

## Pioneering Work Achieved Through Kakenhi Funding

Juichi Yamagiwa

President, Kyoto University

President, Science Council of Japan (SCJ)

President, Japan Association of National Universities (JANU)



I first received support from the Kakenhi (Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research) program when I was working on my doctoral research at Kyoto University's Graduate School of Science. During my master's program, a Joint Usage/Research Grant from Kyoto University's Primate Research Institute enabled me to traverse the Japanese archipelago investigating the physical features and social structures of monkeys. As that work was winding down, and I had at last submitted my master's thesis, I was asked by my advisor, Prof. Junichiro Itani, whether I would be interested in travelling to Africa to study gorillas. I eagerly accepted the invitation, and thus began my research on gorillas. I wanted to study great apes, as they are closer to humans than Japanese macaques, and chimpanzees had already been studied by many of those preceding me at the institute. Gorillas were the first apes to be studied by Japanese primatologists at the end of the 1950s, but the studies had to be terminated early due to independence struggles in Africa. Besides, I viewed them as the perfect research subject to help elucidate the origins of the human family, a subject of great interest to me.

In the 1970s, Japan's great ape studies were concentrated on chimpanzees and their cousins, bonobos, which had been newly discovered in the Congo Basin in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were no Japanese scientists studying gorillas. Prof. Itani, therefore, contacted Prof. Takayoshi Kano of the University of the Ryukyus, who had put together a team to study bonobos, and I was added to the team. The gorillas I wanted to study were also located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire), the same country as bonobos. As a co-investigator for overseas scientific investigation funded by Prof. Kano's Kakenhi grant, I traveled to the DRC with three other members.

At Kinshasa, the capital of the DRC, I parted ways with the other members, embarking alone on a trip of more than a thousand kilometers to Bukavu. There, while negotiating with the management office of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park and with local villagers, I began

fieldwork on eastern lowland gorillas. I had to go travel to various places to gather information and form a team. We then had to walk through the forest trying to encounter gorillas. What proved to be immensely useful in this situation was a motorbike that I purchased in Kinshasa. Our team leader, Prof. Kano, had arranged for me to obtain, at low cost, a 125 cc Honda bike that had been exhibited at a motor show. Several years earlier, Prof. Kano went into the Congo Basin on a bicycle in search of bonobos, but he now provided me with an excellent mode of transportation. Thanks to him, I was able to traverse bad roads with local youth riding on the back, carrying out studies beyond my expectations.

Although I investigated the behavior of two groups of gorillas and wrote up the results in a paper, I did not have any opportunities to get close to the true essence of gorilla society. However, I did not want to trouble Prof. Kano's team for further help. Instead, following Prof. Itani's advice, I became a junior researcher at the Nairobi Research Station (at the time, the Research Station for African Regional Studies) of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), in Kenya. In addition to looking after the needs of researchers visiting from Japan, I investigated mountain gorillas living in the Virunga Mountains, a chain of volcanoes along the Rwanda border. These gorillas, which had been studied by a team under the American researcher Dian Fossey, were well accustomed to the presence of human beings. At long last, I was able to find a subject to write about in my dissertation. When my two-year job came to an end, I used the salary I had earned to return to the Virunga Mountains and continue my studies.

After returning to Japan with materials from a total of approximately two years of gorilla studies, I became a research fellow at the Japan Monkey Centre (JMC). It was a fixed-term position of five years. I thought that serving as a researcher and curator there, while also occasionally helping to look after the animals, would provide me with an opportunity to carefully analyze my findings and work on my dissertation. At the JMC, however, I became directly involved in various issues, such as the conservation of Japanese macaques, the control of damage caused by monkeys, and the display and welfare of captive primates. This revived a strong desire in me to return to fieldwork studying Japanese macaques or gorillas. The problem was, I lacked funding. I therefore decided to apply for Kakenhi and other grants from various foundations.

But when I looked for application forms at the JMC, thinking first of all to apply for Kakenhi, there were none to be found. At the time, application forms and details of the

procedures were sent by the Ministry of Education to universities and research institutions. When I called the Science and International Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Education directly, the reply was, “Monkey Centre? What is that, a colony of some kind?” I indignantly pointed out that the JMC was an academic organization accredited by the Ministry of Education. Once they had investigated the situation, I was told that, “We didn’t send any forms there because there haven’t been any applications in the last seven years.” I ended up going to the Ministry of Education and reporting on the progress of my research work to date, at last getting to the point of making an application. It was my first time to apply for a Grant-in-Aid for Overseas Scientific Survey—and as principal investigator at that, but I had the good fortune to be awarded the grant, thanks, perhaps, to my novel plan of investigating gorillas and chimpanzees in the same area.

At the time, Kakenhi funds could not be used until July of the award year, so if I wanted to go abroad earlier, I would need to obtain an interest-free loan from a bank. I recall with feelings of nostalgia that Prof. Masao Kawai, who served as director of the Primate Research Institute, arranged for a loan of several million yen from a local bank. After that, I continued to receive Kakenhi funding each year without fail, right up until last year, enabling me to maintain the momentum of my gorilla research work. I also switched from individual to team research, and was able to conduct various collaborative projects with researchers of the same generation from Japan and other countries. Without Kakenhi funding, I doubt that, as a young researcher lacking a record of accomplishments and lacking funds, I would have been able to conduct overseas scientific investigations on new themes. Thanks to this funding, understanding of gorillas, and of the origins of human society as seen through the eyes of gorillas, has been furthered. I am extremely grateful for this. My hope is that Kakenhi funds will continue to be distributed widely, so that young researchers with ambition can realize their goals.