Drawing on a holistic conceptual framework that integrates culture and social institutions, this chapter sets out to explore the relationship between employment regulation and practices in the context of non-regular work. It argues that the contours of non-regular work are shaped by two closely interconnected key factors. The first factor has much to do with Japan's largely unchanged institutional arrangements between the state, capital and labour, which subject a great many workers to management prerogatives and market despotism. The second and more entrenched factor is the prevalence and persistence of cultural assumptions concerning the male breadwinner-female dependent family model, which underpin the state's regulatory and welfare frameworks, labour market dualism, industrial relations, corporate management and many other areas of Japanese life.

16

Employment regulation and practices

The production and consumption of non-regular work

Huiyan Fu

Introduction

Since the 1960s, the distinct character of work and employment in Japan has received much international attention for its perceived contribution to the country's postwar economic growth. Much has been made of the so-called three pillars or jewels: lifetime employment (*shūshin koyō*), seniority promotion (*nenkō joretsu*) and enterprise unionism (*kigyō kumiai*). As the defining features of Japan's 'firm-as-family' management (Clark 1979; Fruin 1980) or 'welfare corporatism' (Dore 1973; Lincoln and Kalleberg 1990), these pillars have been instrumental in retaining loyal workers, keeping workers loyal to the firm, and maximizing corporate profits. Closely entangled with the work and employment system are popular discourses of 'culture', notably the traditional Confucianism-informed family (*ie*) values, which are frequently invoked by the ruling elite to emphasize the sense of Japanese 'uniqueness'.[1] Such attempt, known as nihonjinron, is now widely dismissed as functionalist or essentialist; to be sure, it is 'in danger of legitimating, perhaps even helping to construct, that system as much as actually describing or explaining it' (Goodman 1998: 135). In this connection, culture can be a dangerous word, unless it is understood as an ever-continuing discursive process in which a society's core values, norms and beliefs are constructed, maintained, mediated,

challenged or changed – one that is intricately intertwined with political and economic forces. This view of culture is particularly pertinent to the discussion of Japan's changing employment landscape in the post-bubble economy where the tension between culture and social institutions is made more acute by the growth of precarious work. As more and more workers are being shunted to the disadvantageous labour market periphery as non-regular temps – and increasingly 'non-regular regulars' (Gordon 2017) – serious questions emerge pertaining to the maintenance of the much-touted Japanese traditions that have been 'invented' — to use Hobsbawm and Ranger's famous phrase (1983) — to entrench and reinforce labour market segmentation and inequality.

Drawing on this holistic conceptual framework that integrates culture and social institutions, this chapter sets out to explore employment regulation and practices in the context of non-regular work. It first identifies new and enduring employment features, with a view to accentuating Japan's gendered, core-peripheral dualism. This is followed by an analysis of the production and consumption of non-regular work, examining (1) the extent to which the growth of non-regular work is caused and exacerbated by formal institutional arrangements and (2) everyday life experiences from the perspective of non-regular workers. The chapter concludes by arguing that the contours of non-regular work in Japan are shaped by two closely interconnected key factors. The first factor has much to do with Japan's largely unchanged institutional structures, especially those centred upon the state-capital-labour relations, which subject a great many workers to management prerogatives and market despotism. The second and more elusive factor is the prevalence and persistence of cultural assumptions concerning the male breadwinner-female dependent family model, which underpin the state's regulatory and welfare frameworks, labour market dualism, industrial relations, corporate management and many other areas of Japanese life.

