A LOOK AT CONTEMPORARY LABOR ISSUES, ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITY UNIONS, AND THE PROSPECTIVE WELFARE SYSTEM IN JAPAN

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by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who helped me pursue my academic career in the United States, and to all the people, who made me “who I am.”
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A Look at Contemporary Labor Issues, Alternative Community Unions, and the Prospective Welfare System in Japan
by
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Contrary to the image of an egalitarian society, the number of irregular workers in Japan is increasing, and temporary workers in particular have gathered public attention since 2008, when a 25-year-old male temporary worker went on a daytime stabbing rampage in Tokyo with seven people killed and ten people injured.

By doing an academic literature review on the dual structure between large firms and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMSEs), the emergence of irregular work, and the welfare system in Japan as well as analyzing the content of 10 interviews with representatives of Community Unions that support irregular and SMSE workers in Japan, this study examines: what labor issues irregular and SMSE workers in Japan pose, how effectively labor unions are able to support and mobilize irregular workers, and what improvement needs to happen in the welfare system in Japan to adapt to the changing employment landscape in Japan.

The analysis of academic literature revealed that a gender bias exists in the irregular labor market of Japan, the labor unions in Japan are organized mainly in large enterprises and are exclusive to irregular and SMSE workers, and business enterprises played a major role in maneuvering the welfare system in Japan. However, the interview materials with Community Union leaders show that it is not so much gender but industrial labor demographics that lead to a discrepancy between female and male workers with volatile employment. Community Unions are willing to help irregular and SMSE workers through troubleshooting activity, bargaining against managers, and lawsuits. At the same time, they have difficulty in mobilizing irregular and SMSE workers because a large number of workers who talk to Community Unions about labor issues do not sign up for membership in a Union. Welfare programs in Japan are badly designed for male irregular and SMSE workers because employment insurance gives them only a symbolic benefit. Being in the status of ‘dependents,’ male workers with volatile employment are not able to design welfare programs of their own accord. The state has begun to deregulate the eligibility for employment insurance, and therefore it is hoped that the conditions on employment insurance may be relaxed further.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................... v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................ viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................ ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................................... x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

1  INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................................... 1
   Temporary Workers in Japan at the End of 2000s .......................................................... 1
   The Dual Structure and the Emergence of Irregular Work ............................................ 4
   Labor Unions, Irregular Workers, and SMSE Workers ................................................... 6
   Research Questions and Methods .................................................................................. 7

2  A BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON JAPANESE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM .................. 10
   Many Faces of Japanese Employment System .............................................................. 12
      What Makes the Lifetime Employment Possible? A Rational Perspective ......................... 12
      The Power of Corporate Welfare on Workers in Large Enterprises ............................. 13
   State Policies Toward Divergent Production Sectors ...................................................... 16
      From the Aftermath of WWII to the 1970s: State Regulations and Subsidies ............... 16
      From the 1980s to 2000s: From Less Visible Political Means to the Lesser Degree of Instruments .................................................. 21
      A Brief Case Study on the Influence of LSRSLL toward Local Retail Stores and the Labor Market ........................................... 24
   Gender Bias in the Labor Market Within the Sticky Male-Breadwinner Welfare System .......................................................... 29
      Gender Bias in the Labor Market of Japan .................................................................. 29
      Why are Women More Prone to Work Irregularly? The Stickiness of Male-Breadwinner Welfare ........................................................................................................ 31
      Two Faces of Irregular Working in Japan .................................................................... 33
      Tax Incentive to the Status of ‘Dependent’ .................................................................. 35
# 3 COMMUNITY UNIONS, IRREGULAR WORKERS, AND SMSE WORKERS

- Methodology .................................................................................................................38
- What are Community Unions? .........................................................................................42
- Irregular and SMSE Workers on the Ground .................................................................44
  - Fukuoka City .............................................................................................................45
  - The Greater Osaka Area ............................................................................................46
  - The Greater Tokyo Area ............................................................................................49
- The Content of Troubleshooting .....................................................................................51
- Troubleshooting Events, Protesting, Contacting Managers, and Filing Lawsuits ..........53
- Temporary Workers on the Ground .................................................................................56
  - Female Temporary Workers in Clerical Sectors .......................................................56
  - Male ‘False Subcontracting’ Workers in Manufacturing Industry ............................58
- The Mobilization Issue of Community Unions ...............................................................60
  - Hearts and Minds of Community Union Leaders .....................................................61
  - The Mobilization Issue of Community Unions ..........................................................62

# 4 JAPANESE WELFARE SYSTEM, IRREGULAR WORKERS, AND SMSE WORKERS

- The Relationship Between Welfare System and Male Workers with Volatile Employment in Japan ......................................................67
- Symbolic Benefits of Employment Insurance and Public Assistance .......................70
  - Employment Insurance .............................................................................................71
  - Public Assistance .......................................................................................................73
- Victims or Free Riders? Job Training Program with Subsidies ....................................74

# 5 CONCLUSION ..............................................................................................................78

# REFERENCES ................................................................................................................84

# APPENDIX

A  INTERVIEW GUIDE ......................................................................................................92
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. The Number of Coverage on ‘Temporary Working’ in Asahi Shinbun ......................2
Table 2. Comparative Social Expenditure, in Percentage of GDP .................................14
Table 3. Comparative State Investments, in Percentage of GDP .................................18
Table 4. The Number of Newly Opened Large Retail Stores, From 1979 to 1983 ..........19
Table 5. Comparative Level of Farm Subsidies, In Percentage of Gross Farm Receipts.....19
Table 6. The Proportion of Subsidies and Pensions Out of Farm Incomes Per Capita ......20
Table 7. The Decline in Financial Resources for Local Government Construction
Projects.........................................................................................................................23
Table 8. The Numbers of Small and Large Retail Stores from 1982 to 2004 ...................23
Table 9. The Gender Discrepancy in the Number of Irregular Workers .........................31
Table 10. Gender Bias in the Number of Temporary Workers........................................31
Table 11. The Numbers of Male and Female Workers and Gender Ratio ..................34
Table 12. Demographics of Community Unions and Leaders in the Study ..................41
Table 13. Demographics on Each Union in Fukuoka City ...........................................46
Table 14. Demographics on Each Union in the Greater Osaka Area .........................47
Table 15. Demographics on Each Union in the Greater Tokyo Area .........................50
Table 16. The Number of Labor Disputes Divided by Content at RFU .......................55
Table 17. The Number of Arbitration Cases Divided by Outcome at RFU .................55
Table 18. The Number of Court Cases by Outcome at RFU .......................................56
Table 19. The Demographics of Temporary Workers from 2004 to 2008, Where
Female > Male in 2004 .................................................................................................57
Table 20. The Demographics of Temporary Workers from 2004 to 2008, Where
Female < Male in 2004 .................................................................................................58
Table 21. A Comparison Between the N of Troubleshooting and Those Who Sign Up
Per Year .......................................................................................................................63
Table 22. Mean Ns of Those Who Sign Up and Exit ..................................................64
Table 23. Social Constructions and Political Power: Types of Target Populations ........69
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A newspaper pictures in the aftermath of Akihabara Rampage.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Map of downtown Omuta City.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>A weekend in YouMe Town Omuta.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>A Sunday afternoon in Shin-Sakaemachi district.</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>A long-term comparison between the numbers of workers in local retail stores and part-time workers in the city of Omuta.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The long-term transitions in the numbers of regular and irregular workers.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>A protest against the cutbacks in temporary workers in Kyoto.</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Contacting managers at a firm of heavy industry.</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

TEMPORARY WORKERS IN JAPAN AT THE END OF 2000s

The capital city of Japan saw an unprecedented incident in the central shopping district on June 8, 2008. A 25-year-old man went on a daytime rampage in Akihabara, an electronics shopping district of central Tokyo, by driving a van into a pedestrian intersection in a reckless manner and by stabbing pedestrians randomly. Seven pedestrians, as a result, were killed and ten were seriously injured. The incident occurred at Sunday noon and therefore received intensified attention from the media (Asahi Shinbun 2008a; Yomiuri Shinbun 2008a). It later turned out that the man worked in a Toyota automobile factory as a temporary worker. Three days prior to the massacre, he assumed that the factory dismissed him because he found that his work clothing was nowhere to be found (Asahi Shinbun 2008b; Yomiuri Shinbun 2008b). He lost his temper and made up his mind that he would drive a van to the intersection and commit a massacre. The media also found that he had left a series of texts on an online massage board, which reported how he proceeded to the mass killings and got motivated to go on the murder rampage (Asahi Shinbun 2008c; Yomiuri Shinbun 2008c: see Figure 1).

The incident made temporary work a nation-wide issue of concern, and the media accelerated coverage on this topic. A long-term look at the amount of media coverage on temporary workers gives us an intriguing finding: searching by ‘temporary work’, the database of Asahi Shinbun, one of the leading newspapers in Japan, hit 1495 articles from 2005 to 2009, whereas it hit only 253 articles from 2000 to 2004 (see Table 1). In other words, the number of media articles on temporary work rapidly increased in the latter half of 2000s, which would show a growing interest in temporary work among the public from the mid-2000s.

Newspaper coverage often associated temporary work with poverty and tough working conditions. A typical narrative on temporary work goes as follows: whenever companies feel that paying salary for temporary workers is a burden in a time of economic
Table 1. The Number of Coverage on ‘Temporary Working’ in *Asahi Shinbun*

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>2000 – 2004</td>
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<td>2005 – 2009</td>
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hardship, they can dismiss the workers (*Asahi Shinbun* 2007a, 2007b, 2008e). The narrative sounds as if temporary workers, deprived of job security, have to put up with a relatively low-income status and unstable life conditions. In other words, temporary workers are treated as a tool for ‘flexible accumulation’ (Harvey 1989, Chap. 9), or a ‘buffer’ against economic
fluctuations. At the same time, an argument began to gain momentum about whether irregular workers should be promoted to regular status or not, and, if so, how possibly it could happen (Asahi Shinbun 2006a, 2006b; Nihon Keizai Shinbun 2006).

In relation to their status of ‘buffer,’ another incident gathered considerable attention from the media in November 2008. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis in the United States, such companies as automobile and electronics abruptly reduced the number of temporary workers due to a shrinking demand, as a result of which these workers lost their jobs without sufficient prior notice, rendering them unemployed (Asahi Shinbun 2008f, 2008g; Nishinippon Shinbun 2008a, 2008b). According to the press release of Ministry of Health, Labour and Wealth (hereafter MHLW) on November 27, 2009, 143,908 temporary workers lost or would lose their jobs from October 2008 to December 2009. It also turned out that, out of 56,822 temporary workers who lost or were going to lose their jobs as of October 2009 and participated in the survey, only 30,703 workers (54 percent of the respondents) were assured of reemployment (MHLW 2009a). The media named those companies’ deeds haken-giri, or sudden cutbacks in temporary workers, which gathered attention from the public (Asahi Shinbun 2008h; Nishinippon Shinbun 2008b, 2008c).

Following the massive cutbacks, some Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) in Tokyo set up a place during 2009 New Year Day period, where temporary workers who had been dismissed and could not afford to pay a visit to their hometowns were able to spend nights and have something warm to eat at the turn of the new year. The NPOs named the place ‘Temps Village’ and it gathered wide public attention through the media (Asahi Shinbun 2008i, 2009a, 2009b; Nishinippon Shinbun 2009a, 2009b). So far I have shown how temporary workers gathered public attention through the high-profile news coverage, from the daytime rampage to massive cutbacks and subsequent homelessness, making temporary workers one of the media focal points in the end of 2000s. Reading and watching a series of media coverage of male temporary workers’ hardship, I began to wonder how temporary work came to be prevalent in male employment, what state legislations led to the trend toward a greater use of temporary workers, how irregular employment in general took root in the labor market of Japan, and if there is any labor union activism in support of workers with volatile employment.
THE DUAL STRUCTURE AND THEEmergence of Irregular Work

To put these media stories in broader perspective, they portray a rather different image on the employment landscape in Japan, which used to be heralded as “Japan as Number One” (Vogel [1979] 2001) or ‘a middle-class society’ (Reed 1993, 39). In actuality, that sort of image, which regards Japan as an egalitarian society, does not accurately represent the broader picture of the Japanese employment system, where a dual structure exists between large enterprises and small- or middle-sized enterprises (SMSEs) in terms of the level of salary increase and corporate welfare. Given bigger capital reserves, large enterprises are able to gain worker loyalty by using annual salary increases and corporate welfare as an incentive, which enables workers to feel satisfied with being in the same workplace for entire lives. In contrast, SMSEs do not have as much capital as large enterprises do and therefore cannot have the system of salary increase and corporate welfare installed as successfully as large firms. Workers in SMSEs, therefore, are less motivated to remain in the same workplace and are more mobile than workers in large enterprises (Reed 1993, Chap.4).

Aside from inequalities between regular workers employed by large corporations versus SMSEs, there is a further division between regular and irregular workers. Among non-regular workers, there are sub-classifications: part-time workers, temporary workers, contract workers, and subcontracting workers. Part-time workers are those who work in fewer hours than regular employees in the same workplace. Temporary workers, which I referred to in the last section, are those hired from a temporary service agency and work in a workplace arranged by the agency. Contract workers have specialized skills and work in a company on fixed-term contracts. Subcontracting workers are sent to work at facilities of a client (usually a larger company) by subcontracting company under subcontract arrangement (Keizer 2008, 412-3).

Historically, serious transformations were under way in terms of the role of married women during the 1980s, when, ironically, Japan was hailed as “Japan as Number One.” The traditional gendered-division of labor among Japanese families, where men would work full-time in a company to maintain the family financially and women would stay home to take care of household and children, began to change in the mid-1970s, when Japanese economy
ceased to grow linearly in the aftermath of 1973 Oil Shock. In fact, it turned out that a growing number of female irregular workers came to be structured within the labor market of Japan in order to enhance the flexibility of labor market and to have the male lifetime employment system secured (Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002; 40-1). Two types of irregular workers, part-time and temporary workers, came to be recognized accordingly. In the 1980s, the number of part-time workers began to increase, especially among married women (Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002; 40-1), and they typically worked in such service industries as retail and restaurant stores and for a shorter-term than regular workers (Broadbent 2001, 295-6; Gottfried 2008, 184-5; Keizer 2008, 415). In 1985, the government in Japan enacted the Temporary Worker Law (TWL), which legalized temporary work through agencies, centering mainly on the jobs that women would engage in (i.e. clerical work) (Gottfried 2008, 187, 189; Weathers 2001, 202). In this regard, one can see how the labor demographics of Japan came to be gendered between regular and irregular workers from the 1980s onward. All these divisions in the labor market – the dual structure between large firms and SMSEs, and the growth of irregular work undermine the image of Japan as an egalitarian society.

In the 1990s, the country saw another change in the employment landscape in the aftermath of the extreme expansion in the economy during the late 1980s. The companies began not to hire as many regular workers as they had before because Japan has been in a long-term recession. Those who graduated from college but did not get a full-time employment ended up working irregularly. State legislation helped the trend to proceed: the government revised the TWL in 2004, which enabled manufacturers to hire temporary workers for a maximum of three years, even though manufacturers were kept from doing so before the revision (MHLW 2004). Official statistics show that the revised TWL helped the number of temporary workers to fluctuate: upward from 850,000 (2004) to 1,400,000 (2008) and downward to 1,080,000 (2009) (Statistical Bureau of Ministry of International Affairs and Communications [SBMIAC] 2011b). For now, it would suffice to say that this legislative outcome would plausibly be one of the reasons why the murderer in Akihabara Rampage was a temporary worker in an automobile factory and the media intensively covered the massive cutbacks in temporary workers in the latter half of 2008.
LABOR UNIONS, IRREGULAR WORKERS, AND SMSE WORKERS

On a close look, therefore, the issue of irregular workers provides us with an intriguing picture on how the country has established the discrepancy between large enterprises and SMSEs and seen a long-term transformation in terms of the availability of irregular workers. It remains to be seen from the academic, legislative, quantitative accounts, however, how strongly irregular workers are able to make their voice heard in setting standards of job security and working conditions.

Labor unions would be an appropriate organization on which they could rely, but labor unions in Japan are traditionally structured on an enterprise basis and only in large firms (Igarashi 2008, 136-7; Nagamine 2003, 39-40; Pempel & Tsunekawa 1979, 263). The enterprise-based, or corporate, unions consist mainly of collective regular workers in large enterprises and therefore disregard irregular and SMSE workers as constituencies of the unions. In other words, there is no room in corporate unions where irregular and SMSE workers belong and make their voice heard. With regard to the attitude toward managers, the enterprise unions tend to be friendly with managers and fail to be assertive in demanding the rights of workers (Igarashi 2008). This is because being insistent on their rights would deprive them of the benefits of lifetime employment and seniority-based payment, which are still in operation among regular workers of large firms (Miyamoto 2008; Reed 1993).

Enterprise unions do hold annual bargaining processes against managers, called *shunto*, but the agenda of bargaining is ordinarily confined to how much of a wage increase should be given to regular workers (Weathers 2008), and they do not typically deal with the issues associated with irregular and SMSE workers. To put it differently, they do not primarily negotiate with managers about how the rights of workers should be properly maintained or how the working condition of workers should be improved, because those sorts of issues are normally outside of the bargaining agenda.

However, on closer scrutiny, it is feasibly possible to find an alternative form of labor union in Japan, namely Community Unions. Community Unions have aimed their activities at irregular and SMSE workers on the individual and local basis. They have arisen throughout the country, and have organized under a single network since the 1980s. In actuality, they have been active in listening to what labor issues individual workers have by
way of troubleshooting activity, trying to bring irregular workers into their activism, and aiming at the improvement of their lives by way of financial aid and job creation programs (Hamamura 2003, 28-30; Nagamine 2003, 56-64). In other words, they had supported irregular workers on the ground even before the issue of temporary workers became an issue of nation-wide concern during the latter half of 2000s. As for academic attention, some scholars have analyzed what activities Community Unions entail and what limitations they face, such as how they could successfully mobilize irregular workers, and how economically viable the financial management of their activities is (Hamamura 2003; Nagamine 2003).

