

Kyoto University's Organizations for Kokoro Research

COMPARATIVE COGNITIVE SCIENCE

Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding the Human Mind

The WISH Project and the Unit at Kyoto University.



On December 12, 2010, Psychologists at Kyoto University formed the “Unit for Advanced Studies of the Human Mind” under the “Center for the Promotion of Interdisciplinary Education and Research”. The Unit serves as a national center for the promotion of the WISH Project (WISH stands for “Web for the Integrated Studies of the Human Mind”). The WISH Project was designated as a national project by the Science Council of Japan (SCJ) in March 2010. It is a collaborative undertaking between several distinguished Japanese research universities and institutions that aims to promote an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the human mind. I happened to play a key role in founding the WISH Project and the corresponding Unit at Kyoto University. At present, the Unit consists of sixty-six psychologists from eleven faculties of the university. Following the SCJ’s recommendation, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) financed the purchasing of equipment for the WISH Project’s research in two cutting-edge fields: comparative cognitive science (CCS) and cognitive neuroscience.

For the study of comparative cognitive science,

the equipment included four huge cages to house chimpanzees and bonobos. Two are located at the Primate Research Institute at Inuyama and two are at the Kumamoto Sanctuary. The cages have allowed us to study the minds of those evolutionary cousins. In total, Kyoto University keeps sixty-nine chimpanzees and six bonobos (the only bonobos to be held in Japan). The relationship between chimpanzees and bonobos is comparable to the relationship between *Homo sapiens* and *Homo neanderthalensis*. The study of these living hominids is essential to understanding the evolutionary basis of the human mind.

For the study of cognitive neuroscience, MEXT provided the WISH Project with three functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) machines for brain imaging. The machines are located at Kyoto University, the University of Tokyo, and Hokkaido University. In this way, the Unit of Kyoto University has played a leading role in promoting the study of psychological sciences nationwide. In recognition of these collaborative efforts, Prof. Toshio Yamagishi of Hitotsubashi University and I were both honored with the Japanese government’s Person of Cultural Merit award in 2013.

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