



INTERNATIONAL
INSTITUTE FOR
LABOUR STUDIES

Discussion paper

Shiho Futagami

Non-Standard Employment in Japan: Gender Dimensions



DP/200/2010

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in Japan: Gender Dimensions**
Shiho Futagami

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Shiho Futagami

International Institute for Labour Studies
Geneva

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ISBN Print: 978-92-9014-950-7

Web/pdf: 978-92-9014-951-4

First published 2010

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Preface

Over the past two decades or so, the incidence of atypical employment increased significantly in the majority of developed countries. In the case of Japan, the practice of lifetime employment, characterised by relatively strong job stability and good career prospects, is less and less the norm. Instead, workers are increasingly employed on so-called non-regular jobs and temporary positions. Self-employment is also on the rise.

Importantly, women are disproportionately represented among non-regular workers – especially in Japan. This study documents the nature of non-regular employment among Japanese women and discusses some of its key determinants. In particular, an effort is made to disentangle economic factors from cultural barriers to regular employment among Japanese women.

Unlike many studies in this area, this paper looks at the business creation by Japanese women. This has become an increasingly popular option, given the obstacles for women getting access to regular employment. Based on a case study, the paper examines the pros and cons of this trend and discusses how policies could support the process of business creation while meeting decent work goals.

This piece provides a well-documented contribution to the debate on job quality and gender balance, of relevance to the analysis of post-crisis labour markets.

Raymond Torres
Director
International Institute for Labour Studies

Acknowledgement

The author¹ wishes to acknowledge the precious advice from Mr. Raymond Torres, Director, International Institute for Labour Studies (IILS) of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Mr. Steven Tobin, Head of Education Programme, International Institute for Labour Studies (IILS), and Mr. Toshio Suzuki, Executive Advisor of Nippon Keidanren International Cooperation Center (NICC), and Employer Member of the ILO Governing Body. This study is subsidized by the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research, Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

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Summary

Employment patterns are changing rapidly in Japan. The practice of lifetime employment is less and less the norm, while “non-regular” forms of employment – including temporary employment and other jobs which offer limited career prospects – are expanding fast. The incidence of “non-regular” employment increased from 16.6 per cent in 1986 to 34.1 per cent in 2008. Importantly, women are disproportionately represented in non-regular employment.

The rising incidence of non-regular employment is a major development. Other things equal, non-regular workers have lower wages, less job security and more limited training opportunities than their regular counterparts.

This study, first, analyses the underlying factors behind non-regular employment among Japanese women. Cultural factors emerge as a major explanation, encompassing stereotypes concerning the traditional role of women in Japanese society, and the need for balancing work and family life. There are “glass ceiling” factors in Japanese companies. Indeed many Japanese women are excluded from corporate management and “regular” career tracks.

Second, the study focuses special attention on temporary agency work among Japanese women – as one type of non-regular employment in Japan. Many women in Japan have to accept temporary agency employment as a result of prolonged economic slump and family responsibilities, even though they are well educated and skilled. This situation reflects the fact that Japanese companies have traditionally focused on lifelong vocational training and job security for male regular workers. Under this system, female labour played a role of buffer against fluctuations of demand and output. This has recently taken the form of growing recourse among Japanese companies to female temporary agency labour as a way to cut labour costs.

Third, the study looks at another emerging type of employment, namely female entrepreneurship. Many more women are becoming self-employed, thus breaking from traditional Japanese management systems characterized by lifetime salaried employment, seniority-based careers and a risk-adverse business culture. The study discusses the case of a business run by a woman in the Information Technology sector, namely *Digimom Workers*. Solutions to barriers to entrepreneurship, based on a decent work approach, are also put forward.

Fourth, the study discusses policies for decent work and gender equality, taking into account cultural factors and structural employment changes ongoing in Japan.

Introduction

Japanese management and non-standard work

The traditional practice of so-called lifetime employment is often seen as one of the main characteristics of Japanese management. Lifetime employment is an employment pattern where new graduates start at a company on the first of April, obtain education and training and reach retirement age within the same company, as described by Abegglen (1958). Lifetime employment assumes a high level of individual employee commitment to the employer, and a reciprocal exchange of commitment of the employer organization to the employee.

However, the reality of the matter is that lifetime employment arrangements have never extended to all workers. In fact, lifetime employment practices have been primarily operational within the larger companies. Furthermore, within most organizations where lifetime employment practices are applied, the existence of “implied” lifetime employment security is often limited to the “core” or “regular” workforce (Gallagher & Futagami, 1998). And the security of the “core” workforce is protected in many organizations by a buffer of “non-regular” or “part-time” workers. There are also cases in which companies hire employees and where university graduates drop out of the company during the year. Nevertheless, for Japanese companies long-term employment is more common than for their foreign counterparts, although the term of lifetime employment is exaggerated (Futagami *et al*, 1998).

In Japan labour market situations are recently changing. Recent changes are the diversification of employment, the increase in female workers, the unstable youth employment patterns like Freeter or NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), the importance of older workers and so on. Especially the diversification of employment is one of the significant recent changes.

Out of 63.85 million people, that are the total number of people in work in the average of 2008, 55.24 million are employees including regular workers and non-regular workers, while 8.31 million are non-employed, such as the self-employed and workers in family business, according to the Labour Force Survey by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. While the rate of regular workers is decreasing from 83.4 per cent in 1986 to 65.9 per cent in 2008, the rate of non-regular workers is increasing from 16.6 per cent in 1986 to 34.1 per cent in 2008, with a large number of women in this category. Non-regular workers consist of part-time workers, temporary agency workers, contract workers and so on. So the labour market is diversified in Japan.

Factors underlining the move towards non-standard employment in Japan are the global competition, the advancement of technological innovation, changes in the structure of industry, the restructuring of firms, worker and firm needs for flexibility, and so on (Futagami, 2002). Along with changes in the structure of industry, the structure of employment is also undergoing some major changes. The proportion of tertiary industries, centered on the service industry, is rising, taking the place of secondary industries centered on manufacturing industries. Out of the 63.85 million people in work in 2008, tertiary industries account for 68.2 per cent (Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training, 2009). Accompanying the change in the structure of employment by industry, in the form of an increase in the ratio of tertiary industries, diversification in the forms of employment is also advancing, with an increase in those working as part-time workers, temporary agency workers, and so on.

Table 1 shows a snapshot of the share of the non-standard workers by gender in 2003 and in 2007, 62.8 per cent of non-regular workers are female, whereas 37.2 per cent of them are

male. Especially the majority, 73.5 per cent of part-time workers are female, while 26.5 per cent of them are male, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Proportion of workers by the form of employment and by gender

Proportion of workers by the form of employment (%)										
Gender	Total	Regular employee	Non-regular employee	Contract employee	Entrusted employee	Transferred employee	Temporary agency worker	Causal worker	Part-time worker	Others
2007										
total	100.0	62.2	37.8	2.8	1.8	1.2	4.7	0.6	22.5	4.3
male	100.0	76.0	24.0	2.3	2.3	1.6	3.9	0.4	10.2	3.3
female	100.0	42.6	57.4	3.6	1.0	0.5	5.8	0.8	40.0	5.7
2003										
total	100.0	65.4	34.6	2.3	1.4	1.5	2.0	0.8	23.0	3.4
male	100.0	80.0	20.0	1.9	1.8	2.2	1.0	0.9	9.6	2.6
female	100.0	44.4	55.6	2.9	0.9	0.6	3.4	0.8	42.5	4.6
Proportion of workers by gender (%)										
Gender	Total	Regular employee	Non-regular employee	Contract employee	Entrusted employee	Transferred employee	Temporary agency worker	Causal worker	Part-time worker	Others
2007										
total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
male	58.6	71.6	37.2	47.0	76.1	82.7	48.6	43.5	26.5	45.0
female	41.4	28.4	62.8	53.0	23.9	17.3	51.4	56.5	73.5	55.0
2003										
total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
male	59.1	72.3	34.3	48.8	75.0	84.8	28.9	62.5	24.7	45.2
female	40.9	27.7	65.7	51.2	25.0	15.2	71.1	37.5	75.3	54.8
Source: Survey of the Diversification of Employment Status (2007).										

