

Viviana Papasidero

S2597144

Supervisor Dr. Saori Shibata

**THE FREETER PHENOMENON IN THE JAPANESE
LABOUR MARKET:
A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.**

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INTRODUCTION:

The temporary staffing business was a marginal part in most of the countries in the world until recent times. It was not allowed in some nations and by many international regulatory conventions.¹ This scenario started to change from the 1970s² when the new concept of Neoliberalism³ emerged. It introduced the idea of liberalizing the labour market and creating flexible employment practices that were prohibited before. From the 1970s⁴, temporary employment practices have registered an exponential increase all over the world.⁵

In Japan since the 1980s, after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bubble economy, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) implemented a series of neoliberal policies in order to increase the flexibility of the Japanese labour market and make the labour market more competitive at global level.⁶ In the typical Japanese pattern of employment, the individual is hired from a company after graduation and remains in the same company until retirement, while he or she receives promotions, benefits and wages according to his or her age and length of the service.⁷ With the introduction of the deregulation of labour laws⁸, firms had the opportunity to stop hiring new graduates as regular workers and started to employ always more young irregular workers with fixed-term contracts in order to cut the personnel costs. Due to neoliberalism and deregulation, it became more complicated for young people to find a full-time job⁹ and young unemployment

¹ Peck, J., Theodore, N., & Ward, K. (2005). Constructing markets for temporary labour: Employment liberalization and the internationalization of the staffing industry. *Global Networks*, 5(1), 3-26.

² In many countries the traditional employment structure has been challenged since the 1970s, while in Japan this process started almost a decade later.

³ There have been many debates among scholars regarding the definition of Neoliberalism. Overall, it seems to be a return to traditional laissez-faire liberalism. The ideal is a society in which the individual can engage in market transactions without the interference of governments, unions, other entities or laws. Moreover, markets are free from regulations and can produce efficient outcomes, while preserving personal liberty. See Cahill, D., & Konings, M. (2017). *Neoliberalism* (Key concepts (Polity Press)).

⁴ This trend began in the 1970s, accelerated in the 1980s and it reached the peak in the 1990s.

⁵ Peck, J., Theodore, N., & Ward, K. (2005). Constructing markets for temporary labour: Employment liberalization and the internationalization of the staffing industry. *Global Networks*, 5(1), 3-26.

⁶ Hiroaki Richard Watanabe (2012): Why and how did Japan finally change its ways? The politics of Japanese labour-market deregulation since the 1990s, *Japan Forum*, 24:1, 23-50

⁷ Takenaka, Emiko and Kuba Yoshiko 1994 *Rōdōryōku no Joseika*, Yūhikaku, Tokyo.

⁸ Labour laws that were deregulated were the Labour Standards Law and the Temporary Work Agency Law. The main reforms were implemented within the following policies: the new Temporary Dispatching Law (1986), the Amendment to the the Labour Standards Law (1987), the Amendment to the Temporary Work Agency Law (1999), the Amendment to the Temporary Work Agency Law (2003). Detailed explanations in the following chapter. See Imai, Jun (2004). The rise of temporary employment in Japan: Legalisation and expansion of a non-regular employment form, *Duisburger Arbeitspapiere Ostasienwissenschaften*, No. 62/2004, Inst. für Ostasienwiss., Duisburg; Watanabe, H. (2014). *Labour market deregulation in Japan and Italy: Worker protection under neoliberal globalisation* (Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese studies series; 95).

⁹ Mōri Yoshitaka (2005) Culture = politics: the emergence of new cultural forms of protest in the age of freeter, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 6:1, 17-29.

has risen drastically since the 1990s to present time.¹⁰ Furthermore, in this period “freeters” began to be new figures in the labour market in Japan.

The word “freeter” (*furītā* in Japanese) originates from the term “free arbeiter” (*furī arubaitā*)¹¹. “The Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW) in Japan has defined “freeters” as individuals between the ages of 15 and 34 who have graduated from school (and, in the case of females, are unmarried), who are employed as the following types of workers: (1) Workers whose employment categories are determined by their employers as “part-time” or “arbeit” (temporary workers); (2) Unemployed individuals who are searching for part-time/arbeit jobs; and (3) Members of the non-labour force population who hope to find part-time/arbeit jobs, who are not otherwise engaged in household labour or education.”¹²

The focus of this thesis is on the changes of the Japanese labour market and Japanese society after the bubble economy recession and neoliberal deregulations that were implemented from the mid-1980s onwards. In particular, the focus will be on the subsequent emergence of young non-regular staff and on whether young people choose to work as non-regular workers. I chose this topic because my aim is to explain the reasons why deregulation has led to negative effects on the generation called “lost generation”. This generation has lost the possibility to be employed for a lifetime employment. This has created a feeling of precarity and anxiety in the Japanese society. I want to focus on this topic because media do not pay enough attention to employment problems that young Japanese people face every day. Indeed, media give little significance to young unemployment compared to middle aged people, justifying the rate of young unemployment as a choice made by young people themselves. In my thesis I would like to shed a new light on the emergence of the new figure of *freeter*.

People of previous generations usually consider freeters to be lazy and irresponsible¹³, without values and inspirations and think that they chose this working condition because they did not want to be tied to firms and retrace the working path of their parents. The overall view is that they are responsible for their situation. By this point of view, they could aspire to and be hired in a full-time and regular job, but they do not want to be tied to firms and do prefer having temporary jobs in order to be free and have the possibility to achieve

¹⁰ See first chapter for specific data and information.

¹¹ The Japanese word for part time job, *arubaito*, derives from the German word *Arbeit*. See, Reiko, K., & Sato, K. (2004). *Jiyu no daisho-freeter: Gendai wakamono no shokugyo ishiki to kodo. Social Science Japan Journal*, 7(1), 165-169.

¹² Ueda, Yutaka & Ohzono, Yoko. (2013). Comparison between Freeters and Regular Employees: Moderating Effects of Skill Evaluation on the Age-Satisfaction Relationship. *International Business Research*, 6:5, p. 101

¹³ The society’s negative impression of *freeters* can be perceived in the companies’ negative view of *freeters*. A survey made by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) in 2004 shows that 30.3% of enterprises evaluated *freeters* negatively, much higher than the 3% that evaluated them positively. Companies view freeters as irresponsible and believe freeters are impatient and will quit the job sooner or later. See Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2004) *Survey on Employment Management*; In 2011 the MHLW reported that 40% of enterprises evaluated a candidate who has been a *freeter*, while only 2% of companies gave a positive evaluation. See Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2011) *Employment measures for young people*.

other personal dreams. According to Masahiro and Hays young people are irresponsible and have a negative attitude towards work. Indeed, young people do not consider work seriously and decide to be employed as non-regular workers in order to have more freedom.¹⁴ In contrast to this point of view, I argue that freeters did not decide to be in this condition. My point of view is that they had no other choice. Indeed, they wish for regular and full-time jobs, but they cannot find them because of the changes in the Japanese labour market as the result of the neoliberal pressure indicated above.¹⁵ This issue will be further investigated in this thesis in order to completely understand whether young people could have the possibility to be hired as full-time employees. The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the phenomenon of *freeters* in the Japanese labour market from 1990s to present time.

In my thesis I want to answer to the following research question: Why is becoming a *freeter* a consequence of recession and Neoliberalism?

This thesis is meant to shed a new light on the field of Japanese economy by using newer official data, surveys, interview and testimony. People could start to consider freeters not as lazy and without ambition youth, but as real victims of the new neoliberal policies implemented by the government that changed the balances in the labour market and that eliminated the possibility for young people to have a regular and full-time job.

The research method for this thesis is a single case study. Usually, case studies are used to “make detailed observations over a long period of time”.¹⁶ The strength of single case study stands in its “capacity to discover new explanations”¹⁷. In this thesis this method is going to be used to investigate the case of the *freeter* phenomenon in Japan from the 1990s to present time in order to give new explanations about its origins. Indeed, other studies discredit young people, but they do never refer to their feelings, to their lifestyle satisfaction or to the fact they protest in order to change their positions. What I want to highlight is the clear

¹⁴ For a total negative view, see Yamada Masahiro (1999). *The Era of Parasite Singles (Parasaito Shinguru no Jidai)*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo; Hays, J. (2012). *Young People and Work in Japan: Freeters, NEETs, Temporary Workers and Shy about Working Abroad*, in “Facts and details”. Other scholars do not have such negative opinion about *freeters*, however claim that they have their faults. See, Cassegård, C. (2014). *Trauma, Empowerment and Alternative Space*. In *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* (pp. 11-26); Kosugi Reiko (2002). *Freeters and the Cost of Freedom: Occupational Consciousness and Action of Contemporary Youth (Jiyu no Daisho Freeter: Gendai Wakamono no Shokugyo Ishiki to Kodo)*. Tokyo: Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Kiko; Honda, Y. (2005). 'Freeters': Young atypical workers in Japan. *Japan labor review*, 2(3).

