

How Labor Unions Are Perceived by Members and Union Disassociation in Japan*

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Summary

This paper describes how Japanese are dissociating from labor unions and examines the reasons why. This paper first describes how Japanese are gradually shifting away from being actively involved in labor unions, and second, it examines the factors behind this trend. It is thought that human relationships in Japan have become partial, formalized, and distant, but such changes are not determining factors in the disassociation from labor unions. This paper identifies how the Japanese perception of labor unions has changed and how the Japanese appreciation of unions has fallen regarding union effectiveness, reliability, existence, and necessity. Subsequently, this paper hypothesizes that employees no longer feel labor unions provide for their needs and therefore they no longer perceive them as necessary. In spite of these perceptions, labor unions have proven to be effective according to studies on the effects of unions. Thus, this paper concludes that labor unions in Japan must reexamine their existing approaches to education and public relations with employees regarding their activities and that they must somehow convey the message that they are indeed necessary and effective in preserving and improving the workplace and livelihood of employees.

Background

It has been known for a while that Japanese workers are disassociating themselves from labor unions. According to Akihiro Ishikawa, the indifference toward labor unions by young workers in particular began prior to 1970 (Ishikawa 1975, 114). In recent surveys of members of the Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union and the Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions, their disassociation from the unions was identified as problematic (Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union 2000, 17; Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers Unions 2002, 89-91). There are

* This report is a revision of Mabuchi (2006).

various possible reasons why workers do not actively participate in unions. This report focuses on worker attitudes, particularly how they view relationships with others in the workplace and how they perceive unions.

The data referenced in this report are national opinion polls based on random sampling methods and surveys of labor union members which were conducted by major industrial organizations in Japan.

The former includes (1) “*Nihonjin no Kokuminsei Chousa* [Survey on national characteristics of Japanese]” by the Institute of Statistical Mathematics (hereafter referred to as the “ISM survey”), (2) *Nihonjin no Ishiki Chosa* [Survey on value orientation of Japanese] by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) Broadcasting Culture Research Institute (hereafter referred to as the “NHK survey”), (3) *Yomiuri Shimbun Zenkoku Yoron Chosa* [Yomiuri Shimbun Poll] by The Opinion Poll Division of the Tokyo Head Office of the Yomiuri Shimbun (hereafter referred to as the “Yomiuri poll”), and (4) *Roshi Komyunikeshon Chosa—Kojin Chosa* [Survey of labor-management communications—Individual Survey] by the Ministry of Labour. The latter includes surveys of union members regularly conducted by the Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union, the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions, and the Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and the Allied Industries Workers Unions.

There are valid reasons for using opinion polls as well as union member surveys. Examining worker disassociation from unions requires long-term data with identical questions, options, and survey methods. However, examination of various surveys of union members conducted by Japanese labor unions showed that were only a few survey items that meet these criteria, which is why opinion polls were selected as the next-best choice. Of course, the published results of the opinion polls do not show if the respondents are union members and they are not categorized by whether or not the respondents are workers. It should be noted that the results of the opinion polls (i.e. the NHK survey, the ISM survey, and the Yomiuri poll) examined in this paper are data collected from Japanese men and women 20 years or older.¹

¹ Ratio of workers is approximately 60 percent in the NHK survey and approximately 65 percent in the ISM survey.

1. Disassociation of Japanese Worker from Labor Unions

Figure 1 summarizes the chronological trends in organizing and flexing collective action of Japanese in the workplace, community, and politics in the NHK survey.

The survey questions listed below investigate organizing and flexing collective action at the workplace. The responses for, “We create labor unions together and participate in activities toward better labor conditions” show a long-term trend of worker disassociation from unions.

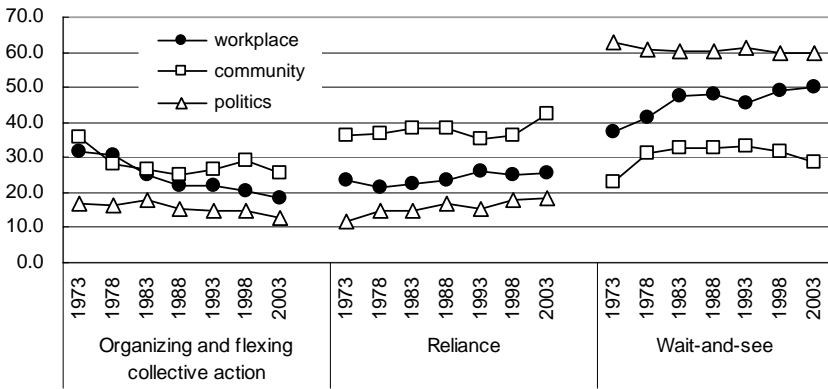
Question 18 (Workplace): Suppose you are hired by a recently established company. If, after a while, workers begin to have strong complaints regarding labor conditions such as wages and working hours, what would you do? Please choose from the following options:

