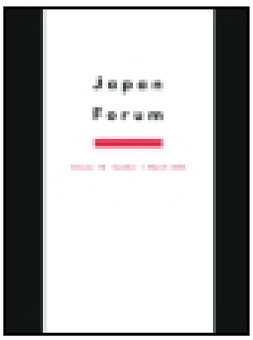

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Japan Forum

ISSN: 0955-5803 (Print) 1469-932X (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjfo20

Precarious regular workers in Japan

Yūki Asahina

To cite this article: Yūki Asahina (2019): Precarious regular workers in Japan, Japan Forum, DOI: 10.1080/09555803.2019.1677745

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2019.1677745

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Precarious regular workers in Japan

YŪKI ASAHINA

Abstract:: While the writing on labor market flexibilization focuses on non-regular employment, this ethnography of precarious work explores one overlooked aspect, the experiences of increasingly precarious young regular workers. These jobs take the form of standard employment, but workers are often subjected to even more precarious and exploitative working conditions than non-regular workers. Drawing on the case of Japan, a seemingly unlikely place to observe such a development, this article has three aims. First, it clarifies the underlying mechanisms of labor exploitation in precarious regular employment. Second, it illustrates these mechanisms at work by examining the experiences of young workers. Third, it explores the potential of such young workers to disrupt these mechanisms through an individualistic form of collective action. The paper illuminates that, in the context of labor market flexibilization, inequality of security exists not only between standard and non-standard employment but also within standard employment arrangements.

Keywords: Employment relations, exploitation, Japan, precarious jobs, regular-employment, young worker

Introduction

"1: 2007/11/24 (Sat.) 21:38:07.44 ID:Jw + br6zA0
My occupation is a programmer. This job is really insane."[1]

On an evening in November 2007, a young programmer posted his first message on the thread he had just created on the popular online community 2 Channel. For the next 2 weeks, he kept sharing his experience at his workplace, which he called a "black corporation" (Burakku Kigyō). He had dropped out of high school due to becoming a target of bullying and lived as a NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) for nearly 10 years. When his mother passed away because of a sudden accident, he decided to get a job. He had already obtained a national certificate for computer programming. After dozens of unsuccessful applications, this company hired him as a regular worker. He even burst into tears during the job interview after finding out that he finally

Japan Forum, 2019
Vol. 0, No. 0, 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2019.1677745

had a job. However, a letdown came soon. On his first day of work, he already had to perform unpaid overtime work. He became a project leader in 2 weeks, and it did not take very long before hundreds of hours of non-paid overtime work and recurring harassment from his boss became a regular part of his life. His online confession went viral. It soon became a best-seller book published by a major press company, and later became a movie.

His experience and that of many people who sympathized with him in front of their computer screens reflect changes in our political economy. While the literature on precarious employment has proliferated in the last few decades, much of the writing on the topic focuses on non-regular employment. Hence, the experiences of many young regular workers such as that of the aforementioned IT worker have received little attention. Precarious regular jobs are just as "uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker" (Kalleberg 2009, 2) as non-regular jobs and the degree of labor exploitation involved is more severe than traditional regular employment. Because precarious regular jobs are simply counted as regular employment in official surveys, it is difficult to know how many exist. According to a 2013 report by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare on "disposable use" of young workers, among 5111 investigated workplaces, 82 per cent (4189) had violated labor laws in one way or another (2013a). As the concern over this form of precarious employment has grown, the Ministry opened a temporary consultation line, and on its first day of operation received 1042 requests for consultations, mainly from workers in their 20s and 30s (MHLW 2013b).

Since the precarity of these young workers does not manifest itself in surveys regardless of how precarious their employment situations are, we need another approach to examine this problem. Drawing on rich data collected through ethnographic fieldwork and interviews in Tokyo, this article has three aims. First, it clarifies the underlying mechanisms of labor exploitation in precarious regular employment. Second, it details the experiences of four precarious regular workers in different workplaces to illustrate how this exploitive system of pseudo-regular employment operates. Third, it explores young workers' ability to protest against such unfair treatment through an individualized form of collective action. After I introduce the context and method of this research, the article will discuss each of these three dimensions in order.

Job insecurity

Precarious regular jobs have grown in the same context as non-regular jobs: job security has declined since the 1980s in many industrialized countries mainly owing to globalization of the production and growth of the service economy under neoliberalism (Alberti et al. 2018; Kalleberg 2009, 2018; Standing 2011). While influential concepts of precarious employment such as

"precarious work" (Kalleberg 2009) and "the precariat" (Standing 2011) emphasize chronic job insecurity and do not necessarily specify its employment form, precarious employment is usually defined in relation to "standard employment relations" or "the salariat." In Japan, the term non-regular employment covers various forms of short-term employment including part-time workers, contract workers, and agency workers (Keizer 2008, 412).

While the vast majority of the working population was composed of non-regular workers before the miraculous economic development of the 1960s–1980s, steady economic growth during this period contributed to the decline of precarious employment (Gordon 2017, 11–12). The lives of a certain group of people have always been precarious, yet Japan's patriarchal employment system provided "salarymen" and their families a high degree of security, and perhaps more importantly, enabled them to predict their future. Both blue-collar and white-collar employees hired as regular employees by large firms (usually directly out of school) enjoy essentially permanent employment with regular pay increases, membership in an enterprise union, and strong legal protection against firing and layoffs. Such security has been declining since the beginning of the 1990s through two financial crises and a long recession in between. As neoliberal reforms allowed companies to meet more of their labor needs without offering regular employment, between 1982 and 2012, the number of non-regular workers increased by nearly 14 million (Gordon 2017). The proportion of non-regular workers grew by more than 20 per cent from 1984 to 2014, and today they comprise about 37 per cent of the work force (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2015).

There is an emerging consensus among scholars that, first, the growing dualism between regular and non-regular jobs is the fundamental problem of today's Japanese labor market (Kambayashi 2017). Second, it not only led to the growth of income inequality but also shifted discourse about class from one "middle-class society" to a "divided society" (Chiavacci 2008, 22–23; Ishida and Slater 2010). The young are the ones who bear the cost of this structural change most severely (Song 2018). About one-third of the working population between age 25 and 34 work as non-regular workers (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2015). From 1982 to 2007, 10-year job retention rates among Japanese between 25 and 29 years old decreased from 47.3 per cent to 38.3 per cent (Kambayashi and Kato 2012, 29). The problem of youth employment initially focused on "freeters" and NEET problems (Genda 2011; Kosugi 2006), and social policies were directed at addressing workers' lack of effort and will to improve themselves (Song 2018).

Those who graduated from school and sought jobs in the late 1990s–2000s are typically called the "Ice Age Generation." They entered the labor market after the Asian financial crisis and had difficulty attaining stable employment, which affected their subsequent life course. Similarly, the ones left the school

in the early 2010s and entered the post-2008 crisis labor market is called the "New Ice Age Generation."