¹⁵ Watanabe, H. (2014). *Labour market deregulation in Japan and Italy: Worker protection under neoliberal globalisation* (Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese studies series; 95); Cook, E. (2013). *Expectations of Failure: Maturity and Masculinity for Freeters in Contemporary Japan*. *Social Science Japan Journal*, 16(1), 29-43; Broadbent, K. (2003). *Gendered employment tracks: 'part-time' versus 'life-time'*. In *Women's Employment in Japan: The Experience of Part-time Workers* (pp. 9-33). Routledge; “*Tokyo Freeters*” (2010) directed by Marc Petitjean and produced by Delphine Morel TS Productions.

¹⁶ Crossman, A. (2019) “Conducting Case Study Research in Sociology”, ThoughtCo.

¹⁷ Collier, D., Mahoney, J. (1996) “Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research”, *World Politics*, vol. 49 (1), pp. 56-91.

sign of dissatisfaction and fear about their future that it is clear when listening to interviews to *freeters*. I argue that its source is the government deregulation of the labour market and not young people's loss of ambition and wish to have a full-time job and a family.

In my thesis I problematize the view that claims that *freeters* personally chose to be employed in a part-time job. Indeed, I do not agree with this assumption and in my thesis I will demonstrate why. In order to do it, I will both use quantitative and qualitative analysis. The approach to qualitative analysis is going to be "analytic induction".¹⁸ More precisely, "generating and providing an integrated, limited, precise, universally applicable theory of causes, accounting for a specific phenomenon".¹⁹ I will analyse both primary and secondary sources, both textual and audio-visual such as interviews made to *freeters* in Japan. Primary sources will be official statistics and data from surveys and reports of The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, Tokyo (JILPT) and from The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). Other primary sources will be interviews and documentaries about the *freeter* phenomenon. As secondary sources I will use academic publications, articles, books and reviews. By using these sources, I will demonstrate how the increasing number of *freeters* depends on the huge decline in the demand for young labour and on the condition of the Japanese labour market and not on their wishes.

Specifically, in the first chapter is intended for analysing the literature review in order to have an overall view of the phenomenon and to understand the different points of view scholars have about this new phenomenon. In the second chapter I will provide an historical and economical background which is necessary in order to understand the emergence of *freeters* and the increasing in the percentages of young non-regular workers in the last decades. The third chapter illustrates the new *freeter* figure that has originated from the labour market reforms. It presents this new figure and shows data and statistics about trends in the numbers and percentages of non-regular workers and trends in the numbers of *freeters*. The fourth chapter regards my analysis on the *freeter* phenomenon. Indeed, by referring to all the data analysed in the previous chapters and by analysing new ones and new interviews, I want to demonstrate why I claim that *freeters* should not be blamed for their condition but understood and helped. The last part of the thesis includes the conclusion. This part's aim is to sum up the main information exposed in every chapter and to connect the dots in order to answer to the research question and show why the negative attitude towards young non-regular workers is baseless and should change.

¹⁸ Glaser, B., G. (1965) "The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis", *Social Problems*, vol. 12 (4), pp. 436-445

¹⁹ Glaser, B., G. (1965) "The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis", *Social Problems*, vol. 12 (4), pp. 436-445

1.LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature the main idea and criticism concern the fact that young people do choose to become freeters. Moreover, it is claimed not only that is self-responsibility but also that they should be blamed for their choice that could affect the future of Japanese economy. Young irregular workers are never completely considered as victims by authors and academics. Even when they think that the triggering factor behind the rise of young non-regular workers could be a shrinking job market, they usually refer also to youth's negative attitude towards work.²⁰

In 1999 in his work "*The Era of Parasite²¹ Singles*" (*Parasite shinguru no jidai in Japanese*), the Japanese sociologist Yamada Masahiro supports the stereotype that sees young people as irresponsible and frivolous. He states that they do not embrace the same values that their parents had and do not consider the sphere of work seriously. In his view young people do not try to apply for full-time jobs because they do want to have more freedom. At the same time, they can choose this way of life because they can rely on their parents' financials. I do not agree with the author when he states that young people are irresponsible and do not want to work seriously. It is not unusual for new generation to have different values than the older generations. Indeed, values and attitudes usually tend to change depending on the historical context and the post-war context in which their parents had to live, and work was very different. Their parents' generation had the task of getting the Japanese economy back on its feet after the defeat. The fact that the values may have changed does not mean that youth are irresponsible, ambitionless and unwilling to have a regular career path.

On the other hand, the sociologist Kosugi believes the main cause for the freeter phenomenon is the cut of full-time jobs available for young people. However, even if the author seems not criticise young people, at the same time she states that they are not victims of the economy and that their attitude towards work is to blame too. I completely agree with the author when she says that the main reason behind the increasing number of young non-regular workers has been the implementation of deregulation laws since the 1990s. Indeed, these laws have drastically altered the Japanese labour market, blocking the employment of new graduates that had to accept non-regular works consequently. However, I do not understand the reason why

²⁰ Yamada Masahiro (1999). *The Era of Parasite Singles (Parasaito Shinguru no Jidai)*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo; Hays, J. (2012). *Young People and Work in Japan: Freeters, NEETs, Temporary Workers and Shy about Working Abroad*, in "Facts and details". Other scholars do not have such negative opinion about *freeters*, however claim that they have their faults. See, Cassegård, C. (2014). *Trauma, Empowerment and Alternative Space*. In *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* (pp. 11-26); Kosugi Reiko (2002). *Freeters and the Cost of Freedom: Occupational Consciousness and Action of Contemporary Youth (Jiyu no Daisho Freeter: Gendai Wakamono no Shokugyo Ishiki to Kodo)*. Tokyo: Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Kiko; Honda, Y. (2005). 'Freeters': Young atypical workers in Japan. *Japan labor review*, 2(3).

²¹ The term refers to young people who exploit their parents by not getting married and by keeping living in their parents' houses, depending on them for food and housing, while having an income from their works.

even Kosugi points out that young people are not completely innocents when she demonstrated the cause is the economic environment. In the same way Yuki Honda analysed the factors behind the increasing phenomenon of freeters, both at micro-level and macro-level. So, she thinks that the condition of the Japanese labour market has been the factor that afflicted the possibility of a full-time employment for young people. However, she claims that “*it is too simplistic just to view freeters as victims of the economic recession*”.²² I am wondering why an economic explanation could be considered too easy. It seems that the authors do not consider the phenomenon in its entirety. Indeed, it could be that some of them do choose to not engage with the working world but how can one consider a phenomenon of this magnitude a simple consequence of a negative attitude?

Carl Cassegård in “*Trauma, Empowerment and Alternative Space*” states that young generation has been affected by a trauma of the recession that led youth to have less hope for the future. Therefore, many decide to be hired for an employment they do not really want to do, and, after a period they quit. Or they think employment stability is a priority. However, Cassegård claims that even if young people suffer from confusion, they would like to have a secure employment. I agree with his point on the idea that young generation has been hit by an economic trauma and can suffer from anxiety and more insecurity. The problem is that it is hard to switch from a non-regular to a regular employment and I think that the insecurity of a young man or woman should not affect his or her entire career.

Emma E. Cook in “*Aspirational Labour, Age, and Masculinities in the Making*” has a different perspective and approach to *freeters*. Indeed, in her work she states that the fact that everyone has always considered these young non-regular workers as being either immature males (or females) or victims of economic changes, has led to the conviction that they are the opposite of the traditional image of a Japanese adult man, always portrayed to the symbolic image of the “*salaryman*”. In this way, *freeters* do not embody the traditional masculinity but an alternative one. *Freeters*’ identities are connected to future-oriented aspirational labour, in which action, intention and meaning-making are particularly important, rather than position or statuses achieved. I find this point of view very refreshing and interesting. In particular, the thing that young non-regular workers might not have a traditional masculinity, but they do have one. It can be different, but it does not mean that is wrong. They might have a different perception of work, but it does not imply that they do not care about it.