Because these studies are not comprehensive or recent, it would be intellectually beneficial to analyze how Community Unions have addressed the work issues of irregular workers in general as well as the 2008 massive cutbacks in temporary workers in particular. This investigation would enable us to garner a more nuanced picture of irregular work in Japan and to update our understanding of the demographics of irregular workers. It also would be of interest to get to know how much mobilization power Community Unions have in having irregular workers incorporated into their activities, because it has been argued that the solidarity among irregular workers is relatively low in comparison with among regular workers in large enterprises (Broadbent 2001, 302-3; Gottfried 2008, 188). In relation to the volatile working conditions of irregular and SMSE workers, it would be particularly important to get to know how such workers have been deterred from enjoying the benefit of Japanese welfare programs, because, historically speaking, corporate welfare in large enterprises has played a major role in providing welfare benefits to people of working age, and state welfare programs have focused on people who are post-retirement (Miyamoto 2008).

**Research Questions and Methods**

To put the argument into perspective, it would be theoretically productive to pose and answer the following research questions. First, why is Japanese employment egalitarianism a myth, and what has been the reality? Second, what are the accurate demographics of irregular and SMSE workers, and what kinds of labor issues do they have in terms of job security and working conditions? Third, how successfully have Community Unions been able to support irregular and SMSE workers and have them mobilized in the times of employment...
transformation? While this thesis focuses its analysis primarily on irregular workers and Community Unions, the topic does raise larger questions about the Japanese welfare system: at what point should this system be reformed for the sake of irregular and SMSE workers, who have been deterred from enjoying the benefits of either corporate or state welfare programs?

Through literature reviews and analysis of interview materials with representatives of Community Unions, the present study aims to answer each of the research questions. I conducted ten semi-structured, open-ended interviews over a two month period from July to August 2010 with the leaders of Community Unions in the three regions of Japan: Fukuoka as well as the greater Osaka and Tokyo areas.

The present study makes the following arguments. First, myths about the Japanese employment system as ‘life-time employment’ hold true for a rather restricted stratum (i.e. regular workers in large enterprises) out of overall labor structure. State policies to bring about economic development in the aftermath of World War II strengthened the dual structure between large enterprises and SMSEs, and gender discrepancy between regular and irregular workers has been recognized in the labor market of Japan, within the model of male-breadwinner welfare. Second, industrial labor demographics show a general difference between female and male workers with volatile employment in the labor market of Japan. Married women are likely to engage in the irregular labor market as part-time workers in service or retail sectors, while male workers would often engage in construction or manufacturing sectors as subcontracting workers. Third, industrial labor demographics also make a difference between female and male temporary workers. Female temporary workers have been prevalent in such office-related sectors as filing and clerical machine operation, whereas male temporary workers had been prevalent in manufacturing sector in the disguise of subcontracting workers even before the 2004 TWL revision. In this regard, the gender bias in the irregular labor market of Japan is not entirely correct; it is not so much gender as the type of industries that make it more likely for women to engage in irregular work.

Fourth, although they are successful in listening to the labor issues of SMSE and irregular workers by way of troubleshooting activity, Community Unions have hard time mobilizing them because not all of the workers who talk to Community Unions about their labor issues sign up for membership. The poor level of participation in the activism of
Community Unions appears to be because it is less economically beneficial for irregular and SMSE workers to sign up and keep on paying membership fee on a monthly basis than to search for another workplace and because the level of institutionalization or the sense of solidarity among SMSE and irregular workers are lower than those among regular workers in large enterprises.

Lastly, male irregular and SMSE workers have been deterred from being a primary beneficiary of corporate and state welfare programs, because such programs are aimed at regular workers in large enterprises and retirees. The program of employment insurance is badly-designed for volatile workers in terms of the duration of insurance benefit and the payment itself, when they are more often subject to layoffs than regular workers in large enterprises, such that the benefit of public assistance outweighs that of employment insurance. The option of public assistance, however, is associated with the social sense of stigma, which discourages workers to apply for the benefit. The state launched a program offering a job training system with subsides available to workers in 2009, but it has been reported that the program is implemented so unsatisfactorily that it does not help them to learn and acquire job skills to find another workplace. The leaders of Community Unions argued for a series of reforms in employment insurance programs so that workers out of labor market do not have to worry about long-term unemployment.
CHAPTER 2

A BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON JAPANESE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM

Once upon a time, the employment system in Japan, which is often characterized as ‘life-time employment’ and ‘seniority-based salary,’ received acclaim in the United States. Some of the most conspicuous praise from an academic came from Ezla F. Vogel’s *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* ([1979] 2001). In his work, he mainly argued that the loyalty of workers toward their companies and the collective identification of workers with the firms were crucial for the maintenance of the Japanese employment system and for the economic growth of Japan in the aftermath of World War II (Vogel [1979] 2001, Chap. 6). In order to explain why this is so, he focused on how eager Japanese people are to study and learn something as well as to read books in a routine manner from early on (Vogel [1979] 2001, Chap. 7). In other words, his main focus was on cultural aspects of the Japanese in general and workers in particular. Broadly speaking, the culture of Japanese people was decisive in his argument of how the lifetime employment system could be successfully implemented.

However, an obvious pitfall of his argument was that he did not take the overall structure of Japanese employment system into consideration. After all, he mainly referred to regular workers in large enterprises and put less emphasis on other type of workers such as workers in SMSEs. Plausibly, because workers in SMSEs belong to family-owned businesses or are subcontractors of larger enterprises, it would therefore follow that their employment has been different from that of workers in large enterprises given the smaller scale of capital and labor. Another evident drawback was that he was not aware of the role played by irregular workers, primarily because they came to be recognized only since the

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1 According to the Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Basic Act, SMSEs are those enterprises whose number of regular workers are less than 300.
In order for my argument to be meaningful, it will be necessary to make common sense of the myths about the Japanese employment system and get to know what the employment system of Japan is like. In what follows, I will argue, firstly, that the ‘life-time employment’ axiom accounts only for the employment of regular workers in large enterprises and that workers in SMSEs have long been more mobile than regular workers, in the sense that they do not settle in the same workplace throughout their lives. In addition, the employment conditions have been sharply different between workers in large enterprises and SMSEs in the sense that the former enjoys generous benefits of seniority-based payment and corporate welfare. Rationally speaking, workers in large enterprises do not quit because they would otherwise lose the benefits of age-graded salary and corporate welfare.

Secondly, state policies to accelerate economic development in the aftermath of World War II framed the discrepancy between large enterprises and SMSEs in terms of working conditions and the relationship between the state and each of the enterprises. State policies toward divergent production sectors in essence produced a double standard. The tension between the two sectors remained high until the beginning of 2000s, when the government of Japan was inclined to be in favor of large enterprises. The pro-business policies of the regime led to the greater availability of irregular workers in the labor market of Japan.

Thirdly, gender discrepancies have been embedded in the labor market within the welfare system of the male-breadwinner model and therefore women are more likely to work irregularly than men. All-encompassing benefits of corporate welfare in large enterprises, in essence, were designed to provide a family income and, on the flip side, discouraged married women to participate in the labor market. In the 1970s, the state officially promoted female labor market participation, but this encouragement rested on the premise that they would work irregularly. Accordingly, Japan saw an increasing number of irregular workers in the labor market, especially among women.
MANY FACES OF JAPANESE EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM

In reference to lifetime employment, one might well place emphasis on the cultural aspects of Japanese enterprises in the argument about what makes the employment custom feasible. According to the cultural argument, firms can be compared to a family, where all the workers are close members of the enterprise. In addition, the mental affiliation between managers and workers is so strong that between them lies a sense of mutual loyalty (Reed 1993, 79). To be brief, the intimacy between them plays the major role in having the lifetime employment securely instituted.

As I mentioned in the preceding section, however, I do not intend to support the cultural argument in this chapter. This is mainly because it would make an all-encompassing explanation and does not explain differences between labor market sectors. Methodologically, it would also be extremely hard to measure to what extent of loyalty each worker has for the firm in an accurate way. Rather than relying on the cultural characteristics of Japanese enterprises, I will aim to make a rational-choice explanation of why lifetime employment is expected to work out in Japan.

What Makes the Lifetime Employment Possible? A Rational Perspective

Workers in Japan do not quit because, if they did, they would lose the benefit of salary increase and promotions in the system of seniority-based payment. After all, payment increase and promotion are closely related to how many years a worker engages with the firm (Miyamoto 2008, 89). In this regard, to quit is costly within the system of seniority-based payment. Moreover, one needs to be cautious about the fact that the system of seniority-based payment is in operation only for the workers in large enterprises. This is simply because large enterprises have sufficiently intensive capital and labor to enable the seniority-based payment to work out in an effective manner.

Intuitively, the demographics of enterprises in Japan show quite a skewed landscape. According to the latest data, large enterprises account only for 0.03 percent out of all enterprises. The regular workers in large enterprises, furthermore, make up solely 33.8 percent out of all the regular workers in Japan (Japan Small Business Research Institute
[JSBRI] 2010, 237-38). In this regard, it would be safe to argue that lifetime employment holds true for a considerably confined stratum within the overall labor structure of Japan.

The better part of SMSEs do not have the system of seniority-based payment in their employment system because they do not have as much capital and labor as large enterprises do. From the rational perspective, there is no point in remaining at the same SMSE workplace throughout the entire life, because, no matter how many years they work in and put up with the same working conditions, they cannot anticipate how their salary and conditions would improve in a satisfactory manner to their expectations. Workers in SMSEs, therefore, are more mobile than regular workers in large enterprises, in the sense that they can and do change workplaces from one to another (Reed 1993, 90).

The dual structure between large firms and SMSEs is one of the most eminent characteristics of Japanese economy, and has been recognized as such for quite a long time (Ozawa 2003; Reed 1993). Even in the extraordinary economic growth of Japan during the 1960s, the dichotomy between large enterprises and SMSEs, as well as agricultural and fishery sectors, was seriously significant in terms of working and salary conditions (Miyamoto 2008, 67).

**The Power of Corporate Welfare on Workers in Large Enterprises**

In addition to the benefit of seniority-based payment, workers in large enterprises have superior welfare benefits to workers in SMSEs. Generally speaking, corporate welfare in Japan has played a critical role in the welfare of workers overall because, from the state budget perspective, the level of state expenditure on social welfare programs is relatively low in Japan when compared with other OECD states. According to the longitudinal data on the proportion of social expenditure out of GDP, Japan shows a modest variance of social expenditure: from 10.4 percent (1980) to 18.7 percent (2007). The austerity of social expenditure in Japan is similar with the variation of social disbursement in the United States: from 13.1 percent (1985) to 16.2 percent (2007). In fact, corporate welfare plays a major role in the welfare of workers also in the United States, with coverage restricted to the male workforce with long-term tenure (Esping-Andersen 1997, 181). These findings make a sharp contrast with Sweden. Commonly known to be a social-democratic state, it shows a
consistently higher level of social expenditure: 27.2 percent (1980) to 32.0 percent (1995) (OECD StatExtract, 2011: see Table 2). To put the state budget on social programs into context, one can see how corporate welfare has been significant in how workers could be blessed with welfare benefits. In fact, enterprise-based welfare has spared the state a social responsibility for providing a safety net with the people in Japan as a whole (Gottfried 2000, 248).

**Table 2. Comparative Social Expenditure, in Percentage of GDP**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
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One caveat should be made on who would benefit from the corporate welfare system. As is the case with the seniority-based payment system, it makes a difference how much capital an enterprise has in making the corporate welfare system feasible. Bluntly speaking, large enterprises, not SMSEs, are able to have corporate welfare system built in their employment conditions simply because they have sufficiently abundant capital that would enable them to do so (Miyamoto 2008, 26-7, 80-1).

What, then, does the corporate welfare entail? Generally, it renders such all-encompassing benefits available to workers in large enterprises that it played a deterministic role in how they contemplate what kind of life paths they would take in years to come. To be specific, workers in large enterprises generally enjoy the following benefits; corporate health-care, private pension, housing allowance, low-interest mortgages for housing, large lump-sum retirement allowance, and even personal and recreational services (Esping-Andersen 1997, 181; Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002, 40; Miyamoto 2008, 80-1). In particular, the housing benefits play a significant role in how male employees arrange the forthcoming family life with a future wife and children, because long-term financial aid would be available to them via corporate welfare (Miyamoto 2008, 80-1). Essentially speaking, the benefits of corporate
welfare and seniority-based payment provide a family income for the households of workers in large enterprises (Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002, 40).

On the flip side, however, workers are expected to commit themselves to the enterprises for a long-term period, because otherwise they would not only lose the benefits of corporate welfare but also fail to live up to expectations of their family plans. In this regard, corporate welfare, as well as seniority-based payment, has an enduring power on male workers in large enterprises, in the sense that it successfully contains them in the same workplace (Miyamoto 2008, 34).

To put the argument in a broader perspective, the caveat needs to be reiterated on who would benefit from corporate welfare. On one hand, large enterprises have sufficiently intensive capital and labor to make corporate welfare financially viable, and therefore workers in large firms feel relatively at ease about their prospective working conditions. On the other hand, SMSEs do not have as much capital and labor as large enterprises do, which would hinder SMSEs from having comprehensive welfare programs installed in their employment conditions. Workers in SMSEs, it follows, are comparatively less eager to devote themselves to the same workplace throughout entire lives. In other words, SMSEs cannot afford to have attractive incentives available to workers in terms of payment standards and welfare benefits. Less motivated to immerse themselves in the same workplace, workers in SMSEs can and do move from one workplace to another in search of more satisfactory payment and working conditions for their incrementally acquired skills.

To sum up the story, the absence of extensive corporate welfare as well as a seniority-based payment system is the crucial factor for workers in SMSEs to be more mobile than workers in large enterprises. In this regard, it would be safe to argue that the maxim of lifetime employment accounts only for a tiny fraction of the grand labor complex in Japan and therefore provides only a superficial and incomplete explanation on the overall employment conditions in Japan.

In terms of labor union activism, the higher level of mobility among SMSE workers would imply that the voice and bargaining power of labor unions is quite low in SMSEs (Hamamura 2003, 22). The low level of institutionalization among SMSE workers makes a sharp contrast with the high degree of mobilization among workers in large enterprises, who are content with being in the same workplace through generous benefits of seniority-based
payment and corporate welfare. In this regard, labor unions in Japan are organized predominantly on the basis of enterprise and mainly in large firms, where workers are consolidated by way of cumulative salary increase and extravagant welfare benefits.

**STATE POLICIES TOWARD DIVERGENT PRODUCTION SECTORS**

What about state policies? Is there any enduring effect of state policies to maintain the dual structure between large enterprises and SMSEs? In order to fully understand how the dual structure came to be framed, it would be helpful to trace the historical background against which the government in Japan pursued developmental policies in the aftermath of World War II.

**From the Aftermath of WWII to the 1970s: State Regulations and Subsidies**

It was fortunate, so to speak, for Japanese officials that the United States took charge of crafting political reform in Japan, the exemplar of which was the leading role played by the American officials in the making of democratic constitution in Japan. This leadership helped the Japanese government to place economic reconstruction at the center of the policy agenda by means of Fordism production model – mass production, mass consumption, and a rationalized mode of production. Since then, capital-intensive industries have played the leading role in the industry of Japan, such as automobile, electronics, railroad, petrochemicals, and steel (Harvey 1989, 132). After all, even from the contemporary perspective, Japanese automobile and electronics products can easily be found not only in Japan but also in the United States.

What were the political interests of Japanese officials to pursue policies that promote economic development? Rationally speaking, the holders of political power would adopt development policies when doing so allows them to maintain the status quo (Lim 2006, 136). In other words, politically distinct benefits, the epitome of which is maintaining political power, must have convinced the officials in Japan to implement development policies after the end of World War II. One can easily recall that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) had held the majority in the parliament and retained political power from 1955 to 2009. Considering the context of post-War Japan, when the authorities were obliged to reconstruct
the domestic industry from scratch, there must have been political motives for the LDP to utilize in pursuing developmental policies as a *quid pro quo* for electoral support from the public.

By what political instruments did the LDP maintain public support? The LDP regime, in fact, directed divergent development policies toward large enterprises (i.e. high-production sector) and SMSEs as well as agricultural and fishery sectors (i.e. low-production sectors). On the one hand, the high-production sector was protected from the international market under state regulations with a view to nurturing the then-deteriorated domestic industry. This sector was also under the direction of administrative guidance, which is a state decree with *de facto* law-enforcement power, issued frequently in Japan until the 1980s. Often termed as the “convoy production mode” of development, the state played the prominent role in protecting the leading industries of Japan and determining the way in which large enterprises pursued the overall economic growth of the country (Miyamoto 2008, 82). As early as in the late 1950s, the state designed plans to promote the growth of major industries and had them implemented via a series of industrial legislation. In the meantime, the seniority-based payment and corporate welfare system became prevalent among workers in large enterprises (Miyamoto 2008, 79-82). In short, there was a high degree of state intervention toward the high-production sector, which turned out to be helpful for the sector to become competitive in the international market and for the workers to be blessed with welfare benefits (Lim 2006; Miyamoto 2008; Ozawa 2003).

On the other hand, the low-production sectors were also an important fount of electoral support for the LDP regime. The state, in fact, heavily subsidized SMSEs and the agricultural sector to maintain their employment status as well as regulating them to avoid excess competition from larger enterprises and international markets. The following three measures provide evidence for this political strategy. First, it was usual for the state to provide jobs for local construction industries via public projects at least until the 1990s. Kakuei Tanaka, who acquired political power by rising to the title of Prime Minister in 1972, came up with the idea of ‘redistribution of industry,’ whereby industrial production places should be relocated across the country so that Japan could avoid the excess concentration of production arrays in Tokyo and Osaka. This idea was, in actuality, one political means of the
Tanaka administration to secure electoral support from local areas other than Tokyo or Osaka (Miyamoto 2008, 76-7; Ozawa 2003, 523).

Quantitatively, taking a look at the comparative table on the proportion of state investment out of GDP would inform us of how state investment in Japan is more significant than that in the United States (Miyamoto 2008, 77: see Table 3). The magnitude of state investment has been so high that it is not, essentially speaking, a state measure to create employment in local areas, as would ordinarily be done depending on economic contractions and expansions, but rather a stimulus package to attract electorates in local regions (Miyamoto 2008, 77).