The high percentage of women are obliged to work as non-standard work like part-time or temporary agency workers because of gender issues in Japan. However non-standard work in Japan, the majority of which are female, is not decent in terms of job security, vocational training, and wages and so on, as discussed in the following section. So this study discusses female non-standard work in Japan from decent work and gender perspectives.

The difference between non-standard workers and standard workers

Although non-regular workers are expanding considerably, there is a big difference on vocational education and training between regular workers and non-regular workers. According to the Basic Survey on Human Resource Development (2007) by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 37.9 per cent of Japanese companies implement OFF-JT, 32.2 per cent of them

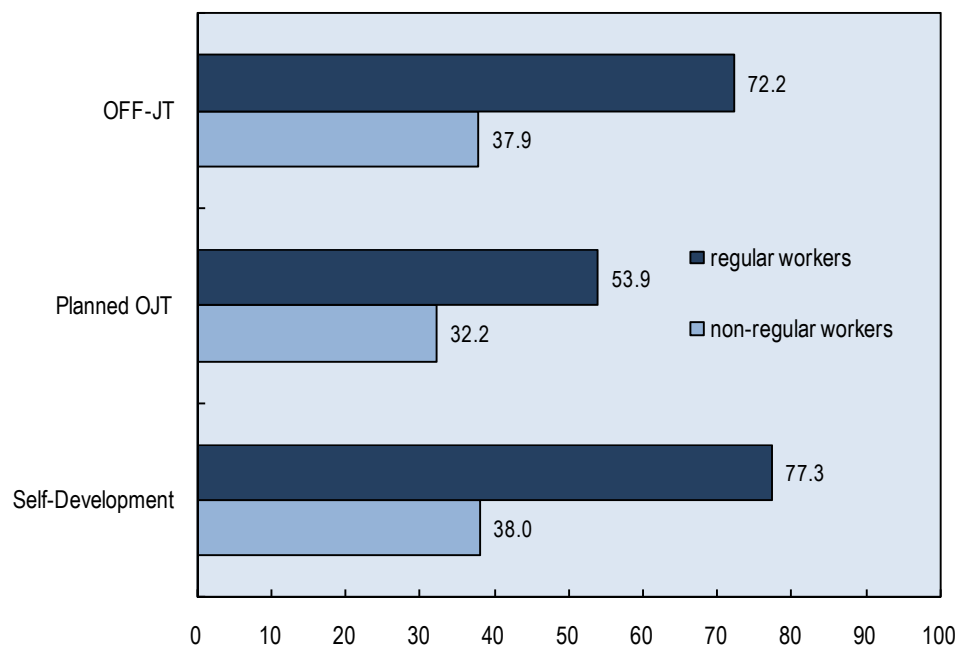
implement planned OJT, and 38 per cent of them support self-development for non-regular workers, whereas 72.2 per cent of them implement OFF-JT, 53.9 per cent of them implement planned OJT, and 77.3 per cent of them support self-development for regular workers, as shown in figure 1. These data show that non-regular workers do not have vocational education and training opportunities as regular workers. Vocational education and training are very important in order to provide workers with opportunities to develop their skills and abilities, so it is a serious problem from decent work perspective.

When one delves into job types for regular workers and non-regular workers according to the Survey of the Diversification of Employment Status (2007), there are job type differences, as shown in figure 2, 92.1 per cent of employees in managerial work, and 75.6 per cent of employees in specialized and technical work are regular workers. In contrast to them, 99.1 per cent of employees in security work and 70.8 per cent of employees in service work are non-regular workers. Out of regular workers, 35.4 per cent of them are in clerical work, 19.4 per cent of them are in specialized and technical work, and 19.1 per cent of them are in managerial work. Out of non-regular workers, 26.1 per cent of them are in clerical work, 20.8 per cent of them are in service work and 18.1 per cent of them are in production process labour. Out of male non-regular workers, 22.5 per cent of them are in production process labour and 20.1 per cent of them are in service work. Out of female non-regular workers, 36.5 per cent of them in clerical work and 21.2 per cent of them are in service work. When one look at job types by the form of employment, 27.0 per cent of contract workers is in specialized and technical work, 38.6 per cent of temporary agency workers are in clerical work, 27.6 per cent of part-time workers, and 19.9 per cent of casual workers are in service work.

When one delves into job satisfactions for regular workers and non-regular workers according to the Survey of the Diversification of Employment Status (2007), there are differences between them with regards to job satisfaction items, as shown in figure 3. The rate of non-regular workers who are satisfied (26.8 per cent) is higher than the rate of regular workers (20.4 per cent) with regards to working conditions (working time/holidays). The rates of regular workers who are satisfied (26.7 per cent, 13.3 per cent, 8.7 per cent) are higher than the rates of non-regular workers (15.9 per cent, 8.3 per cent, 5.2 per cent) with regards to job security, fringe benefit and education/training/human resource development. Non-regular workers are more satisfied with working conditions (working time/holidays) than regular workers, while they are less satisfied with job security, fringe benefit and education/training/human resource development than regular workers. Especially job security, fringe benefit and education/training/human resource development are important for decent work. These results suggest serious problems for non-regular workers from decent work perspective.