Peter Matanle, in his work “*Lifetime Employment in 21st Century Japan: Stability and Resilience Under Pressure in the Japanese Management System*” investigates the proportion of lifetime employment in the Japanese labour market in the last decades. In his opinion, lifetime employment has remained the core of the Japanese labour system and regular work keeps being the main aspiration of young people. I agree on

²² Honda, Y. (2005). 'Freeters': Young atypical workers in Japan. *Japan labor review*, 2(3), p. 5.

the fact that young people still aspire to a regular job, but I do not think that the institution of lifetime employment shows little sign of weakening, as he says. Indeed, he believes that employers and the management system have managed to remain stable despite globalization, post-industrial transformations and neoliberal pressure.

Another important historical and economic perspective is given by Hiroaki Richard Watanabe. He has conducted studies on comparative politics of labour market deregulation in Japan and Italy, on deteriorating working conditions and labour's social movements in East Asia, on Japanese regulatory reforms in financial markets and on the comparative political economy of work precarity. He illustrates how the rise of neoliberalism promoted labour market deregulation in both Japan and Italy and caused the rise of non-regular workers. I share his opinion about the effects of globalisation and neoliberal policies which have radically altered both the Japanese and the Italian labour markets and have led to the rise of non-regular workers in the countries.

This chapter has examined other scholars' opinions about the *freeter* phenomenon and has highlighted whether I agree with them. I believe that there is a gap in the literature regarding the way this phenomenon has been investigated. Indeed, I think that people have not paid enough attention to direct testimony and interviews of *freeters*, to the data about their level of satisfaction and the ones about the economic consequences of the neoliberal pressure and my aim is to fill this gap within my thesis.

The next chapter's aim is to provide an historical and economic background to the thesis.

2. HISTORICAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND TO THE INCREASE IN NON-REGULAR WORKERS IN JAPAN

After the collapse of the bubble economy and the following decline of the Japanese economy in the 1990s, Japan faced a period of economic recession. In addition, economic competition was globally increasing and, Japan had to compete with its Asian neighbours. Employment and unemployment situations were very hard. Against this background every sector in the country has changed its policies in order to reduce costs and remain globally competitive.²³ Japanese firms decided to respond by cutting personnel costs, reducing the number of regular staff and "abandoning corporate paternalism"²⁴. By keeping the number of regular

²³ The spread of non-regular work marks a radical change in a nation which is usually associated with job security and paternalistic employers. See Cook, Emma E. (2017) "Aspirational labour, performativity and masculinities in the making". *Intersections: gender and sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* (41): 1-13; Watanabe, H. (2018). Labour Market Dualism and Diversification in Japan. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 56(3), 579-602; Allison, A., & Baldwin, F. (2015). *Japan: The Precarious Future*. NYU Press.

²⁴ Osawa, M. and Kingston, J. "Risk and Consequences: The Changing Japanese Employment Paradigm". Pag. 59. (2015). In *Japan: The Precarious Future* (p. 58). New York; London: NYU Press.

employees as small as possible and by starting to hire more non-regular employees, business performance has improved significantly. Non-regular employees started to be considered necessary for competitiveness and for making profits.²⁵ Discussions about work and recruitment policy started to bend towards a new perspective and liberalisation, corresponding to employers' perspective and not to workers' one. Under the pressure of employers, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) started implementing neoliberal²⁶ policies aimed to deregulate the labour market and expand the hiring of non-regular staff. These policies were measures implemented in order to make Japan at the level of global competition. Therefore, they led to an increasing deregulation of employment.²⁷ Deregulation concerned mostly three areas: laws and regulations about staff organization, occupations in which non-regular workers were allowed and the period in which they could have been employed.

According to "Survey of Diversification of Employment Status"²⁸ made by Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, an increasing percentage of employers says that the main reason for hiring non-regular workers is saving personnel costs or labour costs in response to worsened economic conditions (Table 1). The employers' attempt was to bring down the percentage of regular workers who can receive seniority wages, promotions and benefit from job protection because they are in a lifetime employment.

	1994	1999	2003	2007	2010		1994	1999	2003	2007	2010
Control personnel costs						Difficulties to recruit regular employees					
Contract workers	19.3	31.9	33.6	36.4	43.2	Contract workers	13.9	7.1	10.4	18.2	17.1
Dispatched workers	34.7	38.6	41.7	35.4	34.9	Dispatched workers	16.4	8.1	16.2	26.0	20.6
Part-time workers	51.6	58.0	61.2	62.4	78.0	Part-time workers	20.0	8.8	11.8	17.6	16.0
Specialized work						Need persons with expertise/experience					
Contract workers	55.7	40.0	39.5	43.6	41.7	Contract workers	19.2	32.6	38.1	38.3	37.3
Dispatched workers	36.4	22.8	24.9	20.2	27.0	Dispatched workers	22.5	29.8	38.0	35.2	30.6
Part-time workers	-	-	-	-	-	Part-time workers	-	-	-	-	-

Table 1 Reasons for hiring non-regular workers (%).

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, "Survey of the Diversification of Employment Status" (Special tabulation by JILPT).

²⁵ JILPT (2010) Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis: Detailed Exposition 2009/2010. Tokyo: JILPT.

²⁶ In this thesis neoliberalism refers to the policy model which emphasizes free-market capitalism and rejects government spending, regulation, and public ownership. It is a policy model that is often associated with laissez-faire economics which considers minimal state intervention in economic and social affairs and sustains the freedom of trade and capital.

²⁷ Obinger, Julia (2013). Japan's 'Lost Generation': A Critical View on Facts and Discourses.

²⁸ It includes data from 1994, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2010.

From the late 1980s the Japanese government started a series of neoliberal reforms on the labour market that have been reshaping Japanese economy. Historically, temporary agency work was not permitted in accordance with the Employment Security Law²⁹ which was enacted in 1947. However, in 1986 the new Temporary Dispatching Law legalized temporary agency work for the first time.³⁰ It has been possible because of the loss of political power of labour unions and the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP). The Temporary Dispatching Law included only 16 occupations³¹ as those permitted for temporary agency work and it was based on the positive list system. These occupations were relatively high-skilled and specialist. In addition, the temporary agency work was permitted within a period of nine months and one year, depending on the type of occupation. The goal was to protect full-time regular workers and maintain the lifetime employment³² as the main system.³³

This first legalisation of temporary work triggered a series of reforms that aimed to increasingly cut the regulations in the labour market. Indeed, in 1995 the Cabinet Office was established for the same purpose. It was created because employer associations did not want to wait for policy deliberation in the Advisory Councils and, thanks to the Cabinet Office, it would have been possible to realise speedy policymaking.³⁴ In 1999 the Amendment to Temporary Work Agency Law was enacted. It established the negative list system, according to which temporary agency work was permitted for every occupation with the exception of the ones listed in the negative list.³⁵ Furthermore, the term of dispatch for the original 26 occupations was extended from one to three years, while for the other occupations, it was set at one year.

²⁹ The Employment Security Law prohibited all the private personnel business, including job placement and temporary dispatching work, for the modernization of the labour market after the WW2.

³⁰ See Imai, Jun (2004). The rise of temporary employment in Japan: Legalisation and expansion of a non-regular employment form, *Duisburger Arbeitspapiere Ostasienwissenschaften*, No. 62/2004, Inst. für Ostasienwiss., Duisburg.

³¹ The 16 occupations were: 1. computer programming; 2. machinery design; 3. machinery operation for producing sound and images for broadcasting programs; 4. production of broadcasting programs; 5. operation of office machinery; 6. interpretation, translation and shorthand writing; 7. secretarial work; 8. filing; 9. market research; 10. management of financial affairs; 11. drafting of foreign exchange documents; 12. presentation and explanation of manufactured goods; 13. tour conducting; 14. cleaning of buildings; 15. operation and maintenance of building equipment and 16. building receptionist and guide.

³² Lifetime employment is the Japanese employment practice in which companies hire graduates under contracts without a fixed period of employment and they keep working for the same company or affiliated companies from the beginning until they retire. According to this system both promotions and wage depend on seniority. Benefits and job security did motivate workers to invest in specific skills for the company. This employment practice has been broadly adopted, becoming the main system in the Japanese labour market.

See JILPT, *Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis 2004/2005*; Kumazawa, M. and J. Yamada (1989) 'Jobs and Skills under the Lifelong Nenko Employment Practice', in S. Wood (ed.), *The Transformation of Work?* London: Unwin Hyman.

³³ Watanabe, H. (2014). *Labour market deregulation in Japan and Italy: Worker protection under neoliberal globalisation* (Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese studies series; 95).

