

Relationships between Rice Diversity and Multi-leveled Social Structure among the Mandinka People in the Middle Gambia River Basin

Yumiko KATAYAMA

Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University

katayama@jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp

In the river basin of The Gambia, a small West African country, Mandinka women have long been engaged in rice cultivation along the river, while men grown pearl millet, sorghum, and maize in fields far from the river. In the research village, although only 5 varieties of pearl millet and sorghum were grown, 49 varieties of rice were found. Rice was all of Asian origin (*Oryza sativa* L.) and each variety was clearly recognized by the women based on its ecology, morphology, productivity, etc. This presentation discusses the connections between varieties and social dynamics such as the agrarian land and labor systems, with special attention given to the cultivation of varieties of rice by women.

People classify the fields into two types, based on the ownership of crops: in Mandinka a *kamanyang* is a field with individual rights over the crops, while a *maruo* is a collective field, the product of which is consumed by a group called *sinkiroo*, a kin-based cooking unit within the compound. And they grow rice with various size and type of labor in both fields.

Women grow a lot of non-popular varieties in individual fields (*kamanyang*). This is done to spread labor at harvesting time because of small labor size, and they test the new varieties. In collective fields (*maruo*), fewer varieties but popular, experienced safe varieties are grown. And, in these two types of fields, planters choose both varieties of low-risk low-return, and high-risk high-return. These practices suggest that the 'Individual' and 'Group' mechanisms of the land and labor systems contribute to maintaining the diversity of rice, and these mechanisms lead to ensure their food security.

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