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Final Essay

In the documentary film of BBC, “Human Planet”, human livings in various environments are shown (Brown et al. 2011). Some environments are harsh, and some environments are relatively generous. Among the environments, deserts and arctic lands are two harshest environments. One remarkable thing is that living in deserts and living in arctic lands are similar though the environmental conditions are extremely opposite. Both the livings have most severe environmental conditions, and the conditions make similarities; the most significant condition is that both environments have lack of food.

The most apparent condition is that both livings have limited period for production activity. Since the period of production is limited, the people can’t always stay in one place, so they need to leave their homes for a season. Livings in deserts are divided into two parts by periods, dry season and rainy season. In dry seasons, the people transact to survive the long season of consumption. When dry season comes, the people need to continuously consume without adequate production. There may be lack in some items, and they might consume more than their expectation, so they eventually need to trade with other groups. They move for trading, and they make camps to spend nights. In rainy seasons, production exceeds consumption, so the people rather stay in one place to provide workforce. Since farming is impossible during dry season, the people need to store foods and water during rainy season. Livings in arctic lands are also divided into two parts by periods, summer season and winter season. In summer seasons, the people need to store food to survive the winter season. Since it is impossible to farm in arctic lands, the people are not able to stay in one place. Instead, they move to their hunting grounds. They gather foods by hunting and fishing, and they leave their homes for several days while they are hunting and fishing. To spend nights, they carry shacks or make igloos. In winter seasons, day never comes, so the people can’t make meaningful production. Therefore, limited period of production makes half-settled livings.

Since both livings are based on half-settled lifestyle, domestic animals are much important in their cultures. Both livings require moving, so the people need to move. One important thing is how they move. Thanks to the advance of technology, they ride vehicles now. However, in old days, they had to use domestic animals to move. A camel is an important animal for livings in deserts. Like camels are called the ship of the desert, camels were the most valuable property in deserts. In episode 2 of *Human Planet*, the episode clearly shows how traditional livings in deserts are dependent on camels (Brown et al. 2011). Camels were the main transportation, so camels were an essential mean of life for the people who live in deserts. In arctic lands, dogs do camels’ job: the people of arctic lands rode dog sled to move. Dogs have dense hair, so they can survive cold weather better than other domestic animals. In addition, they eat much less than large livestock, and they can be used for hunting. Since dogs have such characteristics, the people of arctic lands have raised dogs rather than other animals. Though dogs are recently replaced by snowmobiles, they are still important for arctic livings.

Lack of grass caused nomadic lifestyle. Since both environments have lack of water, grass is rare in both environments, so the people could not feed their cattle in one place. If they fed their cattle in only one place, then the grass would all gone. To prevent such problem, the shepherds change meadows. In deserts of dry season, the shepherds need to find water to keep their cattle alive. Since the land is much dried, the shepherds need to travel far distance to find water. While they are finding water, they may encounter predators. Predators are a big risk to the shepherds as predators directly damage their properties. To prevent the risk, the shepherds are armed. In arctic lands, some tribes raise reindeers, and they do similar with nomad people in deserts. As winter season comes, tundra becomes frozen land, so the people need to move for feeding their reindeers. While they are moving, they are prepared for encounter of predator. Therefore, lack of water causes nomadic life.

The social structures of two livings are quite different to each other. Living in deserts is based on group while living in arctic lands is based on family. In the *Human Planet*, episode 2 shows that people of deserts gather to make a group (Brown et al. 2011). The groups are relatively small and formed by several families. The elders instruct related knowledges to every child in the group, and the eldest member is responsible for the most crucial tasks. However, episode 3 shows that people of arctic lands don’t make a group (Human Planet, Brown et al., 2011). The people work only with their family members, and they instruct related knowledges to their own children. Especially, every family member is responsible for each part of tasks. Kinships in deserts seem matrilineal and elder-based. On the other hand, kinships in arctic lands seem it is based on nuclear family. In general interpretation, kinship in desert is matrilineal and elder-based because transaction between the groups is often, and kinship in arctic lands is based on nuclear family because transaction between the groups is relatively rare. The most appropriate term for the kinships would be Sudanese kinship and Eskimo kinship.

It seems religion have big influence in the societies of both lands. As deserts and arctic lands have harsh environmental conditions, the people of the lands tend to believe in religions. Since people can not predict future, they pray to god for safety. As the people in those lands always need to face serious risks, they would believe in religions more than others do. In episode 2 of *Human Planet*, the episode shows shamanism in Mali, sky-worship of Mongol, and Islam of oasis (Brown et al. 2011). One common thing of those religions is that the believers appreciate for foods. Since there is lack of food in deserts, the people pray to gods for foods and appreciate if they got foods. In episode 3 of *Human Planet*, the episode shows how the traditions in arctic lands are related to religions (Brown et al. 2011). It seems the people of arctic lands explained the nature with myths. For example, sea unicorns were explained as sacred animals, and the people believed that they can absorb the holiness by eating sea unicorns while the truth was that sea unicorns were the only resource providing vitamin C (Human Planet, Brown et al. 2011). As arctic lands are full of mysteries such as endless night and auroras, the people needed myths to explain the mysteries.

*Human Planet* is a well-designed documentary film. It approaches the cultures and livings analytically. The explanation of culture is based on both emic and etic methods. The film uses etic explanation when it approaches the livings, but it uses emic explanation when it approaches the cultures. For example, the film explains why Inuit hunt and eat sea unicorns and describes how Inuit hunt and eat sea unicorns. The purpose of this kind of explanation is to make viewers accept the cultures. For example, if the film described why Inuit eat sea unicorns, then the film would describe the myth of sea unicorns, and the viewers would think that Inuit are barbarians. On the other hand, if the film explained how Inuit hunt sea unicorns, then the film would explain the purpose of tools for the hunting, and the viewers would think that Inuit are cruel. Since the film is a television series, it is focused on popular appeal.

In conclusion, human livings in deserts and arctic lands have many similarities though the conditions are opposite. The main factor of the similarities is that both environments have limited time of production. Since the production is limited, the livings become half-settled. On the other hand, the biggest difference between two is frequency of transaction. Livings in deserts cause frequent transactions between groups and families, but livings in arctic lands cause rare transactions between families; this difference eventually makes the difference of social structure.

**References**

Brown, N. Flowers, M. Jones, T. Leith, B. Stone, T. & Templar, D. (2011). Human Planet [Television series], London, UK: BBC One.