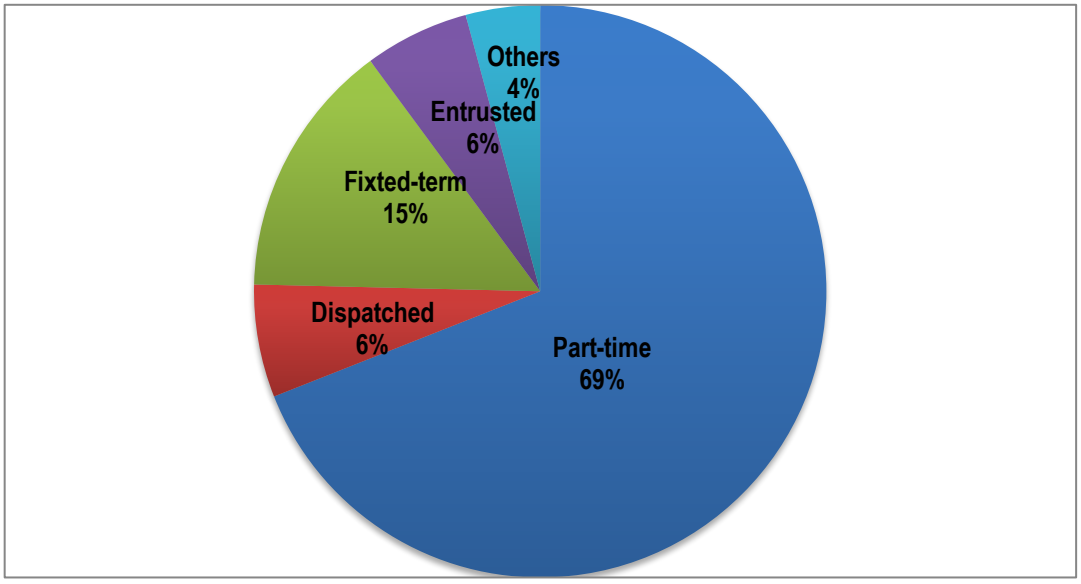
The gendered, core-peripheral dualism

Increased use of non-regular workers has been the single most important change in the Japanese labour market since the 1990s (Rebick 2005; Keizer 2010). Non-regular employment in Japan assumes a bewildering variety of forms, including *pāto* (part-time), *arubaito* (part-time), *haken* (dispatched or agency-mediated), *keiyaku* (fixed-term), *shokutaku* (entrusted), *kisetsukō* (seasonal workers), *rinjikō* (emergency workers) and *hiyatoi* (day labourers) (Figure 16.1). In practice, these categories are not defined consistently and cannot always be distinguished from one another. More importantly, despite being officially classified as non-regular workers, many put in the same number of hours as their regular counterparts. This is particularly true in service industries, such as retailers and restaurants, where part-timers often make up a large proportion of the workforce as 'core' or 'pseudo' temps (Matsunaga 2000).

Since the postwar period of rapid economic growth, non-regular workers have long been used as a cheap buffer against the negative effects of economic fluctuations (Gordon 1985, 1998; Chalmers 1989; Gill 2001). They function as a crucial means of shoring up the 'lifetime employment' limited to a shrinking aristocracy of (male) regular workers. Recent post-bubble decades have seen progressive neoliberal deregulation of temporary employment, as exemplified by the drastic liberalization of dispatched workers whose expandability and availability, rhetorically designated as their 'flexibility', have come to represent Japan's 'working poor' (*wākingu pua*) and 'gap-widening society' (*kakusa shakai*) (Fu 2011, 2016; Kojima 2015; Imai 2009). Relying on a new flexible model based on 'multi-track' personnel, large firms have facilitated their needs through greater use of low-cost, disposable labour (Crump 2003; Jackson and Miyajima 2007). Consequently, the existing core-peripheral labour dualism has been renewed and intensified, as evidenced by the changing percentage of non-regular workers, which has