1. Since it is my new workplace and labor conditions will probably improve little by little, I will just wait and see how things go. [Wait-and-see]
2. I will ask my boss to improve the labor conditions. [Reliance]
3. I will create a labor union with others and work for better labor conditions. [Action]
4. Others
5. Don't know, No response

Figure 1 clearly shows that those who choose to join a labor union as a solution to workplace issues was 31.5 percent in 1973, declining to 18.2 percent in 2003. (● in the figure indicates [Action])

On the one hand, organizing and flexing collective action in the community gives a different perspective. The NHK survey asks, “If there is a pollution problem that would harm your daily life, what would you do?” In response to this, the ratio of respondents who selected “I will call for a public movement to solve the problem,” which indicates an aggressive attitude equivalent to the organization of a labor union in the workplace, increased continuously from 1993 to 1998 although it had decreased from 1973 to 1988. This ratio showed a slight decline in 2003, but the number of those who preferred to “wait and see” did not increase as observed in workplace issue question; after 1998 there was also an increase in the number of respondents who selected “I will ask local influential people, city officials, or representatives to solve the problem.” The ratio of those who said they would instigate a public movement was 25.5

Figure 1. Chronological trends of organizing and flexing collective action in the workplace, community, and politics (%)



Note: Created by the author using the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute (2003, 61, 66, 68).

percent in 2003, which is 7.3 percentage points higher than the 18.2 percent who gave the equivalent response for the workplace (“Will create a labor union”). This shows that Japanese are clearly more assertive in tackling community issues rather than labor issues, although this aggressiveness is not extreme.

For questions in the workplace, the ratio of the most passive approach, “Will wait and see”, increased, reaching 50.2 percent in 2003 compared to 37.2 percent in 1973 (● in figure indicates [Wait-and-see]). The response “Will ask my boss,” which is between passiveness and aggressiveness was 23.6 percent in 1973, and staying in the 20 percent range at 25.5 percent in 2003. (● in figure indicates [Reliance]).

These survey results included non-workers, since it does not publish the data from workers only. Still, it is clear that disassociation from unions has been increasing continuously since 1973. These results also indicate that people are disengaging themselves from labor union activities, but not from organizational activities overall.

2. Partial, Formalized, and Distant Relationships in Japan

How have Japanese begun to disassociate themselves from labor unions? It has been often pointed out that human relationships in the Japanese workplace have become distant. Most labor unions in Japan are corporate unions, and many

major companies have unions with a union shop system, which means that workplace relationships reflect labor unions. Therefore, one can hypothesize that distant relationships in the Japanese workplace have caused workers to disassociate themselves from labor unions.

Hypothesis 1: Distant relationships in the workplace → Disassociation from unions in corporate union system

If this hypothesis is true, we can assume that distant relationships in the community could cause an indifference towards organized public movements in the community. As it was discussed in the previous section, the ratio of the willingness to create a labor union is lower than that of the willingness to initiate a public movement. Therefore, one could assume that human relationships in the workplace have become more distant than those in the community, however; when the ways Japanese actually perceive relationships in the workplace and in the community are compared, this assumption, as well as Hypothesis 1, is contradicted—this point will be investigated in greater detail below.

