

Research Activity Report
Supported by “Leading Graduate Program in Primatology and Wildlife Science”
 (Please be sure to submit this report after the trip that supported by PWS.)

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Affiliation/Position	Primate Research Institute/M2
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1. Country/location of visit
Kyoto, Japan
2. Research project
First Kyoto Workshop on Evolutionary Thanatology
3. Date (departing from/returning to Japan)
2017.3.24 (1 day)
4. Main host researcher and affiliation
Dr. Jim Anderson, Professor at Kyoto University
5. Progress and results of your research/activity (You can attach extra pages if needed)
Please insert one or more pictures (to be publicly released). Below each picture, please provide a brief description.
<p>I joined the workshop on evolutionary thanatology. The theme of the workshop was “An Integrative Approach to the Study of Death and Dying”. Ten speakers gave presentations from different fields, including primatology, archeology, and anthropology. The workshop discussed death and dying from an interdisciplinary point of view. I learned a lot of new things.</p> <p>I was interested in joining the workshop initially because I was curious about how animals react to dead conspecifics. My ongoing study focus on (alive) body perception in chimpanzees, and it would be interesting to see how they react to dead bodies. I found the answer from the workshop, and at the same time I also learned about other aspects of death and dying in humans and non-human animals.</p> <p>It was the first time I learned that some social insects will clear or “bury” dead individuals, and their clue was the chemicals produced when the body decays. Researchers add the same chemicals to other objects, and the insects will still clear them. In mammals, the mechanism of death understanding is more complicated, and currently we don’t really have the knowledge of how exactly animals think of death. In the presentations there were several examples from chimpanzees, monkeys and other species. They reacted differently in each case. Some became excited about others’ death, but some didn’t. Some didn’t touch the dead individuals but some did. There were also many cases of dead infant carrying by the mother. The various behaviors may be related to the reason of death, the specific situation of death, and the relationship between the dead individuals and the target individuals. Especially, the behavior of not touching the dead and even not using the place where the individuals died might have evolutionary function of hygiene. Concerning their mind towards death and dying, it was suggested that death-awareness might be related to self-awareness. Also, in the discussion some possible approaches of studying the cognition of death were proposed. We could use matching-to-sample to let animals match two scenes that both show death, and a lot of controls are needed including sleeping/resting. Another point I found interesting was that the ability of non-human animals to understand death might be constrained by their limited ability of mind time travel, and this might also explain why children could not understand death as adults do, although the ability of children to understand death still needs further study. Dr. Biro mentioned “the uncanny valley”, in which humans and also monkeys find “bodies” that are just like but not really are humans/monkeys are very creepy. This is also related to how we react to dead bodies.</p> <p>I also learned a lot of knowledge from the fields of archeology and anthropology. We discussed how the internet influence people’s behavior of death, and various types of memorial of deaths of different areas and of different times. The workshop gave me many fresh ideas and interesting thoughts. I enjoyed it a lot.</p>
6. Others
I would like to thank PWS for supporting this trip.