A Note on the Contribution of Olu Longe (1932 – 2020) to Management Information System

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ABSTRACT

In this note, tribute is paid to the memory of Professor Oluwumi Longe, the first Nigerian Professor of Computer Science. Apart from holding the position of the pioneer Head of the Department of Computer Science, University of Ibadan (Nigeria's premier university), he was also the first indigenous Director of the University's Computer Centre. After formal retirement from the services of the University of Ibadan, he taught for five years at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Professor Longe thus made significant contributions to the development of management information system (MIS). This memorabilia is based on the author's personal encounter with him as well as information in the literature.

Keywords: *Computer Science, Professor, Management Information System.*

1.   INTRODUCTION

The news of the transition of Professor Oluwumi Longe to the great beyond naturally came to me with mixed feelings. As a man who lived to fairly good old age, who lived a fulfilled life by all standard and who was a mortal, his transition did not come with too much shock. However, as someone who is in a special category of scholars – scholars with both sound intellectual and behavioral disposition – his transition was painful. One is naturally consoled by the saying that great men never die because their works live on. In fact, there is no gain saying the fact that, spiritually, humans at death merely transit from the material realm to the celestial realm.

Professor Longe was an outstanding Nigerian first generation computer scientist and manager. Among others, he was the founding father, pioneer professor and Head, Department of Computer Science, University of Ibadan (UI) (Nigeria's premier university) (www.ui.edu.ng). He was also the first fellow and President of the Nigeria Computer Society, the (pioneer) umbrella association for information technology professionals in Nigeria.

Professor Olu Longe received Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in Physics from the University of London (through the then University College, Ibadan, now University of Ibadan) (1959). He

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thereafter obtained a Master of Science (M.Sc.) degree in Computer Science from the University of Sydney, Australia (1966) and a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in Computer Science from Ohio State University, USA (1974). After formal retirement from the services of the University of Ibadan, he taught for 5 years at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He was *primus inter pares* in the computing profession in Nigeria.

2. PIONEERING EFFORTS AND ACTIVITIES AS A PROFESSIONAL COMPUTER SCIENTIST

Prof. Olu Longe was promoted to the rank of Professor of Computer Science at the University of Ibadan (UI) in 1978. He is *de facto* first Professor of Computer Science in Nigeria, precisely, the first PhD degree holder in Computer Science to become a Professor of Computer Science.

As the first indigenous/Nigerian Director of the Computer Centre of UI, Professor Longe contributed enormously to management information system (MIS) in Nigeria. That was the era of the (large) mainframe computers such as the IBM 360/370. He was an arrow head in the successful processing/running of computer programs written on punched cards by staff and students of UI, as well as outsiders. Such cards were normally submitted to the Computer Centre for processing in batches, a process called batch processing. This was the same procedure in the few other Nigerian university computer centres then in existence.

One of the early Nigerian universities which have computer centres include University of Ife (now known as Obafemi Awolowo University) (www.oauife.edu.ng,), which is the first Nigerian university to start an undergraduate degree programme in Computer Science. Other universities include Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (www.abu.edu.ng), University of Lagos (www.unilag.edu.ng) etc. Popular systems which were generally developed on the platform of the mainframe computer at the time included the payroll system and stock control system. Some of the popular computer programming languages at the time were FORTRAN, COBOL, PASCAL, WordPerfect, Dbase and BASIC.

In his inaugural lecture of 1983, Professor Longe brilliantly (and for the first known time in the literature) established a link between the Ifa divination corpus and Computer Science, with respect to binary arithmetic (Longe, 1983). Ifa divination is a primal mythological system of the Yoruba people of South Western Nigeria.

Prof. Longe is also author of two books on Yoruba counting system. In the first book (Longe, 2009A), he introduced the Yoruba vigesimal number system (counting in 20s) which has been existing for centuries and is hitherto the only number system in use. In the second (Longe, 2009B), a Yoruba decimal number system was presented. In the latter, he identified significant problems which are associated with the vigesimal system and proferred solutions to the problems, thereby proposing a completely new Yoruba counting system based on the decimal concept.

