with the outside world. I will focus on the village meeting house or *mwaneaba*¹⁾ in Tabiteuea South District in Southern Kiribati, based on my field research there from 1994 to 1995. My aim is to clarify the present circumstances of the seats or *inaki* (generally known as *boti*)²⁾ in the village *mwaneaba* and to situate the *mwaneaba* system in the context of current Kiribati society in the modern world.

Mwaneaba is a great edifice thatched by pandanus leaves or recently roofed with galvanized iron sheets. In the early twentieth century, Sir Arthur Grimble and Henry E. Maude, both colonial officials and anthropologists, were quite interested in the *mwaneaba* in Kiribati, part of a British colony in the Central Pacific called the Gilbert Islands at that time. The pioneer ethnographers expressed it as 'the focus of social life in Gilbertese.' Nevertheless, since the first contact with Europeans, the I-Kiribati (formerly described as Gilbertese) have been losing most of their oral traditions or knowledge about their ancestors, including various customs concerned with the *mwaneaba*. Part of the prevailing structural functionalists' theory at that time, their inclination of study could be situated in so-called 'salvage' anthropology today. Their ethnographies neglected the colonial situation of those days, and their main purpose was the reconstruction of 'traditional' social models of the pre-contact period.

However, new *mwaneaba* are being built incessantly even today. Moreover, the functions of the *mwaneaba* system have been diversified, and their number has increased in the twentieth century. A *mwaneaba* is attached to the present villages and some social organizations from the outside world, such as Christian churches, schools, and the island councils. It is not a mere building but is significant for being I-Kiribati. Naboua T. Ratieta, who was the first elected prime minister, characterized it as 'the heart of our culture and traditions' (Lundsgaarde, 1978: 67), and Nakibae Tabokai, who was an official in the Ministry of Education, said that '[*mwaneaba*] combines theory, institution and process and has been

in Kiribati since the beginning of time' (Nakibae Tabokai, 1993: 23).

Government officers emphasize the importance of *mwaneaba* in the integration of this island nation-state. The islands of Kiribati were integrated indirectly by British colonial power, although they had not been integrated politically before colonization. Upon winning independence in 1979, the Republic of Kiribati succeeded in the integration of the nation from the colonial power. The nation-state has its particularities and differences with neighbour countries, and it needs a symbol (cf. Appadurai, 1996: 188-191). *Mwaneaba* became the symbol of pseudo-homogenous 'Kiribati society and culture,' in spite of the diversity and the historically different experiences of the various islands. The symbolized *mwaneaba* should be not only a 'traditional' being but also an alive being. The governmental elites tend to obscure the distinction among *mwaneaba* of the ambiguous mythical era, the historical past, and the present day. *Mwaneaba* should be legitimately identified only as one symbolic quality.

Meetong House in Precedent Ethnographies

'Traditional' Model of Meeting House

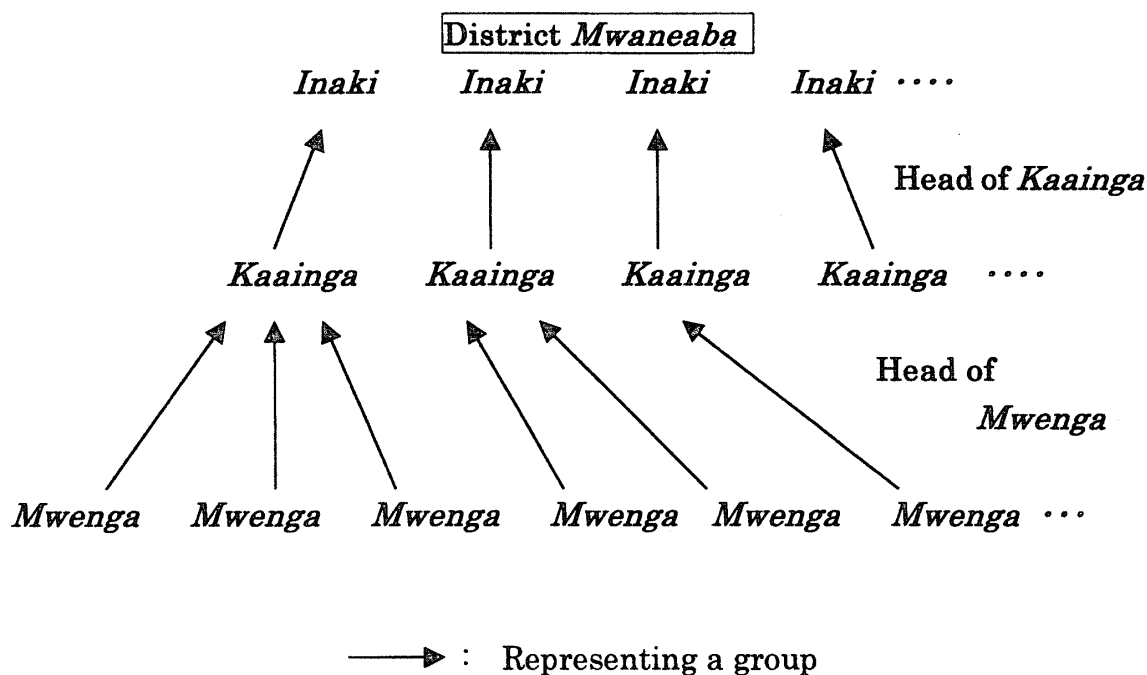
In contrast with I-Kiribati elites, European scholars were apt to restrict their interest to the pre-contact 'traditional' *mwaneaba*. They neglected the contemporary situation when they did their research and reconstructed the non-historical and static model of *mwaneaba* as though it were continuous from the mythical era. Perhaps they had a sentimental attachment to the decayed and forgotten Kiribati 'traditional' society and culture. The descriptions of the pioneer ethnographers have been authorized. English-trained I-Kiribati elites read and applied them to ceremonial speeches. It is probable that the European knowledge of traditional *mwaneaba* influenced people all over the islands through the radio programme of parliament discussions and the speech in the ceremonies marking the anniversary of independence..

It may be significant to cite a passage from one of the pioneer ethnographies before analyzing *mwaneaba* in the present context:

The focus of the whole social life of the community, in it were held all discussions concerning peace or war or any of the other innumerable concerns affecting the common weal; it was Law Court...; and the centre for the many ceremonies and feasts of a formal characters....

The *m[w]aneaba* was all that to the Gilbertese, and much more: the traditional clubhouse of the aged; a *pied à terre* for the stranger; and a sanctuary for those in flight. All behaviour under its roof had to be seemly, decorous, and in strict conformity with custom, lest the *m[w]aneaba* be matauninga (offended) and the culprit *maraia* (accursed) (Maude, 1977[1963]: 11). ([] added by Kazama)

Each 'traditional' *mwaneaba* had a rigid seating division called *boti* (or *inaki* in Tabiteuea) combined with various rights and obligations (Grimble, 1989; Maude, 1977[1963]; Hockings, 1989; Lundsgaarde and Silverman, 1971). The word *boti* or *inaki* meant not only seating division but also a kin group itself which could trace its male line to a common ancestor; Grimble and Maude described it as a clan. Though a *boti* or *inaki* seat was basically passed from father to son, some descendants succeeded mother's seat. When

Figure 1. Model of Political Structure Concerning 'Traditional' *Mwaneaba*

a woman married, she could sit on her husband's seat. The group members co-resided in a *kaainga*, or ancestral land of the *boti*, which had been a residence of the *boti* founder.³⁾ Within the *kaainga* there were several nuclear families like small households, called *mwe-nga*. The aged head (*atu*) of the *kaainga* governed its inhabitants. He was the same person as the head of the *boti* and attended the various meetings held in the district *mwaneaba* as the representative of the *kaainga*. *Mwaneaba*, *boti*, and *kaainga* combined particular myths concerned with genealogies or their establishments (Fig.1). The knowledge about them was quite important for group membership, and it was essential in order to be entitled to sitting privileges in the *boti*.

Historical Change

Next, I will refer to the historical change of the society. Grimble described the 'modern' situation of *mwaneaba* with vexation as follows:

...the gradual decay of native custom, and its generalization...is responsible for a change in the *m[w]aneaba*'s "centre of gravity."...[I]t has lost in depth of special significance. For example, its application to modern uses has enhanced its character of convenience, and reduced almost to nothing its sacred quality. ...In these modern times, children of all ages run shouting in bands in and out of the building, at any hour of day. In old days, it was unthinkable that a child of any age under puberty should be allowed to set foot even upon the *marae* 'shingled open space,' which surrounded *m[w]aneaba*. ...[F]or all shouting, all unseemly behaviour, every attitude or word that was not marked by decency and decorum, was considered a cause of offence to the edifice and a danger to the

community...(Grimble, 1989: 198). ([] added by Kazama)

Since the European contact, 'traditional' *mwaneaba-kaainga* linkage had been broken, and various rituals and knowledge about it were lost through Christianization in the late nineteenth century and British domination around 1900.

The Gilbert Islands became a British Protectorate in 1892, when Captain Davis, commanding *HMS Royalist*, raised the Union Jack at Abemama atoll. Britain was reluctant to extend its protection to the Gilbert Islands, but decided to do so because of wider international obligations (Macdonald, 1982: 68). The protectorate (later Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony) government introduced the Queen's tax, new legal concepts, and regulations to the islands. European agents were employed by the government to execute the regulations and to collect taxes. George Murdoch⁴⁾ is the most notable agent, who virtually governed Abemama, Kuria, Aranuka, Nonouti, and Tabiteuea from 1898 until the First World War (Macdonald, 1982: 85-86). In Tabiteuea atoll:

[Murdoch's] most disruptive regulation was the one which required that every house be built fronting on to the newly constructed road. Since the road cut through every *ka[a]inga* on the island, every *ka[a]inga* was directly affected by this ruling. Murdoch's decree that...only houses which were closest to the road in each *utu*⁵⁾ could be used. All other members of the *utu* had to find alternative house sites on the roadside. ...[S]o that the residential requirement for membership in a kin group could no longer be met. ...[T]he *ka[a]inga* now consisted of a mere fraction of the number of households in each prior to the decree.

