

Kakenhi and my Collaborative Research Work at the Institute for Research in Humanities

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Complex Study on the Processes and Mechanisms of Racialization
(Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (S))



The Institute for Research in Humanities, my home affiliation, is a research institution within Kyoto University. It is the oldest collaborative research institution in Japan and has the largest staff of any institution of its kind in the country. The main work of professors at the institute is to manage collaborative research projects. Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research have been essential to the successes of the collaborative research work that I have undertaken at the institute.

My first involvement with the Kakenhi began at my previous university, when I joined a Kakenhi-funded research group through the invitation of a senior colleague. Following this experience, I received a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C) for my individual research. I moved to the present institute in 1999, and since 2001, when I was still an associate professor, I have led a series of joint research projects. I have applied for Kakenhi funding as a group representative in the field of cultural anthropology and have benefitted from grants almost every year except when I have been out of the country. So far I have received Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B), (A), and (S) and my project is currently on its second Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (S). Since it became an officially recognized center for joint usage and joint research for scholars from around the country, the Institute for Research in Humanities has been assured of a moderate funding budget. Up until the time when I took up my position, apart from a few research groups that were funded by Kakenhi grants, members working on collaborative research projects paid their own travel expenses on a voluntary basis. This approach was only a feasible possibility in the case of projects led by eminent professors who were leaders in their field. I was a relatively young researcher at the time, and had moved to Kyoto from the Kanto region because someone at the institute had noticed my book and offered me a position, not through any connections. I knew that such a prohibitive custom would not work for a research group I would lead. I was the only female tenured faculty at the institute; I had no network like those that my male colleagues enjoyed.

I had to start alone from nothing. Race studies had constituted a major academic discipline in many countries, but has received relatively little scholarship in Japan. I knew I wanted to put together a team of the very best researchers in the field from Japan, and invite top leading researchers from other countries to advance this field through trans-national dialogues that would include perspectives from Asia. I got in touch with leading researchers in various fields relevant to this undertaking, and in 2001 was able to launch Japan's first collaborative research group on the subject of "race" (as a social

construct). In 2002, we held an international symposium at the Kyoto International Conference Center with the title "Is Race a Universal Idea?" This was held as the Kyoto Symposium of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences. The symposium was covered in the media, including English-language newspapers and NHK (the Japanese public broadcast) radio, and I published an edited volume a few years later with the same title. None of this would have been possible without Kakenhi funding. Since then, we have continued to publish on a wide range of subjects within the field of race studies. We are currently working on our second Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (S) project.

One quality that has united all our research from the very first project for the Scientific Research (B) category to the present has been the interdisciplinary (bringing together humanities and sciences) and international nature of our work. During my time as a graduate student in the United States I received a modicum of training in natural and biological anthropology as well as cultural anthropology. Thanks to this experience, I was able to overcome psychological blocks regarding the natural sciences (in particular with regard to natural and biological anthropology and genetics). Although our approach was essentially humanities-based, the cooperation of scientists who understood the importance of what we were doing was nevertheless essential, given that we were seeking to deny the existence of biological race.

In the 2005 academic year, I had the opportunity to teach a class at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and engage in research at Harvard University. Thanks to Kakenhi funding, I have been able to keep alive the network I built up then, a network that has steadily continued to grow in the years since. Up to the present time, we have had academic exchanges with universities and research institutions on five continents and continued to publish widely, including a compilation of essays published by a leading U.S. university press and a special edition of an academic journal in Australia.

As the group's representative, I have to keep an eye on all kinds of things: the ways in which we use our Kakenhi funding, the planning and management of collaborative research projects, smooth communication with overseas researchers as well as providing proper care for visiting researchers, providing opportunities and funding to the many researchers in the humanities with little funding (particularly young researchers), consideration and treatment of staff, tough negotiations with overseas publishers, and ensuring that the complex network of human relationships involved in the project are maintained with smooth and peaceful footing.

Additionally, my work includes compiling and editing collections of research papers, writing comprehensive and logical introductions and summaries, as well as also carry out my own empirical research as an individual member of the team. As anyone who has worked as the representative of a large project surely knows, I have faced the challenge of having to steer a wide network of complex relationships while working to produce results of myself which I can be proud of. Being able to share the happiness and sense of achievement when

you achieve a target is one of the great joys of collaborative research.

Having started from nothing, these collaborative research projects and the long list of publications and findings that have resulted would never have been possible without Kakenhi. I am extremely grateful for the fair way in which projects are assessed on their results and for the opportunities I have been given at each stage that have enabled our projects to take the results of our research to the next level.

In June 2015, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology sparked huge controversy when it announced that it would push to shut down or revamp university departments in the humanities and social sciences. As a result of public opposition it was later forced to tone down its position. In recent years, the number of successful applications for Scientific Research (S) category in the humanities and social sciences have fallen dramatically, particularly in the humanities. In some fiscal years, only one project was awarded the grant. However, I firmly believe that it is not only the obviously practical and applicable academic subjects that are essential for society. Academic subjects that may appear less useful at first glance can also provide important new perspectives, including in the sciences, and can make critically important contributions to changing established frameworks.

Note: For more details on some of our collaborative joint research, an article is available online in *Kakenhi News*, Vol. 2, 2015: http://www.jsps.go.jp/j-grantsinaid/22_letter/data/news_2015_vol2/p05.pdf