The number of job openings increased after 2013. However, a closer look reveals that this rate has been pushed up by the growth in the number of relatively unstable jobs. In 2019, there are 9.91 job openings per candidate in small-size workplaces with 300 or less employees (Recruit Works Institute 2019). In contrast, there are only 0.37 jobs per job seeker in large-size workplaces with 5000 or more employees, which is the worst record in recent years. Similarly, while there are about twelve times more job openings than the number of people who wish to have jobs in the logistics industry, only 0.21 openings are available in the financial industry. While blue-collar, insecure, and demanding jobs at small companies are readily available, secure white-collar jobs appear to be difficult to attain.

Thus, work that once was a source of security is now the source of anxiety for many. According to a comparative survey of six countries conducted by the Japanese government, 64.6 per cent of Japanese young adults worry about the possibility of layoffs, the highest rate among the surveyed countries including the UK (58.6) and the US (54.2) (Cabinet Office Government of Japan 2014, 110). The World Values Survey also reports that more than 80 per cent of respondents under 29 worry about losing their job or not finding one (Inglehart et al. 2014).

Currency of regular jobs

Growing labor market flexibility is particularly problematic for young people in countries like Japan, "which has traditionally been characterized by a well-defined, rigid progression to adulthood that presupposes a strong attachment to work organizations" (Kalleberg and Vallas 2017, 17). Trapped in the increasingly fluid labor market, non-regular workers have increasingly delayed or even foregone traditional markers of adulthood such as marriage and family-making.

Non-regular jobs come with lower income and fewer benefits than regular employment. In 2013, male regular workers in Japan earned 45 per cent more than male non-regular workers on the basis of hourly wages (OECD 2015). In the process of rapid economic development, the country shaped a "welfare through work" model of welfare state policies. Employment is at the core of the social protection system, along with the family (Miura 2012; Ochiai 2014). This resulted in the gendered dual system of social protection, in which insiders (regular employees of large firms) were protected while outsiders (non-regular employees and workers at small firms) were not (Miura 2012; Schoppa 2006; Song 2014).

Young men's decreasing ability to play the provider role destabilized the East Asian breadwinner-home maker family model. Not surprisingly, Japan has seen a remarkable rise of single-person households in the last few decades (Ronald 2017; Ronald, Druta, and Godzik 2018). Scholars caution that the rampant job insecurity will further decrease fertility rates of countries like Korea and Japan, even though they are already among the world's fastest aging societies (Piotrowski et al. 2018; Raymo et al. 2015; Raymo and Shibata 2017; Shirahase 2014). As Mary Brinton argues, increasing difficulty in gaining access to secure jobs translates into difficulty for young people to secure their location in society (or *ba* as she calls it, which roughly translates to a social location) (2010, 2–5).

In this context, regular jobs gain new currency among young workers. According to the World Values Survey, "safe job with no risk" has been consistently ranked one of the most important criteria for choosing a job in Japan from 1994 to 2009 (Inglehart et al. 2014). Another recent government survey found that nearly 90 per cent of people under 29 prioritize a job that is "stable and they can keep working for a long time" when choosing a job (Cabinet Office Government of Japan 2017). What this means for employers is that they can attract a larger number of workers using the allure of "regular employment" rather than a call for non-regular employees. Yet, it is puzzling why employers can sustain such a tricky and exploitative form of employment. We need an approach that goes beyond secondary analysis of surveys and governmental statistics to examine this problem.

Precarity of regular workers

As job insecurity has grown, the resulting precarity and ontological instability beyond only those who hold irregular employment became a widely shared concern among social theorists (Allison 2013, 2015; Han 2018; Lorey 2015; Ortner 2016). Theories of precarity tend to see it as a new mode of domination, which has an universalistic character (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 2008). Political theorist Isabell Lorey observes that "precarization is not an exception, it is rather the rule" (Lorey 2015, 15).

> It is spreading even in those areas that were long considered secure. It has become an instrument of governing and, at the same time, a basis for capitalist accumulation that serves social regulation and control. Precarization means more than insecure jobs, more than the lack of security given by waged employment. (Lorey 2015, 15).

If so, it is not only unfortunate minority groups whose jobs are in crisis.

In his late career, Pierre Bourdieu (2000) argued that "job insecurity is everywhere now." Accordingly, "insecurity acts directly on those it touches (and whom it renders incapable of mobilizing themselves) and indirectly on all the others" (2000, 84). Similarly, Anne Allison, one of the pioneering

anthropologists in the study of precarity, argues that what she calls ordinary refugeeism—longing for an intimacy attached to a time and place that no longer exists—is prevalent in twenty-first century Japan. She argues that "no longer is precarity, insecuritization, or even poverty the purview of the exceptional few; its spread to even college graduates and those who manage to get (then lose) decent jobs means that no one is totally "safe" today" (Allison 2012, 366). Thus, the theorists of precarity argue that the impact of labor market flexibilization is more far-reaching than we imagine.

Furthermore, pessimism about precarious workers' politics prevails among social theorists because workers are increasingly individualized and oriented to short-term thinking that deprives them of the basis for collective action (Bauman 2005; Bourdieu 2000, 83; Castel 2016, 166; Sennett 2006, 178; Standing 2014). For example, Wendy Brown analyzed that neoliberalism is "undoing" basic democratic principles, and one of its consequences is that "labor disappears as a category, as does its collective form, class, taking with it the analytic basis for alienation, exploitation, and association among laborers" (Brown 2015, 38) although recent empirical studies suggest that precarious workers can and do mobilize (Kojima 2017; Meyer 2017; Paret 2016).

There is no shortage of literature on the causes and process of labor market flexibilization in Japan (e.g. Gordon 2017; Gottfried 2014; Osawa, Kim, and Kingston 2013; Osawa and Kingston 2015; Song 2018). However, we know much less about the impacts of this social change on human subjects and their agency. The precarity of regular workers, in particular, merits more attention given what the theorists of precarity have been arguing. Though there are a growing number of ethnographic studies, these studies tend to focus on the experiences of men and women with non-regular jobs (Cook 2013, 2016; Kojima 2010, 2013; O'Day 2012). Once in the field, I found that the major characteristics of non-regular employment are increasingly extended to the realms of regular employment. There is emerging inequality of security between the group of relatively secure workers who are protected by lifetime employment, seniority-based wage, and enterprise unions, and those who do not have access to any of these despite the fact that their employment form is considered "regular." Drawing on ethnography of precarious regular jobs, this paper fills this void.

Research setting and method

The research took place in Tokyo from February to August 2018. I conducted participant observations of the activities of two of the most influential labor unions for young people, Tokyo Young Contingent Workers' Union and a group of unions affiliated with NPO POSSE. These are relatively new (founded in 2000 and 2014, respectively) small unions with less than ten full-time staff members.

These unions share the basic structure and strategy of individual-affiliate unions that emerged in the context of declining union membership and density. They are militant in their self-recognition, in contrast to many enterprise unions that they consider as being too concessional. They rely on a form of union organizing, which utilizes social movement style campaigning and online media to organize precarious young workers who are not likely to be organized by enterprise unions (Kojima 2017; Royle and Urano 2012; Suzuki 2008; Watanabe 2018). At the same time, the two unions diverge in some important respects, such as the extent of human resources they possess, and the strength and nature of solidarity among members. These combinations make them appropriate cases for this study.

