

Young Researcher Overseas Visits Program for Vitalizing Brain Circulation
Trip Report, French Polynesia (Tahiti), July 18 to 25, 2011

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Trip dates: July 18 to 25, 2011

Destination: French Polynesia (Tahiti)

Trip report: I visited Tahiti from July 18 to 25 with the following three objectives:

- 1) To observe the research of Noa Nishimoto, currently stationed in Tahiti as a young researcher of this program, and, if appropriate, provide guidance/advice.
- 2) To contact local researchers and work towards smooth management of this program.
- 3) To evolve and deepen the scope of my own research in relation to the two items above.

Here, I will comment on each of these objectives.

(1) First, I will comment on Dr. Nishimoto's research. Dr. Nishimoto flew from Kansai International Airport on June 15 to Tahiti via Auckland, New Zealand. While there are several alternative routes to Tahiti, I flew directly to the capital of Tahiti, Papeete, from Narita International Airport on Air Tahiti Nui.

Tahiti is officially a part of French Polynesia, which comprises 118 islands in total. These islands are grouped broadly into 5 archipelagos: the Society Islands, the Tuamotu Islands, the Gambier Islands, the Austral Islands (the Tubuai Islands), and the Marquesas Islands. Tahiti is located in the Society Islands. The capital city, Papeete, located on Tahiti Island, is home to approximately one tenth of Tahiti's 260,000 residents.

While the majority of Tahiti's inhabitants are of Polynesian descent, approximately 12% are said to be of French descent. Also we find a considerable number of mixed race. In addition, there is a relative large (5%) easily-recognizable population of Chinese. Most of the food in lunchboxes sold in markets or served by food vendors out of remodeled trucks was Chinese.

The language of Tahiti is Tahitian. Tahitian is a Polynesian language that more broadly belongs to the Austronesian language family, and is genealogically linked to the Madagascar language described by Dr. Nishimoto in her doctoral dissertation. Tahitian contains many words that are similar enough to corresponding words in the language of Madagascar to be easily recognizable as cognates. Although Tahitian is predominantly spoken in Tahiti, French, along with Tahitian, are recognized as official languages. Walking through Papeete, it is not uncommon to hear mixing Tahitian and French words when speaking. There are also individuals of Polynesian descent who speak only French. Dr. Nishimoto had originally planned to study the use of Tahitian on Tahiti Island, but taking a cue from my research in Uganda, she decided to take primarily a sociolinguist approach in Tahiti and conduct a descriptive linguistic

study in Rurutu Island located in the Austral Archipelago. Rurutu Island is located 664 km south of Tahiti Island and, as such, has received little French influence.

(2) With regard to making contact with local researchers, I planned to visit researchers at the University of French Polynesia and exchanged emails with a number of researchers including Prof. Serge Dunis, a cultural anthropologist, prior to my trip. Unfortunately, my trip coincided with the university's summer holidays and I was unable to meet with Prof. Dunis. Luckily, I was able to have fruitful discussions at other research institutions and gathered valuable information.

First, I met Frédéric Cibard, assistant director of the Conservatoire Artistique de Polynésie Française. Mr. Cibard was extremely openhearted, and from there my contacts spread. He introduced me to Mr. Heremoana Maamaatuaiahutapu, director of the Maison de la Culture, and also sent out an e-mail to many of his colleagues that there was a famous researcher visiting from Kyoto, Japan. The following is a list of institutes and organizations in Tahiti that conduct culture-related research (the institute's director/representative is listed when such information was available).

- 1) Université de la Polynésie Française
<http://www.upf.pf/>
Cultural Anthropology: Serge Dunis, Linguistics: Louise Peltzer
- 2) Musée de Tahiti et des Iles
<http://www.museetahiti.pf/>
Director: Jean-Marc Pambrun
- 3) Maison de la Culture
<http://www.maisondelaculture.pf/>
Director: Heremoana Maamaatuaiahutapu
- 4) Conservatoire Artistique de Polynésie Française
<http://www.conservatoire.pf/>
Director: Roger Taae, Assistant director: Frédéric Cibard
- 5) Service de la Culture et du Patrimoine
<http://www.culture-patrimoine.pf/spip.php?article78&lang=fr>
Director: Teddy Tehei
- 6) Centre des Métier d' Art
<http://www.cma.pf/wp2011/>
- 7) Institut de Communication Audiovisuelle
<http://www.ica.pf/>

(3) Normally, this report would not be the appropriate forum to discuss my own research. However, in as much as it relates to the contact with other researchers in objective (2) above, I will briefly mention only my research related to drums. More than a decade ago, on the occasion of a visit to Honolulu, Hawaii, I saw a big drum carved out of wood. The drum looked exactly the same as the talking drums used in Africa for communication. The description noted that the drum was from Tahiti. Ever since then, Tahiti has been deeply engrained somewhere in my brain. As such, on this visit to Tahiti, I thought that I definitely wanted to look at some Tahitian drums.

There were plenty of drums being sold in folkcraft shops, but all of them were small. I was told that if I was interested in “music,” I should visit the Conservatoire Artistique de Polynésie Française. That’s why I ended up going there. Frédéric Cibard, assistant director of Conservatoire Artistique de Polynésie Française suggested, however, that while they offer courses on how to play drums, if I was interested in research, I should visit the director of the Maison de la Culture, Heremoana Maamaatuaiahutapu. And so I went to the Maison de la Culture, and as luck would have it, was able to meet with Heremoana Maamaatuaiahutapu and gather valuable information on drums.

According to him, such large drums might be from the Cook Islands or Fiji and all the drums from Tahiti are small. The longest are on the order of 70 to 80 cm, but at most they have a diameter of 20 cm, much smaller than African drums, which can be close to 1 m across. Such drums are called *toʔere* in Tahitian. They are made of solid, heavy wood similar to ebony called *miro* in Tahitian (*bois de rose* in French, rosewood in English). Apparently, a wood called *tou* can also be used in some cases.

The drum is similar in appearance to African drums, with a central slit carved down the middle of the drum body. However, the sound is the same regardless of which side of the slit is struck. This might be because Polynesian languages are not tonal like African languages. The drum is played by striking it with a stick held in one hand, while the drum is held upright. The harder the material and the smaller the drum, the higher the pitch. One of the characteristics of Polynesian dance is intense hip shaking by women dancers. This high frequency shaking is accompanied by the high pitched beating of *toʔere* drums. It is said that, in the past, these drums were used to announce a person’s death. Now, they are only used to provide rhythm for dancing. There are other drums of the same type that are not played upright, but laid horizontally on a rack and played with two sticks. These are called *toʔere piti* and are much less common.



Photo 1. A street in the Tahitian capital of Papeete



Photo 2. A building on campus of the University of French Polynesia



Photo 3. *Toʔere* drums for sale in a folkcraft shop