With the dispersal of the *ka[a]inga* and *utu*, however, *mwenga* became independent units which could be held alone accountable for their actions (Geddes, 1977: 389-390). ([] added by Kazama)

As a consequence of *kaainga* breakdown caused by European rule, *mwenga*, formerly only a part of the kin group on *kaainga* land, became an independent residential unit. For the purpose of governing the local people easily, the European government tried to reorganize local political institutions.

In order to establish law and order, Murdoch recruited a man from each village and appointed these men village policemen. They were responsible for ensuring that the village would be kept tidy and that villagers would present themselves for public works, for checking the curfew, and so on. He also appointed a council, or *kabowi*, comprised of representatives of each village on the atoll. But this council came into constant conflict with the village elders' councils. In order to undermine the position of the elders' council, Murdoch tried to increase the power of the *kabowi*, centralizing all island government in the head of the councillors, or *kaubure* (Geddes, 1983: 36-39). The appointed head of *kaubure* on the islands from Nonouti southwards was to assume the leadership functions equivalent to those of a High Chief of the northern islands (Macdonald, 1982: 77-78). Thus Murdoch had, by reorganizing villages and removing responsibility from the village elders' councils, undermined the 'traditional' organization and kin groups (Geddes, 1983: 39).

Moreover, during the process of Christianization, religious wars occurred on some islands and caused drastic population decreases and desolation of land. In Tabiteuea atoll, the narrative of large-scale religious war in the late nineteenth century is remembered even today (Maude and Maude, 1981).⁶⁾ The mission exercised destructive influences on the

island society, even though most of the inhabitants in the atoll had already converted to Christianity. In 1936, Father Terrienne established his headquarters in Tabiteuea North. He opposed all forms of 'traditional' activity in order to eradicate every form of paganism, real or imagined, from the islands:

He saw *m[w]aneaba* custom and performance of rites related to the *m[w]aneaba* as 'pagan vestiges' and determined they should be stamped out. He therefore decreed that no Roman Catholic could enter a village *m[w]aneaba* or take part in any customary ceremony on pain of excommunication. ...Old men's Councils lost their effectiveness, kin groups were split up and scattered all over the atoll, *m[w]aneaba* ceased to function as Roman Catholics no longer participated in meetings or ceremonies and the *m[w]aneaba* could only function if all the *inaki* were represented, villagers became split between Roman Catholics and Protestants and ceased to operate as units, the authority of heads of *mwenga* and *utu* was superseded by the authority of village policeman and Tabiteuea was in danger of losing all effective kin and village social controls from the past (Geddes, 1983: 39-40). ([] added by Kazama)

It is certain that the *mwaneaba* system ceased to function under the supervision of the mission in those days, although the above description by Geddes seems to be somewhat exaggerated. But there is no strict European Father in Tabiteuea today. The present mission tolerates the 'traditions' of Kiribati, such as village *mwaneaba* meetings or Kiribati dance (which was once prohibited). People can enter and hold meetings freely in a village *mwaneaba*, when the occasion arises.

In 1967, new Island Council Regulations came into force in Tabiteuea. The purpose of the new organization was to enable the island councils to progressively take over responsibility for their own affairs with the central government relinquishing its right to dictate in island concerns. The island councils were given the right to control and direct the activities of government departments in the islands. New councillors or *kauntira*, instead of the former *kaubure*, were elected from each village (Geddes, 1983: 181).

The present island council has succeeded to the new organization and institution of *kauntira*. It can be said that increasing autonomy in the outer islands allows people to separate themselves from the central government. Elders' councils have also been revived and regained their effectiveness in the villages. People, under the elders' authority, can regulate the island council and autonomously make decisions concerning island affairs at present.

Here I have to point out that some scholars who undertook fieldwork in the 1970s still adhered to 'traditional' *mwaneaba*, myths, *kaainga*, and *boti* even in recent years (e.g. Hockings, 1989; Latouche, 1984). They completely neglected the historical process as well as the contemporary socio-cultural situation of the late twentieth century. Their attitudes were just like those of the pioneer ethnographers in the early to mid-twentieth century, neglecting the historical fact that the 'traditional' *mwaneaba-kaainga* system has collapsed; they are truly "salvage" anthropologists.

Precedent Studies of Present Meeting House

It is notable that the precedent studies about *mwaneaba* apparently tended to exclude 'non-traditional things' in their descriptions. Only Lundsgaarde examined contemporary *mwaneaba* comparatively in detail. He referred to *mwaneaba* of the Christian church and

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of the island council in addition to the village *mwaneaba*, and estimated that there were more than three hundred *mwaneaba* buildings in all of the islands in the 1970's (Lundsgaarde, 1978: 69).

However, his study concentrated only on the legal aspect of the *mwaneaba*'s function. He emphasized that the village *mwaneaba* was a political centre maintaining local influence in each village just as it used to, although jurisdiction and some other rights were transferred to modern courts and institutions from the past *mwaneaba*. He also insisted that the British administration adopted the *mwaneaba* system in order to govern the people, and that the *mwaneaba* was connected to the organization of the British government during the colonial period. His premise was that, although knowledge about the genealogy of the *boti* and its mythical derivation was lost, most of the functions of the 'traditional' *mwaneaba* were maintained through the colonial period (Lundsgaarde, 1970: 247-249, 254-256).

I recognize the worth of his study but disagree with it for several reasons:

- 1) He deals with the modern village *mwaneaba* which maintains 'traditional' functions and, at the same time, is incorporated into modern administrative organization. However, he does not describe concretely how the *boti* is constituted and how it functions.
- 2) I do not accept his simple premise that *mwaneaba* 'tradition' continues from the past to the present. *Boti* is certainly recognized by most of the people who belong to the village *mwaneaba*. Nevertheless, how much knowledge the villagers retain is different from one villages or islands to another. Though he assumes that a village is 'traditional,' he neglects the fact that present village or *kawa* is also the smallest administrative unit of modern government. If continuity of some functions is admitted, we must evaluate village *mwaneaba* in the modern context.
- 3) Lundsgaarde recognizes himself that he emphasizes legal aspects too much and discards other phenomena surrounding the *mwaneaba*. His explanation draws heavily on European legislation, and he does not pay any attention to the local values or logic (e.g. Lundsgaarde, 1968). Consequently, it seems that similarity to European law is over-emphasized.

We are able to observe that the *mwaneaba* system has a function in recent times. Even if it vanished once, it revived afterwards in some islands. In the case of Tamana Island, the *mwaneaba* building vanished for several decades after 1881. However, according to a local informant, it was rebuilt by the colonial government in the early twentieth century. Then the village *mwaneaba* building was built in 1941 (Lawrence, 1983). The *mwaneaba* system is flourishing on every island today. That is the reason why I-Kiribati officers and statesmen repeatedly emphasize *mwaneaba* as 'the centre of social life in Kiribati.'

Unfortunately, the present *mwaneaba* system has scarcely been described in anthropological works although it is essential for understanding present-day Kiribati society.

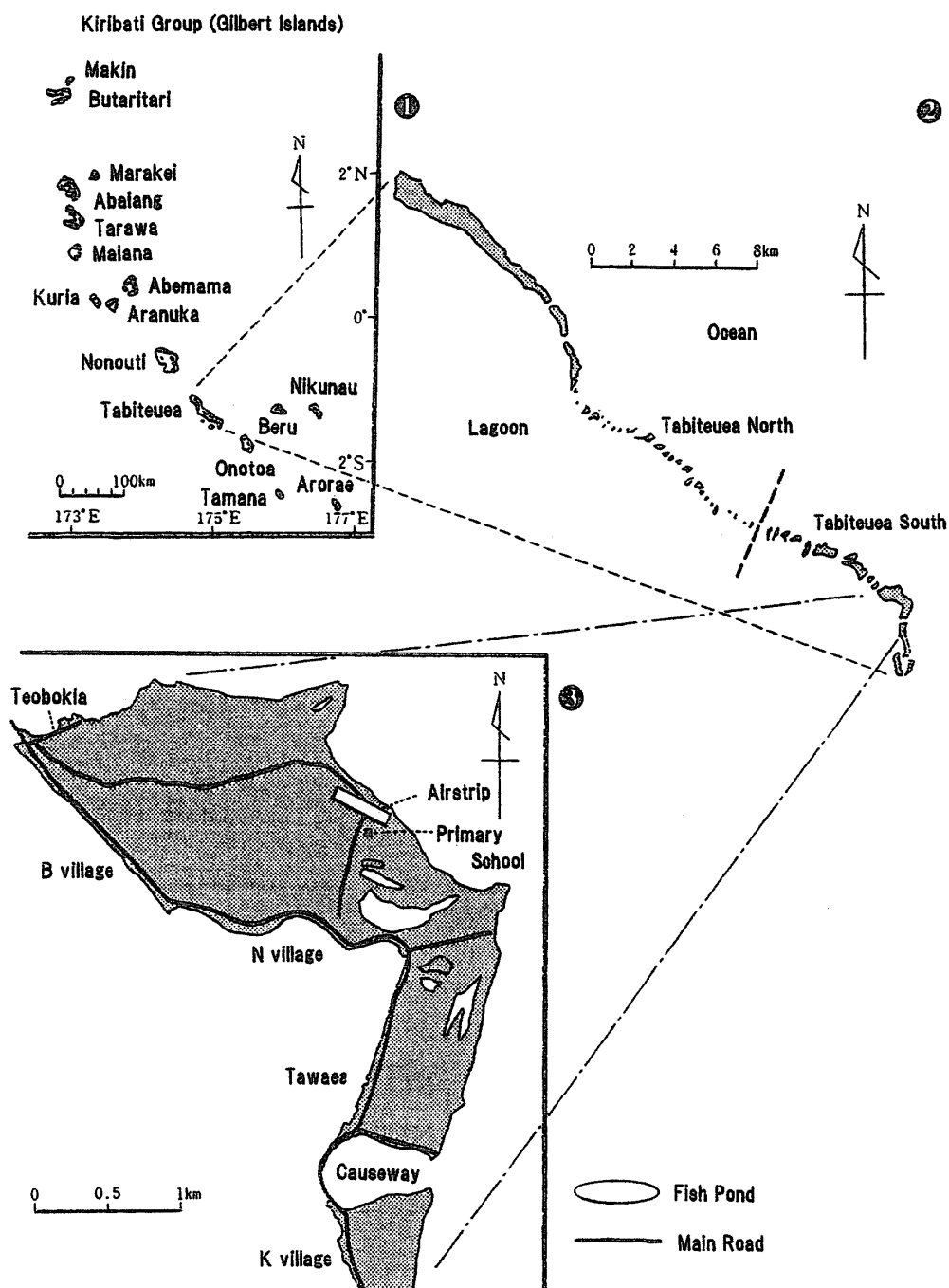


Figure 2. Kiribati Group (Gilbert Islands), Tabiteuea Atoll and Tabiteuea South. (1) Kiribati Group (Gilbert Islands) (Van Trease, 1993: 4); (2) Tabiteuea Atoll (Land Survey Division, Government of Kiribati, 1980); (3) Tabiteuea South (Land Survey Division, Government of Kiribati, 1980).

