

Selection and Training of Women Officers in Japanese Labor Unions: Focusing on Enterprise Unions

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Recognition of the importance of the selection of women for officer positions in Japanese labor unions has prompted a rise in the numbers of women union officers. However, there are still major gaps between the rates of women union members and those of women officers, and union-officer positions tend to be dominated by men. This paper draws on the results of the Labour Research Council's "Union Leader Survey" of union officers of enterprise unions to reanalyze the means of selecting and training men and women union officers in private enterprise unions, and attitudes toward labor union activities and careers as union officers, in order to clarify the challenges regarding the selection and training of women union officers in enterprise unions. The results of the Union Leader Survey revealed that while women union officers engaged in union activities with similarly high levels of awareness of being trained as union officers compared to their men counterparts, women's attitudes toward careers as union officers were less proactive than those of men. This may be attributable to factors such as the differences in women's experience of union activities in comparison with men as a result of the gender division of assigned work or other reasons, or the time burdens of labor union activities.

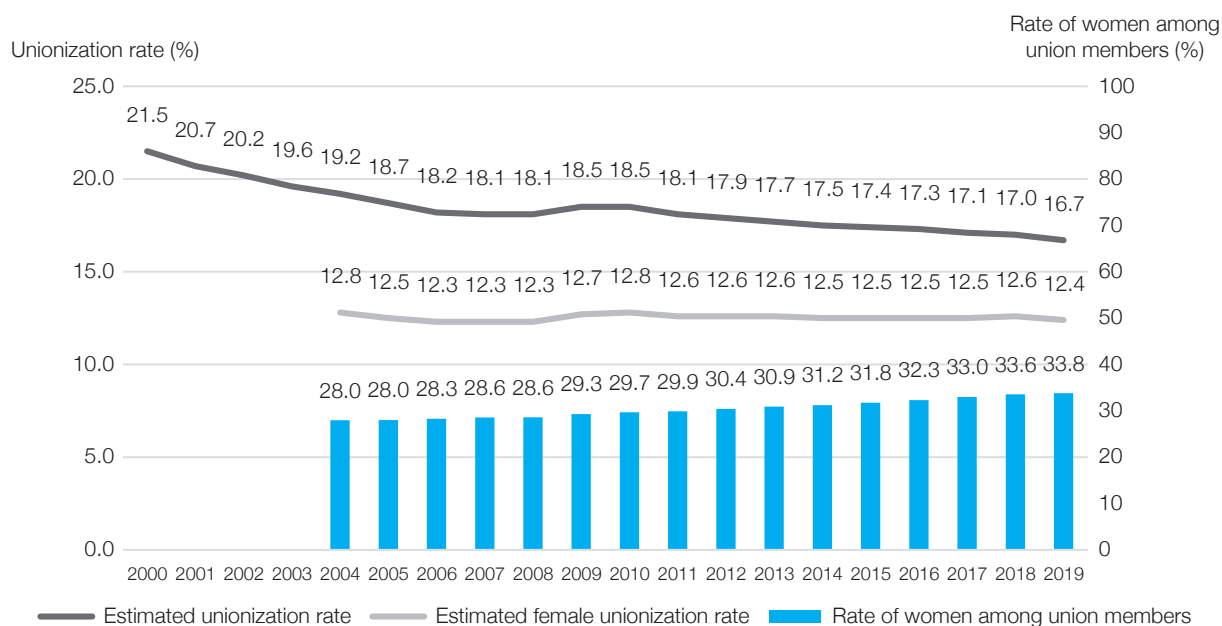
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I. Introduction

1. Japanese labor union organization rates and the percentage of women among union members

According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's "Basic Survey on Labour Unions," the number of union members in 2019 was 10,087,915, which was slightly higher than the previous year's number. However, the estimated unionization rate (the percentage of the number of union members within the number of employees) was 16.7% or 0.3 percentage points below that of the previous year. This labor union organization rate has continued to fall after peaking at 55.8% in 1949, falling below 30% in the early 1980s and below 20% in the early 2000s (Figure 1).

Looking at the estimated female unionization rate since 2004, when data on the number of women union members and the estimated female unionization rate first became available, the rate has shown very



Source: Basic Survey on Labour Unions, 2019, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

Figure 1. Changes in the labor union organization rate and the rate of women among union members in Japan

little change over these 15 years, levelling off at the 12% level. Calculating the rate of women among union members (the percentage of women members among members of both sexes) based on the survey’s published data shows a rise in the rate of 5.8 percentage points, from 28.0% in 2004 to 33.8% in 2019. Thus, an increase in women members, albeit gradual, can be observed.¹

Although Japan has seen significant changes in its labor market including an expanding service industry and a growing number of non-regular workers, the country’s labor unions continue to be comprised mainly of “men and regular employees.” Consequently, questions have arisen concerning whether Japan’s labor unions can speak for “women and non-regular” workers, who face comparatively severe conditions in the labor market, as the workers’ representatives in the formulation of labor policy. While the labor union organization rate continues to fall, the organization of non-regular workers—and particularly part-time workers—is rising little by little; however, this rise is not enough to drive up the labor union organization rate.