**Table 3. Comparative State Investments, in Percentage of GDP**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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Second, the LDP regime took advantage of the protection of small retail stores in local areas and utilized it as another electoral tool. In 1973, the cabinet enacted the Large-Scale Store Law (LSSL), which prevented large retail stores from competing with small stores, by way of regulations on how large the stores could be in scale, when they should end business hours, and how many off-duty days they should have, with all regulations in favor of local small stores (Miyamoto 2008, 78-9). In addition, the 1979-revised LSSL determined that large stores, prior to opening a new shopping mall at a new location, must go through deliberation councils with the representative of local merchandise associations. This revision, in fact, helped local communities to hinder large stores from opening a new shopping mall with ease and in a swift manner (Hayashi 2010; 80-2). Furthermore, the state regulation toward large stores in favor of local stores was strengthened by the 1981 administrative guidance, which accelerated further regulation on the openings of large retail store (Hayashi 2010, 82). Complying with the LSSL and the guidance, large stores were strongly forced to have a long-term talk with local merchants to have the conflict of interests on both sides.
settled, which often kept them from opening new shopping malls where they had not yet done so (Hayashi 2010, 90: see Table 4).

Table 4. The Number of Newly Opened Large Retail Stores, From 1979 to 1983

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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1605</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>402</td>
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In this regard, the LSSL legislation and the accompanying administrative guidance would be regarded as another political instrument for the LDP regime to generate electoral support from low-production sectors, because the employment of those who engage in local retail stores was protected against the terror of large retail stores under the umbrella of legislation and guidance (Hayashi 2010, 80-2; Miyamoto 2008, 78-9; Ozawa 2003, 523).

Third, the government in Japan has supplied relatively large production subsidies to those who engage in agriculture, a good representative of which is rice cultivation in the context of Japan. Taking a look at statistical data would let us know how state subsidies are crucial in farm incomes. According to the latest data on comparative scale of farm subsidies among OECD nations, state subsidies in Japan accounted for averaged 52.3 percent of overall farm incomes from 2002 to 2009. This proportion makes a sharp contrast with farm subsidies in the United States, which averaged 12.9 percent of total farm earnings during the same period (OECD iLibrary 2010: see Table 5).

Table 5. Comparative Level of Farm Subsidies, In Percentage of Gross Farm Receipts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/Year</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
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On longer-term scrutiny, Japanese farmers have seen pensions and subsidies grow as a proportion of their gross incomes. Until the 1970s, they accounted for less than 30 percent. From the 1980s onward, however, the proportion began to get larger and larger: around 45
percent in the 1980s; 55 percent in the 1990s; and 60 percent in the 2000s (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries 2009, 176-7: see Table 6). In addition, the domestic rice market had been protected from international competition under state regulations and therefore imported rice had not been available in Japan until 1993 (Ozawa 2003, 522). In this regard, rice cultivators in local areas were one of the electoral support hubs for the LDP regime, which helped them make a decent living by way of relatively ample financial aid.

Table 6. The Proportion of Subsidies and Pensions Out of Farm Incomes Per Capita

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<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
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</table>


To make a long story short, the LDP regime utilized reciprocal political means to obtain electoral support from both high- and low-production sectors by way of state regulations and subsidies. On one hand, state regulations and administrative guidance toward the high-production sector against international market made it easier for the sector to grow exponentially as the leading industries of Japan and to have the system of seniority-based payment and far-reaching corporate welfare instituted, which turned out to be the foremost incentive to attract new college graduates. On the other hand, another state regulation helped the low-production sector to protect itself against the high-production sector. The relocation of production areas from central regions of Japan, the protection of small retail stores against large ones, and the relatively vast amount of subsidies for farmers were set up in favor of the low-production sector and helpful for the LDP regime to acquire electoral support from local areas.

However, one caveat needs to be made on the divergent state measures for both sides of the sectors. The measures for the LDP regime to ensure electoral support from both sides were, in essence, mutually exclusive. Implicitly, the tension between the high- and low-production sectors remained high during the period of rapid and exponential economic growth in the 1970s (Miyamoto 2008, 28, 82). Once the economy of Japan ceased to grow
linearly in the aftermath of 1973 Middle East Oil Embargo, the high-production sector became skeptical of the state measures to ensure employment in the low-production sectors.

From the 1980s to 2000s: From Less Visible Political Means to the Lesser Degree of Instruments

In the aftermath of the 1973 Oil Crisis, Japan saw a change in the high-production sector itself and a differing relationship between the state and the high-production sector. In the first place, a discernible change took place in the high-production sector with regard to employment landscapes: large enterprises began to hire more irregular workers than previously in order to reduce personnel costs (Miyamoto 2008, 118). In other words, they started to utilize flexible labor as a ‘buffer’ against economic fluctuations and sowed the seeds for the later proliferation of irregular workers during the 2000s (I will refer to the increasing number of irregular workers later).

Another palpable transformation occurred in terms of the relationship between the state and large enterprises. The previous political means of LDP regime to promote economic growth and to attract the support from the high-production sector, namely subsidies and regulations, became obsolete. To put it differently, large enterprises preferred to take off and be independent of state regulations against the international market. Furthermore, they became wary of the state regulations and subsidies for low-production sectors, because they speculated that these political means would hinder the competitiveness of Japanese leading enterprises within the international market. Therefore, they demanded that the state intervene in the market to a lesser extent and that the state protection for local areas and low-production sector be weakened (Miyamoto 2008, 118-9).

However, the state continued to pursue projects aimed at local areas, this time by less visible political means, in order to continue to secure local electoral support, a strategy that increased the implicit tension between the high- and low-production sectors. Taking a look at how the state promoted projects under the supervision of individual local governments would be helpful for us to be familiar with the political operations of the LDP in this era. From 1984 onward, the state readily allowed local governments to issue debt under the condition that they would utilize it as financial resources for the projects. The problematic point, in turn, was that the part of debt would be repaid by way of a Local Subsidy Tax, which was
generated from individual incomes, corporate profits, the sales of liquor and tobacco, and so on. By implication, the Tax was subject to criticism from the high-production sector, because part of their capital gains would end up being resources for the projects of local governments. This less visible political strategy enlarged the proportion of debt to resources for local government projects: 28.1 percent in 1987 and 46.0 percent in 1994. To reiterate, the growing reliance of local governments on debt was in sync with an anticipation that the debt would be compensated for via the Local Subsidy Tax (Miyamoto 2008, 122-3).

In the aftermath of the extreme economic expansion of the 1980s, however, the relationship between the state and local governments began to change due to the massive criticism of the less visible political strategy for electoral support and owing to the claim that structural reforms in the bond between the state and local governments should be done in times of economic hardship (Miyamoto 2008, 126). After all, a serious transformation had taken place in the employment system of the high-production sector: large enterprises began not to hire as many regular workers as they had previously, because they could not have as much capital secured as they used to. In short, the delicate tension between high- and low-production sectors was on the verge of breakdown.

In the face of considerable denunciations, the LDP regime at last had the structural reform implemented in the beginning of the millennium. Jyunichiro Koizumi, the prime minister in the former half of the 2000s who is remembered for being pro-business and reformist, had an array of regulations lifted in his policy agenda. Most importantly, the scope of deregulation included the relationship between the state and local governments and the degree of labor market flexibility.

In reference to the relationship between the state and local governments, his manifesto on the structural reform maintained that Local Subsidy Tax not be levied as heavy as previously and took a critical attitude toward how the state had readily allowed local governments to issue debt, on the ground that it would undermine the sense of self-help among local governments (Miyamoto 2008, 140). To put it differently, the Koizumi regime demanded that local governments not issue debt to finance their projects. His critical attitude toward the previous strategy led to a lesser frequency of projects under supervision of local governments. In actuality, financial resources for construction projects of local governments saw a steady decline in quantity (Miyamoto 2008, 140-1: see Table 7).
Table 7. The Decline in Financial Resources for Local Government Construction Projects

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<tr>
<td>Resources in USD</td>
<td>201.8 Billion</td>
<td>182.9 Billion</td>
<td>119.2 Billion</td>
<td>90.9 Billion</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Miyamoto, Taro. 2008. *Fukushi seiji: nippon no seikatsu hoshou to demokurashi* [The politics of welfare: democracy, employment, and welfare in Japan]. Tokyo: Yuhikaku. Page 141. Note: I converted JPY into USD by the following exchange rate as of April 11, 2011: 100 JPY = 1.18 USD.

In addition, the Koizumi regime let go of the protection for small retail stores. The state did away with the LSSL and enacted the Large-Scale Retail Store Location Law (LSRSLL) in June 2000, which, unlike the LSSL, enabled large retail stores to open a new shopping mall without holding deliberation councils with the member of local merchandise associations and even without getting the consent of local retail stores (Hayashi, 2010, 87; Miyamoto 2008, 141-2). The legislation of LSRSLL led to a growing number of large shopping malls in suburban areas of cities, where a large-scale parking lot is available for free, and a declining number of local retail stores in central areas (Hayashi, 2010, 84, 88: see Table 8).

Table 8. The Numbers of Small and Large Retail Stores from 1982 to 2004

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>1,715</td>
<td>1,612</td>
<td>1,490</td>
<td>1,392</td>
<td>1,285</td>
<td>1,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hayashi, Masaki. 2010. “*Wagakuni daikibotenpo seisaku no hensen to genjyo* [The transformations and realities of large shopping mall policies of our country].” *Kokuritsu Kokkai Toshokan Refarensu*. Page 84. Note: All numbers are in thousands. According to the definition of the table, small retail stores have less than 50 employees, whereas large retail stores have more than 50.

In terms of employment, the proliferation of large retail stores would imply that more irregular employment would be available at newly opened large shopping malls, because it is recognized that irregular workers would typically work in such service industries as retail and restaurant stores (Broadbent 2001, 295-6; Gottfried 2008, 184-6; Keizer 2008, 415-6). As for commercial activity, local retail stores would not look as attractive as they had previously in the eyes of consumers, mainly because they began to appear relatively out-of-date and did not have toll-free parking lots available. The harder local stores found it to
attract consumers, the harder it would become for them to continue business. The LSRSLL, in effect, helped to deteriorate the shopping avenues of small retail stores across the country. Often named “shuttered avenue,” 85 percent of all the avenues have at least one store out of business. What is more, one third of all the avenues have shopping districts where more than 10 percent of the stores are shuttered (Hayashi 2010, 86). By political and labor implications, the legislation of LSRSLL disintegrated part of the close relationship between the state and SMSEs and those who were fired would try and find irregular jobs at nearby large shopping malls.

**A Brief Case Study on the Influence of LSRSLL toward Local Retail Stores and the Labor Market**

Taking a look at a specific picture of local shopping districts would be helpful for us to see how precisely the legislation of LSRSLL has affected the business of local retail stores and the conditions of employment. Let me introduce the case of Omuta city, a post-coal mining town at the southern end of Fukuoka Prefecture, because the city would be a good representative to look at how the LSRSLL exerted a disrupting influence on local retail stores. The City of Omuta once flourished as a coal mining town, with Mitsui, a large enterprise of Japan, in charge of the management of mining. The town also saw a growing labor movement among workers of coal mining during the 1960s (Miyamoto 2008, 79; Obara 2004). In the meantime, the Shin-Sakaemachi (literally New Prosperous Town) district, located up north of the town, became the center of the town’s commercial activity in the 1970s and 1980s (*Ariake Shinpo* 2004). To be exact, to the east side of the Shin-Sakaemachi station was the downtown of Omuta, where local retail stores formed a cohesive shopping district and Izutsuya, a middle-sized shopping mall with its headquarters north of Fukuoka Prefecture, played the leading role in the commercial activity there (*Ariake Shinpo* 2001: see Figure 2).

Due to the transformation in fuel consumption, however, the coal mining activity gained less momentum and came to a halt in 1997. Prior to the shutdown, Mitsui had reached an agreement with YouMe Town (literally the Town of Dreams), a large retail firm in western Japan. According to the agreement, Mitsui would relocate one of the coal mining factories and let YouMe Town use the site, which is located on the west side of the Shin-Sakaemachi station, to set up a large shopping mall (*Asahi Shinbun* 1996). Local retail stores
Figure 2. Map of downtown Omuta City. Note: The line of demarcation between east and west are railroads. The station located up north is Shin-Sakaemachi Station. On the east side of the station is local shopping store district. The shopping mall of YouMe Town is located on the west side. A relatively small number of railway crossings (signified by the icon ) across the station implies that it is not really easy to walk across the railway there from east to west and vice versa. Source: Kuroda, Shigeo. 2011. Fukuoka-ken douro chizu [Road map of Fukuoka Prefecture]. Tokyo: Shobunsha. Page 35.

on the east side found the location to be a primary concern, because they were afraid that the inferior access from west to east across railway would keep consumers from coming over to their shopping district (Nishinippon Shinbun 1996; Yomiuri Shinbun 1996). A new shopping mall of YouMe Town nonetheless opened in October 2001 and found itself to be bigger than
any other shopping mall in the town at that time (Obara 2001b). Fortunately for the shopping mall, it continues to be popular among Omuta residents, with a lot of people coming over on a weekend, and is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year (Nikkan Omuta 2011: see Figure 3).

Figure 3. A weekend in YouMe Town Omuta. Source: I took these pictures myself on April 3, 2011.

On the other hand, the shopping district of the Shin-Sakaemachi saw a declining popularity among people in the town. This decline was to be expected. Small retail stores in the district had regarded the opening of YouMe Town as a threat to their commercial activities primarily for its location and different scale of business (Nishinippon Shinbun 1996; Yomiuri Shinbun 1996), but could not insulate themselves from the influence of large shopping mall. Plus, Izutsuya had already withdrawn from the east side in December 2000 because its managers anticipated that it would see a huge decline in profit (Ariake Shinpo 2000). As a consequence, the east side shopping district found itself to be just another “shuttered avenue,” with hardly anybody walking on the avenue on a Sunday afternoon (see Figure 4).
Importantly enough in terms of labor demographics, the new shopping mall made it increasingly easier to find irregular jobs there, because the mall recruited 1000 employees prior to its opening in October 2001, but many of them were going to work irregularly (Obara 2001a). In a similar vein, before it launched its business in March 2011, Aeon Mall Omuta, another large shopping mall, had held a series of job interview conferences to recruit approximately 2000 regular and irregular employees. It is presumable that most of the job openings were of irregular status, because they were related to such service industries as a cinema complex, sportswear and apparel shops, and dining places (Koyanagi 2011).

According to official statistics, the number of part-time workers surpassed that of workers in local retail stores in 2004 and saw a surge in 2007, a finding which is plausibly a reflection of the opening of YouMe Town and other retail stores of a large scale. By contrast, the number of workers in local retail stores\(^2\) has been decreasing since the 1990s due to the

\(^2\) According the definition of official statistics, workers in local retail stores are a product of self-employed
declining popularity of the Shin-Sakaemachi district among Omuta residents (see Figure 5). In this regard, the legislation of LSRSLL transformed both local shopping practices and the employment structure of retail sector in the city of Omuta, rendering an increasing number of part-time workers available to large retail stores.

![Figure 5. A long-term comparison between the numbers of workers in local retail stores and part-time workers in the city of Omuta. Adapted from: General Affairs Department of Omuta City Hall.](image)

To make a long story short, the deregulation policies of the Koizumi regime turned out to break with the previous political measures of the LDP regime in the 1980s. It lessened the close relationship between the state and local governments by way of a strict measure to contain the budget availability of local governments. It also shattered the intimate relationship between the state and small retail shops by enabling large shopping malls to open easier than before, which gave birth to the greater availability of irregular employment there. As I will refer to it in the proceeding section, the policy of Koizumi regime accelerated the proliferation of irregular working since the 1980s and strengthened the gender bias in the irregular labor within the male-breadwinner welfare system.

workers, family employees, and full-time workers. By implication, the data represents the local retail stores that do not hire part-time workers.
Gender Bias in the Labor Market Within the Sticky Male-Breadwinner Welfare System

So far I have referred to how different large enterprises and SMSEs in Japan are from each other in terms of payment systems and welfare benefits, as well as how the dichotomy between them came to be framed by way of assertive state policies to promote economic growth of the country and to secure the employment of workers in SMSEs. In the aftermath of extreme economic expansion in the 1980s, it was getting more and more difficult to maintain state measures that kept the tension from falling apart, because large enterprises began to take a critical attitude toward the state protection of SMSEs. In the former half of 2000s, sweeping reforms of the Koizumi regime drastically weakened the relationship between the state and local governments as well as SMSEs and accelerated an increase in the number of irregular workers in the labor market of Japan.

Gender Bias in the Labor Market of Japan

According to the official middle-term statistics on demographics of workers, the number of irregular workers has consistently increased since the 1980s, mainly because large enterprises began to utilize a flexible labor force in the aftermath of the 1973 Oil Shock. From the 1990s onward, the labor market of Japan saw a surge in the number of irregular workers due to the prolonged economic contraction in the country. It is a surprising fact that the number of irregular workers in 2010 is almost three times larger than that in 1986, even though the number of regular workers in 2010 is a little smaller than in 1986. Therefore, the proportion of irregular workers has become more significant within all the Japanese labor force in the course of last fourteen years (see Figure 6).

In the middle of the 1990s, in fact, managers of large enterprises were strongly in favor of the greater use of a flexible workforce in order to have the lifetime employment and welfare benefits of core regular workers secured. In the path-breaking book titled *Japanese Management of New Age*, Japan Federation of Employers’ Associations, or Nikkeiren (1995), explicitly argued that Japanese firms (large enterprises) should establish three distinct career paths within the system of human resource management. According to its argument, firms in Japan should regard a core, or elite group of workers as the sole beneficiaries of long-term employment and corporate welfare. It argues that they should identify other types
of workers as a flexible workforce to reduce personnel costs: they should hire, on one hand, a
group of specialists for dealing with specific issues by means of outsourcing (i.e. employing
temporary workers), and, on the other hand, a peripheral group to do monotonous routine
tasks (e.g. filing). It would follow that the last two categories of workers, unlike the first one,
would be employed on the fixed- or short-term basis (Keizer 2008, 413; Miyamoto 2008,
138-9; Okamura 2009; 124-5). In other words, managers of large enterprises in Japan readily
admitted that they could not afford to have the benefits of lifetime employment and corporate
welfare available for all the workers they hire and that they needed to hire and take advantage
of more irregular workers in the time of dismal economic prospects.

To put gender into the context of irregular worker employment, however, the
statistics show quite a gender-skewed composite among irregular workers. In fact, the
number of female irregular workers has been at least twice as large as that of male irregular
workers since 1986 (see Table 9). This finding is sort of counterintuitive, because it was
publicly perceived that male temporary workers had increased in the last several years, as the perpetrator in Akihabara Rampage was a male temporary worker in an automobile factory.