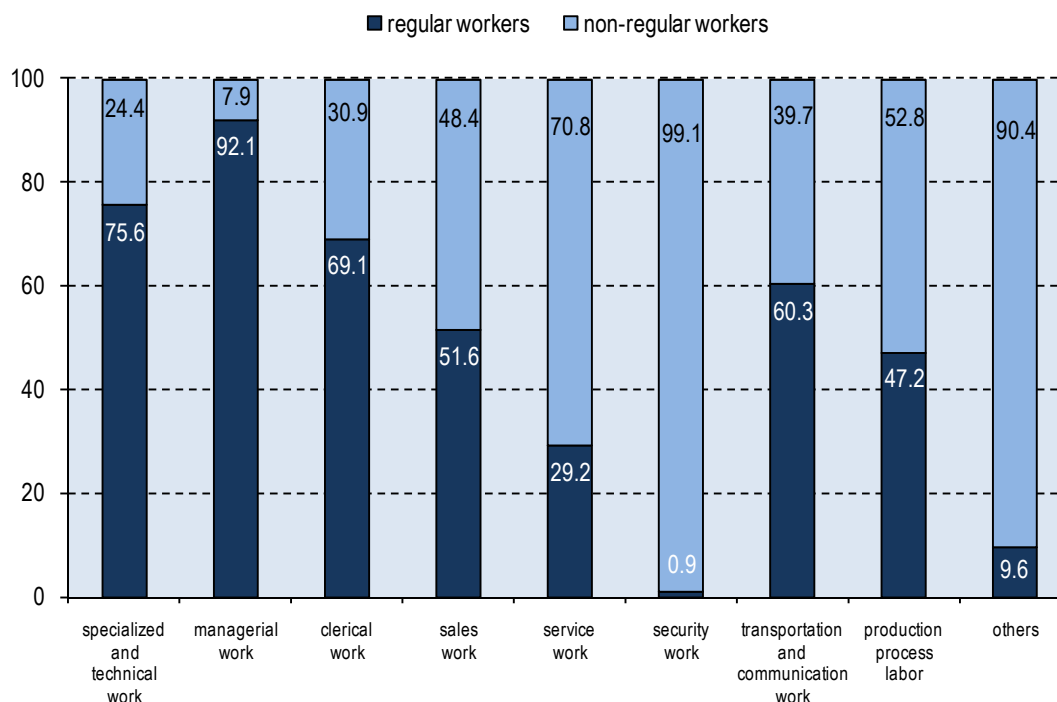
There is also a big wage differential between regular workers and non-regular workers. According to the Basic Survey on Wage Structure (2007), the average wage level for non-regular workers is 192,900 yen, 61 per cent of regular workers. When workers are at 18-19 years old, there is little difference between them, but the gap widen with age, as you can see in figure 4; when workers are at 45-49 years old, it is the largest, 47 per cent. When one focuses on the wage differential between regular and non-regular for male workers, the average wage level for male non-regular workers is 224,300 yen, 65 per cent of male regular workers. When one talks about the wage differential between regular and non-regular for female workers, the average wage level for female non-regular workers is 168,800 yen, 69 per cent of female regular workers. So the average wage level for female non-regular workers is 49 per cent that of male regular workers, very low. It is a serious problem from decent work and gender perspectives.

Figure 1. Vocational education and training for regular workers and non-regular workers (%)



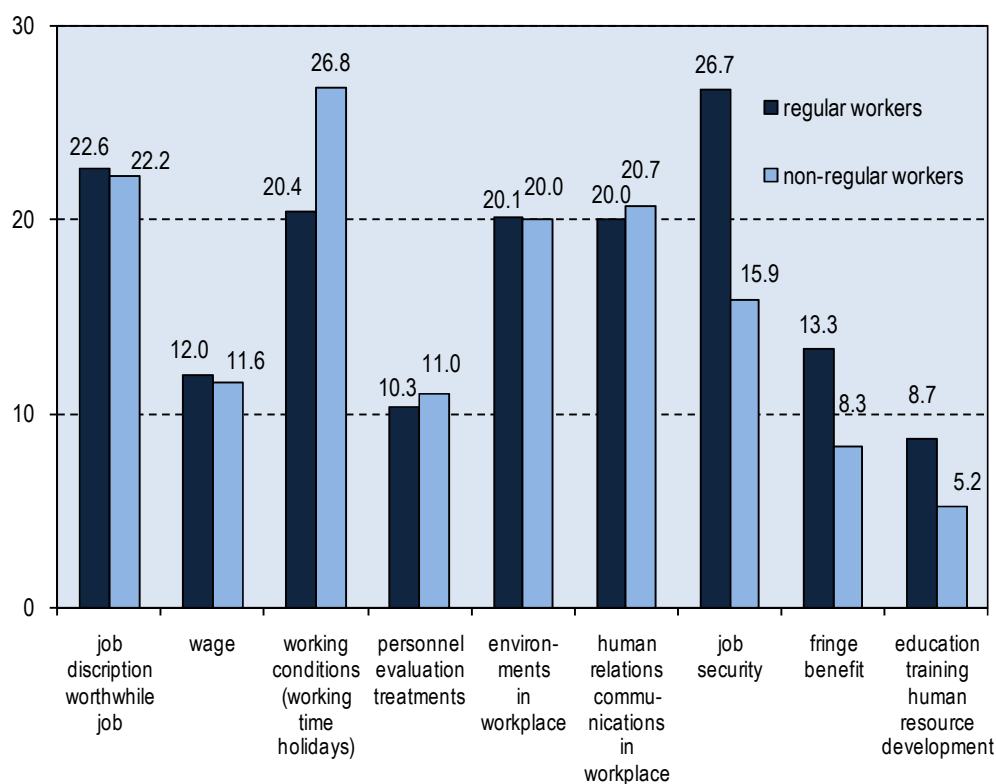
Source: Basic Survey on Human Resource Development (2007).

Figure 2. Job types for regular workers and non-regular workers (%)

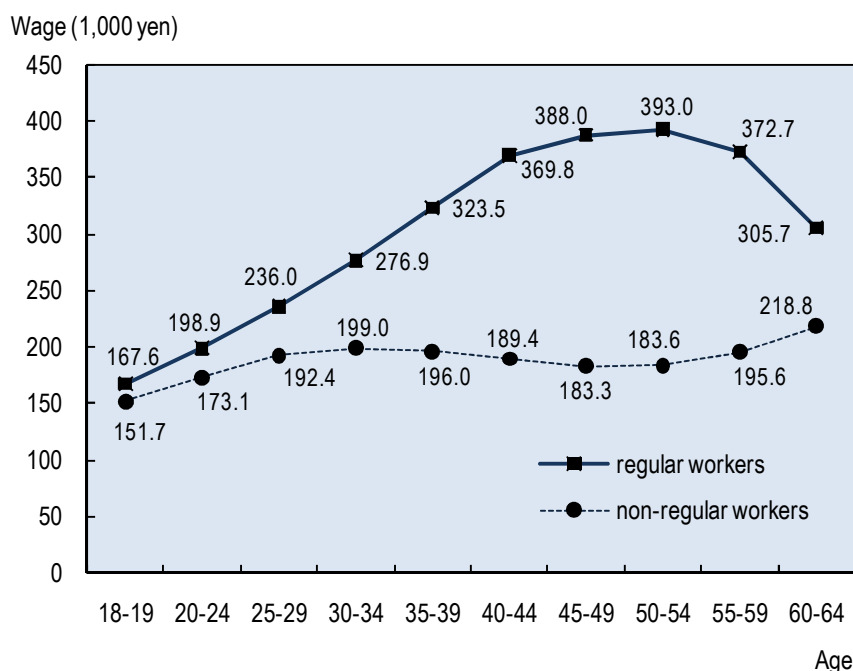


Source: Survey of the Diversification of Employment Status (2007).

Figure 3. Job satisfactions for regular workers and non-regular workers (%)



Source: Survey of the Diversification of Employment Status (2007).

Figure 4. Wage differential between regular workers and non-regular workers

Source: Basic Survey on Wage Structure (2007).

When one delves into monthly salary for regular workers and non-regular workers according to the Survey of the Diversification of Employment Status (2007), the monthly salary of non-regular workers is lower than that of regular workers, as shown in table 2. Thirty-nine per cent of regular workers earn 200,000-300,000 yen, 25.5 per cent of them earn 300,000-400,000 yen and 13.8 per cent of them earn 400,000-500,000 yen a month. In contrast to them, 40.5 per cent of non-regular workers earn fewer than 100,000 yen, 37.4 per cent of them earn 100,000-200,000 yen and 14.2 per cent of them earn 200,000-300,000 yen a month. Especially 51.7 per cent of female non-regular workers earn fewer than 100,000 yen a month. It is not decent wage. When one looks at monthly salary by the form of employment, there are differences among them. 60.3 per cent of part-time workers and 51.1 per cent of casual workers earn fewer than 100,000 yen, 49.7 per cent of contract workers earn 100,000-200,000 yen and 42.2 per cent of temporary agency workers earn 100,000-200,000 yen a month.