I attended meetings, individual labor consultations, study groups, protests on the street and in front of various corporations, collective bargaining sessions, similar sessions mediated by the Tokyo Metropolitan labor relations committee, and informal parties after these events. I also worked in the backyard of a parcel delivery system in Tokyo to familiarize myself with the arrangement of flexible employment. The experience of working there gave me a practical understanding of how tough it is to make a living with this sort of job, and the reality of inequality that exists between secure and non-secure forms of regular employment.

The time period of the fieldwork provided a rare opportunity to explore this topic. It was the period in which the government was trying to extend the flexible work hours system—a system akin to the salaried worker exemption from earning overtime—to non-managerial workers. There were many protest activities going on in Tokyo, which enabled me to observe closely the social movement aspects of these unions' activities. The Japanese government enacted the bill which included this labor law reform in 2018, and the law came into effect in April 2019.

I also conducted seven semi-structured interviews with young adults who had experiences in precarious regular jobs. This data derives from a larger comparative study of economic insecurity based on more than 100 interviews with young adults in Tokyo and Seoul, South Korea. During the same time, I worked at a parcel delivery service in Tokyo to gain first-hand experience of flexible work arrangements, and even joined a protest against my employer organized by POSSE unions. All the names of companies and individuals are pseudonyms unless otherwise noted. When I discuss particular disputes I refer to both unions as "the union" to prevent workers from being identified.

Precarious regular jobs and mechanisms of labor exploitation

Precarious regular jobs

Precarious regular jobs take the form of regular employment (permanent employment), but they are as precarious as non-regular jobs from workers' perspective, and the workers bear the risk of employment instead of the

employers. Furthermore, the degree of labor exploitation in precarious regular employment is also comparable to or even more severe than that involved in non-regular employment. These employers tend to hire a massive number of workers that they cannot afford to employ for the long term and exploit their labor force as much as they can. Often, workers have to quit "voluntarily" when they reach the limits of their physical or mental capacities. The employer does not expect this labor to reproduce because they can replace it by hiring new workers. Hence, it is mainly large corporations that systematically "use and dispose" young workers.

A possible drawback of these jobs for employers is that, in places like Japan where laws are relatively protective of labor, it is difficult to lay off or fire regular workers. Furthermore, it is puzzling that they are able to keep filling vacancies because these workers are often paid much less than the minimum wage due to excessive unpaid overtime work, whereas non-regular jobs at least guarantee the minimum hourly wage. Then, why can employers sustain this precarious and exploitative employment form? By modifying activist-scholar Konno Haruki's articulation of the characteristics of this type of job (Konno 2012, 2015), I argue that there are three mechanisms that tend to sustain precarious regular employment in certain contexts: deception; coercion; and the worker's reluctant consent[2].

Deception

First, this highly exploitative practice cannot be sustained unless employers maintain the required number of workers (Shimazaki 2015, 23); they misinform potential workers to achieve this goal. A typical method is what union members call job description fraud, in which the job description is entirely different from the actual job. Virtually all the people I interviewed reported that their salary was much lower than what they had been promised, and they worked much longer hours than the hours on the contract. Sometimes, an employer even includes a minor clause in the contract, indicating the possibility of dismissal during the trial period, or that the contract may change to short-term employment. There was even an extreme case in which an employer posted a job opening for a regular position, but hired a woman in her 20s and treated her as a non-regular worker instead.

Coercion

Second, workers must stay in the workplace for a certain period of time for employers to appropriate surplus value, but employers also need to leave room to lay them off. To make this possible, they rely on coercion, which is often associated with verbal and physical violence as a scheme to subjugate workers

psychologically. This violence is often referred to as "power harassment" in Japanese. Employers severely exploit workers by not paying overtime wages and forcing them to work beyond the legal limit. This tends to involve illegal measures such as unlawful operation of the de facto over overtime system. Mass hiring means that the selection process actually happens after employees enter the company. Konno (2015) points out that the employer often announces a layoff plan and makes employees compete with each other. The employer also selectively harasses certain employees deemed "useless." The purpose of this performative punishment is to threaten other workers. One manager said in an interview with a journalist that he reprimands workers for the task they performed to make them think "they damaged the company by their mistake" (Akiyama 2014). This is effective because "they don't even know why it was a mistake. But I make them have a sense of indebtedness. Once this is done, new employees always keep an eye on my mind. Then, I can handle them easily."

Reluctant consent

Third, precarious regular jobs involve the worker's consent at least to some extent. Caught in the perceived mismatch between the desire for secure employment and the grim reality of the labor market, young workers who do not have enough credentials reluctantly subject themselves to an employer in their search for job security. While this appears puzzling at first, as Michael Burawoy's classic study of labor process shows, sometimes workers subject themselves to the benefit of the capitalist (Burawoy 1979). They still exercise their agency outside of labor market institutions, as a growing number of studies have documented (e.g. Meyer 2017; Millar 2017; Paret 2016). However, when it comes to their career choice within the labor market, what they can do appears to be limited. Thus, they have learned to practically adjust to insecurity. The experiences of precarious regular workers illustrate these three mechanisms at work.

Experiences of precarious regular workers

Takashi at T housing

For Takashi, who worked for T Housing, a big company with nearly 10,000 employees across the country, it was the first regular position he has been offered in his life. According to the contract, his work hours were from 9 am to 6 pm in addition to 89 h of de facto overtime per month, which was already included in his salary. However, the available record collected by the union shows that he typically worked at least 100 h a month in addition to 160 regular hours. He arrived at the office at 8:30 and joined the morning assembly. A

month's quota was placed on each employee's desk, and they were forced to shout out that quota and how much they sold in the month in front of their colleagues. Afterward, they had another shouting assembly within the department to which they belonged. At the beginning of the month, there was also a "no-result person" speech time. Employees who had not sold anything during the period were forced to confess publicly that they were bad employees. The company's housing products were high price deals, and the housing market was already saturated in the area where Takashi was assigned, so no one in his or previous cohorts had ever gotten a contract. Virtually everyone was deemed a "no-result person."

At 9:30 am, employees were dropped off at random points in town with a map and sales materials in hand from a Toyota minivan driven by the department manager. They randomly visited around 35 relatively large houses found on the map. They went back to the office around noon and wrote a report for the manager to read. Then, they made documents to show to the possible customers they had just visited that morning, and the rest of the day was spent revisiting them. At 8 pm, Takashi would call the manager and ask if he could go home. Most times the manager would request him to keep visiting new houses until he got something. If he found a customer who was interested, he had to go back to the office and stay until midnight finishing crafting a specific sales plan for that customer. The next morning, at 8:30 am, he returned to the office for another shouting assembly. On the weekend, sometimes the manager would show up at Takashi's place without notice and take him to the office.

The Japanese government implemented "work style reform" after Matsuri Takahashi, a 24-year-old graduate of the University of Tokyo and employee at a large advertisement agency, jumped from the employee housing building on the night of Christmas in 2015. Depression from excessive overwork was seen as the cause of her suicide. However, if the amount of work does not change, leaving the office early only means that they have to work somewhere outside of the office without being paid.

