

A forest remained in seasonal swamp and rural development — A Case study of Mbozi District, Tanzania —

Year: 2007

Place of fieldwork: Tanzania

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Key Words: Seasonal swamp, Economic liberalization, Rain-making, Environmental conservation, Grazing.

● Research background

On the Mbozi plateau in southern Tanzania, seasonal swamps have been mainly used to graze cattle and partly grown finger millet in indigenous cultivation system. At the beginning of 1990s, however, some farmers began to grow maize in the fields of swamp, which are surrounded by ditches for drainage. Economic liberalization and population increase caused the shortage of farming fields for subsistence in many areas of Tanzania, and then the seasonal swamps came to be exploited drastically. In the research field, the seasonal swamps were rapidly changed to farming lands.

● Objectives

Social conflicts between the farmers who exploit the swamps and the local government which protects the ecological environments appeared in the process of maize field expansion. At the result of conflict for some years, a small forest, called “*ahasitu ahapina* (a solitude forest)” in the local language, has been remained alone in the center of swamp. This study aims to reveal the reasons why only the forest was remained and to clarify the influences of the symbolic



Plate 1: An isolated forest in the maize fields

forest to the ecological consciousness by the villagers. It also aims to understand the realities of cattle feeding in the research site where most of the seasonal swamps have been covered with maize.

● Results

Spring flowing in the isolated forest has several mysterious stories; such the flowed water is always changing color. The chief of ethnic group, the Nyiha, and the followers have conserved the forest in order to

use the spring water to various rituals, such as rain-making when drought. In the 1990's, however, some villagers who did not have enough lands for subsistence expanded their farm fields nearby the forest. And then, the conflict between the traditional leaders who conserve the environment of swamp and the exploiters arose. Most of the exploiters were Christians and were negative against the traditional belief. They claimed their situations of land shortage to the village council. Eventually the village leaders allowed the cultivation in the seasonal swamp if the small forest is not opened.

- Implications and impacts on future research

The aspect of forest remained in the seasonal swamp reminds us "Chinju-no-mori", a grove around village



Plate 2: The inside of the forest



Plate 3: The spring in the forest

shrine in Japan. It is pointed out that the grove means the consciousness of the rural people to environmental conservation as well as symbolizes life and regeneration. I focus on the impacts of the isolated forest in the research site, where the ecological environments have been degraded immediately, and the changes of villagers' consciousness to the ecological issues or natural resources.