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| Author(s) | ICHIKAWA, Mitsuo; YASUOKA, Hirokazu |
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PREFACE

Anthropological studies by Japanese researchers in southeastern Cameroon started in 1993, when we were promoting a research project on the “Sustainable Use of the Tropical Rainforests in Africa.” The research was initially planned to be carried out in DRC (former Zaire) and Congo-Brazzaville. We were, however, forced to change our study sites, due to the political unrests in these countries. We moved our field to the forest areas in southeastern Cameroon, where we have been carrying out the research on the Baka hunter-gatherers and the Bantu and other slash-and-burn cultivators, focusing in particular on their subsistence activities and use of forest land and resources.

In the years that follow, a team led by Prof. Hiroaki SATO (Hamamatsu University School of Medicine), and another team of Kobe-Gakuin University, led by Prof. Hideaki TERASHIMA, joined our research, and research activities in the southeastern Cameroon became active with a dozen of researchers and students participating in the study on the Baka hunter-gatherers and Bantu cultivators in the area. In the early 2000s, two other projects started; one is “Anthropological Study on African Tropical Rainforests as Human Habitat,” and the other is “Ecological Anthropology from a Perspective of Communication Process,” both of which were sponsored by the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). In these projects, the research was expanded to other topics than the initial interests in the subsistence activities, diets and economy, such as “history of human activities and their impacts on the forest environment,” “behavioral study on singing and dancing performances,” “characteristics in everyday communications,” and “infant care and children’s play.”

As the research became more active, there was an increasing need for a space to serve as a research base, where we could arrange the plant specimens collected in the forest, exchange research information, and hold a small meeting on our research. In late 1990s, a house was constructed using local plant materials for these purposes. The house is located near Ndongo village on the Dja river, about 40 km west (upstream) from Moloundou, the administrative center of the study area.

In 2002, the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies launched the 21st Century COE (Center of Excellence) program, “Aiming for the COE of Integrated Area Studies: Establishing Field Stations in Asia and Africa, and Integrating Research Activities and On-site Education in Fieldwork.” Under this program, field stations were established in various areas in Asia and Africa to facilitate the field research and on-site education, and our research base in Cameroon forest was selected as one of such field stations. What we did actually was to enlarge and renovate the existing research base. Meanwhile, the facilities of the field station have been gradually improved, furnished with

a solar energy generation system and a satellite communication system, thanks to the cooperation with researchers from various universities in Japan. It is actually served as joint research base for researchers and students from Kyoto University, Hamamatsu University School of Medicine, The University of Tokyo, Yamanashi University, Shizuoka University, Yamaguchi University, and Kobe-Gakuin University (for the details of the Cameroon field station, see our website (<http://jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp/cgi-bin/CameroonFS/wiki.cgi>)).

We are now launching new projects, “An Integrated Study on Bushmeat Hunting and Trade in Tropical Africa” and “Historical Ecology of Human Activities in the African Tropical Forests.” The first is to examine the economic as well as cultural importance of bushmeat to the forest peoples, and analyzes the economic and social background for the recent boom of bushmeat trade, and to seek for a way to its sustainable use by the forest people in the region. The second project aims to clarify the interactions between people and forest environment in a historical perspective. At the first step of these projects, we feel it necessary to publish some of the results we have so far obtained, in particular from the research on the ecology, social organization, folk knowledge, and recent changes in economic life of the forest peoples in the region.

Mitsuo ICHIKAWA
and Hirokazu YASUOKA