In Takashi's branch, employees were forced to alter the records of their working hours. Because the company car assigned to each of them had a time recorder, which was used to count their working hours, workers sometimes had to use a bicycle instead of a car, or the cars assigned to those who were on sick leave. The computers in the office also kept a log of when they were turned on and shut down. In addition to using other people's computers, Takashi often left the office without turning his computer off. This would mess up the log and makes it difficult to track hours. If they did not alter the record, they would be forced to submit an apology letter to the manager and alter it anyway.

T Housing had a mechanism to encourage no-result persons to leave. At the end of the first year of employment, they would reduce the base salary of those

who did not get any contracts by 50,000 yen (about 500 USD). Three months later, they would reduce the salary by another 50,000 yen. At this point, the remaining base salary was only about 40,000 yen (about 400 USD) per month, and 89 h of overtime payment was added to that. If they were at least paid the minimum wage (956 Yen [about 9.50 USD] per hour) in the area where Takashi's office was located, for the 249 h that Takashi's employment contract specified, their monthly salary before deduction should be around 240,000 yen (about 2,400 USD) a month. And this simple calculation does not even include unpaid overwork beyond 249 h. However, they were not even paid as much as the minimum wage. According to Takashi, T Housing also benefited from networks their employees had. T Housing hired workers in the area where they grew up. The purpose of this was to make employees sell products to their friends and families using their personal networks. One of Takashi's senior workers forced his own grandfather to sign a contract, an act that broke his family apart.

When Takashi decided to quit after 6 months of employment, all but one employee in his cohort had already left the company. So had everyone in earlier cohorts. If an employee still chose to stay despite the reduced salary, the company finally fired her or him at the end of the second year. This mechanism enabled the company to exhaust labor in a short period of time. Upon telling his boss of his intention to resign, however, the department leader banned Takashi from applying for another job, and threatened him: "If you get a new job I will tell them (the new employer) that you quit us like this so you will never get a job." Even after Takashi submitted his resignation notice, the manager still called him every day and then started calling his family.

Kana at J publishing

Kana, in her early 30s, worked for J Publishing, a middle-sized company producing various monthly magazines including the Japanese edition of a well-known fashion magazine distributed globally. Kana joined the company as an editor after working for another company in the same industry. At first, Kana was responsible for editing one of their magazines. Typically, she had a peak time for 2 weeks before the publication date of the magazine every month. During these 2 weeks, she went to the office at 10 am, the starting time specified in the contract, and stayed in the office throughout the day and night until the first train to her home departed around 5 am the next morning. She then went home and slept for 1 or 2 h and went back to the office again at 10 am. Otherwise, she would have to take the last train at night and work at her home until the next morning. If she came to the office later than 10 am, even if by 1 min, J Publishing deducted 3000 yen (about 30 USD) from her salary for each late instance. Such a disproportionate amount of salary reduction is

illegal. At J Publishing, the official working hours ended at 7 pm and the overtime hours started from 9 pm, which meant that an employee had to perform at least 2 h of non-paid work to be eligible for any overtime payment. But this was not a big deal for Kana because J Publishing operated a de facto overtime system illegally and did not pay most overtime hours anyway.

Kana also suffered harassment from one senior female manager, such as ridiculing her appearance. One incident she still remembers with resentment was that, knowing Kana had been raised mainly by her grandmother, that person told her that "people who are raised by grandparents are likely to become criminals" in front of other workers. There were constant unreasonable orders as well. One night at 10 pm, she was ordered to buy and bring cut fruit to the next morning's shooting, which featured a young celebrity. Finding a grocery store in a commercial district in central Tokyo at 10 pm, especially one selling cut fruit, was not easy. That night she had no time to sleep because she had to travel to a suburban town to find fruit and cut it up at her place before going to the shooting studio early in the morning. When she brought the fruit, the manager scolded her for bringing hand-cut fruit.

Soon Kana became responsible for editing two magazines. Having two different deadlines each month, the days on which she stayed in the office until 5 am expanded from 2 weeks a month to the full 4 weeks. After a month, Kana gave up and decided to quit.

Yoshiki and Takuya at JP drinks

Yoshiki and Takuya worked for JP Drinks, which is a subsidiary of a major beverage producer. JP Drinks alone had around 5000 employees across the country. Takuya had served in the Japanese Self-Defense Force for 6 years after graduating from high school and did not have other work experience before JP Drinks. The company appeared attractive to him because "it was a company I can enter without skills, and the employment condition was slightly better than other industries." In Yoshiki's case, he was offered a job at a big company in his final year of college. But then the 2008 financial crisis hit, and the company canceled the job offer. Fortunately, he gained another job offer as a regular employee at an IT company ten days before his graduation. In that company, however, he had to perform more than 200 h of overtime per month on average. He usually worked from 7 am to 1 am without any overtime payment. Despite working that long, his annual income was less than three million JPY (about 30,000 USD). That is why he moved to JP Drinks.

At JP Drinks, long hours of unpaid work were normalized. Yoshiki typically drove a truck and filled about 20 vending machines with canned beverages each day. On the contract, they were supposed to work for 7 h and 45 min a day starting from 9 am. In reality, they had to go to the workplace around 7:30

in the morning and work until 9 or 9:30 pm without any break. This resulted in more than 110 h of overtime work per month, and many of these hours were not paid due to the illegal operation of de facto overtime hours system. Furthermore, while the company had suggested to young workers that they might be relocated to the headquarters and work as white-collar workers after some years, such relocations did not happen.

Workers at JP Drinks also endured harassment. Among Yoshiki and Takuya's colleagues, one manager was called "the kick man" because he kicked employees quite often. While paid vacation is mandated by the labor law, another manager posed a difficult quiz to workers and only those who answered correctly were allowed to have a paid leave. Nobody was able to answer correctly, so they were denied their vacation leave. Carrying around hundreds of canned and bottled drinks was a taxing job, especially for 14 h a day without break. In the summer, when they had to work under the scorching sun, workers collapsed from heatstroke. Yoshiki collapsed from overwork and got an IV drip on his way to the union's office.

The mechanisms at work

All of these workers were deceived by their employers before they took their positions. Furthermore, as we can tell from the manager's "abduction" of Takashi from his own home and "the kick man" at JP Drinks, they were exposed to various psychological and physical violence that was used as a means of coercion. Their experiences also speak of a growing chasm between aspiration for secure employment and the grim reality that contradicts such hope. Takashi had accepted the job offer from T Housing and endured harsh working conditions because it was a regular position. At J publishing, many workers who already have experience in the industry often leave the company after a short period of time, but others think they have to leave the industry altogether if they quit, which is the choice Kana eventually made. Yoshiki told a staff member of the union, "In my experience, even if you quit a black company, you will end up with another black company. One friend of mine changed jobs seven times after graduation until he turned 30 and all of them were at black companies" (Kita 2018, 98).

It is increasingly difficult to believe that simply quitting their current job will make their situation any better when there are not enough secure positions. Young workers are not overly socialized cultural dopes who lack the ability to question their situation (Garfinkel 1967). They are keenly aware not only of their pain but also the inadequacy of their resume that places them in a particular position in the labor market. In addition, secure employment also has a symbolic value. Even if the level of security the sort of jobs my interviewees had is no different from that of non-regular jobs, they can be seen by others as

regular workers, which remains the basic condition of living as an adult and a source of dignity and respect.

