JSPS Global COE Program
The Fifth International Conference

In Search of Sustainable Humanosphere in Asia and Africa

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Inamori Foundation Memorial Hall, Kyoto University

Conference Statement

This is the fifth and final international conference of this Global COE Program, which is designed to serve for both the dissemination of our research outcome and our effort to develop further research agenda. We set out below the basic mission statement of the Program, which has evolved in the last four years or so.

The tropical regions of Asia and Africa are inhabited by approximately half of the world's population, and this proportion will increase in the future. It is also this region, home to numerous developing countries, that is most seriously affected by dramatic fluctuations in resource and energy prices and global warming. What constitutes the essential ingredients for the sustainability of local communities in the tropics? And what must humankind do to maintain a sustainable global community as a whole? We seek to shed a new light on these questions by proposing the concept of humanosphere, which combines the research domain of human society with that of the natural environment, thereby creating an interdisciplinary platform for the study of sustainability.

Prior studies on Asia and Africa have not been free from the bias of research frameworks developed on the basis of historical experiences of the West and Japan. The temperate zone-based paradigm, which assumes the primacy of *production* for sustainability, presents a skewed view of the tropics where environmental factors influence people's livelihood in a much more complex and structured way. Such an inclination is not limited to the disciplines of area studies and development studies, but is shared by many researchers and intellectuals. In order to overcome this bias, this conference proposes a new way of observing the globe from the multi-faceted vantage point of geosphere, biosphere, and human society, and the interactions among the three.

The first of the vantage points is a shift from the idea of *production* to that of *livelihood*. In the

post-industrial-revolution world, the societal goal of industrialized Western countries and of Japan (especially after the Second World War) has been often boiled down to the domain of *production*, especially *raising productivity*, as the latter was associated with the rise of the living standard as measured by per capita income. Both technology and institutions have been developed, in order to achieve high productivity. In such a society, labour, and in particular the quality of labour (or human capital) in the public sphere, has become a central expression of social norms. However, if we consider a longer time span and take the entire globe as the object of our studies, we realize that the concentrated concern for *production* is a phenomenon that occurred in a limited part of the world over a limited period of time. The fact that humans have been in existence for over 200,000 years is certainly due, in part, to our ability to produce, but, more fundamentally, is due to our ability to temper our survivability. Moreover, the primary forge for such tempering has been not so much the *public sphere* but the *intimate sphere* comprising family and neighbours, and involving reproduction. The intimate sphere was also the key domain where humans responded to epidemics and natural disasters. In this context, values and norms are shaped and defined, not by labour process but by manifestations of *care*, a term which captures the human response to nature more broadly. Perhaps what is necessary is not a denial of the modern value of raising productivity and the quality of labour, but, rather, a reappraisal of the significance of these "public" activities from the standpoint of livelihood, and a deeper understanding of humans' relations with nature.

The second is a paradigm shift from the *temperate zone* to the *tropics*. The tropics absorb the majority of solar energy received by the earth and distribute part of that energy to temperate and other regions of the world through atmospheric movements and ocean currents. In other words, the tropics are central to the earth's material and energy circulation. Accordingly, the world's biota (plants and animals, microorganisms) are most active in the tropics. In order to overcome the challenge of declining biodiversity and to strengthen the vitality of the earth's biosphere as a whole, it is necessary to place the tropics at the center of our consideration.

Through the domestication of plants and animals and expansion of arable land, humans have altered the environment over the past 10,000 years to fit their needs. This process, however, certainly did not begin as a result of a lack of resources in the temperate zone. Even while bending to and battling the overwhelming strength of nature in the tropics, human society has sought to coexist with nature and has survived by continually making efforts to *care* for the environment. That said, innovations in technologies and institutions over the past two centuries have primarily occurred in the temperate zone. The logic of industrialization is not the logic of coexistence with the biosphere. More than 70% of the energy consumed by modern humans,

including all the energy used for livelihood in developing countries, comes from fossil fuels. There is a serious discrepancy between our fundamental reliance on the tropical environment, especially tropical biodiversity, and the dominance of temperate-zone countries in terms of technological and institutional development. Unless we recognize the seriousness of this gap and try to rectify it, we will not be able to understand and coexist with the global environment. Humans living in the temperate zone too will no longer be able to survive unless they find the right harmony with tropical humanosphere.

The objective of this conference is, based on these views and observations, to explore how we can assess and create conditions necessary for the long-term survival and sustainability of human society. By setting the humanosphere as the basic unit for analyzing the sustainable environment, we seek to identify concrete ways in which we can create a sustainable humanosphere in local, regional, and global contexts.