The first question to be examined is if one would choose a company with a good salary or a family-like ambience. Table 1 summarizes the chronological trend of the responses to this question in the ISM survey.²

Table 1. Popular types of company for Japanese (%)

	Good salary	Family-like ambience	Others	Don't know
1973	21	74	1	4
1978	18	78	1	3
1993	30	65	1	4
1998	34	62	1	3
2003	44	53	1	3

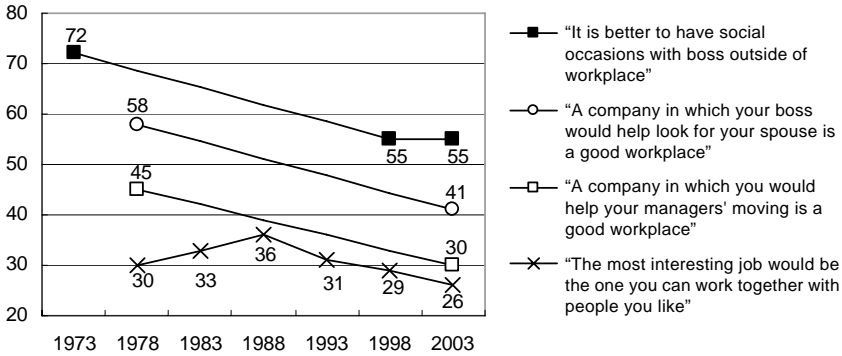
Note: Created by the author using the Institute of Statistical Mathematics (2004, 74).

In 1973, a “family-like ambience” accounted for 74 percent of the responses, while “good salary” was only 21 percent; however, “family-like ambience” has declined continuously since 1993, dropping to 53 percent in 2003. On the other hand, “good salary” has shown a definite increase, reaching 44 percent in 2003.

² This item was not included in surveys conducted in 1983 and 1988.

Figure 2 shows the number of people who value good relationships with their colleagues and managers.

Figure 2. Changes in relationships in the workplace (%)



Note: Created by the author using the Institute of Statistical Mathematics (2004, 73, 75, 76, 103).

The number of respondents saying that it was better to have social activities with one's managers outside the workplace was 72 percent in 1973, but this number decreased to 55 percent in 1988 and 2003. In 1978, the number of respondents saying a company in which they would help their managers moves is a good workplace was 58 percent, but this dropped to 41 percent by 2003. Also in 1978, 45 percent of the respondents said a company in which their manager would help them look for a spouse was a good workplace, but only 30 percent said so in 2003. The percentage of respondents saying the most interesting job for them would be one where they could work with people they liked reached its peak in 1988 at 36 percent, but this has since declined continuously, dropping to 26 percent in 2003.

These results show that relationships in the workplace are weakening. For many Japanese, the workplace is not a "commune" where workers share the same interests and work in a friendly atmosphere, but it has become a place where individual workers are there to earn a wage.

The NHK survey seems to indicate this as well. Figure 3 shows the chronological trend of responses from 1973 to 2003 on preferable relationships in the workplace, community, and relatives. Below are several of the questions from the survey (NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute 2003, 59, 61,

65):

Question 17 (Relationships: Workplace): Which type of relationship do you prefer with your colleagues: Choose your response from the list:

1. Confined to work only [Formal relation]
2. Chatting and being social after work [Partial relation]
3. Frequently consulting and helping each other [Comprehensive relation]
4. Other
5. Don't know, no response

Question 31 (Relationships: Neighborhood): The following list describes different types of relations with neighbors. Which type of relationship do you prefer with your neighbors? Choose your response from the list, regardless of your actual relationship with your neighbors:

1. Greet when meeting each other [Formal relation]
2. Occasional informal chatting [Partial relation]
3. Frequently consulting and helping each other [Comprehensive relation]
4. Other
5. Don't know, no response

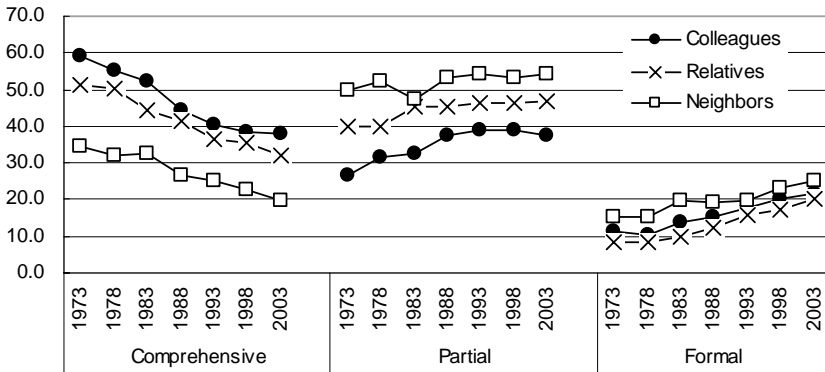
Question 9 (Relationships: Relatives): Which type of relationship do you prefer with your relatives? Choose your response from the list:

1. Practice basic greetings and other basic obligations [Formal relation]
2. Visit each other informally [Partial relation]
3. Frequently consulting and helping each other [Comprehensive relation]
4. Other
5. Don't know, no response

As Figure 3 shows, the percentages indicate that comprehensive relationships in the workplace, among relatives, and in the community are declining, while partial and formal relationships are increasing. From 1973 to 2003, the largest decrease in comprehensive relationships was observed among “colleagues,” falling 21.6 percentage points; “Relatives” dropped 19.0 percentage points, and “neighbors” fell 14.9 percentage points.