At some point, however, workers reach their limit. Precarious regular jobs are simply not sustainable. When Yoshiki's application for another regular job was rejected, the only choice left for him was to resist. "Even if I want to change the job, I could find only black corporations and there was barely any job with good working conditions. So I decided to fight while staying in the company" (Kita and Aoki 2018, 85).

Young worker's individualistic collective action

For precarious young workers, enterprise unions—the dominant form of union organizing in Japan—are of little help because their workplaces rarely have unions in the first place. Therefore, they come to the two unions that are explicitly aimed at organizing precarious young workers. Since the two unions do not organize workers at the workplace, their activities are inherently individualistic, in which workers across diverse industries participate as individuals to help other workers as well as themselves. Young workers are introduced to the union by their family, friends, or officers in the Labor Standard Office, or find the union through the internet. Under Japanese labor law, a union does not need to be elected as the sole bargaining agent for a company. Instead, an individual member union can demand the right to bargain collectively on behalf of one employee, and an experienced union representative attends the meeting with the employee.

Thus, their individualistic collective action takes the form of collective action, but one in which an employee confronts their employer as an individual rather than organized within the company. This combination of individualism and support from experienced activists resembles what Diana Fu calls disguised collective action, which "blurs the lines between collective and individual contention by transforming civil society organizations into mobilizing vehicles for the purposes of individual contention" (2017, 500). Based on the ethnography of the underground labor movement in China, Hu argues that this tactical innovation helps to reduce the cost of organizing in contexts where the state is highly repressive against labor unions. The pedagogical process by experienced activists is central in this process, which tends to shape the sense of efficacy among workers (Fu 2017, 515–517). I also found similar dynamics at play among young precarious workers in Tokyo.

Takashi joined the union in order to quit his company, but union staff members found other problems including unpaid overtime wages, for which they had other means of redress through a formal complaint to the labor standards office. After knowing from their first collective bargaining session that T housing did not intend to apologize to him sincerely, Takashi and the union decided

to employ more contentious tactics including a street protest in front of their corporate headquarters in Tokyo. Right after the labor standards office had issued a citation to T Housing regarding unpaid overtime wages to Takashi, he and the union held a press conference, in which Takashi described his experiences at T Housing to journalists belonging to virtually all the major newspaper and broadcasting companies in Tokyo.

Successfully, T Housing's scandal appeared in the headlines of major newspapers and was televised. When T Housing paid unpaid wages to Takashi, his case was settled. He currently works for another company in the same industry. Before going to the union, Takashi recounts, "Because I was able to enter a very big company listed on the first section (of Tokyo Stock Exchange Market), I did not have any idea that the big company could do wrong things." He is now interested in helping other people in the same situation and actively participates in labor consultations. "I am very certain that there are a lot of, very many, people having the same feelings (as I had) and I want to support them."

In collective bargaining sessions, the union and Kana demanded that J Publishing apologize for their ill-treatment and pay her compensation for unpaid overtime. In the first two sessions, the lawyer J Publishing had hired appeared not to have any interest in resolving the dispute. Employers and their lawyers often try to buy time, knowing that a prolonged dispute puts more emotional and financial strain on workers than themselves. To break the impasse, Kana brought about 25 union members to confront two company representatives and their lawyer in the third meeting. At the end of the third meeting, irritated by the company's refusal to make any concession, a union staff member told them that the union might want to mobilize a sound truck, a reference to a tactic that extreme right-wing groups in Japan use to harass their enemies through public embarrassment, by broadcasting loudly from the sound truck in front of the company's offices. When the company representatives mentioned the possibility of street protest in front of their office to a major client, with which they had a contract to dispatch the publication team to their office to produce catalogues, the client implied that they might cancel the contract. Freaked out, the company representatives removed the hawkish lawyer from the conversation and agreed to pay the amount of compensation Kana had been demanding. They also made Kana's former boss apologize to her at the last bargaining session. This contributed to salvaging Kana's damaged dignity.

The kinds of direct confrontation in which these unions engage are very difficult for young workers initially, because they go against major norms of social propriety even though the workers are deeply angry and frustrated about their situation. In the process of carrying out these activities with the union's support, workers gradually start talking about their experiences eloquently, finding a way to express emotions that used to be repressed within the self under

coercion and reluctant consent. These experiences are also a source of efficacy, leading them to feel that what they are doing is worthwhile and effective in altering the situation (Meyer 2017). Furthermore, Kana's experience reveals the strength of working with unions. Considering previous court rulings about other cases, if they had gone to court Kana would have had little chance of winning compensation for the overtime work she had performed at her home. Kana and the union still claimed the legitimacy of this extra-legal demand and won the compensation they requested, which would have been impossible by other legal means.

At JP Drinks, through three collective bargaining sessions and protests, the company agreed to pay part of the unpaid wages to all employees (which, according to union members, may have amounted to one million USD in total) and to mandate at least 1 h of lunch break. However, it turned out that as a condition of this partial payment, JP Drinks made employees agree to waive the debt for the rest of the unpaid wages and prohibited disclosing any information to third parties. During this period, JP Drinks became increasingly hostile toward the union, which was slowly expanding its membership and had organized around 15 JP Drinks workers. JP Drinks relocated Yoshiki to an isolated route where he could not interact with his colleagues. Then, they took disciplinary action against him for his "problematic union activities," ordered him to stay at home, and reduced his salary.

In response, the union decided to embark on a strike, which is usually considered the last resort of union activities. Their strategy was to use a "work-to-rule strike" to reveal JP Drink's injustice to the public. In a work-to-rule strike, the workers work only during the hours specified in the contract and do not perform any unpaid overtime work. The strike took place at JP Drink's branch in Tokyo station, one of the busiest train stations in the world. Soon after their first work-to-rule strike had started, JP Drinks assigned additional employees to this branch, which is considered disruption of a legal strike and is prohibited by the Employment Security Act. The union reported the incident to the Labor Standards Office, which withdrew job announcements for JP Drinks from the Public Employment Security Office as a sanction. Due to the workers' refusal to work overtime, vending machines began running out of drinks. The union staff members live-tweeted the progress of the strike.

This caught attention from the public because people rarely see vending machines with drinks sold out (Figure 1). As one Twitter user posted, "so it was managed by overtime work…," (Twitter user 1, 19 April 2018), it conveyed the simple message that the seemingly "normal" operation of vending machines was possible only because of the unpaid labor of young workers. The picture of an empty vending machine was immediately retweeted more than 50,000 times. Despite the union members' anticipation that they would receive criticism for organizing the strike, supportive messages flooded their Twitter

Figure 1. An empty vending machine

timelines and some people even suggested organizing a buyer strike of JP Drinks' parent company's beverage products. One Twitter user left a comment to the above post,

> Oh, this is terrific. It is a crime to drink canned coffee without paying for it. Then, it must not be legal to make people fill vending machines with canned coffee without paying them. Work must be rewarded by wages. Why can't JP Drinks understand such a simple thing? (Twitter user 2, 19 April 2018)

This tweet was retweeted more than eight hundred times. It was one of many similar tweets. In this way, the union's activism reached a larger audience than Yoshiki and his colleagues had expected. More than 10,000 people signed an online petition demanding reversal of Yoshiki's disciplinary action. As of this writing, the struggle of Yoshiki, Takuya and their colleagues is still underway.

