

TAKEUCHI, K., 2005, "The Ambivalent symbiosis between the Aka hunter-gatherers and neighboring farmers," In: K. TAKEUCHI ed. *Culture Conservation and Development in African Rain Forest* (Research report of MEXT Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research), pp.11-28

THE AMBIVALENT SYMBIOSIS BETWEEN THE AKA HUNTER-GATHERERS AND NEIGHBORING FARMERS

Kiyoshi TAKEUCHI
Faculty of Humanities, Toyama University

INTRODUCTION

Descriptions of foragers' relations with their farmer neighbors in the central African forest have swung between dependence and independence. Among the classical works on foragers in the eastern Congo Basin forest, Schebesta depicted the relationship of foragers as being totally dependent on farmers, while Turnbull sharply emphasized the mutual independent characteristics of the two societies adopting the dichotomy of 'forest world' versus 'village world' (Schebesta 1933; Turnbull 1965). From the 1970s ecological studies on the subsistence economies has demonstrated that foragers and farmers are economically interdependent and are best understood as two different ethnic groups within a single society (Hart & Hart 1986; Ichikawa 1986; Terashima 1986).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the economically interdependent but culturally antagonistic relationship of two coexisting societies, the Aka foragers and their neighboring Bantu farmers in northeastern Republic of the Congo. To place analysis of Aka-farmer relations within a comparative discussion of diversified forager-farmer relations in the central African forests is beyond the scope of this paper. Immediate concern here is to describe the ethnographic context of the hierarchical relationship within which the Aka and the farmers relate to one another. As such, the hierarchical and ambivalent relationship between the Aka and farmers describes a hitherto neglected aspect of the multiplex forager-farmer relations in the Congo Basin.

THE COEXISTENCE BETWEEN THE AKA FORAGERS AND SLASH-AND-BURN FARMERS

The Farmers and the Aka

In the tropical forest region of northeastern Republic of the Congo, the area of my investigation, small, meandering rivers are dotted with slash-and-burn farming villages whose populations range from a few tens

to about 300 people. These farmers, who have migrated from other regions over the past 200 years, lived in small settlements within the forest prior to colonialization. The farmers were then compelled to form their present villages along riverways under French colonial rule in the early 20th Century. A wide diversity of languages are spoken by the farmers, reflecting their history of immigration from various other regions (Fig.1).

While farmers having a common language or native homeland share a loose sense of group identity which extends beyond village boundaries, there is generally no clear self-identity by ethnic group distinctions, and individuals express their sense of belonging rather in terms of the name of the village where they dwell. For instance in Moumpoutou, the village I used as a base for my studies (Fig.1), residents refer to themselves with an expression meaning "a person of Moumpoutou." The male farmer I described in the prologue was a Moumpoutou villager. Here I will discuss the farming villagers of Moumpoutou and their mutual relations and negotiations with the neighboring Aka, and in line with the villagers' community-based sense of identity, I shall refer to the residents of Moumpoutou as "villagers" and treat them as a single ethnic group.

