The historical dynamics of the socioeconomic relationships between the nomadic San and the rural Kgalagadi

Kazunobu Ikeya

Abstract

This paper presents an account of the historical changes in the various socioeconomic relationships between the nomadic San and the rural Kgalagadi. The author's survey results show that the relationships are not limited to goat-raising but also include the sharing of wild and cultivated watermelons and the trading of wild animal skins. The fact that most of the place names in the Reserve are derived from San indicates that San were the first settlers in the Reserve and that relationships were later formed when Kgalagadi migrated to the Reserve. From the late nineteenth century until the 1930s, a Kgalagadi headman ruled over a large area of the Reserve around Xade. When he died, his children and those who worked for him moved to various parts of the Reserve. In the 1950s, the relationships broke up following the decrease in the Reserve population due to an outbreak of smallpox and migration of people to farms outside the Reserve. These movements correspond to the formation of the six bands in the Reserve reported by Silberbauer.

Introduction

Many past reports on the socioeconomic relationships between San and Bantu-speaking neighbours such as Kgalagadi and Tswana have mentioned the existence of the loan-cattle ("mafisa") system under which San who tended cows owned by Kgalagadi or Tswana were allowed to use the milk from the cows and were later given calves as payment for their labour (Schapera, 1930; Russel, 1975; 192; Hitchcock, 1978; 173; Lee 1979:407). The same type of system was also re-

Figure 1. — The study area

1 Associate Professor, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan
ported to exist between San and Kgalagadi with regard to goats (Murray, 1976; Sugawara, 1991). This system was not only an effective method for increasing the chance of survival during periods of drought but also contributed to the maintenance of social relationships between the San and Kgalagadi (Ikeya, 1993). However, there has been little investigation of relationships between San and Kgalagadi in areas other than livestock raising, such as crop farming (Kent, 1993:495) and hunting for animal skins. Moreover, historical changes in the various relationships between San and Kgalagadi have not been elucidated.

The area of the present study was the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (hereafter called “the Reserve”) (Fig. 1). Two different images of the San living in the Reserve have been portrayed in past studies. Silberbauer (1965), who was the Bushman survey officer of Ghanzi District, conducted in social ecological survey of the /Gui, an ethnic group that had little cultural contact with the Kgalagadi. On the other hand, it is noted in Silberbauer’s survey report of August 1959, that Kgalagadi living in Kgaotwe, a small settlement about 20 kilometres southeast of Xade, traded tobacco and irons for animal skins from the San (Ikeya, 1998). The Kgalagadi living in Kgaotwe had tried to grow sorghum, but the crops had been destroyed by drought. Most of their goats and cattle had died from the drought or been killed by lions. Although it is clear that trading took place between the San and the Kgalagadi living at Kgaotwe, it is not clear whether the San were involved in looking after the livestock and fields belonging to the Kgalagadi (Ikeya, 1998).

This paper presents an account of the historical changes in the various socioeconomic relationships between the nomadic San and the rural Kgalagadi, and clarifies the factors that gave rise to the two different images of the San: the image of the San existing in isolation from the outside world and that coexisting with Kgalagadi. For this purpose, the author conducted interviews with elders in various settlements in the Reserve and observed situations in which San and Kgalagadi interact. The people interviewed were descendents of the family line (father to eldest son) of Kgalagadi headmen, including Keigyom (headman around 1930). /Teru and Rekowa (1940s), Sukarabu (1950s) and Tuelo (1960–1997). The author was able to conduct interviews with Keigyom’s two children and a man who tended his cattle, as well as sons of /Teru, Rekowa and Sukarabu like NU and Tuelo.

Variations in annual precipitation, movements around the Reserve and relationships between San and Kgalagadi

The amount of annual precipitation affected not only the movements of San and Kgalagadi within the Reserve but also the relationships between the San and Kgalagadi in general. Figure 2 shows the variations in annual precipitation in Ghanzi from 1923 to 1992. As can be seen in the figure, the annual precipitation varies greatly, from around 200 ml to 800 ml. These annual precipitations match the reports of conditions in the Reserve. For example, the annual precipitation in 1959, the year in which Silberbauer reported drought conditions in the Reserve, was only 228 ml, while Tanaka reported an abundance of wild watermelons in 1967, a year in which 629 ml of rainfall was recorded.