To the Japanese, in the areas of workplace, community, and relatives, the ideal types of relationships have become partial, casual, and formal. The figure,

Figure 3. Ideal relationships (%)



Note: Created by the author using the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute (2003, 59, 61, 65).

however, shows that relationships in the workplace have always been valued more highly than those within the community. In short, although relationships at work have not necessarily become weaker than those in the community, labor unions still receive less support than public movements.

Thus, it can be concluded that the factors leading to disassociation from labor unions are not human relationships. In the next section we will examine how workers perceive labor unions and what the factors may be.

3. The Perception of Labor Unions by Their Members

If union members believe that union activities are fully systemized and provide a social function, it is natural that there would be many members who believe they do not need to be actively involved in the union; subsequently, one can hypothesize that their disassociation from the union is a “free rider” issue.

Hypothesis 2: Systemization of labor unions → “Free rider” disassociation from unions

If Hypothesis 2 were true, then workers would highly value union activities and a large proportion of the union members would acknowledge the need for the union; unions would have a *raison d’etre* in the eyes of the workers.

On the other hand, it can be hypothesized that, contrary to Hypothesis 2, since the number of union members who think labor unions do not help improve or preserve their own work conditions or society has increased, the number of

union members who do not want to actively participate in their union has also increased.

Hypothesis 3: Dysfunction of Labor Unions → Decreased Willingness to Participate → Disassociation from Unions

If Hypothesis 3 is true, the appreciation of union members of their labor union would show a declining trend and the number of those who acknowledge the necessity of labor unions would decrease; furthermore, workers would no longer think labor unions had a reason to exist as an organization.

The following sections of this report investigate which hypothesis, Hypothesis 2 or 3, is the better founded.

3-1. Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Labor Unions

(1) Perceptions Based on National Opinion Polls

How many people believe that labor unions are useful for workers? How has this number changed over time? The results of these questions from several national opinion polls, the Yomiuri poll, the survey of the Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union survey, and the survey of the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions, are shown below.

The poll by The Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper asked questions about the image of major corporations, government, and labor unions (Prime Minister's Office of Cabinet Public Relations, ed 1981, 539f; 1986, 501; 1991, 526f). According to the poll, the image of labor unions as being “useful” fell below 20 percent from 1979 to 1984 and remained at the same level in 1989. The image of being “not useful” also decreased from 1979 to 1984, showing further a decline in 1989 to approximately 10 percent. This indicates that the effectiveness of labor unions has become less impressive and that their presence has become less visible.³

(2) Perceptions by Members of the Japanese Electrical, Electronic & Information Union

According to the survey conducted by the Japanese Electrical, Electronic & Information Union of its members in 1994, 68.5 percent of the respondents said the union was useful in improving labor conditions, etc. (16.0 percent responded, “Yes,” and 52.5 percent responded, “Probably”); 26.6 percent said

³ Less presence of unions will be discussed in the next section.

the union was not useful. This shows that the perception by the majority is positive; however, most of the responses were “Probably,” and therefore indicates only a passive positiveness (Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union 1995, 195).

(3) Perceptions by Members of the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Union

According to the survey of the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Union, in 1996, only 14.2 percent of the respondents said the union played a major role in improving labor conditions, in 2000, this figure was 14.3 percent.⁴ In 1992, the percentage of respondents who thought the union performed its social role, together with the combination of the responses above and thought the union had a certain level of influence, was 77.1 percent, but this fell to 60.6 percent in 1996 and to 59.9 percent in 2000. This decline indicates that the number of the union members who think the union contributes to the improvement of labor conditions has been declining gradually. As Table 2 shows, the number of union members who value the influence of the union on social welfare and volunteerism, community issues, and on the demand for policies and systems, increased from 1996 to 2000.⁵ As previously discussed, however, the workplace has become merely a “place to earn a wage,” and the perception by workers that the union is ineffective at improving their labor conditions must have a significant influence on their disassociation from the labor union.

