

Formation process of the multiple subsistence system in a mountain area of Lesotho

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Place of fieldwork: Lesotho

Name: Miyo Nagakura

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- Research background

Kingdom of Lesotho is a small mountainous country, with its area of only 30,000 km², and it is completely surrounded by Republic of South Africa. People practice crop cultivation (maize, wheat, etc.) and pastoralism (sheep, cattle, etc.). Migrant labour has also been practiced in Lesotho, as a mean of cash income since 1800s, when gold mine was discovered in South Africa. Mine works used to be done on an emergency basis, such as drought, but its importance to household economy has increased and by 1930's, Lesotho has become to be known as "labour reserve" of South Africa. With such background, many researchers have been studying on the social and economical impact of migrant labour on the Lesotho society.

- Research purpose and aim

Lesotho can be divided into two areas; western "lowlands" (1400 ~ 2500m) and eastern "mountains" (2500 ~ over 3000m). There are larger grazing lands in the mountains, so subsistence in the mountains differs from that of lowlands, in the point that pastoralism is more important. Under such background, in the mountains, migrant labour has become popular about 40 years later than in the lowlands. However, most of the researches have focused on the lowlands, without counting the difference within the country. So the aim of the research is to study the formation process of present multiple subsistence system in the mountains in specific, under impacts of migrant labour.

- Results and achievements by fieldwork

Interviews on subsistence, stock theft and life history of villagers were conducted in a village in the mountains. In this year, some households have began to grow cash crops (eg; cabbage) in the fields where they used to grow only staple food (eg; maize). In the livestock interview, many households owned more than 10 livestock (eg, cattle, sheep) before 1950s, but now, most of them owned none or very few. The reason was the stock theft. In fact, the number of stock theft increased after 1990s, according to the interview result. In the life history interview, number of migrant labour had increased in 1950s, and after the peak around 1970 ~ 80, it decreased in the 1990s.

- Implications and impacts on future research

The fact that the peak period of migrant labour in mountain region lasted only for 30 years, which is only a generation, is an important feature to study on its social impact on the area. Further study will be implemented through the study about impact of migrant labour on the subsistence system.



Photo Left. A present from a husband who was back from South Africa.
Photo Center. Shepherd boys and a kraal.
Photo Right. Vegetables grown in a field.