

JSPS Global COE Program  
*In Search of Sustainable Humansphere in Asia and Africa*

The Third International Conference  
**Changing Nature of *Nature*: New Perspectives from Transdisciplinary Field Science**

December 14 – 17, 2009  
Inamori Foundation Memorial Hall, Kyoto University

**Conference Statement**

Social and natural sciences have long engaged in the study of connections. From community, region, nation-state, to empire -- or from patch to landscape -- we have scaled and rescaled the units of analysis in time and space to comprehend how constituent parts of a system are related, and distant places linked.

Such engagements in the study and theorization of connections, however, have usually been pursued without connecting their thoughts to other attempts, and a common ground for the confluence between geo/biospheric and humanosperic systems has not been fully investigated. While the science of nature and technology deals with the material flows such as water, gases, and minerals through physical and biological processes, social science looks into commodity chains and levels of socio-cultural, economic, and political integration and disintegration.

The distinction between a social and a natural domain continues to make communication between researchers in these two categories an uneasy task. However, the current global confluence of geo-, bio-, and humanosheres is too important to be addressed in any way other than a transdisciplinary approach. We can no longer afford to be in isolation and separation in the task of understanding the connections between natural and social systems.

This workshop is a sequel to the previous Global COE International Conference “In Search of Sustainable Humansphere in Asia and Africa: Biosphere as a Global Force of Change” (2008) which challenged conventional anthropocentric perspectives for the understanding of the modern world. Specifically looking at the interfaces between nature and non-nature as a crucial field for investigation, the workshop brings participants out of their own comfort zones by posing the following questions.

What are the points of articulation between material cycles and socio-economic movements of capital, human, technology, and institution? What are the consequences of connections, not only at the local but also at the cross-continental and global scales? How do we locate linkages among non-adjacent and seemingly disconnected locations in nature and society?

We ask, for instance, anthropologists, historians, and political scientists to identify agents of social change in the natural world with their own logics of reproduction and evolution. Ecologists, environmental and material scientists are, in turn, asked to situate non-human agency and its working in sociocultural fields of humansphere.

Workshop participants examine the multi-dimensional driving forces of change generated at nature non-nature thresholds at micro, meso, and macro-levels. The integration of the three levels of analysis leads us to new understandings of the changing nature of nature in a globalizing world. The obligation now falls on us to take a holistic look at nature as a social process as well as society as a natural process, and to consider how arguments about the past and the present are applied for the understanding of the future.