I am from Central African Republic, a country located in the “heart” of African continent, just like the location of Yamanashi prefecture within Japan. C.A.R. is a landlocked country surrounded by Chad on north, both Congo and Democratic Rep. of Congo down south, Cameroon in the west and Sudan in the east. The country is 1.6 times bigger than Japan (area = 622,000 km²) but with only about 4 millions population. As former colony of France, C.A.R. has acquired its political independence on August 13th, 1960’s as many of its neighbor and former French colonies in central and west Africa. The national language (spoken all over the country) is Sango and, French is the official language. The currency if Franc CFA which is bound to Euro (1 Euro = 656 Franc CFA; 1 JPY ≈ 4.38 Franc CFA).

1. What is your specialized field in electrochemistry?
   Dr. Myung: Lithium-Ion Secondary Battery
   Dr. Beleke: I majored on the properties of molten salts coexisting with solid porous materials, a theme related to interfacial electrochemistry. But I am fascinated for research on energy conversion such as fuel cells, batteries or solar cells.

2. In Japanese educational system, we must go to elementary school (age of 7 to 12) and junior high school (13 to 15). After that we go to high (16 to 18) school and college and more, if we want. If you are clever enough, you may skip last year at high school. How about your country?
   Dr. Myung: In South Korea, all system is basically identical to Japanese educational system. Some expensive private schools, they have skip system in all grades of school. So do universities.
   Dr. Beleke: I first heard about this Japanese educational system during the geography lesson when I was 3rd year student in senior high school in my country (as we studied the geography USA, the former Soviet Union and Japan as parts of the program). I believe that this has been the basement of the development of Japan, and I really envy this system.

   The educational system sequence in my country, as we inherited from French system is almost the same with that of Japan. That is, elementary school (age of 6 to 11), junior high school (12 to15), senior high school (16 to 18), sometimes the junior and senior high school are combined to make what is called in French “Lycée” (12 to 18), then the higher education such as college or university.

   Unfortunately the Government is not able to provide necessary facilities within the whole country in order to allow everyone to acquire basic education as in Japan. In cities, almost all the children have chance to attend the elementary and junior high school. Senior high schools are located only in the main cities of each prefecture, and there is only one university. In remote areas such as some villages where there is no school, those children are supposed to walk sometimes 10 to 15 km to the nearest city to attend school. You can imagine how tough it is for younger children to afford such difficult daily task. Therefore, large part of children has no chance for education in rural areas. Making the education accessible to all the people is still a dream for our Government.

3. Why did you choose electrochemistry as your specialty?
   Dr. Myung: Well, one of my personnel interests is electrochemical energy conversion. It is very interesting
field to research and promising one to provide energy for humane beings. I hope to continue to work in this field in order to fulfill my personnel interests and contribute to our society.

Dr. Beleke: When I was undergraduate student, my desire was to study something whose applications can be understood by common people, rather than acquiring purely fundamental and theoretical knowledge. That was the main motivation of choosing to Japan to sit for my doctoral course. Along this program, I was attracted with electrochemistry due especially to its applications in many fields such as batteries, fuel cells and other electrochemical devices.

4 Why did you choose Japan for your research activity?

Dr. Myung: It is very nice question. One can see developed countries, such as Japan, USA and western European countries. They have the state-of-the-art techniques in every field. In Japan, research facilities are greatly integrated and if someone wants to use the state-of-the-art analytic tools he or she can use the machine in short time due to the well-organized research cooperation system in Japan. That is the reason.

Dr. Beleke: As mentioned above, I have completed my doctoral course at Kobe University under the guidance of Prof. Shigeihito DEKI and Prof. Minoru MIZUHATA to whom to pay reverence. I know more about research in Japan than in other countries. Although there are some personal motivations to this choice, regarding research on fuel cells, I believe that there is no better place than my current host laboratory, the Clean Energy Research Center of the University of Yamanashi. Therefore I am grateful to Prof. WATANABE for giving me the opportunity to be a part of the Leading Project on the next generation of fuel cells.

5 Did you find some difference about a research institute or a laboratory between your own country and Japan, such as working time, a style of investigation, and so on?

Dr. Myung: In Japan, they have tradition. For example, once one laboratory begins a research work, it is continued for a long time. Sometimes, the theme hands in generation to generation. Actually, you may see from recent mass media that South Koreans work heaviest in the world in average. For case of style of investigation, Korean, they are very hot but their research themes are frequently flowing to only the way of making money. In other word, it can be said “lack of basic research ability”. That is why Korean companies usually import a lot of high technologies from developed countries.