Table 9. The Gender Discrepancy in the Number of Irregular Workers

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>1,098</td>
<td>1,194</td>
<td>1,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Surprisingly enough, the statistics show that the number of female temporary workers has been consistently larger than that of male temporary workers (see Table 10), suggesting that the gender bias is also prevalent among temporary workers. Therefore, the common assumption that most temporary workers are male is incorrect. The assumption might be a product of media coverage on temporary workers, giving a flawed perception of the real picture of temporary work. In fact, it has been widely recognized among academics that women are more prone to work irregularly than men in such service industries as sales, retail and restaurant as well as in the clerical sector (e.g. filers and office equipment operators) (Gottfried 2008, 184; Keizer 2008, 415; Weathers 2001, 204-6).

Table 10. Gender Bias in the Number of Temporary Workers

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Why are Women More Prone to Work Irregularly? The Stickiness of Male-Breadwinner Welfare

One might well wonder why women are more likely to work irregularly than men. This is arguably because of a image about the traditional (i.e. from the 1950s on) gendered-division of labor among Japanese families: on one hand, men would work full-time in a
company to earn money for managing their families’ cost of living and to enjoy the benefits of corporate welfare for having their family plans fulfilled; on the other hand, women would stay home to take care of household and children (Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002, 40-1).

However, the traditional gendered-division of labor among Japanese families is based on the premise that male-breadwinner is a worker in large enterprises: if male-breadwinner is a SMSE, or self-employed worker, a spouse might as well work in the same workplace to aid the household financially (Gottfried 2008; 182-4). Quantitatively, the proportion of regular workers in large enterprises to all the regular workers in Japan is just 33.8 percent (JSBRI 2010, 237-8), and therefore the traditional gender-division of labor was not widely shared in actuality. In this regard, it is fair to say that Japanese families of upper class were so advantaged that they could extend the image of gendered-division of labor among them to among Japanese families in general.

For the moment, let me focus on the image of Japanese families where a husband is a worker in large enterprises. The income and corporate welfare of men were crucial in the financial management of Japanese families of upper class and, in contrast, women were dissuaded from participating in labor force and encouraged to become ‘professional housewives’ (Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002, 40-1). Theoretically speaking, one could plausibly consider this gendered-division of labor among Japanese families of high society to be the model of “male-breadwinner welfare”, where married women are confined to home-related labor and relegated to being in charge of domestic responsibility (Gottfried 2008, 180; Gottfried 2000, 239; Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002, 40-1).

In the aftermath of 1973 Oil Shock, however, the traditional, gender-polarized labor role among Japanese families of a restricted stratum began to change. In the time when the Japanese economy saw a shift from consistent and exponential to modest growth, the managers in large enterprises gradually recognized that they would need to make the labor market more flexible via the greater use of irregular workers in order to avoid deteriorating the system of male lifetime employment (Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002, 40-1). Responding to the demand from large enterprises, the state launched the campaign to construct the image of “Japanese-style welfare,” which explicitly regarded family as the figure in having welfare services maintained. Importantly, women are portrayed in this discourse not as ‘professional housewives’ but rather as ‘unpaid caregivers’ and ‘part-time workers’ (Gottfried & O’Reilly
In other words, managers in large enterprises were in such a superior stratum of Japanese society that they could have a strong say in the construction of another gender ideal among Japanese families at large. As a consequence, the state officially encouraged married women to participate in labor market, but only so as long as they would work on an irregular basis and place themselves mainly as domestic housekeepers. Theoretically stated, the model of male-breadwinner welfare was sticky in the emancipation of married women from being ‘professional housewives,’ which led to an increasing availability of female labor force as irregular workers in the labor market of Japan.

Specifically, married women are hindered from entering the labor market and being on a career track, because the Japanese internal labor market is known for being rigid to enter; only new college graduates or certain workers during early years of their career are eligible to apply for jobs in large enterprises in Japan (Gottfried 2000, 252; Keizer 2008, 419). It follows that, having spent years outside the labor market due to child rearing, married women have little choice but to work irregularly in a low-paying job (Gottfried 2000, 252; Keizer 2008, 419).

According to the official long-term statistics on demographics of workers by gender, the ratio of male to female workers has decreased over the 50 years from 1960 to 2010. The ratio fell below 2.00 in the aftermath of the 1973 Oil Shock and around 1.50 after the collapse of excessive economic growth in the beginning of 1990s (see Table 11). In other words, an increasing proportion of women came into the labor market relative to male workers. The growing number of female workers vis-à-vis male workers would give us a general sense of how successfully the state mobilized the framework of “Japanese-style welfare” in the 1970s to allow married women to participate in labor market, only to the extent that they would work irregularly.

Two Faces of Irregular Working in Japan

Demographically, Japan saw the emergence of two types of irregular work among married women. First, female part-time workers came to be prevalent in such service-intensive sectors as sales, retail, and restaurants, the working conditions and payment of which are remarkably low (Broadbent 2001, 295-6; Gottfried 2008, 184; Keizer 2008, 415). The
Table 11. The Numbers of Male and Female Workers and Gender Ratio

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16,320</td>
<td>22,104</td>
<td>26,174</td>
<td>30,013</td>
<td>32,162</td>
<td>31,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7,382</td>
<td>10,961</td>
<td>13,539</td>
<td>18,338</td>
<td>21,400</td>
<td>23,290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Gender Ratio | 2.21 | 2.02 | 1.93 | 1.64 | 1.50 | 1.35 |


Inferior working conditions of part-time workers are justified on the ground that the principles of equal payment and equal opportunity do not apply in the Japanese labor market (Broadbent 2001, 298-9; Gottfried 2008, 191-2; Miyamoto 2008, 25-8), which allows managers in service industries to hire female irregular workers in discriminatory working conditions. Therefore, some part-time workers show a long-term tenure in the same workplace and engage in the same number of working hours with full-time workers (e.g. managers), but still they operate under inferior wage and benefit conditions (Broadbent 2001, 298-9; Gottfried 2008, 184, 192; Keizer 2008, 413).

Second, the labor market of Japan saw an increasing number of female temporary workers since 1985, when temporary working was legalized through the legislation of Temporary Worker Law (TWL). According to the TWL, it was permissible for companies to hire temporary workers in 13 specified professional jobs, which, in principle, require workers to have technical knowledge, skill and experience in order to have each task done in a prompt and precise manner (Okamura 2009, 124). The TWL, however, came to strengthen the gender-skewed landscape in the Japanese labor market, because it was found that female temporary workers would engage in such office-related jobs as filing, which, in practice, does not require technical skills (Gottfried 2008, 187, 9; Okamura 2009, 124; Weathers 2001, 202). Another point is that single women and single mothers are more likely to work as temporary workers than married women, because they lack the financial support from a

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3 The Law allowed companies to hire temporary workers in the following 13 fields: software engineering, clerical machine operation, secretary work, filing, research, financial transaction, contract document making, demonstration, attendant work, building cleaning, building maintenance, parking lot management, and translation or stenography (Okamura 2009; 124).
male-breadwinner and the payment of temporary work is superior to part-time work (Gottfried 2008, 187-8).

What is more, the regulation on the types of temporary jobs came to be relaxed in years to come. In 1999, the state revised the TWL, which allowed temporary workers to engage in all occupational fields other than dockyards, construction, security, nursing, and manufacturing (Weathers 2001, 203). In 2004, in a reminiscence of the deregulation policies under Koizumi regime, the state went on to revise the TWL again, which permitted temporary workers to engage in manufacturing for a maximum of three years (MHLW 2004, 4). According to the official study on temporary workers in 2008, the second revision of the TWL led to an increased proportion of temporary workers in manufacturing, which accounted for 41.8 percent of all the temporary labor force (MHLW 2009b, 8). In other words, the official account found out that the second revision paved the way for manufacturers to hire temporary workers, which they have begun to do.

**Tax Incentive to the Status of ‘Dependent’**

Back to the story of gender bias in the Japanese labor market, some married women are, in fact, willing to work part-time for a rational reason: it would alleviate tax burdens not only for themselves but also for male-breadwinners. In 1986, the state introduced a special tax exemption for part-time incomes of married women, as long as they earn less than a stipulated threshold of around 1 million JPY per year (Gottfried 2000, 248; Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002, 42, 48). In principle, married women would be granted the status of ‘dependents’ by earning less than the threshold. This legal status of married women, in turn, enables male-breadwinners to enjoy a spouse exemption (380,000 JPY in full) for their annual income in calculating their earnings subject to income taxes (Keizer 2008, 419). Empirically, an academic study found out that two-thirds of married part-time workers intentionally adjusted their working hours to be below the threshold to enjoy the benefit of the tax exemption system (Gottfried 2008, 248; Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002, 42, 48). In this regard, the 1986 tax reform is an incentive for married women to work part-time, instead of full-time, and has successfully reinforced the model of male-breadwinner welfare.

To sum up the argument, the dual structure between large enterprises and SMSEs in terms of payment, corporate welfare, and working conditions has been inherent in the
Japanese employment system. On one hand, workers in large enterprises are blessed with age-graded salary and extravagant corporate welfare benefits, which dissuades them from quitting the workplace and encourages them to stay there for the better part of life. On the other hand, SMSEs do not have the same kind of payment and welfare system installed in their human resource management programs, which discourages workers to remain at the same workplace.

The developmental policies of the LDP regime toward the two production sectors were, in essence, mutually exclusive. The state protected large enterprises against the international market and gave them marketing directions to lead the economy of Japan. The state, however, also protected SMSEs against large enterprises by way of generous subsidies and regulation policies. Between the two production sectors lay an implicit tension, which fell apart in the beginning of 2000s under the pro-business Koizumi regime. In terms of the Japanese retail sector, his deregulatory policies led to an increasing number of large shopping malls, where large numbers of irregular workers came to be available, and to a declining popularity of local retail store shopping districts. In other words, the policies under Koizumi regime gave birth to the greater availability of irregular workers in general and the deterioration of local shopping malls, especially in the provinces.

What is more, gender bias in the irregular market of Japan has been prevalent over the post-War years. The traditional model of male-breadwinner welfare, once installed in the Japanese welfare system, has been so sticky that married women have not been able to free themselves from being housewives or part-time workers. The far-reaching benefits of corporate welfare and seniority-based payment, which are only available among workers in large enterprises, have enabled male-breadwinners to afford the family cost of living, with spouses in charge of housekeeping and child rearing. Within a slightly modified mode of male-breadwinner model in the aftermath of 1973 Oil Shock, married women were encouraged to participate in the labor market of Japan, but based on the premise that they would work irregularly. Subsequent gender bias in the irregular labor market of Japan reflects how the model of male-breadwinner welfare has been so sticky that the opportunities of female employment tend to be contained within the realm of irregular work.
CHAPTER 3
COMMUNITY UNIONS, IRREGULAR WORKERS, AND SMSE WORKERS

So far I have shown how academic literature has represented the dual-structure of Japan’s labor market, divergent state policies toward large enterprises and SMSEs, and underlying gender bias in the irregular labor market of Japan. Just looking at the descriptive and legislative accounts, however, does not necessarily give us an accurate insight on what kind of problems would arise in the daily lives of SMSE and irregular workers on the ground. Also, it fails to offer a nuanced explanation of what kind of people fit into the demographics of the irregular labor market in Japan. Therefore, I pose the following questions: does gender bias really exist in the irregular market of contemporary Japan?; are male temporary workers just another construction ensuing from the extraordinary rampage in Tokyo and the subsequent media coverage? Furthermore, existing literatures also fail to take into consideration the power of labor unions to improve the working conditions of SMSE and irregular workers, offering no more than a dismal account on the helplessness of workers with volatile employment. In other words, just gathering and summarizing what academics and media have argued over irregular labor in Japan is not sufficient to understand the realities of SMSE and irregular workers as well as the activism of labor unions supporting them. We have only a superficial explanation of who actually works in SMSEs or in an irregular job, what it would be like to engage in SMSEs or in the irregular labor market of contemporary Japan, and what could be done for the lives of transient workers.

In order to get familiar with SMSE and irregular workers on the ground, I will focus on the activities of alternative labor union in Japan, namely Community Unions. Although Community Unions are relatively less known to the public, the representatives of the Unions purport to support and mobilize workers on an individual and regional basis, with their activist agenda primarily focused on labor consultations with SMSE and irregular workers (Hamamura 2003, 29-30). Their main focus on workers in unstable conditions makes a sharp
contrast with corporate unions, the major type of labor union in Japan, which organize workers in large enterprises on the vertical basis of each enterprise and are congruent with its managers, with collective bargaining over the increase in annual wages at the top of their agenda (Igarashi 2008, 136-7; Nagamine 2003, 39-40; Weathers 2008). Taking the difference between the two unions into consideration, knowing more about daily Community Union activities would make a productive and vibrant account on what problems arise in the working conditions of SMSE and irregular workers. In addition, it would be intellectually intriguing to get the sense of how much mobilization power Community Unions have to attract individual workers and get them to participate in their activities, when it has been argued that the solidarity among SMSE and irregular workers is relatively low in comparison with workers in large enterprises (Broadbent 2001, 302-3; Gottfried 2008, 188).

**Methodology**

To have these purposes fulfilled, I conducted eleven interviews with leaders of Community Unions in the three regions of Japan – Fukuoka city, as well as the greater Osaka and Tokyo areas. Interviews took place over a two month period from July to August 2010, lasted from 30 to 90 minutes, and were tape recorded and transcribed; I translated all quotes from Japanese to English verbatim, except where names of individuals are changed to protect confidentiality. For the interviews with the representatives of Community Unions, I made sure that what Robert S. Weiss called the ‘interviewing relationship’ be maintained, presenting myself as someone who respected the integrity of respondents, namely a researcher who does not interrogate the “respondent’s appraisals, choices, motives, right to observations, or personal worth” (Weiss 1994, 65). In addition, I consciously ensured that the respondent’s participation and communications would be confidential (Weiss 1994, 65). During the research period, I visited two Community Unions in Fukuoka city and four in the greater Osaka and Tokyo areas, respectively. To find out which the Community Unions existed in each region, I referred to links on the website of a Community Union as well as the information from an academic article (Rengo Fukuoka Union 2005; Okamura 2009, 129).

As the core of the research, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 leaders of Community Unions to examine the background on how each Union came to exist in the region, the accurate demographics of SMSE and irregular workers in general and
temporary workers in particular, the mobilization power Community Unions have over SMSE and irregular workers, and the ideal welfare system in the eyes of Community Union leaders. I fulfilled the second and third purposes by asking what type of and how many workers would often come to talk to respondents regularly (i.e. per month or year), and by asking how many workers, having talked to them, would join the membership of each Union by the same period. I facilitated the fourth question by asking whether or not workers would often stop by to talk with them about the working conditions and the issue of employment insecurity (see interview guide in the Appendix).

In guiding each question, I made sure that I not make leading comments on what academics and media already argued over SMSE and irregular workers, which would have led the content of interview to the stories that are not related to what each Community Union had actually done for the workers (Weiss 1994, 107-19). Instead, I tried to facilitate conversations on what respondents had in mind about the question.4

One of the interviews was conducted in the situation where several members of the Union were also present, observed the interview, and made a comment during the research, but this did not interrupt the interviewing process. Rather, having an impromptu focus group helped me to get various perspectives on the topic under investigation. In addition, I had informal interaction with some of the Union’s leaders through conversation during the pauses and/or after the end of interviewing. One of the Unions even offered me an opportunity of dining with the members at the Union’s office. Moreover, most of the respondents provided me with reports on the demographics and number of workers who had talked to them and brochures on a series of forthcoming events, which turned out to be another good source of information. Some of the Community Union leaders affiliated with Japanese academics and therefore introduced me a couple of academic articles written on the activism of Community Union as a whole (Nagamine 2003).

4 In leading the third and fourth questions, I made the following generally-accepted comments on the labor union and welfare system of Japan: “It is generally held that most labor unions are organized on the enterprise basis in Japan. Could you tell me the defining difference between your Union and corporate unions?”; “It is widely accepted that corporate welfare has played the major role in securing the well-being of workers in large enterprises. Could you tell me your ideas on the welfare program that would be available also to SMSE and irregular workers?” The premises on the labor union and welfare system of Japan were readily understood among the respondents and spurred conversations on the topics.
To assess the diversity and difference of each region, I made sure that the number of Community Unions interviewed was proportional to the size of each region. Fukuoka city is the largest town on the island of Kyushu, but is relatively small in terms of the size of population and function of economy vis-à-vis the greater Osaka and Tokyo areas. Two interviews, therefore, sufficed to represent the voice of Community Unions there. The greater Osaka and Tokyo areas, generally speaking, are the two metropolitan hubs in Japan, and therefore, I made sure that I interview as many Community Unions leaders there as the restrictions on research period and budget would allow me to do. Four Community Unions of each metropolitan area participated in my interviews, which turned out to be a reasonable representation of each region, in the sense that the Unions involved did not cluster around one area or another (see Table 12).

As for the issue of confidentiality, I made sure, prior to interviewing, that I hand over the informed consent to respondents so they would understand the purpose of interview. In fact, none of the respondents seemed concerned with the issue of confidentiality or using their real names in the thesis. The names of each Community Union are open to the public and appear online as well as on academic articles and therefore I will use the real names of each Union in the subsequent analytical sections. Although the respondents readily allowed me to use their real names, I will use pseudonyms for each respondent to make sure that their personal privacy be protected. Having read the informed consent, most of the respondents willingly wrote their signature on it, except for one respondent who would not write a signature (this might be because writing a signature prior to academic interview is less common in Japan than in the United States). The leader did verbally offer consent, on the condition that I permit him to review any citations I used from the interview. I did not compel the person to write down a signature, and to the best of my knowledge, this strategy helped the interview go as successfully as other interviews.