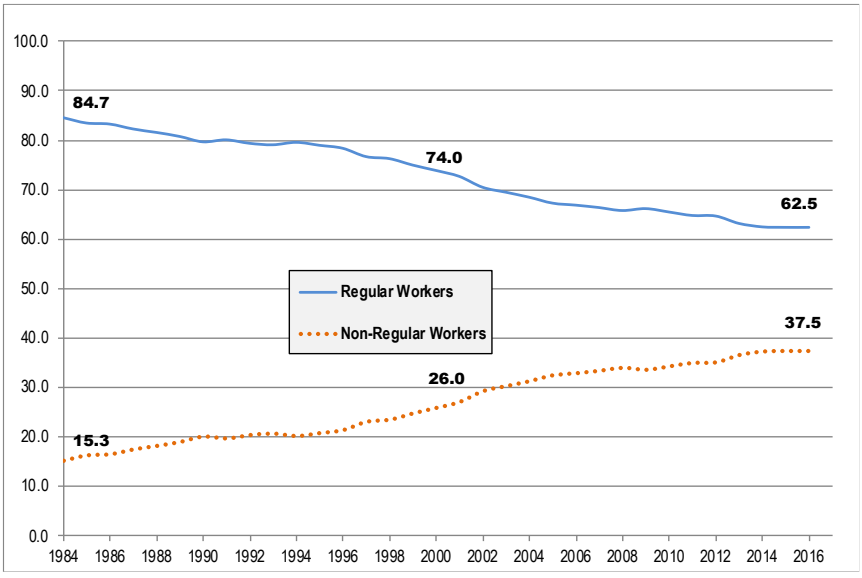
grown to 37.5 per cent in 2016, compared to 15.3 per cent in 1984 and 26.0 per cent in 2000 (Figure 16.2).

Figure 16.1 Composition of non-regular labour



Source: Labour Force Survey 2015 MIAC Statistics Bureau.

Figure 16.2 Percentage of regular and non-regular workers in total employment



Source: Labour Force Survey (various years), MIAC Statistics Bureau.

Given that almost 40 per cent of the national workforce – nearly 20 million people – are now identified as non-regular workers, long-term job security has become an increasingly rare commodity. This trend, which is a globally widespread phenomenon, has peculiar gendered features in Japan: women make up around 70 per cent of the non-regular labour force whereas men make up around 70 per cent of the regular labour force. Compared to Europe or the United States, in which gender-based labour division takes place primarily along occupational lines, in Japan it is located within occupations along the lines of temporary-permanent employment status. This distinctive gendered pattern also makes an interesting contrast with labour market dualism in China, where hundreds of millions of rural migrants, who are institutionally segregated from urban locals by their second-class citizenship, shoulder an excessive burden of non-regular or precarious work. Moreover, education, which tends to play an important role in empowering women elsewhere, is not positively linked with the improvement of women's employment opportunities in Japan: an international survey suggests that, despite having a very high number of well-educated women, Japan was ranked third lowest in 2013 among OECD countries in its employment rate for women with a university degree.[2] Neither the postwar economic growth nor recent periods of economic stagnation have significantly altered this gendered employment formation. Japanese women continue to be relegated to the margins of political and economic life as part-time wage workers and full-time family caregivers. It should be noted that the gendered dualism is particularly prevalent among small and medium-sized firms – by far the largest segment of Japan's workforce – whose working environment for the peripheral majority is profoundly different from that of Japan's core, male regular workers in large firms.[3]

To a great extent, the gendered, periphery-core dualism, together with its underlying cultural assumptions, is a key, albeit less visible, pillar that explains much of Japan's postwar 'economic miracle' (Brinton 1993; Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato 1998;

MacNaughtan 2005; Gottfried 2009). It is consequential in shaping the contours of precarious work and social inequalities in post-bubble periods. With the exception of a handful of high-status and affluent individuals in professional, managerial and technical occupations who are empowered by flexible work, the vast majority of non-regular workers is excluded from the same array of benefits that are available to regular workers, ranging from job security, bonus payments and social security coverage to training, childcare, sick leave and paid holidays. As Table 16.1 suggests, gender and employment status constitute key structural variables in income distribution: 84.6 per cent of female non-regular workers have an annual income below JPY 2 million, compared to 22.3 per cent of female regular workers and 11.3 per cent of all regular workers. According to *The Japan Times* (26 April 2016), Japan's relative poverty rate – defined as the proportion of people whose income falls below half the national median household income (JPY 1.22 million in 2012) – is 16.1 per cent, ranked sixth from the bottom of OECD countries. Poverty is particularly severe among single-mother households and households with children aged 17 and below, which are disproportionally affected by the growing trend towards non-regular employment.