On the other hand, the non-regular segment of employment has been growing among women in Japan. However, as women achieve higher levels of academic qualifications and systems relating to the combining of work and child-rearing become more sophisticated, an increasing number of women are continuing employment without leaving work for marriage or childbirth. As a result, the valley of the M-shaped curve, which had been a characteristic of female employment in Japan, is gradually flattening out. Additionally, “gender equality” and “women’s participation” are being declared as national objectives in Japan, which were reflected in the execution of the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society in 1999 and Act on Promotion of Women’s Participation and Advancement in the Workplace in 2016. Within this context, the selection of women officers is receiving attention as an important issue in labor unions, mirroring a trend seen in the government and private enterprises, and the number of women officers has been growing in recent years accordingly. The main purpose of selecting women officers is to gain the participation of women in decision-making by labor unions. However, as the number of women members increases with more women continuing employment, it can be assumed that the length of time that women are union members is growing, and thus

efforts to increase the number of women officers in labor unions are a natural extension of this. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that there are still major gaps between the rates of women union members and the rates of women officers, and union-officer positions tend to be dominated by men.

In view of these circumstances, I will examine in this paper the selection and training of women officers in the enterprise unions in Japan. The selection of women union officers is, as in enterprise unions, an issue in national centers and industry-based organizations in Japan. However, the officers in those organizations are largely selected from among officers of enterprise unions, and therefore it is important to focus on enterprise unions to ensure the participation of women in the decision-making organizations of labor unions as a whole.

2. Previous studies

There have been almost no studies or research focused on the “human resources” of labor unions in Japan in recent years. Going back thirty years, the Ohara Institute for Social Research’s Union Leaders Study Group conducted a “Survey on Union Leaders in Japan” and the 21st Century Study Group conducted a “Questionnaire Survey on Union Leaders” in 1990, which was the year following the formation of the national center known as the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (JTUC-Rengo). Both focused on the union officers of private-sector industry-based organizations. The former sought to grasp the individual attributes, histories within the organization, and corporate careers of union leaders who led the Japanese Private Sector Trade Union Confederation (JPTUC-RENGO) while also investigating their perception concerning labor union activities, Japanese society, politics, and other matters. The latter aimed to shed light on the characteristics of union leaders’ career paths and career development. It was conducted in the forms of a questionnaire survey and an interview survey. There was also a survey by Fujimura (1995) conducted in the early 1990s that focused on the officers of enterprise unions. It regarded enterprise unions themselves as a main source of union officers and was marked by its attention on the training and career formation of union officers. However, analyses by studies conducted up through the 1990s focused almost exclusively on men officers, in part because the number of women officers was even smaller than it is today.²

On the other hand, sources illuminating the actual circumstances of women officers are primarily comprised of records in which women union officers noted their own experiences, such as Takagi and the Division of Gender Equality of JTUC-Rengo (2004), and analyses based on interview surveys by Shuto (2011) and others. Additionally, Iwamoto and Okura (2019) clarify the characteristics of the political preferences of men and women union members and attributes of women officers based on a political awareness survey of union members. However, they do not shed light on actual circumstances in the selection and training of women officers.

3. Data used in analysis

In the following, I will first present the career patterns of officers in enterprise unions. I will then give a current picture of the selection of women officers based on the results of surveys targeting enterprise unions and other sources. From there, I will draw on the results of the Labour Research Council’s³ “Next Generation Union Leader Survey” (conducted in 2014; hereinafter “the Union Leader Survey”) to reanalyze the means of selecting and training men and women union officers in private enterprise unions and attitudes toward careers as union officers and labor union activities. My aim here will be to clarify challenges regarding the selection and training of women union officers in enterprise unions.

The Union Leader Survey used in this paper has been conducted a total of four times thus far: in 1995, 2001, 2007, and 2014. The survey targets those who “are expected to lead the labor union in the future” within enterprise unions, and many of them have comparatively little experience among the officers of enterprise unions. This point makes it difficult to assert that the survey is providing a sample representing all current officers of enterprise unions. Nevertheless, given that no cross-industry surveys of union officers have been conducted in recent years, and that the perceptions of union officers who will lead the next generation will