As a comment on potential limitations on methodology, three out of the 10 unions interviewed are not in affiliation with Community Union National Network (hereafter CUNN). Yet, all of them are organized on an individual basis and are specific to local areas as well as focusing on irregular and SMSE workers, the attributes which render them more similar to bona fide Community Unions than to enterprise-based unions. In this regard, the three cases belong to a gray zone of some sort and might keep me from making a constitutive
### Table 12. Demographics of Community Unions and Leaders in the Study

#### (1) Fukuoka City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>CUNN Affiliation</th>
<th>Leaders’ Name</th>
<th>Leaders Joined in</th>
<th>Leaders’ Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rengo Fukuoka Union</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Takeki</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeter Union Fukuoka</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ryosuke with several Union members</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Male</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### (2) The Greater Osaka Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>CUNN Affiliation</th>
<th>Leaders’ Name</th>
<th>Leaders Joined in</th>
<th>Leaders’ Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kansai Labor Union for Part-time and Temporary Workers</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Takashi</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobe Workers’ Union</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yohei &amp; Ayumi</td>
<td>1988 / 2001</td>
<td>Male / Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naniwa Union</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Suguru</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyoto Union</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Masaki</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### (3) The Greater Tokyo Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>CUNN Affiliation</th>
<th>Leaders’ Name</th>
<th>Leaders Joined in</th>
<th>Leaders’ Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kawagawa City Union</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mamoru</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shitamachi Union</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yukihiro</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continues)
account on the activism of official Community Unions as a whole, but they would nonetheless offer an insightful account of the labor union activism to support irregular and SMSE workers, the topic which this study purports to explain. Tellingly, one of the previous studies on Community Unions also included in its scope of research the unions that are not affiliated with CUNN but are composed of individual workers and local-specific (Nagamine 2003, 38). The current study, therefore, would not be subject to methodological errors for including the three unions, all of which are aimed at local regions and individual workers.

**WHAT ARE COMMUNITY UNIONS?**

It would be helpful to give some historical background on how Community Unions emerged across the country, what they are bargaining for in principle, to which type of workers they mean to lend a helping hand, and what kind of specific activities they entail. As described in the previous chapter, in the aftermath of 1973 Oil Shock, large enterprises and the state gradually fed the greater availability of irregular workers to ensure that male lifetime employment in large enterprises be maintained, which led to an increasing number of female part-time workers. In sync with the changing demographics in the labor market of Japan, Community Unions started troubleshooting activity in the metropolitan areas of Tokyo and Osaka since the 1980s, with such irregular workers on target as female part-time workers. Growing number of Community Unions emerged across the country, culminating in the first national conference of Community Unions at Hirosaki city in northeastern Japan and the organization of CUNN in 1989. This said, the degree of consolidation among Unions is moderately weak in such a way that the characteristics of each Union depend on labor demographics of each region. In other words, the CUNN is not intended for constructing the single umbrella under which each Union is organized in a top-down fashion (Hamamura 2003, 28-30; Nagamine 2003, 40-1, 65; Takagi 1988, 12-3).
According to an official flier that I obtained in a series of interviews, 71 Community Unions are in affiliation with CUNN, showing quite a wide range of distribution from northeastern to southwestern Japan (CUNN 2010). The flier also informs us of a list of demands in the bargaining agenda of CUNN: “We need to progress a social labor movement by bringing members regionally and nationally into our activity and by advocating the rights of part-time, temporary, immigrant, namely, every type of workers!” (CUNN 2010: italic added) What could be inferred from the statement is that the activity of Community Unions is aimed primarily at society at large and workers of every kind. It is apparent that they are not advocating solely for regular workers in opposition to particular managers and do not aim to bargain for annual wage increases, because a specific list of demands followed right after the general principle: “We are opposed to neo-liberal ‘reforms’ that brought about breakdowns of employment, lower level of income, and lives of each workers as well as led to a greater discrepancy between the rich and poor.”; We need decent income to make a living! We require that anybody earn more than 1,200 JPY per hour in every town.”; The same work, the same income: impartial benefit for each worker – make these principles viable! We are in the process of having a fair working rule instituted.”; and “We are in favor of the prohibition on fixed-term employment without any reasonable ground” (CUNN 2010). In this regard, one can see how Community Unions are different from corporate unions in terms of bargaining guideline, purpose of activism, and groups targeted.

Community Unions are aimed at local areas and those workers excluded from the activism of enterprise-based unions; SMSE, part-time, and temporary workers would be the most typical representative of membership in each Community Union (Hamamura 2003, 29-30; Nagamine 2003, 48; Takagi 1988, 11-6). This is mainly because these three categories of workers do not experience workplace transfers as frequently as workers in large enterprises, and therefore are more likely to remain in local areas (Nagamine 2003, 48; Takagi 1988, 15-6). To put it into a broader context, how readily Community Unions can organize SMSE and irregular workers is politically significant, because it has been argued and shown that the degree of unionization and institutionalization among them is remarkably low in comparison with workers in large enterprises, even though the proportion of SMSE and irregular workers has been getting larger in the labor market of Japan (Broadbent 2001, 302-3; Gottfried 2008,
In addition, the principle of membership is that individual workers can join and become a member of Community Unions, a principle that differs from corporate unions, because the latter constitutes collectively-organized regular workers of large enterprises in an exclusive manner (Nagamine 2003, 46-7).

In a similar tone with the principle of membership, troubleshooting with individual SMSE and irregular workers is on top of the activism agenda. The representatives of each Community Union are, in fact, willing listeners to the daily adversities that volatile workers go through. “You know what, I work overtime way too often” or “they don’t pay me more even though I worked overtime” would be a good representative of daily consultations (Takagi 1988, 20-1). It would not be too much to say that Community Unions are so enthusiastic about listening to hardships of transient workers that they could be regarded as a labor union that specializes in troubleshooting or a singular social mechanism to deal with labor issues of SMSE and irregular workers (Hamamura 2003, 30; Nagamine 2003, 57-9).

My first-hand interaction with leaders of Community Unions gave me the impression that they are not hard-core labor movement activists, with their attitudes toward labor issues being not emotional or ideological, but rather objective and calm. Indeed, all of them did concur that they would like to acquire a larger scale of public recognition and a stronger role in the grassroots movement of Japan, given the gradually increasing number of irregular workers, but they were not completely obsessed with enlarging the interests of their activity only. On the contrary, they appeared to be specialists in labor issues of each region, which might be because of their main emphasis on the troubleshooting with individual SMSE and irregular workers. It goes without saying, therefore, that their deep insights on local labor issues gave me a lot of insight into irregular work in Japan as well as labor union activism in support of precarious workers.

**IRREGULAR AND SMSE WORKERS ON THE GROUND**

By asking what kind of workers would most likely to talk to Community Unions, I was able to learn a broader picture on the volatile labor market of Japan. Intuitively, the

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5 According to official and academic accounts, the rates of unionization among workers in small-sized enterprises (where the number of workers is less than 100) and irregular workers are 1.3 and 2.7 percent, respectively. This outcome makes a sharp contrast with workers in large enterprises (i.e. the number of workers is more than 1,000), where the rate of unionization is 55 percent (Nagamine 2003, 42-3).
overall demographics of workers with volatile employment talking to Community Unions were not as clear-cut as media stories told; I found out that not only temporary workers but also part-time, fixed-term contract, and SMSE workers would often come to talk to Community Unions. In addition, male immigrant workers of Japanese descent from Latin American states were also likely to talk to two of the Community Unions in the Greater Tokyo areas\(^6\).

As for the gender bias that academics argue characterizes the irregular labor market of Japan, careful consideration should be given to the findings. On one hand, female irregular workers were likely to come to talk to Community Unions in Fukuoka city and the greater Osaka area, a finding which is more or less consistent with the academic argument about gender bias and a long-term transformation in the role of married women as a part-time workforce. On the other hand, male irregular workers were more likely to talk to Community Unions in the greater Tokyo area. A couple of caveats, though, need to be made regarding the larger troubleshooting cases of male irregular workers in this area. Firstly, male immigrant workers occupied a considerable portion of troubleshooting cases in two of the four Unions in Tokyo. Secondly, one of the Unions was specific to the occupations that male workforce would engage in (i.e. construction and manufacturing sectors). In this regard, a large number of female irregular workers would also be present in the greater Tokyo area, as a Union with a broader occupational scope of troubleshooting reported that a discernible number of female irregular workers have been rampant in their daily troubleshooting.

**Fukuoka City**

Within Fukuoka City, the two Community Unions which participated in the study were different from each other in terms of how many troubleshooting cases they regularly pursue, whether they are more likely to talk to men versus women, and how they came to be seen in the city (see Table 13). Rengo Fukuoka Union (RFU) has dealt with a wider range of irregular workers (e.g. part-time, fixed-term contract, temporary workers) and reported larger numbers of troubleshooting cases, in which female irregular workers were more representative than male (RFU interview, 2 July 2010). This is plausibly because the leader of RFU has a longer-term history in supporting local labor union activism: Takeki, a leader

Table 13. Demographics on Each Union in Fukuoka City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>N of Troubleshooting</th>
<th>Gender Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rengo Fukuoka Union</td>
<td>700 / Year</td>
<td>Female &gt; Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeter Union Fukuoka</td>
<td>15 / year</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Rengo Fukuoka Union. 2010. Interview, July 2; Freeter Union Fukuoka. 2010. Interview, July 16.

of RFU, has been an active troubleshooter with female part-time workers since the beginning of 1980s. In 1982, he set up a Part-time Workers Dial 110, an emergency hotline number in Japan, to deal with labor issues of female part-time workers in the service industry and ponders how the RFU troubleshooting activity has taken root in the minds of irregular workers of the city. When I asked him about the gender proportion in troubleshooting cases, he told me that the number of female part-time workers is overwhelmingly larger than that of male counterparts, given a long-term experience of troubleshooting with part-time workers in Fukuoka City (RFU interview, 2 July 2010).

In a somewhat contrasting tone, Freeter Union Fukuoka (FUF) shows a modest number of troubleshooting cases and sees a larger proportion of male workers, which might be because FUF is a younger organization (i.e. founded in 2006) than RFU and focuses on male employment sectors (FUF interview 16 July 2010). In fairness to cases, this outcome might well be because they are less motivated to increase the number of troubleshooting cases than to deal with individual issues in a careful manner. Ryosuke, a leader of FUF from 2006 onward, mentioned that “it is much better to have 10 labor unions like us organized than for us to have 100 constituencies ... so that we could mutually help each other with the issues of individual unions (FUF interview, 16 July 2010).” In other words, he was in favor of a stronger horizontal relationship among locally-based and individually-organized unions.

The Greater Osaka Area

The demographics of troubleshooting by gender in the four Community Unions in Osaka were similar in that female workers have occupied a considerable portion of the troubleshooting cases of the Community Unions (see Table 14). Takashi, a leader in Kansai Labor Union for Part-time and Temporary Workers (KLU) from 2009 onward, saw a greater number of female irregular workers in his daily troubleshooting cases. In his reasoning, those
who come to talk to him might have the furious feeling of ‘I cannot forgive it in any case,’ because an economically rational worker would search for another job instead of talking to him. He said he meant no offense to women, but that he often finds that female workers are more likely to have their anger linger on (KLU interview, 27 July 2010). His way of thinking about female workers’ anger as “irrational” is problematic, because in fact they might experience more discrimination or harassment by managers (for example, the term ‘sexual harassment’ usually accounts for male managers touching female workers against their feelings), and therefore their lingering anger might be well-founded and ‘rational.’

His comment raises the implication of a possible social distance between male Community Union leaders and women workers. In fact, leaders interviewed in this study show a skewed gender distribution: Ayumi, a leader in Kobe Workers’ Union (KWU), was the only female leader out of 11 Community Union leaders interviewed. The gender bias in Community Union leaders evident here appears to apply to Community Unions in general, because only four Community Unions are evidently aimed at female workers out of 71 Unions in affiliation with CUNN: Hokkaido Women’s Union, Women’s Union Niigata, Women’s Union Kanawaga, and Union Okayama for Women and Region (CUNN 2010). In this regard, the gender bias in Community Unions might signal that female workers may find assistance through Community Unions limited, which makes it less likely for Unions to successfully mobilize female workers with volatile employment.
Back to the explanation about the demographics of workers talking to Community Unions in the Greater Osaka area, the representatives of KWU and Naniwa Union (NU) said that female irregular workers were once predominant in the troubleshooting cases of each Union in the past three years, but male irregular workers have became also likely to come to talk to them recently (KWU & NU interviews, 26 and 28 July 2010). In addition, Masaki, a leader of Kyoto Union (KU) from 1988 onward, sees a large number of male irregular workers in his daily troubleshooting. He once felt a need to have less cohesive female part-time workers organized by way of local labor union. By implication, his intention to be an active labor union activist was directed toward female irregular workers. When it comes to the gender proportion in his daily troubleshooting, however, he reported that not only female but also male irregular workers would often come to talk to him (KU interview, 30 July 2010). What can be inferred from the findings is that male irregular workers may have become more prevalent in the greater Osaka area quite recently.

As for the demographics of irregular workers in troubleshooting cases, all of the Community Unions in the greater Osaka area showed quite a wide but relatively unified range of workers; part-time, fixed-term contract, temporary, and SMSE workers (KLU, KWU, NU, & KU interviews, 26, 27, 28 and 30 2010). What is discernible here is that SMSE workers would also often come to talk to Community Unions for troubleshooting. This finding would demonstrate that demographics of workers with volatile employment in the greater Osaka area are multi-faceted and are not as clear-cut as media coverage would tell us, because it was not only temporary but also SMSE workers that were likely to talk to Community Unions, contrary to media narratives about the hardships of male temporary workers.

From a long-term perspective, Yohei, a leader of KWU who has actively engaged in regional labor union activism for more than 30 years, told me that married women began to work as part-time workers in the beginning of 1980s and how willing he was to support them by way of Part-time Dial 110, a telephone service to deal with labor issues of part-time workers, and via the attempt to organize a labor union for married women (KWU interview, 26 July 2010). What needs to be reiterated here is the time when female part-time workers came to be seen: the early 1980s. In total congruence with the academic argument, it is only after the 1973 Oil Shock that married women came to be recognized as a major labor force.
for part-time working and actually started to work irregularly (Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002, 40-1). Masaki of KU referred exactly to the labor transformation among married women in the aftermath of the Oil Shock:

> You know how the Oil Shock took place in either 1974 or 1976 [sic]. That was the time when the Japanese economy grew not as strong as previously and enterprises quit hiring a considerable number of new college graduates. Instead, part-time workers, who had been seen as short-term workers or a supplementary workers for managing households, began to play major role in the management of enterprises. This said, they were still contained in low-status jobs (KU interview, 30 July 2010; italic added).

What can be theoretically inferred from what he said is that the male-breadwinner model of Japanese welfare system was sticky for even women at a time when the role of part-time workers began to be seen differently. In this regard, it was no wonder how eager the two leaders of Community Unions became to set up a labor union for married women who worked part-time (KWU & KU interviews, 26 and 30 July 2010).

**The Greater Tokyo Area**

In contrast to the other areas, a majority of Community Unions in the greater Tokyo area reported that male irregular workers were predominant in their daily troubleshooting. On closer scrutiny, however, it is plausible that this outcome was a product of the characteristics of each Union rather than the average number of male irregular workers in the area (see Table 15).

Surprisingly enough, a considerable number of male immigrant workers are represented in the troubleshooting of Kanagawa City Union (KCU) and Shitamachi Union (SU). Interviews with the leaders of each Union helped me become familiar with a long-term historical context regarding how immigrant workers came to be utilized in the irregular labor market of Japan. In the latter half of the 1980s, when Japan saw an extreme economic expansion and Japanese business went into frenzy, an increasing number of immigrant workers from such Asian countries as Korea and the Philippines began to work in the nightlife industry, with overstayed visas. At that time, not only male but also female immigrants came to settle in Japan, engaging in precarious working environments or prostitution.
Table 15. Demographics on Each Union in the Greater Tokyo Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>N of Troubleshooting</th>
<th>Gender Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kanagawa City Union *</td>
<td>500 – 600 / year</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shintamachi Union **</td>
<td>170 – 200 / year</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaten-Kei Solidarity ***</td>
<td>180 / year</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo Union</td>
<td>3000 / year</td>
<td>Female = Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: Kanagawa City Union. 2010. Interview, August 5; Shitamachi Union. 2010. Interview, August 3; Gaten-Kei Solidarity. 2010. Interview, August 4; Tokyo Union. 2010. Interview, August 6. Notes: * A majority of constituencies are male immigrant workers of Japanese descent from Latin American countries in manufacturing sector. ** A large part of constituencies are such male immigrant workers as the Japanese-Brazilian, Bangladeshi, and Burmese in manufacturing sector. *** A vast majority of constituencies engage in construction and manufacturing sectors.)

In the middle of 1990s, when the Japanese economy was stuck in the long-term slump, those immigrants with overstayed visas left Japan for their countries. Instead, a growing number of male immigrant workers of Japanese descent from Latin American countries came to settle in Japan, who would often work as subcontracting workers in manufacturing sector, where male workers are prevalent. A revision of immigration law in 1990, in fact, made it legitimate for immigrants of Japanese descent to stay in Japan without time restriction, which led to the greater availability of immigrant workers of Japanese origin in the sector (SU & KCU interviews, 3 and 5 August 2010; Tsuda 2003).

Comparatively speaking, Gaten-Kei Solidarity (GKS) is similar to the two Unions in terms of labor demographics; the troubleshooting activity of GKS places primary emphasis on male subcontracting workers in construction and manufacturing sectors. However, GKS is different from the first two Unions in that immigrant workers do not often come to talk to it (GKS interview, 4 August, 2010). In this regard, a comparison among KCU, SU, and GKS would imply that industrial labor demographics are a key factor in the making of male irregular workers; male workers have been prevalent in construction and manufacturing sectors, for workers of all nationalities.

Lastly, Tokyo Union (TU) has a broader scope in the irregular labor market of the greater Tokyo area, primarily because the number of troubleshooting cases in TU is much larger than the other Unions in the area. In addition, TU shows a wider range of workers in the demographics of troubleshooting, because not only irregular but also SMSE workers would often come to talk to it, with the gender proportion showing an equal divide between
female and male (TU interview, 6 August 2010). What would be implied in the case of TU is that female workers are also prevalent in the irregular labor market of the greater Tokyo area, and are less prevalent proportionally in this study because there are also Community Unions focused on male employment sectors. My sampling may not be indicative of actual gender distributions among irregular workers.

To make a long story short, a series of interviews with Community Union leaders enabled me to identify the demographics of irregular and SMSE workers who sought out assistance from Community Unions in the three regions of Japan. To clarify, the interview data did not yield a picture of the overall irregular and SMSE workforces, just those who have a sense of grievance who sought assistance from Community Unions. In this regard, my sampling may be skewed one way or another and not indicative of actual labor demographics among workers with volatile employment. For now, let me focus on the workers who felt a sense of grievance for misconduct at workplaces and came to talk to Community Unions about labor issues. The gender bias in the irregular labor market of Japan, which is vigorously argued in a series of academic articles, was generally present in troubleshooting cases of Community Unions in the three regions of Japan. However, what I was able to observe consistently in the pattern of troubleshooting cases was that industrial labor demographics make a bigger difference in the making of gender discrepancy between female and male workers with volatile employment. On one hand, married women were likely to engage in service or retail industry as part-time workers. On the other hand, male workers with volatile employment often engaged in manufacturing and construction sectors as subcontracting workers, regardless of the status of nationality. As far as my interview data were concerned, the gender bias in the irregular labor market of Japan was partly correct but partly wrong; it was not so much gender as industrial labor demographics that made a gender discrepancy between female and male workers with volatile employment in troubleshooting cases.