Table 16.1 Income distribution by employment status and gender

Annual Salary (Million Yen)	Non-regular Workers			Regular Workers		
	Male (100%)	Female (100%)	Total (100%)	Male (100%)	Female (100%)	Total (100%)
Less than 1	26.6	45.0	39.1	1.1	5.2	2.4
1–1.99	30.8	39.6	36.8	5.2	17.1	8.9
2–2.99	22.4	11.3	14.8	14.7	28.2	18.9
3–3.99	11.0	3.0	5.5	20.5	22.0	20.9
4–4.99	4.5	0.7	1.9	17.6	12.7	16.1
5–6.99	2.9	0.3	1.1	22.0	10.6	18.4
7–9.99	1.3	0.1	0.5	14.1	3.6	10.8
10–14.99	0.3	0.1	0.2	4.1	0.5	3.0
Above 15	0.2	–	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.5

Source: Labour Force Survey 2015, MIAC Statistics Bureau.

Increasingly, not only women but also men fall outside of a secure career track and find it difficult to fulfil social expectations (Roberson and Suzuki 2002; Cook 2016). For example, as depicted poignantly in Gill's ethnographic account, male-dominated day labourers are confronted by the 'darkness of the choice' and 'social opprobrium and/or personal feelings of guilt' because of their rejection of, or failure to achieve, expected masculine roles in the Japanese household and workplace (2003: 157). Indeed, the gendered, core-peripheral dualism foists upon men a different kind of pressure: as Matsunaga remarks, 'an employee of a large company is a more desirable husband and son-in-law than an employee of a small company, and certainly more desirable than a casual labourer' (2000: 151). Growing public acceptance of diverse identities and lifestyles notwithstanding, the position of regular employment and organizational identity in the ideological makeup of hegemonic masculinity in Japan remains paramount (Dasgupta 2012). It is perhaps not surprising that there is a direct link between non-regular work and low marriage and fertility rates (Piotrowski et al. 2015). Thus, the growth of non-regular work brings a wide range of risks and inequalities, which go beyond statutory rights and statistic measurements, to both individuals and households.

The production of non-regular work

Employment regulation figures importantly in the construction and normalization of non-regular work. The formation and enforcement of a mode of regulation reflects and affects the power balance in employment or industrial relations, that is the tripartite relationship between the state, employers and labour unions. In Japan, employers are a formidable force, exerting a powerful influence in the development of a regulatory environment that furthers their own interests and militates against protective labour legislation.

Historically, they have developed a cosy relationship with ministry bureaucrats, often operating along informal lines, as evidenced by *amakudari* (lit. descent from heaven), a customary practice that shifts retired bureaucrats to executive positions in industries normally related to the public sector of work from which they have just retired (Okimoto and Rohlen 1988; Eccleston 1989). Such an employer-ministry affinity enables key businesses to have preferential access to government and exercise substantial power over major policy decisions, which in turn renders the role of politicians largely that of 'ratifying' rather than of 'shaping' (Dore 1986: 23) in policy-making processes. This 'truncated', 'elusive' power triumvirate (Van Wolferen 1989) has a direct bearing on workers struggles.

Postwar industrial relations saw the fatal defeat of unions in key labour movements, which had much to do with a coordinated assault by employers and the state, the latter playing a relatively indirect but crucial role in steering its development (Johnson 1995; Whittaker 1998; Jeong and Aguilera 2008). Employers were particularly adept at deploying coercive actions and soft measures – not least their 'conscious act of institution-building' through the 'creative' use of tradition (Cole 1979: 24) – to successfully shepherd workers and their struggles into the confines of a self-sustained, single firm. Despite changing national circumstances, this employer-dominated enterprise unionism has remained largely unchanged and unchallenged; it is characterized by the union's cooperative stance towards management and an inability or unwillingness to engage with non-regular workers. Rengo, the largest national centre of organized labour comprising mainly large enterprise unions, is widely condemned as ineffective, if not colluding with the management. As Imai and Shire (2006) point out, during the post-bubble neoliberal reforms, the major direction for labour law and policy was controlled by employers; labour unions were only occasionally represented. Suffice to say, the uneven tripartite relationship is one of the driving forces behind Japan's accelerated

employment flexibilization, which gives rise to greater ease with which employers are able to recruit and dismiss workers, especially among those at the bottom end of labour markets. The corollary is that a great many workers are left disorganized, unprotected and subjected to management control.