Because the majority of non-standard workforces are female, these differences between non-standard workers and standard workers mean those between men and women, namely gender issues at the same time, too. Similar to other industrialized countries, women in Japan often have part-time and temporary agency jobs, while men hold more of well-paid and secure one. For women, the outcome of this labour market segmentation is lower income, limited access to qualified jobs and fewer opportunities for vocational training or career development (Wirth, 2001).

The primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human rights (ILO, 1999). Four decent work components are rights at work, employment, social security and social dialogue (Ghai, 2002). Especially employment is a vital component of decent work (Ghai, 2005). Employment in the decent work paradigm refers not just to wage jobs, but to work of all kinds – self-employment, wage employment, work from home. It refers to full-time, part-time and casual work, and to work done by women, men and children (Ghai, 2006). For decent work to obtain, certain conditions must be satisfied. There should be adequate employment

opportunities for all those who seek work (Ghai, 2006). Work should yield a remuneration that meets the essential needs of the worker and family members.

First, this study analyses the underlying factors behind non-regular employment among Japanese women from decent work and gender perspectives.

Second, the study focuses special attention on temporary agency work among Japanese women as one type of non-regular employment in Japan.

Third, the study looks at female entrepreneurships as another emerging type of employment, discusses the case of a business run by a woman in the Information Technology (IT) sector, namely *Digimom Workers*, and examines how a woman overcame Japanese labour market barriers to entrepreneurship.

Lastly, the study discusses policies for decent work and gender, and suggests cultural interpretations for recent employment changes in Japan.

Female employment in Japan

Female employment in Japanese labour market

GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) of Japan ranks the 58th among 108 countries and GGI (Gender Gap Index) of it ranks the 98th among 130 countries, although HDI (Human Development Index) of it ranks the 8th among 179 countries in 2008. It means that in Japan the gap between men and women is big and the economic and political opportunities for women are not enough, although human developments are achieved. That is why this chapter focuses on female employment in Japan from decent work and gender perspectives.

Table 2. Monthly salary of workers by the form of employment (%)

	total	fewer than 100,000 yen	100,000- 200,000 yen	200,000- 300,000 yen	300,000- 400,000 yen	400,000- 500,000 yen	over 500,000 yen	no answer
regular worker (2007)	100.0	0.2	11.8	39.0	25.5	13.8	8.5	1.2
[regular worker] (2003)	[100.0]	[1.0]	[20.8]	[33.3]	[25.2]	[10.3]	[7.2]	[2.1]
male	100.0	—	4.6	34.0	30.3	18.0	11.4	1.7
female	100.0	0.8	30.2	51.8	13.2	2.8	1.2	0.0
non-regular worker (2007)	100.0	40.5	37.4	14.2	3.9	1.9	1.4	0.6
[non-regular worker] (2003)	[100.0]	[37.2]	[40.8]	[12.7]	[3.8]	[1.7]	[1.5]	[2.3]
male	100.0	21.2	35.9	25.3	8.2	5.1	3.6	0.7
female	100.0	51.7	38.4	7.6	1.4	0.1	0.1	0.6
contract employee	100.0	6.8	49.7	29.1	7.8	2.7	3.4	0.6
entrusted employee	100.0	7.4	41.5	32.7	10.5	3.9	2.8	1.2
transferred employee	100.0	0.8	8.4	21.6	23.1	20.0	24.9	1.2
temporary agency worker	100.0	8.8	42.2	36.8	8.8	1.8	1.0	0.6
registered temporary agency worker	100.0	13.6	49.6	32.2	3.3	0.3	0.4	0.6
permanent temporary agency worker	100.0	3.8	34.6	41.5	14.4	3.2	1.7	0.6
causal worker	100.0	51.1	38.8	7.3	1.0	0.4	0.4	1.0
part-time worker	100.0	60.3	32.5	4.6	0.9	1.0	0.1	0.5
others	100.0	16.6	56.2	20.3	4.2	1.0	0.6	0.9

Source: Survey of the Diversification of Employment Status (2007).

One of the recent changes in Japanese labour situations is female employment. The number of female employed persons in Japan, which accounted for 35.9 per cent of all employed persons in 1985, has gradually grown and then reached 42.3 per cent in 2009, according to the Labour Force Survey by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Regarding women in particular, education levels are rising. For example, the female advancement rate to higher education (including university and junior college) is increasing from 34.5 per cent in 1985 to 54.1 per cent in 2008.

However, the female labour force ratio in Japan develops in the M curve, because the portion that withdraws from the labour market to marry and raise the children remains high.

Only 46.4 per cent of women are in regular employment, compared with 80.8 per cent of regular male employees, with majority of female employees working in non-regular forms of employment as part-time workers, temporary agency workers, contract workers, and others, according to the Labour Force Survey by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Additionally the ratio of female managers in Japan is gradually increasing, but still 9.8 per cent in 2008, compared with 42.7 per cent in the U.S.

The study discusses why the majority of non-regular employees are female. Major factors for it are Japanese traditional role model for women, balancing work and family, human resource management and glass ceiling in Japanese companies. Each factor is discussed in the following sections.

Traditional role model for women

In Japan there still remains the deeply rooted social attitude or a so-called sexual division of labour that men should work to support the family, while women should stay at home to do housework. So women are largely excluded from corporate management due to cultural pressures forcing them to quit work once they marry.

Mackie (2003) traced the rise of feminism in Japan from its inception in the 1870s and notes Japanese women have had tenacity, perseverance and a dogged reluctance to simply exist within the constricting framework of the prevalent *ryōsai kenbo* ideology—that of the 'good wife and wise mother' espoused by educators, media, politicians, and the greater Japanese society. These low societal expectations of women continue to keep them in traditional roles regardless of their abilities, education, or desires.

For example, Japan's Meiji Constitution viewed people as subjects of the Emperor rather than as citizens of a nation. The Civil Code which governed all aspects of society remained in effect until after WWII and emphasized 'a wealthy country and a strong army' supported by these 'good wives and wise mothers' (Mackie, 2003). Women were only defined by their relation to men and were not allowed to participate in politics. Their access to education, however, helped to change their viewpoint regardless of their limited role in society. From the mid-1970s to the 1990s, according to Mackie (2003), feminist groups worked to reform the legal system, employment practices, and welfare systems.

Even though many agree Japan's greatest untapped human resource is highly motivated women wanting to utilize their intellect and creative power and to be recognized for it, the gender segmentation in labour market is still deeply rooted by traditional role model for women in Japan.

Balancing work and family

Balancing work and family is also a serious problem for working women in Japan. In Japan "the Law Concerning the Welfare of Workers Who Take Care of Children or Other

Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave” came into effect since 1995. According to this law, workers are entitled to a one-year leave of absence from their company for child care. The majority of individuals who have applied for child care leave under the law are female. Returning to the workplace after a year of child care leave is often very difficult for female as a regular worker due to the lack of support systems for balancing work and family, such as day care centers at the workplace or job re-training.

Even though they wish to continue to work balancing with family, they are obliged to work as part-time or temporary agency workers. Part-time work for women is often triggered by motherhood, while for men it occurs more often in conjunction with labour market entry or exit (Wirth, 2001). So the high percentage of women choose to or are obliged to work as part-time or non-regular workforces because of family responsibilities. That is why the majority of non-regular workforces in Japan are female.

