INTERVIEW WITH SAYAKA SAKODA

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Sayaka Sakoda is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) at Kyoto University. She was a visiting researcher at FFJ for the first time in 2014 and has come back to EHESS almost every year since.

How did your collaboration with FFJ begin?

The "International Comparative Study on Happiness" project led me to study at FFJ-EHESS in 2014, thanks to the JSPS Strategic Young Researcher Overseas Visits Program for Accelerating Brain Circulation. From 2018, the project was funded by the Toyota Foundation Research Grant, under the leadership of Professor Sébastien Lechevalier, and JSPS' fund "Scientist for Joint International Research".

Could you tell us about some of your achievements as a young researcher?

Thanks to the continuation of our initial project on happiness, I was selected for the JSPS LEADSNET project, a group that aims to become an international exchange hub for researchers who wish to conduct academic research in Japan with a truly international perspective. I am very proud of this experience and I will make sure to honor the privilege I have been given.

I also enjoyed my experiences as a local organizer of the SASE conference at Doshisha University in June 2018 and as a visiting scholar at EHESS in February 2019. These experiences have honed my fighting skills in the international academic world.

> "**My doctoral dissertation looked at how family structure widens economic disparities.**"

Now, I am currently a Research Fellow at JSPS. I successfully applied for JSPS' KAKENHI (C)[1] fund in 2017 and I am registered in its jury database. For this reason, I am frequently asked for advice on how to fill out these JSPS applications by people in various positions, such as PhD candidates, postdocs, and URA, both in Japan and abroad. It gives me great pleasure to help pass on the benefits I myself received to a younger generation.

What is your current research project about?

My specialty is income distribution, and my doctoral dissertation looked at how family structure widens economic disparities. With Professor Toshiaki Tachibanaki, we presented the results first in 2013's "Unequal Society in Married Couples" and more recently in "The Economics of Divorce: The Logic of Love and Separation". My research output in 2013 showed that income inequality is reduced through marriage due to Douglas-Arisawa's 2nd law. This first publication is a snapshot that shows "who married to whom". My latest publication "The Economics of Divorce", however, focuses on the relationship between marital status and economic inequality.

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1. One of the main types of grant provided by JSPS.
See: https://www.jsps.go.jp/english/e-grants/grants01.html

The mechanisms for deciding to divorce are as follows: (1) "search cost", meaning that at some point people decide to marry, as they cannot search endlessly for a marriage partner, but when they meet someone better than their current spouse they divorce him/her to remarry; (2) "information asymmetry", meaning the disparity between time spent getting to know each other before marriage and time spent being married when life is getting longer; and, finally, (3) "uncertainty", meaning the changes in the couple's environment.

In my latest book, I also dealt with marital infidelity, since infidelity is an example of "search cost". In collaboration with Akira Igarashi from Rikkyo University, we now do research on marital infidelity based on a survey conducted in March of this year to find out "who commits marital infidelity with whom and why".

"Marriage with whom" is the result of individual choices and the government cannot intervene in people's personal choice, except when they sink into poverty. There has been some debate on what is the most appropriate way to measure inequality. We have not yet grasped what basic principle is most desirable for income distribution. When we try to measure and understand increasing income inequality, we are often faced with complications such as demographics, age structure, tax units, which vary according to the country and also analytical instruments.

This is because (1) how taxation units are managed and (2) how individual income is treated are not comparable. For example, France uses household unit taxation and Japan uses individual unit taxation. It is difficult to assess any implications on policy for optimal taxation based on an international comparative/ empirical analysis. I joined the World Inequality Lab's project to clarify the Distributional National Accounts (DINA) of Japan.

To explain fair income distribution, I recently published a paper based on the idea of "Egalitarian Liberalism", which aims to eliminate the impact of luck or misfortune and differences in natural and social circumstances on each person's welfare (Sayaka Sakoda, "Inequalities and Unfair Income Distribution in Japan", *World Journal of Applied Economics*, Vol.6, Issue 1, 2020).