



**Title of Project : Cultural History of PaleoAsia -
Integrative Research on the Formative Processes
of Modern Human Cultures in Asia**

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【Purpose of the Research Project】

The Out of Africa hypothesis on the evolution and subsequent migration of modern humans across Eurasia, an event directly addressing the biological and cultural origins of modern human beings, has been one of the most hotly debated anthropological and archaeological issues of the last decade. The present research project aims to analyze an extensive set of relevant field and theoretical data from Asia in order to interpret the nature of distinct patterns in the formation of modern human cultures across Asia.

A growing body of field data has shown that modern human cultures, developed in the Middle and Upper Paleolithic, were not necessarily brought into Eurasia as a package from their origins; instead, they might also have evolved from earlier cultures, formed through contact with the local indigenous cultures, or resulting from cultural adaptation to new environments. In other words, they are most likely the outcomes of modern humans' interaction with regionally varied natural and social environments. This project aims to verify those possible patterns in Asia, a large continent with diversified environmental and population backgrounds, and provide an anthropological perspective on the causal factors behind the variability.

【Content of the Research Project】

The project employs two major research strategies to analyze evidence from past (Group A01–A03) and present records (Group B01–B02). Group A01 constructs an extensive archaeo-anthropological database to provide a chrono-spatial framework for the emergence of modern humans and their cultures in Asia. The framework serves a basis for the intensive case studies under A02, which analyzes the diversity of the behavioral features and cultures by regions. Then, the possibility that this diversity resulted from adaptation to regionally diverse ecological conditions is studied under A03.

Groups B01 and B02 contribute various theoretical perspectives to the project. B01 explores the patterns of cultural changes in historical and ethnographic records, with a particular focus on changes caused by population contact and movements. Referring to information gathered by B01, B02 predicts mechanisms

governing the observed patterns through mathematical experiments.

With the aid of these multidisciplinary approaches, the project develops pertinent models that will help explain the identified geographic patterns of the formative processes of modern human cultures across Asia.

【Expected Research Achievements and Scientific Significance】

A classic scheme to define regionally different cultural developments in PaleoAsia was provided more than a half century ago for the Lower Paleolithic, when a distinction was made between the lithic industries of the East and West of Eurasia. While this view as well as the geographic position of the boundary—the Movius line—has been repeatedly challenged by more recent discoveries, there is no doubt that the scheme itself has provided a useful working hypothesis on which a number of insightful discussions have been conducted to determine different adaptive strategies and cultural traditions of early hominids in Asia. In the same vein, the global scale models that the present project will provide—models that will be defined with much more refined research strategies and field data—for determining regional patterns in the formative processes of modern human cultures are expected to serve as another useful working hypothesis for future studies.

【Key Words】

“Modern humans” refers to *Homo sapiens* (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) and “modern human cultures” to the cultures of these homo sapiens. The long lasting view that Upper Paleolithic cultures were created by *modern* humans and the Middle Paleolithic ones by *archaic* humans is no longer applicable to every region of Eurasia. Therefore, modern human cultures, the subject of this project, need to be defined with fossil evidence as well as archaeological evidence.

【Term of Project】 FY2016-2020

【Budget Allocation】 664,800 thousand yen

【Homepage Address and Other Contact Information】

<http://paleoasia.jp>