Women in Japanese management: Two-track hiring system

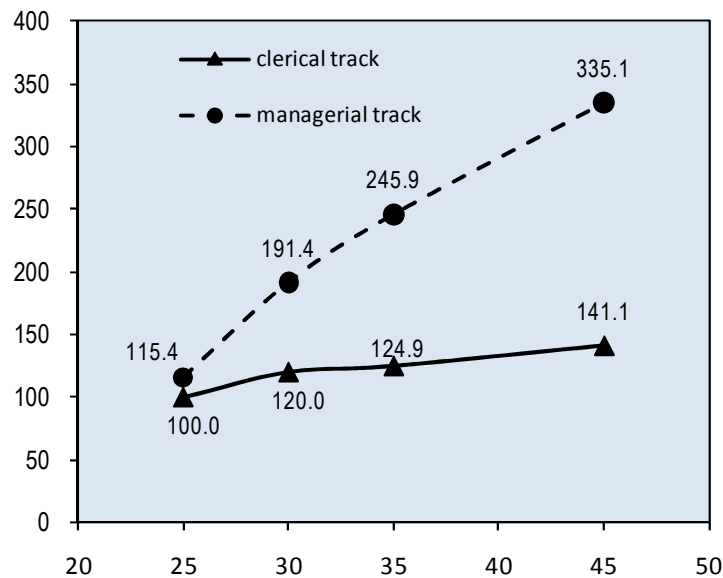
There are also barriers to women in Japanese management. The male-dominated society does not recognize women as equal in the ability to manage and own a business. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the average salary level for women in Japan in 2008 was 67.8 per cent that of men. This is very low, compared with 79.9 per cent in the U.S. in 2008, 79.4 per cent in Britain in 2006 and 88.0 per cent in France in 2006.

One reason for the wage differential between men and women in Japan is the two-track system in Japanese companies (Futagami, 2004). As the protracted economic slump prompts companies to shed the time-honored practices of lifetime employment and seniority-based wages, another victim of the cost-cutting axe is the two-track hiring system that has effectively kept women's wages lower than men's (Shimizu, 2003). The two-track system includes a fast career path for management and a slow career path for routine, clerical work. Although the tracks are ostensibly open to both sexes, men have dominated the fast track while women are usually found in the subordinate path. Companies have introduced the system to reduce labour costs by effectively keeping wages lower for non career-track employees (Futagami, 2004). Futagami surveyed wage patterns of companies in 2002 that introduced the two-track system and found that when workers were at age 25, there was little difference between the two tracks, but the gap widened with age. By age 45, the salaries of those on the managerial track were more than twice that of workers on the subordinate, clerical track, as shown in figure 5 (Futagami, 2004). From decent work and gender perspectives, female workers in subordinate career path cannot have decent work, decent wages, and vocational training and promotion opportunities. In this context the two-track system means the segregation between male and female within the firm from the starting point of hiring, and the indirect discrimination for female workers.

Rice paper ceiling

Even though women work in the management track, there are few opportunities for them. Women account for less than 0.8 per cent of CEOs of Japanese companies with shares listed on the stock market (Wiseman, 2005). And women represent only 5.74 per cent of top executives in registered Japanese companies in 2007, according to the research by the Teikoku Databank. Only 3 per cent of Japanese companies have a woman on their boards. In addition, Japan ranks below average in providing economic opportunities to women, according to a study by the World Economic Forum (Wiseman, 2005).

**Figure 5. Wages of clerical track and managerial track
(100 = wage of clerical track at age 25)**



Source: Futagami (2004).

Chambers (2007) refers to the sexism that remains fierce in Japan as the country's "rice paper ceiling" within the Japan's salary-man dominated corporate culture. Wiseman (2005) agrees women who are shut out of opportunities with traditional Japanese companies seek jobs with foreign firms in Japan. He further notes women in Japan have to fight harder than their male peers to be accepted in their positions.

While women in Japan appear to believe more strongly than their male counterparts in the importance of equal distribution and power (Stedham & Yamamura, 2004), Tipton (2000) suggests that inequality and gender discrimination remain pervasive in Japanese society due to the assumptions about the sexual division of labour. Differentiation by gender, especially in the power-distance dimension is more pronounced in Japan than in the United States.

Traditionally, Japanese companies hire men almost exclusively to fill career positions, reserving shorter-term work, mostly clerical tasks and tea serving, for women, who are widely known as "office ladies." Japanese businesses keep female employees on the lower levels of business careers. Regardless of a woman's qualifications, it is difficult to break into a career track and overcome entrenched biases. It is a serious problem from decent work and gender perspectives. Managers also do not like the interruption of childbearing from their female employees and often do not retain women after marriage and childbirth, although it seems to be changing recently. Indeed many Japanese women are excluded from corporate management and "regular" career tracks.

Female non-standard work in Japan

Female temporary agency workers in Japan

In Japan the number of temporary agency workers is increasing and 3,989,006 in 2009. Especially the number of registered temporary agency workers has dramatically increased from 87,370 in 1986 to 2,811,987 in 2009. Sales of temporary agency work service in 2009 were 7.789 trillion yen. Because the majority of registered temporary agency workers in Japan are

female, this section focuses special attention on female temporary agency workers as one type of female non-standard work in Japan.

A temporary agency worker means the worker who is employed by a temporary agency and works under the direction of a client company. Within this triangular relationship, a temporary agency not only holds the responsibility for the assignment of work to the temporary agency worker, but also controls the extrinsic terms of employment (e.g., wages and benefits), while the client company has a direct influence on the day-to-day work environment and supervision of the temporary agency worker (Gallagher & Futagami, 1998).

The reasons why temporary agency work has undergone considerable growth in Japan are various. On the supply side, reasons to become a temporary agency worker, based on the survey conducted to female temporary agency workers are 1) the opportunity to work at many workplaces, 2) to work without feeling bonds of human relations in one organization, 3) to utilize their professional skills and abilities, 4) flexibility in working times, 5) being able to better balance work and family life, 6) the chance to learn or acquire new skills, 7) earning additional household income, and 8) the desire to use temporary agency work as a means to transition toward permanent employment.

On the demand side, reasons why Japanese companies utilize temporary agency workers are 1) to utilize professional skills, 2) to cut off personnel expenses, 3) to obtain personnel with skills and talents for immediate response, 4) to respond to rush and slack periods during a workday or a week, and 5) to adjust to cyclical changes in the demand for the organization's goods or services.

Furthermore, the additional reason why temporary agency work has grown rapidly is deregulation in Japan. Since 1999 the utilization of temporary agency work in Japan has been basically applied to all occupations, although some arguments are discussed these days.

Education levels for women are rising and women with high skills and knowledge are recently increasing. However the high percentage of women in Japan are obliged to work as temporary agency workers because of prolonged economic slump, family responsibilities and so on. So this section focuses on high skilled female temporary agency workers.