Table 2. Perceptions of the union by men/technical union members of the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers (%)

	1992	1996	2000
Improvement of labor conditions such as wages or work hours	77.1	60.6	59.9
Demand for policies and systems	51.7	36.9	41.1
Suggestions for policies on industry and corporate management	—	33.3	37.5
Statement and action for politics	34.8	24.7	28.9
Commitment to community issue	49.6	36.5	44.8
Social welfare and volunteering	42.7	32.3	48.5

Source: Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions (2001, 115).

⁴ The result of 1992 survey is unclear.

⁵ Described in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 of Nakamura and Research Institute for Advancement of Living Standards, ed. (2006).

3-2. Trust in Labor Unions

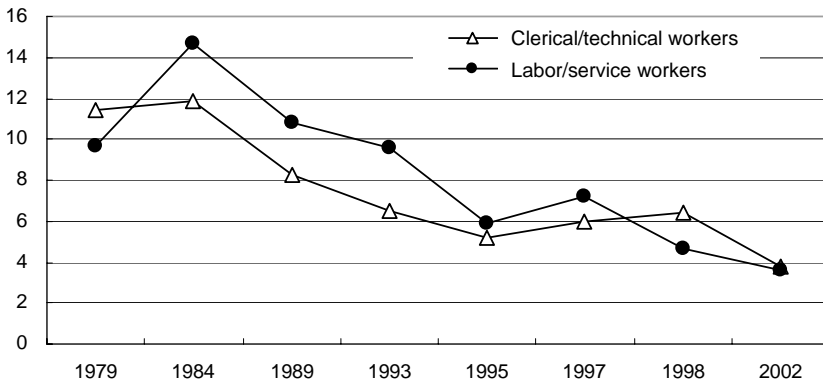
(1) National Opinion Poll Results

The Yomiuri Poll included questions on trust and distrust of labor unions and ten or more other types of groups and public organizations. Figure 4 shows the transition of trust of labor unions by clerical/technical workers and labor/service workers.⁶

Figure 4 shows that the percentage of labor unions thought to be a reliable group or organization is consistently low, and it is declining further; however, at least until 1989, the number of those who distrust unions did not increase; it actually decreased.

When asked separately about the image of labor unions, the percentage of respondents who said “Don’t know” or did not give a response dropped from 31.3 percent in 1979 to 27.9 percent in 1984, then rose to 32.3 percent in 1989. This means that the sense of trust rose and distrust fell between 1979 and 1984, but from 1984 to 1989, the awareness of labor unions became less visible, indicating that more people found it difficult to judge if they could or could not trust unions.

Figure 4. Trust of labor unions (%)



Note 1: Created by the Author using the Yomiuri Poll (Opinion Poll Division of the Tokyo Head Office of The Yomiuri Shimbun, n.d.) conducted by the Opinion Poll Division of the Tokyo Head Office of The Yomiuri Shimbun.

Note 2: Received permission from the Opinion Poll Division of the Tokyo Head Office of The Yomiuri Shimbun for quoting the results.

⁶ Questions regarding distrust are included only until 1989.

(2) Trust in Labor Unions by Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union Members

The survey conducted by the Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union on its members in 1994 included questions on the reliability of unions. When asked if the union could be relied upon when one was subjected to a poor job transfer, 27.4 percent said “Yes,” while 56.5 percent answered “No.” In the face of job layoffs or corporate restructuring, 29.5 percent said they could rely on the union for protection, but 53.8 percent said they could not. This indicates that at least more than half of the union members do not believe the union can be relied on regarding job transfers and employment adjustment issues.

3-3. Presence of Labor Unions

The Yomiuri Poll asked respondents to identify organizations which are strongly related to their daily lives. The organizations included labor unions, medical institutions, universities, JR (formerly Japan National Railway), the Self Defense Force, courts, the National Diet, city offices, major corporations, and the Japan Agricultural Cooperative. Although unfortunately this question was included only in the 1984 and 1989 surveys, it is useful in this investigation because it provides one of the few resources that directly identify the Japanese awareness of labor unions.

