
Introduction

Non-regular Employment and Vocational Career

In Japan, the ratio of non-regular employees has been increasing steadily for years. According to the Annual Report on the Labour Force Survey (Detailed Tabulation) statistics compiled by the government, the percentage of non-regular staff among all employees was 29.4% in 2002 but increased to 34.4% in 2010, an increase of 5 percentage points in about eight years. The annual average percentage of non-regular staff for 2011 is unclear, as the survey was not conducted for a time in the three prefectures most severely damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake, but this percentage was 35.1% for the January-March period of 2012, after the survey was resumed in these three prefectures. These figures imply that non-regular employees already account for a high percentage of the Japanese labor market.

Against this background, opportunities have been increasing for Japanese workers to be employed as non-regular staff. For example, it is quite common for university students and high school students to work part-time as *arubaito* (non-regular staff), while studying. Furthermore, women who had been working as regular employees but who quit when they were married or had children still often choose to work part-time when they start working again. Since Japan entered into a long-term recession in the mid-1990s, in particular, an increasing number of young people graduating from high school or university start working as non-regular employees, or quit working as regular employees after a short period of time and continue their working lives as non-regular employees. In addition, many seniors work as non-regular employees after retirement.

As such, it is not at all unusual for Japanese workers to experience non-regular work during their vocational careers. Non-regular employment offers workers a flexible working style that allows them to select their own working hours and workplaces, and at the same time provides unskilled workers with a greater chance of finding a job. On the other hand, non-regular employment often brings about employment instability and worse working conditions, including wages, compared with regular employment. However, non-regular employment has become more and more diversified, ranging from short-term employment with low wages to job opportunities under stable employment relationships with relatively high wages. Given such circumstances, non-regular employees efforts, while engaging in non-regular work, to shift to a more stable working style and improve their working conditions—looking for regular employment in order to achieve these purposes—could reveal a significant route for career development.

How does non-regular employment help workers build an awareness of employment and career and develop their skills, from the standpoint of making this kind of career development possible? How are there chances laid out for them to shift from non-regular employment to regular employment? We are asked to carry out research on Japanese labor policies with such circumstances in mind, with the aim of searching for appropriate measures to encourage career development through work as a non-regular employee or career development involving a shift from non-regular employment to regular employment. This edition features the latest empirical studies concerning the correlation between non-regular employment and vocational career.

The paper entitled “Part-Time Work Experience of University Students and Their Career Development” utilizes questionnaire survey data acquired from students at national universities in Japan to analyze the relationship between qualitative aspects (job characteristics and behaviors in engaging in work) and quantitative aspects (hours worked) of *arubaito* (part-time work) held by university students, as well as the awareness and behavior that will contribute to their career development after graduating

from school (level of career development). The study demonstrates that students engaged in part-time work that involves a wide range of skills, and students who are proactive in their part-time workplaces, have higher levels of career development. Furthermore, an inverted U-shaped relationship was observed between the number of hours of part-time work per week and the level of career development, indicating that consideration of optimum working hours is important in the career development of university students. Additionally, students engaged in part-time work that requires a diverse range of skills have high levels of career development even with short working hours, indicating that the optimal working hours are shorter in this case. These results indicate that maintaining appropriate quality and working hours in regard to part-time work activities, which are a part of daily life for most students, can play a vital role in both their career development and their school-to-work transition.

The paper entitled "Job Choice by Short-Term Temporary Agency Workers and Job Security Concern" focuses on temporary agency workers who worked under short-term contracts of less than three months during the employment cutbacks after the "Lehman Shock," and conducts a factor analysis regarding the choice of temporary agency work, and workers' job security concerns, as well as their hope to become regular employees, based on a questionnaire survey and an interview survey. The analysis found that the most typical short-term temporary agency worker is a woman in her 20s or 30s with a junior or senior high school diploma who engages in a sales, manufacturing or light manual labor job, rather than a clerical job. It also found that the typical short-term temporary agency worker works in prefectures where the unemployment rate is high and has a post-school history of illness that could affect working life. The factor analysis regarding job security concern showed that temporary agency workers with short-term contracts of less than three months are more prone to be concerned about job security than those with long-term contracts of more than one year. It also indicated that whereas workers' hopes to become regular employees are significantly affected by job security concerns, people who realistically expect to become regular employees are less prone to be concerned about job security. Moreover, the analysis found that short-term temporary agency workers who realistically expect to become regular employees typically work under a contract with an employment period of more than one year, while those who hope to become regular employees but who realistically expect to continue temporary agency work or who have no idea of what employment arrangement they will be working under three years later typically work under a contract of less than one year. Based on these analysis results, the report concluded that the hope of becoming a regular employee stems largely from job security concerns, and proposes measures to ease job security concerns both with regard to client companies and temporary staff agencies.

