

Project Outline: Comparative Genocide Studies (CGS)

Yuji Ishida

“The Comparative Genocide Studies Project” is one of the core research projects in the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science’s “New Research Initiatives in Humanities and Social Sciences: Area 2, The Reconfiguration of Knowledge towards Building Peace”.

The aim of this project is to establish and reposition “genocide research”, currently grouped in an unexplored area of the humanities and social sciences in Japan, and to make a contribution to the construction of peace. Genocide is still now taking place in various regions all over the world. This research project represents an attempt to establish a theoretical framework for comparative genocide studies, based on concrete empirical evidence, and to work towards theories of prevention.

The object of study for this project will be broad: the many different instances of genocide which have taken place all over the world throughout the twentieth century. Firstly, we will reposition the massacres which took place during World War II, generally accepted and understood as the “Holocaust”, as “European genocide”, and approach it from a variety of points of view: racism and eugenics; ethnic self-determinism and forced migration; acts of war and acts of extermination; and critical approaches to the modern nation state. Alongside this, we will examine the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire during World War I; genocide which occurred in developing countries such as Cambodia, Rwanda and Guatemala; and genocide in the former Yugoslavia; analyzing the background to and contributing causes of each, as well as their processes and consequences, all the while highlighting the universality and present-day relevance of the issue of genocide.

Further, we will examine genocide occurring under colonial rule or under conduct of war (including sexual violence and “cultural genocide”), and genocide under socialist dictatorships as occurred in the former Soviet Union and China, to empirically demonstrate the various forms and mechanisms of genocide. Focus will also be placed upon the ability of genocide to fundamentally alter the structure of regional societies, and upon issues such as the reconstruction of and reconciliation within post-genocide afflicted societies, as well as memories and trauma of the victims and their representation. In this way, while this project will use modern history as its starting point, its scope far exceeds this sector, and represents an endeavour to identify the intrinsic qualities of modern-day genocide.

For each individual topic of research, the methods employed will largely be those of the academic disciplines of history and area studies, but on the theoretical front we intend to develop a greater elaboration of the notions of “peace building” and “human security” which have been key concepts in sociology in recent years. This project will extend across several

academic disciplines and remove barriers between specialties. In concrete terms, the project will chiefly be undertaken by young scholars and those of middle standing who have striven to overcome boundaries between disciplines and who have held an interest in the significance of genocide to such diverse academic fields as history, area studies, medical history, cultural anthropology, international law, international politics, peace studies and philosophy.

The essays in this volume were originally presented as part of the CGS conferences and workshops held in Tokyo from December 2003 to July 2004. I wish to thank all the contributors and the many people who have supported the CGS project. In particular, I express my deep gratitude to the Japan Society for the Promotion of Sciences for making the project possible and also to the Center for German and European Studies at the University of Tokyo, Komaba (DESK) for the generous financial support.

Yuji Ishida
Director of the CGS Project