³⁴ Watanabe, H. (2014). *Labour market deregulation in Japan and Italy: Worker protection under neoliberal globalisation* (Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese studies series; 95).

³⁵ The occupations prohibited were construction, port transportation and security guard services, which were regulated by different laws, and the manufacturing sector.

Employers and Deregulation Committee did not stop requesting further deregulation. Therefore, in 2003 another Amendment to Temporary Work Agency Law was enacted. Temporary agency work in the manufacturing second was not prohibited anymore. Furthermore, an open-ended contract was permitted for the original 26 occupations, while the other ones had an extension of the period from one to three years.

Due to the deregulation of labour laws, employers have been able to employ always more non-regular workers³⁶ that can be hired and fired at need, have a lower cost and a higher flexibility, while core workforces have shrunk. The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT) has focused on the study of this phenomenon and has conducted many surveys in the last years.

	1993	1997	1999	2001	2002	2004	2005	2007	2009	2011	2012
Regular	79.2	76.8	75.1	72.8	70.6	68.6	67.4	66.5	66.3	64.9	64.8
Part-timers	11.9	12.9	14.0	15.4	14.5	15.3	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.9	17.2
<i>Arubaito</i>	5.0	6.2	6.9	7.6	6.8	6.7	6.8	6.6	6.6	6.9	6.8
Others	3.9	4.2	4.1	4.2	8.1	9.4	10.3	11.0	11.1	11.4	11.1

Table 2 Percentages of employees by type of employment.

Source: Compiled from the Labour Force Special Survey (survey in February each year) in the case of data for 2001 and earlier, and from the Labour Force Survey Detailed Tabulation (annual averages) in the case of data for 2002 onwards.

According to the Labour Force Special Survey and the Labour Force Survey Detailed Tabulation (from 1993 to 2012), the percentage of regular workers has shrunk from 79.2% in 1993 to 64.8% in 2012. While the percentage of non-regular workers, which comprises part-timers, *arubaito* and others³⁷, has increased from 20.8% in 1993 to 35.1% in 2012.³⁸ From this data it is clear that the Japanese non-regular labour market has significantly expanded in the last decades, while there has been a strong decline in regular staff. This shows to what extent the neoliberal reforms implemented in order to deregulate the employment market were effective. Indeed, it can be noted a strong rise in non-regular workers especially after 1999 (Table 2), year in

³⁶ The term “non-regular worker” refers to a kind of employee that is hired under different terms to those of regular workers who have a lifetime employment and seniority-oriented pay system.

³⁷ Part-timers are workers that work less hours than regular employees in the same workplace. However, some work as many hours as those of full-time employees.

Arubaito is a job for people who can only work a limited number of hours, maybe because he or she is still in school. Others comprise contract workers (with specialist skills on fixed-term contracts), agency workers (employed from an employment or temporary agency), *shokutaku* (workers on temporary contracts).

See Keizer, A. (2008). Non-regular employment in Japan: Continued and renewed dualities. *Work, Employment & Society*, 22(3), 407-425.

³⁸JILPT (2002b) Main Labour Economic Indicators: March. Tokyo: JILPT; JILPT (2004c) Main Labour Economic Indicators: April. Tokyo: JILPT; JILPT (2006) Main Labour Economic Indicators: August. Tokyo: JILPT.

which the Amendment to Temporary Work Agency Law was enacted. The percentage of non-regular staff soared after 1999, increasing to 34% of the workforce in 2009.³⁹

Since the end of 1990s key changes in the Japanese work system have been observed. Unemployment rates have increased, categories of irregular workers have expanded, while the power of labour unions have weakened. Furthermore, the possibility to have a lifetime employment has decreased.⁴⁰ Full time regular jobs are advertised with a limit of 34 years old. Furthermore, moving from an irregular position to a regular one is hard because firms prefer to hire young and cheap workers than those who have already been employed as non-regular workers.⁴¹ *“Even a competent job candidate had to accept a position as a non-regular employee due to a shortage of permanent job.”*⁴² These changes in the labour market had a strong effect on the society and its malaise. Indeed, at the end of the 1990s the number of suicides increased.⁴³ Three factors could have influenced social malaise. The first one is that the huge pay gap between regular and non-regular workers. (Table 3)

		Average total monthly wage (10,000 yen)			Average pseudo hourly wage (yen)		
		1999	2003	Change from 1999 to 2003	1999	2003	Change from 1999 to 2003
Male	Regular employees	34.4	33.2	-1.2	1,944	1,811	-133
	Contract employees	27.7	24.6	-3.1	1,888	1,545	-343
	Transferred employees	42.6	38.5	-4.1	2,496	2,196	-300
	Dispatched workers (full-time)	27.7	25.3	-2.4	1,709	1,369	-340
	Dispatched workers (non-regular employed)	25.0	21.8	-3.2	1,461	1,228	-232
	Temporary workers	12.9	15.1	2.2	1,091	980	-111
	Part-time workers	9.4	12.8	3.4	1,071	1,054	-17
	Others	20.1	20.7	0.6	1,280	1,219	-61
	Total	32.4	30.9	-1.5	1,878	1,732	-147
Female	Regular employees	22.9	21.7	-1.2	1,418	1,258	-161
	Contract employees	18.1	16.9	-1.3	1,370	1,134	-236
	Transferred employees	23.6	24.6	0.9	1,440	1,515	75
	Dispatched workers (full-time)	18.3	15.7	-2.6	1,192	1,045	-147
	Dispatched workers (non-regular employed)	19.3	17.9	-1.4	1,346	1,168	-179
	Temporary workers	10.1	10.1	0.1	922	888	-34
	Part-time workers	9.0	10.1	1.2	956	881	-75
	Others	13.9	13.8	-0.2	1,029	940	-88
	Total	17.1	16.5	-0.5	1,221	1,096	-125

Table 3 Wages difference between form of employment and gender.

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, “Survey of the Diversification of Employment Status.”

³⁹ JILPT (2011) Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis: Detailed Exposition 2011/2012, The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, Tokyo.

⁴⁰ Broadbent, K. (2003). Gendered employment tracks: 'part-time' versus 'life-time'. In *Women's Employment in Japan: The Experience of Part-time Workers* (pp. 9-33). Routledge; Watanabe, H. (2014). *Labour market deregulation in Japan and Italy: Worker protection under neoliberal globalisation* (Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese studies series; 95).

⁴¹ Cook, E. (2013). Expectations of Failure: Maturity and Masculinity for Freeters in Contemporary Japan. *Social Science Japan Journal*, 16(1), 29-43.

⁴² JILPT (2010) Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis: Detailed Exposition 2009/2010. Tokyo: JILPT. Pag. 105.

⁴³ Cassegård, C. (2014). Japan's Lost Decade and Two Recoveries. In *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* (pp. 27-43).

According to this data regular workers, both male and female, earn more money than non-regular workers. Another important factor is that the wages of regular employees do increase with age on the contrary of those of non-regular workers.⁴⁴ The second reason is that many non-regular workers feel that their jobs are not secure. According to the Survey on Diversified Types of Employment, conducted in 2014 by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's General, the percentage of non-regular workers who responded that they were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the security of their job was 42.6%. The third reason is that irregular workers have less opportunities for skills development than regular ones. In the Comprehensive Survey on the Employment Conditions of Japanese People FY 2009 made by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT), 54.9% of regular workers said that their current company of employment gave many opportunities to expand the scope of their work and knowledge, on the other hand only 40.5% of non-regular workers gave the same response.⁴⁵

This chapter has provided an historical and economic background which is necessary in order to understand the emergence of non-regular workers. The huge category of non-regular workers comprises different kind of workers. Indeed, it can be subdivided into a series of subcategories such as part-timers, freeters, freelancers, day-laborers, contract workers and dispatched workers. In the next chapter I will focus on young non regular workers known as *freeters* and I will analyse the increasing in number of this new kind of workers.

3. INCREASING IN THE NUMBERS OF FREETERS

This chapter's aim is to present the *freeter* phenomenon by showing data and statistics about trends in the numbers and percentages of non-regular workers and trends in the numbers of *freeters*.

Before the bubble burst and the economic crisis, the figure of the *salaryman*⁴⁶ represented the hegemonic form of masculinity.⁴⁷ However, since the 1990s the figure of *salaryman* has been challenged by the economic recession and its concept in the Japanese society has changed. The traditional model of a labour system in which middle-class man was the main character, was replaced with an unequal society in which non-regular

⁴⁴ JILPT (2017) Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis: Detailed Exposition 2016/2017. Tokyo: JILPT; JILPT (2010) Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis: Detailed Exposition 2009/2010. Tokyo: JILPT.