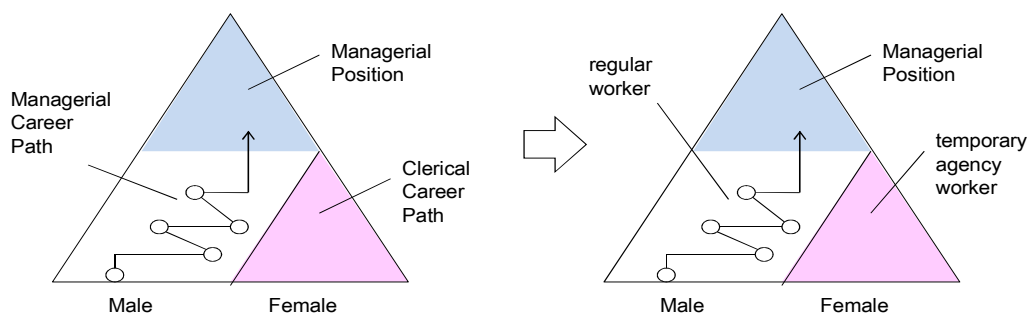
The two female skill groups are developed for the comparison, based on the survey conducted to female temporary agency workers. The female high skill group means the group of female temporary agency workers performing the jobs, which are rated as requiring higher levels of skill and responsibility. Included within this group are system engineers, programmers, translators and interpreters. The female low skill group means the group of female temporary agency workers performing the jobs, which are rated as requiring lower levels of skill and responsibility. Included within this group are general office workers, office workers in sales departments, receptionists and office automation operators.

A comparative analysis of the two female skill groups indicates no significant difference between the female high skill group and the female low skill group with regard to the level of commitment to the temporary agency, the client company and work. However the results indicate that a significant difference between the two female skill groups can be found with regard to the level of Job Focus. Job Focus is employee commitment or attachment to the job or type of work that they are performing on a daily basis. Job Focus is more specific in terms of ascertaining worker attitudes about their interest and attachment to the type of work that they are assigned to perform. Conceptually, the measure is designed to capture attachment to the job rather than commitment to work in general. Job Focus is one important indicator to measure decent work, because it shows an interest and an attachment to job. Female temporary agency workers performing high skilled jobs show significantly ($p < .01$) greater attachment or involvement in the type of work they are performing than is the case for the low skill group.

Even though female temporary agency workers are high-skilled, however, some say that they feel utilized as just alternatives for permanent, not as professionals, according to the interviews with them. They do not think that they have decent work, decent treatments, decent vocational training and decent wages, although their Job Focuses are high and their performances are good. The problem is Japanese management and its employment systems. After the Equal Employment Opportunity Law came into effect since 1986, many Japanese big companies introduced two-track employment systems, as you can see in the left side of figure 6. As discussed before, the two-track employment system includes a fast career path for management and a slow career path for routine, clerical work. Although the tracks are ostensibly open to both sexes, men have dominated the management career track while women are usually found in the subordinate clerical career path. Actually, Japanese companies have introduced the two track employment system to reduce labor costs by effectively keeping wages lower for clerical career-track employees, namely females (Futagami, 2004). Recently many Japanese companies accelerate to utilize female temporary agency workers as alternatives for the clerical female career paths in order to cut personnel expenses. The focal point of wage gap has just shifted from the gap between two tracks to the gap between regular workers and temporary agency workers, as shown in the right side of figure 6. In the case that female temporary agency workers are high-skilled, they feel so excluded from the core and also feel no chance to develop their skills and abilities and it is a serious problem from decent work and gender perspectives.

The high percentage of Japanese women are obliged to work as non-standard workforce, even though they are highly educated and skilled. Because Japanese companies have traditionally implemented vocational education and training in-house mainly for regular male workers, non-regular workers, the majority of which are female, have no chance to develop their abilities and skills. That is why it is serious from decent work and gender perspectives.

Figure 6. Gender segregation in Japanese companies



One solution is to encourage employers to prepare and facilitate the transition of career path from temporary agency work into permanent work. This is an important improvement to provide female temporary agency workers with many career route opportunities and options.

Another way to solve these situations, at the same time, is the equal treatment between temporary agency workers and permanent workers, especially in terms of vocational training. It is important for Japanese companies, government, and also communities to collaborate to educate and train not only standard workers, but also non-standard workers as professionals in

order to improve their skills and abilities from decent work and gender perspectives, because many highly educated and skilled women are forced to work as non-standard workforces.

Female entrepreneurs in Japan

This section looks at female entrepreneurs as another type of female non-standard work in Japan. Female entrepreneurs are emerging outside the traditional Japanese management systems of lifetime employment, seniority systems, enterprise unions, and a group-oriented, risk-adverse Japanese business culture. This section considers reasons why female entrepreneurs are emerging in Japan today from decent work and gender perspectives, and then discusses barriers and challenges facing them.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2007), the number of entrepreneurs in Japan is 5,909,700, as shown in table 3. Among them, 4,246,300 are self-employed and 1,663,400 are executive officers of companies. When one gives a snapshot of the share by gender, 82 per cent of them are male and 18 per cent of them are female. When one looks at a snapshot of the share by age, 37.1 per cent of them are older than 75 years old.

The number of entrepreneurs who started and established new businesses within five years is 541,000, as shown in table 4. When one delves further into them by industry, the most popular industries are service industry (26.6 per cent), wholesale and retail trade (15.8 per cent), and construction (12.8 per cent). For male entrepreneurs, the most popular industries are service industry (25.8 per cent), wholesale and retail trade (15.4 per cent) and construction (15.1 per cent). For female entrepreneurs, the most popular industries are service industry (30.2 per cent), wholesale and retail trade (18.0 per cent) and eating and drinking places, accommodations (17.2 per cent).

The industry specification coefficient of entrepreneurs means the rate by industry of entrepreneurs who started and established new business within five years divided by the rate by industry of all workers. The industry specification coefficients of entrepreneurs are high in real estate (2.6), service (2.0) and information and telecommunication (1.9), as shown in table 5. In these industries entrepreneurs are more likely to start new business than other industries. Especially in information and telecommunication industry, Japan holds great promise for entrepreneurs as an advanced IT nation today.

Table 3. Entrepreneurs by gender

(in 1,000, %)

Gender	Number			Rate		
	total number of entrepreneurs	self-employed	executive of company	total number of entrepreneurs	self-employed	executive of company
total	5,909.7	4,246.3	1,663.4	100.0	100.0	100.0
male	4,846.7	3,377.0	1,469.7	82.0	79.5	88.4
female	1,063.1	869.4	193.7	18.0	20.5	11.6

Source: The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2007).

Table 4. Entrepreneurs who start new businesses within five years by gender and by industry

(in 1,000, %)

Industry	Number			Rate		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
total number	541.0	449.8	91.2	100.0	100.0	100.0
agriculture	30.8	29.2	1.6	5.7	6.5	1.8
construction	69.0	67.9	1.1	12.8	15.1	1.2
manufacturing	20.0	17.1	2.9	3.7	3.8	3.2
information and communications	36.0	32.6	3.4	6.7	7.2	3.7
transport	22.3	20.9	1.4	4.1	4.6	1.5
wholesale and retail trade	85.6	69.2	16.4	15.8	15.4	18.0
real estate	22.1	20.7	1.4	4.1	4.6	1.5
eating and drinking places, accommodations	43.3	27.6	15.7	8.0	6.1	17.2
medical, health care and welfare	31.6	23.8	7.8	5.8	5.3	8.6
education, learning support	19.0	9.5	9.5	3.5	2.1	10.4
services not elsewhere classified	143.7	116.2	27.5	26.6	25.8	30.2

Source: The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2007).

While the Japanese economy lacked the necessary level of entrepreneurship, particularly by women, the reasons for the situations were rooted in the Japanese past history and culture. Within the Japanese culture and norms, it was so difficult particularly for women to obtain financial capitals from banks.