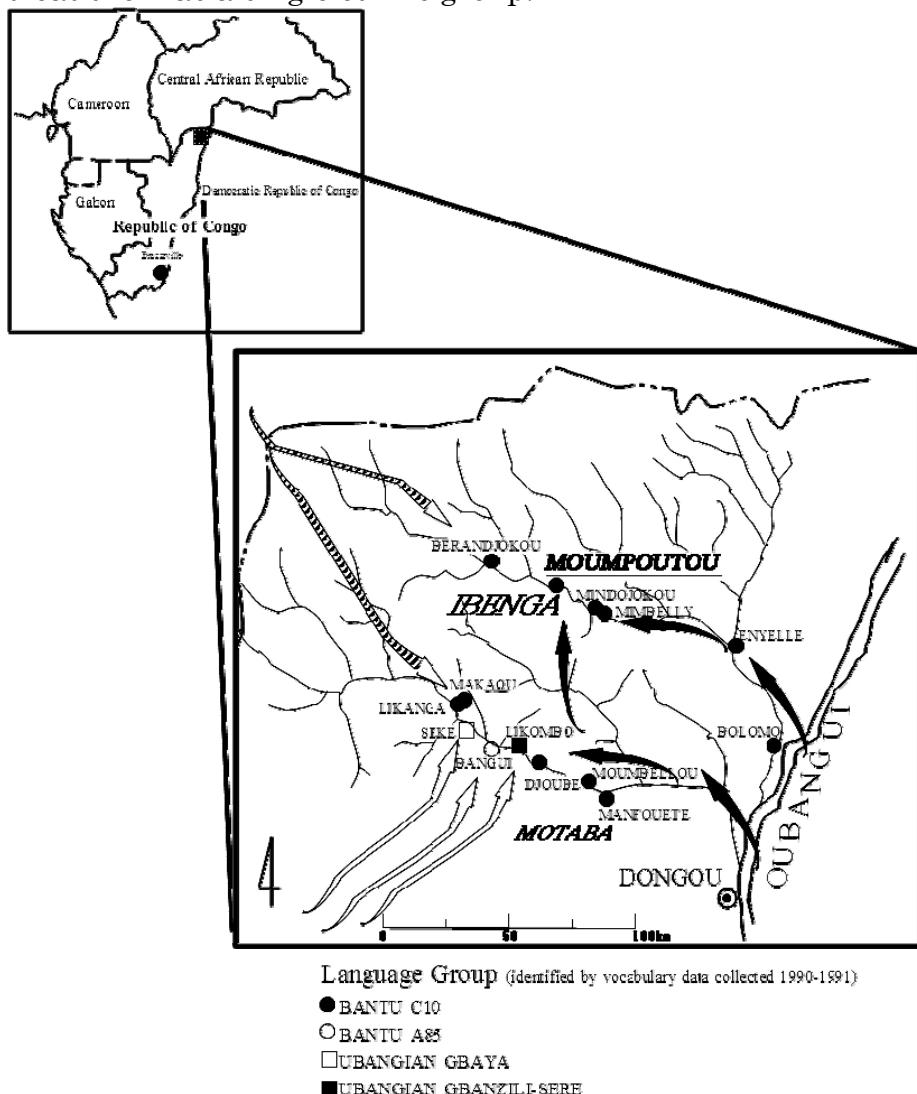


Fig. 1 Distribution of slash-and-burn farmers

In terms of physical characteristics, the Aka are short of stature, representing one of the ethnic groups collectively referred to as so-called 'Pygmies' who live scattered throughout the tropical forest region of Africa. According to data collected in 1991, the average height of the adult Aka male is about 154 cm, or roughly 14 cm shorter than that of an average adult male farmer. The two groups can be easily distinguished physiognomically as well, as the Aka possess somewhat broader noses and larger mouths than the farmers. The term "Aka" employed here is an anthropological term derived by stripping the numerical prefixes from the words the Aka use to refer to themselves, *mo*.Aka (singular) and *ba*.Aka (plural). The neighboring farmers, meanwhile, call the Aka "*ba.mbenga*" or "*bo.jeli*". The Aka inhabit the whole tropical forest region of northeastern Congo, but rather than being uniformly distributed, their camps center around farming villages, the total population within a radius of 8 km around a village being 1.5 to 2.5 times that of the farmers in the village. For example, in Moumpoutou, the village focused on in this study, at the time of a 1989 survey there were about 270 farmers in the village, while around the village there lived some 700 Aka in nomadic camps of 10 odd to 30 people, and semi-permanent settlements with a population of over 60 (Fig. 2). Aka make their livelihood mainly by hunting and gathering in the primary forest areas, but meanwhile they form, without exception, a close economic relationship of the kind I will describe below with the farmers of the nearest village; indeed, there exist no Aka groups who attempt to live independent of such relationships. While the farming peoples include numerous linguistic groups, the Aka, despite their geographically extensive distribution, use a single language which is classified into the Bantu language group. Furthermore, in contrast to the farmers, who mostly possess no clear cultural identity beyond the village unit, the Aka, through a shared lifestyle, myth on the Creation and rituals, possess a common sense of cultural self-identity. While maintaining socio-economic ties with farmers of many ethnicities, the Aka refer to any farmers with the term *mi.lo* (plur. *bi.lo*). And whereas in the case of villages such as Moumpoutou, whose inhabitants immigrated relatively long ago, and thus have a relatively long history of contact with the Aka, the language used for mutual communication is the farmers' language, in villages with a shorter history of contact with the Aka, Aka language is used instead for the mutual communication.



Aka at a hunting camp (1989)

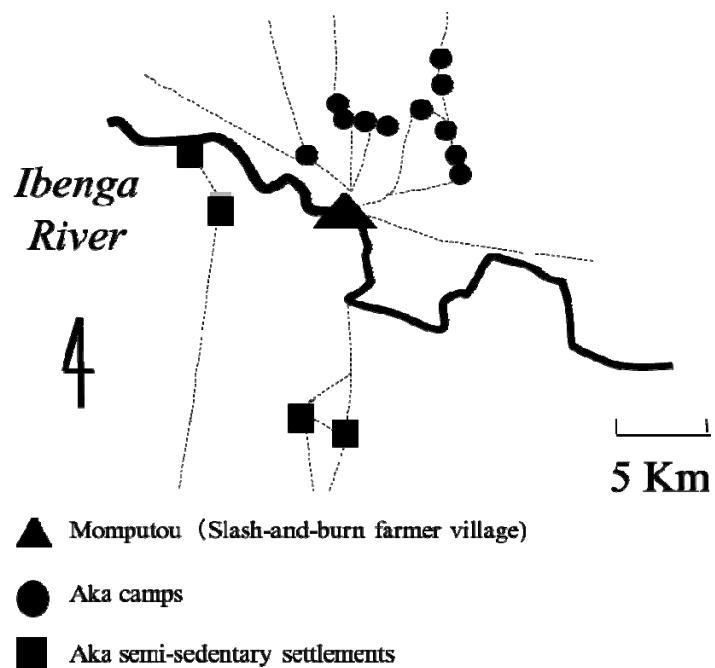


Fig.2. Aka camps and settlements around Moumpoutou village

Taking as a case study the villagers of Moumpoutou and the Aka living around the village, which has been my continuous object of research since 1988, let us now examine the relationship between the two as distinct ethnic groups which differ concretely in terms of physical characteristics, subsistence, and linguistic culture. In a prologue, I described an instance of the scornful image the Aka have of the farmers; in fact, the farmers also look down upon the Aka. However, at the same time, as the detail will be described hereafter, the two groups share a relationship in which each stands to gain from the other in terms of livelihood. Thus, the Aka and the farmers balance an intense psychological aversion to each other with an

economic interdependence which presupposes the existence of the other party. Or, in other words, they coexist in a single region in a relationship connoting the two contradictory vectors of opposition and cooperation. The aim of this paper is to delineate the mechanism whereby this sort of ambivalent symbiosis is produced.

THE ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AKA AND THE FARMERS

In the tropical forest region of northeastern Congo, where the Aka and farming peoples live, land transport is hindered by a network of wetlands, in particular the great swamps spreading across the southern area. Until the recent advance of logging operations, there was no major development nor population influx, and the penetration of the commercial economy was sluggish. In the case of Moumpoutou, the villagers could expect a stable cash income only from sales of coffee beans to buyers from the state capital. The Aka, meanwhile, occasionally receive meager cash remunerations from the villagers for labors such as shot-gun hunting or transporting meat. In most cases, however, this cash is then directly returned to the villagers in exchange for tobacco or marijuana, such that cash is something which vanishes like smoke from the Aka.