**The Content of Troubleshooting**

The representatives of Community Unions in the three regions of Japan reported a wide variety of adversities in the daily lives of irregular and SMSE workers, but, taken together, they were relatively coherent in content. Layoffs were most prevalent in the
troubleshooting of Community Unions, because irregular workers are often hired on a fixed-term basis. The issue of layoffs is particularly prevalent among contract and temporary workers, because managers would not extend the period of employment in times of dire economic outlook (TU interview, 6 August, 2010). Another aspect of layoffs was specific to SMSE female workers in the case of KWU troubleshooting. Getting pregnant would deprive women of working status, because they would eventually need to leave the workplace for a certain period of time. They would wish to come back to the same workplace, but managers would keep them from doing so by way of dismissal, because they were unwilling to grant them maternity leave and to have them come back to the workplace after months of absence from the workplace (KWU interview, 26 July 2010).

At the same time, the issue of human relationships in a workplace has recently come to be recognized among the majority of Community Union leaders (RFU, KLU, NU, KU, GKS and TU). Surprisingly enough, worsening human relationships has become a pervasive issue among not only irregular workers but also workers in SMSEs. Termed as ‘power harassment,’ an intimidating attitude of managers or bosses toward subordinate workers has been so rampant that Kenichi, a leader of TU in his sixties, lamented how human relationships in a workplace have deteriorated:

Listening carefully to a story of workers fired, I often find there is something like power harassment going on, they sometimes do not recognize it, though. You know what I mean, a very straightforward attitude like “I hate this guy”, “How dare you not work in a collective manner with us”, “How dare you not listen to what I’m saying” and so on. That kind of stuff was also present back in the day when I started to work, but it did totally change (TU interview, 6 August 2010: italic added).

What can be inferred from the growing dysfunctional relationship between managers and SMSE workers is that workers of young generation have little choice but to work in a stifling environment, which is plausibly a reflection of the long-term recession in Japan from the 1990s onward. Temporary workers are also under severe pressure, because they are hired not directly in the workplace but by way of a third party, temporary worker agencies. This is why the relationship between temporary workers and managers of workplace would be so remote from each other that managers do not often recognize them by real names and instead call them “Mr. / Ms. Temp” (TU interview, 6 August 2010).
Troubleshooting Events, Protesting, Contacting Managers, and Filing Lawsuits

Besides listening to labor issues from workers with volatile employment all year around, Community Unions also hold a series of labor troubleshooting events in every spring and fall in order not only to deal with labor issues of irregular and SMSE workers but also to make themselves known among workers at large (KWU 2009, 14; RFU 2006, 26). Other than troubleshooting activity, Community Unions protest against workplaces, contact managers of workplaces, and file lawsuits to settle labor disputes between workers and managers. First, Community Unions protest not only against such general labor issues as the cutbacks in temporary workers in 2008 (see Figure 7) but also against specific workplaces in a strategic way. Yohei, a leader of KWU, told me that he would often distribute fliers to pedestrians in front of workplaces to let them know about a protest against a workplace (KWU interview, 26 July 2010). This strategy was also adopted by other Unions. For example, after an instructor at one of the private universities in Kyoto City had been dismissed in 1988 due to a reform in department structure, the lecturer signed up for Kyoto Union to go on collective bargaining against the university, but to no avail. In the meantime, he distributed filers with students coming there to take entrance examinations in order to let them know about the protest against the university (KU 2009, 27).

Second, Community Unions contact managers either by way of collective bargaining against workplaces (see Figure 8) or through the process of arbitration at Regional Labor Relations Commissions. In the process of collective bargaining, Community Unions encourage workers either to sign up for a Union (RFU 2006, 25; FUF interview, 16 July 2010) or to organize an affiliate Union in a workplace (KWU 2009, 24-7; KLU, KWU, SU and TU interviews, 26 and 27 July, 3 and 6 August 2010). According to a booklet of RFU, the Union deals with each labor dispute by way of three or four collective bargaining and from two to three months, to the extent which the dispute would satisfy the grievances of workers. In other words, not all labor disputes lead to outcomes in favor of workers, depending on specific conditions of workplaces (RFU 2006, 26). Statistics on the number of labor disputes divided by content shows that a large number of cases are related to issues of employment, such as dismissals and no contract extension, a finding which is a reflection of unstable employment conditions of irregular and SMSE workers (see Table 16).
Figure 7. A protest against the cutbacks in temporary workers in Kyoto. Source: Page 40. Kyoto Union. 2009. *Kyoto yunion kessei 20 syunen kinenshi* [20th anniversary of Kyoto Union booklet]. Kyoto: Kyoto Yunion. Note: The sign reads as follows: “Don’t forgive temp cutbacks! Employment Destruction = Life Destruction. We workers are humans, not tools. Unite! Union Network Kyoto.”

Table 16. The Number of Labor Disputes Divided by Content at RFU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Payment</th>
<th>Labor Contract</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N (1997-2006)</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>627</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


If a worker is not satisfied with the outcome of a labor dispute, Community Unions will help him / her to bring the case into the process of arbitration at Regional Labor Relations Commissions (KWU 2009, 28; RFU 2006, 26-7). Statistics on the number of arbitration cases at RFU show that a considerable number of cases came to a halt in the process where issues of employment were on the agenda (RFU 2006, 26-7: see Table 17). Therefore, the process of arbitration might not be a terribly efficient strategy for Community Unions’ labor disputes.

Table 17. The Number of Arbitration Cases Divided by Outcome at RFU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Settlement</th>
<th>Halt</th>
<th>Rejection</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N (1997-2006)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Finally, if the process of arbitration comes to a halt, Community Unions will bring the labor dispute into the courtroom. Statistics on the number of court cases at RFU show that a majority of labor disputes between workers and managers were settled in the process of filing a lawsuit (see Table 18).

In short, Community Unions try to make themselves known to workers by way of troubleshooting hotlines and flier distributions. In addition, statistics on the number of labor disputes, arbitration cases, and court cases at RFU suggest that Community Unions in general at times engage in collective bargaining against managers and bring cases of labor dispute
Table 18. The Number of Court Cases by Outcome at RFU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Reconciliation</th>
<th>For</th>
<th>Against</th>
<th>Rejection</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N (1997-2006)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


into arbitration processes or the courtroom. In order for labor disputes to proceed, Community Unions encourage workers either to join a Union or to organize a branch union at a workplace.

**TEMPORARY WORKERS ON THE GROUND**

What about the demographics of temporary workers in particular? Did male temporary workers become prevalent immediately after the revised TWL had allowed manufacturers to hire temporary workers from 2004 onward? Or did they come to talk to Community Unions about their layoffs during the massive cutbacks in temporary workers of fall 2008? By asking how the leaders of Community Unions perceived the presence of male temporary workers in their troubleshooting from 2004 onward and in fall 2008, I was able to infer the diversity in the demographics of temporary workers across the country from troubleshooting cases and came to realize that the emergence of male temporary workers might have been exaggerated by way of a series of media coverage. In fact, many of the male temporary workers in the manufacturing sector had already engaged in the workplace as a subcontracting worker of legal gray zone before the TWL was revised in 2004. In addition, it was most likely across the country that female temporary workers have been rampant in such office-related sectors as filing and clerical machine operation, as discussed below.

**Female Temporary Workers in Clerical Sectors**

A large number of Community Union leaders agreed that female workers were more prevalent in the temporary labor market of Japan even after the revision of TWL in 2004 (see Table 19). The observations of the Unions were coherent in that female workers were more likely to work temporarily in office-related sectors out of 13 specified professional jobs (RFU, KWU, KU & TU interviews, 2, 26, and 30 July and 6 August 2010), a finding which
is in concordance with the academic argument of gender bias in the temporary labor market of Japan (Gottfried 2008, 187; 9; Okamura 2009, 124; Weathers 2001, 202). Filing and clerical machine operation, which, in essence, does not require technical skills, did make it more likely for female workers to work temporarily.

**Table 19. The Demographics of Temporary Workers from 2004 to 2008, Where Female > Male in 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>2004 onward</th>
<th>Fall 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFU</td>
<td>Female &gt; Male</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KWU</td>
<td>Female &gt; Male</td>
<td>Female = Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Female &gt; Male</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TU</td>
<td>Female &gt; Male</td>
<td>Female &gt; Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It was true that the leaders of RFU, KWU, and KU found that an increasing number of male temporary workers in the manufacturing sector came to talk to them in the aftermath of massive cutbacks in temporary workers of fall 2008. However, all of them concurred that it was only ephemeral and therefore inessential (RFU, KWU, KU & TU interviews, 2, 26 and 30 July and 6 August 2010). Yohei and Ayumi, leaders of KWU, did acknowledge that a growing number of male temporary workers in the manufacturing sector came to talk to them around 2007, but female temporary workers remained significant in number out of their troubleshooting cases (KWU interview, 26 July 2010). In a similar tone, Masaki of KU did confirm that he dealt with a rapidly increasing number of male temporary workers in manufacturing sector, but recently female temporary workers in clerical sectors have been more likely to come to talk to him (KU interview, 30 July 2010). In this regard, it should not be ignored that female temporary workers in office-related sectors have been very present in the overall temporary labor market of Japan. Although Jyunya, a leader of GKS, mentioned that female workers would also be likely to engage in electronics industry, it was not clear if female workers in the sector would often come to talk to him (GKS interview, 4 August 2010).
Male ‘False Subcontracting’ Workers in Manufacturing Industry

In contrast, other Community Union leaders observed that a growing number of male temporary workers who engaged in manufacturing sector came to talk to them after the revision of TWL in 2004 (see Table 20). However, it is plausible that this was just a matter of labels, because most of the representatives acknowledged that the male temporary workers had already been doing this work under the disguise of subcontracting workers (SU, KGS & KCU interviews, August 3, 4 and 5 2010). In fact, it has been widely recognized among the leaders and academics that many of the large enterprises in manufacturing sector had hired *de facto* temporary workers through the network of their subcontract firms, even before the 2004 revision of TWL (Weathers 2004, 429).

Table 20. The Demographics of Temporary Workers from 2004 to 2008, Where Female < Male in 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>2004 onward</th>
<th>Fall 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NU</td>
<td>N / A*</td>
<td>Female : Male = 3 : 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCU</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male Immigrants</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male Immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SU</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male Immigrants</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male Immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GKS</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male</td>
<td>Female &lt; Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Naniwa Union. 2010. Interview, July 28; Shitamachi Union. 2010. Interview, 3; Gaten-Kei Solidarity. 2010. Interview, August 4; Kanagawa City Union. 2010. Interview, August 5.

Why had enterprises in manufacturing sector hired *de facto* temporary workers prior to the 2004 revision of TWL? In order to understand how problematic it was from a legal perspective for manufacturing enterprises to hire *de facto* temporary workers, it would be helpful to explain the difference between temporary and subcontracting working in terms of who would be in charge of them. On one hand, when one works in a workplace arranged by a temporary working agency, he / she would be under the workplace’s supervision, not the agency (Okamura 2009, 121-2; KCU interview, 5 August 2010). In other words, the agencies supply other enterprises with a workforce at the disposal of enterprises. Prior to the World

---

*Suguru, a leader of NU, joined the union activism of NU in 2006 and therefore was not sure if an increasing number of male temporary workers had come to talk to the Union since 2004 (interview, 28 July 2010).*
War II, in fact, enterprises in Japan exploited temporary workers by making them work in such harsh conditions as mining and manpower transportation, because of which the state in Japan prohibited the worker supply business in 1947 (Okamura 2009, 121-2).

Why had enterprises in manufacturing sector hired *de facto* temporary workers prior to the 2004 revision of TWL? In order to understand how problematic it was from a legal perspective for manufacturing enterprises to hire *de facto* temporary workers, it would be helpful to explain the difference between temporary and subcontracting working in terms of who would be in charge of them. On one hand, when one works in a workplace arranged by a temporary working agency, he/she would be under the workplace’s supervision, not the agency (Okamura 2009, 121-2; KCU interview, 5 August 2010). In other words, the agencies supply other enterprises with a workforce at the disposal of enterprises. Prior to the World War II, in fact, enterprises in Japan exploited temporary workers by making them work in such harsh conditions as mining and manpower transportation, because of which the state in Japan prohibited the worker supply business in 1947 (Okamura 2009, 121-2).

On the other hand, subcontracting work is allowed in accordance with the article 632 of civil law. In principle, under subcontracting arrangements, it is subcontracting firms that supervise workers in order to finish what client enterprises (mainly large enterprises) assign them to do (Okamura 2009, 121-2; KCU interview, 5 August 2010). However, this was not an iron principle, because “many subcontracting workers ... work in the contracting firms and are supervised by its managers rather than those of the (nominal) subcontracting firm (Weathers 2004, 429: italic added).” In other words, subcontracting workers often find that they are told what they should do by the managers of large enterprises and therefore fall under the supervision of the workplace, not the subcontracting firms. Contrary to the status of subcontracting workers, they are *de facto* temporary workers and work in a state of ‘false subcontracting’ (Weathers 2004, 429). This status is problematic because, when workers are injured or killed on duty, it becomes unclear who has a legal responsibility to compensate for the injury or the death (MHLW 2006, 2). In this regard, many of the male temporary workers had already worked in manufacturing workplaces as subcontracting workers of a legal gray zone before the TWL was revised in 2004 to allow manufacturing enterprises to hire temporary workers legitimately for a maximum of three years.
From the perspective of troubleshooters, the 2004 revised TWL did not bring about a major change in the daily operation of the Unions, because ‘false subcontracting’ workers had exactly engaged in the same kind of labor in manufacturing sector (SU interview, 3 August 2010). Statistically speaking, the number of temporary workers did increase from 2004 to 2008 (SBMIAC 2011b), but this was actually because most of the ‘false subcontracting’ workers were granted the status of temporary worker (SU interview, 3 August 2010). In this regard, there was a spurious relationship between the 2004 revised TWL and an increasing number of temporary workers.

To sum up, a series of interviews with Community Union leaders enabled me to identify the demographics of temporary workers who came to talk to Community Unions about labor issues in the three regions of Japan. Again, the interview data did not yield a picture of the overall temporary workforces, just those who have a sense of grievance, so my sampling may not be completely representative of actual labor demographics among temporary workers. The findings from the demographics of temporary workers in the daily troubleshooting of Community Unions has implied that industrial labor demographics makes a bigger difference between female and male temporary workers. On one hand, female temporary workers are likely to engage in the office-related labor, such as filing and clerical machine operation. On the other hand, male temporary workers had been prevalent in the manufacturing sector in the disguise of subcontracting workers, even before the state revised the TWL in 2004 to allow manufacturers to hire temporary workers in a lawful manner for the first time in the history of temporary work in Japan. It turned out that the revised TWL gave the ‘false subcontracting’ workers the legitimate status of temporary workers. As far as my interview data were concerned, the gender bias in the temporary labor market of Japan was not entirely correct; it was not so much gender as industrial labor demographics that led to the prevalence of female workforce in temporary work.

THE MOBILIZATION ISSUE OF COMMUNITY UNIONS

So far I have shown not only how diverse the demographics of irregular workers are in general in terms of the type of workers but also how divided female and male irregular workers are by industrial labor demographics, a finding which is consistent with the gender discrepancy in temporary workers between office-related sectors and manufacturing sector.
However, I have to this point maintained a kind of detached stance on the hearts and minds of Community Union leaders. At this point, one might wonder why the leaders of Community Unions got motivated to help out the workers in need. In order to understand the mindset of Community Union leaders, it would be helpful to show how differently the leaders think between enterprise-based unions and Community Unions in terms of functions and prospects. At the same time, it should be mentioned that the majority of Community Union leaders have difficulty in the mobilization of irregular and SMSE workers. That is, a lot of workers, having talked to Community Unions, would not sign up for the membership list of each Union, because it would be often costly for them to pay membership fees regularly. In addition, it is often the case that a lot of workers, who had signed up, would often exit from the list of membership. Unfortunately for the leaders of Community Unions, the poor participation of workers in the Unions would lead to a limitation on their resources and activities.

**Hearts and Minds of Community Union Leaders**

Many of the Community Union leaders told me a series of articulate stories about how they made up their minds to engage in Community Unions rather than enterprise-based unions. Intuitively, the leaders were concerned with how corporate unions are, mainly because they are often exclusive to themselves and fail to be assertive toward managers of each enterprise. Kenichi, a leader of TU who used to play a leading role in enterprise unions of a blue-collar industry (e.g. a middle-sized subcontracting chemical firm), strongly felt a limitation on the activism of corporate unions:

> You know what, if you are to actively engage in corporate union activism as seriously as anybody would ordinarily be, you’d definitely find that it doesn’t make a difference, no mater how hard you might try. *After all, managers have more power over workers and information on human resource management* (TU interview, 6 August 2010: italic added).

His experience with the limitation of enterprise unions made him realize that workers and labor unions of every enterprise should be mobilized, which would enable them to support each other and to share the information, which is unavailable within the sphere of each enterprise (TU interview, 6 August 2010).
Yohei, a leader of KWU who has actively engaged in Community Union activism for more than 20 years, perceived how corporate unions are getting exclusive to themselves over the last 20 years, with the focus solely on annual increases in salaries. Acknowledging how fundamental the growth in income is for every worker, he was concerned with how corporate unions have ignored the issues associated with the daily life of women, such as maternity leave and child care responsibilities. At the same time, he recognized that an increasing number of fixed-term contract workers and temporary workers came to be replaced with regular workers at the workplace, which led to a remote relationship among workers. From the perspective of this Community Union activist, it is totally the case that enterprise-based unions have become so dysfunctional that they have literally collapsed (KWU interview, 26 July 2010).

**The Mobilization Issue of Community Unions**

As truly motivated as Community Union leaders appeared to be, they also have difficulty in mobilizing irregular and SMSE workers in order to fulfill their visions. By comparing the number of troubleshooting cases and those who sign up for the membership list of each Community Union regularly, I came to realize that the mobilization power of Community Unions is not strong. In fact, the number of troubleshooting cases is much larger than that of those who sign up for the membership list of each Union, except for the case of KCU (see Table 21). This finding would suggest that a large number of workers do stop by at a nearby Union to talk about issues on working, but they do not always join the activism of each Union.