likely affect the labor union activities' future direction, I will attempt to conduct an analysis based on the Union Leader Survey. Ten organizations participated in the fourth survey used in this paper. They are UA Zensen (The Japanese Federation of Textile, Chemical, Food, Commercial, Service, and General Worker's Unions), Jichiro (All-Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers Union), Denki Rengo (Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union), JAM (Japanese Association of Metal, Machinery and Manufacturing Workers), Kikan Roren (Japan Federation of Basic Industry Workers' Unions), JP Rouso (Japan Postal Group Union), NTT Rouso (All NTT Workers Union of Japan), Gomu Rengo (Japanese Rubber Workers' Union Confederation), Nikkyoso (Japan Teachers' Union), and Zen Insatsu (All Printing Bureau Labour Union). Thus, it is fair to say that JTUC-Rengo's affiliates are covered to a certain extent. Among the respondents to the Union Leader Survey, I look in this paper at 2,489 (250 women, 2,237 men, and 2 who did not indicate their sex) who are executive committee members or among the so-called "three highest ranks" (chairperson, deputy chairperson, and chief secretary; collectively called *sanyaku*) in the headquarters or business establishments/branches of private-sector enterprise unions, with consideration for differences in the private/public composition of male and female samples, differences in the means of the selection and training of officers in private and public unions, and other matters.⁴

II. The selection of women officers in enterprise unions

1. Officer careers in enterprise unions

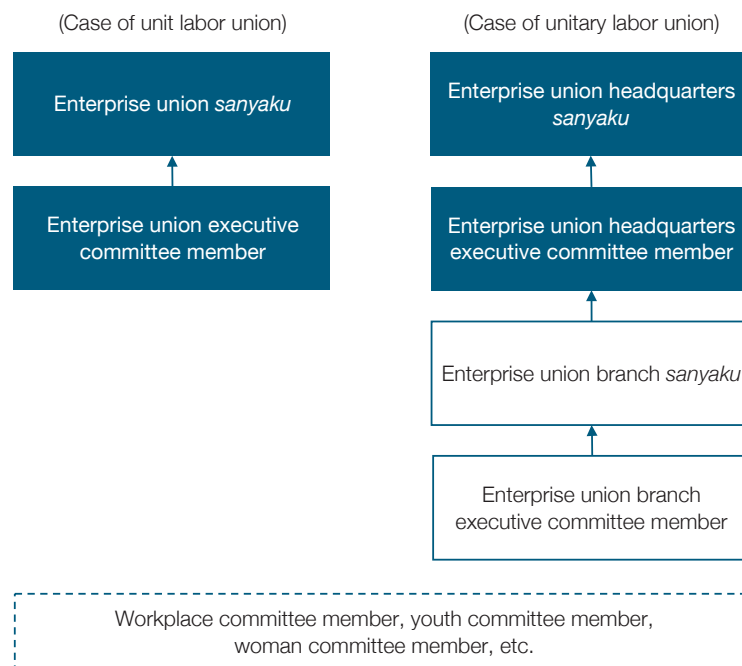
The officers of Japan's enterprise unions have the characteristic of keeping their qualifications and status as company employees and serving as union officers only for the time that they are being selected (Shirai 1966: 120). Because of this, the "careers" of union officers are closely related to their careers in their companies.

Fujimura (1995) clearly shows that the careers of union officers are not uniform, varying depending on the size, industry, traditions, and other attributes of the union organization. Even today, it is difficult to define them in terms of not only their titles but also their roles. In general, in the case of unit labor unions, the careers of union officers involve first serving as executive committee members and then being selected as *sanyaku*. In the case of unitary labor unions, the basic route is to first experience serving as executive committee members or *sanyaku* at a branch and then become officers in the headquarters.⁵ There are also cases in which people experience being workplace committee members or youth/women committee members as a stage before selection as executive committee members (Figure 2).

2. The selection of women officers

According to a "Survey on Women's Participation in Labor Union Activities"⁶ that JTUC-Rengo conducted in 2017 (JTUC-Rengo 2018) targeting member enterprise unions (headquarters)⁷ (hereinafter "the JTUC-Rengo Survey"), only about half of unions (52.5%) select women officers, and the rate of women officers (i.e., the percentage of women officers among officers of both sexes; weighted average) is 11.8%. This rate of women officers showed a rising trend during the 1990s and 2000s but has been levelling off since the 2010s. The rate of women union members (i.e., the percentage of women members among members of both sexes; weighted average) in private-sector unions is 30.2%. Thus, there is a large gap between the rate of women union members and rate of women officers. Moreover, the percentage of private-sector unions in which women serve as *sanyaku* stands at just 12.7%, and the rate of women in *sanyaku* (i.e., the percentage of women in *sanyaku* among people in *sanyaku* of both sexes; weighted average) is very small at 4.3%.

JTUC-Rengo specified within its "4th RENGU Action Plan for Gender Equality" (plan period: October 2013 to September 2020) that it would strengthen its support to member unions in terms of the introduction of quota systems. And within JTUC-Rengo itself, one woman vice president and twelve women central executive committee members have been selected as its quota of women's representatives in its executive committee.⁸ Additionally, according to a survey by Department of Gender and Employment Equality of JTUC-Rengo



Notes: 1. “Unit labor union” refers to a labor union that takes a form of individual membership and has no internal subordinate organizations (such as branches) that can act independently, according to its constitution.
 2. “Unitary labor union” refers to a labor union that takes a form of individual membership and has internal subordinate organizations (such as branches), according to its constitution.