The villagers of Moumpoutou farm a variety of crops such as plantains, cassavas, taros, and some domesticated yams, but the staple of their diet is the plantain, while the other crops are used either as supplementary crops or as catch crops when the plantain crop runs out. The villagers claim to have formerly been active hunters, but at present most hunting using shotguns is entrusted to the Aka, and the villagers themselves seldom hunt. As of 1989, out of the 60 households in Moumpoutou, 25 (or about 40%) possessed shotguns. The game shot and brought back to the village by the Aka, however, is consumed not only by those households owning guns, but is distributed among their relatives as well, so that the supply of meat eaten in the village is almost wholly dependent upon the hunting conducted by the Aka. In addition, the villagers catch fish with nets and weirs set in the river where the village is located, and in the dry season they set up camps in the forest and join the Aka in fish-bailing in receded rivers. In this way the farmers make a comfortable living, obtaining the core caloric content of their diet through mixed farming, while procuring animal protein from various types of fishing and from game hunting entrusted to the Aka. In particular the male villagers, except during the season when land is cleared for new fields, enjoy considerable free time, drinking palm wine and chatting.

The Aka hunt in the primary forest at least 4 km away from the village, using nets, spears, crossbows, cable snare and various other kinds of traps. The mainstay of Aka hunting activity is the duiker, which is hunted with nets, and which provides a relatively stable source of game, while other methods of hunting are supplementary (Takeuchi, 1995). As for guns, since the Aka have practically almost no cash income, nobody possesses his own

shotgun. And while they do not fish in the major rivers, the Aka bail fish in small streams, and as mentioned above, at times set fishing camps with the villagers. These activities provide the Aka with a source of animal protein, while the Aka women collect edible wild plants, including ten-odd varieties of yam rhizomes, fruits, nuts and mushrooms. However, as the women participate in the frequent net hunts, it is difficult to continuously devote their time and effort to gathering vegetable foods. There are some Aka groups who maintain slash-and-burn fields, but these are generally small in scale, making it difficult to harvest enough food to compensate for the insufficient caloric intake provided by the unstable harvest of wild plants. In reflection of these circumstances, the cultivated crops provided by the villagers occupy a weighty position in the Aka dietary lifestyle. In other words, the Aka depend upon the villagers to adjust their imbalanced subsistence activities.

How, then, do the Aka obtain crops from the villagers? In the eastern part of the Congo Basin's tropical forest region live the Mbuti, one of "Pygmy" forager groups who conduct net-hunting much as the Aka do. To obtain agricultural produce, they exchange nearly half of the catch with farmers and meat brokers (Ichikawa, 1986). In contrast, the Aka consume almost all the wild game they hunt. According to data gathered over 42 days in 1989, about 980kg of wild meat was obtained from hunting, excluding that with shotguns, of which only a few kilograms ever reached the villagers' hands, while almost all the meat was consumed by the Aka themselves. Meanwhile, game hunted by shotgun is considered the property of the gun owner, and according to the customary rule of game distribution, only the heads and innards of the animals hunted are granted to the actual hunters, the Aka. In other words, the villagers make use of the Aka to obtain wild game. From the angle of maintaining a living, however, it can be said that the Aka and villagers procure wild meat for themselves independently. In addition to gun hunting, the Aka provide the villagers with their labor in a variety of forms, including clearing the fields, weeding, harvesting and transporting produce, harvesting coconuts and making palm oil, assisting in canoe construction, daily chores like gathering firewood, and even helping with sorcery practices. In return for labor-intensive jobs like clearing land for farming, harvesting coconuts and gun hunting, the Aka are remunerated with luxury items such as tobacco, marijuana, and palm wine, or occasionally small amounts of cash, but for jobs that do not require such intensive effort, they often do not receive any reward. Furthermore, while the payment received from the villagers does satisfy the Aka's cravings for luxury items, it does not contribute to supporting their lifestyle, and is rather more like a tip. However, at the same time, it cannot be said that the Aka receive too little reward for their labor. This is because during their residence in or near a village, even when they have done no work for the villagers, the Aka are given foodstuffs, or treated to simple cooking (most often a dish of cassava leaves cooked in palm oil). Even when the Aka help themselves to young cassava leaves or yams directly from the villagers' fields, the villagers will turn a blind eye so long as the amount is not too great. Simply put, in return for their labor services, the Aka are recompensed with daily food supplies. From the

frequencies of use at dinnertime of 3 kinds of foods by the Aka living near a village (Fig. 3), it can be seen that the greater part consists of produce provided by the villagers. Even when the Aka stay at a hunting camp far from the village in the depths of the forest, the Aka women frequently carry produce from the village to their camp. From the viewpoint of the Aka, who have no stable source of calorie-rich vegetable foodstuffs of their own, the village is like a great storehouse which can be relied upon in times of need. The villagers, on the other hand, by sharing excess agricultural products such as cassava and its leaves, can avail themselves of the Aka's excellent hunting skills and thereby obtain a source of animal protein, while at the same time gaining extra manpower for farming and other activities. For the villagers, the Aka camps scattered around their village are a valuable source of labor. Moreover, upon completion of activities such as clearing forest, the villagers sometimes bestow a kind of "bonus" upon the Aka by giving them old clothes, pots or pans, etc. Such goods are coveted by the Aka, who have practically no source of cash income, but when focusing solely on the maintenance of livelihood, it can be said that the pillar of economic relations between the Aka and the villagers is the exchange of cultivated crops for labor. However, as described above, the provision of labor and supplying of produce are not always simultaneous, and there are no fixed rates for how much produce is to be supplied for a given type or amount of labor. The essence of this exchange is not one of explicit equivalency but instead is give-and-take, with a time lag between payment and repayment.

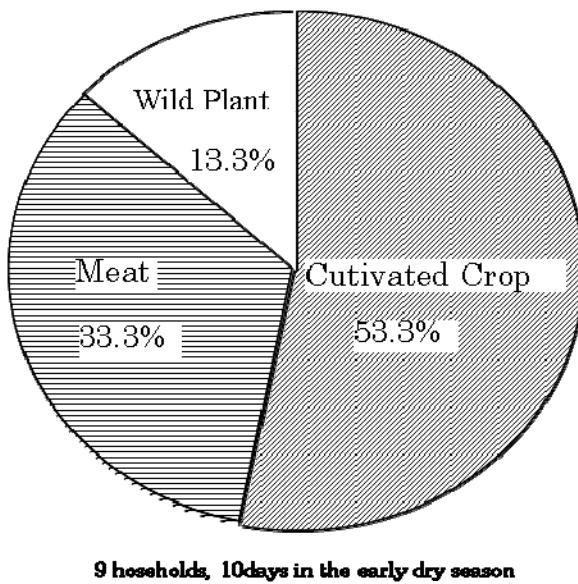


Fig. 3 Composition of Aka meals.

