

My Experience with Grants-in-Aid

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It was in 1966 when I started doing field studies in Egypt. Forty-six years have already passed since then. Upon entering Waseda University as a student, I met the late Professor Kiichi Kawamura, who specialized in the origins of agriculture in the Near Eastern civilization. I said to him “Let’s do archaeology in Egypt.” Nearly a half century has elapsed since he made that proposal in 1964.

In 1966 I embarked upon a general survey of the archaeological sites in Egypt. To do it I went to Egypt and back on a tanker, and I got around on a jeep that I had brought with me from Japan. In conducting the survey, I relied heavily on the good will of Japanese companies for equipment and provisions. For example, a canning company supplied me with food and a camera maker gave me a camera, all for free. Needless to say, we conducted our general survey to make sure if we will be able to do research and excavate in Egypt by both our own budget and the donation from several companies because it has to do by ourselves. Though I laugh when I think of it now, A fishing equipment maker gave me five sets of fishing gear in order to fish in the Nile River. With this support, I was over a seven and a half month period able to travel beyond Egypt and also visit Syria, Iraq, while comparing Egyptian with Near Eastern civilization. I made two field surveys covering most of Egypt’s important historical remains. Being confident of my ability to carry out an excavation research in Egypt, I drafted a research plan and intended to submit it to the Ministry of Education and Science for Grant-in-Aid funding.

Before doing so, however, I would need to get permission from the Egyptian government to do the excavation. Yet, I was haunted with the thought and wondered what to do if the Ministry wouldn’t approve my grant even if I got permission from the Egyptians. Hearing my anxieties, the late Prof. Kawamura said “Well, just go for it.” So, I came up with a plan for acquiring the excavation permission: I got admitted to Cairo University

as an auditing student, from which position I tried to negotiate with the Egyptian Antiquities Organization of the Ministry of Culture in Egypt (now the Ministry of the State for Antiquities Affairs). In a rather formal setting, I was told that there was a possibility that my request could be approved. So, taking the next step, I got hired into a part-time position at the Japanese Embassy, and continued my negotiation effort. Fortunately, Dr. Gamal Mokhtar, the director of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization at that time, was invited to Japan to learn about Japanese archeology—subsequently I was at last able to get permission to do my excavation project.

For it, I got my first Grant-in-Aid from the Ministry of Education and Science. The application I submitted only asked for half of the required funds. When I was given a hearing in the screening process, I was asked how I intended to acquire the rest of the funding, to which I replied that I planned to cover it with donations from companies. To that, a reviewer said my plan as submitted lacked stability, but if I would reduce the amount of its budget to the minimum required, they would meet me half way by increasing the amount of my Grant-in-Aid. What I was hearing seemed like a dream. The person who told me this was the late Tsugio Mikami, then a professor at the University of Tokyo. He added the caveat, “If you don’t work hard and advance your research and earn your PhD, we’ll have to ask you to return the grant.” While these were words were spoken as encouragement, they were also plainly a threat. I promised to follow his admonition, but regretfully I was not able to fulfill that promise while Prof. Mikami was still alive. I did earn my doctorate on research themed “Restoration of the Solar boat.”

From that point on, I have received Grant-in-Aid assistance every year without pause for about a half century. Of course, the first leader of our project was the late Prof. Kawamura, the second was the late Prof. Kiyohiko Sakurai, and I was the third. As we were not able to cover all of our excavation project costs with just Grants-in-Aid, the late Prof. Sukenaga Murai set up an Egypt Fund for us in Waseda University when he was serving as its president. Supplementing Grants-in-Aid with our own self-generated funds derived from the Fund, corporate donations, royalties, lecture fees, TV appearances and other sources, we have continued carrying out our excavation and research project for nearly a half century without even a single year’s break. Currently,

we are working to foster more than 10 young researchers, who are given opportunities to present their work at international conferences. Our ability to do this owes solely to the support we receive from Grants-in-Aid, for which I am very thankful.

That said, there have been times when we teetered on the blink of having our funding cut off. Amidst instability in the Middle East, Egypt was relatively stable; nevertheless, we came close to having to suspend our project twice, once during Gulf War and the other during the Iraq War. Then, the situation became tense in Egypt during the January 2011 revolution. Fortunately, however, our work escaped being caught up in any of the uprisings, so it moved forward uninterrupted for even one day. During that period, there were more than 1,000 members in our excavation team. While implementing the project, not one of them died or suffered an injury due to an accident, nor did anybody become seriously ill and have to return home in midstream. Though there have been situations and times when funding became tight, I believe what enabled us to continue the project was the strict control we exercised over its budget and the manner in which we strived to carry forward our work within budget limitations.

Having succeeded in carrying out the project to this point and given our ability to generate funds, there are some who say that we do not need Grants-in-Aid any more. However, I believe these grants to be very important: Not only do they cover costs, but they signify recognition by the Japanese government for our undertaking. As members of a national project supported by the government, we are able with a sense of pride to seek and gain understanding for work from the Antiquities Minister and other high-ranking Egyptian officials. In turn, this raises our own sense of self-value. After all, Grants-in-Aid are financed by Japanese people's precious tax money. We must, therefore, not lose sight of the need to use them frugally—never spending the money wastefully. This knowledge of being supported by the government and the people infuses us with a special power as we pursue our excavation and research endeavors. In the future as well, I will strive to sustain and advance our Egypt archeological project at the very highest level of global excellence.