**Chapter 7　Becoming Fijian**

In September 2014, a national election was scheduled to be held in Fiji. Fiji is a peaceful country, but its politics is not much so. Since 1987, a political coup d’état has been occurring almost as often as the Olympic Games. Though it is phrased as a "coup d’état", it is a 'good' coup almost like a relaxed regime change, not blood-shedding conflicts like those happening in dangerous parts of the world.

Even after I began to live in Fiji, the situation had not change. Despite the democratic finalization of the national elections in 2006, Commodore Bainimarama led the military to the coup on December 6th.

Fiji has long been urged by the international community to have a democratic election. In 2014, Fiji was finally ready for their democratic election, despite that eight years have passed since the establishment of the interim government.

My business in Fiji was no exception to becoming the subject to political influence. I have petitioned to government officials, as well as politicians and military personnel. Moreover, China was providing a lot of economic assistance to Fiji. When I first heard of "assistance" I thought the Chinese were donating monetary gifts. However, in actual, it was "exploitation" with high interest rates and large economic collateral. I wanted to do something about this.

I got the idea of acquiring a Fijian citizenship, running as a Parliament member, and trying to change Fiji from this state. The reconstruction of the national high school which the Fijian government had left in my hands were showing signs of success, my high school rugby team won the spring national competition, and local people requested me to run up as a politician.

In fact, I had been applying for Fijian citizenship for two years, corresponding with Fiji's Immigration Bureau, but in Fiji time that seems to be flowing really isn't flowing... The approval for my application was delayed, over and over.

The Immigration Bureau called Principal Baleilevuka, who was a guardian of my acquisition application for Fijian nationality. I was told to go to the Immigration Bureau in Suva to retrieve my passport.

I can't keep count of how many times I had been deceived by these phone calls! 　I had received similar contacts before (more than once) and headed to the Immigration Bureau as instructed, only to find out that I need to submit extra paperwork, or the person in charge had left his seat, or that they had lost the original passport. Naturally, I did not expect to receive my passport and listened to the request half-heartedly. I was given this call on August 4th, the final day announcing national election day. If I am not able to receive my passport on this day, then I would have to give up becoming a Fijian and would not be able to vote or run in Fiji's election.

Strangely, though, when arriving at the Immigration Bureau that evening, Secretary Vuniwaqa of the Immigration Bureau came out and handed me my passport with much "Congratulations!"

The clock read 4 pm.

I hurriedly finished voter registration. FYI, the voter registration closed at 6 pm on this day. At the same time, I declared to run for office.

My declaration was immediately reported in newspapers, television and radio. It became quickly known in Fiji. Starting with the current administration, various political parties asked me to run for office from their party. I chose the fourth party "People 's Democratic Party" in Fiji. I chose a weak party because it is not involved in the barren political strife between/within big parties.

I received the official recognition from the political party, and officially applied to run for office.

In Fiji, after proceeding to run for office, the candidate is investigated whether he/she has any criminal records, whether there are any doubtful aspects on the submitted asset certificates, etc. About ten days later, the election commission approves the nomination of the candidate.

While I was waiting for that nomination approval, I was literally invited everywhere, from speeches on the street and debates at a university. The reasons for the great support from Fijians were most likely because I had a unique resume and probably because I was the only candidate to have my manifests printed in the newspaper.

For reference, I'd like to note that other politicians did not have any manifests whatsoever. Usually it was an incomprehensible battle of bragging and slandering, such as "I am a relative to so-and-so!" or "I share ancestry with the king." or "He is possessed by the devil!"

I enjoyed visiting villages of those who I have never met and shaking hands with the village people, during my election campaign with other members of the political party. Everyone kept making selfish requests such as "We want you to make a road here" or "Please increase teachers' salaries" or "I want you to pull ODA from Japan."

But first, they must take a look at the current state of the country! 　Fiji turned down the 3% interest loan offered by the World Bank IMF. Instead, they chose "donations" from China set at an interest rate of 10% which was three times higher and was now suffering. When I started explaining this, the crowd seemed to acknowledge me different from other politicians. From children to the elderly, everyone came out to greet and shake hands with me.

Or maybe everyone had nothing better to do.

I was too absorbed into the fun of the election that I did not see it coming:

That night, I was watching the 9 o'clock news on TV at my hotel room. They were reporting which candidates were denied nomination approval.

Candidate A is rejected because he had a car accident three years ago. Candidate B is found ineligible because he had a record of causing an incident with bodily injuries. Candidate C was still a civil service worker when he declared himself as candidate and thus cannot be approved. Candidate Hiroshi Taniguchi is rejected because his period of residency in Fiji is too short!!

I couldn't believe what I just heard. I had been concerned about my period of residency in Fiji, so I had Principal Baleilevuka's daughter, who happened to be a lawyer, confirm this for me. In the new Constitution promulgated the year before, it did not mention anything about the term of residence of the candidate.

So naturally, I thought I would be able to qualify as a candidate.

As soon as the news ended, my cell phone would not stop ringing. Everyone called to encourage me with "There must have been a mistake!" There was no doubt, I was only two hours a Fijian, registering as a voter just in time before the registration office closed. I was a person with the shortest history as a Fijian.

Many people, including the political party I belonged to and my friends, protested against the electoral committee for me, but the decision never overturned.

And this is how my first election ended. I would have to wait another four years, until September 2018, for the next election.

Speaking from the extreme, if I was part of the electoral committee, I will not have allowed someone who had only been a Fijian for two hours run for the Parliament. So, I decided to regard that the Fijian people inadvertently forgot to note the required period of residency when running for office in their newly promulgated Constitution and election rules.

But I did not get away with this disapproval empty handed.

On the night that the news of my disapproval was aired, I could hardly fall asleep due to sadness and anger. One of my Facebook followers had read my post and contacted me. She later became my girlfriend and supported me throughout my struggle against cancer.

Although we ended up parting, there is no doubt that I was able to overcome the painful fight against my illness because of her. If I did not get approved, I wouldn't have met up with her after my return home to Japan, and thus I would not have made it through the cancer treatments.

There is an old saying "Jinkan banji saiou ga uma" (literally translated as "Everything in life is like the horse of the old man, Sai"). I regard it as "all bad happenings are a precursor of good happenings and vice-versa."

This saying originated from ancient China and is a bit complicated, so I will indicate here an abstract of the original story as supplement.

There lived an old man (named Sai) near the country border with his beloved horse. This horse had a great reputation for being a very swift horse. One day the horse gets stung by a bee (I think) and suddenly runs away. The horse doesn't come back, and everyone feels sorry for the old man. Yet the old man continues to patiently wait for the horse's return saying, "Something good may come out of this."

After a while, his horse comes back bringing back another horse. This horse was as good as the old man's beloved horse. People around the old man says how lucky he is but the old man warns himself, "This happiness may trigger something bad." and never rejoiced for this new good horse.

Then one day, the old man's beloved son fell from that horse and hurts one of his legs. Again, everyone feels sorry for the old man and expresses their sympathy, but the old man says again, "This may be a precursor to good happening."

After a while, a war broke out with the neighboring country. All young men were driven into war and killed in battle. However, his son was hurt and thus was not drafted. He survived the war.

After the war ended, Okina lived happily together with his sons.

I like this old saying.

If my life will continue a little longer, I would like to become a Parliament member in Fiji. And as I have written in my manifest printed in the newspaper, it is one of my dreams to make this Heaven on Earth an even better country.