MUTUAL ALIENATION AND THE SUBORDINATE STATUS OF THE AKA

As detailed in the section above, the Aka are strongly dependent in economic terms upon the villagers, and yet as described in the introduction, they harbor a very contemptuous image of them at the same time. To the

Aka, the villagers are arrogant, lazy brutes who sometimes do violence to the Aka without just cause. What is more, the villagers are deeply involved in evil arts of sorcery, and the Aka even fear that they sometimes perform heinous rites of black magic in which they cannibalize sacrificial Aka victims. According to the Aka, the true nature of the villagers is not human, but rather the men are gorillas, the women chimpanzees and the children bushbabies, and after death they are reincarnated in these original forms. On the reverse side, the villagers see the Aka as unpunctual, slovenly and utterly irrational; they are filthy, smelly and full of procreative power. Whenever an Aka failed to keep an appointment with me in my work, the villagers would reprovingly repeat the same cliche to me: "The Aka are no different from chimps, and after all, a chimp cannot be expected to keep an appointment." Their image of the Aka is that they are only anthropoids, and not truly human. They even assert that if an Aka passes by a freshly planted seedling in a field, the Aka's foul smell will cause the seedling to rot. This remark is a metaphor of the villager's view to the ethnicity of the Aka that a still fragile, newly planted seedling in a field cut out of the forest, in other words in a part of the expanded civilized human world, would be damaged by the uncleanliness of the animal-like Aka.

Even in other parts of the tropical forest region of the Congo basin, many examples have been reported of farmers viewing the "Pygmy" forager as being on the borderline between animal and human, or culture and nature (e.g. Kazadi 1981; Dodd 1986; Grinker 1994). However, in the case of the Aka and the villagers, both parties consider each other as occupying the borderline between human and animal, and attach discriminatory stigma to the other's ethnicity. Both use "*ba.knye*" to refer straight to one another, which means "barbarian" or "uncivilized people."

According to Terashima, who studied the Efe foragers of the eastern Congo basin, they and their horticulturalist neighbors bear, as in the case of the Aka, a mutual negative image of each other's ethnicities. These two groups, however, apparently make efforts to foster solidarity by participating cross-culturally in one-another's social events, such as ceremonies held by the farmers, or dances held by the Efe (Terashima, 1986). In contrast, while the Aka frequently obtain the villagers' permission to hold ceremonial dances within the village, at best only the village children will watch, and then from a distance, while the adults express practically no interest whatsoever in such functions. Indeed, the villagers fear that the Aka will become overly involved in their dancing and neglect their assigned jobs. The Aka, meanwhile, never participate in the villager's dances, and instead comment from the sidelines, criticizing the dancing as utterly dull. Thus, not only is there a clear lack of cultural exchange in terms of ceremonial events, but even sharing room and board in daily life is rare. When the Aka stay overnight in the village, for instance, they do not sleep in the main house with the villagers, but rather in a detached kitchen hut, and they eat their meals separately as well. Conversely, when the villagers stay in an Aka camp to observe the progress of hunting they have requested, they borrow an Aka hut for their own exclusive use. Terashima reports frequent marriages between Efe girls and farmer men (Terashima, 1987), while between the Aka and villagers there

is no intermarriage. There do exist sexual relations between Aka women and village men, but whatever the reality of such relations may be, they are publicly viewed by both sides with disapproval. The village men say that the Aka are filthy and smelly and therefore lack sex appeal, and that even were a man to accidentally fall into a sexual relationship with an Aka woman, he would be ridiculed by the village women, who would thereafter have nothing to do with him. For their part, the Aka women assert that even the thought of sexual relations with the village men, to them bestial brutes, makes their blood run cold. Furthermore, it is rare for Aka and villagers children to play together; the marked absence of serious contact between these two ethnic groups outside of the economic one begins from childhood. In short, while maintaining a mutual negative image of the other's ethnicity, the Aka and villagers avoid interaction which crosses ethnic boundaries.

Although they mutually despise and alienate each other, whereas the villagers will openly make scornful comments about the Aka in their presence, the Aka will never overtly express their contempt in the villagers' presence. This asymmetry in their relationship can be seen concretely in various daily situations between the two groups. When the villagers visit an Aka settlement, for example, they will stride right into a hut unannounced as if they owned the place; yet the Aka would never enter a village dwelling without permission, and in fact are rarely ever invited in at all. In an Aka camp, villagers will help themselves to the Aka's palm wine, or to the bark of a tree of the madder family (*Corynanthe* sp.), which the Aka collect from the primary forest and add to their palm wine as an energy tonic. Should, however, an Aka sneak some of the villagers' palm wine, it would be viewed as an act of theft. In both of these cases, the same behavior is permitted of the villagers, but not of the Aka. In chance encounters as well, their behavior is asymmetrical: without fail, it is the villagers who initiate greetings, while the Aka wait to be greeted before saying anything. Furthermore, when meeting on a narrow forest path, it is always the Aka who make way for the villagers. Thus while the social relationship between the Aka and the villagers is one characterized by alienation, it is also one of inequality, in that the Aka regularly take a subordinate position in mutual interactions. Let me describe one impressive case I was witness to. Two young Aka men sitting in the village were approached by several village boys, who began circling doggedly about the young men and hitting them with sticks, while jeeringly calling out *ba.mbenga!*, the name by which they call the Aka. The young men, meanwhile, only made gestures of shooing the boys away, but never actually touched them.

THE SOCIAL MECHANISM WHICH PRODUCES OPPOSITION AND ASYMMETRY

Thus far we have examined the economic interdependence between the Aka and the villagers, consisting of a loose exchange of labor for cultivated crop, and the contrasting social relationship between them of mutual

opposition and alienation, as well as the subordinate position assumed by the Aka. I would like now to consider the following two questions. Firstly, why would an asymmetrical and hierarchical relationship form between two groups with such deep economic ties? And secondly, why would such a contemptuous image for the other form mutually between them? Let us consider these problems from the point of view of the social relationship binding the Aka and villagers at the level of basic social unit.