However, female entrepreneurs in Japan are now challenging the traditional barriers and the situations are slowly changing today. According to the 2007 report on Women and Entrepreneurship of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), the early-stage entrepreneurial activity of female is 5.22 per cent, while that of male is 3.47 per cent. In 2007 women are more active in starting a business than men, although the early-stage entrepreneurial activity in Japan is still low in the world.

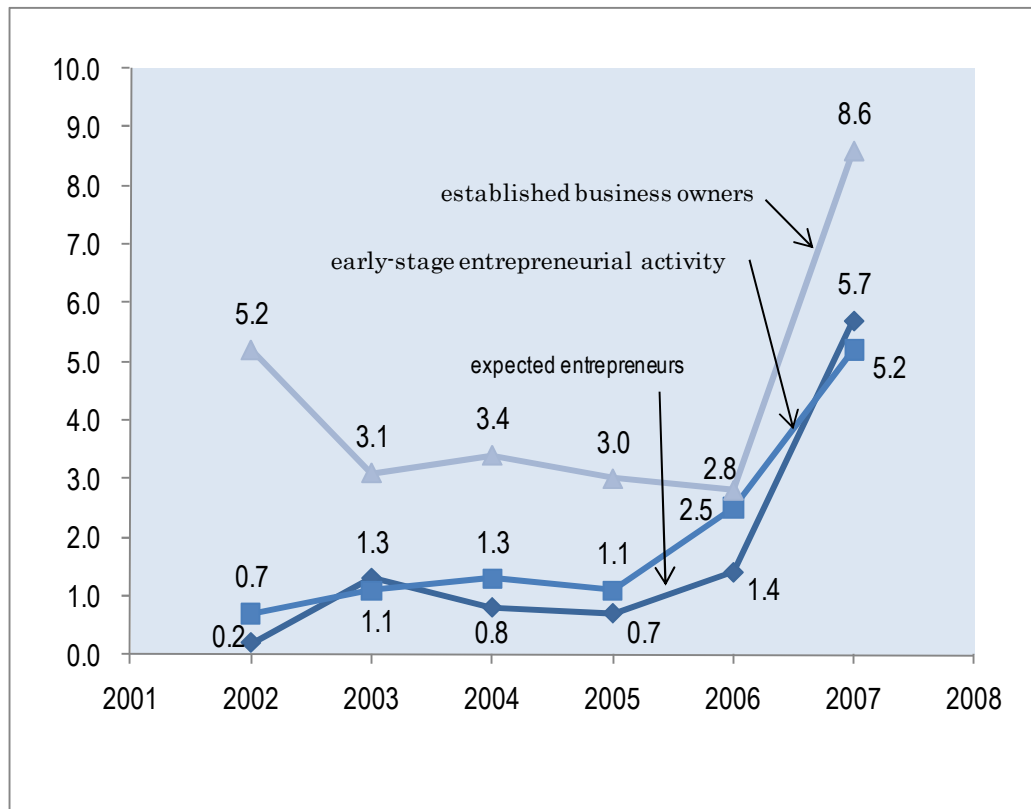
When one looks at female entrepreneurial activities over time, the rates of female expected entrepreneurs who plan to start a business, the female early-stage entrepreneurial activity and female established business owners are increasing from 2002 to 2007, as shown in figure 7.

Table 5. Entrepreneurs who start new businesses within five years by gender and by industry and industry specification coefficient of entrepreneurs

(%)

Industry	Rate of all workers (A)			Rate of entrepreneurs who start new businesses within five years (B)			Industry specification coefficient (C)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
total number	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	—	—	—
agriculture	3.8	3.7	3.9	5.7	6.5	1.8	1.5	1.8	0.5
construction	8.3	12.1	3.0	12.8	15.1	1.2	1.5	1.2	0.4
manufacturing	17.6	20.7	13.3	3.7	3.8	3.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
information and communications	3.4	4.3	2.3	6.7	7.2	3.7	1.9	1.7	1.7
transport	5.0	7.0	2.2	4.1	4.6	1.5	0.8	0.7	0.7
wholesale and retail trade	17.4	14.8	20.9	15.8	15.4	18.0	0.9	1.0	0.9
real estate	1.6	1.6	1.5	4.1	4.6	1.5	2.6	2.8	1.0
eating and drinking places accommodations	5.3	3.7	7.4	8.0	6.1	17.2	1.5	1.7	2.3
medical, health care and welfare	9.0	3.6	16.4	5.8	5.3	8.6	0.6	1.5	0.5
education, learning support	4.5	3.5	5.9	3.5	2.1	10.4	0.8	0.6	1.8
services not elsewhere classified	13.1	12.9	13.4	26.6	25.8	30.2	2.0	2.0	2.3

Source: The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2007).

Figure 7. Trends on female entrepreneurial activity in Japan

Source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM).

Especially IT offers opportunities for female entrepreneurs to overcome the lingering institutional barriers in Japan. Given the Internet penetration and its growth in Japan, women have been encouraged to start e-businesses and this holds great promise for female entrepreneurs.

This section therefore profiles success factors and challenges of female IT business, namely *Digimom* (or “Digital Mom”) *Workers*, which was founded by Ms. Teramoto in 1999 and specializes in Internet projects, particularly webpage design and systems development, based on the interviews with her.

The gender segmentation in labour market is still deeply rooted by traditional role model for women in Japan, as discussed before. For women in particular, entrepreneurship nowadays makes sense in such situations.

Digimom Workers is a good case study why a female entrepreneur overcame the Japanese labour market barriers which were specific to females. Success factors of *Digimom Workers* are the followings.

The first success factor is the choice of an Internet business. Because the Internet business is a lower-cost start-up requiring lower start-up capital funding, it is easier for a female entrepreneur to establish this type of business. Internet businesses in general therefore hold great promise for female entrepreneurs in Japan.

The second success factor is hiring female employees in the community. Within the traditional Japanese management systems of lifetime employment, seniority systems, enterprise unions, and a group-oriented, risk-adverse Japanese business culture, many female workers cannot have decent work regardless of their high qualifications and motivations. *Digimom Workers* utilizes untapped and highly talented and motivated females and this has led to the

company's success. Hiring female employees was a key way *Digimom Workers* overcame the labour market barrier that were specific to most Japanese female entrepreneurs who cannot hire the best workers, because they were already employees in large companies.

The last success factor is the collaboration with community networks. *Digimom* was originally an activity group within the community for local mothers and a community network. Ms. Teramoto networks not only with Internet-related groups, but also with other peripheral fields within the community. Networking has been a key to the firm's success.

However there are still barriers and challenges for female entrepreneurs in Japan from decent and gender perspectives. One point to note is, as the business grows, *Digimom Workers* will need more human and financial capitals, but it will be difficult to attract them within traditional practices of Japan. Therefore such women-owned businesses tend to be smaller in scale and it will be a limit to female entrepreneurs in Japan, as Schweitzer (2007) agrees that women face entry barriers to entrepreneurship in general and tend to start businesses that do not have high demands for both human and financial capitals because they lack access to them. Financial supports for women, for example, venture capitals for female entrepreneurs in Japan are needed as soon as possible, because the sustainable economic development does not occur without female entrepreneurship.