Figure 2. Conceptual career paths of union officers

(2019), approximately 20% of JTUC-Rengo’s affiliates (industry-based organizations) select women officers based on a female quota. The rates of women officers are rising in industry-based organizations, albeit gradually, as a result.

However, looking at the circumstances in enterprise unions based on the aforementioned JTUC-Rengo Survey, the private-sector unions that set numbers or percentages of women among their officers in union bylaws and the like account for only 3.2%. Moreover, according to the same survey, the percentage of private-sector unions that “set numerical targets to promote women’s participation” as a means of promoting women’s participation in enterprise unions’ executive bodies is 13.8%. In other words, at present, there are not so many enterprise unions working to select women officers by establishing so-called “female quotas” and setting numerical targets.

3. The significance of enterprise unions’ selection of women officers

The selection of women officers is an action for promoting gender equality in the sense of ensuring women’s participation in decision-making by labor unions. The presence of more women officers in enterprise unions has great significance for companies (namely, their internal labor-management relations) as well as for industry-based organizations and national centers, which are positioned above enterprise unions.

The aforementioned JTUC-Rengo Survey used a free format to ask about any changes brought by the selection of women officers. Respondents reported not only effects on union activities that resulted from the selection of women officers but also progress in activities to improve workplace environment—namely, “advancements were made in issues concerning harassment countermeasures, support for work-life balance, and gender equality” and “more initiatives were implemented to develop comfortable working environments

for child-rearing women”—and that “women can now directly express their views to the company in labor-management councils.”

Additionally, in Japan’s labor unions, where enterprise unions are the central element, the selection of women officers in enterprise unions also leads to more women officers in industry-based organizations who are selected from the officers of enterprise unions. However, the officers of industry-based organizations and national centers are often comprised of chairpersons and presidents who are at the top of member organizations. Accordingly, simply increasing the number of women officers in enterprise unions will not be sufficient to ensure that women make up a certain percentage within the decision-making settings of labor unions as a whole. As I mentioned earlier, the percentages of women who are selected as *sanyaku*, including chairpersons, in enterprise unions are extremely small, and therefore the selection of women officers based on “female quotas” is taking place in national centers and some industry-based organizations.

III. Union officers in enterprise unions as seen from the survey

In the following, I will look at the attributes of union officers as well as activities and experiences as union officers based on the Union Leader Survey.

1. Attributes of union officers

Looking first at the managerial positions of unions, both men and women have high shares in the executive committees of enterprise unions (headquarters) and business establishments/branches. However, in the case of women, the total of “*sanyaku* of enterprise unions (headquarters)” (2.4%) and “*sanyaku* of business establishments/branches” (6.0%) does not reach 10%. Meanwhile, the same percentage for men approaches 30% at 26.2%. The percentage of “full-time” officers is 16.0% for women and 19.3% for men, with men having a slightly higher percentage. Thus “non-full-time” officers make up the majority for both men and women.

There is a wide distribution for both men and women in terms of the number of years of experience at the branch executive committee member level and higher. However, a difference of about one year is seen in terms of the average number of years, with the average for women standing at 3.6 years and the average for men at 4.7 years. Furthermore, the average number of total years of experience as an officer, including as a workplace committee member and youth/woman committee member, is 5.7 years for women and 7.2 years for men. Looking at composition of academic background, the percentage of university graduate level or higher is 47.6% for women and 42.2% for men, with women surpassing men by 5.4 percentage points.

2. Background for becoming a union officer

No significant differences are seen between men and women in terms of the events leading up to their becoming union officers. Of such events, the one given most was “at the suggestion of a union officer,” which was provided by 77.6% of women and 70.6% of men. Additionally, “at the suggestion of my superior” was provided by 9.2% of women and 10.8% of men, accounting for roughly 10% of all respondents. The fact that more women than men responded “at the suggestion of a union officer” supports the point that enterprise unions have been putting more effort into selecting women officers in recent years.

Looking at reasons for accepting the position of union officer (multiple responses accepted), the most common response is “because my contacts with people and information will grow and my perspective will broaden” for both women (60.4%) and men (64.9%). Following are “because I have no reason to refuse,” which was provided by 32.4% of women and 32.5% of men. These results are largely shared by men and women. However, there is just one item for which a difference is seen in terms of percentage, and that is “because it will be useful in acquiring abilities that are difficult to acquire in the workplace, such as bargaining skills, negotiating skills, and management abilities.” While 29.6% of men provided this response, a lower

percentage of women (19.2%) did so, resulting in a gap of 10.4 percentage points. In other words, men officers are more likely than women officers to consider the time serving as a union officer to be an opportunity for career formation in their own company.