⁴⁵ JILPT (2017) Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis: Detailed Exposition 2016/2017. Tokyo: JILPT.

⁴⁶ A middle-class white-collar permanent employee who works for a large company.

⁴⁷ Dasgupta, R. (2000) 'Performing masculinities? The "salaryman" at work and play'. Japanese Studies, 20(2): 189–200; Roberson, J. E. and Suzuki, N. (eds) (2003) Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa. London: Routledge Curzon.

workers are increasing.⁴⁸ Among Japanese citizens young people⁴⁹ have been hardly hit by the neoliberal reforms and had to face the most difficult situation of employment and unemployment. Before the collapse of the bubble economy, Japanese young people's unemployment situation had one of the lower rates in the world.⁵⁰ From the new employment structure the new term "*lost generation*" was created.⁵¹ Indeed, from the 1990s always more students found hard to be employed for a regular work after graduation. This period has lately been known as the "*hiring ice age*"⁵². According to the study conducted by Kosugi, people who were born at the beginning of the 1980s were the most affected by the changes in the labour and employment systems. She calculated that about 40% were not hired after graduation⁵³ undermining the Japanese traditional system "from school to workplace".⁵⁴ As regular jobs were not available, they had to get hired for temporary jobs that did not provide good wages. Young men and women who were not married and were employed as non-regular staff, were known as *freeters*. Their existence was recognized for the first time at the end of 1980s, when the bubble economy was at its peak and after the new Temporary Dispatching Law legalized temporary agency work for the first time in 1986.⁵⁵ After the bubble burst the *freeter* phenomenon has increased because companies stopped recruiting new graduates for lifetime positions and they had to find other non-regular solutions. It can be stated that the altered scenery of youth labour is a direct consequence of structural changes caused by globalization, corporate cost cutting and neoliberalism. The Japan Institute of Labour⁵⁶ started to study this new phenomenon and many reports and analysis have been compiled.

⁴⁸ Hidaka, T. (2011). 'Masculinity and the family system: The ideology of the "salaryman" across three generations,' in Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation, ed. Richard Ronald and Allison Alexy. London and New York: Routledge: 112–30.

⁴⁹ According to the definition of the term "freeter", by young people I mean men and women who are 34 years old and under.

⁵⁰ JILPT (2006b) *School-to-work Transition and Employment of Youth in Tokyo Metropolitan Areas*, JILPT Report Series No. 72. Tokyo.

⁵¹ It is not an official and scientific term, but rather a social category produced by recent discourse. It includes people born between the late 1970s and the early 1980s who were trying to be hired in the Japanese employment system in the late 1990s, often failing.

See Obinger, Julia (2013). Japan's 'Lost Generation': A Critical View on Facts and Discourses.

⁵² Obinger, Julia (2013). Japan's 'Lost Generation': A Critical View on Facts and Discourses.

⁵³ Based on the Basic School Survey (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology).

⁵⁴ Kosugi, R. (2004). The transition from school to work in Japan: understanding the increase in freeter and jobless youth. *Japan Labour Review*. Pag. 52.

⁵⁵ JILPT (2017) *Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis: Detailed Exposition 2016/2017*. Tokyo: JILPT.

⁵⁶ The Japanese Institute of Labour was the predecessor of the Japanese Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT).

		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015
Males and females age 25-34	(A) People in work	1,434.0	1,430.0	1,429.0	1,414.0	1,397.0	1,352.0	1,313.0	1,267.0	1,235.0	1,186.0	1,168.0	1,152.0	1,125.0
	(B) Employed workers	1,314.0	1,311.0	1,323.0	1,307.0	1,305.0	1,258.0	1,223.0	1,180.0	1,154.0	1,122.0	1,102.0	1,086.0	1,062.0
	(C) Non-regular workers	269.0	281.0	308.0	318.0	328.0	324.0	313.0	302.0	298.0	297.0	301.0	303.0	290.0
	(C)/(A) X 100	18.8	19.7	21.6	22.5	23.5	24.0	23.8	23.8	24.1	25.0	25.8	26.3	25.8
	(C)/(B) X 100	20.5	21.4	23.3	24.3	25.1	25.8	25.6	25.6	25.8	26.5	27.3	27.9	27.3
Males and females age 35-44	(A) People in work	1,251.0	1,276.0	1,294.0	1,323.0	1,360.0	1,399.0	1,427.0	1,436.0	1,451.0	1,509.0	1,516.0	1,514.0	1,498.0
	(B) Employed workers	1,052.0	1,082.0	1,102.0	1,128.0	1,167.0	1,214.0	1,238.0	1,254.0	1,272.0	1,337.0	1,344.0	1,341.0	1,329.0
	(C) Non-regular workers	259.0	274.0	289.0	301.0	318.0	329.0	344.0	338.0	348.0	370.0	389.0	397.0	393.0
	(C)/(A) X 100	20.7	21.5	22.3	22.8	23.4	23.5	24.1	23.5	24.0	24.5	25.7	26.2	26.2
	(C)/(B) X 100	24.6	25.3	26.2	26.7	27.2	27.1	27.8	27.0	27.4	27.7	28.9	29.6	29.6

Table 4 Trends in the numbers and percentages of non-regular workers.⁵⁷ (1,000s of people).

Source: Labour Force Survey (Detailed Tabulation) conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC).

The first part of table 4 shows that the percentage of non-regular workers in the 25-34 age bracket has increased from 20.5% in 2002, to 27.3% in 2015. This proves that the number of young non-regular workers has continued to broaden in the 2000s. At the same time, the lower half of Table 4 demonstrates that in the 35–44 age bracket the percentage of non-regular workers has increased from 24.6% to 29.6% in the same years. This means that for mid-prime-age (35-44 years old) non-regular workers is even harder to have the possibility to be hired as a regular worker in the future.

⁵⁷ “People in work” includes employed workers, and people who are self-employed or work for a business run by their family. “Employed workers” refers to people employed by a company or organization, etc. See JILPT (2017) Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis: Detailed Exposition 2015/2016. Tokyo: JILPT.

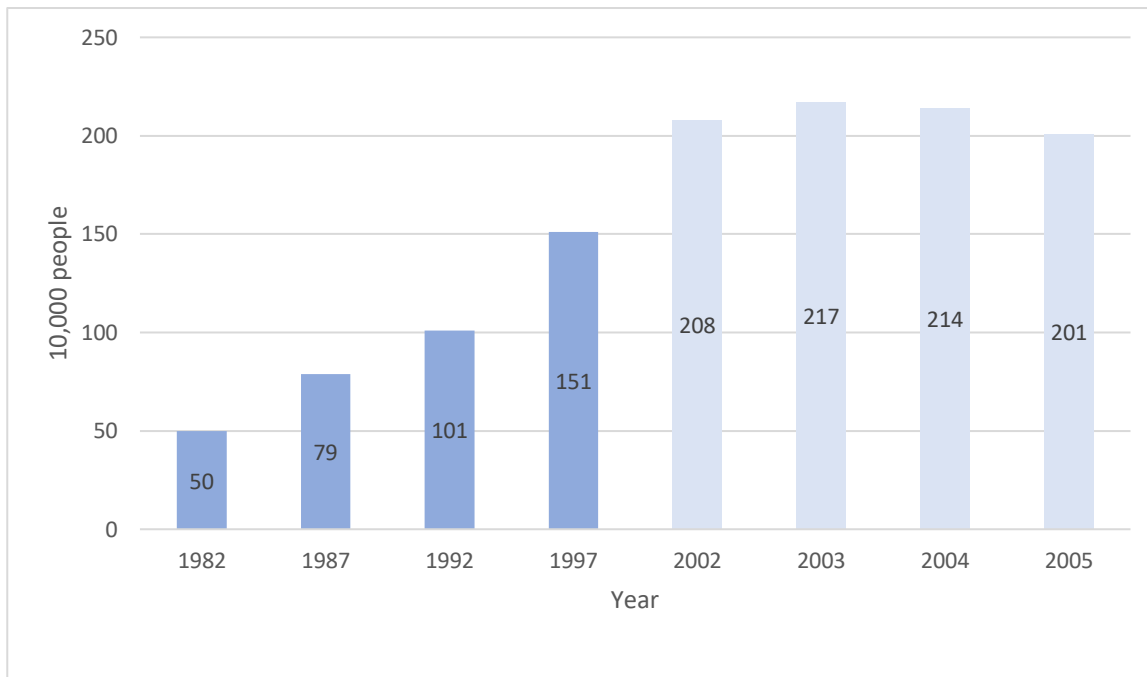


Table 5 Trends in the numbers of Freeters.