The growing labour market inequalities, as Yun (2010) explicates, are caused by Japan's 'conservative corporatism', where the state, employers and enterprise unions seek to protect the job security of (male) regular workers while shifting the burdens of job insecurity and cost reduction to (female) marginal workers. Such a conservative orientation throws into relief the pervasiveness and persistence of the male breadwinner/female homemaker family model. While gender across the world is a salient category whereby labour division is constructed, wide variations exist in the extent to which it is institutionally entrenched and culturally articulated. In Japan, gender roles are rigidly formalized and sharply delineated, as illustrated by the continuing emphasis on the role of women as a 'good wife and wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*) and men's breadwinner responsibilities as a 'central supporting pillar' (*daikokubashira*) in the traditional household. The rapid economic growth in the 1960s made possible the 'professional full-time housewife' (*senmon shufu*) ideal, but there was a major shift in gender ideology during the 1980s and 1990s. As explained by Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato, the state 'coordinated family, employment and welfare policies as an instrument to draw more women into waged work as part-timers and to retain them as full-time, unpaid care-givers' so as to 'suit the "needs" of capitalist production and to preserve the patriarchal gender contract' (1998: 37, 40). This institutionally embedded gender contract has continued intact throughout the post-bubble decades, which is partly caused by Japan's long-standing aversion to immigration.

A close examination of thresholds, exemptions and exclusions stipulated in employment laws and regulations often reveals how protections, entitlements, benefits,

risks and responsibilities are differentiated by gender, employment status, age and other social stratification variables. Non-regular workers in Japan are not only excluded from the firm-centred on-the-job training, seniority promotion and collective bargaining, but they also suffer considerable disadvantages in contractual and statutory rights. More crucially, many of the Japanese labour policies and regulatory frameworks are premised upon the male breadwinner model and aim to protect primarily regular (male) workers. For example, employment-related entitlements and benefits, such as sick pay, injury payments, holiday pay, maternity leave and insurance programmes, impose strict screening criteria especially concerning the length of continuous employment, which effectively excludes the majority of non-regular workers from the protective coverage (see Osawa et al. 2013). Another example is the existing spousal tax deduction system, which was introduced in 1961 to support housewives whose husbands worked long hours during the rapid economic growth period. The system exempts the second earner from tax if their income falls below a threshold. In practice, the threshold not only encourages employers to offer low-paid, non-regular jobs to married female workers but also provides a disincentive for women to pursue regular employment over the course of their life cycle (MacNaughtan 2015). As Gottfried and Hayashi-Kato rightly argue, 'the state makes it economically rational for households to base their division of labour along traditional gender lines' (1998: 39). In April 2017, instead of abolishing the anachronistic system, the government increased the threshold (from JPY 1.03 million to JPY 1.50 million) in order to boost women's workplace participation (continuously as non-regular workers) amid concerns over a rapidly aging population and shrinking labour force. Similar orientations were seen in the 1990s, when the state came up with 'the Angel Plan' and 'the Sam Campaign' to improve fathers' involvement in child-rearing and make family and work demands more compatible for women. Rather than challenging and changing women's marginalized position as part-time wage workers and full-time family

caregivers, these initiatives, as Roberts (2002) emphasizes, are designed to encourage women of reproductive age to have children while continuing part-time work.

Since 2013, Prime Minister Abe's government has put forward a new policy, popularly known as 'womenomics', with the aim of increasing levels of gender equality, generating GDP growth and improving international reputation. Although pledging to create 'a society that enables all women to shine' (*subete no josei ga kagayaku Nihon*), the policy has been widely dismissed as mere rhetoric. Once again, the state has tried to attract more women to work and encourage those who already work to put in longer hours, without directly contesting the male breadwinner model. In addition to the imposed policy and regulatory barriers from above, the persistence of this normative model is sometimes attributed to lack of strong resistance from below. It is often reported that there exists among the wider population a sentimental attachment to and a general compliance with the traditional gendered division of labour. However, real people in concrete situations are far more complex and multifaceted than such a simplistic explanation would allow.

