

Sharing and Livelihood of the Baka Pygmies in the Tropical Rain Forest of Cameroon: —Reconsidering the “Egalitarian Societies”—

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Location of Fieldwork: the Republic of Cameroon

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• Research background

In previous studies, African hunter-gatherer societies have been considered “egalitarian” because of frequent food sharing, a lack of property accumulation, and a lack of leadership. However, the societies of the Baka Pygmies, who are hunter-gatherers in southeast Cameroon, are now changing because of variety of influences, such as sedentarisation, the expanding of a monetary economy, and the permeation of education.

• Research purpose and aim

The aim of my research is to reconsider “egalitarianism” and “equality” among the Baka Pygmy hunter-gatherers by focusing on their food sharing and labor. I also researched wage earning to make clear observations from an economic viewpoint. I also try to clarify the relationship between sharing and labor cooperation.



Photo 1: Woman sharing boiled casaba.



Photo 2: Girl carrying food.

• Results and achievements of fieldwork

The research was conducted in L village located in the Messok District, Haut-Nyong Prefecture, Province of East Cameroon. In the village, 150—170 Baka people live with the Bantu *Jime* people.

In this fieldwork, I first researched the kinship of the villagers and ownership of cultivated fields, and then I focused on their sharing and labor behaviors. Regarding sharing behavior, I observed the passing of a cigarette among men sitting in the gathering place called *mbanjo*, and I asked questions about food sharing among women. As for wage labor, I attended women's gathering activities and wage work. I asked about the members who went together. Wage work included weeding, harvesting in the cultivated fields, and working in the cacao plantation. Payment was made by money or goods, such as crops or alcohol.

Food or cigarette sharing is not conducted in the same way from person to person, even among those who reside in the same place. In other words, there are differences according to the individuals and households. They share widely or narrowly, according to the situation and the amount of food. Some pairs of households frequently share food with each other, and others do not. I suppose that the main factors influencing sharing behavior are kinship and house location. On the other hand, in the case of wage work, they work together to a great extent with people outside the range of their food sharing. The members of the wage work are not fixed unlike the people with which they share food.



Photo 3: Women going to a farmer's field.



Photo 4: Woman weeding in the farmer's field.

• Implications and impact on future research

I found that research based on listening is not enough for my study. It is necessary to research communication behavior, such as conversation, at the time of sharing. Therefore, I need to develop language skill. I would like to clarify why there are some differences between households' food sharing practices. Next time, I will research men's wage work done for several days or longer. For the analysis of sharing and labor, I will clarify the cognitions and meanings of "sharing," "working together," and "money" in the Baka hunter-gatherer societies. Then I aim to reconsider and inquire further whether hunter-gatherer societies are actually "egalitarian societies."



Photo 5: L village in the morning.



Photo 6: Gathering place called *mbanjo*.