Social Units of the Aka and Villagers

The fundamental social unit of the Aka is the extended family centering around the elder male known as *kombeti* and including his family, his siblings' families, the families of his married children, and so on. The greater family group which shares residence and consumer activities takes this extended family as its core, and includes other relatives. As a general rule, each camp is composed of one family group, while the relatively larger, more populous settlements, which tend to be permanent, are composed of several.

The opinion of the *kombeti* is respected by other members of the family group and affects overall group decisions, but is not powerful enough to restrict the behavior of individual group members. Among the Aka, who share a common lifestyle, the dividing of game or cooked food is repeated daily, and no one particular member ever unilaterally assumes a privileged, benefactorial role. As Hewlett(1991) points out, intergenerational inequality is also slight, with a weak standard of precedence by age. Seniors do not often intervene in the conduct of younger members, and even when they do, the youths will more often than not defend and persist in their intentions. While the *kombeti* is the representative member of the group, that he commands only a relatively weak influence over other members is a result of this general character of Aka society.



Aka father and his son during net-hunting

In the village, living relatively close together, using the Aka and

dividing up the game hunted by them, a closely related group of families centered around one elder male provides unity among the villagers in terms of lifestyle. The composition of this kinship group is very much like that of the Aka family group, but whereas the former includes the families of the *kombeti*'s married daughters, the villagers' kinship group is patrilineal. Furthermore, the elder male leader has patriarchal authority, and enjoys considerable restrictive power over the other members. Overall, the standard of precedence by age is clearly defined, and elders act authoritatively and exercise a strong influence over others. Youths, in particular, until they marry and become independent, must obey their parents' authority and perform various household chores and duties on request.

Fictive Parent-child Relationship

What, then, is the relationship between the social groups of the Aka and the villagers? The *kombeti* of the Aka family group refers to the elder (usually male) leader of the village kinship group as *nkuma*, which connotes a patron or boss, while using *tata* (father) or *mama* (mother) in face-to-face situations, and referring to himself as *ko* (child). In other words, the personal connection between these individuals of differing ethnic groups is established by invocation of the most basic human relationship for both the Aka and the villagers; namely, that of parent and child. Such fictitious parent-child relationships are generally succeeded patrilineally among both Aka and villagers, but this individual relationship is expanded to apply to other members of each group as well.

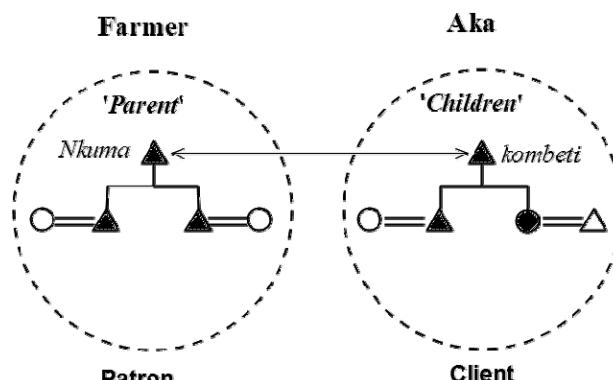


Fig.4. Model of Aka and farmer social relations.