Meeting House in Tabiteuea South Today

Tabiteuea South

Tabiteuea, the largest atoll in the Kiribati group (Gilbert Islands), is situated in the southern part of the islands (Fig. 2). The atoll is divided into two administrative districts, Tabiteuea North and South. I carried out my field research in N village in Tabiteuea South from 1994 to 1995. The population of the district was approximately 1,400, and that of N Village was 180 in 1995 when the census was taken. The people, who live in six villages in the district, make copra to earn cash and engage in temporary wage work such as construction of public buildings, loading copra, and unloading cargo.

Subsistence activity is not profitable except for fishing. The people cannot live without cash and imported goods. Though the villagers cultivate giant swamp taros called *bwabwai* (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis*) and plant pandanus trees (*Pandanus tectorius*) and breadfruit trees (*Artocarpus mariannensis*), they rely on imported rice and flour as daily staple foods. When a cargo ship does not arrive for more than one month, the lack of necessities including staple food seriously affects them. In that case, they endure the shortage of food by eating coconut meat (*ben*) until the next ship comes.

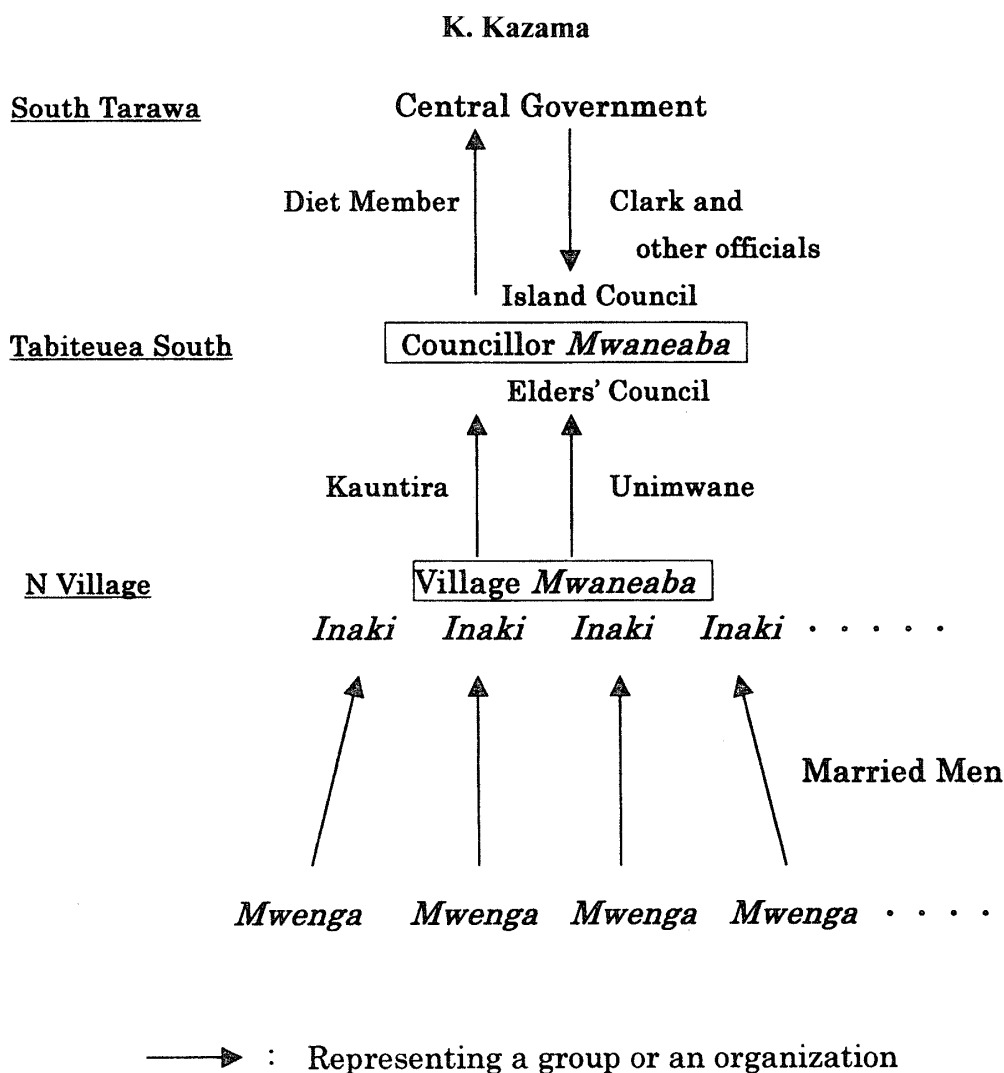
N village is located in the central part of the district. There are three *mwaneaba* in N village. The village *mwaneaba* (*mwaneaba n te kawa*), named Barekiaatau, thatched with pandanus leaves, stands in front of the lagoon beach. From about fifty meters north along the main road from it, one can see the church *mwaneaba* (*mwaneaba n te aro*) constructed next to the Catholic chapel.⁷⁾ The third one, the smallest of the three, is the school *mwaneaba* (*mwaneaba n te reirei*) attached to the primary school. It stands at the edge of the village by the airstrip. The villagers often gather in one of the *mwaneaba* for discussion, feasting, or other purposes. These *mwaneaba* are quite essential to the villagers' daily life.

Administrative and Religious Organizations with 'New' Meeting House

People on the island regard the village *mwaneaba* as a 'traditional' *mwaneaba* inherited from their ancestors or *bakatibu*. In addition, there are three kinds of relatively 'new' *mwaneaba*: the councillor *mwaneaba*, the church *mwaneaba*, and the school *mwaneaba* in Tabiteuea South. It seems that the emergence of various *mwaneaba*, which I would call 'diversification of *mwaneaba*,' is a particular response of the island society to the historical process. These three *mwaneaba*, constructed during the colonial period, have no *inaki*, in which they differ from the village *mwaneaba*. When attendants, who are married men including elderly men or *unimwane*, gather from several villages to meet in one *mwaneaba*, seating divisions are allocated them by village instead of *inaki*.

The Councillor *Mwaneaba*

The largest *mwaneaba* building in the island, called *mwaneaba n te kauntira* (the councillor *mwaneaba*, Fig. 3), stands in Teobokia, which is the administrative and economic centre of Tabiteuea South. The public buildings, such as the island council office, the guest house, the copra board, the health centre, and the lodging houses for the public servants, stand beside the *mwaneaba*. The clerk or *kiraka* and other officials who are appoint-

Figure 3. Model of Political Structure Concerning Present *Mwaneaba*.

ed by the central government in South Tarawa work there.

The word *kauntira* means 'councillors,' who are village representatives elected from each village. One of them is appointed as chief councillor. This position is passed from one village councillor to another at the beginning of the term of office. Generally, *kauntira* in their forties are junior to elderly men. The *kauntira* often discuss with the officials the affairs of the whole island. Each *kauntira* delivers and explains this information to his villagers in the village *mwaneaba*.

Large meetings are held in the councillor *mwaneaba* building for the purpose of feasts or *botaki*, such as the feast of the anniversary of national independence, welcome and farewell parties for government visitors, and so on. Meetings of the whole island, or *maunga-tabu*, are sometimes held to discuss important island affairs and local policies issued by the central government. In these cases, elders and middle-aged married men or *rorobuaka*⁸⁾ of all villages attend in addition to the *kauntira* and the island council officials and, if possi-

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ble, the member of the Diet (*tia tei*) elected from Tabiteuea South. The Diet member takes the responsibility of transmitting the significant results of the discussions, such as opposition to local policies or requests (*bubuti*) from the island to the central government.

Apart from the government organization, elders and middle-aged men from the whole island organize the elders' council named Te Uea ni Kai (literally 'The Chief of People'). This elders' council can autonomously use the councillor *mwaneaba* building as the occasion arises. Even for Diet member or the *kiraka* (clerk), it is hard to get the elders' council to consent to settlement of matters concerning their interest, such as the distribution of temporary wage labour to each village, at meetings in the councillor *mwaneaba* building. The elders' council members have the power in the meetings because they regard Tabiteuea South as their own island. From the islanders' view, the national officials are only temporary visitors (*iruwa*) from other islands. When I talked with one young clerk, a Butaritari man, he complained in a suppressed voice that the elders' council had a strong influence on the island and often neglected his opinion in the meeting, even though the council had no official authority at all.

Kauntira do not have leadership because they are younger than the elders. The administrative position of *kauntira* is between that of elders and officials. They sit in back of the elders and only sometimes give their opinions in the meetings. Though this *mwaneaba* building is called the councillor *mwaneaba*, it is dominated and led by the elders' council at the meetings held there.