3. The job of a union officer

Each union officer is put in charge of union work when he or she is selected as an officer. Looking at the items of union work that respondents indicated they had handled up to the time of the survey (multiple responses accepted), the most common work item among women officers is “gender equality” with 49.2%. This is followed by “public relations and education” (40.4%), “wages and working conditions” (31.6%), “young workers” (31.2%), “social contribution” (28.8%), “organizational measures” (27.6%), and “health and safety” (26.8%). Comparing these items with men, men surpass women by between 11 and 15 percentage points in “wages and working conditions,” “health and safety,” and “organizational measures,” which occupy the top spots for men (Table 1). In particular, the percentage of men *sanyaku* who have experiences handling “wages and working conditions” in an enterprise union (headquarters) exceeds 80%, which is conspicuously high compared to the other items. “Wages and working conditions” is positioned as a work item in which experience must be gained before entering *sanyaku*. On the other hand, the percentage of men officers who handled “gender equality,” which is the most common item among women, does not exceed 13.0%. Thus, a gender division emerges in terms of the union work items that are handled by men and women officers.

For both men and women, the number of work items handled thus far in their careers as union officers goes up with more years of experience at the branch executive committee member level and higher, and for almost all work items, the percentage of respondents with four or more years of experience increases in comparison with those with less than four years of experience. However, the percentage of men who handled “gender equality” is low at 18.8% even when they have experience of four or more years.

4. Hours spent on union activities

The Union Leader Survey asks about the hours spent on union activities during a normal week and a week when such hours are the longest. The number of hours spent on union activities varies greatly depending on the union of membership and is affected by differences in the organizational makeup of the male-female samples. The average number of hours spent on union activities during a normal week for non-full-time officers who engage in union activities while also doing their jobs is 12.0 hours for women and 10.6 hours for men.⁹ If weekly work hours are considered to amount to 40 hours, this means that the total of work hours and hours spent on union activities surpasses 50 hours per week. The average number of hours spent on union activities during the week with the most such hours is 25.3 hours for women and 21.5 hours for men. It can be

Table 1. Work items experienced in career thus far (% , multiple responses accepted, top ten work items experienced by women officers)

	Wages and working conditions	Organizational measures	Health and safety	Mutual aid	Young workers	Gender equality	Public relations and education	Political matters	Social contribution	General affairs and financial affairs	Number of responses
Women officers total	31.6	27.6	26.8	22.8	31.2	49.2	40.4	18.4	28.8	14.0	250
Men officers total	46.2	38.8	41.9	34.3	39.4	13.0	37.0	28.0	28.4	18.1	2,237

Source: Labour Research Council, “4th Next-generation Union Leader Survey,” 2014.

seen from this how burdensome union activities are in terms of hours.

The length of these hours spent on union activities also appears in concerns and dissatisfactions that respondents feel in their union activities (multiple responses accepted). For non-full-time officers, the majority of both sexes indicated “own time and home life are sacrificed to take care of union work” (51.7% for women and 54.6% for men). This is the leading concern and dissatisfaction. Additionally, “unable to do union work because hands are full of job” and “busyness of union work interferes with job” both account for 20% of women and 30% of men. Thus, considerable numbers of non-full-time officers mention the problem of balancing their jobs and union activities.

Furthermore, I would like to look at women officers’ statements concerning their union activities taken from an interview research on the perceptions and actual circumstances of next-generation union leaders¹⁰ (hereinafter “the Interview Survey”), which was conducted by the Labour Research Council as a follow-up survey of the Union Leader Survey (Labour Research Council 2019), in order to get a detailed picture of the hours that women officers spend on union activities.

- My workload increases and duties come to me because of the “female quota.” I must go to outside meetings, such as those of the industry-based organization and national center’s local organization, as part of women’s activities. (Branch deputy chairperson, non-full-time)
- I take a paid holiday to do union activities about once a month. In fact, I ran short of paid holidays when I had to handle activities for the national center’s local organization. I want to continue with the union and have never thought about quitting. But I don’t know what will happen when I’m faced with marriage or childbirth. (Branch executive committee member, non-full-time)
- I can do this now because I’m single. But I think it would be quite difficult if I had a child. I don’t intend to continue being an officer. Many of the women who are serving as officers have children who have already grown up. (Branch deputy chairperson, non-full-time)
- I have not only meetings of my branch and regional headquarters (intermediate organization between the enterprise union headquarters and branch), but also activities on weekends. And I become particularly busy during elections. In a month, I have an executive committee meeting for my local headquarters, a branch chairperson/chief secretary meeting, about three branch meetings and about three conferences of the councils organized at the area level. Sometimes I even have two union meetings a day. (Concurrently acting as branch executive committee member and regional headquarters executive committee member, non-full-time)

The problem of hours spent on union activities is one shared by both sexes. However, looking at the statements that women officers made with respect to these hours, it is apparent that a situation particular to women officers—namely the taking of concurrent positions based on a “female quota”—is emerging as a result of demands to select women in various situations. With respect to this “female quota,” women are being asked to serve not only as labor union officers in organizations above the enterprise unions to which they belong—that is to say, industry-based organizations and national centers—but also as worker representatives, such as members of councils that deliberate labor policies. And being fewer in number than men officers, they must also attend more committees. Moreover, it is suggested that in Japan, where women are the central figures in terms of family responsibilities, women who have married or given birth find it difficult to handle the work of being a union officer, which unavoidably entails doing activities after work hours and weekends.