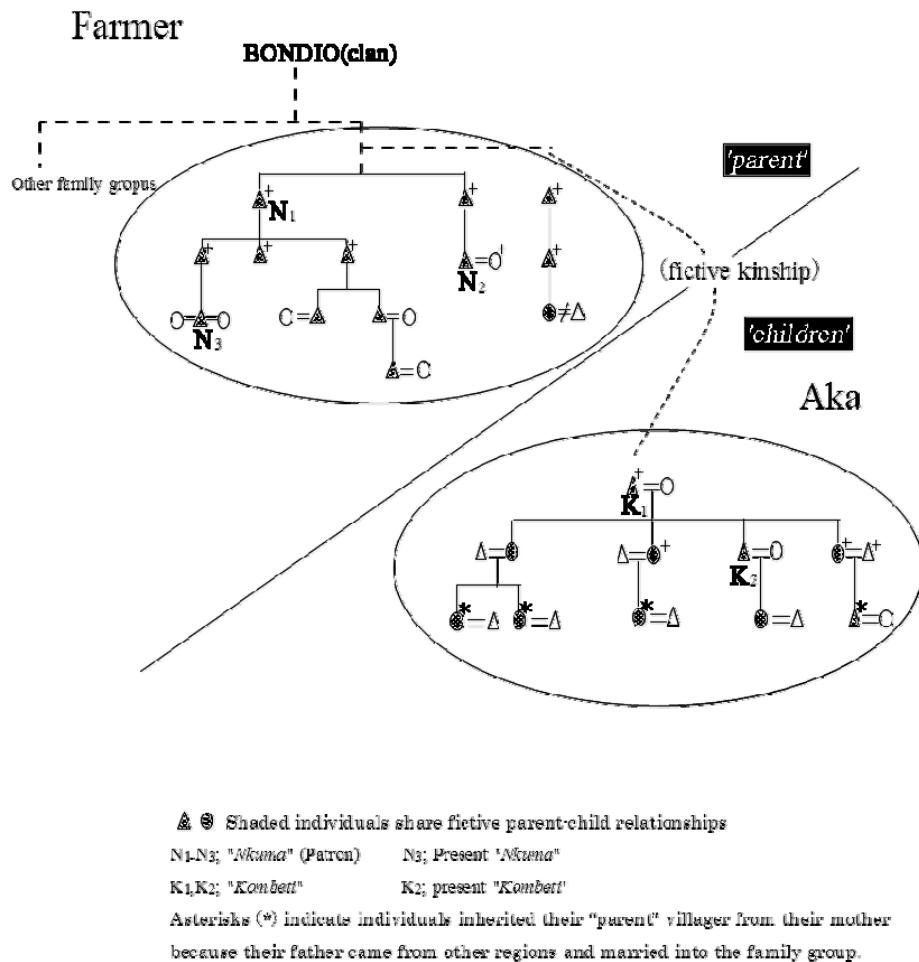


Fig. 5. A case of Aka and farmer social relations

Fig.4 shows the model for this relationship, while Fig.5 shows an actual case. Basically, all of the kombeti's children become "children" of his nkuma and the nkuma's close relatives. Thus, except for those members related only by marriage, villager and Aka kinship groups assume a parent-child relationship en masse, forming a loose genealogical connection and giving the Aka perfunctory membership in the villager's clan. The terms used to describe this relationship, viz. nkuma, tata and mama, are from the villagers' language; amongst themselves, the Aka refer to the nkuma as "mi.lo wa mu", which means "my farmer" (in the case of a female, "mo.ato mi.lo wa mu"). As described below, this suggests that the relationship between the Aka and the farmers is constructed according to farmer's logic.

With the fictive child/parent relationship between *kombeti* and *nkuma* as a medium, the inter-social group relationship of Aka as subordinate and villager as boss forms a bond stretching across ethnic boundaries. Taken overall, all of the Aka living around a given village are affiliated with a specific village kinship group (Fig. 6). However, the social relationship between Aka and villager does not conclude with that between specific groups. That is to say, through the false parent-child relationship, familial terms of address are derivatively applied to the in-laws of the "parents," or villagers, as well as those of the "children," or Aka; and as villager marriages are mostly between members of the same village, except for

those immigrating from faraway places, all of the Aka and villagers have some sort of false kinship tie with each other.

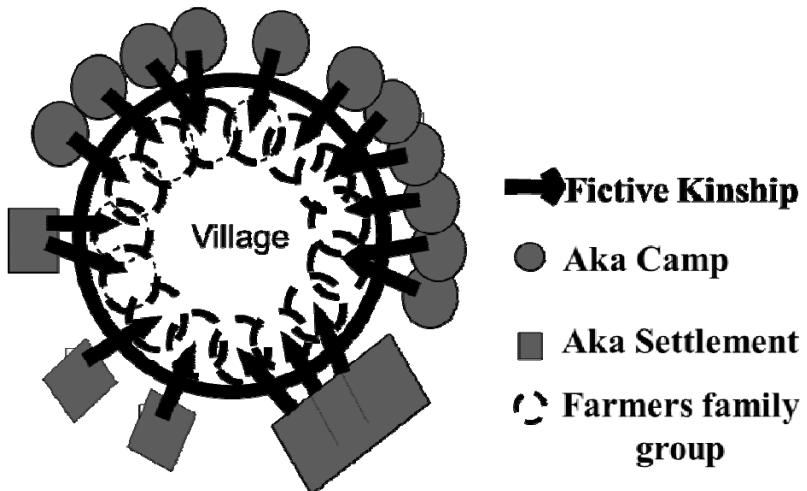
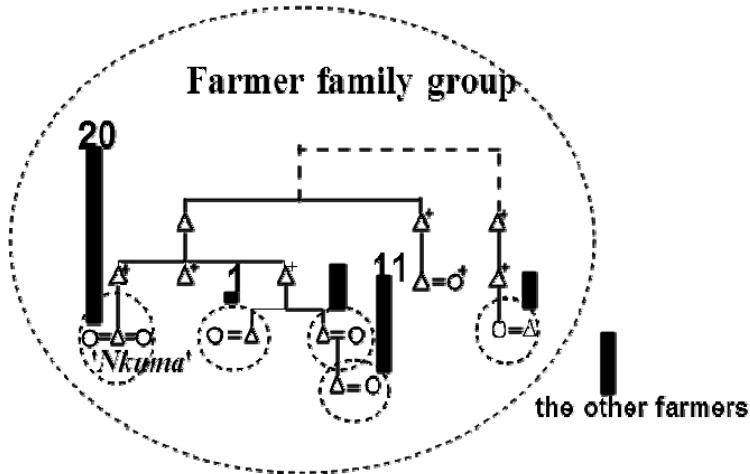


Fig.6. Aka and farmer inter-group relationship.

In terms of inter-ethnic relations, an important point about the boss/subordinate relationship between the Aka and villager social groups is that it forms a social link which is key to the previously described economic interdependence. From the viewpoint of individual Aka family groups, this link serves to confirm the villagers as counterparts who provide a reliable supply of cultivated crop and metal goods, etc. Likewise, from the viewpoint of the village kinship groups, this link ensures them a priority claim to the labor force the Aka family groups provide. While it is not uncommon for the Aka to provide labor to others than their counterparts, on the whole, as clearly shown in Fig.6, within the region surrounding a village, this fictive parent-child connection results in a concrete organization of the exchange of cultivated crop for labor. The avoidance of marriage between Aka and villager is not only a product of their deep-seated aversion to each other's ethnicity, but can be explained in terms of this kind of socio-economic relationship as well. This is because in the network of the fictive parent-child relationship bridging these two groups, the Aka are always in the position of descendant, such that marrying a villager would mean allowing marriage between descendant and ancestor, and would confuse the order of the parent-child premise underlying the relationship of interdependence.

Fig. 7 shows how many Aka, from the Aka group subordinate to the household of a certain villager's kinship group, were employed for planting in the dry season. From this figure, it can be seen that the Aka labor force is used possessively by the villager group to which it is bound by the fictive parent-child relationship. The *nkuma* will often make a show of power by bragging how many Aka he "possesses," but this does not indicate how many Aka he personally controls, but rather how many Aka's labor he has preferential right to. However, as can be observed in the figure, the *nkuma* does not monopolize the Aka labor force. In this sense, the *nkuma* is no more than a representative of a villager group which shares use of Aka labor.



