

## *Book Reviews*

**Land, Local Custom, and State Policies: Land Tenure, Land Disputes and Disputes Settlement among the Arsii Oromo of Southern Ethiopia.** Mamo Hebo, Kyoto: Shoukadoh Book Sellers, 2006, 186 pp.

Today, issues involving land are important to the economy and politics not only of Ethiopia, but also of local societies that are experiencing dramatic transformations as a result of globalization. However, study of local land tenure systems on the basis of long-term field research remains insufficient. This book, based on fieldwork, makes a significant contribution to studies on the African land tenure system. The Japanese Association for Nilo-Ethiopian Studies awarded the 2007 Takashima Prize to the author, Dr. Mamo Hebo, for this study.

With this book, Mamo examines relationships between the land and the people of the Arsii Oromo using a multi-dimensional perspective that includes historical, cultural, political, and gender-related aspects. This book is based primarily on the author's Ph.D thesis, submitted to Kyoto University. He conducted field research for this thesis in the Kokossa district, located in the Bale zone of the Oromia regional state in southern Ethiopia, for seventeen months between 1999 and 2003.

Mamo grew up in the study area until junior high school. However, he was careful about conducting research in his former "hometown." In the first chapter, he frankly describes his ambiguous position as a field worker working at home.

The first chapter outlines the theoretical framework for this book, the research methods used, and some basic information about the research area. This area, located in the Bale highlands, is characterized primarily by a subsistence economy in which the Arsii Oromo raise cattle and other livestock and barely cultivate enset, maize, and so on. Mamo notes that cultivation of cereal crops seems to be rapidly transforming the land use system in this region.

Chapter 2 provides a review of land tenure systems in Ethiopia. Previous studies have classified Ethiopian land tenure systems into two types: north and south. The former originated in Abyssinia and was imposed on conquered peoples after the creation of the Ethiopian empire. The latter, consisting of the systems indigenous to the conquered peoples, have

not been studied adequately in the past. Mamo also refers to the dichotomy between private and state ownership that currently structures debates on land issues. He criticizes the dichotomies used by previous studies, north vs. south and private vs. state ownership, that ignore the variety of local land tenure systems. Mamo emphasizes importance of the socio-cultural dimension.

Chapter 3 addresses the land customs of the Arsii Oromo. Mamo describes relationships between land and lineage, focusing on mystical or ritualized relationships. He claims that the land is regarded not as a mere economic object but also as a religious value.

In Chapter 4, Mamo uses a diachronic perspective to focus on the dynamics of land tenure systems, dividing the development of those systems according to four regimes: pre-conquest, imperial (late 1880s–1974), the former socialist government "Derg" (1974–1991), and the present Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front government. Mamo describes the Arsii land tenure system as being "in between the local systems and the systems imposed by the state" after the conquest. Thus, he claims that Arsii peasants have had access to the land in various ways under all regimes.

Chapter 5 addresses women's land rights in the Arsii Oromo culture. Mamo describes the variety of ways in which women access the land of the Arsii Oromo. He emphasizes that the property rights of women change according to the status of women, and criticizes using the male-female dichotomy to establish the rights of women.

The core of the book is the next three chapters. These consider land disputes and settlements and then discuss these cases more specifically. Chapter 6 focuses on land disputes among the Arsii Oromo in the context of the tenure systems throughout history. Mamo points out that land disputes emerged after the fall of the Derg in 1991. He categorizes cases into six types of land disputes: customary vs. political rights, disputed political rights, land inheritance, land sale, sale of grazing rights, and boundary, and then provides data showing that cases categorized as customary vs. political represent more than half of the total of sixty-four cases studied. In conclusion, he claims that the dramatic emergence of disputes is caused by the coexistence of opposing systems.

Chapter 7 clarifies the pluralism characterizing

land dispute settlements. Mamo divides dispute settlements into two types, a formal state settlement and an informal settlement achieved via local customs, and describes in detail the process attending each type of settlement. Arsii peasants informed Mamo that they preferred settlements achieved via local customs over formal judgments because of the lower costs and familiarity of the former and the inconsistency of the latter. However, Mamo adds that local and the state institutions are not always in opposition and occasionally cooperate in regard to dispute settlements.

Chapter 8 describes four land disputes cases. Two are classified as customary vs. state's rights, the third is classified as disputed political rights, and the last is classified as a dispute about the sale of grazing rights.

In the last chapter, Mamo reemphasizes that Arsii peasants trust the judgment of traditional institutions more than the judgment of governmental authorities. Therefore, he suggests that traditional institutions should be available, recognized, and strengthened, and that formal and informal institutions should cooperate in settling disputes.

In summary, Mamo's book clearly provides important ethnographic data on land tenure systems in contemporary Ethiopia. In addition, he draws on both local and practical perspectives to offer an important suggestion for solving problems. However, global capitalism and fluid political situations complicate land issues and render related problems seemingly more difficult to resolve in the future. Researchers must collect more data on the land tenure system in Ethiopia to solve problems related to land issues. Therefore, this book should be read not only by Ethiopianists interested in the land tenure system and in Oromo societies, but also by policy-makers, aid workers, and other social scientists more generally.