IV. The experience and career of a union officer

Comparing the experiences and activities of union officers in terms of sex reveals some differences in the assigned work they experienced in their service; however, there are also many areas that are common to both men and women. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents indicating that they “have a sense” of being trained (i.e., the total of respondents indicating that they have a “deep sense” and “some sense” of

being trained) is roughly the same for both sexes, standing at 76.4% for women and 74.7% for men. Thus, many union officers, both men and women, are engaged in union activities with a real sense of being trained as union officers.

Here, I would like to look at the careers of union officers and examine the relationship between experiences as a union officer and attitudes toward the career of a union officer.

1. Attitudes toward the career of a union officer

First, looking at respondents' attitudes toward continuing as a union officer, for women officers, answers vary with a percentage of just under 40% (38.8%) saying "not sure" (this was the most common response) and percentages of about 20% respectively for "want to continue" (21.6%), "do not want to continue" (22.0%; this is the total of "don't want to continue if possible" and "do not want to continue at all"), and "will continue if no one else is available" (17.2%). For men, "want to continue" was indicated by 25.4%, a percentage that is slightly higher than that for women, and thus no conspicuous difference is seen between the sexes. However, if the examination is limited to executive committee members of enterprise unions (headquarters) (77 women and 369 men) with consideration for differences in the duty makeup of men and women, the percentages of "want to continue" show a difference of 10.3 percentage points, with the percentage for women being 26.0% and that for men being 36.3%.

Then, what kinds of career do union officers envision within a labor union? When the survey asked respondents about the positions "they desire or are willing to take on", the percentages of women responding "enterprise union (headquarters) executive committee member level" and "branch executive committee member level" both stood at 30.8%, while the combined percentages for "branch *sanyaku* level" (8.0%) and "enterprise union (headquarters) *sanyaku* level" (7.2%) did not go beyond around 15%. Additionally, the percentage responding "a level before executive committee member" is not low at 18.0%, either. As for men, like women, more men mentioned the executive committee member level rather than the *sanyaku* level for both enterprise unions (headquarters) and business establishments/branches. However, the percentages of 16.2% for "branch *sanyaku* level" and 18.1% for "enterprise union (headquarters) *sanyaku* level" are both higher than the corresponding percentages for women.

For the positions that respondents desire or are willing to take on, the percentage indicating the same position as their current position was high for both sexes. Looking at the percentages of respondents who show a desire or willingness to take on a higher office than their present position (based on the envisioned careers of union officers shown in Figure 2 [unitary labor unions]), the percentage for women is 24.4% while that for men is 35.0%; thus, the percentage for men stands 10.6 percentage points above that for women. Furthermore, looking only at executive committee members of enterprise unions (headquarters), the percentage of respondents envisioning a position above their current one—that is, a career of the *sanyaku* level or higher in an enterprise union (headquarters) (including officer at the industry-based-organization or JTUC-Rengo level)—shows an even larger difference between the sexes, with women standing at 13.0% and men at 33.6% (Table 2).

2. Influences that union officers' experiences have on attitudes toward career

Several characteristics can be seen from the results of the analysis of union officers' experiences and attitudes by degree of intention to continue that focused on women officers, including those in public unions, using the Union Leader Survey. For example, women officers who want to continue being a union officer have experienced handling a broader range of assigned work and have a stronger sense of being trained as a union officer than those who do not want to continue (Goto 2016).

In this paper, I will conduct my analysis with attention to female respondents' different career advancement intentions as union officers—that is, whether or not women officers envision taking a position above their current position within their careers as union officers—while bearing in mind not only women officers'

Table 2. Positions that respondents show a desire or willingness to take on (%)

	Level attained up to becoming an executive committee member	Branch executive committee member level	Branch sanyaku level	Enterprise union (headquarters) executive committee member level	Enterprise union (headquarters) sanyaku level	Industry-based organization or JTUC-Rengo officer level	No response	Number of responses	Total of positions higher than current position
Women officers total	18.0	30.8	8.0	30.8	7.2	2.0	3.2	250	24.4
Enterprise union (headquarters) executive committee member	9.1	11.7	2.6	59.7	10.4	2.6	3.9	77	13.0
Men officers total	13.6	29.1	16.2	16.5	18.1	5.1	1.2	2,237	35.0
Enterprise union (headquarters) executive committee member	8.7	12.2	3.8	40.4	28.2	5.4	1.4	369	33.6

Source: Labour Research Council, "4th Next-generation Union Leader Survey," 2014.

continuation in their capacity but also an increase of women officers who become associated with decision-making in labor unions as a whole.