The numbers shown here indicate total labor per Aka/day for each household in a nine day period (1989.2.2~2.10)

Fig.7. Distribution of Aka labor for clearing gardens

Superiority of the Villager's Ideology

As we have seen, the interdependence between the Aka and the villagers is organized via the fictive parent-child relationship. However, the principle which embodies this organization is supposed to be the logic of the villagers, and not that of the Aka. Namely, through the villager's parent-child logic, whereby in exchange for food and support from the parent, the child must perform the demanded labor, the social relationship of fictive parent and child is transformed into the economic relationship of exchanging labor for crops. That the powerful villagers should be called "parent" while simultaneously being referred to as *nkuma*, with its nuance of patron or boss, is significant of a relationship of service and patronage modeled on the villager's parent-child relationship. Furthermore, in this fictive kinship, it is the authoritative ideology of domination of elders over youths, that dictates the 'descendant' Aka always take a subordinate position to the 'ancestor' villagers. In other words, the various inequalities between the Aka and the villagers described thus far are the inevitable consequence of daily socio-economic interactions supported by the villagers' ideology.

While the mutually advantageous relationship between the Aka and farmers is imbued with the villagers' ideology in social interaction taking the form of Aka service and villager patronage, the Aka receive does not end with the economic aspect of crop distribution. The Aka, who pay no taxes and carry no identification card, occupy a political position in which their life as formal citizens is not completely ensured. It is not uncommon for residents of rural towns, petty officials of rural government offices, or farmers of other regions, when encountering Aka by chance, to find fault with them, seize their possessions, or do violence to them. The *nkuma* and other 'parent' villagers, by protecting the Aka from such threats from outsiders, serve as a valuable political bulwark. I once visited a farming

village about 70 km away from my research area with two Akas of Moumpoutou who had never been there before. Throughout the journey, the Aka poured forth an endless stream of verbal abuse about the farmers; yet upon reaching our destination, their first action was to enquire among the Aka living nearby whether there were any relatives of their fictitious kinsmen of Moumpoutou farmers in the village. After spending a whole day in their search, they somehow managed to find a farmer who was a distant relative of their *nkuma*, and for the duration of their stay in the village, they frequently visited the man's residence. For the Aka, a close connection with a specific farmer is a guarantee of safety and stability not just economically, but politically as well.

While the respective roles in their symbiotic relationship consist of the Aka's service and the villager's various forms of patronage, it cannot be said that daily relations between the two parties always proceed smoothly. The Aka are fully aware that the villagers expect them, as subordinates, to act obediently. However, the patriarchal parent-child logic of the villagers, while used to order the relationship, is difficult for the Aka to adapt to, as their own parent-child relationship involves much more independence and freedom for the child. And as can be inferred from their custom of referring, among themselves, to their *nkuma* as "my villager," fundamentally speaking the Aka do not accept the idea of one person controlling another's actions. Furthermore, for the Aka who are obscured in their vague role in the daily repetition of food distribution from bestower to recipient, the provision of food by the villagers does not produce a feeling of indebtedness to the extent that might be expected of them. The villagers are well aware of this, and when persuading Aka who are reluctant to perform a given task, they do not overemphasize the fact that the Aka are consuming their crop, but rather more often use the social debt, such as being allowed to conduct their funerals in the village as leverage to make the Aka consent.

At any rate, the Aka, who lack a hierarchical social system or ideology, do not recognize that they must go so far in their attention to the villager's theory or ideology as to substantially overstep their own area of initiative. Indeed, the Aka will often forgo duties allotted them by the villagers at their own discretion, depending upon circumstance or lack of interest. The villagers, meanwhile, when faced with such negligence, will employ various measures to bring the Aka in line with their own intentions. The type or severity of countermeasures taken by the villagers will vary according to the specific relationship with that individual; thus, a youth whose ties to the family group are weak and who often stays in the village to perform odd jobs will be treated severely, whereas a *kombeti* or a hunter with excellent skill will be treated appealingly (Takeuchi, 1991). When imposing punishment on an Aka who has neglected his/her duty, the villagers might require disciplinary labor such as weeding around the house, seize items essential to the Aka's livelihood such as a spear or ax, or resort to direct corporal punishment. This sort of punishment too is justified as a penalty imposed by a senior upon a disobedient junior. Naturally this sort of punishment and its justification are difficult to accept and endure, and while direct retaliation is not resorted to neither will the Aka become obedient in performing tasks they do not care for. Thus, the inconsistency

and opposition between the logic of the Aka and the villagers' ideology, which underpins the socio-economic relations between the two parties, produces a constant tension in their daily interactions. However, as their relationship is one of reciprocal interdependence, there is no danger of their opposition reaching beyond interpersonal or inter-group strife to the level of a wide-reaching and critical inter-ethnic group discord. Instead, the contradiction internalized in the relationship spins forth an endless symbol of mutual contempt. Therefore on the one hand, the villagers look down upon the Aka as half-human creatures unable to conform to social norms, while on the other hand, the Aka revile the villagers as arrogant sloths not deserving of the title "human."

DISCUSSION

In relation to why the logic and ideology of the villagers is used to structure inter-ethnic relations with the Aka, I would like to point out the following two factors regarding the contrast between two societies.

The Ngandu, slash-and-burn farmers living in central Zaire (presently Democratic Republic of Congo), where there are no resident hunter-gatherers, obtain their source of protein by supplementing farming with fish-bailing and various hunting activities in the forests (Takeda and Sato, 1993). The farmers of the region treated herein, *viz.* northeastern Congo now rely almost entirely on Aka rifle-hunting to obtain wild game. Without a doubt, however, they originally, like the Ngandu, were generalist farmers who employed a composite subsistence strategy highly adapted to the tropical forest ecology. The Aka were unable to establish a lifestyle like that of the previously mentioned Mbuti; namely, based on the exchange of wild game for agricultural produce. It is deduced that the Aka, whose living based on unreliable hunting and gathering activities made them unable to compete in terms of environmental utilization, had no choice but to offer their labor services, including game hunting, to the farmers, and to become highly dependent in a sympatric and symbiotic relationship. In other words, it can be conjectured that at the base of the farmers dominant relationship with the Aka lies the farmers' superior potential adaptability to the tropical forest environment. It can also be supposed that farmers immigrating as newcomers to the tropical forest region from the savannah or scrub regions were therefore on a more equal footing with the Mbuti or Efe (Ichikawa, 1982; Terashima, 1986).

