

Strategic Young Researcher Overseas Visit Program for Accelerating Brain Circulation

Dispatch Report

Year: 30 MAY 2014-14 June 2014

Place of fieldwork: Bhutan

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- Research background

People in Asia and Africa have invented many utensils and tools that are used on a daily basis to adapt to the natural environment, enhance social relationships in communities, and influence the outside world. This research contributes to the development of a sustainable human sphere in Asia and Africa by describing the process by which local knowledge (*ZAIRAICHI*) related specifically to the body and bodily techniques, the domain that is most vulnerable to changes in global conditions and social institutions, is shared and disseminated.

- Research purpose and aim

The focus of this research includes the following three components: 1) fieldwork in Southwestern Ethiopia; 2) academic collaboration with the South Omo Research Center and Museum (SORC&M) at Addis Ababa University as well as with local communities, such as the South Omo People's Ensete Research Center (SOPERC); and 3) academic exchanges related to the results of my research at international conferences. This year, I will focus on the second and third components.

- Results and achievements by fieldwork

The international conference of Ethnobiology was held in Bhutan on June 1–7, 2014. My poster presentation at this conference met one of the three objectives of this research project: to participate in academic exchanges related to the results of my research at international conferences.

The international conference of Ethnobiology is held every 2 years, and this was the fourteenth conference in Bhutan. About 360 foreign participants from 56 countries and about 100 residents of Bhutan attended this conference in UWICE, Bhutan, and Eastern Bhutan. The conference consisted of two sections: oral presentations and poster presentations. My presentation was based on research regarding the transmission of knowledge about ensete cultivation and processing and the community-based activities related to ensete fiber production in southwestern Ethiopia.

Conference participants occupied almost all the hotels and guesthouses in the Bhutan area. As a result, I was able to engage in discussions about my research topic and current issues in anthropological research outside the conference venue. Indeed, the academic exchanges at this conference were more fruitful than were those at international conferences I had attended previously. Although the time allocated to my actual poster presentation was limited to 90 minutes, it generated productive discussions with many participants from Uganda, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Taiwan, China, Thailand, and Cameroon.

- Implications and impacts on future research

This was my first visit to Bhutan and my first presentation in this conference. At least two aspects of this event were relevant to my research topic and activities: 1) The broader interests of participants in this conference, and 2) the nation-building efforts of Bhutan, which are focused on environmental conservation and usage.

(1) Most participants were ethno-botanists and ethno-zoologists conducting research in foreign countries, government officials with responsibility for the management of natural resources, and specialists in environmental issues working for international organizations. These participants were familiar with minor crops and the issues facing Japanese society and academics. I was able to meet many participants interested in my topic: the transmission of knowledge regarding ensete cultivation and processing and the community-based activities related to ensete fiber production in southwestern Ethiopia.

(2) Participants had several opportunities to learn about the unique activities available in Bhutan through a special session and an excursion after the conference. Additionally, almost all government officials were eager to explain that Bhutan has rich natural resources that need to be conserved and used effectively. I met several government officials from developing countries who understood the importance of conservation issues for their countries, even though the priority placed on these issues tended to be lower than that placed on other issues, such as modernization and the development of a market economy. The nation-building activities of Bhutan, which are quite unique, seemed positive and suggested several possibilities and ideas that may be applicable to my research area.



Photo1 Participants in the session organized by Dr.Pui discussed the possible of role of Anthropology in the domain of climate change.



Photo2 In one session, participants volunteered to tell stories drawn from the folklore of their countries. The woman in the middle of this photograph introduced the folktales of Bhutan.



Photo3 During the final 2 days of conference, local products and crafts produced by local communities throughout Bhutan were exhibited.