The consumption of non-regular work: dispatched workers as an example

Drawing on an ethnographic study of dispatched workers or *haken* conducted between November 2006 and September 2007 inside two Japanese firms, this section investigates how non-regular work is actually experienced from an actor-centred perspective. Dispatched workers are distinguished from other non-regular workers due to a triangular employment structure where they are typically hired by staffing agencies and dispatched to work at the facilities of, and under the authority of, user firms. Such tangled

employment relations are fraught with legal ambiguities, making it difficult for the law to tackle violations that abound in everyday practice. As a result, dispatched workers are prone to a number of manipulative and exploitative activities on the part of both staffing agencies and user firms.

During the ethnographic fieldwork, many agencies asked the job candidate, who had already passed the interview with the agency, to have a further interview with the user firm. This practice was, however, illegal, as, in order to prevent discrimination, the *haken* law did not allow the user firm to select workers by requesting CVs or holding interviews. In everyday communication, agencies often used alternative expressions, such as a 'face-to-face meeting' (*kao-awase*) or 'company tour' (*kaisha kengaku*) instead of the term 'interview' (*mensetsu*). Such interviews with the user firm were so common that many dispatched workers thought that they were legally permitted. Another relatively hidden violation was concerned with social insurance coverage, as a well-informed dispatched worker explained:

> Many agencies will not let you join the mandatory insurance schemes immediately. Every time we shift to a new job assignment, we have to re-enrol in the insurance system. The re-enrolment won't take place until we finish a so-called 'trial period' (*shiyō kikan*) that lasts typically between half a month and two months. Agencies and user firms are making good profits out of these non-protection, non-payment periods.

In addition, there were more serious employer manoeuvres that would have long-term consequences for dispatched workers. According to the *haken* law, user firms were obligated to 'make efforts' to directly hire workers who had worked on the same job for more than one year, and had to offer direct employment to those who had worked on the same job for more than three consecutive years. Yet two customary practices were prevalent before the three-year period concluded: one was to simply alter the job title so

as to make it look like a different job assignment and the other was to move the worker to a different department or branch within the same firm. These tactics of manipulation aimed at circumventing employer responsibilities had a pernicious effect on workers' job security and wellbeing, as a dispatched worker described:

> I have worked in different workplaces of the current firm for eight years. I was dispatched to the current workplace two years ago when the previous one was suddenly dissolved due to corporate restructuring. I do not know where I will be after my current three-year job assignment.

In recent government revisions to the *haken* law (MHLW 2015), the three-year limit has been allowed to be rolled over and reset on terms that are more favourable to employers, rendering workers increasingly vulnerable to 'lifelong dispatch' (*shōgai haken*).[4]

Clearly, focusing on everyday practices goes a long way towards unearthing otherwise invisible loopholes in the existing regulatory frameworks. It helps to lay bare the lack of collective representation mechanisms and social protection measures for non-regular workers. Furthermore, ethnographic fieldwork lends itself well to the investigation of how individuals negotiate with imposed social norms and conditions. One of the main findings emerging from the fieldwork was that dispatched workers were not a homogenous group – nor were they Weberian 'ideal' types, contesting or conforming to social expectations in a mechanical manner. Although dispatched workers were predominantly female and concentrated in the category of office clerical work (*jimukei*), they were immensely diverse in terms of age, marital status, educational attainment, family background, workplace/industry and personality. Their everyday negotiations were full of equivocations, ambiguities and discontinuities. These observations made it impossible to formulate any neat generalizations.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that traditional gender norms were the most prominent factor affecting dispatched workers' perceptions and practices, as a single woman in her mid-thirties commented:

> Work is after all a male world (*otoko no sekai*). I don't think seriously about my work. . . . I wish to marry the right man and would love to be a professional housewife who takes good care of her husband and children. I have asked my superiors to introduce someone from their circle of friends, but they seemed to think I was joking.

