

Abstracts

Collectivism in Japanese Employment Practices: A Focus on Industrial Relations

Hak-soo Oh (The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training)

Wages in Japan have generally not risen for about 30 years after the collapse of the bubble economy in the early 1990s. Japanese wages are the lowest among G7 nations and lower than Korea. Factors preventing rises in wages include the decline in the unionization rate of labor unions, the lack of expanded application of labor agreements, and the failure to exercise the collective power of labor unions (industrial disputes). Meanwhile, shareholder dividends and internal reserves have risen almost every year. Raising wages in Japan requires that labor unions obtain their demands by exercising their rights under the three labor laws, that power equality between labor and management at non-unionized companies are ensured through legislation on employee representation, and that labor unions organize further.

The Role of Worker Representatives in Labour and Employment Law and Legal Issues in Systems for Establishing Working Conditions

Yumiko Kuwamura (Tohoku University)

In Japan, collective bargaining by trade unions is protected by Article 28 of the Constitution and the Trade Union Act (TUA). However, due to the decline of the unionization rate, the statutory representatives of employees play an increasingly important role in establishing working conditions. This article overviews the reforms of the employee representation system, especially majority representation and labor-management committees. It then points out that the main role of worker representatives (trade unions and other employee representatives) is worker protection on a collective basis and proper regulation of diversified interests of workers. From this view, both systems of majority representation and labor-management committees have crucial defects and should be reformed as soon as possible. Regarding trade unions, it is not clear whether the content of collective agreements may/should be judicially controlled. A collective agreement can be applied exceptionally to unorganized workers at a plant or workplace level (Article 17 of the TUA). If the extension of the normative effect of the collective agreement is considerably unreasonable to unorganized workers, it will be denied by a court. As for the extension of its effect at a regional level (Article 18 of the TUA), the limits to the authority of the administrative organs (Labour Commission, the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare and the prefectural governor) must be discussed.

From “Gender Equality” to “Kumijo (Women in Unions)” : The Current State and Issues Surrounding Representation of Women in Labor Unions

Kazunari Honda (Mukogawa Women’s University)

This paper investigates representation of women in labor unions. An extensive review of previous literature organized into four lines revealed a lack of detailed research investigating female officers. Based on this, we examined the state of organization and representation of women and found that labor unions were still male-oriented organizations with female directors in the minority and that there were “walls” preventing the appointment of female officers as well as “cliffs” that increased their tendency to resign. Plans to increase the number of female officers have moved forward despite the fact that they often feel negatively toward their role as representatives for women, experience strong dissatisfaction, and have low work consciousness. While this has resulted in poor numbers and placement of female officers, increased sensitivity toward the state of women and harassment has been observed, suggesting a potentially major role for women as opinion leaders. It is essential to reassess and redefine the role of female officers to integrate these factors. There are also concerns regarding the undermining of female officers in labor union practice, insufficient increases and the weak presence of female officers, and a lack of discussion and agreement when increasing female members. Supposing that the means (increasing the number of officers) will be

given more focus than the ends and that overgeneralization of gender equality in form rather than in substance will lead to the disempowerment of female officers, improvements of substance in representation for women are fragile. Future research in this field should not only analyze labor unions in pursuit of gender equality but should recognize a fifth area of research that starts with the attitudes and behaviors of female officers, as pioneered by this paper.

Informal Negotiations in Industrial Relations

Hiroyuki Aoki (Kagawa University)

This paper sets out to clarify the role of informal negotiation in Japanese industrial relations and shows that informal labor-management negotiations are abundant in Japanese companies, which, in conjunction with formal collective bargaining, have contributed to the prevention and resolution of industrial disputes. At the workplace level, work councils that take advantage of the team leader's ability to work in a dual role serve as a voice on the labor side, leading to a better understanding of the workplace among managers. This serves as a place for discussion between supervisors and subordinates in the workplace, which can create solidarity as managers empathize with the worker's norms. These factors support managers' ability to have a voice within the company. To understand the process by which this bottom-up dynamic starts from the workplace and spreads throughout the organization, one must understand there are specific bargaining relationships within management and within the labor union. First, Japanese managers often see themselves as representatives of their workplaces and assert their department's interests to their superiors. This is due to the fact that the improvement of workplace performance depends on the willingness of the workers to contribute, and in order to motivate them, managers try to share norms with workers. Second, union officers must draw bargaining power from the workplace and simultaneously organize overall policy while controlling sectionalism. This is because in the process of labor-management talks, which emphasize the coordination of opinions in advance, the union officers are also strongly required to coordinate opinions within the union. Thus, there are bottom-up mechanisms within the management organization and controls within unions, and these are interrelated. This entire structure needs to be taken into account when considering the issue of workers' voice in Japan.