Potential and limitation of individualistic collective action

While theorists of precarity question the ability of atomized precarious workers to organize, the experiences of precarious young workers in Japan show both

the potential and limitation of an individual form of collective action concerning disrupting the mechanisms of precarious regular jobs.

The experience of confronting employers is a pedagogical process supported by experienced activists. It often transforms worker's agency and shapes their sense of efficacy. These workers often have a sense of injustice that Summers-Effler (2002) calls deviant emotions. These emotions are a central element of critical consciousness but do not fit within norms of feeling in particular settings and thus are usually managed or repressed within the self. By revealing the contradictions of deception, coercion, and reluctant consent, the individualistic collective action that focuses on gaining media attention can incite anger against unethical employment practices and offer a way for it to be expressed. For example, Takashi and Kana's anger against their bosses was managed until they joined the union. As all three cases illustrate, in the case of precarious regular workers who are alienated from other workers in workplaces, collective identity as workers and a sense of efficacy are often outcomes rather than the basis of their collective action. Such emotions are resources that everyone has access to regardless of their social position, and thus "there is radical potential inherent in subordinate positioning" (2002, 58–59).

Furthermore, as union staff members acutely pointed out during the dispute with JP Drinks, the public is increasingly aware and resentful of the brutal reality that precarious regular workers confront. The surprising support for workers at JP Drinks implies that there is a ground for the public to be sympathetic with the experience of exploitative employment practices, and indeed many of them are critical of such practices. In this sense, the public is not merely and universally the "homo oeconomicus"—or "economic man," whose action is always underlined by the maximization of economic benefits—that theories of neoliberalism suggest (Brown 2015, 33), rendering critical politics against precarity possible.

The two unions and the workers have also achieved more concrete outcomes. The government adopted a new rule in 2015, in which they officially recognized and disclosed the names of workplaces that have violated labor laws to allow long hours of work. At first, this rule was dysfunctional, as the standard was too strict and only one workplace's name was made public between 2015 and 2017 (Konno 2017). However, as a result of the union's activities and increased repercussions from the public, the government loosened the standard in 2017. At present, they have named companies in more than 1200 cases. Furthermore, as a result of the union's demand, one of the biggest job-hunting portals in the country has rejected job postings for JP Drinks' Tokyo branch. If workers keep appealing to the public, at some point, not sanctioning bad employers will become too costly for the government and the private business.

However, there are also limitations underlying the very nature of this form of collective action. First, many if not most precarious regular workers remain non-unionized. Despite union members' efforts to organize workers both within and across the workplace, successful cases like JP Drinks where they manage to organize a substantial number of workers within one industry remain rare. One consequence is what one union staff member called "the revolving door problem": young workers come to the union to solve their employment problem and leave when it gets solved, which hinders the growth of the movement. While the individualistic nature of activism enables collective organizing by reducing the associated costs, it also presents a barrier for the development of strong solidarity among workers.

Another problem is a strategic dilemma in the context of limited political opportunities for these unions to affect labor-related policies. When the union has to simplify its message to appeal to the public by focusing on a particular aspect of employment relations, it runs the risk of losing the larger picture of labor market transformation and reducing the problem to the evil of specific employers. This concern was raised by some of the union activists I talked to. Yet, we cannot simply dismiss these struggles, the positive meanings young workers attach to them, and the possibilities for ameliorating the conditions surrounding precarious regular workers.

Conclusion

Focusing on one relatively overlooked impact of labor market flexibilization, this article has sought to achieve three goals. First, it clarified the characteristics and underlying mechanisms of precarious regular jobs. Precarious regular jobs are ones in which workers bear the risk of employment even though they appear to be standard regular employment, at least on the paper. Employers rely on the three mechanisms of deception, coercion, and gaining reluctant consent from workers to sustain this employment. Second, the experiences of four young workers in three different industries showed the realities of precarious regular jobs. Third, the article has shown the possibility of individualistic collective action among young workers. In sum, this article has shown that in the context of labor market flexibilization, inequality of security exists not only between standard and non-standard employment but also within standard employment arrangements.

While theorists of precarity see that precarity is widespread in advanced economies today, we know relatively little about the experiences of precarious regular workers in Japan. While there is little doubt that the effects of labor-market flexibilization are class-specific, if we narrowly focus on the precarity of those who hold short-term and contract-based employment, we risk coming short of understanding its far-reaching effects. Rather than to single out the

precarity and insecurity of non-regular workers, we need to make effort to understand precarity relationally. This ethnography exemplifies one instance of such an approach.

At this point, it remains unclear how the aforementioned measure by the government is effective in addressing the problem of excessively exploitative employment practices. Thus, Konno (2017) argues for the importance of "self-defense" by workers such as taking notes of unpaid overwork hours. In 2019, the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy of the Cabinet proposed a draft measure of a 3-year plan to support the "Ice Age Generation," as many among this generation, now in their mid-30s to mid-40s, still face the continuing challenge of the flexible labor market[3]. The council's proposal to call this generation "the first generation to re-design their life-course" when some of them are already in their 40s, along with ambiguous measures to achieve this goal such as job counseling and training, have attracted various criticisms (Japan Times 2019). At best, the government's current response to this problem only tries to address the symptoms rather than the causes of labor market polarization. The concurrent trends of increasing labor market flexibilization and declining job quality—regardless of employment forms—are not very likely to come to an end in the immediate future, both in Japan and globally. Thus, future study should continue to investigate not only the inequality of security between regular and non-regular employment but also within various forms of standard employment arrangements.

The highly exploitative employment practices used by "black corporations" are seen by literature written in Japanese as uniquely Japanese phenomena that are a legacy of the Japanese management style. However, Akira Suzuki (2015) argued that there are both unique and distinctive aspects to these employment practices. Similarly, I suggest that this is not a problem peculiar to Japan, although its specific manifestations may differ. Secure jobs are increasingly out of reach for many young people in post-industrial societies across the globe in spite of their yearning for it, which is the same context as the case for this article where precarious regular jobs have gained ground. In 55 interviews I conducted with young adults in Seoul, South Korea, several young adults shared experiences akin to those of precarious regular workers in Japan. Considering the similarities these two societies share, such as the nature of economic development, forms of welfare regimes, labor market dualism, and levels of income inequality, it might come as little surprise. The three-way mechanism explored in this paper is broad enough to be used to examine comparable instances beyond Japan. The examination of the global implications of my argument, however, goes beyond the limited scope of this article and remains to be pursued in the future.