The paper entitled "Is Temporary Work a "Dead End" in Japan?: Labor Market Regulation and Transition to Regular Employment" examines the transition from temporary to permanent or regular employment in Japan, using panel data. Employment protection legislation (EPL) in Japan for regular employees is more rigorous than the average of OECD countries, even though it is weaker for temporary workers. Those currently engaged in temporary work may reach a "dead end" in their attempts to become regular employees. Making a comparison between Japan and European countries, it became clear that Japan had the lowest possibility of transition from temporary to regular employment. Focusing only on men, however, 30% of temporary workers find regular employment each year. This is nearly equal to the lowest rates of transition among European countries. Analyzing gender differences in the rate of transition in Japan, there was a substantial gap between women and men, irrespective of age or employment status. In particular, the rate of transition to regular employment within the same company was much lower among women than among men. Temporary agency workers who are assigned to the client companies to work only for a limited period are less likely to find regular employment within the company where they are working and more likely to become non-working.

The paper entitled “Career Development Process, Starting with Non-Regular Workers: Based on an Analysis of Factors Determining the Transition from Non-Regular to Regular Employment, Including Promotion to Regular Employment within the Same Firm” explores the factors that divide workers’ career courses into two types: transitions from non-regular to regular employment and from one non-regular position to another, based on the results of a survey of the personal data of young people between the ages of 25 and 44. This study is based on the author’s awareness that the transition from school to work has become more uncertain in recent years, along with which more young people have become non-regular workers inferior in status to regular employees in terms of working conditions and access to capacity building opportunities, and that promoting the transition of non-regular workers to regular employment is a pressing issue. It attempts to engage in a quantitative analysis and review of the qualities companies emphasize when recruiting workers, by applying control variables relating to workers’ personal attributes and views and those relating to companies’ manpower demands. As a result, it was confirmed that the transition from non-regular to regular employment through movement between companies takes place less frequently for workers in their late 20s or older, whereas age does not act as a great hindrance to the transition to regular employment within the same company. It was also observed that off-the-job training experience while engaged in non-regular work and engagement in self education have great effects on the transition to regular employment. From these findings, the author of this paper proposes strengthening measures to broaden and increase the number of promotions to regular employment within companies, and enhancing consultation services for young people.

The paper entitled “Conversion of Non-Regular Employees into Regular Employees and Working Experiences and Skills Development of Non-Regular Employees at Japanese Companies” analyzes how the introduction of a system to convert non-regular employees into regular employees affects non-regular employees’ skills development, based on data collected through a questionnaire survey conducted on individual employees. The paper examines the hypothesis that companies with a system for converting non-regular employees into regular employees tend to assign jobs in a manner that encourages workers to build up their skills at the workplace, giving them greater opportunities for skills development. From the analysis, it can be concluded that if companies employing non-regular employees expand the opportunity for them to become regular employees by introducing such a system, many of the companies can not only increase the opportunity for non-regular employees to develop their career and skills in the long term through the conversion to regular employee status but also help them develop skills without conversion by gradually assigning them to a progressively wider range of jobs, jobs requiring more advanced skills and jobs with greater responsibility. In Japan, non-regular employees tend to have less of an opportunity to build up their skills compared with regular employees. If the system to convert non-regular employees into regular employees becomes widely adopted, this will work to broaden non-regular employees’ opportunities for skills development.

The papers in this edition introduce some of the latest empirical studies concerning the correlation between non-regular employment and vocational career. As mentioned above, non-regular employment is prevalent among a wide range of people in Japan. A number of themes remain to be studied, such as the issue of work-life balance and non-regular employment in workers’ careers during their child-rearing years and the relationship between the careers of the elderly and non-regular employment. Be that as it may, we hope that this edition will spark a deepened interest in and understanding of non-regular employment and vocational career in Japan.

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