Sources: for the years 1982, 1987, 1992 and 1997, *White Paper on the Labour Economy 2004*. For the other years, *Labour Force Survey Detailed Tabulation*, Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.⁵⁸

According to the *Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis* published by JILPT in 2007, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of freeters in the period between 1982 and 2003. Indeed, it has risen from 500,000 to 2.17 million. From 2003 to 2005 the number of freeter has decreased to 2.01 million, however the number is still high. (Table 5).

The irregular employment situation experienced by the young is hard. Indeed, non-regular workers in the 25-34 age bracket receive a lower wage and have less benefits, opportunities and job security compared to

⁵⁸ For the years 1982, 1987, 1992 and 1997, data about freeters were limited to young people between 15 and 34 years old.

1. Defining those who are usually engaged in work and called *arbeit* (temporary workers) or “part-time workers” at the work places with males being those who have continuously being in work for one to less than five years, and females being those who are unmarried and mainly engaged in work figures have been calculated.
2. Defining people usually not in engaged as those who neither keep house nor attends school, and who would do “*arbeit* (temporary work), part-time work”, figures have been calculated.

For the years 2002 to 2005, the definition of freeters is restricted to those who have graduated and are aged between 15 and 34, with women defined as those who are unmarried,

1. Those currently in work defined as employed people whose job is referred to as “*arbeit* (temporary workers)” or “part-time work” and
2. People currently not engaged in work as those who neither do housework, nor attend school, and who wish to do “*arbeit* (temporary work), part-time work”. Using these definitions figures have been calculated.

Regarding the values for the year 1982 to 1997, and 2002 to 2005, it should be heeded that values do not link up, due to the differing definitions and so on freeters.

See JILPT, (2007) *Labour Situation in Japan and Analysis: General Overview 2006/2007*. Tokyo: JILPT

regular workers of the same age.⁵⁹ In order to protest against the huge gap between regular and non-regular workers, The Freedom and Survival May Day has been organised in Tokyo since 2004 by The General Freeter Union that was created that year out of the PAFF.⁶⁰ Protesters define themselves the “*precariat*” to comprise all the workers with an employment that is precarious and irregular. Even among the Union’s members, people distinguish themselves. Indeed, there are two groups of demonstrators. The first one addresses the govern, authorities and employers and asks for an improvement of their working conditions. On the other hand, the second group asks to have the possibility to live their lives without overworking.⁶¹

It is undeniable that in the last decades there has been a strong increase in the percentages of freeters in Japan, as demonstrated by previous statistical data and surveys. However, economists, scholars, psychologist and other researchers have often different opinions and points of view regarding the real causes of this phenomenon. On one hand, young people who have a non-regular job are considered the responsible for their work conditions and they should be blamed. On the other hand, they are victims of the neoliberal trend started in the mid-1980s. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate why youth should be considered victims of the economy and I will do it in the next chapter.

4. FREETERS

The fourth chapter aims to explain why I do not agree with people who state that *freeters* should be blamed for their conditions and, therefore, it presents my opinion on this topic. Furthermore, it answers to the research question and explains the reasons why becoming a *freeter* is a consequence of recession and Neoliberalism and not a choice. I will do it by analysing official data and statistics and by using direct testimony of *freeters*.

⁵⁹ Kosugi, R. (2012). Career Development Process, Starting with Non-Regular Workers: Based on an Analysis of Factors Determining the Transition from Non-Regular to Regular Employment, Including Promotion to Regular Employment within the Same Firm. *Japan Labour Review*. Vol.9 no.3.

⁶⁰ For presentations of PAFF and the General Freeter Union, see Karin Amamiya, *Ikisasero! Nanminka suru wakamonotachi (Let Us Live! The Refugeization of Young People)* (Tokyo: Ôta Shuppan, 2007); Asato and Takahashi, “Furîtâ zenpan”; Asato and Takahashi, “Furîtâ zenpan rôdô kumiai ni tsuite no arekore to megamakubâgâ” (“This and That about the General Freeter Union and a Mega McBurger”), *PACE 3* (2008): n.p.; Grapefruit [pseud.], “Furîtâ no tame no kaikyû tôsô junbian” (“Proposal for the Preparation of a Class Struggle for Freeters”), *Jôkyô (Situation)* 6, no. 2 (2005): 110 – 14.

⁶¹ Carl Cassegard. (2014). Let Us Live! Empowerment and the Rhetoric of Life in the Japanese Precarity Movement. *Positions*, 22(1), 41-69.

4.1 FREETERS: PARASITES

Many academics and people in general⁶² state that the inability of young people to have a regular employment should not be attributed to economic issues but to psychological factors⁶³ and to their attitudes towards work. They accuse them to have not been active enough and not been able to relate to society in a productive way. Young people are considered ambitionless, immature, immoral, parasite who do not have a work ethic, in contrast to their parents' generation.⁶⁴ The image associated to the term *freeter* represents a new lifestyle and a new way of working that include freedom and rejection of a busy life focused on work. In this way they can achieve their dreams while they are in a temporary work. As Oyama argues, Japanese society is not as it was before. It is evolving and people's values and aspirations are evolving as well. Japan has always been considered a collectivistic society⁶⁵ because the emphasis is on the needs and goals of a group over the needs and desires of each individual. This kind of society is less self-centred and have social values that revolve around what is best for a community and society.⁶⁶ The loyalty to a company is a perfect example of a collectivistic attitude. Indeed, employees are expected to demonstrate qualities of conformity, diligence, loyalty, dedication, self-sacrifice, hard work for the firm in which they are employed.⁶⁷ However, in the last decades Japanese's collectivism has been shifting to an individual orientation. Indeed, by choosing

⁶² Yamada Masahiro (1999). *The Era of Parasite Singles (Parasaito Shinguru no Jidai)*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo; Hays, J. (2012). Young People and Work in Japan: Freeters, NEETs, Temporary Workers and Shy about Working Abroad, in "Facts and details". Other scholars do not have such negative opinion about *freeters*, however claim that they have their faults. See, Cassegård, C. (2014). Trauma, Empowerment and Alternative Space. In *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* (pp. 11-26); Kosugi Reiko (2002). *Freeters and the Cost of Freedom: Occupational Consciousness and Action of Contemporary Youth (Jiyu no Daisho Freeter: Gendai Wakamono no Shokugyo Ishiki to Kodo)*. Tokyo: Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Kiko; Honda, Y. (2005). 'Freeters': Young atypical workers in Japan. *Japan labor review*, 2(3); Documentary "Freedom and Survival- The Freeter Union"; Documentary "Tokyo freeters".

⁶³ Psychological factors such as immature career consciousness, laziness, indecision, passivity, belief in the idea of perfect vocation, inclination towards personal interests, lack of responsibility and lack of loyalty. See Adachi, T. (2006). The career consciousness among youth and career development support: A study focusing on university students. *Japan Labor Review*, 3(2), 28-42; Cassegård, C. (2014). Japan's Lost Decade and Two Recoveries. In *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* (pp. 27-43); Yamada Masahiro (1999). *The Era of Parasite Singles (Parasaito Shinguru no Jidai)*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo.

⁶⁴ Adachi, T. (2006). The career consciousness among youth and career development support: A study focusing on university students. *Japan Labour Review*, 3(2), 28-42; Cook, E. (2013). Expectations of Failure: Maturity and Masculinity for Freeters in Contemporary Japan. *Social Science Japan Journal*, 16(1), 29-43; Honda, Y. (2005). 'Freeters': Young atypical workers in Japan. *Japan labor review*, 2(3).

⁶⁵ Individualism and collectivism have been explored and compared primarily among Western and East Asian populations and East Asian populations have been recognised as collectivistic, in contrast to Western ones. Overall in individualist societies the main value is the achievement of personal goals. In contrast in collectivistic societies the most important aim is the group membership. See Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., Minkov, M., *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. Pag. 19. Revised and Expanded 3rd Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill USA, 2010; Noguchi, K. (2007). Examination of the content of individualism/collectivism scales in cultural comparisons of the USA and Japan. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 10(3), 131-144; Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and Collectivism*. Oxford: Westview Press.