Such high expectations of married life were, however, not simply the result of cultural influences. This woman talked a great deal of how she envied those female regular workers who had a fuller remuneration and benefits package. The tremendous difficulty in securing a regular job and the looming prospect of being a permanent temp often filled her with a deep sense of insecurity and anxiety. Another pertinent factor was that she had a difficult relationship with her mother, who treated her like 'a complete stranger' (*aka no tanin*). Lacking job security as well as financial and emotional support from the family, she was hoping to improve her life through a good marriage.

It should be emphasized that more and more young women in today's Japan consider career a vital part of womanhood, one no less meaningful than a woman's roles in the household. Among the studied dispatched workers, some considered regular employment as an essential prerequisite to successful professional development; others were toying with the idea of juggling a full-time career and family life; and still others were keen to learn professional skills, develop friendships and foster social bonds. However, their enthusiasm and spirits were often dampened by women-unfriendly work environments, as a highly accomplished and confident young woman recounted:

> Of course, my ultimate goal is to become a regular worker. But I do not want to settle into a mediocre job and firm. That is why I think being a dispatched worker is flexible and a good way of trying out different workplaces and lines of work. And I have learned a lot of professional skills from different job assignments, which I think will eventually benefit my future full-time career. I haven't got a clear idea of what career path I want to choose now. . . . Last year, I was offered a full-time position by a foreign-affiliated big firm after a temporary contract. I initially said yes, but changed my mind when I found out that my line manager would be the middle-aged male chauvinist whom I disliked very much during the temporary contract. I have passion for my job and career, but I just couldn't bear the thought of working under such a repulsive man every day!

To be sure, many aspects of the existing male-dominated corporate culture, such as hierarchy, long working hours and career progression based on continuous employment, pose serious challenges to career-oriented women who dare to defy normative gender expectations (Roberts 2011). Bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination are rife in the Japanese workplace; women in non-regular work are particularly vulnerable to such abuse. For example, a female dispatched worker in her mid-twenties, who often put in long hours and suffered work-related stress, recalled how she was treated unfairly:

> A middle-aged salaryman, who sits right next to me, would write a rambling email over something urgent instead of explaining to me in person. And I am often the one who is to blame for misunderstanding things. . . . I am not interested in cultivating a good working relationship here. Unless necessary, I would rather not interact with them at all. I just want to do my job properly and professionally so that those arrogant men won't assume that my work is sloppy simply because I am a woman and a dispatched worker!

Compared to their female counterparts, male dispatched workers were underrepresented in the public and tended to keep a low profile in the male-dominated office life. Being a dispatched worker meant they had to confront their inferior masculinities, low social standing and emotional pain associated with their 'second-class' employment status. A young male dispatched worker, whose job was of an auxiliary nature, was struggling to carve out a niche in a harsh working environment. He was a hard-working and shy man. Despite a two-hour commute, he always came to the office earlier than others and was often the last one to leave. Most of the time he worked alone, rarely interacting with others: a young female regular worker in his department once described him as an invisible (*medatanai*) figure with a somewhat strange personality. There were a couple of times when some ill-natured manager deliberately ignored his small requests, leaving him standing there, awkward and embarrassed. As a male and relatively unskilled non-regular worker, he was susceptible to many obvious and subtle forms of office bullying.

There was, however, another young male dispatched worker in the same office who received much better treatment. He was hired as a technical expert and was well respected for his specialist skills. Not only did he advise senior managers, but he was also sometimes asked to supervise new recruits and go on business trips abroad. When asked whether he had tried to apply for a regular position in the firm, he said:

> I wish I could become a permanent member of the firm. But the firm's personnel system is not flexible. . . . Now that non-regular hiring is the norm, mid-career direct hiring could become more difficult. . . . Surely I would have much better pay, promotion opportunities and a career ladder to move up if I were a regular worker. It is unfair to have such differential treatments based on employment status. Many of my frustrations come from the fact that no matter how much I contribute to the firm, the part I

> am allowed to play in the big picture is always limited. The management keeps certain corporate information secret from me.