The ratio of respondents who said labor unions were strongly related to their daily lives was 13.1 percent in 1984, decreasing to 10.7 percent in 1989. For both years, approximately only 10 percent believed unions were strongly related to their lives, and the trend was decreasing. Over the five-year period from 1984 to 1989, the number of males comprising the responses above dropped from 19.7 percent to 15.2 percent, females dipped from 8.0 percent to 6.9 percent. (Opinion Poll Division of Tokyo Head Office of Yomiuri Shimbun, no date).

Table 3 summarizes the results for both years by age grouped in five-year brackets. The ratio of respondents that said labor unions were strongly related to their lives decreased for all age groups, except for the late 30s group, which showed 1.7 percent increase.

A breakdown of the declining trend for this response by job type over the 1984-1989 period shows the decline in Management/Professional, Clerical/Technical, and Labor/Service groups. The Clerical/Technical group was 24.6 percent in 1984, but fell to 20.0 percent in 1989; the Labor/Service group was

Table 3. Trend of respondents saying labor unions were strongly related to their lives by age group (%)

	Early (20s)	Late (20s)	Early (30s)	Late (30s)	Early (40s)	Late (40s)	Early (50s)	Late (50s)	60s	Older than 70
1984	19.7	20.3	16.5	12.8	15.0	17.7	10.2	11.1	3.5	4.1
1989	18.9	16.4	10.2	14.5	13.0	15.8	8.6	8.9	2.4	3.7
Increase and Decrease	-0.8	-3.9	-6.3	1.7	-2.0	-1.9	-1.6	-2.2	-1.1	-0.4

Note 1: Created by the author using the Yomiuri Poll (Opinion Poll Division of the Tokyo Head Office of The Yomiuri Shimbun, n.d.) conducted by the Opinion Poll Division of the Tokyo Head Office of The Yomiuri Shimbun.

Note 2: Received permission from the Opinion Poll Division of the Tokyo Head Office of The Yomiuri Shimbun for quoting the results.

25.2 percent in 1984, dropping to 20.2 percent in 1989. Other job groups showed neither an increase or decrease (Mabuchi 2004).

This data shows that workers do not have a clear image or awareness of labor unions in Japan.

3-4. Awareness of the Need for Labor Unions

This section examines how Japanese workers perceive the need for labor unions. One of the few national surveys asking this question is the survey on labor-management communication by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. The surveys in 1989 and 1994 questioned only workers whose workplace did not have a labor union. The survey in 1999, however, asked all workers and it did not provide separate statistics split on the presence or non-presence of a labor union. Since chronological comparison is not possible with this data, estimates were conducted based on several assumptions. In 1999, the number of workers who responded that labor unions were absolutely necessary with union-employers was estimated to be 57.7 percent at most (7,159,666 people)(Table 4).⁷

According to *Soshiki Rodosha no Kumiai Ishiki Seiji Ishiki ni Kansuru Chousa* [Survey of Opinions of Organized Workers on Unions and Politics] conducted by the Labour Research Council in 1964, 86 percent responded, "Labor unions are absolutely necessary," 12 percent responded, "It is better to

⁷ Refer to Mabuchi (2006) and Mabuchi (2004) for details.

Table 4. Cross table of “with/without labor unions” and “necessity of labor unions”: Estimation in 1999

With/without Unions	Absolutely necessary	It is better to have labor unions	Doesn't matter	It is better not to have labor unions	Unknown	Total
No	0.0% (0)	41.1% (3,787,774)	49.5% (4,564,017)	9.4% (865,216)	0.0% (0)	42.1% (9,217,007)
Yes	57.7% (7,159,666)	41.3% (5,123,955)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.0% (129,782)	56.7% (12,413,404)
Unknown	33.1% (86,960)	41.2% (108,240)	21.1% (55,433)	4.0% (10,509)	0.6% (1,576)	1.2% (262,718)
Total	33.1% (7,246,625)	41.2% (9,019,969)	21.1% (4,619,450)	4.0% (875,725)	0.6% (131,359)	100.0% (21,893,128)

Note: Number in parenthesis under the percentage is number of people. The total column is the actual value by the Policy Planning and Research Department, Minister's Secretariat, Ministry of Labour (2000, 104). Other numbers in italics are the authors' estimation by maximizing the cells with gray shadow, based on the author's hypothesis.

have labor unions,” and the total of those who responded, “Doesn't matter,” “It is better not to have labor unions,” and “Don't want to have it” shared only 1 percent (Ishikawa 1975, 98f). Therefore, the number of union members who believe that unions are “Absolutely necessary” is estimated to have decreased at least 28.3 percentage points (= 86 – 57.7 percent) over the 35 years from 1964 to 1999.