Acknowledgements

I am thankful for the participants of the two labor unions for sharing their insights and experiences with me. I also wish to thank Dr. Patricia Steinhoff, Dr. Yoonkyung Lee, and the anonymous reviewers for insightful suggestions. An earlier version of this paper was presented at Asia Group Meeting in the Department of Sociology as well as the seminar on Contentious Politics in East Asia in the Asian Studies Program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting in 2019 in New York City. I appreciate the insights I gained from the participants of these meetings.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. This thread is available in a book format (Kuroi 2008).
2. By mechanisms, I refer to more or less general processes that "alter relations among specified elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations" (McAdam 2003, 284; Tilly 2004).
3. The council estimates that 17 million people belong to this generation.

ORCID

Yūki Asahina http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1848-0754

References

Akiyama, Kenichiro. 2014. *Burakku Kigyō Keieisha No Honne [Straight Talk of Burakku Kigyō's Managers]*. Tokyo: Fusousha.

Alberti, Gabriella, Ioulia Bessa, Kate Hardy, Vera Trappmann, and Charles Umney. 2018. "In, against and beyond Precarity: Work in Insecure Times." *Work, Employment and Society* 32 (3): 447–457. doi:10.1177/0950017018762088.

Allison, Anne. 2012. "Ordinary Refugees: Social Precarity and Soul in 21st Century Japan." *Anthropological Quarterly* 85 (2): 345–370. doi:10.1353/anq.2012.0027.

Allison, Anne. 2013. *Precarious Japan.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Allison, Anne. 2015. "Precarity and Hope: Social Connectedness in Postcapitalist Japan." In *Japan: The Precarious Future*, edited by Frank Baldwin and Anne Allison, 36–57. New York: NYU Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2005. *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor.* Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time.* London: Polity Press.

Brinton, Mary C. 2010. *Lost in Transition: Youth, Work, and Instability in Postindustrial Japan.* New York: Cambridge University Press.
Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Burawoy, Michael. 1979. *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
Cabinet Office Government of Japan. 2014. *International Survey of Youth Attitude 2013.* Tokyo: Cabinet Office Government of Japan.
Cabinet Office Government of Japan. 2017. *Kodomo Wakamono No Genjou to Ishiki Ni Kansuru Chousa [a Research about Consciousness of Children and Youth].* Tokyo: Cabinet Office Government of Japan.
Castel, Robert. 2016. "The Rise of Uncertainties." *Critical Horizons* 17 (2): 160–167. doi:10.1080/14409917.2016.1153886.
Chiavacci, David. 2008. "From Class Struggle to General Middle-Class Society to Divided Society: Societal Models of Inequality in Postwar Japan." *Social Science Japan Journal* 11 (1): 5–27. doi:10.1093/ssjj/jyn022.
Cook, Emma E. 2013. "Expectations of Failure: Maturity and Masculinity for Freeters in Contemporary Japan." *Social Science Japan Journal* 16 (1): 29–43. doi:10.1093/ssjj/jys022.
Cook, Emma E. 2016. "Adulthood as Action: Changing Meanings of Adulthood for Male Part-Time Workers in Contemporary Japan." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 44 (3): 317–337. doi:10.1163/15685314-04403003.
Foucault, Michel. 2008. *Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France, 1978–79.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Fu, Diana. 2017. "Disguised Collective Action in China." *Comparative Political Studies* 50 (4): 499–527. doi:10.1177/0010414015626437.
Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
Genda, Yuji. 2011. "Young, Japanese, and Not in Education, Employment or Training: Japan's Experence with the NEET Phenomenon." In *Demographic Change and Inequality in Japan* edited by Sawako Shirahase, 76–97. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.
Gordon, Andrew. 2017. "New and Enduring Dual Structures of Employment in Japan: The Rise of Non-Regular Labor, 1980s–2010s." *Social Science Japan Journal* 20 (1): 9–36. doi:10.1093/ssjj/jyw042.
Gottfried, Heidi. 2014. "Precarious Work in Japan: Old Forms, New Risks?" *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 44 (3): 464–478. doi:10.1080/00472336.2013.867523.
Han, Clara. 2018. "Precarity, Precariousness, and Vulnerability." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47 (1): 331–343. doi:10.1146/annurev-anthro-102116-041644.
Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin, and B. Puranen. 2014. *World Values Survey: All Rounds – Country-Pooled Datafile Version.* Madrid: JD Systems Institute.
Ishida, Hiroshi, and David H. Slater. 2010. "Social Class in Japan." In *Social Class in Contemporary Japan: Structures, Sorting, and Strategies*, edited by Hiroshi Ishida and David H. Slater, 1–29. London and New York: Routledge.
Japan Times. 2019. "Employment Ice Age Generation' Needs Support." *Japan Times*, June 6
Kalleberg, Arne L. 2009. "Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition." *American Sociological Review* 74 (1): 1–22. doi:10.1177/000312240907400101.
Kalleberg, Arne L. 2018. *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies.* Malden, MA: Polity.
Kalleberg, Arne L., and Steven P. Vallas. 2017. "Probing Precarious Work: Theory, Research, and Politics." *Research in the Sociology of Work* 31: 1–30.

Kambayashi, Ryo. 2017. *Seiki No Sekai, Hiseiki No Sekai: Gendai Nihon Roudou Keizaigaku No Kihon Mondai [the World of Regular Employment and the World of Irregular Employment: A Basic Problem of Labor Economics in Contemporary Japan]*. Tokyo: Keio University Press.

Kambayashi, Ryo, and Takao Kato. 2012. "Trends in Long-Term Employment and Job Security in Japan and the United States: The Last Twenty-Five Years." Center on Japanese Economy and Business Working Paper Series, New York City: Columbia University 302.

Keizer, Arjan B. 2008. "Non-Regular Employment in Japan: Continued and Renewed Dualities." *Work, Employment and Society* 22 (3): 407–425. doi:10.1177/0950017008093478.

Kita, Yoshiki. 2018. "Tachiagaru Roudoushatachi [Workers Standing Up]." *POSSE*, July.

Kita, Yoshiki, and Kotaro Aoki. 2018. "Watashi Wa Burakku Kigyō to Tatakai Tsuzukeru [I Keep Fighting with Burakku Kigyō]." *POSSE*, July.

Kojima, Shinji. 2010. "When Dismissal Becomes a Business Transaction: Analysis of the Processes and Consequences of Haken-Giri under the Global Recession." *Contemporary Japan* 22 (1–2): 23–45. doi:10.1515/cj-2010-004.

Kojima, Shinji. 2013. "Japanese Temp Workers: The Culture and Politics of Precarious Employment." PhD diss., University of Hawaii.

Kojima, Shinji. 2017. "Social Movement Unionism in Contemporary Japan: Coalitions within and across Political Boundaries." *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 00: 1–00. Accessed 07 December 2018. doi:10.1177/0143831X17694242.

Konno, Haruki. 2012. *Burakku Kigyō: Nihon Wo Kuitsubusu Youkai [Burakku Kigyō: A Monster Eating up Japan]*. Tokyo: Bungei Shunju.

Konno, Haruki. 2015. "Burakku Kigyō Mondai' No Enkaku to Tenbou. [History and Provision of the Problems Related to Burakku Kigyō]." *The Journal of Ohara Institute for Social Research* 681: 6–21.