The second reason is more fundamental, and deals with the basic social character of each group. In farmer society, there are prominent social categories of senior and junior, parent and child etc., and the rules of authority between categories are clearly defined in a unified social organization; whereas Aka society is characterized by the homogenization and equalization of differences between members. In short, the Aka lack the basic mechanism necessary for drawing distinct boundaries between groups to establish a relationship of inter-ethnic coexistence. In 1999, about 70 km northward of Moumpoutou on the Central African Republic side of the border, I conducted a survey in a region where commercial

logging had penetrated early and which therefore possessed an established network of roadways. Farmers of various backgrounds gather from the surrounding areas to cultivate coffee beans, and cohabit with the Aka in a village there. Due to the frequency of movement by farmers in and out of the region, the fictive kinship relationship with the Aka has been severed, and the economic interaction between Aka and farmers is more of a contractual arrangement where on-demand labor is traded for remuneration. Some of the Aka who have converted to coffee cultivation and slash-and-burn farming refer to the those who have preserved their original lifestyle by using a term from the farmer's language, while to refer to themselves, they employ the French "*civilize*" (civilized person), and they do not participate in the net hunts or dances with the other Aka. Thus in regions where the old entanglement between farmer and Aka has disappeared through development and the spread of the commercial economy, the boundaries between ethnic groups begin to blur, and an ethnic change on the part of the Aka can be observed. Conversely, in regions like Moumpoutou where the influence from exterior regions is relatively slight, the coexistence based on hierarchical logic advocated by the farmers results in the imposition of a self-contradictory identity on the Aka.

The ambivalent and multilayered relationship of mutual dependence and opposition between the Aka and farmers can be thought to originate from the fundamental social characteristics and occupational activities of both groups. However, if there is a drastic change in the socio-economic conditions surrounding these two ethnic groups, as in the case described in central Africa, an unavoidable effect is exerted on their relationship. In conclusion, I would like to convey the recent state of affairs in the village examined herein, Moumpoutou, and its surrounds.

In 1995, a logging company had expanded operations to the point where a logging road had been cut to within 40 km of the village, and at the end of that road a logging village with a population of over 200 had sprung up. With this sudden influx of laborers has arisen a new demand for wild game meat, and with the improvement in transportation to larger towns facilitated by the new road, the commercialization of game meat has begun at a rapid pace in Moumpoutou. Bent on accessing this new source of cash, the villagers have begun sending the Aka out hunting more often than before, and the incidence of physical abuse for coming back empty-handed has increased as well. At the same time, the Aka have ceased to think of gun-hunting as a mere labor service, and have begun going to sell meat directly to outsiders and to ask for greater cash remuneration from the villagers. Thus in Moumpoutou, as a result of meat acquiring a commercial value separate from its subsistence value, the tension between Aka and villager has reached previously unseen heights. Since the Republic of the Congo fell into a state of civil war in 1996, I have not had opportunity to visit Moumpoutou, but from what I hear, the logging company has persisted despite the unstable political situation to extend its logging road even further. With the increase of human traffic and goods to the area, in addition to the commercialization of game meat, many other socio-economic factors which cannot be handled within the framework of local Aka-villager relations will likely develop. Will the multilevel symbiosis described herein

be destroyed as in the aforementioned case in central Africa? Or, will the new elements from the outside be incorporated, the old system reorganized, and a new symbiosis evolve? Considering the very rapid change of the region's socio-economic environment, I am inclined to think the former option more likely to occur; at any rate, I hope to investigate the outcome directly in a future study.

REFERENCES

- Bahuchet, S. and H. Guillaume 1982. Aka-farmer relations in the northwest Congo Basin. In (E. Leacock and R. Lee, eds.) *Politics and history in band societies*, pp.189-211, Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
- Dodd, R. 1986. The politics of neighbourliness. Paper presented in CHAGS4
- Grinker, R.R. 1994. *Houses in the rain forest; Ethnicity and inequality among farmers and foragers in Central Africa*. Univ. of California Press, Berkely & Los Angeles.
- Hart, T. B. and J. A. Hart 1986. The ecological basis of hunter-gatherer subsistence in African rain forests: The Mbuti of eastern Zaire, *Human Ecology* 14(1):29-55.
- Hewlett, B.S. 1991. *Intimate Fathers: The Nature and Context of Aka Pygmy Paternal Infant Care*. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Ichikawa, M. 1986. Ecological bases of symbiosis, territoriality and intra-band cooperation of the Mbuti Pygmies. *Sprache und Geshishte in Afrika*, 7(1): 161-188.
- Kazadi, N. 1981. "Meprises et admires: L'ambivalence des relations entre les Bacwa (Pygmées) et les Bahembas (Bantu)," *Africa* 5 (4): 836-847.
- Schebesta, P. 1933. *Among Congo Pygmies*, Hutchinson & Co.,London.
- Takeda, J. and H. Sato 1993. Multiple subsistence strategies and protein resources of horticulturalists in the Zaire basin: The Ngandu and the Boyela, *Tropical forests, people and food*, UNESCO and The Parthenon Publishing Group
- Takeuchi, K. 1991. *Social identity of the Aka; A case study from a permanent settlement* (in Japanese), (J. Takenaka and M. Kakeya, eds.) *Human Nature*, pp. 415-439. Heibonsha, Tokyo.
1995. Subsistence hunting in the African tropical forest; Hunting techniques and activities of the Aka in the northeastern Congo (in Japanese) *Zoo-Archaeology*, 4, 27-51.
- Terashima, H. 1986. Economic exchange and the symbiotic relationship between the Mbuti(Efe) Pygmies and the neighbouring farmers. *Sprache und Geshishte in Afrika* 7(1): 392-405.
1987. Why Efe girl marry farmers?: Socio-ecological backgrounds of inter-ethnic marriage in the Ituri forest of Central Africa, *African Study Monographs*, Supplementary Issue 6:65-83
- Turnbull,C. M. 1965. *Wayward Servants; The two worlds of the African Pygmies*, Natural History Press, New York