School Mwaneaba

Christian churches had been given the function of primary education until a public primary school was established in outer islands of Kiribati in the 1950s. Villagers told me that the largest public primary school building in the island was built beside the airstrip in the early 1990s. When the public primary education was introduced to the island, the buildings of the school *mwaneaba* (*mwaneaba n te reirei*) were constructed, and its system was incorporated into the school organization at the same time.

Teachers and members of the school committee (*komete n te reirei*) often discuss the affairs of school management in the *mwaneaba* building. The school *komete* are the representatives of the villagers who participate in school management. They are appointed from among the middle-aged men or elderly men in the village *mwaneaba* meeting. It might be said that the position of school *komete* in the school *mwaneaba* is similar to that of *kauntia* in the councillor *mwaneaba*. They are the ones who convey the information about school affairs to the village *mwaneaba* meeting.

Botaki feasts are held in the school *mwaneaba* building to celebrate such occasions as the end of the school year or to welcome or say farewell to the teachers appointed by the central government. When such *botaki* feasts are held in the school *mwaneaba* building, villagers and school *komete* rather than teachers lead it. Village women prepare food for *botaki* feasts. The villagers respect teachers for their knowledge and status. But, at the same time, teachers are regarded as guests in the *botaki* feasts. The school *mwaneaba* is housed together with the public primary school; however, the villagers, mainly elders, lead the meetings in the building.

Church *Mwaneaba*

As far as I know, church *mwaneaba* buildings (*mwaneaba n te aro*) are built together with the chapels of the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) and the Roman Catholic in Kiribati. Generally, the church *mwaneaba* building is built just beside a chapel, or facing one across a street. There is only one church *mwaneaba* building in N village as all the villagers are Roman Catholic, and neither Kiribati Protestant Church nor other religious denominations exist. In villages where KPC and Catholic denominations coexist, each denomination has its own church *mwaneaba* building. In such villages, there are two church *mwaneaba* buildings in addition to a village *mwaneaba* building. In addition, several subgroups or *makoro* (literally 'branch') of church members might build their own small *mwaneaba* building in the case of large villages. It seems to be the case that when a subgroup is formed, its members build their own *mwaneaba* building.

A Roman Catholic catechist or KPC pastor, conducts a service every Sunday and discusses religious affairs with elders and middle-aged men in each church *mwaneaba* building. In N village, members of the committee of the Catholic church, called *komete n te aro*, are appointed from among the young married men in their twenties and thirties. They deal with miscellaneous affairs of the church.

Beyond the village boundaries, there are various religious organizations of both denominations in Tabiteuea South, such as women's church clubs, youth clubs, and so on. They organize various *botaki* feasts for fund raising, bingo games for collecting money, welcome parties for religious guests such as the Father (*Tama*), and so on. The devotees of each denomination gather from the whole island and stay for two or three weeks in each church *mwaneaba* building in B village, where the first mission landed in Tabiteuea South, on the occasion of Christmas, Easter, or other significant religious events. It is possible to say that the church *mwaneaba* is a symbol of the Christian life of the people in Tabiteuea.

Process of Decision Making and Integration of Villagers

Several kinds of meetings, such as discussions or *bowi*, feast or *botaki*, and public hearings or *kaongora*, are held in *mwaneaba* buildings. The villagers argue in the *bowi* meetings not only about penalties for violations of rules but also about allotment of communal works, plans for *botaki* feasts, or other aspects of social life in the village. The *botaki* feasts are held for various purposes in all *mwaneaba* buildings: to observe life rituals of villagers, hold welcome and farewell parties for guests, celebrate public or religious events, and so on. The host group of the *botaki*, such as a village, church organization, or household, prepares food dishes for the gathering. In the case of a large *botaki*, dancing and singing are also performed, and gifts, usually twist tobacco and cash, are given by guests who have regular incomes, such as teachers, to the host group. The *kaongora* are held so that government policies and other public matters can be explained by member of the Diet, officials, or the village councillor in the village *mwaneaba* building.

No individuals, even the eldest men, have a voice in the meetings. A chairperson called *tia babaire*, M. C. (master of ceremonies), or *bira* (literally 'whistle') simply adjusts different opinions when large meetings with visitors from other villages are held. On the other hand, at small meetings of villagers, such role assignment is not apparent. Elderly men lead the small meetings, and attendees voice their own opinions when they want to.

Elders and middle-aged men in their forties mainly state their opinions. But on some matters elders seldom express their views, and men in their forties or even thirties actively take part in the argument instead. The opinion of an elder is not necessarily accepted by the attendees, and is sometimes objected to by the middle-aged men.

They frequently refer to the words *boraoi* or equality and to its opposite *bobuaka* in the discussions. *Boraoi* is always used to mean 'equal,' 'even,' or 'fair,' while *bobuaka* means 'unequal,' 'uneven,' or 'unfair.' But the implications of these words are various. The set of *boraoi* / *bobuaka* implies smooth/rough for surfaces, cheap/expensive for commodity prices, and peaceful/hostile for social or political situations.

Controversial points of discussion in a meeting include about assignment of communal work and distribution of wages among people, someone's absence from communal work, unfair profits of some individuals, or decisions about spending community funds. Their arguments usually come down to whether the situations are *boraoi* or *bobuaka*. It is ideal when the situation is thought to be *boraoi*. Attendees at a meeting will consent only to a *boraoi* decision. *Boraoi*, which represents the local idea of equality, is reproduced repeatedly at *botaki* feasts. For example, the exchange of dancing, singing, speech, or gifts creates a peaceful and fair relationship between hosts and guests. Tobacco handed by visitors must be equally distributed to all attendees at a feast.

Decisions are never made by a majority in any meeting. Discussion continues until all the attendees reach *boraoi* agreement. When a chairperson or elders adjust the various opinions and the attendees agree on the decision, all villagers are informed that 'the elders decided' (*E taku unimwane*). People must obey this decision, at least publicly; however, it sometimes offends some members of the group. When violations of the decision become problematic, the villagers discuss the matter again, and offenders are occasionally given punishment, or *tua*. If all attendees agree on the decision, the idea of equality at a collective level comes to be invoked within the whole social group under the authority of the elders.

There are some rules decided by the villagers concerning *mwaneaba* in Tabiteuea South, as follows:

- 1) One must slow down when passing in front of any *mwaneaba* building by motorcar or bicycle while a *botaki* feast or other meeting is being held there. It is proper to slow down in this way especially when one passes some other group's *mwaneaba* buildings. I often witnessed neighbouring villagers alighting from their bicycles and pushing them when they passed by the N village *mwaneaba* building.
- 2) The rule that owners of dogs must make sure their animals do not enter the village *mwaneaba* building was prescribed by N villagers during my stay. For violating the rule, an owner must pay two Australian dollars as penalty. Though I did not hear of any actual case of such a fine, I saw villagers shout loudly or throw stones at their own dogs to drive them away from entering the *mwaneaba* building. The owners' funny upset looks caused people to laugh.
- 3) Quarrels or anger, or *unun*, is generally prohibited within any *mwaneaba* building, although this sometimes caused hot arguments.

Villagers regard quarrels and intrusions of animals as impolite or *matauninga* for *mwaneaba*.

I would call the process of compulsion process by the social group 'the collective mechanism.' This integrates people into the social group and forces them to obey the meeting decisions made by the authority of elders and *mwaneaba*. Needless to say, all individuals do not always obey the collective mechanism. But it is certain that it strongly influences the social life in the village. The collective mechanism is quite significant, so the idea of equality can operate within the whole social group. It is possible to regard meetings at *mwaneaba* buildings as an arena to realize the idea of equality and to operate the collective mechanism in any social group.

After the collapse of the *kaainga*, the residential unit became the smaller household or *mwenga*, which was almost equivalent to a nuclear or stem family in size. Geddes concluded that individualism has emerged in Tabiteuean society since the collapse of the *kaainga*. "The net result is that individual households act more and more frequently on their own and the number of co-operative activities requiring the involvement of other households is small" (Geddes, 1977: 391). On the contrary, I would emphasize the integration of the village community operated by a collective mechanism rather than the emergence of 'social individualization.' The present society is certainly not the same as it used to be. However, accompanying the reconstruction of society through drastic changes during the colonial period, the *mwaneaba* system has been reinvented as a focus of village social life.

The Village Meeting House

The character of the village *mwaneaba* (*mwaneaba n te kawa*) can be understood in comparison with the use of the church *mwaneaba* in the village. People basically choose either the village or the church *mwaneaba* building depending on the purpose. The village *mwaneaba* building is used for various public occasions, such as discussion of village affairs, election of the President and the Diet member and *kauntira*, welcome parties for officials or other visitors, question-and-answer sessions about the policy of the island council office, physical examinations by the medical doctor from Tarawa, and so on. However, the N village *mwaneaba* building is sometimes used for religious purposes as a substitute for the church *mwaneaba* building because all the villagers are Roman Catholic. In some cases the church *mwaneaba* building cannot be used for meetings because of rain water leakage through the rotten thatch or the uneven dirty floor underneath the coconut mats being ruined by pigs. But this is a special case. Catholic and KPC groups coexist in most of the villages in Kiribati. In such villages, people seriously separate them and use these *mwaneaba* buildings depending on the purposes of meetings. The use of the village *mwaneaba* building is limited to non-religious purposes.⁹⁾

Number of Seats in the Village Meeting House

Past ethnographies have reported that *mwaneaba* buildings were classified into various types by different plans (Maude, 1980[1961]: 10-12; Hockings, 1989: 203-207). However, the elders in N village had no idea of the various plans in detail. According to them, the village *mwaneaba* buildings were classified into only two types in Tabiteuea atoll. One was Taboiaki type, and the other was Tabiang type. The elders explained to me that these types differed in the arrangement of *inaki* seats. The first *inaki*, as I will describe

later, in the Taboiaki type *mwaneaba*, was located in the centre of the north side of the edifice. The Tabiang type's first *inaki* was in the centre of the south side. The villagers unanimously agreed that the *mwaneaba* building of N village was certainly the Taboiaki type.¹⁰⁾

Grimble, Maude, and Latouche identified about ten to twenty *boti* seating divisions with clear boundary lines (Grimble, 1989; Maude, 1977[1963]; Latouche, 1984). In the cases described by them, the ranges of *boti* seating divisions were fixed by the placement of pillars or pandanus thatches as identification of *boti* boundary lines. When I conducted research on Nikunau Island, I could find the names and divisions of *boti* similar to Latouche's figure. But in Tabiteuea South, the situation was quite different from that of Nikunau.