Significance of Collectivity in Labor-Management Relations from the Point of View of Employers

Tsuneyuki Tanaka (Labor and Social Security Attorney)

This paper deals with the significance that employers attach to collective labor-management relations, with a special focus on distribution of added value created cooperatively by both labor and management, and how the current variety of labor groups influences employers. Post-World War II Japanese labor-management relations can be divided into two eras. During the first era, negotiations on distribution were smooth because the basis of both labor and management was stable, owing to that in-house labor unions were dominant within their companies. However, the second half has witnessed remarkable divergence on the side of labor, including an increasing number of atypical workers and specialized workers who are not categorized as conventional "regular employees". This has forced change in the characteristics of labor as a group. In response to this movement, employers must pay attention to the new wave of collectivity of labor-management relations. Finally, this paper offers prospects for future social dialogue, which should transform from its present features, and discusses the need to review the state of labor-management relations, including reexamining labor laws and regulations.

Formation of Social Policies and Organized Labor: The Labor Movement for the Minimum Wage System in Postwar Japan

Atsushi Hyodo (Senshu University)

In general, the type and level of the welfare state is closely related to the nature of labor unions. However, the characteristics of social policies in different countries are not simple

function of the power and organizational formation of its labor unions. The same is true for minimum wage systems. While in some cases labor unions have little interest in the minimum wage system because such unions, backed by strong social and industrial forces, have enough power to maintain autonomy, in other countries revitalization of unions reflecting the surge of voices from “marginal” workers has provoked demands by unions to raise the minimum wage. Some argue that labor unions in Japan have not been interested in the minimum wage system because major unions are enterprise unions composed of regular male workers paid under the seniority wage system. In reality, however, Japanese labor unions have been more strongly committed to the minimum wage system than unions of other developed countries. Why, then, have Japanese labor unions been so committed to the minimum wage system? To answer the question, we must investigate origin of the movement for a minimum wage system in the early 1950s. Double or multiplex structures of the workplace and society reemerged, which served as a disincentive toward organizing and labor union action. Faced with such a situation, Sohyo (General Council of Trade Unions of Japan) and its affiliated unions with their then strong socialist nature, strove to assist the new non-regular workers in order to maintain vitality of unions and strengthen class solidarity. They considered the movement for the minimum wage system as an important measure for the purpose.

Expansion of Platform Workers and the Change to Industrial Relations: Implications from the Case of South Korea for the Past 20 Years

Juyoung An (Ryukoku University)

This study analyzes the significance of group and industrial relations within new ways of working by examining the case of South Korea. Specifically, labor unions in South Korea are more active and successful in organizing platform workers compared with those in Japan, although enterprise unions in South Korea experience difficulty in organizing precarious workers, which is similar to Japan. Platform work is a new form of precarious work in which workers are employed formally as independent contractors instead of as employees. These workers are excluded from the conventional framework that is intended to protect those who fall under the criteria of workers or self-employed individuals. Therefore, policy changes are required across countries, and various policies, such as the reform of social security systems, have been attempted alongside revision of economic and labor laws. However, policy changes are still in progress, and very few countries have been successful. Under these circumstances, labor unions in South Korea have organized for platform workers based more than 20 years of organizing “workers in special employment types”. Labor unions in South Korea are building new groups and industrial relations, although many scholars pointed out that the fragile working environment and under-representation of precarious workers are due to company-based labor unions and industrial relations in South Korea. Japan, which is facing the same challenges, should pay attention to these changes.

Interactive Effects of Strategic Competencies and Human Resource Competencies on Job Satisfaction in Human Resource Professionals

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Kosuke Igawa (University of the Ryukyus)

The purpose of this study is to examine how job satisfaction among human resource (HR) professionals is affected when they demonstrate competencies that meet the demands for both contributing to business strategy and creating an environment for workers to exercise their abilities. Although the actual state of competencies among HR professionals has been discussed, there has been little research that quantitatively examines the competencies of HR professionals in terms of what they consist of and how they might be demonstrated individually or complement rather than oppose each other. In this study, a sample of 140 HR professionals obtained from a questionnaire survey administered to a total of 144 HR professionals at Japanese firms is included in the analysis. The following two findings were revealed through the results of the quantitative survey study: First, the main effects of “business ally competency,” which is required to achieve business strategy, and “labor legal competency,” which is included as

a human resource competency related to developing an environment for workers to demonstrate their abilities, on job satisfaction of HR professionals were non-significant, while the other component of human resource competency, "developing talent competency," had a significantly positive impact. Second, the interaction between business ally competency and labor legal competency was significantly positively related, while the interaction between business ally competency and developing talent competency was not significant. These findings suggest that, while it is important to demonstrate both business ally competency and human resource competency, there are some human resource competencies that are not necessarily compatible with business ally competency and should be demonstrated independently.