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**The Story of Land and People: Africa I. (Asakura World Geography Series, Vol. 11)** Kazunobu Ikeya, Ren'ya Sato and Shinichi Takeuchi, eds., Asakura Shoten, 2007, 435 pp. (in Japanese)

Publication of a renewed Asakura World Geography series started in 2006, 35 years after the precursor series was launched in 1971. While experienced authorities on geography contributed to the precursor series, the new one, far from being a minor revision, boldly adopts a number of up-to-date studies by active researchers.

Plans call for 15 volumes, of which two (vol. 11

and 12) deal with Africa. While the series aims to enhance geographical knowledge, the volume that is the focus of this review actually covers multiple disciplines. Volume 11 contains 29 sections, contributed to by 28 Japanese researchers who study geography, anthropology, history, linguistics, economics, politics, and hygiene.

Volume 11 consists of three parts ('I. General Introduction: African Continent', 'II. Islamic Africa', and 'III. Ethiopia') and volume 12, unpublished at the time of review, is to include another three parts ('IV. Bantu Africa', 'V. Coastal West Africa', and 'VI. Islands'). The basic structure of volume 11 is as follows:

I. General Introduction: African Continent

Chapter 1. Climate and Environment (p. 3–50)

Chapter 2. History and Civilization (p. 51–105)

Chapter 3. People and Livelihood (p. 106–146)

Chapter 4. State and Society (p. 147–189)

II. Islamic Africa

Chapter 5. Climate and Environment (p. 193–249)

Chapter 6. People and Livelihood (p. 250–318)

Chapter 7. State and Society (p. 319–362)

III. Ethiopia

Chapter 8. Climate and Environment (p. 365–380)

Chapter 9. People and Livelihood (p. 381–421)

Part I presents a general overview of Africa, and the remaining two parts cover more specific, regional topics. While all three parts start with a chapter titled 'Climate and Environment' and have a chapter titled 'People and Livelihood' in common, Parts I and II also contain a chapter on 'State and Society', while only Part I has a chapter on 'History and Civilization'. Each chapter consists of one to four sections.

Chapter 1, consisting of four sections, introduces physical and cultural environments in Africa in terms of topography, vegetation, climate, environmental issues, and hygiene. Chapter 2, also containing four sections, explains human evolution, language classification, historical slavery, and the history and geography of kingdoms. Chapter 3 (three sections) examines ethnicity, agricultural systems, and religion. Chapter 4 (three sections) considers politics, conflicts, and economies.

Chapter 5, the first chapter in Part II (Islamic Africa), contains four sections that describe the physical environment of the Nile River and Sahara Desert, livelihoods in Sahelian region, and the regional history of the Chad Basin. Chapter 6 (also four sections) describes livelihoods in an Algerian society, women's activities in Tunisia, the history of Soninke merchants, and seasonal migration in Morocco. Chapter 7 discusses modern Egyptian society, the civil war and famine in Sudan, and construction of the state of Guinea in three sections.

Chapter 8 (one section) views the regional eco-

logical history of Ethiopia. The last chapter (three sections) covers the following topics: changing inter-ethnic relationships in highland Ethiopia, relationships between the Ethiopian state and lowland societies, and trading networks of sheep skin merchants.

All of the sections are written as a textbook guide for undergraduate and graduate students. Some are general reviews of the literature covering the topic and others specifically analyze field data collected by the contributors themselves. Most of the discussions show how the land and people are closely intertwined in the continent. The following is a typical example of how information is conveyed in this text.

Consider Chapter 2, Section 4, on the distribution of historical African kingdoms by Prof. Yoshihito Shimada. First, the continent is classified into four zones, according to the annual rainfall: desert, savanna, woodland, and humid tropical forest areas with annual rainfall of <250, 250–1000, 1000–1500, and >1500 mm, respectively. Then, it shows that most ancient and a number of major, relatively modern African kingdoms and empires, such as Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Mossi, Hausa, Kanem/Bornu, Nubia, Funj, Axum, Nyoro, Ganda, Ankole, Bunyoro, Great Zimbabwe, Lozi, Zulu, and Ndebele, were centered in savanna areas, where millet cultivation dominates. Then, the historical dynamics of the kingdoms are considered by examining how relationships have changed with the world beyond (Middle East and Europe).

Finally, I would like to make one critical comment. It concerns the structural basis for the division of the volumes. In the preface, the editors state that this (and the coming) volume do not follow the customary distinction that divides the continent into Africa north and south of the Sahara. Instead, they introduce five categories: 'Islamic Africa', 'Ethiopia', 'Bantu Africa', 'Coastal West Africa', and 'Islands'. However, the criteria used to make these distinctions seem controversial. Obviously, different criteria are employed for that: religion ('Islamic Africa'), linguistic category ('Bantu Africa'), state ('Ethiopia'), and topographical features ('Coastal West Africa' and 'Islands'). Then, beginners will easily ask such a question as, whether muslim-dominant regions and Bantu-speaking regions do not overlap each other? In reality, there are muslim-dominant regions in Bantu-speaking regions, e.g. Swahili-speaking East African Coast. In addition, Ethiopia is too narrow a regional category in relation to the other groupings; 'Northeast Africa' or 'Horn of Africa' would be better divisions. Those who are familiar with Africa may be able to understand the logic of this system, but those who are unfamiliar, and who are supposed to be the main readers of this text, will have difficulty understanding the rationale. Such an unusual classification system requires a more detailed and persuasive explanation in the introduction.

Overall, the publication presents recent advances in African studies in Japan.

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