

A Study on the sustainability of Fijian Wooden House *Bure*

– A Case Study focusing on communal work in Cautata village -

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1. Background and purpose

Recent modernization and social changes have impacted on living style in rural villages in Fiji. One of the remarkable changes observed in the rural villages is transformation of living environment. Indigenous Fijians used to live in traditional wooden housing called *bure*, though it is little seen even in rural villages in these days. Since 2010, the Laboratory of Global Environment Architecture have carried out a research project on Fijian traditional housing and reconstructed a *bure* in collaboration with Centre for Appropriate Technology and Development (CATD). Nine villagers including a master carpenter from Cautata village were invited to the project and took a leading role of the construction. Cautata village, like others, has no more *bure* in their village despite the fact that all the housing was *bure* until 1940. However, after the project, the villagers came together and built a *bure* by themselves in their village. Will the construction of *bure* be continued in Cautata village now and the future? Will they pass down their traditional culture? This research based on a field survey aims to explore the sustainability of *bure* and communal work which is basis of their traditional village culture by focusing on transformation of living environment and their communal living style.

2. The transformation of housings

Based on interviews with the villagers in Cautata village, the process of housing transformation was summarized chronologically and their reasons for changes were revealed. Housing style and building materials has been changed step by step. Increasing cash earning opportunities in the middle of twenty centuries was one of the major triggers for the change in housing style and building materials. In addition, requirements for constant maintenance of *bure* which was built with thatched roofing and walls were another reason for people to shift from *bure* to modern one.

3. Communal Work in the village

In order to construct a *bure*, people need to collect natural resources around their village by themselves, and cooperate with others in every phase of construction. While “Communal work” is a vital to a construction, this paper also focused on “community” and “communal work” and observed their current status. Although a variety of livelihood activities including farming, fishing, housing construction used to be carried out by a big group, like a collective effort of a whole village, it is still observed that such activities are still carried out by a group, but smaller such as a direct family (*tokatoka*) and/or a tribe (*mataqari*).

4. Meanings of participation in reconstruction project and latter self-motivated *bure* construction in Cautata

The interviews with the villagers who involved in these two *bure* construction revealed that “Practical experience” have resulted in reacknowledgement of the value of their traditional culture among the villagers. The villagers saw that “continual construction” was necessary for passing down their traditional knowledge and techniques to the next generations. After the self-motivated construction, they have utilized the *bure* for assembly, church service and welcome session for the visitors.

5. Conclusion: the potential inheritance of *bure* in Cautata

The field survey showed that the close cooperation in the “community” which was one of important factors for *bure* construction still existed in Cautata village. As people had changed their housing styles from *bure* to modern one due to a variety reasons, utilizing *bure* for residential purpose is not realistic in current situation. While the villagers still hold culture of cooperation and interests in their traditional housing, there is a need to explore the new ways of using *bure* a second house, a place for ritual and tourism in order to identify the potentials of *bure* in the changing society.