

## Joint International Research with a Focus on Japan Made Possible with Kakenhi

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Having been invited by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science to submit an essay, I decided to reflect on my research career and its connections with Kakenhi. This reawakened me to the realization that I have been able to organize and sustain intensive joint international research with the support of Kakenhi.

As a researcher, I have specialized in the comparative analysis of social policies and welfare regimes, and feel that I have extended the horizons of this field in various dimensions through joint international research. Social policies encompass social security systems and labor policies. In welfare regime studies, it had mainly been discussed what types of interrelationships existed between the state, market, and family within the context of providing welfare benefits as well as their relative importance in that context.

Past efforts in comparative welfare research have been marked by a pronounced weakness in their approach and by limits to their subject matter or scope of analysis. Firstly in terms of approach, their weakness was that, in examining the question of how the needs of people in the workplace or household are met, women and children were essentially marginalized as members of the set of people. Being sensitive to differences in age and gender is called a “gender perspective.” In citing limits to the subject matter or scope of analysis, secondly, I am referring to the fact that the geographic scope of past welfare research has been limited primarily to Europe and America, or the West, and thirdly to subject matter that had to do mainly with the provision of social security benefits.

In the West, welfare states or welfare regimes have been classified into several types. The

Japanese system has been variously described as closely resembling its counterparts in Germany on the one hand, or the US or Australia on the other, and has also frequently been treated, albeit somewhat hastily, as a hybrid system.

In or around 1999, as I was growing more aware of these weaknesses and limitations of prior research, I decided to take up an invitation and participate in a joint research project involving investigators from the US, UK, Germany, and Japan. The research group (abbreviated as “GLOW”) was attempting to elucidate, from a gender perspective, how labor organizations and regulations in each nation were changing under the influences of globalization. Its members included leading sociologists from each participating nation, and its themes were focused more on the formation of work and the regulations imposed by government or labor and management organizations, rather than welfare regimes.

GLOW required funding for the surveys that would be conducted in each nation and also for the meetings that would be held several times each year. In the autumn of 2001, I submitted an application for Kakenhi—my first in 15 years (in the interim, I had frequently worked as a coinvestigator). In fiscal 2002–03, I received a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B), which had to do with the theme, “Comparative Gender Analysis of New Economy: Service, Information and Widening Social Gaps in Aging Societies.” With that assistance, I was able to invite GLOW members and other experts to Tokyo, and hold an intensive workshop and a public symposium. Additionally, I launched a questionnaire survey of 600 home caregivers in the Tokyo metropolitan area. By holding public symposia and sessions in academic conferences prior to and following our workshops, we created the opportunity to publicly disseminate the interim findings of our research and receive feedback. Since then, I have continued to utilize that approach.

During workshops, I engaged in intensive discussions and debate with labor sociologists from several Western nations, and recognized that the framework for my own research had evolved in the process. Conditions for employment are critically important from the standpoint of individual human needs. It is essential that we examine the ways that not only government policies but also the institutions and practices of families, companies, not-for-profit organizations, and other private entities interact with the legal and policy influences of taxation and social security systems and labor market regulations, and determine how human needs are being met.

I decided to label these mechanisms a “livelihood security system.” Taking into account actual conditions and trends among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member nations around the 1980s and applying a gender perspective, I was able to classify livelihood security systems into three categories: the male breadwinner model, the work-life balance model, and the market-oriented model. Japan’s system is a hard-line male breadwinner model. This approach was shared by other GLOW members.

In fiscal 2004–06, I received a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (S), this time on the theme, “New Economy and Work, Family and States: A Comparative Gender Analysis of Japan, the US, UK and Germany.” This enabled me to conduct a comparative questionnaire survey of care workers for the elderly not only in Japan but in other covered nations as well, and perform a secondary analysis of relevant government statistics and other data. For this project, I introduced the concept of social exclusion as an outcome of a livelihood security system that is dysfunctional or functioning in reverse, and investigated the correlations between extent of social exclusion and models of system. Social exclusion refers to an inability to participate in society due to factors that include low income, unemployment, or condition of health.

GLOW’s research accomplishments were published in 2007 in a single volume titled *Gendering Knowledge Economy*. The book was compiled by four editors, one from each nation represented, and I was one of them. An augmented edition in Japanese was published in 2016, thus, in my view, enabling us to share our research findings with a larger audience in Japan.

I have continued my research with Kakenhi assistance up to the present. Working together with GLOW’s German members and mid-career researchers in Japan and South Korea, I have pursued comparative analyses on themes including “gender and financial and economic crises” as well as “gender and large-scale disasters.” As a sole author, in 2011 I published a book in English on my findings from research focused in Japan. Additionally, in 2011 and 2014 I conducted a large-scale fact-finding survey of social conditions in Fukui Prefecture, which was estimated to have the lowest level of social exclusion of any prefecture in Japan. (The 2014 survey was conducted jointly with Fukui Prefecture.)

The findings from this series of research endeavors demonstrated that Japan’s system is not

merely dysfunctional but functioning in reverse. Functioning in reverse refers to a state that actually makes a problem worse instead of contributing to its solution. For example, the design of social insurance schemes that are vertically divided by number of hours worked as well as income earned has led to an increase in non-regular employment in particular, harmed the balance between social insurance revenue and expenditures, and limited eligibility for benefits. Furthermore, the redistribution of income by the government has actually exacerbated conditions of poverty and given Japan almost the worst poverty rate among OECD member nations. This is an irrational state of affairs, and possible remedies in tax reform and social security reform have been provided through research.