

The Second G-COE Conference
In Search of Sustainable Humanosphere in Asia and Africa

Biosphere as a Global Force of Change

9th to 11th March 2009
Inamori Foundation Memorial Hall, Kyoto University

A Missionary Statement

The modern world, which brought about industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation, has not always shown a due appreciation to the human knowledge of biosphere and its relationships with geosphere and humanosphere. Until two centuries ago most people lived in the countryside, and most heat energy humans used came from the biomass taken from their surroundings. Their work and life hinged on their biospheric knowledge of the productivity of land and forests and the danger of infectious diseases, as well as their geospheric knowledge of rainfall patterns and large scale ecological disasters.

Various cultures and civilisations have interpreted the biosphere. Collectively, we possess rich and diverse visions on life, its evolutionary dynamics, and its relationships with geosphere and humanosphere. Only part of this body of knowledge has been successfully replaced by modern science and technology. Meanwhile, as the scope of humanosphere expanded and globalised, some fundamental assumptions have been altered to suit the pattern and pace of the modern world. We live in the world of clock-time discipline and long-distance travel, without having to understand the diversity of biosphere and its critical importance for our life.

This conference aims to rehabilitate the biospheric perspective for the understanding of the modern world. It addresses the issue of how to absorb the biospheric perspective in various parts of Asia and Africa, and examines the ways in which biosphere could be better utilised for the creation of a sustainable humanosphere. We are also concerned with the roles of technology and institutions in making the biosphere more accountable to the humanosphere and vice versa. We see the biosphere not as an object of conservation but as a sphere which has its own logic of evolution and adaptation, and interacts with the humanosphere as such. We therefore recognise it as a force of change in our understanding of life and the world.

Furthermore, the biosphere is not just a local, national and regional force, but a global force which

urges us to reformulate the agenda for the direction of economic and social development on a global scale. From such a perspective we will ask questions about the relationships between ecology and economy; energy efficiency and environment; climate change, land use and social norms; indigenous medicine and its modern expressions, among others.

The formulation of a new paradigm has been one of the main purposes of this five-year research programme “In Search of Sustainable Humansphere in Asia and Africa” (2007-2012) at Kyoto University. We have tried to assemble our knowledge on how to create a new way of understanding and creating a humansphere which is capable of sustaining itself, biosphere and geosphere at the same time. Reflecting the results of our research during the second year (April 2008 to March 2009), this conference will discuss the extent to which the study relating to biosphere could make a contribution to this goal. An active interdisciplinary discourse, especially between scientists, and humanities and social science specialists, is anticipated.

Kaoru Sugihara
Convener of the Programme