In addition, it is generally accepted among Community Union leaders that a considerable number of people who had signed up for membership would exit from the membership list later on (KLU, interview 27 July 2010: TU, interview 6 August 2010). To cite some specific data, the mean numbers of those who sign up for and exit from the membership lists of RFU and KWU shows that the number of former is slightly larger than that of latter (see Table 22). In other words, a lot of workers ‘come and go’ in the membership list of Community Unions.
For all the weak mobilization power of Community Unions in general, one might wonder why KCU has been so successful in having workers mobilized. However, the case of KCU can be considered exceptional, because a majority\(^8\) of constituencies in KCU are immigrant workers of Japanese descent from Latin American countries, who are very well known with each other. In fact, they often spend daily life in a group of the same background, being in a country with unfamiliar people, town, and language. In the meantime, KCU had become the place to talk about work issue among the immigrants, through word of mouth and referrals.

\(^8\) According to an estimate by Mamoru, a leader of KCU, immigrant workers account for 80 percent out of all the constituencies (interview, 5 August 2010).

\(^9\) To reiterate, Ryosuke, a leader of FUF, were less motivated to have a large number of workers mobilized than other Community Union leaders, because he wanted the number of Community Unions itself to increase (interview, 16 July 2010).

### Table 21. A Comparison Between the N of Troubleshooting and Those Who Sign Up Per Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>N of Troubleshooting / year</th>
<th>N of those who Sign up / year</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFU</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>18.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUF</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>N / A</td>
<td>N / A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLU</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>53.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KWU</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NU</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KU</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCU</td>
<td>500 – 600</td>
<td>500 – 600</td>
<td>83.3 – 100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SU</td>
<td>170 – 200</td>
<td>60 – 70</td>
<td>30 – 41.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GKS</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TU</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>250 – 300</td>
<td>8.3 – 10 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mamoru, a leader of KCU who has played a leading role in the Union since the start of 1984, plainly told me that he had not imagined how the situation would come to be what it is now, and seemed to be sort of overwhelmed by immigrants, who come on a ‘way too large’ scale. In addition, his attitude toward immigrant workers implied that he kept immigrants at arm’s length, because he mentioned that ‘they’ were not good at going through labor disputes with managers at workplaces, which require a long-term process of argument between a worker and a workplace (KCU interview, 5 August 2010). By implication, Mamoru found that immigrant workers were short-sighted and could not adjust themselves to a long-term process of labor disputes in Japan, which would connote a social distance between him and immigrant workers.

In this regard, although KCU has a large number of immigrant workers who signed up for the membership list of the Union, the leadership found them of too diverse a background in terms of history and culture for him to narrow the distance between them and to settle divergent interests of immigrants in KCU, which he argued was many times more difficult than to organize a labor union among regular, fixed-term contract, and temporary workers in the conglomerate of Toshiba. In addition, it is only in a pressing situation that immigrant workers come to talk to him, perhaps because they do not understand what KCU really is because they happened to get to know it through word of mouth and referrals within their social circles. The relationship between KCU and immigrant workers can be remote from each other, in a time when they need to take urgent and practical measures against managers at workplace (KCU interview 5 August 2010). In short, as fortunate as KCU is to have a lot of immigrant workers in the membership list, the Union has tended to keep a distant relationship with immigrants and has not managed any regular mobilization.

Table 22. Mean Ns of Those Who Sign Up and Exit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mean N of those who Sign up</th>
<th>Mean N of those who Exit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFU (1997 – 2007)</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KWU (1988 – 2008)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Back to the point on the generally weak mobilization power of Community Unions, why do workers either just stop by the Unions or ‘come and go’ in the lists of membership? It seems plausible that economic rationality is at work. It is more economically rational for irregular and SMSE workers to search for another job than to sign up for the Union activism, which would cost them a monthly membership fee. Keeping on paying a membership fee is not an easy deal for irregular and SMSE workers, considering how economically marginal their lives can be. To take a couple of specific examples, taking part in the membership list of RFU would cost workers 3,000 JPY as an entrance fee plus a monthly fee, ranging from 1,000 to 4,000 JPY depending on the level of income. Participating in the list of KU would cost workers 1,000 JPY as an entrance fee plus 3,000 JPY as membership fee per month (Nagamine 2003, 50-2; RFU & KU interviews, 2 and 30 July 2010). Taking the unstable economic condition of volatile workers into consideration, it would not be easy for them to keep on paying a certain amount of membership fee in every month.

According to Takashi, a leader of KLU, workers’ reluctance to sign up for Union activism and to keep on paying a membership fee is a source of headaches, because it leads to restrictions on the financial management of each Union; financial resources of some Union are in such dire straits that that they cannot afford to hire a full-time staff or rent an individual office. In his vision, a labor union has to take root in a workplace and bargain for better working conditions there in a collective manner. He wondered (in a heavy Osaka dialect but with a slightly sarcastic tone) if individually-organized unions, such as his, are really a labor movement or not, because they are not so much a labor union as a professional troubleshooter on labor issues (KLU interview, 27 July 2010). In this regard, Community Unions in general might be faced with a dilemma between traditional labor union activism (i.e. collective bargaining against managers on wage increase with permanent memberships in a workplace) and Community Union activism (i.e. troubleshooting activity and collective bargaining against managers on employment or working conditions with temporary memberships in several workplaces). My interview materials do not make it clear if Community Union leaders are generally inclined to be in favor of the former or the latter.

What should not be ignored, however, is that the level of institutionalization among irregular and SMSE workers is relatively low vis-à-vis that among workers in large enterprises, because the workers do not necessarily work in the same workplace and know
each other (Broadbent 2001, 302-3; Gottfried 2008, 188; KWU interview, 26 July 2010; Nagamine 2003, 42-3). Therefore, the momentum to set up labor unions remains weak among workers with volatile employment. According to Ayumi, a leader of KWU, a worker at a chocolate factory of small scale had once talked to her about overtime working without payment, wondering what it needs to be done for setting up a labor union at the workplace. However, she told me that the worker did not want to come to KWU alone:

And then, the worker told me that he / she’d like to find partners. I said “Okay, go ahead” but the worker did not come eventually, which means he / she did not have any partner or could not step one foot forward. ... Workers [with volatile employment] might not want to play a leading role in labor union activism (KWU interview, 26 July 2010: italic added).

Therefore, the poor performance of Community Unions in mobilizing workers with volatile employment does not necessarily mean that they are not attractive to irregular and SMSE workers; a lot of workers would often talk to them about labor issues via troubleshooting activity, as exemplified in Section 3.3. This is politically significant, because irregular and SMSE workers have only a limited means of troubleshooting for them to deal with their labor issues. Community Unions are there for volatile workers to depend and therefore it will be hoped that the role of the Unions come to be recognized among the larger public and they play a stronger role in making the public get to know the daily adversities of irregular and SMSE workers.
CHAPTER 4

JAPANESE WELFARE SYSTEM, IRREGULAR WORKERS, AND SMSE WORKERS

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WELFARE SYSTEM AND MALE WORKERS WITH VOLATILE EMPLOYMENT IN JAPAN

Earlier in the argument, I referred to how large enterprises have played the dominant role in providing welfare benefits to workers, which was all-encompassing but exclusive to regular workers in large enterprises. In other words, the state has relied on large enterprises in taking care of welfare issues associated with workers, who would presumably keep engaged in the same firm until the age of retirement. However, it should be obvious that there are also workers who would not necessarily be employed in the same workplace for their entire lives: irregular and SMSE workers. In other words, the selective nature of corporate welfare would suggest that irregular and SMSE workers are barred from enjoying the extensive benefits of corporate welfare.

In addition, I mentioned how poor the level of state expenditure on welfare program is in comparison with Sweden. Taking the limited resources for state welfare programs into consideration, one might as well wonder what kind of people the program is aimed at and what kind of benefits it entails. Intuitively, the welfare program in Japan has targeted the people who retired from the labor market, and the welfare benefits are associated with the care of the elderly (Miyamoto 2008, 32-3). To cite specific data in 2001, the resources of state welfare program are spent primarily on medical services, nursing-care, and the pension system, which accounts for 80 percent of the overall expenditure (Miyamoto 2008, 32). What little money the state has to spend on welfare programs is directed mainly toward the people in years of post-retirement.

By implication, irregular and SMSE workers are off the agenda of state welfare programs. From the perspective of workers with volatile employment, the state welfare system is not well-designed in a time when they are unemployed and in need of financial
assistance. In this regard, irregular and SMSE workers are beyond the reach of most corporate and state welfare programs. How they are excluded from the both programs is sort of counterintuitive, because they are more often subject to layoffs in times of dismal economic conditions or prospects, rendering them unemployed without any stable source of income, and are more likely to need a safety net.

To put the findings in theoretical perspective, one could plausibly find that the bias in the Japanese welfare program is a reflection of the power of social construction in public policy making (Schneider & Ingram 1993). By ‘social construction,’ these authors meant “the cultural characterizations or popular images of the persons or groups whose behavior and well-being are affected by public policy (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 334)”. In other words, how culturally characterized a person or group is within a society is crucial in determining which groups in a society would deserve to be a beneficiary of public interest programs.

According to Schneider and Ingram, there are four categories of cultural characterization within a society, depending on the attributes of constructions (i.e. positive or negative) and the degree of political power (i.e. strong or weak). In turn, the four clusters enjoy a varying degree of benefits of public interest programs, and a differing extent of burdens would be inflicted on each of them. First, ‘the advantaged,’ with positive popular construction and strong political power, would be a primary beneficiary of programs with the least burden inflicted on them to manage programs. To the opposite side lie ‘the deviants’ with negative construction and weak political power, who would not only be kept from enjoying the benefit of programs but also obliged to endure the highest burdens of punitive policy. Third, ‘the contenders,’ with negative construction but strong political power, would be granted benefits discernible only to people in the group, with symbolic burdens inflicted on them to appease the public. Lastly, ‘the dependents,’ with positive construction but weak political power, are often granted symbolic benefits (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 335-9).

At this point, one might as well wonder to which of the four categories specific groups of people would belong. Schneider and Ingram, then, posed a hypothetical table on to which category a group of people would belong (see Table 23). Importantly enough, the elderly belongs to the school of ‘the advantaged’, which makes it most likely for them to enjoy a primary benefit of public interest programs. The identification of the elderly with ‘the
advantaged’ would reasonably be in agreement with how state-sponsored welfare program in Japan prefers the elderly to other groups in its agenda.

Table 23. Social Constructions and Political Power: Types of Target Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power / Construction</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Advantaged</strong></td>
<td><strong>Contenders</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>The elderly</td>
<td>The rich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Big unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scientists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td><strong>Dependents</strong></td>
<td><strong>Deviants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Criminals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mothers</td>
<td>Drug addicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>Gangs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In addition, married women with children would belong to the school of ‘dependents.’ In Japanese context, married women have been portrayed as ‘unpaid caregiver’ and ‘part-time workers’ since the aftermath of 1973 Oil Shock within the framework of “Japanese-style Welfare” (Gottfried & O’Reilly 2002, 40-1; Miyamoto 2008, 97-100: see Chapter 1.3). In other words, they have been constructed positively, in the sense that they would play an important role in child rearing and housekeeping, but with a limited political power, because they have been unable to free themselves from the gender-divided role of Japanese family and been confined in the irregular labor market of Japan.

One might also as well wonder to which category male irregular and SMSE workers would belong. Taking a look at the table and reflecting on constructions and political power, it seems very likely that they would fall into the category of ‘dependents,’ because they have been sympathetically constructed within a series of media coverage on the daily hardships of male workers with volatile employment in the aftermath of 2008 massive cutbacks in temporary workers. For example, during 2010 New Year Day period, a women editor of *Asahi Shinbun* visited an apartment where three male temporary workers lived together, portraying with pity how stifling it was for them to go through job interviews and ended up
without finding a workplace in 2009 (Miyajima 2009). The line of narratives sounded as if they were victims and their hardships were not the responsibility of theirs but of the private sector (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 341-2), especially where the editor described how intimidating it was of a company to ask an applicant bluntly whether he had any qualification, in a tone with the blame on the firm (Miyajima 2009).

As for the level of political power, it is fair to say that they have little cohesive political power, because the solidarity among them is so low that Community Unions have hard time in having them mobilized (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 344; see also Chapter 3.5). In short, a sympathetic image of male irregular and SMSE workers and a lack of political power on their part would make them likely to enjoy benefits of state-sponsored welfare system in Japan, but only so long as they are symbolic because the workers cannot have a strong say in how the welfare programs should be designed for male workers with volatile employment (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 338-9). In addition, the state welfare programs aimed at male workers with volatile employment would likely to set eligibility requirements, giving labels or a sense of stigma on recipients (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 339, 342). In order for the theoretical argument to be meaningful, the following sections will illustrate what benefits and requirements the programs of employment insurance, public assistance, and job training with subsidy entail and how much change male irregular and SMSE workers are able to make in the design of the programs. As for the last program, taking a look at a series of media coverage on outcomes of the program will be helpful to see if male irregular and SMSE workers are portrayed as victims and therefore are positioned as ‘dependents’ in this political context.

**SYMBOLIC BENEFITS OF EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE**

In the context of Japanese labor market, irregular and SMSE workers would be most likely to need employment insurance because they are more often subject to layoffs than regular workers in large enterprises, who would presumably keep on working in the same firm until the age of retirement. As obvious as it is that irregular and SMSE workers would more often be in need of employment insurance, Community Union leaders, who are cognizant of the issues with employment insurance by way of daily troubleshooting, told me
a series of articulate stories about what benefits and eligibility requirements the employment insurance program entails in Japan’s labor market. With an interpretation of the leaders’ reports, I found that the system of employment insurance merely gives a symbolic benefit to male workers with volatile employment, because insurance benefits last only for a short period of time and give them a small amount of money. In addition, workers out of labor market have to wait for a certain period of time before they would be able to get on the benefit.

**Employment Insurance**

First of all, how many days would unemployed workers be able to enjoy the benefit of employment insurance? According to Community Union leaders, employment insurance will last from 90 to 240 days (KLU & SU interviews, 27 July and 3 August 2010), depending mainly on the reason why a worker stopped work in the previous workplace (KU interview, 30 July 2010). The leaders, who inclined be sympathetic to troubles of irregular and SMSE workers, argued that the range of period on insurance benefit is not sufficiently long for workers out of labor market to acquire job skills necessary for trying to find another workplace in an incremental manner (KU & TU interviews, 30 July and 6 August 2010).

In addition, workers out of labor market have to wait a certain period of time before they would be able to get on insurance benefit, depending on a reason why a worker left a previous workplace. On one hand, if a worker quit a workplace due to a reason on the part of workplace (e.g. layoffs to reduce personnel costs), he / she would have to wait only another eight days before insurance payment begins (FUF interview, 16 July 2010). On the other hand, if a worker leaves a workplace due to a reason on the part of workers (e.g. due to an illness or child rearing), he / she would have to wait as much as another 90 days prior to getting on insurance benefit (FUF & KU interviews, 16 and 30 July 2010). The reason for stopping employment makes a big difference in how long a worker would have to wait before they can get on insurance benefit. Added to this is that an unemployed worker, having quit for a reason on his / her own, would be on the benefit for a shorter period (KU interview, 30 July 2010). In short, for workers to quit a workplace for any individual reason would be likely to make the benefit of employment insurance more symbolic, from the perspectives not only of the duration of benefit but also of the period of waiting prior to getting on the benefit.
As one might expect, some managers compel workers to quit due to a “personal” reason, even when they need to lay off some workers to reduce personnel costs. This idiosyncratic situation often happens, because, when a worker is laid off due to a reason on the part of workplace, the workplace would lose the benefit of state subsidies, which would be available to them on occasions where they hire other workers (Kobayashi 2009, 148). To put the power relation between managers and workers with volatile employment in context, it is not easy for workers to resist a persistent order from their workplace that they should quit for a personal reason, because the power relation would allow managers to be assertive toward workers. This is why Ryosuke, a leader of FUF, cited the question of “how should I quit the workplace?” as one of the most representative issues in daily troubleshooting (FUF interview, 16 July 2010).

Lastly, the amount of money paid by way of employment insurance is not large. According to an estimate by one of the Community Union leaders, a worker in his / her thirties would receive 6500 JPY per day, which amounts to 182,000 JPY per month (28 days). This is, in actuality, smaller than the monthly benefit of public assistance for a family of husband, housewife, and two children in Tokyo, which is approximately 230,000 JPY. The poor benefit of employment insurance in comparison with public assistance urged the leader to lament how inhumane the benefit of the former is, such that workers tend to be extraordinarily concerned about unemployment (GKS interview, 4 August 2010).

With all the symbolic benefits and unfair eligibility requirements (i.e. the reason for stopping employment), male irregular and SMSE workers are not able to reform the program of employment insurance of their own accord. In fact, one of the Community Union leaders told me that some workers asked him what was happening with the program of employment insurance, because a series of reforms in the program took place one after another (NU interview, 28 July 2010). In other words, the workers were not well-informed about the reforms, which were taking place beyond reach of their sphere of politics. In this regard, irregular and SMSE workers do not have power strong enough to have control over the design of employment insurance program, which is a reflection of their status as the ‘dependents’ (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 338).
Public Assistance

At this point, one might think that unemployed workers should get on public assistance, because it is more economically rational to get on the program given the larger amount of money paid to them than employment insurance. The thing is, however, public assistance programs are associated with a social sense of stigma, which has become a near-universal characteristic in welfare programs aimed at ‘dependents’ (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 339, 341). Given a fear that getting on public assistance would undermine their sense of self-esteem, workers out of the labor market often reject the option of public assistance. Family members – even extended family – would often discourage them from getting on public assistance. In addition, the requirements for workers to get on public assistance are so rigid that public officials would discourage a worker with a house or car from enrolling in public assistance (KU interview, 30 July 2010). Therefore, workers would need to admit their dependency status if they are to be eligible for public assistance programs (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 342). The social stigma and rigid requirements of public assistance programs render the program underutilized in such a manner that workers on public assistance account for only 20 percent out of workers in dire need of the program (KU interview, 30 July 2010). However, workers with volatile employment cannot control public assistance programs in favor of them, because the conditions to get on the program are at the disposal of government officials (Nishinippon Shinbun 2011b). In short, male irregular and SMSE workers have no choice but to remain the status of ‘dependents’ as far as the programs of employment insurance and public assistance are concerned. The programs are truly available to them, but only so long as benefits of the programs are symbolic and undersubscribed (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 337). Workers with volatile employment fail to control the programs due to a lack of strong say in the design of the programs and are at the mercy of the programs passed down from the authorities.