On my first visit to N village, in August 1994, I asked the elders whether there were some *inaki* in the village *mwaneaba* or not. They answered unanimously there were *inaki* in their *mwaneaba* called Barekiaatau. However, they did not clearly answer to my question concerning the number of *inaki*. They only told me there were a lot (*A bati te inaki iai kanouan te mwaneaba*). It is certain that the villagers recognized their seating allocations, so that they sat down at the same spots in the building every time meetings were held.

When I visited each of 31 households from October 1994 to January 1995, I asked the *inaki* name of each married man (or woman in some cases). Seventeen persons could tell me seven *inaki* names; the rest did not know their own *inaki* names. After thinking for several hours, one elderly man finally remembered the names of two *inaki* which had been those of long-term absentees from the village.

Asking villagers repeatedly about their *inaki* during my stay in Tabiteuea, I consequently collected twelve names of *inaki* in the village. Many young married men did not know their *inaki* names. And even elderly persons did not always know theirs. Table 1 indicates the households and their respective *inaki*. Residential land names of present villagers are additionally shown in Table 1. It is found that there is no correlation between present residential land and *inaki*.

The seats where the married men of each household sit in the village *mwaneaba* building are illustrated in Figure 4. Fourteen *inaki*, including four whose names are unknown, are occupied by resident villagers, and two *inaki* are empty (Table 2). It may be noted that nine persons out of twenty-three were found to be in the same *inaki*, Te Katanrake.

Five Special Seats

Here I depict in detail the present village *mwaneaba* system and especially its *inaki*, adopting the case of N village; however, only five *inaki* were operated with specific functions in the village *mwaneaba*, as follows:

- 1) Etannimone (or Karongoa)¹¹⁾; the first *inaki*, or *moa ni bwai*, of the village *mwaneaba*. The representative of this *inaki* presented foods first when *botaki* feasts were held. TK, who was in his middle forties, and his son BB, in his twenties, sat in the front row of the *inaki*.
- 2) Te Bureniui (or Te Wiwi); the second *inaki*, or *uoua ni bwai*. TT, in his twenties, sat there.

Table 1. Households and their Respective *Inaki*, and Residential Lots (1994-95)

No.	Householder	Name of <i>Inaki</i>	Name of Residential Lot
1)	TK	Etanimone (Karongoa)	Maeon te Mwaneaba
2)	OK	?	Maeon te Mwaneaba
3)	AT	Te Bue	Maeon te Mwaneaba
4)	TA	Te Katanrake	Auriaria
5)	NK	Te Katanrake	Maeon te Mwaneaba
6)	TI	?	Maeon te Mwaneaba
7)	BU	Te Bakoa	Auriaria
8)	KR	?	Auriaria
9)	TG	?	Auriaria
10a)	TE	Karongoa Raereke	Auriaria
10b)	IO	Buriburi te Rara	Auriaria
11)	BK	Te Katanrake	Tenkieura
12)	WG	Birimo	Auriaria
13)	NE	?	Te Maunga
14)	GA	?	Te Maunga
15)	RI	Te Bue	Te Maunga
16)	KM	Te Katanrake	Te Maunga
17)	UE	Te Mauri	Te Neiba
18)	BR	Te Katanrake	Te Neiba
19)	AK*	?	Te Neiba
20)	AU	?	Tabon te Ba
21)	AO	Tawaea	Tabon te Ba
22)	TT	Te Bureniui(Te Wiwi)	Tabon te Ba
23)	KI	Te Bakoa	Tabon te Ba
24)	TB	Te Mauri	Tabon te Ba
25)	BA	?	Te Bananginang
26)	ON	Te Katanrake	Te Bananginang
27)	TR**	(Te Katanrake)	Te Bono
28)	TO	Tawaea	Te Bono
29)	UT	Te Katanrake	Te Bono
30)	GU	?	(Tawaea)
31)	RU	Te Katanrake	Tabon te Ba

?: Names unknown or uncertain.

*: A widow.

**: A man from Marakei Island.

- 3) Buriburi te Rara; The third *inaki*, or *tenua ni bwai*. This was called KR's *inaki*.¹²⁾ The elderly woman KR was in her seventies. Her son, TE, had already succeeded to his father's (i.e., KR's husband's) *inaki*, Karongoa Raereke. TE's son IO, in his twenties, sat in the front row of Buriburi te Rara. Karongoa Raereke was different from the first *inaki*, Karongoa, although the names were similar.

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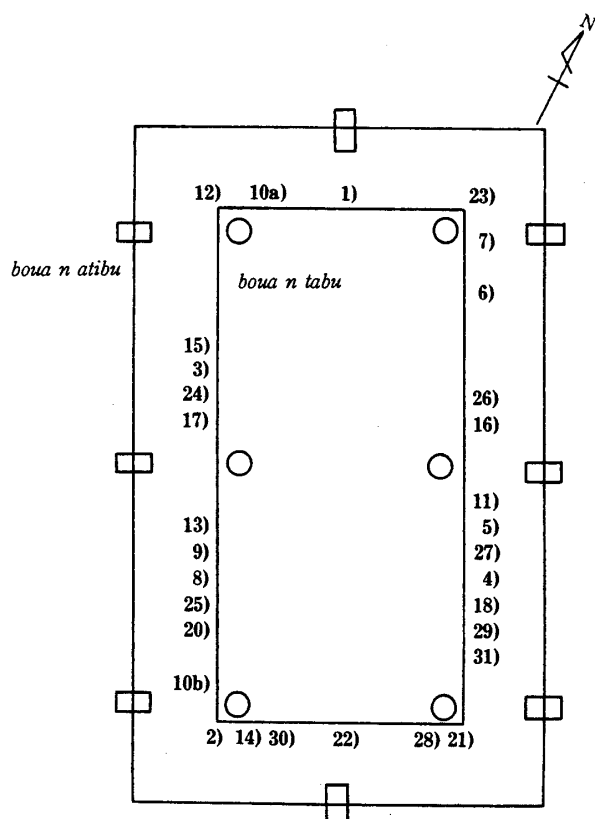


Figure 4. Sitting Position in the N Village *Mwaneaba*. Numbers show households in the N village. (See Table 1)

- 4) Te Bue; this *inaki* was called “workers of *mwaneaba*” or *tani mwakuri*. It was also called “feet (*wae*) of *mwaneaba*.” It was thought that the members of this *inaki* should work when *botaki* feasts were held, and they recruited village men to work on construction and repair of roof thatches of the edifice. A married man AT, in his early fifties, and his brother RI, in his forties, sat in the front row.
- 5) Te Katanrake; this *inaki* was also called “workers of *mwaneaba*,” similar to Te Bue. Nine married men sat in the front row in the village *mwaneaba* building.

There was no elderly man among the members of *inaki* 1) to 4) when my research was going on. Past ethnographers reported that the elderly representative of the first *inaki* usually spoke the first words at the beginning of the village meetings. But in the case of N village, an elderly man sitting in another *inaki*, such as Te Katanrake, Te Mauri, or Tawaea, spoke first and led *botaki* feasts and other meetings held in the *mwaneaba*. According to TK of the first *inaki*, the reason was that he was not old enough to play the first speaker’s role, so he left it to the elders of other *inaki*.

The second and third *inaki* representatives were the married youths who were in their twenties. TW, in his forties, sometimes sat on the second *inaki*, however, he was not con-

Table 2. Names of *Inaki* and Number of their Respective Households (1994-95)

Names of <i>Inaki</i>	Household No.*	Number of Households
Etanimone(Karongoa)	1)	1
Buriburi te Rara	22)	1
Te Bureniui(Te Wiwi)	10b)	1
Te Bue	3) 5)	2
Te Katanrake	4) 5) 11) 16) 18) 26) 27) 29) 31)	9
Karongoa Raereke	10a)	1
Te Mauri	17) 24)	2
Te Bakoa	6) 7) 23)	3
Tawaea	21) 28)	2
Birimo	12)	1
Bare te Ngaina	Absentee	0
Te Maikuike	Absentee	0
?	9) 13)	2
?	8)	1
?	20) 25)	2
?	2) 14) 30)	3
		Total 31

*: See Table 1.

sidered the representative of it because of his unmarried status. Sometimes in daily conversation this *inaki* was called TW's *inaki*, but in fact, not TW but the married youth TT usually sat on the *inaki* seat as the representative at most of the meetings.

The third *inaki* was named after the elderly woman KR. Only one of her sons lived in N village. But he has already succeeded to his father's *inaki*. Consequently, KR's grandson had come to sit on the third *inaki* after his marriage. But it did not seem attractive to him, because of the third *inaki*'s heavy load that fell on his shoulders.

According to Grimble (1989), each *boti* had a specific function. In the situation where all *boti* members cooperated and performed their obligations, the *mwaneaba* meetings and the community were administered. In contrast, I found that only five *inaki* had specific functions in the present *mwaneaba* of N village. Although not all *inaki* had specific functions, the *mwaneaba* system could apparently be maintained. However, the example of the succession of the third *inaki* showed that a situation in which the special *inaki* was unoccupied was carefully avoided in the village.

Activities of Special Seat Members

I will give examples of special Seat functions below.