This number, however, is a minimum estimate of the decrease in people's perception of the need for unions. In conducting this estimate, it was assumed that those workers with unions did not believe that “It is better not to have labor union.” This hypothesis is clearly extreme, and the actual number of those who believe that labor unions are “absolutely necessary” has probably decreased drastically.

If workers regard labor unions as ineffective, unreliable, and without a presence, it is natural that they do not feel the unions are necessary. It is also self-explanatory that workers would not want to actively participate in labor unions when they have such an image. Therefore, Japanese workers' disassociation from labor unions must derive from the fact that workers do not value union activities.

3-5. Satisfaction for Labor Union

Last, this section examines union members' satisfaction with labor unions in major industrial organizations.

Figures 5 and 6 show the trends of satisfaction level with unions for male and female union members of the Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions, the Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union, and the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions.

The results for males show that "Satisfied" (the total of "very satisfied" and "satisfied") has increased slightly for the Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions since 1980. "Satisfied" largely decreased between 1984 and 1989 for the Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union, showing a modest recovery afterwards.⁸ "Satisfied" decreased between 1984 and 1996 for the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions, showing a jagged trend.⁹

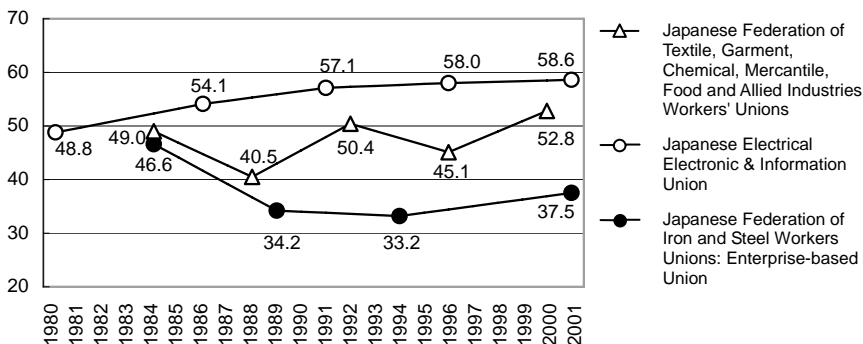
The results for females show that "Satisfied" in the Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions increased from 1980 to 1991, but stagnated towards 1996, and slightly decreased in 2001. Similar to the results for males, "Satisfied" decreased dramatically between 1984 and 1989 for the Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union, and slowly recovered afterwards. "Satisfied" increased from 1984 to 1988 for the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions, but decreased in 1996, and then remained level until 2001.

These figures indicate that the satisfaction levels with labor unions are different for each union. The ratio of union members who were satisfied with each union between 1996 and 2001 increased or held steady.

⁸ The survey of the Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union is a 5-scale rating with "Yes and No" in the middle, thus we should note that when comparing with the surveys of the Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions or the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions with 4-scale rating, ratio of "satisfaction: total" is somewhat lower. Same is true for the female data as well.

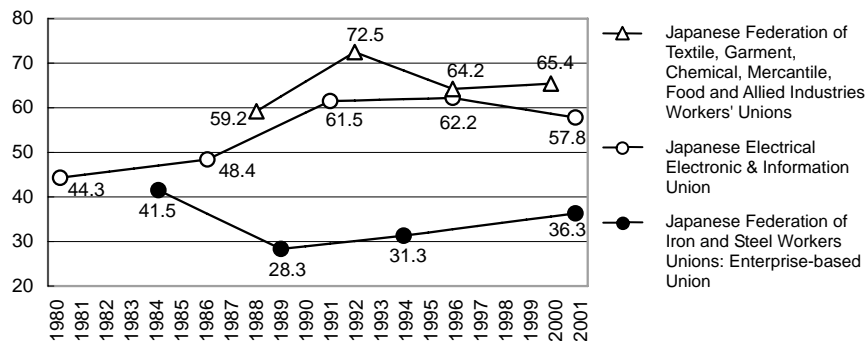
⁹ According to the survey report of the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions, the year when "Satisfied" decreased was the year of their employment adjustment and wage revision, resulted in a strong influence on the survey. (Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions 1997, 84).