The relationships between San and Kgalagadi can be illustrated by reconstructing the life of one of the settlement elders from 1940s to 1960s (Figure 3). NU was born in Tankukyue, located in the area in which the Kumchuru group lived. NU’s first wife died from smallpox, but he later remarried. The first daughter in his second marriage died in Koechi. The second child was born in Ilaka, and the third child was born in Tseukxam. As shown in Figure 3, the movements of NU and his family within the Reserve were influenced by the amount of rainfall and wild watermelons. In some years when there was little rainfall, NU moved to the Kgalagadi village of Tsetseng or to the cattle farms at D’kar while in other years of little rainfall, he moved to neighbouring camps within the Reserve such as Metsimaneng or Hao where there were plenty of watermelons. Thus, the San had three basic patterns of movement depending on the amount of rainfall:

1) to locations of abundant wild watermelons, as reported by Silberbauer (1981) for the inhabitants of Xade;
Figure 2. — The variations in annual precipitation in Ghanzi from 1923 to 1992.
2) to neighbouring camps of wild watermelons within the Reserve such as /Kxaru, as reported by Tanaka (1978); and
3) to villages or cattle farms outside the Reserve, where the San came into contact with village Kgalagadi living outside the Reserve.

These movement patterns led to the establishment of three different relationships between San and Kgalagadi. One relationship concerns the tending of livestock. Before the policy of promoting goat-raising was implemented by the Botswana Government in 1980, there were already 370 goats in Xade, 98 of which were being raised by San or Kgalagadi who did not own the goats. These goats had been raised by several generations of inhabitants of the Reserve (Murray, 1976).

Figure 3. — The movements of NU and his family from 1930s to 1960s

\[\text{Diagram showing movement routes from 1930s to 1960s}\]

\[\text{Legend: } \bigcirc: \text{watermelon} \quad \blacklozenge: \text{field} \quad \circle: \text{Kumchuru group's territory} \quad \bigstar: \text{birth place}\]
Kgalagadi in Molapo, Metsimaneng, Gope and Mothomelo who own large herds of goats, now employ San or Kgalagadi from other settlements to raise their goats, and the San or Kgalagadi are given new-born kids as payment for their labour (Ikeya, 1993). The San have therefore come to acquire their own goats, but their herds do not last for long; most of the goats die during drought or are killed and eaten by the San.

The second type of relationship formed between the San and Kgalagadi is related to wild and cultivated watermelons. In years when there is an abundance of wild watermelons, San and Kgalagadi both move to areas where wild watermelons are growing, and the harvest of watermelons is shared between the San and Kgalagadi. Tanaka (1978:25) reported that more than 200 San moved to Kxaru in September 1967 to gather wild watermelons. In the case of cultivated watermelons, San who are relatives of, or who have material ties to, Kgalagadi gather near the watermelon fields of the Kgalagadi to receive watermelons in times of abundant harvests (Ikeya, 1996). The San sometimes assist in fence-building in return for the watermelons. This system of distributing cultivated watermelons to the San can also be seen in the sedentary village like Xade (Ikeya, 1996:97).

The third relationship that has been formed between the San and the Kgalagadi is a hunting relationship. If the San borrow iron traps, dogs or guns from the Kgalagadi for hunting, any prey the San catch becomes the property of the Kgalagadi. However, most San use their own bows, traps and dogs for hunting and the animal skins are used for trading with the Kgalagadi.

Thus, the relationships formed between San and Kgalagadi are not limited to goat-raising but also include the sharing of wild and cultivated watermelons and the trading of wild animal skins.

**Historical changes in the relationships between San and Kgalagadi**

**a) Movements of Kgalagadi and the formation of relationships between San and rural Kgalagadi**

There seems to have originally been four ethnic groups (/Oui, //Gana, Tsila and Hai/nu) living in the Reserve. Silberbauer’s survey in the early 1960s showed that the west part of the Reserve was inhabited by /Oui, while the east part was inhabited by //Gana (Silberbauer, 1965). A survey conducted in the 1980s by Valiente-Noailes, however, revealed that Tsila and Hai/nu also inhabited the Reserve (Valiente-Noailes, 1993). Tsila were living in the settlements of Gope and Mothomelo and seven Hai/nu families were living with Kgalagadi in Pele-a-Kukama (/Koutou) (Valiente-Noailes, 1993:10). The author also confirmed the existence of Tsila in Gope and Mothomelo (Treis, 1998) and the existence of Hai/nu who migrated from Pele-a-Kukama in the 1980s, in Metsimaneng and Mothomelo.