Repairing Roof Thatches on 8 September 1994

The villagers filled up the gap around the ridge log of the roof in order to stop rain water from leaking through the rotten thatches. Four young men of Te Katanrake, and one

married man who came from Marakei Island, worked on the roof under the direction of the *rorobuaka* or middle-aged married men of Te Katanrake and Te Bue. The reason the man from Marekei worked with Te Katanrake members was that his deceased father-in-law (i.e., his wife's father) was a member of Te Katanrake.

According to one *rorobuaka* of Te Bue, repairing *mwaneaba* building was an obligation to Te Katanrake and Te Bue, and only two *inaki* members were permitted to climb the roof of the village *mwaneaba* building. They added some pandanus thatches and fixed a long coconut mat on the ridge log to fill the gap.

After their work ended, around 1:30 p.m., a small *botaki* feast was held in the *mwaneaba* building. The representative of the first *inaki* provided the workers with *manam ni burawa* (dumplings of flour and scraped coconut meat with sugar) and sweet tea, and the representative of the second *inaki* also provided them with *manam ni bwabwai* (dumplings of swamp taro) and sweet tea. The attendees of the other *inaki* brought their own meals.

Providing New Coconut Leaf Mats on 24 November 1995

The coconut leaf mats (*inai*) laid in the village *mwaneaba* had to be replaced before holding a large *botaki* to collect funds for construction of the new church *mwaneaba* building. The rolled mats woven by women were brought from every household and were put beside the *mwaneaba* building on that day. They were not supposed to be brought into the *mwaneaba* building until the mats of the special three *inaki* were brought and laid on the floor.

Two *rorobuaka* of Te Katanrake visited the first *inaki* TK's household at 11:30 a.m. and were treated to a meal. After that they brought a new mat to the *mwaneaba* building and laid it there. One *rorobuaka* man of Te Bue and three of Te Katanrake went to the second *inaki* TT's house. After having a meal, they returned to the *mwaneaba* building with a new mat around 1:00 p.m. In a similar manner, two Te Katanrake men went to the third *inaki* successor IO's house and got back to *mwaneaba* building in the evening. After they laid down the three mats, the rest were finally laid on the floor by the young men of Te Katanrake.

Receiving Food and Gifts at the Feasts on 5 August 1994

A welcoming *botaki* for me, the anthropologist, was held in the village *mwaneaba* building. At the beginning, one *rorobuaka* of Te Katanrake walked around the floor and collected prepared dishes from each married couple (*buki ni bwai*) of the village. First he received a dish from the first *inaki*, TK's married son, who sat at the centre of the north side of the *mwaneaba* building, because his father was absent. The Te Katanrake man turned to the centre of the south side and received a dish from the second *inaki*. When receiving dishes, the worker announced loudly the names of the donors and put the dishes on the centre floor of the building side by side along the north-south axis.

The third *inaki* was vacant at that time because the successor to it served as a catechist of the Catholic Church in the village. The worker walked around clockwise in the building, from the next seat to the second *inaki*, and received dishes in order.

Blowing the Conch Horn

Before a discussion meeting (*bowi*) or public hearing (*kaongora*) and cooperative work, a conch horn (*bu*) was blown in front of the *mwaneaba* to notice the villagers to gather. Only the men of Te Katanrake and Te Bue were allowed to play this role.

Kiribati Dance

Some kinds of Kiribati dance were occasionally performed at *botaki* feasts. Male dancers wore waistcloths made of pandanus leaves (*be*), with black belts made of women's hair. For two types of dance called *ruoia* and *kamei*, the first to third *inaki* men stood at the centre of the north side of the building. While dancing, the men were arranged in a U shape with the first *inaki* representative standing at the centre of the line and the second and third *inaki* men on both sides.

We can find that only five *inaki* have simple functions in the present village *mwaneaba*. This is quite different from the description of past ethnographies, which insisted that every *boti* (or *inaki*) had particular rights and obligations concerning the *mwaneaba*. It is possible to say that functions of *inaki* are maintained in quite simple forms in the present village life.

Inconsistency among Village Informants

In this section, I will refer to the ordinary *inaki* which have no particular function, in addition to the *inaki* described above. However, villagers' understandings about *inaki* were often inconsistent.

Present Seat and Old Ancestral Land Name

(1) While I was talking with one of the eldest men about *inaki*, he asserted that the names which I had collected in interviews and supposed to be the *inaki*'s proper names were not *inaki*'s but *kaainga*'s. I understood his insistence, as the informants sometimes confused land names of old *kaainga* with those of *inaki*.¹³⁾

It was true that there really existed some land names in the village corresponding to the supposed *inaki* names, for instance Etanimone, Te Bue, and Tawaea. Compared with names of *boti* reported by Grimble and Maude, only four common *inaki* names—Te Bakoa, Birimo, Karongoa Raereke, and Te Katanrake—were found in the village.

(2) TW, an unmarried man in his forties, insisted that the name of the *inaki* of his married brother TT was Te Wiwi, and that its *kaainga* name was Te Bureniui, although TT regarded Te Bureniui as his *inaki* name. This view overlapped with the eldest man's assertion quoted above. Furthermore, TW told me his late father and the eldest man's *inaki* name was Te Bakoa and also that its *kaainga* name was Te Neiba, even though the eldest man did not know his *inaki* name. It was certain that there was a piece of land called Te Neiba in the village.

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Table 3. Relation of Household to *Inaki* and Old *Kaainga* Land Ownership (1994-95)

Household No. *	Names of <i>Inaki</i>	Assumed Old <i>Kaainga</i> Land	Ownership of Land
1)	Etanimone(Karongoa)	Etanimone	no
3)	Te Bue	Te Bue	yes
4)	Te Katanrake	Te Katanrake	?
5)	Te Katanrake	Te Katanrake	yes
7)	Te Bakoa	Te Neiba	no
11)	Te Katanrake	Te Katanrake	no
12)	Birimo	Birimo	?
15)	Te Bue	Te Bue	yes
16)	Te Katanrake	Te Katanrake	no
18)	Te Katanrake	Te Katanrake	yes
21)	Tawaea	Tawaea	no
22)	Te Bureniui (Te Wiwi)	Te Bureniui	yes
23)	Te Bakoa	Te Neiba	yes
26)	Te Katanrake	Te Katanrake	no
28)	Tawaea	Tawaea	no
29)	Te Katanrake	Te Katanrake	?
31)	Te Katanrake	Te Katanrake	no

*: See Table 1.

yes: Case where a householder claims old *kaainga* land ownership.no: Case where a householder does not claim old *kaainga* land ownership.

?: Unknown.

Relationship between Present Seat and Old Ancestral Land

Boti (or *inaki*) was closely connected with *kaainga* land (Maude 1977[1963]: 30). That is, only those who had residential status and were able to claim inheritance to the *kaainga* land were permitted to sit on the respective *boti* in those days.

How did the present villagers recognize the relationship between them? I attempted to inquire of seventeen people whose *inaki* names were the same as land names such as Te Katanrake and Te Bue, or whose *inaki* clearly corresponded to the land names such as Te Neiba in the village. Such land names seemed to correspond to the old *kaainga* land names. Some informants asserted that they held the estates or were able to claim inheritance to the pieces of the old *kaainga* land, while the others did not (Table 3). For example, AT and RI held the estates in Te Bue land, BR and NK in Te Katanrake land. But BK and KM did not hold any estate and right in the same Te Katanrake land; nor did TK in Etanimone land.

The residential lots of present-day villagers shown in Table 1 have no correlation with the assumed old *kaainga* land names in Table 3. The reason is that the ancestors of the villagers were forced to move from their residential *kaainga* land to the strange residential lots beside the main road by the European administration at the turn of the twentieth century.

It could be suggested that the relationship between the old *kaainga* land and the *inaki* became weak and the villagers almost lost all knowledge about it. In other words, the present villagers need not hold estates nor have any inheritable rights in the old *kaainga* land

in order to exercise their privilege to sit on the corresponding *inaki* in the village *mwaneaba* building.

Confusion of Seat Names

(1) One of the eldest men had already retired (*mutirawa*) from village activities and only appeared in the *mwaneaba* meetings. According to him, his *inaki* was Karongoa Raereke, and he had no idea of the corresponding *kaainga* name. He also pointed out that the first *inaki* name in the village was not Etanimone, as TK insisted, but was actually Karongoa. I understood that Etanimone was the name of the old *kaainga* and Karongoa was that of the *inaki* (see above 'Present Seat and Old Ancestral Land Name'). Later, just before I left N village, TK changed his assertion and began to claim that his *inaki* was called Karongoa. It was likely that he heard the name Karongoa from the elder or other villagers indirectly.

(2) One middle-aged man did not know his *inaki* name at my first interview. Afterwards, he insisted that his *inaki* name was Te Mauri. But he sat at a seat which was clearly different from the *inaki* of Te Mauri in the village *mwaneaba*.

(3) When I inquired of one young married man in his twenties, he claimed that his *inaki* was maternal Te Katanrake, based on asking his mother. But actually, he sat at a different *inaki* in the *mwaneaba* building. On a later day, just like the middle-aged man above (2), he changed his assertion and insisted that his *inaki* name was Biribiri Te Rara.¹⁴⁾

I asked some villagers including elders to confirm whether the newly asserted *inaki* names of informants (2) and (3) were correct or not. Everyone clearly contradicted their assertions and insisted that (2) and (3) should sit together on a different *inaki* whose name was unknown.

Occupation of Two Seats

One elder sat at the one *inaki* where he did not usually sit. When many visitors came into the *mwaneaba* building, the villagers might be pushed out of their places and sit in unusual places. But that day, there was no visitor except me. I asked the elder the reason why he sat there. He told me, laughing, that this seat was also for his *inaki*. Some days later, he returned to the former *inaki*, Tawaea. It seemed that one person could occupy two *inaki* and move flexibly between them.

