

Sustainable Humanosphere in Asia and Africa: Its Implications and Consequences

Kono Yasuyuki
Professor CSEAS

In July 2007, the Global COE Program was launched and, since then, faculty members, post-doctoral fellows and graduate students of CSEAS as well as collaborating graduate schools and research institutes totaling more than 100, have devoted themselves to carry out field work, organize seminars and conferences, write books and journal articles, and most importantly, to discuss the nature of a “sustainable humanosphere”. As our activities are constantly updated on our website, I would like to take the opportunity to emphasize the implications and consequences of the program.

CSEAS has taken the initiative to lead a series of large-scale research programs over the last two decades. These include Scientific Research on Priority Areas “Towards an Integrated Approach to Global Area Studies: In Search of a Paradigm for a Harmonized Relationship between the World and Its Areas” (1993 – 96); Center of Excellence (COE) Program “Making Regions: Proto-Areas, Transformations, and New Formations in Asia and Africa” (1998 – 2002); Core University Program “The Making of East Asia” (1999 – 2008); and 21st Century COE Project “Aiming for Center of Excellence of Integrated Area Studies: Establishing Field Stations in Asia and Africa to Combine Research Activities and Onsite Education” (2002 – 06).



Jungle rubber in Riau, Indonesia

Two types of smallholders' rubber growing, garden rubber and jungle rubber, coexist in Indonesia. Garden rubber has higher land productivity, while jungle rubber has higher resilience against pest and disease damage. This suggests that the issue of livelihood, eco-system and appropriate technology is a key in attaining “sustainable humanosphere.”

The Global COE Program is undoubtedly one of the major outcomes of these seamless efforts, but has different, more innovative and challenging, characteristics which distinguishes it from previous programs. First, the coverage of the program in terms of research field is much wider than the previous ones. Kyoto's area studies have been interdisciplinary since the center's inception in the early 60s. Interdisciplinarity was recognized as one of the core foundations of CSEAS's research which has been passed down to new generations as is reflected in the allocation of faculty members, one third each for the natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities. The specialization of natural scientists so far involved in area studies was limited to nature-related research fields such as agriculture and ecology, medical science and informatics. However, in the current program, we have considered technology as the major driving force of social change in tropical Asia and Africa and the predominant tool for global society to deal with environmental problems. Thus we invited researchers of advanced technology studies from other departments of Kyoto University and, in particular, from Research Institute of Sustainable Humanosphere (RISH). These include specialists from the fields of energy science, material science and bio-technology. On the other hand, as the specialization of the social sciences and humanities was limited to area-based studies, we invited researchers of global studies such as global history and international relations to join the program.

Second, the research agenda is evolving according to changes in researchers' composition. We formed four Research Initiatives in the program. The major research concern of the first



Banana irrigation in northern Laos

Chinese traders invested in banana production in Laos. This provides a big chance to Lao landowners to earn land rent, but causes serious water conflict with Lao rice growers. Through the premature governance of water use, the non-hegemonic negotiation process plays a crucial role in reconstructing a “sustainable humanosphere.”

initiative is “Long-term dynamics of environment, technology and institutions,” focusing on a development path in which they take a spatial and temporal zooming up and down approach, connecting from the village to global level studies. The second initiative, “Study on nature-inspired technologies and institutions,” attempts to incorporate indigenous knowledge, customs and the practices of local people in Asia and Africa in modern science and technology studies to strengthen them in an ecosystem-friendly direction. The third initiative, “The forestry model of sustainable humansphere,” seeks global production, processing and marketing systems of forestry and forest products in which forest-dependent local people’s livelihood are synthetically embedded. The fourth initiative, “Studies in the potentialities of local culture, institutions and technology,” pursues the initiative of local societies to elaborate institutions and technology for modern society. In all, the collaboration between conventional area studies and newly introduced research fields is indispensable to widen the research agenda and to propose a new paradigm.

Third, a wider research agenda requires changes in research CSEAS since the beginning. Information and ideas obtained through observing what is going on at the site, listening to the voices of the people and grasping nature and society through all the senses are recognized to be the basis of fieldwork-based research. We have never abandoned this research style, but more than ever before, the upper structure we are pursuing to construct in the program is higher in terms of abstraction and wider in terms of research discipline. To meet these requirements, we are placing more emphasis on literature surveys, reciprocal visits to study sites among program members, and theoretical considerations and conceptualization through brain storming and discussion.

These endeavors are, of course, not totally new to CSEAS, but, in terms of the scale of effort, we can say that it has been a big challenge for CSEAS to reform its research policies and directions. Challenge and risk always coexist, and our program is no exception. In this sense, we cannot expect 100% success of the program. But, it is a fate of area studies to innovate itself according to the changes of the target area and consequent changes of contemporary research issues. We believe that, as the leading

research institution of Southeast Asian studies, this challenge is our duty and worth doing.

At present, we have successfully set up several research projects as an outcome of the Global COE program. Prof. Hayami Yoko initiated the Asian Core Program, “Asian connections: South-east Asian model for co-existence in the 21st century,” in 2009 which succeed the idea developed in discussions mainly of the fourth research initiative. Dr. Ishikawa Noboru has also initiated a Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research project, “Planted forests in Equatorial Southeast Asia: Human-nature Interactions in High Biomass Society,” in 2010 which aims to elaborate the biomass society model of the third research initiative and to implement it to a river basin society in Sarawak, Malaysia. I have also set up a Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research project, “Livelihood transformation and reconstructing humansphere in rural Southeast Asia,” in 2010 which aims to interpret “sustainable humansphere” in the context of rural Southeast Asia and to domesticate the idea in rural livelihood systems. In addition, we have also started discussions to elaborate “sustainable humansphere” as the umbrella concept of reciprocal social growth and region-making of the East and Southeast region. These indicate that the program members are inspired through discussion of the program and their new ideas are well accepted among the academic community.

Frankly speaking, we are not sure in what direction Southeast Asian studies will go in, as we cannot precisely predict how the Southeast Asian society will evolve and transform. We are sure, however, that stronger connections between humanity and nature, the global and local, public and private, and society and academism is indispensable. We are confident that a “sustainable humansphere” will be a key concept of Southeast Asian studies in the next decade.

For more information on the G-COE program please visit <http://www.humansphere.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/>



Tropical peat land is one of the largest remaining virgin lands in the world, having rich bio-diversity and large carbon stock. It is now under serious development pressure, converting it to plantation forestry and oil palm farm, particularly in Southeast Asia. Although synthesized collaboration among stakeholders and strong governance is required to achieve sustainable management of tropical peat land, huge development benefits make consensus making difficult.



Coastal zone, bordering land and the sea, is a rich biosphere in terms of diversity and biomass production, but less utilized and weakly governed compared to land surface. In order to meet the increasing demand for sea food coupled with the emergence of the middle class in Southeast Asia, sustainable management of coastal ecosystems together with sustainable livelihood of coastal dwellers should be investigated from the ecological, technical and management viewpoints.