Here, I will look at the relationship with attitudes toward career as a union officer from five standpoints: (1) number of years of experience as an officer (less than four, four or more), (2) existence/non-existence of experience handling duties associated with wages and working conditions, (3) existence/non-existence of experience handling duties associated with gender equality, (4) existence/non-existence of concerns or dissatisfactions concerning balance with family life (“own time and home life are sacrificed”), and (5) existence/non-existence of real sense of being trained as a union officer. Considering the data quantity for women officers, I conducted a cross-tabulation of whether or not respondents envisioned taking a position higher than their present position for each of (1) to (5) and conducted a chi-squared test (χ^2) of independence.

I also conducted a similar analysis on the respondents’ intention to continue. However, except for “sense of being trained as a union officer,” I was unable to obtain statistically significant results for women officers.

According to Table 3, in the case of women, the percentage of respondents indicating a desire or willingness to take on a higher office than their present position is significantly higher for the groups that have experience of four or more years, have experience handling wages and working conditions, have no difficulty balancing duties with family life, and have a real sense of being trained ($p < 0.01$). As was mentioned above, the percentage of having experience handling wages and working conditions is conspicuously high among men *sanyaku* of enterprise unions (headquarters). And, it can be observed that experience handling wages and working conditions leads to the envisioning of career advancement as a union officer for women as well. As for whether or not experience handling gender equality does the same, no significant difference was observed from test results.

On the other hand, in the case of men, the percentage is significantly higher for the groups that have experience of four or more years, have experience handling wages and working conditions, have experience handling gender equality, and have a real sense of being trained ($p < 0.01$). However, no significant difference is seen for “difficulty balancing duties with family life,” and thus it is shown that, for men, concerns about balancing duties with home life do not influence attitude toward career as a union officer.

Table 3. Officer experience and career advancement (percentages of respondents indicating desire or willingness to take on a position above current position)

Total	Women (n=250)		Men (n=2,237)		
		(Test) p-value		(Test) p-value	
(1) Number of years of experience	4 or more	36.7%	**	39.5%	**
	Less than 4	17.5%	$p < 0.001$	31.3%	$p < 0.001$
(2) Experienced work (wages and working conditions)	Yes	35.4%	**	39.8%	**
	No	18.4%	$p = 0.004$	30.6%	$p < 0.001$
(3) Experienced work (gender equality)	Yes	29.3%		47.2%	**
	No	18.4%	$p = 0.051$	33.1%	$p < 0.001$
(4) Difficulty balancing duties and home life	No	32.1%	**	36.7%	
	Yes	15.8%	$p = 0.003$	33.9%	$p = 0.176$
(5) Have sense of being trained	Yes	28.8%	**	37.0%	**
	No	10.3%	$p = 0.004$	29.6%	$p = 0.002$

Source: Labour Research Council, “4th Next-generation Union Leader Survey,” 2014..

V. Issues concerning the selection and training of women officers

As is seen above, like men, women officers have a strong real sense of being trained. However, they are less proactive about their careers as union officers. This may be attributable to factors such as the differences in women's experience of union activities in comparison with men as a result of the gender division of assigned work or other reasons, or the time burdens of union activities. Then, what measures are needed in enterprise unions' selection and training of women officers?

1. Union careers for women officers

Looking at the results of the Union Leader Survey, it is apparent that the difference between years of continuous employment and years of experience as a branch executive committee member or higher—that is, the time between becoming a union member and being selected as an officer—is smaller for women officers having the university degrees or above, who account for nearly half of all women officers, than men having the same academic backgrounds. In other words, as the selection of women officers is pressed forward, women officers are being selected more quickly than men officers. Accordingly, shorter is not only their involvement in union activities before their selection as union officers but also their time of employment in their companies. I believe this kind of “quick selection” is making it difficult for women officers to position being a “union officer” as a part of their careers.

Additionally, under the current circumstances whereby women officers are fixed into the work of “gender equality” and have few opportunities to handle “wages and working conditions,” which is the work that many men in the *sanyaku* ranks experience, it is hard for women officers to envision a union career in which they will also enter the *sanyaku* ranks.

From the results of the analysis, it can be observed that the length of years of experience being a union officer and the experience of handling a broad range of work lead to a mindset that envisions a future higher position as a union officer, even among women officers. Even if “quick selection” in comparison with men officers is unavoidable for the selection of women officers, consideration must be given to ensure that women officers can position their time as a union officer within their careers at the time of selection. Moreover, work must be assigned consciously without any gender biases to ensure that women officers can get a long-term view of their careers as union officers.

2. Method of selecting and training women officers

The Union Leader Survey put forth two ways of approaching the selection and training of women officers. They were “(a) Priority should be given to increasing the number of women officers by, for example, setting a female quota,” and “(b) Priority should be given to training human resources that are appropriate as union officers, without distinguishing between men and women.” Respondents were asked to indicate which view they agreed with. In the case of women officers, only 19.2% indicated “agreement” (the total of respondents indicating “agree” and “agree more than disagree”) with the approach of (a), while the majority (56.4%) indicated “agreement” with the approach of (b). Put another way, not many women officers see selection through so-called “female quotas,” such as quota systems, in a positive light.