⁶⁶ Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., Minkov, M., *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. Pag. 19. Revised and Expanded 3rd Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill USA, 2010.

⁶⁷ Dasgupta, R. (2000). Performing Masculinities? The 'Salaryman' at Work and Play. *Japanese Studies*, 20(2), 189-200.

to not being tied to firms, the priority is given to the personal happiness and freedom over the society's and country's wellness.⁶⁸ By this point of view, *freeters* are selfish and do not give their own contribution to the State and do generate a loss in the social security budget. Indeed, *freeters* earn low wages and tend to remain poor and do not manage to contribute to social security which aim is to cover the cost of future state investment to sustain the citizen in times of need. "Furthermore, their low level of income acts as an impediment to them in forming new families, suppressing the growth of consumption while worsening the downward spiral in the fertility rate (and the deficit in the social security system)."⁶⁹ In both documentaries I have analysed, media and older generations do think that this new generation is more selfish than the previous ones. In "Tokyo Freeters"⁷⁰ there is a testimony from a freeter's father. He claims that nowadays young people have become too soft because their parents let them do what they wanted. In his opinion, young people think they can live without a stable job, without getting married and having a family and without choosing anything about their life. On the contrary, in the father's generation everybody was able to and had to find his own way and keep following it. Now young people refuse to sacrifice their lives for works as their fathers did before and prefer to live just for themselves enjoying life. "When I see young people today, I realize that they have given up. If some of them could only react, then Japan could face a brighter future" he says. In previous generation people have worked hard in order to bring Japan back to life after World War II and give future generations a better world in which they could live but they are refusing to be devoted to job in the same way. Therefore, they are considered ungrateful.⁷¹ According to the documentary "Freedom and Survival- The Freeter Union"⁷² it is true that some freeters have refused to join the traditional lifetime employment system and that many of them had a stable job but decided to drop out in order to have more alternative lives.

The old generations' criticism is that young people are supposed to graduate having a positive approach to the working life, even if finding a job could be hard. *Freeters* are criticized because they are individualist and

⁶⁸ Oyama, N. (1990). Some recent trends in Japanese values: beyond the individual-collective dimension. *International Sociology*, 5(4), 445-459.

⁶⁹ Hook, G., & Hiroko, T. (2007). "Self-Responsibility" and the Nature of the Postwar Japanese State: Risk through the Looking Glass. *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 33(1), 93-123. Pag. 117-118; Yamada, Kibō kakusa shakai, p. 221. For a similar view from a think-tank economist, see Maruyama Shun, *Furi-ta-bo-kokuron* (Tokyo: Daiyamondosha, 2004), pp. 148-53. Yamada's discussion here closely relates to so-called "parasite singles," a term he coined. See Yamada, *Parasaito shinguru no jidai* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1999).

⁷⁰ "Tokyo Freeters" is a docufilm directed by Marc Petitjean and produced by Delphine Morel TS Productions in 2010. The film focuses on the new category of workers called freeters and those who refuse to accept the status quo of others.

⁷¹ Cook, E. (2013). Expectations of Failure: Maturity and Masculinity for Freeters in Contemporary Japan. *Social Science Japan Journal*, 16(1), 29-43.

⁷²The documentary "Freedom and Survival- The Freeter Union" describes the story of a Japanese Union created in 2004 in Tokyo through and for Freeters. The union has the goal of fighting unjust work conditions to regain freedom as well as giving solidarity and emotional support to each other. Through the Union, the Freeters can collectively defend their survival and support and empower themselves through direct actions against unfair working conditions and bad bosses and solidarity with each other.

not willing to sacrifice their private lives. Furthermore, they do not take seriously the workplace and are not able to devote themselves to anything. Previous generations believe that the trend towards not looking for a good job, doing nothing after graduation or quitting the job voluntarily, is attributable to the changes in the behaviour and the attitude of the new lazy generation. It has been argued that this attitude towards work could be due to the feeling of frustration and betrayal that the new generations do feel, having grown up in a more prosperous period than later generations.⁷³ According to the Japanese economist Yoshikawa Hiroshi “The prolonged recession has given rise to a stifling feeling of being locked inside a box with no exit in sight, and has cast a dark shadow on the national psyche. The sudden increase in suicide as reported by Japanese newspapers is simply shocking.”⁷⁴ According to Cassegård, the lost generation has been affected by a “*collective trauma*”⁷⁵: the recession. Its effects have hit the people who have not experienced the traumatic events themselves but who has grown up in the society signed by the trauma. Young people do suffer from the work uncertainty and would like to have a stable and permanent employment as their parents’ generation. However, many do reject the traditional Japanese lifestyle and decide to quit their jobs. A growing rate of resignations is caused by the youth’s attitudes. Indeed, many of them decide to accept an employment after graduation but they are not sure about it or about their future or they just do not think that employment stability is a priority in life.⁷⁶ According to Hays freeters are not people who do not manage to have a stable and secure employment but they choose to be employed in a non-regular job.⁷⁷ Among young people who quit their job and found a new one, the rate of those who decide to be employed in a non-regular work is increasing. Notably, there is a grow in the percentage of young people who switch from regular to non-regular employments. (Table 6).⁷⁸

⁷³ Indeed, this was the first post-war generation to experience a period of recession, a labour market crisis and a decline in living standards. See Honda, Yuki (2007) “Seijimondai to shite no wakamono” (Youth as a political issue), Studio Voice, Vol. 380 (August): 40–42.

⁷⁴ Yoshikawa, Hiroshi (2001) *Japan’s Lost Decade*, Tokyo: The International House of Japan.

⁷⁵ A “*collective trauma*” is not just a trauma shared by people. Cassegård defines it “*as damage sustained by discursive systems that hold collectives together. One distinguishing mark is that a collective trauma is felt to have caused an irreparable damage to a group’s identity or self-image. In the wake of a trauma, the group can no longer remain “itself” but has to relinquish things once treasured as central to its identity. This in turn usually brings about a weakening or disintegration of the social ties that hold the group together.*” See Cassegård, C. (2014). *Trauma, Empowerment and Alternative Space*. In *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* (pp. 11-26).

⁷⁶ Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2005). *Labour Policy Issues in a Society with a Declining Population in White Paper on the Labour Economy 2005*.

⁷⁷ Hays, J. (2012). *Young People and Work in Japan: Freeters, NEETs, Temporary Workers and Shy about Working Abroad*, in “Facts and details”.

⁷⁸ Office of Counsellor in charge of Labour Policy, from “Special Survey of Labour Force Survey” (February), Statistics Bureau, MIC, (1988-2001); *Labour Force Survey (Detailed Tabulation)*, Statistics Bureau, MIC, (2002-2004).

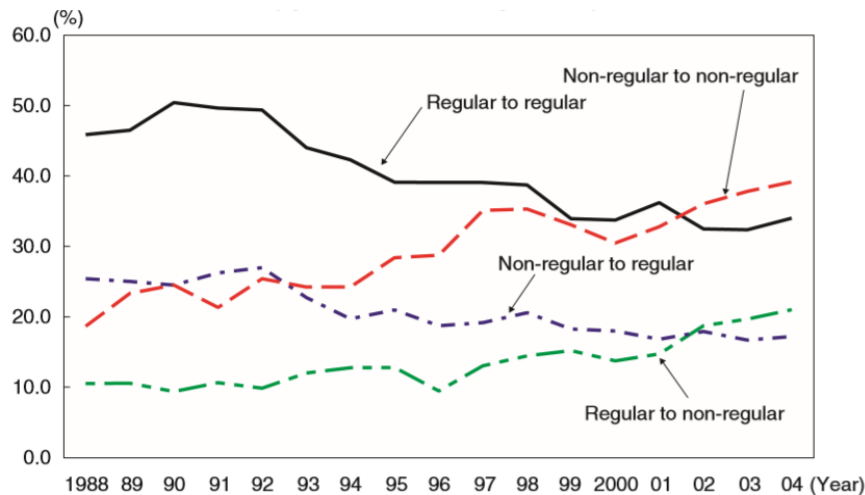


Table 6 Employment Patterns of People who Left Work and Found New Employment, by Employment Pattern (ages 15–34, not including students).

Source: Specially calculated by the Office of Counsellor in charge of Labour Policy, from "Special Survey of Labour Force Survey" (February), Statistics Bureau, MIC, for 1988 through 2001 and "Labour Force Survey (Detailed Tabulation)," Statistics Bureau, MIC, for 2002 through 2004.

Note: "People leaving jobs" in this case refers to those who have left jobs within the past year.