Being sympathetic to workers with volatile employment, it was no wonder how strongly Community Union leaders felt a need to reform the program of employment insurance in favor of irregular workers. Masaki, a leader of KU, insisted that the duration of insurance benefit continue for a longer period of time, such as two or three years, so that workers are able to exit from the labor market without feeling an immediate concern about trying to find a next workplace (KU interview, 30 July 2010). In addition, they also strongly
felt a need to improve the job training program so that workers receiving employment insurance would be able to acquire job skills necessary in another workplace (SU & TU interviews, 3 and 6 August 2010).

**Victims or Free Riders? Job Training Program with Subsidies**

In relation to the need to have job training system improved, the state in July 2009 launched a program of job training with subsidies available to irregular and SMSE workers whose employment insurance had expired. According to an official account, workers in the program would be able to not only learn and acquire such job skills as PC operation, clerical work in the medical industry, and nursing-care for the elderly, but also enjoy a subsidy of 100,000 JPY per month, as long as they follow 13 steps of proper procedure. Workers need to apply for the program at a public job center (known as Hello Work), where the application will be processed and turned in to Japan Vocational Ability Development Association (JVADA), an agency of the MHLW. The JVADA would determine which training body a trainee would take part in through the program (MHLW 2009c). The chance to acquire job skills and enjoy a subsidy might well appear attractive to irregular and SMSE workers who cannot receive employment insurance benefits. With the program in operation, a large number of workers participated in 2010, amounting to approximately 183,000 beneficiaries (Taketsugu 2011). Judging from the content of program and the number of participants, the program seems to be beneficial and responsive to the workers in need of financial assistance as well as job training.

However, a series of issues came to be reported through media coverage in the beginning of 2011: simply put, the program turned out to be unhelpful for workers to acquire decent job skills. Interestingly, media narratives had divergent ideas on who were responsible for the malfunction of the program. On one hand, media narratives of *Asahi Shinbun* and *Nishinippon Shinbun*, public-oriented newspapers in Japan, directed responsibility toward training organizations, because teachers in job training programs neglected to help the trainees learn the skills, treated them with contempt, or were not well-informed about the content of program (Takahashi & Moromugi 2011; Taketsugu 2011; *Nishinippon Shinbun* 2011a). To explain why the issues are the responsibility of training organization, an editor
cited the number of misconduct reports during sessions, which totaled 430 from April to November 2010, the exemplar of which is that they were made to clean restrooms (Taketsugu 2011). In short, the editors were sympathetic to the hardships of trainees, who were portrayed as ‘victims’ in the narratives within the framework of social construction (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 341-2).

On the other hand, a media narrative of *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, a pro-business newspaper in Japan, blamed workers on the malfunction of the program: they were more motivated to enjoy the benefit of a subsidy than to learn and acquire job skills. According to the article, officials at Hello Work in Kyoto City became bothered by a series of questions from workers, asking if they were eligible to enjoy 100,000 JPY (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 2011). Bluntly speaking, the subsidy of 100,000 JPY per month is not necessarily enough for workers to make a decent living, but it does look attractive to workers who are not on employment insurance benefits. According to the pro-business newspaper, the program offers the chance of having workers spoiled by the availability of financial incentive and is not necessarily successful in making trainees eager to learn and acquire job skills. In this regard, the program entails the free rider issue, enabling workers to enjoy the benefit of subsidy without contributing to the overall improvement of the program.

Why are trainees portrayed either as ‘victims’ or ‘free riders’ in the media narratives? In a sort of counterintuitive tone, both images on the trainees were a product of the social construction of male irregular and SMSE workers as the ‘dependents.’ On one hand, the articles in the two public-oriented newspapers were sympathetic to trainees and blamed job training organizations for the malfunction of the program, because the organizations did not teach them right. In other words, their hardships in learning job skills were the responsibility of the private sector, unfairly victimizing the workers (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 341). On the other hand, the article in the pro-business newspaper reported that the trainees became dependent on the benefit of subsidies and were then less motivated to learn and acquire job skills in the course of program participation. In effect, the divergent media stories on the job training program focused on two sides of the same social construction of ‘dependents.’

Institutionally, the job training program with subsidy is full of flaws, because the program does not have a framework for regulating job training organizations. In fact, the JVADA do not require that each training organization has previously experience in labor
training nor that teachers have qualifications to teach specific job skills. The content of each program is also left to the discretion of each training organization, which enables them to implement programs in an arbitrary manner (Taketsugu 2011). In addition, a considerable amount of subsidies are also paid to each organization. If a job training body gets affiliated with the program, the state will render a large sum of subsidies to it, up to a maximum of 3,000,000 JPY (Takahashi & Moromugi 2011; Taketsugu 2011).

Can trainees reform and improve the job training program? Is there any way for them to strengthen regulations of job training organizations? Unfortunately for the participants, it is not likely that they have any control over the design of the program because it involves an intricate scheme of bureaucracy. After all, workers have access only to Hello Work, which would process and send the application information to JVADA. The agency, in turn, would determine which job training organization a trainee would participate in on an arbitrary basis (Taketsugu 2011). To put it differently, the content of the program is left to an agency of the MHLW and to job training organizations. The lack of windows accessible to workers other than Hello Work is a reflection of the status of male irregular and SMSE workers as the ‘dependents,’ because they are not able to have control over the design of the program and are not imagined as being entitled to choices in the way that advantaged groups would be (Schneider & Ingram 1993, 338).

A practical prescription that can be offered in the argument is that job training programs with subsidies should not be taken into serious consideration, because they can indulge the worst instincts of both job training organizations and workers, ending up with just another source of income for both sides. It is ironic that irregular and SMSE workers are not able to reform employment insurance programs of their own accord due to their status as the ‘dependents,’ but they have no choice but to hope that government officials will reform the program, so that a larger number of irregular and SMSE workers are able to get on insurance benefit for a longer period of time and with a larger sum of benefit available to them.

Fortunately for workers and Community Union leaders, a series of reforms have been made since 2009 in terms of eligibility for employment insurance. Prior to the reform, a worker would have to engage in a workplace for a minimum of 12 months to be eligible for employment insurance. The 2009 reform decreased the number of months, enabling workers
engaging in the same workplace for six months to be eligible (MHLW 2009d). The 2010 reform did a further deregulation, rendering workers engaging in the same workplace for a month to be eligible for insurance (MHLW 2010). In short, a series of deregulations made it easier for irregular and SMSE workers to be eligible for employment insurance, which would be helpful for them because they often work on a short-term basis. It would be, therefore, hoped that the state could also improve the content of employment benefit so that workers out of the labor market do not have to worry about being unemployed for long stretches. For example, two-year-round benefits of employment insurance would be helpful for workers to have stable financial assistance and to acquire superior job skills in a cumulative manner, so that they could find another workplace that meets their expectations.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Rather than relying on clear-cut media narratives about hardships of male temporary workers, this study has shown how irregular and SMSE workers came to be structured and recognized in the labor market of Japan over the last 60 years. Contrary to the popular image of the Japanese employment system as ‘life-time employment,’ irregular and SMSE workers do change workplaces and are subject to layoffs. In addition, the working conditions under which they engage in the workplace are not as ideal as workers in large enterprises, because they are not able to expect annual salary increase and generous welfare programs. In this regard, one can see how problematic and superficial it is generalize the model of large enterprises in Japan to the overall labor complex of the country. The dual structure between large enterprises and SMSEs should not be ignored, which shows a more accurate picture on the general employment and working conditions of workers in Japan.

A historical analysis of state strategies to promote economic growth as well as to gather electoral support from both sides of the dual structure revealed that the state policies toward divergent production sectors had become mutually exclusive. On one hand, the state protected large enterprises against international markets by way of a wide array of regulations and marketing directions, which helped large enterprises to play a leading role in the development of the Japanese economy. On the other hand, the state also protected SMSEs against large enterprises via extravagant subsidies and regulatory policies. An implicit tension between both sides was on the verge of breakdown in the aftermath of the extreme economic expansion of the 1980s and fell apart when Jyunichiro Koizumi, a pro-business prime minister in office during the former half of 2000s, shifted policy to favor the demands of large enterprises. As a consequence, the relationship between the state and SMSEs in local areas came to be weakened and the level of labor market flexibility heightened, with a larger number of irregular workers available to large retail stores.

As for the emergence of irregular work, a growing number of part-time workers came to be structured in the labor market of Japan in the aftermath of 1973 Oil Shock, with women
more prone to work irregularly. To take the model of male-breadwinner welfare among Japanese families into consideration, married women are more likely to be relegated to being in charge of domestic responsibility, and this gendered division of labor encouraged women to work on an irregular basis. From the 1980s onward, a larger number of women began to engage in the irregular labor market of Japan as part-time workers or temporary workers. On one hand, female part-time workers would often engage in such service-intensive sectors as sales, retail, and restaurants but with inferior working conditions and payment. On the other hand, female temporary workers have also been channeled into such office-related jobs as filing and clerical machine operation, which do not require technical skills. In this regard, it has been recognized among academics that a gender bias exists in the irregular labor market of Japan, with women more likely to work irregularly than men.

Through the first-hand interview materials with Community Union leaders, however, I found out that it is not so much gender as industrial labor demographics that make a bigger difference in the discrepancy between female and male workers with volatile employment. To reiterate, married women are likely to engage in service or retail industry as part-time workers. Yet, both foreign and native-born male workers also work irregularly, often in workplaces of manufacturing and construction sectors as subcontracting workers. In other words, not only women but also men are likely to engage in the irregular labor market of Japan, depending on the type of industry. The same goes for the demographics of temporary workers: on one hand, female temporary workers are likely to engage in the office-related sectors, such as filing and clerical machine operation; on the other hand, male temporary workers had been prevalent in manufacturing sector in the guise of subcontracting workers, even before the state revised the TWL in 2004 to permit manufacturers to hire temporary workers in a legitimate way. In this regard, the gender bias in the irregular labor market is partly correct but partly wrong; it is not so much gender as industrial labor demographics that lead to the prevalence of female workers in the landscape of irregular work.

A reservation about the claim, however, also should be mentioned here. A series of interviews with Community Union leaders did enable me to identify the demographics of irregular and SMSE workers who sought out assistance from Community Unions in the three regions of Japan, but they did not yield a picture of the overall irregular and SMSE
workforces: the interview data showed the demographics of workers who have a sense of grievance. In this regard, my sampling may be skewed one way or another and not indicative of actual labor demographics among workers with volatile employment.

To look into the hearts and minds of Community Union leaders, they were well-informed about how different Community Unions are from enterprise-based unions in large enterprises. On one hand, corporate unions mobilize collectively-organized regular workers in each firm. In other words, they are aimed at regular employees in large enterprises, not at irregular and SMSE workers. As a consequence, they tend to be exclusive to themselves and friendly with managers of each enterprise. On the other hand, Community Unions are aimed at workers of every kind on an individual basis, which is exemplified in how willing they are to listen to the daily adversities of irregular and SMSE workers by way of troubleshooting activity. In addition, Community Unions are likely to encourage workers either to sign up for membership in a Union or to organize an affiliated union at a workplace, so that they would be able to engage in collective bargaining against managers and bring the case of labor dispute into arbitration processes or the courtroom. In this regard, Community Unions offer workers with volatile employment a playing field where they are able to belong and make their voices heard.

Unfortunately for the Community Unions, however, this study showed only modest outcomes in terms of how successfully they are able to bring irregular and SMSE workers into their activity. That is, a majority of workers, having talked to Community Unions about labor issues, would not necessarily sign up for the membership list of each Union. In addition, a lot of workers, who had signed up, would later exit from the list of membership. In other words, a large number of workers would either just ‘stop by’ at a nearby Union to talk about labor issues or ‘come and go’ in the membership list of Community Unions. Workers with volatile employment, who are under unstable economic conditions, might as well prefer to search for another workplace than to sign up for the Union activism, would cost them a monthly membership fee. Tellingly, the low level of workers’ participation in the Union activism led to a limitation on the financial management of each Union; some Unions cannot afford to hire a full-time staff or rent an individual office. In fairness to rates of participation, however, it should not be ignored that the level of institutionalization among irregular and SMSE workers is generally low in comparison with that among workers in
large enterprises, because they do not always work in the same workplace and know each other. Mediocre outcomes in union participation, therefore, would not mean that Community Unions are not attractive to irregular and SMSE workers. It is politically significant how eager Community Unions are to incorporate volatile workers into their activity, because they have been pushed outside the realm of corporate union activity. It will be hoped that the activism of Community Unions come to be recognized in the society at large and, in the meantime, that people come to understand how precarious the work conditions of irregular and SMSE workers are.

Welfare programs available to irregular and SMSE workers are undersubscribed because they are barred from enjoying the benefits of not only corporate welfare programs, the beneficiary of which is regular workers in large enterprises, but also the bulk of state-sponsored welfare programs, which are aimed at people who retired from the labor market. Even while irregular and SMSE workers are socially constructed sympathetically, they lack political power, and hence are kept from being a primary beneficiary of state-run welfare programs, with merely symbolic benefits available to them. As for employment insurance programs, Community Union leaders told me that the program is undersubscribed for workers who are currently unemployed, in terms of how long insurance benefit would last, how long an unemployed worker have to wait before he / she gets on the benefit, and how much benefit the insurance program would do him / her. In 2009, the state launched a program of job training system with subsidies available to workers whose employment insurance has expired, but it turned out that the program has been inefficient due to a lack of a regulatory framework toward job training bodies and the free rides issue on the part of workers, enabling them to enjoy the benefit of subsidy without committing themselves to learning and acquiring job skills for them to find another workplace. It is unfortunate that workers with volatile employment are not able to reform welfare programs of their own accord, but it will be hoped that the state will also reform the program of employment insurance so that a larger number of irregular and SMSE are able to get on insurance benefit for a longer period of time and with a large sum of benefit available to them and, in the meantime, to learn and acquire superior job skills in a cumulative manner for them to find another workplace that meets their expectations.
In this study, I have found that the dual structure between SMSEs and large enterprises and the issue of irregular work have been embedded in the history of Japanese labor market, which made me realize how superficial and problematic it was for anyone to interpret these issues within the framework of contemporary media stories, which tend to portray male temporary workers in a sympathetic manner. These issues are not as clear-cut as media stories would tell us so. On one hand, the issue of dual structure came to be framed in the course of state policies toward both sides of divergent production sectors in the course of economic development programs in the aftermath of World War II. On the other hand, the issue of irregular workers came to be seen through the attempts of the state and large enterprises to increase labor market flexibility and to avoid deteriorating the model of male breadwinner welfare in the aftermath of 1973 Oil Shock. In other words, irregular and SMSE workers have become such an underlying foundation of the contemporary Japanese labor market that it is not only unsatisfactory but also dangerous to interpret these issues at face value through a series of media narratives, which would incline readers to treat irregular workers as objects of pity and as aberrations to the employment system as a whole.

For example, it was true that the issue of male temporary workers came to be widely recognized among the public through the 2008 media coverage on the extraordinary rampage in Tokyo and massive cutbacks in temporary workers, inclining the public to assume that the 2004 revised TWL led to the proliferation of male temporary workers. From the perspective of Community Union leaders, however, this interpretation is superficial because such workers had been prevalent in manufacturing and construction sectors in the disguise of subcontracting workers prior to the 2004 revision. In addition, it should not be ignored that female temporary workers have been prevalent in clerical sectors. In other words, there have been loopholes in civil law and TWL for enterprises to create new means of cheap labor, endangering the life security of subcontracting and temporary workers. In this regard, workers with volatile employment can fall into the trap of a legal gray zone, being unaware of how problematic working conditions they are under in terms of the level of income, employment insurance benefit, and human relationships.

My interview materials revealed that human relationships in irregular or temporary workplaces are increasingly dysfunctional, giving young workers little choice but to work in a stifling environment. In particular, the relationship between temporary workers and
managers of workplace can be so remote from each other that managers do not recognize them by real names, because they are hired by way of a third party. The more stifling environment it is, the less motivated irregular workers are to stay in the same workplace. This is far from an ideal working environment. I would demand that managers not regard irregular workers as a disposable workforce, in a time when some irregular workers are likely to spend entire lives as irregular workers. It will be hoped that managers make the most of their working environment so that irregular workers could feel motivated to engage in the workplace and that managers help workers to learn and acquire job skills necessary in the forthcoming workplace, no matter how transient their employment might be.

At the same time, by understanding the labor issues of irregular and SMSE workers through the interviews with Community Union leaders, I came to realize that there is a social labor movement willing to support and listen to irregular and SMSE workers. It should not be ignored that, although they might be under unstable working conditions and precarious life security, irregular and SMSE workers have a place where they can depend and belong and a safety net to deal with labor issues. At a time when the proportion of irregular workers is getting larger in proportion to the overall labor force, it is politically significant for Community Unions to help out workers with volatile employment, and they seem to have some potential to do so. Although they have hard time in mobilizing volatile workers with volatile employment and the challenge remains of how they would be able to make themselves known to the larger public, it is hoped that their significance will become recognized in society at large, and that their activism will gain momentum.
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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE
(1) Background on the Respondent
: How did you come to work in your Community Union?
: How long do you work in your Union?
: Do you live in this region throughout your life?

(2) Hardships with Irregular Workers
: Which type of workers do you feel are likely to come to talk to you?
: How many troubleshooting cases does your Union have per month or year?
: What kind of labor issues is representative in your troubleshooting cases?
: Which do you feel is more often come to talk to you between female and male?

(3) A Series of Deregulatory Policies such as the revision of Temporary Worker Law in 2004
: Did you feel that an increasing number of temporary workers came to talk to you after 2004?
: What about after fall 2008?
: Did you feel that a large number of temporary workers in manufacturing sector came to talk to you?
: What about gender?

(4) Labor Union in Japan
: Do you feel a need for labor unions alternative to enterprise-based unions?
: If so, what kind of labor union do you think of?
: How many workers sign up for your Union per month or year?

(5) Welfare System in Japan
: Do you feel a large number of troubleshooting cases about employment insurance?
: Do you feel a need for welfare programs alternative to corporate welfare programs in large enterprises? Is so, what kind of welfare program do you think of?