

【Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research(S)】

Integrated Science and Innovative Science (New multidisciplinary fields)



Title of Project: Conflict Resolution and Coexistence through Reassessment and Utilization of “African Potentials”

Itaru Ohta

(Kyoto University, Center for African Area Studies, Professor)

Research Area: Area Studies

Keyword: Africa, Reconciliation, Social Healing, Indigenous Knowledge and Institutions

【Purpose and Background of the Research】

One of the most serious problems in Africa is the disruption of the social order due to civil wars and regional conflicts. Conflicts in the 1990s and beyond are especially notable in their production of enormous numbers of refugees and IDPs. It is essential to the stability and growth of African societies to find effective means to ameliorate the varied problems these conflicts cause.

Both governmental and non-governmental international bodies have intervened in these conflicts in various ways, such as, peace keeping missions, supporting the establishment of post-war political institutions, and prosecuting violations of human rights and war crimes. These interventions have, however, achieved limited success, because they are based on ideologies, values and processes that are fundamentally Western in origin. This research project, in contrast, emphasizes the knowledge and institutions that African societies have themselves developed and utilized in resolving conflicts and maintaining co-existence. We thus aim to understand how this existing body of indigenous knowledge and institutions—which we term “African Potentials”—might most effectively be employed in settling conflicts, bringing about reconciliation, and healing post-conflict societies in Africa today.

These African Potentials have long been generated through encounters and clashes with European and Arabic Islamic societies and continue to undergo constant transformation, an ability we term “Interface Functions.” As we identify and evaluate African Potentials, we also will explore how they are articulated with the external factors through the work of Interface Functions.

【Research Methods】

Drawing on a range of specific examples of conflicts, we will investigate three main areas based on intensive fieldwork, (1) how conflicts occur, continue, and were resolved, (2) What kind of African Potentials were effectively utilized in conflict resolution, and (3) The role of

Interface Functions in these processes.

The project members are sub-divided into four “Research Units,” focusing on specific topics (e.g. politics, culture), and four “Research Clusters,” focusing on geographical areas (e.g. East Africa). Each member participates in at least one Unit and one Cluster. Plenary meetings will be held every two months in order to systematically unite Units and Clusters. An international forum, including African scholars and practitioners, will be held annually in various African countries. A “Data Archive on African Potentials” will be created to consolidate data on conflict resolutions in Africa.

【Expected Research Achievements and Scientific Significance】

This project is significant because of its focus on that which has previously been underplayed in previous studies of conflict resolution and peace-building: Namely, African Potentials and Interface Functions, and the ways to most effectively utilize such institutions. To further facilitate this goal, and disseminate findings, African scholars and practitioners will also participate in this project. We also believe that it is our duty to tackle the difficult problems of conflict resolution and coexistence in order to respond to the social needs of contemporary African societies.

【Publications Relevant to the Project】

Ohta, I., 2009. “Pastoralists are proficient in cultivating positive social relationships: Case of the Turkana in northwestern Kenya.” *Mila (NS)*, 10: 24-38.

Ohta, I. and Y. D. Gebre, (eds.) 2005. *Displacement Risks in Africa*. Kyoto: Kyoto University Press.

【Term of Project】 FY2011-2015

【Budget Allocation】 157,600 Thousand Yen

【Homepage Address and Other Contact Information】

Our website is under construction. For the outline of the project, see the following URL:

<http://jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp/kibans/index.html>