

**33<sup>rd</sup> KUASS**  
**(Kyoto University African Studies Seminar)**

**Reconstructing the history of African crops:  
the contribution of linguistics and archaeology**

Date: Feb. 2 (Mon), 2015, 15:00 – 17:00

Venue: Middle-sized seminar room, 3F Inamori Center.,  
Kawabata Campus, Kyoto University

Title: Reconstructing the history of African crops: the contribution of linguistics and archaeology

Lecturer: Dr. Roger Blench

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Abstract :

Our understanding of the domestication, spread and genetic diversification of many African crops, including important staples, remains very limited. Archaeobotany is gradually improving our knowledge of the history of seed crops which produce identifiable macro-remains, although there are still many nations in Sub-Saharan Africa for which we have no data. However, most minor crops and those which reproduce vegetatively are still almost unknown. Historical linguistics is one method which allows us to shed some light on the centres of origin of African crops. The paper will look at the basic methodology of researching and compiling vernacular names and summarise the conclusions of some existing work, particularly with relation to millets, sorghum and other minor cereals. It then extends the methods to much more problematic crops such as taro, bananas and oil-crops such as the oil-palm. The paper explores how we can use loanwords, for example to trace the diffusion inland of cassava and maize, both New World domesticates. Finally it considers the different patterns formed by vernacular names for useful trees, and for livestock by comparison to agricultural crops.

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