Boundaries of Seating Divisions

Inaki in the present N village were not fixed divisions of limited ranges, apparently differing from what past ethnographies showed. Nearly one-third of the married men in N village were members of Te Katanrake. When holding *botaki* feasts, nearly all married men sat in the front row of the *mwaneaba* building. Therefore, the Te Katanrake members occupied a quite wide range of places. On the other hand, there were some *inaki* with only one married man or even nobody.

The range of each *inaki* depends on the number of married men. That is, the present *inaki* seats are placed in seating plots, rather than in fixed divisions with clear boundaries as reported in past ethnographies. Occupied space of each *inaki* can be flexibly expanded

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or reduced depending on the situations. If sitting range is fixed, the number of members to sit in the crowded *inaki* must be reduced. But so far, Te Katanrake men need not move to other less-crowded *inaki* where they maintain potential sitting privilege.

As I showed above, the villagers did not always agree, and sometimes one person made various statements. I will summarize them as follows:

- 1) A number of villagers do not know their own *inaki* names, and they confuse the names of *inaki* with old *kaainga* land names. Therefore it seems that they are not careful about *inaki* names. The knowledge about the connection between *inaki* and old *kaainga*, and about mythical ancestors, has not been transmitted. Each person rather retains fragmentary knowledge concerning *mwaneaba* individually. They neither argue over the views to give their consent nor try to gain public approval for one consistent opinion about the *mwaneaba* building.
- 2) The number of *inaki* which the villagers recognize is sixteen, including those of absentees and unknown names. In the near future, it is likely that the number of *inaki* recognized by the villagers will be reduced, because it is uncertain whether emigrants to the Line Islands, where the government recommends that people colonize, and to the capital Tarawa or Tabiteuea North will return to the village or not. Inevitably, the *inaki* of absentees may be forgotten by degrees.
- 3) The *inaki* seat is mainly succeeded directly from one's father. Some villagers also told me that it was ambiguously succeeded from ancestors or *bakatibu*, though they could not explain the concrete succession in detail by tracing the genealogy.
- 4) A case was observed that one elder flexibly sat here and there between two *inaki*. Attendees at the meeting did not pay any attention to his conduct at all. This suggests that one can exercise the privilege of two *inaki*, retaining the potential privileges of both.
- 5) The fact that a number of married men can sit on Te Katanrake suggests that the occupied ranges of the *inaki* are not physically fixed. That is, the boundary lines between *inaki* are obscure and flexibly changeable depending on the situations. If the boundary lines were firmly fixed as described in the past ethnographies, the seat division of Te Katanrake would be full and several men would have to move out to maternal or other potential *inaki*.

The present situation around *inaki* in N village is quite different from what the past ethnographers described. The N villagers have only fragments of knowledge about *inaki* and their relation to old *kaainga*. Their statements hardly coincide with one another. Villagers also have no idea of oral tradition about the origin of *mwaneaba* or other myths. Other southern islands, except for Nikunau or Beru where Latouche and Maude conducted research, seem to be in a similar situation to Tabiteuea South.

Meaning of Seat Privilege

Seating Division as not a Social Group

Any *inaki* having more than two members, such as Te Katanrake, does not have a definite head or *atu* status, unlike the report of past studies (cf. Maude, 1977[1963]: 25; Lundsgaarde and Silverman, 1971: 105-106). The villagers have no idea of *atun te boti* or *inaki*. According to Maude, only the head of a *boti* was allowed to speak at a meeting. But in my observation, all married men are allowed to speak at a meeting if they want to or need to. The married men take part in meetings not as the representatives of *inaki*, but as representatives of small households or married couples.

According to the past ethnographies, the term *boti* meant not only the seat in the *mwaneaba* building, but also the kin group. It is likely that most scholars still recognized the *boti* as a social group or unit even after the Second World War. In the case of Nonouti Island, Lundsgaarde insisted that “*boti* members act as one political unit (through its representative) in all matters related to public welfare or community decision-making process” (Lundsgaarde, 1970: 254). It is certain that the villagers who have a close relationship to each other, such as that between parents and children or among siblings, tend to sit on the same *inaki*. But as far as I observed in the village, it is impossible to regard the *inaki* members as integrated into one political unit. The villagers who live in different households, even though they sit on the same *inaki*, do not closely concern themselves with one another’s affairs.

The *inaki* do not even form economic units. It rather can be said that the economic unit is the household and the political unit is the village. The same *inaki* members often live in separate households scattered in the village. The relatives sitting on the same *inaki* and living in different households do not always work together in daily life. It is rather observed that neighbours or close friends often cooperate in working with each other. There are an exceptional five *inaki* whose members only sometimes work together with relatives living in different households on such occasions as preparing for feasts and making mats or pandanus thatches for the *mwaneaba* building.

The discrepancy between Lundsgaarde’s interpretation and my observation may be explained by local differences between Nonouti and Tabiteuea (cf. Lundsgaarde 1970). If this supposition is true, it suggests that the independence of each household may be quite strong in Tabiteuea, as Geddes insisted. If Lundsgaarde had discussed the whole southern Kiribati islands and not just Tabiteuea, where he investigated, he would not have made the mistake of excessively substantializing the *boti* or *inaki* as a social entity.

Entitlement of Seat Privilege

I will describe how villagers are entitled to *inaki* nowadays. Most of the villagers, who were born and have lived in the village since their childhood, are not especially conscious of *inaki* privilege. Children do not hesitate to enter and play in the *mwaneaba* building. They can succeed to their fathers’ *inaki* without difficulties. Men sit behind their fathers until puberty. After marriage, they can sit beside their fathers. Women who are married to village men, regardless of their places of birth, can sit behind their husbands. When the inhabitants of other villages come to N village *mwaneaba*, they can sit beside their rela-

tives. In order to participate in the *mwaneaba* meetings, people need not know the name of their own *inaki*, the relation with the old *kaainga*, or their genealogy in depth.

Both men and women who have come from other islands and gotten married to villagers, even though on a temporary visit, can still sit at their spouses' or father-in-law's *inaki*. It is likely that they are regarded as quasi-members of the village. A man who came from Marakei Island and lived in his wife's household, of course, did not have his own *inaki* in the *mwaneaba* building. When *botaki* or other meetings were held, however, he had to attend and sit in the front row because he was the only married man of the household. His sitting place was the *inaki* of his late father-in-law, Te Katanrake. However, if there is a divorce, the stranger cannot continue to live in the village and must go back to his or her home island.

If a stranger who does not have a spouse or relatives comes to the village, he/she is regarded as a visitor or *iruwa* and must sit at the centre position of seat on the lagoon side. This person is permitted to sit within the *mwaneaba* building, but the seat assigned him/her is only a temporary one.

These observations suggest that admission to the village would allow the privilege of *inaki* in the village *mwaneaba*. It also may mean that one can claim the potential right of at least one piece of village land. The spouse of a villager from another island can also be allowed to reside as a quasi-member of the village. The *inaki* privilege simply means that married men of the households are admitted to meetings in the *mwaneaba* building. The privilege does not seem related to large kin groups but rather to residence in the village. *Inaki* privilege is recognized as village membership and entitles one to enter and sit in the *mwaneaba* building.

Shallow Consanguineal Relationships

Lundsgaarde argued about present *boti* entitlement as follows:

...*Boti* membership no longer had to be diligently contested by complicated genealogical proofs of descent ties to quasi mythological founders. It became sufficient to show kinship to an existing *boti* member. ...The general rule, which affiliates every individual with a particular *boti* division in his village *m[w]aneaba* and extends to seating privileges in island *m[w]aneaba*, is based on membership affiliation. ...In the first instance, the principle of affiliation is based on the recognition of 'shallow' consanguineal or direct affinal ties (Lundsgaarde, 1978: 72-73). ([] added by Kazama)

This description can almost be applied to the situation of N village. There are two interesting cases concerning *inaki* privilege. In early 1990s, two households' members who had relatives in the village immigrated from Tabiteuea North to N village. Married men, BU and TO, represented each household, sitting beside elderly relatives at the meetings in the *mwaneaba* building. When I asked them the names of their *inaki*, they did not know them as I expected. Instead, they answered that their *inaki* were the same as their elderly relatives. But, in both cases, there was no certain evidence that their sitting *inaki* were descended legitimately from ancestors along the patrilineal lines described in the past ethnographies.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, people were forced by Europeans to move their places of residence from *kaainga* land to strange lands near the road newly construct-

ed along the lagoon (Geddes, 1983). After that, *kaainga* as social groups were disbanded and *kaainga* land lost the connection with *inaki* and mythical ancestors traced genealogically. The old *kaainga* land has become mere land without distinctive marks. Some old *kaainga* lots are completely forgotten in the bush or *buokanikai* within the village.¹⁵⁾

Consequently, if a person is related to present or former villagers, one is able to reside in the village and is entitled to *inaki* in the *mwaneaba*. Succession to *inaki* is very simple at present. Only five *inaki* have particular functions; the rest do not. *Inaki* members do not form politico-economic units. The institution of present-day *inaki* has become simplified, but the village *mwaneaba* system is still being maintained.

As an Agency of Administrative Organization

The present village *mwaneaba* system, which has been rearranged historically, is made up of entangled components. Some seem to be transformed from institutions of the past, and others to be derived from European ones. The institutions from the outside world have been accepted after being interpreted and transformed by the local people. In this section, I will focus on the latter, and especially on the administrative aspect of the present village *mwaneaba*.

The village *mwaneaba* system was not completely destroyed during the colonial period, although most of its components were extinguished or rearranged. It could be supposed that the colonial government preserved the *mwaneaba* not by the cultural conservation policy but by the administrative convenience in order to utilize the existent system under the indirect rule. It is possible to say that the *mwaneaba* system was kept from complete extinction throughout the colonial experience, because it was an efficient way to govern the local people. At the time the Republic of Kiribati became independent, I-Kiribati displaced Europeans as governors. But the role in governance of the people of the village *mwaneaba* has not decreased under the present government.