Since there has been no archaeological survey conducted in the Reserve, the only way of knowing the history of settlements before the time of surviving settlement elders is by the place names. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the place names in the Reserve. They were attached in places where there were reservoirs of rain water, and the place names are thought to have reflected the topography or the animals and plants of the area (Ikeya, 1994:131). All of the place names in the Reserve, except for Gope, Molapo and Metsimaneng, are derived from San, indicating that San lived in this area before Kgalagadi. Gope, Molapo and Metsimaneng are relatively new names given by Tswana.

Interviews with settlement elders revealed that Kgalagadi living in Kgaotwe and /Koutou had moved to these settlements from /Kou (Fig. 4). For example, Piri, the father of Puute, a Kgalagadi living in Kgaotwe, had first moved to /Kou from Maun and then later moved to Kgaotwe. On the other hand, Moshonbe, the father of Thaora, was a Kgalagadi who had first lived in Molepolole and later moved to /Kou and finally to /Koutou. Thaora’s mother was a //Gana. Another Kgalagadi, Mozanbo, the father of Miliyajyou, also moved to /Koutou together with Moshonbe and Mokoe.

Thus, the migrations of rural Kgalagadi to nomadic San areas in the Reserve included two types of migrations; firstly, many years ago to places such as Molapo and Metsimaneng and secondly in the latter half of the 19th century, to places such as Kgaotwe and /Koutou.
b) Continuation of relationships between San and rural Kgalagadi from 1930–1950

From 1930 to 19050, relationships existed between San and Kgalagadi in three different areas: Xade, Kgaotwe and /Khaoxa.
Case 1.: During this period, Keigyom, who lived in Xade, was the headman not only of the people living in Xade but also those in Kumuchuru and //Aka (Ikeya, 1998). Figure 5 is a reconstruction of the life of Keigyom during this period. He owned many cows, which were allowed to graze in the woodlands around da//nau and, when rain fell, were taken to Kaegui or Kaetsagoi and when there was no rain, the cows were taken to drink from the well in Lethken, near Molepolole (Fig.5) Two /Gui were in charge tending his cows. The sheep and cows were all kept in the central camp ofDal//nau, while the goats were dispersed. There were no donkeys at the time. He owned a cart, which was drawn by six cattle. (Ikeya, 1998).

The San not only tended Keigyom's goats and cows but also carried animal skins for him as a form of tax payment. When Keigyom died, his son Rekowa became headman and later moved

Figure 5. — The life of Keigyom around 1930

- Animal skins transportation route
- Cattle grazings route
- Goat grazings route
- Keigyom’s territory
- Field
to Kumchuru. His other son, /Teru, moved to Xade. Kxaegyu and /Harahokue looked after /Teru’s goats. Tobakougo, a //Gana who had been employed by Keigyom to milk his cows, moved to //Aka.

After that, one of Rekowa’s sons, Sukarabu, married the daughter of a headman, Siroro in /Kou. Their child, Tuelo, lived in /Kou for a long time and then moved to Kumchuru. Rekowa’s other son, NU before he was married, would carry steenbok skins in a net over his back from //Gau/on to Rakops. After buying tobacco in Rakops, he would then go on to Ngeneon where there were some cattle owned by Kainyon living in Molapo, and he would return to Kumchuru in the rainy season.

**Case 2:** Puute, who lived in Kgaotwe, would leave his cattle in Lethakeng and set off hunting with ten guns and with four dogs that he borrowed from Kealeboga (Paramount chief) in Molepolole. The dogs were used to hunt foxes, jackals, genets and wild cats, the skins of which he would take to Kealeboga. The dogs died in Kgaotwe. According to the records of Vernay-Lang in 1930, Kgalagadi living in Kgaotwe paid taxes in the form of animal skins (Ikeya, 1998).

**Case 3:** “My Kgalagadi” is /Gui. His father, Koupì was the headman in /Khaosa. He had lived in there for many years and paid taxes. He collected skins of steenbok, leopards, cheetahs, foxes and wildcats and he carried the skins to Molepolole by donkey. Leopards were hunted with rifle-traps. “I carried the leopard skins on my back from Koyachi to /Khaosa. As I don’t have any iron pots, I either use cans or borrow iron pots from /Gui, and /Gui lets me keep them” (Ikeya, 1998)

“The only goats and sheep were those that belonged to Koupì. I was in charge of tending his goats, and I made a small pouch to keep the goat’s milk in. In return, for this Koupì presented me with one or two goats.”