Konno, Haruki. 2017. "Seihu No Atarashii 'Burakku Kigyō Taisaku' No Kanousei [the Potential of the Government's New Policy to Deal with Burakku Kigyō]." Yahoo! Japan News. https://news.yahoo.co.jp/byline/konnoharuki/20170102-00066172/.

Kosugi, Reiko. 2006. "Youth Employment in Japan's Economic Recovery: 'Freeters' and 'NEETs." *Japan Focus* 4 (5): 1–5.

Kuroi, Yuto. 2008. *Burakku gaisha ni tsutometerundaga mō ore wa genkai kamo shirenai [A working poor in a troubled company]*. Tokyo: Shinchosha.

Lorey, Isabell. 2015. *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*. London: Verso.

McAdam, Doug. 2003. "Beyond Structural Analysis: Toward a More Dynamic Understanding of Social Movements." In *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, edited by Doug McAdam and Mario Diani, 281–298. New York: Oxford University Press.

Meyer, Rachel. 2017. "Precarious Workers and Collective Efficacy." *Critical Sociology* 43 (7–8): 1125–1141. doi:10.1177/0896920516655858.

MHLW. 2013a. "Wakamono No 'Tsukaisute' Ga Utagawareru Kigyo Tou Heno Jyuten Kantoku No Jisshi Jyoukyou [On the Supervision of the Companies That 'Use and Dispose' Young Workers]." https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/houdou/0000032425.html.

MHLW. 2013b. "Wakamono No 'Tsukaisute' Ga Utagawareru Kigyo Tou Ni Kansuru Muryou Denwa Soudan Ni Tsuite [On the Consulatation about the Companies That 'Use and Dispose' Young Workers]." https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/koyou_roudou/roudoukijun/wakamono/index.html.

Millar, Kathleen M. 2017. "Toward a Critical Politics of Precarity." *Sociology Compass* 11 (6): e12483. doi:10.1111/soc4.12483.

Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. 2015. "Toukei Today No. 97 [Statistics Today]." http://www.stat.go.jp/info/today/097.htm#k1.

Miura, Mari. 2012. *Welfare through Work: Conservative Ideas, Partisan Dynamics, and Social Protection in Japan*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

O'Day, Robin. 2012. "Japanese Irregular Workers in Protest: Freeters, Precarity and the Re-Articulation of Class." PhD diss., University of British Columbia.
Ochiai, Emiko. 2014. "Leaving the West, Rejoining the East? Gender and Family in Japan's Semi-Compressed Modernity." *International Sociology* 29 (3): 209–228. doi:10.1177/0268580914530415.
OECD. 2015. *OECD Economic Surveys Japan.* Paris, France: OECD Publishing.
Ortner, Sherry B. 2016. "Dark Anthropology and Its Others: Theory since the Eighties." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (1): 47–73. doi:10.14318/hau6.1.004.
Osawa, Machiko, Myoung Jung Kim, and Jeff Kingston. 2013. "Precarious Work in Japan." *American Behavioral Scientist* 57 (3): 309–334. doi:10.1177/0002764212466240.
Osawa, Machiko, and Jeff Kingston. 2015. "Risk and Consequences: The Changing Japanese Employment Paradigm." In *Japan: The Precarious Future*, edited by Frank Baldwin and Anne Allison, 58–86. New York: New York University Press.
Paret, Marcel. 2016. "Politics of Solidarity and Agency in an Age of Precarity." *Global Labour Journal* 7 (2): 174–188. doi:10.15173/glj.v7i2.2481.
Piotrowski, Martin, Arne Kalleberg, Erik Bond, and Rick Wolford. 2018. "Non-Standard Work and Fertility: A Comparison of the US and Japan." *Asian Population Studies* 14 (2): 116–136. doi:10.1080/17441730.2018.1446310.
Raymo, James M., Hyunjoon Park, Yu Xie, and Wei-jun Yeung. 2015. "Marriage and Family in East Asia: Continuity and Change." *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (1): 471–422. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112428.
Raymo, James M., and Akihisa Shibata. 2017. "Unemployment, Nonstandard Employment, and Fertility: Insights from Japan's 'Lost 20 Years." *Demography* 54 (6): 2301–2329. doi:10.1007/s13524-017-0614-y.
Recruit Works Institute. 2019. "Daisotsu Kyūjin Chousa [A Research of Job Openigs for College Graduates]." http://www.works-i.com/surveys/graduate.html.
Ronald, Richard. 2017. "The Remarkable Rise and Particular Context of Younger One-Person Households in Seoul and Tokyo." *City & Community* 16 (1): 25–46. doi:10.1111/cico.12221.
Ronald, Richard, Oana Druta, and Maren Godzik. 2018. "Japan's Urban Singles: Negotiating Alternatives to Family Households and Standard Housing Pathways." *Urban Geography* 39 (7): 1018–1040. doi:10.1080/02723638.2018.1433924.
Royle, Tony, and Edson Urano. 2012. "A New Form of Union Organizing in Japan? Community Unions and the Case of the McDonald's 'McUnion." *Work, Employment and Society* 26 (4): 606–622. doi:10.1177/0950017012445093.
Schoppa, Leonard J. 2006. *Race for the Exits: The Unraveling of Japan's System of Social Protection.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Sennett, Richard. 2006. *The Culture of the New Capitalism.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Shimazaki, Ryo. 2015. "Saiyou, Naitei, Nyūsha Wo Meguru Mondai [Problems Related to Job Offer and Entrance to the Company]." *The Journal of Ohara Institute for Social Research* 681: 22–34.
Shirahase, Sawako. 2014. *Social Inequality in Japan.* London and New York: Routledge.
Song, Jiyeoun. 2014. *Inequality in the Workplace: Labor Market Reform in Japan and Korea.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Song, Jiyeoun. 2018. "Young People, Precarious Work, and the Development of Youth Employment Policies in Japan." *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 19 (3): 444–460. doi:10.1017/S1468109918000117.
Standing, Guy. 2014. *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens.* New York: Bloomsbury.
Standing, Guy. 2011. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class.* New York: Bloomsbury.

Statistics Bureau of Japan. 2015. *Nenrei Kaikyu Betsu No Seiki-Hiseiki Koyousha Kan No Koyou Keitai No Ikou [Forms of Employment by Age Group]*. Tokyo.

Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Conscoiusness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20 (1): 41–60. doi:10.1111/1467-9558.00150.

Suzuki, Akira. 2008. "Community Unions in Japan: Similarities and Differences of Region-Based Labour Movements between Japan and Other Industrialized Countries." *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 29 (4): 492–520. doi:10.1177/0143831X08096230.

Suzuki, Akira. 2015. "'Burakku Kigyō' No Fuhensei to Tamensei." *The Journal of Ohara Institute for Social Research* 682: 30–43.

Tilly, Charles. 2004. "Social Boundary Mechanisms." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 34 (2): 211–236. doi:10.1177/0048393103262551.

Watanabe, Hiroaki Richard. 2018. "The Political Agency and Social Movements of Japanese Individually-Affiliated Unions." *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 00: 1–00. Accessed 07 December 2018. doi:10.1177/0143831X18789794.

Yūki Asahina is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA. He can be reached at yasahina@fas.harvard.edu.