3. IMPACT ON THE LIVES OF OTHERS

The present author has significantly many fond memories of 'Baba' Longe, but these will be stated within some bounds, considering the obvious limitation of space. He first came into physical contact with Baba Professor Oluwumi Longe around the year 2000. This was not long after 1999 when he joined the services of the University of Ibadan (UI) as an academic staff in the Department of Computer Science, Faculty of Science. He had just completed his Master's degree in Mathematics at the Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife where he was also a Graduate Assistant in the Department of Mathematics. By this time, Prof. Longe had retired from the services of UI but was still retaining his office in the Department of Computer Science. He was the founder/Managing Director of COMPFOTECH Computer Services, a computer consultancy and training firm, located in Agbowo Shopping Complex, in front of UI main gate. He occasionally came to the department and was fond of calling me by the simple name 'Dele'.

Right from the time this writer first met Baba Longe, the impression about him (rightly confirmed) was of a reserved/quiet person with a genial and friendly personality. He was then in his late 60s. Having heard about his role in the department as the pioneer Professor and Head of Department, I naturally became close to him. He was present during my M.Phil./PhD to PhD conversion seminars in the Department of Computer Science, UI in the early 2000s and I vividly remember that I modified the project title to include the word 'uses' based on his comments (Oluwade, 2002). The word tended to emphasize that the research problem which I was

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working on, though looked relatively theoretical and unpopular, but has important practical applications.

Prior to this time, I decided to publish my Postgraduate Diploma in Computer Science (PGDCS) project report as a book. This diploma was awarded by the University of Lagos based on the submission of the report to her Department of Computer Science. Having done some personal editorial work on the project, I decided to seek for a senior academic to write a foreword to the book. I sent an email request to 3 seasoned professors in different Nigerian universities, and to my utmost surprise, Professor Longe, whom I had barely become acquainted with, was the only one who responded to the mail and agreed to write the foreword. Eventually, he thoroughly read the book and pointed out some significant corrections which were effected in the manuscript before it was published in 2003 (Oluwade, 2003).

Around the same time, I co-authored a paper with him on the application of computer science to Ifa divination mythological practice of the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria (Oluwade and Longe, 2003). I developed interest in the theme of the paper after purchasing a copy of Prof. Longe's inaugural lecture (1983) from the UI bookshop during a routine visit to the store. The lecture brought to the fore the inherent computer arithmetic in the Ifa divination codes, the codes which arise in the course of Ifa divination practice.

Our paper improved on the lecture by studying the codes as computer coded character sets and bringing out their novel characteristics as discrete structures. The paper was published in the journal of the Nigeria Computer Society of which Prof. was the first president (Oluwade and Longe, 2003). Later, around 2009, at a professional computing conference, a senior computer science scholar recommended that I purchase the 2 books written by Prof. Longe on Yoruba number system, which I did (Longe, 2009A; Longe, 2009B). I have since cherished the books with interest in extending the results in them. It needs be noted that Prof. Longe's interest in Ifa divination and Yoruba number system was ostensibly just for cultural and research purpose, and not as a result of his religious persuasion for Yoruba (African) traditional religion!

More recently, about 6 years ago, this author visited Prof. Longe in his house in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. This was the second time that he would pay a visit to him in his house after an earlier visit in the early 2000s. The latter visit also marked the last time he would be physically seen by this writer. On each visit, he was warmly welcomed by both Prof. Olu Longe and his equally amiable and friendly wife, Prof. (Mrs.) Remi Longe.

In this latter visit, this writer had gone to the Longe's house to present a copy of a magazine, *Computers & ICT* (of which this writer is the publisher) (Oluwade, 2014), and in which he was featured as a distinguished personality in the computing profession. On this occasion, Prof. Olu Longe gave me an unsolicited surprising cheque of a reasonable amount of money for my effort on the magazine.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Finally, based on the totality of this author's personal relationship with Baba Prof. Oluwumi Longe, the following attributes and lessons are derivable from his lifestyle viz. he was easily accessible to both the privileged and less privileged; he exhibited simplicity, love for God and hardwork; he was a good mentor, and exhibited humility. He was professionally active even after formal retirement, and his life demonstrated the need to re-evaluate the general public perception of African Traditional Religion vis-à-vis Christianity.

On a ligher concluding note, I had always known Prof. just by the name Oluwumi Longe, because the other personal names did not reflect in his popular works. But alas, after his demise, these names emerged through public announcement of his demise: Enoch Sunday! Thus, I say with a final parting sentence: Adieu, Baba Professor Oluwumi Enoch Sunday Longe!

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