Another important point to note is the lack of vocational education and training systems for self-employed, because Japanese companies traditionally educated and trained employees mainly in-house. Ms. Teramoto, the founder of *Digimom Workers* utilizes her strength of nine years work experiences in the former company as a firmware programmer. After start-up she had to learn computer skills on her own from the seminar in the field of IT, but actually it is very difficult for working women to develop her skills on her own. So vocational education systems and the government incubators must provide female nascent entrepreneurs with the training opportunities and motivation. It is important for Japanese companies, government and also communities to develop human resource development systems and vocational training programs for female entrepreneurs from decent work and gender perspectives.

Conclusion

Policies for decent work and gender

Employment patterns are rapidly changing in Japan, and the traditional practice of lifetime employment is less and less the norm. Non-regular workforces, including temporary employment and other jobs which offer limited career prospects, are expanding fast. Importantly, women are disproportionately represented in non-regular employment. However, non-regular workers actually have serious problems: Other things equal, non-regular workers have lower wages, less job security and more limited training opportunities than their regular counterparts.

One of the most serious problems for non-regular workers is insecurity of employment from decent work perspective. Because of the prolonged economic slump after financial crisis in 2008, Japanese companies are forced to lay-off non-regular workers such as temporary agency workers which have effectively kept their wages lower than regular workers. Recently Japanese companies notice the sudden termination of the contract to temporary agency workers and this leads to political debates. According to the estimate of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2009) during the time from October 2008 until March 2010, 4,537 Japanese companies lay off 250,291 non-regular workers, including 145,044 temporary agency workers (58.0 per cent), 57,476 contract workers (23.0 per cent), and so on. The contract is usually renewed every year and the expectation of the temporary agency worker for renewal of the contract is very high, so the sudden termination of the contract could lead to troubles.

The Japanese government is now responding to these serious problems on non-regular workforces. Concerning to temporary agency workers, Act for Securing the Proper Operation of Worker Dispatching Undertakings and Improved Working Conditions for Dispatched Workers was enacted in 1985, and some revisions were already made to the Worker Dispatching Act in 1996, 1999, and 2003. The revised Worker Dispatching Act is now sent to the Diet to be deliberated in 2010. Temporary agency worker is not employed directly by a client company, but by a temporary agency, so the problem is complicated. So the clear rule for employment termination in this reform is necessary from decent work perspectives. In the revised Worker Dispatching Act, decent wages and decent vocational training for temporary agency workers are suggested and the balanced treatment between temporary agency workers and permanent workers are also discussed. The new reform encourages employers to prepare and facilitate the transition of career path from temporary agency workers into permanent workers, which is called 'Temp to Perm' from decent work and gender perspectives, because the majority of registered temporary agency workers, namely women are forced to work as non-standard workforces. The government is also discussing that only high skilled registered temporary agency workers such as system engineers and translators are allowed to be dispatched. Low skilled temporary agency workers in the manufacturing industry are prohibited to be dispatched in the revised Worker Dispatching Act, because low skilled temporary agency workers are utilized only in order to cut off personnel costs and their employments are not secure. Concerning to part-time workers, Act on Improvement, etc. of Employment Management for Part-Time Workers (Part-Time Workers Act) was enacted in 1993 and the revised Part-Time Workers Act gets into effect since 2008. The most appealing idea of this reform is the balanced treatment between part-time workers and full-time workers in terms of wages, vocational training and welfare facilities. According to the Total Survey on Part-Time Workers in 2006, the number of part-time workers is 9.56 million and 74.4 per cent of the total are female. So this balanced treatment between part-time workers and full-time workers means one between female and male workers at the same time. This reform also encourages employers to prepare and facilitate the transition of career path from part-time workers into full-time workers. This is very important improvement to provide female non-standard workers with many career route opportunities and options.

Discussions and implications

To conclude, cultural interpretations for recent employment changes in Japan are discussed.

The first is changes in sense of work among younger workers. Younger workers in Japan have different values and their senses of work are now changing. In contrast with traditional sense of lifetime employment, many female temporary agency workers want to work without feeling bounds of human relations in one organization and to work at many places, as discussed in this study. They prefer psychological success to promotion within one organization. These days over 30 per cent of new university graduates quit their jobs and separate from the company within 3 years. Freeter and NEET are also increasing, and the number of them is over 2 million in 2005, according to the Labour Force Survey of the Statistics Bureau. However these younger workers who do not work as permanent cannot have decent vocational education and training opportunities, because Japanese companies have traditionally implemented in-house lifelong vocational education and training mainly for regular workers. So it is a serious problem in the future for younger workers not to have decent vocational education and training. Japanese companies, government and also communities should provide younger non-regular workers with decent vocational education and training opportunities for better work.

The second is balancing work and family. Many female temporary agency workers which make up a very large share of registered temporary agency workforces in Japan think that they

want to balance between work and family, as discussed in this study. Balancing work and family is a challenge for working women, due to the lack of support systems and the negative and deeply rooted social attitudes toward working women in Japan. With limited child care available to many talented Japanese women, they are compelled to quit their standard works to stay with their families, although many want to work and utilize their talents. Start-up business like *Digimom Workers* is a good workplace for balancing work and family. It is because a female entrepreneur can work on her own, at her discretion, and with flexibility that attracted her to start-up business and balance work and family, although she becomes to handle additional challenging responsibilities at work as the business grows. They want to be a professional in the workplace and a partner and a mother in the family, and a member of society in the communities. They want to feel a sense of fulfillment in the workplace, family and community. So it is indispensable for Japanese companies, government and also communities to encourage female to balance work and family, and to develop their talents from decent work and gender perspectives.

The third is if female non-standard workers decide to work voluntarily or not. Some female temporary agency workers are forced to quit the former company as permanent and work as temporary agency workers involuntarily because of company's restructuring or husband's transfer. According to the interview with them, there are some evidences to suggest that those working involuntarily are less focused on jobs and do not have decent work, decent wages and decent job security. Flexibility in the labour market is important, however, for many increasing flexibility in the labour market is synonymous with decreasing security in the labour market, because it just might mean a relaxation in the regulation of hiring and firing and in flexible forms of employment, such as temporary agency jobs and other forms of 'atypical' jobs yielding less securities (Stanford and Vosko, 2004). Especially those working as temporary agency workers involuntarily do not have decent works, decent wages and decent job security, then it is a serious problem. So 'flexicurity' is an appealing concept which suggests that two dimensions of flexibility and security are not contradictory (European Commission, 2006) and offers a way to restore a positive link between competitiveness and social protection.

The last is Japanese companies' Human Resource Management (HRM) and the vocational training systems. Even though female temporary agency workers are high-skilled, some say that they feel utilized as just alternatives for permanent, not as professionals, according to the interviews with them. In the case that female temporary agency workers are high-skilled, they feel so excluded from the core and also feel no chance to develop their skills and abilities and it is a serious problem from decent work and gender perspectives. One solution is to encourage employers to prepare and facilitate the transition of career path from non-standard work into permanent work. This is an important improvement to provide female non-regular workers with many career route opportunities and options. Another way to solve these situations, at the same time, is the equal treatment between regular workers and non-regular workers especially in terms of vocational training, because many Japanese high skilled and educated women are obliged to work as non-standard workforces. In the case of female entrepreneurs, vocational training programs and financial supports like venture capitals for women are needed as soon as possible, because increasing economic independence via female entrepreneurship can be a way to sustain the Japanese economy. It is important for Japanese companies, government, and also communities to collaborate to develop vocational training systems for not only standard workers, but also non-standard workers from decent work and gender perspectives.

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