Although feeling frustrated with the exclusion from 'members-only' meetings and information, this man quickly turned to what he perceived as the positive side of being a dispatched worker:

> Looking on the bright side, I can take advantage of what a big firm can offer: learning new things, trying out professional skills and building up experiences. At least, work at the current firm is never boring. I am grateful to have the opportunity to focus on my skills and self-development. . . . Of course, I will apply for a regular job in the future, perhaps in a foreign-affiliated firm, especially for my family. I was married last year. My wife is a dispatched worker too, so our financial situation is not good. If we want to have children, I need to have a regular job.

This somewhat ambivalent attitude resonated with many of the studied dispatched workers, who neither completely resisted nor simply complied with the gendered nature of non-regular work. While being constrained by institutional and ideological forces, many were challenging, in myriad small ways and to varying degrees, socially imposed norms and expectations. To a significant degree, their everyday negotiations were mediated by gender, which simultaneously intersected with other social stratification variables – notably age, marital status and family/educational background – in ways that were revealing for the complexity of everyday life.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the new and enduring gendered, core-peripheral dualism that characterizes Japan's shifting employment landscape. By combining macro-level structural analysis and micro-level actor-centred perspectives, it has highlighted the gap between imposed norms and experienced realities and its serious consequences for workers and their families. On the one hand, the state, employers and enterprise unions continue to endorse the gendered pattern of non-regular employment and its underlying cultural assumptions concerning the male breadwinner-female dependent family model. On the other hand, everyday practices reveal how a growing number of people are unable or unwilling to fulfil the normative model, as well as unbridgeable tensions between cultural ideals and institutional constraints. This is closely related to the fact that non-regular workers disproportionally suffer job insecurity, low pay, unequal access to a range of benefits and entitlements, lack of training and upward mobility, illegal management practices, harassment and discrimination.

It is worth noting that, in recent years, there have been increases on the lower rungs of the regular employment hierarchy. As Gordon (2017) points out, Japanese firms have changed some non-regular workers to 'nominal' (*nabakari*) regular workers, providing job security under unfavourable conditions such that they share more in common with long-term temps. Indeed, employment practices in the core workforce has been incrementally converging towards those prevailing on the precaritized periphery (Osawa and Kingston 1996). Thus, the expansion and intensification of precarious work and social inequality both lie in and transcend the gender and employment status boundaries, affecting an increasingly diverse population.

The prevalence of non-regular work raises important questions beyond formal institutions. As this chapter has demonstrated, the traditional gender and family values, which are embedded in government policies, regulatory frameworks, industrial relations and other key areas of social life, merit special attention. It is the values that 'justify the

particular pattern of gender inequality which structures employment practices and role relations in other institutions in Japan today' (Marshall 2017: 275).

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Notes

1 There is a well-established body of literature that critically examines the discourse emphasizing the Japanese cultural uniqueness, known as *Nihonjinron* (see e.g. Dale 1986; Sugimoto and Mouer 1989; Befu 1993).

2 According to a 2015 OECD economic survey, women hold only 2.1 per cent of seats on boards of directors in Japan, compared with 36 per cent in Norway, around 30 per cent in France and Finland and about 20 per cent in Canada and the United States. Japanese women filled only 3.3 per cent of managerial positions in the

central government in 2014, which is even lower than their 7 per cent share in local governments.

3 As Chalmers (1989) argues, the further from the elite workforce, the lower the frequency of unionization and the more severe the imbalance of power between management and labour.

4 During the fieldwork, the Japanese mass media brought to light a series of illegal labour dispatching practices, including ‘re-dispatching dispatched workers by the user firm to a third party’ (*nijū haken*) and ‘disguising dispatched workers as outsourcing workers’ (*gisō ukeoi*). Such techniques were widely used by unscrupulous employers to evade payment of health and safety insurance and other legal obligations.