Thus, three aspects of relationships between San and Kgalagadi can be pointed out:

1. the San tended cattle or goats owned by the Kgalagadi,
2. some San hunted with dogs or rifle-traps, and
3. some San recognize as Kgalagadi those people whom the author also regards as Kgalagadi.

c) **Gradual breakup of relationships between San and rural Kgalagadi in the 1950s**

Figure 6 show the distribution of San bands around 1950. Eight bands can be seen in the Reserve. Some San, such as those in two groups from the northern area and some in the /Ruim and Xade groups, moved to work on cattle farms owned by Afrikaners, while others, such as those in the Kgaotwe group, stayed in the Reserve. This corresponds to the report by Sheller (1977:11) of the movement of about 500 San from the western part of the Reserve to work on farms due to the growing commercialisation of cattle products from D’kar Farm. Many people also moved out of the Reserve in 1950 and 1951 following the outbreak of smallpox (Silberbauer, 1972:303; Scheller, 1977:11).

**Case 4:** Kxaegyu from Xade, who was a Kgaotwe, heard that many people had contracted smallpox from people who had come from Testseng. Sukarabu had also contracted the disease but survived but cutting off the affected areas of skin and squeezing out the pus. The bodies of those who died were thrown into large holes, and vultures came to feed on the carcasses. After that, he moved to the farms.
Figure 6 — The distribution of San bands around 1950

shows labour migration from the central Kalahari to farms

shows Keigym’s life area around 1930
**Case 5:** In Kumchuru, NU married the daughter of Koupí's sister, who lived in /Kha0xa. NU’s wife later died from smallpox in /Hao, and NU remarried to a woman whose husband had died from smallpox. As there were no wild watermelons in Kumchuru to provide water for his donkeys, Sukarabu moved to Tsetseng with his donkeys and later died in Tsetseng. NU and his family moved to Buyazatousi in search for wild watermelons. The mother of two young children, Tseu/ori and /Narekowaho, had been killed by a lion. When Tuelo heard that his father, Sukarabu had died, he went to Tsetseng to collect Sukarabu’s belongings, leaving his goats in the care of NU. However, the goats were all killed by lions or hyenas. In winter of the same year, NU moved from Kumchuru to farms at Toukare and Tamahana and returned to Kamcnuru in the rainy season. NU’s sister, Koikue married a Nharo man and stayed on the farm. In Kumchuru, NU bartered a donkey he had received from the Ghanzi farm for goats from Kona, a Kgalagadi who lived in Tsetseng. NU also received some goats from Haurapero in Molapo for sending him a present of cheetah skins, and he also bought some goats from Karasneba in Molapo.

**Case 6:** In Kgaotwe, TE heard about Sukarabu’s death when he was working with Ayakoi at a mine in Johannesburg in South Africa. Mogaladijo traded animal skins and goats for guns from Baitote in Tsetseng. Silberbauer later confiscated all of the guns in Kgaotwe. Gyoru managed to keep his gun by hiding it in the sand.

Thus, there was a gradual breakup of relationships between San and Kgalagadi in the Reserve in the 1950s due to movement of people out of the Reserve to work on farms or in mines and due to the decrease in population following the outbreak of smallpox.

d) **Change in cultural identity from Kgalagadi to San since 1960**

Figure 7 shows the distribution of six San bands around 1960. The migration patterns of San in Xade differed greatly depending on the abundance of wild watermelons (Silberbauer, 1981). There was a Kgalagadi settlement at Kaochue, but this is not shown in the figure.

Through a reconstruction of the genealogy of the Kgaotwe group, the first generation were Kgalagadi who came form /Kou and /Kha0ha. The second generation of people were descendants of Kgalagadi who had married /Gui or //Gana. The third generation of people became /Gui or //Gana. An example of these changes in generations can be seen in a photo that appears on the cover of Silverbauer’s book published in 1981; the youth standing on the left is ET, who has a Kgalagadi father and /Gui mother. He is a skillful bow-and-arrow hunter, while his father hunts with a gun but cannot use a bow and arrows. He learned the skills of bow-and-arrow hunting from his sister’s husband, who was a /Gui.

Silberbauer regarded both Gyoru, who owned goats and sheep as well as a large field, and Mogaladji, who had fields of sorghum, beans and watermelons, to be Kgalagadi as well as Tuelo in Kumchuru. However, other researchers have regarded them to the San. In the 1970s, there were two San settlements about seven kilometers northeast of Kgaotwe Pan (Jeffers and Childers, 1976), which appear to have been Kgalagadi settlements in 1959. This change shows the change in identity from Kgalagadi to San.