Dr. Beleke: Unfortunately, I did not deal with research when I was home recently, since I was focused on teaching. But I can say that the University of Bangui is a young institution which has no graduate programs. Within the Faculty of Sciences when I belong, the authorities are now examining the possibility to start master program in some disciplines, but this must be done with the cooperation of some north universities, especially in France. However, there are some research institutes which are trying their best, but the lack of funding and the dilapidation of equipments are their main shortcomings. The working time is subject to the country’s working regulation. As for the style of investigation, it depends on each institute.

6 What do you want to be in your future with electrochemistry?

Dr. Myung: Academic-positioned researcher who studies basic researches.

Dr. Beleke: It depends on where I will be in my future. If in my country, as teacher I will contribute to the revision of the program of electrochemistry within the Faculty of Sciences, taking into account some new knowledge for undergraduate courses. In the vision of LMD (Licence-Mastère-Doctorat) program which basically means the combination of undergraduate 3rd year (B3) with 4th year (B4). Master and Doctorate, I will appeal for the introduction of credits in electrochemistry with focus on fuel cells. If I have chance to continue research abroad, then I would like to get more familiar with electrochemistry, achieve lots of publications, attend international conferences when I can have chance to discuss with the giants of electrochemistry of the planet.

7 How do you say “a happy new year” in your mother language?

Dr. Myung: Sehe boke mani baduseyo.

Dr. Beleke: As former colony of France, people commonly say “BONNE ANNEE” which can be pronounced in Japanese as ボンナーネ. But the translation of the new year in Sango (the national language of C.A.R.) is FINI NGU (“fini” means “new” and “ngu” is the same word to say “water”. It is considered that the year is flowing like water in river. Once it passed, one can’t catch up. So, formally one says “NZONI MATANGA TI FINI NGU” (ンゾニ マタンガ チ フィンギュ) that means Happy New Year. Old people say BORLAMI.

8 Please describe traditional new year’s day or a new year’s holiday in your country. And recently, how do you spend your new year’s day or a new year’s holiday?

Dr. Myung: Sehe chon nal. I usually share the time with my family. Koreans bow to elder people in their family, relatives or neighbor at the day with praying happiness for them. Then, elder people compensate for the bowings to younger people by giving a small amount of money with praying also happiness for the young. I also do these kinds
of things on the new year’s day.

**Dr. Beleke:** Among the national holidays, the New Year and the Mothers Day are the most important ones and, the New Year especially is the most lively one. In cities, especially in Bangui where I grew up, most of people don’t sleep the eve of December 31 before 000 a.m., as they prefer the new year to meet them alive. Dancing bars, “Nganda” (small bar with outside facilities) and night clubs are full of people and usually at this period, the Government takes a decree to allow such businesses to run for 24 hours. Parallel to this, there are many festivals going on in most places such as lotteries, shows, and so on. At exactly 000 in local time, there is 21 times cannon-shots from the military base to announce the new year has come while fireworks are shot everywhere. From that time all the main roads are crowded with people singing and dancing BONNE ANNEE, BONNE ANNEE! Some keep doing until the morning. At home in the morning, each householder wakes up and goes to say BONNE ANNEE to his neighbors. Sometimes young people make the door-to-door wishes, singing and bringing flowers with them. In return, they receive some money from the hosts.

The day usually consists of family meal and visit with some other activities. Although there is no established New Year meal as in Japan, chicken and goat meat are the most consumed meals that day. People enjoy the whole day until late in the night.

In Japan, I have had chance to spend a New Year holiday in a Japanese family and have enjoyed the traditional New Year meal. However I was surprised for the first time I spent the New Year in Kobe in 2000 in the way the city was quiet. For the last New Year holiday, I spent it at home with my family, enjoying TV programs.

いかがでしたか？「お年玉」は日本だけの習慣ではなかったですよ。日本は研究設備や技術そしてスタッフに恵まれた環境にあるので、これからも多くの留学生や外国人研究者を迎えようでしょう。私たちも彼らと切磋琢磨しながら今年もよい研究ができるように研鑽を積んでいきたいと思います。このコーナーで取り上げてほしいテーマがありましたらぜひお寄せください（e-mail：edit@electrochem.jp）。今年も読物小委員会一同全力でがんばりますのでよろしくお願いします。