The village *mwaneaba* can be thought of as a terminal administrative agency which receives information from the central government through the councillor *mwaneaba* which is attached to the island council office. From the viewpoint of the administration, it is possible to assume that the central government needs an apparatus to convey its information to the terminal districts. The function of the village *mwaneaba* system which integrates local people into community is invoked by the government.

I will show an example clearly suggesting the connection between a village as an administrative district and a village *mwaneaba*. K village is located in the southern side of N village at present. However, K village and its *mwaneaba* system do not have a long history. It was said that K village used to be a part of N village. In the mid-1950s, K hamlet was separated from N village and became an independent administrative unit. When it became an independent village, the *mwaneaba* building of K village was newly built,¹⁶⁾ and a new *mwaneaba* system was invented at the same time. People in a new administrative village needed their own village *mwaneaba* and its system.

From the viewpoint of the villagers, the village *mwaneaba* system is used as an apparatus to receive and examine information from the central government through the councillor *mwaneaba* system. The discussion in the councillor *mwaneaba* building is transmitted to the villagers by the *kauntira* in the village *mwaneaba*. It is possible to say that the coun-

cillor *mwaneaba* system connects the inside and outside worlds. Then, the villagers finally meet to discuss administrative affairs at the village *mwaneaba* meeting. Connecting with the councillor *mwaneaba* system, the village *mwaneaba* becomes the arena where villagers negotiate indirectly with government policy or with institutions from the outside world.

When the island council officials from Tarawa come to the village, they are ushered into the village *mwaneaba* building. Village elders and the village *kauntira* lead them to seats on the lagoon side. At the beginning, the officials are entertained with dishes and tea. After the meal, they announce and explain administrative affairs to the villagers. The attendees ask them questions, and the meeting continues for some time. In the same way, the village *kauntira* explains to them the contents of discussions in the councillor *mwaneaba*. When a member of parliament returns home, he goes around to all the villages and explains the situation of the Diet in each village *mwaneaba* building. After the hearing, the villagers argue about the affairs and coordinate their opinions.

The present village, which consists of small households, is a terminal administrative unit connected to the central government. We should not assume continuity between the past and present village with its *mwaneaba* system, although some similarities can be observed. The village and its *mwaneaba* system must rather be considered in the current context. The village *mwaneaba* system has been reinvented by both the local people and the government, and the building has become a symbol of the reorganized administrative village. We can observe the integration of the inhabitants in the society. The organized activities of the villagers are discussed and decided at the meeting led by elders in the village *mwaneaba* building.

Conclusion

As was already mentioned, there were apparent differences between the present *mwaneaba* model of N village and the 'traditional' *mwaneaba* model reconstructed by pioneer ethnographers during the colonial era. The pioneers completely neglected the contemporary situation in those days. The island society was subjected to European domination, and it has experienced drastic changes, such as the breaking down of *mwaneaba-kaainga* linkage, since the nineteenth century. Unlike the pioneers, Geddes referred to the historical changes concerning kin group and *mwaneaba*. According to him, 'social individualization' emerged after the collapse of the *kaainga*, or coresidential kin group, which led to resolution into *mwenga*, or small households.

The present village inhabitants certainly have almost no idea of the functions and names of the *inaki* seats in the village *mwaneaba*. Moreover, it is not necessary for the villagers to consider the connection between *inaki* entitlement and knowledge of myth and genealogy in depth. Nevertheless, the villagers consciously maintain several significant *inaki*. Some members of the *inaki* work for *mwaneaba* on occasions like *botaki* feasts. However, the rest have no particular role. It was said that the functions of the *inaki* of the village *mwaneaba* are quite simplified at present. However, as far as I could observe, the village *mwaneaba* integrates households and their inhabitants into a community through meetings led by elders, and the close social ties among villagers are far from being weak. Though the village organization changed from *kaainga* to *mwenga*, the village *mwaneaba* is still 'the centre of social life' (*nuka n maiu*) for the present villagers.

In addition to the village *mwaneaba*, various kinds of *mwaneaba* can be observed which do not have *inaki* seats in Tabiteuea South. They accompany social groups or organizations such as churches, schools, and the island council. Since the nineteenth century, the island society has been forced to accept modern European institutions such as Christianity and the government organization from the outside world. The island society that has become differentiated in the global process could be multi-centred. Through this process, the *mwaneaba* system has been diversified to various forms in the local society. Each of the newly established organizations needs its own *mwaneaba* system that should be situated in the centre of each social group. Instead of vanishing, the village and other aspects of the *mwaneaba* system have expanded and are actively functioning in Tabiteuea South today.

The village *mwaneaba* is thought of as one of the various *mwaneaba* in the present island. As an administrative organization, the village *mwaneaba* can be assumed to be the terminal agency, with direct contact with local people, of the administrative organization of the central government. Through the island council and the councillor *mwaneaba*, policies about outer islands coming from the central government are related to the villagers at meetings held in the village *mwaneaba* building. This is the apparatus that accepts and relates information from the outside world into the village, adding the local egalitarian ideas or *boraoui*. The people can maintain their autonomous decisions within the *mwaneaba*, because the villagers, mainly the elders who have symbolic authority, lead meetings on their island. By contrast, government officials from the capital Tarawa are regarded as the temporary guests and do not have a strong influence in meetings. The reorganized village *mwaneaba* system, maintaining several *inaki* and these simplified functions, is a flexible adjustment to the peripheral society of the modern world. By reinventing their 'tradition,' the local people have retained their autonomy in the process of globalization.

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Notes

- 1) It seems that the orthography of Kiribati language has not been unified yet. I heard

that some spellings, such as 'ma' or 'mwa,' 'ba' or 'bwa' or long vowels like 'a' or 'aa,' were differently taught between public school and church school. I found the spellings above mingled in the letters-to-the-editor column of the popular weekly newspaper *Te Uekera*. In my paper, I distinguish spellings of 'mwa,' 'bwa,' and 'aa' from 'ma,' 'ba,' and 'a' according to pronunciation. For example, '*mane*' means money, and '*mwane*' means male.

- 2) *Inaki* literally means pandanus thatches. This word is usually used in Tabiteuea atoll instead of *boti*. I will term the seats in *mwaneaba* as *inaki* in the context of Tabiteuea and as *boti* for the whole islands.
- 3) When the *kaainga* population grew and *kaainga* land became crowded, some members migrated to newly cleared land. This new residence was called *kawa* (Hockings, 1989: 92; Maude, 1977[1963]: 34). *Kawa* residents were permitted to sit at *boti* of original *kaainga* when meetings were held, because *kawa* was not assigned its own *boti*.
- 4) George Murdoch, who had been a trader in the Gilbert group for twenty years, was appointed British Administrator of Tabiteuea atoll about 1900 (Geddes, 1977: 386).
- 5) Many scholars have discussed the definition of *utu* (cf. Goodenough, 1955; Lundsgaarde and Silverman, 1971; Maude, 1977[1963]). Most of them interpreted *utu* as a kin group, but, based on my observation, I cannot agree with their interpretation. The present *utu* can be regarded as approximate ego-centric kindred (Yoshioka, 1988; cf. Maude, 1977[1963]: 61).
- 6) This war, called *ana buaka* Kabu or Kabu's war, was caused by two Polynesian missionaries, one of whom was called Kabu. A lot of people in Tabiteuea South, who had not yet converted to Christianity but had faith in *Anti n Tioba* (Spirit of Jehovah Cult) at that time, were slaughtered by Protestant devotees during the war.
- 7) The church *mwaneaba* was newly constructed in 1995 and completed in 1996. This *mwaneaba* was roofed by galvanized iron sheets instead of pandanus leaf thatches called *rau*.
- 8) The word *rorobuaka*, literally meaning warriors, can be interpreted as all married men in the broad meaning. But usually it is limitedly interpreted as married men the age of approximately between forty and fifty, in contrast to elderly man, or *unimwane*. One elder said *rorobuaka* was the same as the words *mwane n uma* and *boua ni kawa*.
- 9) For example, I observed such a case in Nikunau Island, southern Kiribati: a large majority of people had faith in KPC and the rest were Roman Catholic at one village in Nikunau. Though the two sects were inevitably opposed to each other, both people gathered regardless of denominations in the village *mwaneaba* only when public hearings or administrative explanations or *kaongora* were made. The village *mwaneaba* was almost always empty because KPC and Catholic groups used each of their own church *mwaneaba* and the people gathered in them respectively.
- 10) Though Tabiang type could be found in the ethnography of Grimble, there was no description of Taboiaki type in it. The two types seemed to be unimportant for Maude's conservative informant, who was a master builder of *mwaneaba*, so he derisively recognized neither Tabiang nor Taboiaki types. The reason was that they were not 'traditional' types. He only regarded Tabontebike and Maungatabu types as 'traditional' ones (Maude, 1980[1961]: 47).

- 11) The name of the first *boti* is described as 'Karongoa n uea' in the ethnographies of Grimble and Maude. The first *inaki* name in N village is a part of Karongoa n uea. The word *uea* means 'chief' or 'king.'
- 12) Generally, women are not regarded as legitimate successors to *inaki*. But in this case, no adequate male successor lived in the village except the old woman KR until her male grandson IO married.
- 13) The *kaainga* land usually corresponded to the *boti* or *inaki*. According to Maude, *kaainga* land names were applied to names of *boti* (Maude, 1977[1963]: 30). If this was correct, there was no inconsistency in the information collected from villagers.
- 14) This name is slightly different from the third *inaki*, Buriburi te Rara. No villagers knew the name of an *inaki* called Biribiri te Rara.
- 15) Before the drastic changes in the society, *kaainga* land and *buokanikai* were clearly distinguished (Maude, 1977[1963]: 29; Lundsgaarde and Silverman, 1971: 106).
- 16) Some elders insisted that K villagers originally had their own *mwaneaba* before the Kabu's religious war in the atoll. They said the K village *mwaneaba* was extinguished after the drastic decrease in population. Whether the *mwaneaba* did exist before the war or not, it is sure that establishment of the administrative village caused reconstruction of the present *mwaneaba* in K village.

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