In recent years, many Kgalagadi have come to regard themselves as being San, and both San and Kgalagadi, claiming to be descendants of the original inhabitants of the Reserve, are opposing the government’s policy of resettling inhabitants of the Reserve in other areas.

In summary, there are four distinct periods of change in the relationships between San and Kgalagadi. In the first period, relationships between San and Kgalagadi were formed after Kgalagadi moved into the Reserve from Maun and Molepolole and then moved within the Reserve from
In the second period, from 1930 to 1940, relationships between San and Kgalagadi were maintained despite the termination of the taxation system and changes in the distribution of bands of San. In the third period, the 1950s, relationships between San and Kgalagadi broke up following the decrease in the Reserve population due to an outbreak of smallpox and migration of people to farms outside the Reserve. Finally, since 1961, when the area was designated as the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Kgalagadi cultural identity has changed that of the San.

Conclusions

Through an account of the historical changes that occurred in the various socioeconomic relationships between the nomadic San and the rural Kgalagadi, this report clarifies the factors that gave rise to the two different images of the San: the image of the San existing in isolation from the outside world and that coexisting with Kgalagadi. The following points were clarified:
1. **Various complex relationships between the San and Kgalagadi**

The mafisa system for goats was continuously maintained between the San and Kgalagadi. Wild watermelons were shared between the San and Kgalagadi in times of abundance, and San received cultivated watermelons from Kgalagadi when there was a good harvest. The San also continued to trade wild animal skins for products from Kgalagadi. Thus, the relationships between San and Kgalagadi can not be defined simply as patron-client-type or master-serf-type relationships (Silberbauer and Kuper, 1966). Rather, they changed according to the types of activities pursued by the San and Kgalagadi, which depended on the amount of rainfall. The San's continuation of hunting is thought to be a factor that allowed them to maintain their own identity.

2. **Historical changes in the relationships between San and Kgalagadi**

That fact that most of the place names in the Reserve are derived from San indicates that San were the first settlers in the Reserve and that relationships between the San and Kgalagadi were later formed when Kgalagadi migrated to the Reserve. From the late nineteenth century until 1930, a Kgalagadi headman ruled over a large area of the Reserve around Xade. When he died, his children and those who worked for him moved to various parts of the Reserve. These movements correspond to the six bands of distribution of San in the Reserve reported by Silberbauer. Tanaka's survey in 1971 revealed that there were also some //Gana living in Xade (Tanaka, 1980), who were thought to have moved to Xade from Kumchuru. In places such as Kgaotwe where both San and Kgalagadi lived together, the Kgalagadi used guns for hunting, but their sons reverted back to the traditional bow-and-arrow hunting practiced by the San.

3. **Cultural diversity in the relationships between San and Kgalagadi**

Relationships between San and Kgalagadi in the Reserve can be classified into three types. One type was a relationship dominated by San, which was the case in Xade from 1960 to 1970 (Silberbauer, 1965; Tanaka, 1980). Another type, which existed in Molapo was a combined type of relationship in which San and Kgalagadi equally took part in a combination of activities, including hunting, gathering, crop-farming and livestock-raising (Cashdan, 1984; Ikeya, 1998). The third type is a symbiotic type of relationship such as that seen previously in Kgaotwe and currently in Metsimaneng and Mothomelo.

It is the author's view that a symbiotic relationship was first formed between the San and Kgalagadi when the Kgalagadi migrated to the Reserve and that this relationship developed into a combined type of relationship in places where Kgalagadi outnumbered San and into a relationship dominated by San in places where San outnumbered Kgalagadi (Table 1). Whatever the relationship, it is the author's opinion that there are almost no San living in the Reserve who have had no contact with Kgalagadi at some time since the late nineteenth century.
Table 1 — The framework of explaining the diversity of relationships between San and Kgalagadi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study area</th>
<th>Xade, Kgaotwe</th>
<th>Molapo</th>
<th>Metsamaneng</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>S &gt; K</td>
<td>S &gt; K</td>
<td>S = K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19c</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B or C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: Type A: a relationship dominated by San
Type B: a combined type of relationship in which San and Kgalagadi equally took part in a combination of activities
Type C: a symbiotic type of relationship between San and Kgalagadi

S: San, K: Kgalagadi
? shows movement of Kgalagadi in the Reserve

References