

## 【Grant-in-Aid for Specially Promoted Research】

### Humanities and Social Sciences



**Title of Project : A Comprehensive Study of the Structural Change in Social Stratification and the Mechanism of Generating Inequality in the Ageing Society with Low Fertility**

Sawako Shirahase

( The University of Tokyo, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, Professor )

Research Area : Sociology

Keyword : Social Stratification, Social Mobility, Demographic Change, Life Course

#### 【Purpose and Background of the Research】

Japan has been experiencing rapid demographic transformation due to an aging population and low birthrate. The number of the elderly aged 65 years and over in Japan is about 30 million, with its proportion reaching 23 percent of the overall population in 2012. The main purpose of our research is to examine the structural changes in social stratification and the process of generating social inequality in an aging society, Japan.

The traditional theory of social stratification has been developed on the basis of individual position in the labor market. Because of the rapid aging of society, however, the number of people who are either partly or completely out of the labor force has increased. The elderly, who are retired from work, cannot be differentiated according to labor market positions, but their work histories and wealth are likely to affect their living conditions.

Regarding the decline in fertility rate, young people tend to postpone leaving the parental home mainly due to economic hardship; they face difficulties in finding decent jobs that would allow them to become financially independent and form new families. These changes suggest that the basis of the stratification system cannot be ascribed easily to labor market position, but they request the new framework of social stratification theory.

#### 【Research Methods】

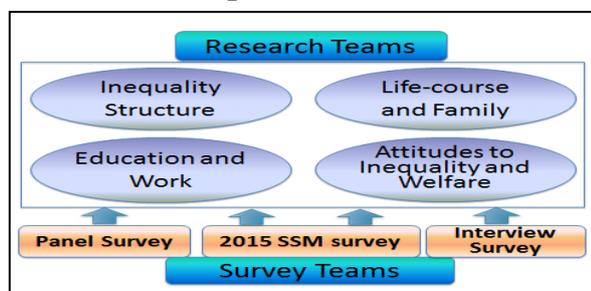


Figure Two-tiered Organization

Our research project is structured on the lines of large-scale social surveys. Since 1955, the Social Stratification and Mobility (hereafter, SSM) Survey has been conducted every 10 years, and the seventh one is planned for 2015. The nationally representative panel surveys of the youth,

middle-aged, and elderly will also be conducted to examine the process of generating social inequality. Our project comprises a two-tiered structure as shown in the figure. In addition to survey teams, there are research teams tasked with examining four topics: (1) inequality structure; (2) life-course and family; (3) education and work; and (4) attitudes to inequality and welfare.

#### 【Expected Research Achievements and Scientific Significance】

There are four outcomes that we expect from our project. First, we will show how the structure of social stratification is associated with demographic change. Second, we will develop a method for measuring social standing by taking into account gender and generational relations within the family. Third, we will pursue the longstanding tradition of the SSM Survey and at the same time, will conduct panel surveys of the youth, middle-aged, and elderly to examine how social inequality is generated on the individual level. Fourth, based on our empirical analyses, we will propose policy implications for suggesting ways of making our aging society sustainable.

Increased longevity and an aging population are inevitable demographic changes that will be faced by almost all industrial societies. Our project, therefore, intends to make a significant contribution to the future of aging societies and related forms of social stratification.

#### 【Publications Relevant to the Project】

Shirahase, Sawako, 2010, "Japan as a Stratified Society: With a Focus on Class Identification." *Social Science Japan Journal* 13(1): 31-52.

Shirahase, Sawako (ed.), 2011, *Demographic Change and Inequality in Japan*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.

【Term of Project】 FY2013-2017

【Budget Allocation】 348, 700 Thousand Yen

#### 【Homepage Address and Other Contact Information】

[http://www.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ssm\\_spr/](http://www.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ssm_spr/)