On the other hand, progress is being made, albeit gradual, in the selection of women officers in national centers and some industry-based organizations as a result of “female quotas,” and selection through “female quotas” is seen as an effective method. However, the perceptions held by enterprise unions' women officers suggest that selecting officers through “female quotas” alone is inadequate, and it can be surmised that women officers do not get a solid sense of quotas' effects or significance. The matter of to what extent acceptance is raised among not only union leadership but also women officers and women officer candidates is an important one when making selections based on a “female quota.”

3. Time spent on union activities as a topic for consideration

The burden of time spent doing union activities is another important issue in the selection and training of union officers, particularly in the case of non-full-time officers. The “three simultaneous demands of work, home life, and union activities” have long been identified as an issue in the selection of women officers, and the same has become true of men as well in recent years.

In the Interview Survey targeting labor unions, several enterprise unions expressed the view that “it is difficult for child-rearing women to become officers.” In fact, it remains true even today that many women union officers are in age groups that are before marriage/childbirth or after child-rearing. Due to the limited nature of the samples used in this analysis, I will refrain from making any statements based on gender-specific data. However, I wish to add that respondents of the group indicating a desire or willingness to take on a higher office than their present position spend more time doing union activities than those of other groups.

As a general rule, union activities in Japan take place outside of work hours. However, union activities can take place during work hours when provisions and regulations for them exist in a collective agreement or when they are established within a labor-management agreement. In fact, according to the RENGO-RIALS (2016), 80% of the enterprise unions (headquarters) and business establishment/branches targeted in a survey responded that union activities could take place during work hours. Wages for time spent not working due to union activities are naturally covered by the enterprise union. Nonetheless, reexamining the time spent on union activities is an urgent issue that should be also addressed from the standpoint of selecting and training women officers.

This paper has been revised from the original one (Goto 2020), which was submitted to the 2019 Conference on Labor Policy Study, in line with the gist of *Japan Labor Issues*.

Notes

1. Estimated unionization rate (labor union organization rate) is calculated using the number of labor union members of unit labor unions and headquarters at the top of unitary labor unions. However, because data on the number of women union members of those unions are not available, I calculated the percentage of women based on the number of women union members in the number of labor union members of unit labor unions and subordinate organizations of unitary labor unions. See the notes of Figure 2 for explanations of “unit labor unions” and “unitary labor unions.”

2. The survey by Fujimura (1995) etc. mainly targeted chief secretaries and involved unionized human resources of organizations. The percentage of women occupying the *sanyaku* ranks in responding unions was only about 1% (Fujimura 1995: 100).

3. The Labour Research Council was established in 1948 with a fund formed by contributions given by labor unions. It is a research body that is mainly entrusted with surveys conducted by national centers, industry-based organizations, enterprise unions, and other labor unions.

4. The first to third surveys were conducted with their focus on branch (organization at the business establishment level) executive committee members and higher. However, the fourth survey included workplace committee members, youth committee members, and women committee members. In addition, the published analyses of the survey use sampling data that mainly correspond to the organizational membership of participating organizations. However, in this paper, I targeted the total number of survey respondents to secure a fixed number of women officers’ samples and then focused on the officers and *sanyaku* ranks of enterprise union headquarters/branches.

It should be noted that, depending on the participating unions, characteristics are seen in the organizational makeups of unions and ways of training union officers, even in private-sector unions. However, given the difficulty of analyzing women officers by participating union, resulting from differences in the number of samples and gender makeup, I did not conduct analyses on individual participating unions in this paper.

5. See the notes of Figure 2 for explanations of “unit labor unions” and “unitary labor unions.”

6. This survey mainly focuses on unions targeted by JTUC-Rengo’s working conditions surveys. Responding private-sector unions number 858.

7. The term “enterprise union (headquarters)” used in this paper refers to unit labor unions and headquarters at the top of unitary labor unions.

8. JTUC-Rengo aims for a women’s participation rate based on the constitution of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), of which JTUC-Rengo is a member. For Congress delegates, the ITUC establishes that “In the event that there are two or more Deputy General Secretaries, at least one shall be women.” And for the percentage of women in the Executive Bureau, it establishes a

target of “starting at 30%, for minimum women’s membership” (Division of Gender Equality of JTUC-Rengo 2013:12).

9. Concerning the average amounts of time spent on union activities for men and women of each participating union, in many unions, the averages for men and women are almost the same or the average of men is higher than that of women.

10. In this survey, the Labour Research Council conducted organizational interviews mainly with the *sanyaku* ranks of branch-level organizations of enterprise unions and individual interviews with young officers (generally in their forties or younger), in most cases executive committee members, of the same organizations. Twenty organizations participated in the organizational interviews and 61 people participated in the individual interviews.

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