Figure 5. Chronological trend of the level of satisfaction with labor union activities (Males, %)



Note: Created by the author using the Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions (1987, 41ff; 2002, 85), Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union (2000, 97), Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions (2001, 107).

Figure 6. Chronological trend of the level of satisfaction with labor union activities (Females, %)



Note: Created by the author using the Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions (1987, 41ff; 2002, 85), Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union (2000, 97), Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers Unions (2002, 47).

This paper examined how Japanese workers perceive unions from various aspects. It was confirmed that a negative perception has increased in terms of labor unions' usefulness, reliability, presence, and necessity. On the other hand, the satisfaction level with unions is surprisingly not negative. This seems to be

contradictory, but it does make sense because the level of expectation of unions by their members is lower.

Conclusion

The appreciation of unions by Japanese workers has declined in terms of unions' usefulness, reliability, presence, and necessity.¹⁰ Worker detachment from unions is probably derived from the fact that workers do not value labor unions anymore.

However, according to Tomohiko Noda, who analyzed the effects of labor unions on wages and employment assurance, companies with unions have higher wages and a slower pace of employment adjustments than those without (Noda 2006). Objectively speaking, labor unions are useful for workers. This means that workers perceive unions as useless, unnecessary organizations because they are unaware of their effect or role.

Therefore, it is difficult to support Hypothesis 2 which says detachment is from free riding on the systemization of unions. On the other hand, Hypothesis 3, which says the dysfunction of labor unions has caused a decreased willingness to participate and thus results in detachment from unions, can be supported only in a workers' subjective world, since the effect of labor unions are objectively real.

The decline in appreciation of the usefulness, necessity, and presence of labor unions is probably caused by the fact that the role of labor unions is vague for union members, workers, and the public at large. The decrease in trust of labor unions could be a reflection of the fact that the system of listening to workers and union members is not fully functioning. In fact, according to the surveys by the Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions and the Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union, one of the three major factors that union members cited as reasons for union detachment was "Do not know the unions' role" (Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions 2002, 89-91; Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union 2000, 170). According to the former survey,

¹⁰ This paper examined that not all of the workers have negative perception. It is important to note this and it is necessary to examine variety of perceptions (Mabuchi 2002). This will be an issue to be addressed in the future.

union members believe that two major factors of being a good union are “Respecting union members’ needs and opinions” and “Strong negotiation skills for wages and other conditions” (Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers’ Unions 2002, 91-92).

Needless to say, a vicious circle develops when a worker does not know the role of a union and does not participate in a union because of that lack of knowledge. Meanwhile, attempts to plan events for union members, to make relationships among members stronger, and to make unions a friendlier place in the hopes of increasing interest in unions would be far from solution.

In the past, young workers in Japan who moved to urban areas from the extremely close relationships of their families and communities, formed a pseudo-community at workplace and were supported by it. Such comprehensive relationships in the workplace were necessary for young workers who lived alone and away from their family; it was also an ideal model. However, the current weak relationships in the workplace indicate that such close relationships are no longer necessary for workers, as shown in section 2. Overall, weak relationships in Japan are clearly a long-term trend and it is futile for labor unions to try to buck this trend; attempting to do so could probably have a reverse effect and make workers to resent the union.

Japanese labor unions should not consider the solution for union detachment to be the revival of a pseudo-community by forming closer relationships between workers or union members. Instead, they need to make workers and union members feel that they have mutual interests and that labor unions are reliable, useful mediums for protecting worker rights and for pursuing their interests. To solve detachment from unions, it is most important to provide education and awareness for workers so that they easily understand that unions are actually useful for maintaining and improving their lives.

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¹¹ The survey reports by labor unions quoted in this paper were provided by the Labour Research Councils. Some of the reports were available thanks to the Research Institute for Advancement of Living Standards. The results of the Yomiuri poll were provided by the Opinion Poll Division of the Tokyo Head Office of The Yomiuri Shimbun. The latest report on value orientation of Japanese was provided by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute. The latest report on Japanese national character was provided by Professor Yoshiyuki Sakamoto of the Institute of Statistical Mathematics. Useful input in interpreting data was provided by members of the Research Committee of the Current Challenges of Labor Unions of the Research Institute for Advancement of Living Standards. Hereby the author would like to tender his acknowledgement to all of the above.

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