According to Driscoll, the fact that *freeters* do not participate in white collar employment is a critique of the old value of sacrifice and delayed gratification.⁷⁹ According to Driscoll, career consciousness of young people today is marked by the belief in the idea of a perfect vocation, passivity and inclination toward personal interests.⁸⁰ They often graduate without any specific aspiration or it is so specific that limits their possibilities. In both cases this leads to engaging in part-time jobs and becoming *freeters*. According to Cook's study, male *freeters* are a disappointment for Japanese society because they do fail to represent the usual form of masculinity and adulthood.⁸¹ They did not complete the transition from school to work successfully, they are not responsible and refuse to enter the normal adult social order.⁸² For her research, Cook interviewed a woman called Sayuki who worked at a café in which many *freeters* were employed. She affirmed "Responsibility, they have it, but less than full-time workers...I think this is because they are young, and because their motivation is different to full-time workers; they put more emphasis on their private lives than

⁷⁹ Driscoll, M. (2007). Debt and denunciation in post-bubble Japan - On the two *freeters*. *Cultural Critique*, (65), 164-187.

⁸⁰ Adachi, T. (2006). The career consciousness among youth and career development support: A study focusing on university students. *Japan Labor Review*, 3(2), 28-42. Pag. 29.

⁸¹ Cook, E. (2013). Expectations of Failure: Maturity and Masculinity for *Freeters* in Contemporary Japan. *Social Science Japan Journal*, 16(1), 29-43.

⁸² For example, a great number of *freeters* do not get married. However, usually this is not a choice but a consequence of the risk of marrying a *freeter* who is not financially responsible or stable and could be fire at any time. Mathews, G. and White, B. 2004. 'Introduction: Changing Generations in Japan Today'. In Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society? Mathews Gand White B(eds.). London and New York: Routledge: 1–12.

on work. They have not much sense of responsibility I suppose. More often than a regular full-time employee they tend to think it is ok to quit.”⁸³

In “Tokyo Freeters” the hostile attitude of the media towards freeter is strongly highlighted. When the media talk about freeters they always repeat that this condition is their own fault. “*The media and the society say that I am a loser, a kind of slave*” says a freeter in the documentary, showing what people’s perception of freeters. At the end of the documentary, a family man warns his daughter against the freeters’ life. They live in a competitive society and must fight and compete in order to have a good life. Freeters are taking it easy and should change their minds and lifestyles. When he interviews them for a job, he tells them that he cannot hire them if they have this kind of mentality. “*I often criticize them very harshly*”.

In this subchapter the focus has been on the negative popular opinion about *freeters*. In the next subchapter the focus will reflect my opinion about this phenomenon. Opinion that challenges the ones exposed in the previous subchapter.

4.2 FREETERS: VICTIMS

“In 1985 during a one-year exchange as a teacher of English to Japanese primary school children, I was surprised to discover that the company classified a female friend and colleague as a part-time employee. I was surprised my friend was classified as part-time because she team-taught the same classes, used the same curriculum and worked the same number of hours—at times, even longer—as other teachers; both Japanese and 'foreign'. Despite her qualifications and ability to speak English fluently, her 'part-time' status meant there was a considerable disparity between her employment conditions and those of both Japanese and 'foreign' full-time employees. My friend did not choose to be employed as a part-time worker. For her, amongst other benefits, full-time employment would have enabled her to live independently and move into an apartment closer to work, reducing the three-hour commute from her parent's house each day.”⁸⁴

As analysed in the previous subchapter, people tend to attribute the main cause of the freeter phenomenon to the approach of young people towards life and employment. However, as we will see in this part, the problem must be recognised as an economic and structural one that requests a political intervention. It could seem that becoming a freeter could be considered a personal and intentional decision but the Japanese labour market has been evolving in a system in which just a small percentage of young people can find a gratifying employment, while the majority is forced to accept a non-regular work. The cause of the freeter

⁸³ Cook, E. (2013). Expectations of Failure: Maturity and Masculinity for Freeters in Contemporary Japan. *Social Science Japan Journal*, 16(1), 29-43. Pag. 33.

⁸⁴ Broadbent, K. (2003). Gendered employment tracks: 'part-time' versus 'life-time'. In *Women's Employment in Japan: The Experience of Part-time Workers* (pp. 9-33). Pag. 1. Routledge.

problem could partially be considered an issue of attitude but the real cause is the recession that started in the 1990s after the bubble burst. The analysis of the data in the chapter “Historical and economic background to the increase in non-regular workers in Japan” has demonstrated how the structural changes in the Japanese employment system have been carried out from the 1990s because they have been requested by employers who wanted to cut the labour costs in a global market that was becoming more competitive. As a result of these requests, the government decided to implement a series of neoliberal reforms which brought to the creation and legalisation of non-regular employment. As demonstrated by the data in the second chapter (see Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5) the increasing the percentage of freeters has been the trend since the 1990s. I think it is superficial to put the responsibility on young people’s lifestyle and mentality when it is clear that they have to face many obstacles⁸⁵ in order to enter the world of work, in particular when taking the wrong decision can mark your future working path irreversibly.⁸⁶ The fact that few regular positions are available, puts anxiety on young people who have to compete from high school in order to grab the few available and stable positions in the companies. Indeed, companies start hiring from high school or university but lifetime positions are limited and students are worried even in the most prestigious institutions.⁸⁷ So, young people have to face harsh competition from high school, regular workers' status are limited due to the government neoliberal policies and it is unfair to say that they are lazy and unwilling to have a normal life when they do not manage to be hired for one of those positions. Documentaries, testimonials and data analysed in this subchapter will demonstrate why I object to the idea that freeters should be blamed and considered the architects of their own faiths.

Protests organised by the General Freeter Union and PAFF⁸⁸ are organised in order to fight against the implementation of neoliberal reforms, abuses made by employers but another important aim is to fight against the convictions that freeters’ precarious condition is attributable to their unwillingness to have a conventional life and they try to do it by influencing public opinion through the media.⁸⁹ In the protests activists do highlight that is not a problem of individuals, but it is social. Furthermore, they emphasize that their desire is to be hired as regular workers, but they are not able to find a regular job because of the changes in the economic system that has shifted “*toward a freeter- based economy*” due to neoliberal policies.⁹⁰ It is

⁸⁵ Obstacles such as government policies, employers who hire always more non-regular workers, difficulties in the school to work transition.

⁸⁶ As shown in the previous parts of the thesis, young people who start their careers as non-regular workers find it hard to switch from a non-regular to a regular worker. (Table 6). If the transition work to school is not successful

⁸⁷ Students’ testimonies in the documentary “*Tokyo Freeters*” (2010) directed by Marc Petitjean and produced by Delphine Morel TS Productions.

⁸⁸ PAFF is the acronym for Part- timer, Arbeiter, Freeter, and Foreign worker and is a network for irregular workers. See Carl Cassegård. (2014). Let Us Live! Empowerment and the Rhetoric of Life in the Japanese Precarity Movement. *Positions*, 22(1), 41-69.

⁸⁹ Cassegård, C. (2014). The Rise of Movements Against Precarity. In *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* (pp. 79-116).

⁹⁰ Carl Cassegård. (2014). Let Us Live! Empowerment and the Rhetoric of Life in the Japanese Precarity Movement. *Positions*, 22(1), 41-69. Pag.52.

illogical to accuse young peoples' laziness since the regular jobs available are so scarce. Why would they protest neoliberal reforms if they wanted to have temporary and unregular jobs? And why would they insist on make people change their minds regarding their real attitudes? If they really had no aspiration in life, why would they care about changing the labour market conditions? However, *freeters* are not asking for a rehabilitation of the traditional Japanese working model. They are asking for a stable and non-precarious workplace. *"Human beings are more than labor power. Life should be something richer, with things like talking and laughing with friends, watching movies, reading books, listening to music, traveling and loving. Such things are not necessarily earned by labor. We don't remember being asked to live with no blanks left outside work. We freeters are forced to long working hours to feed ourselves thanks to our cheap wages. And you have the nerve to tell us to work more!"*⁹¹

According to Honda in addition to the problems regarding the employment system, there are two causes of the freeter phenomenon: one regards the education system and the other one regards household living. The first problem within the education system concerns the career guidance that lacks completely, or it is too rigid when students are pushed towards a specific employment or education career, without considering the students' interests ⁹². Both extremes have a great impact on the increasing rate of freeters. The other problem within the education system concerns the curriculum content that does not consider the student's interests. This causes the loss of interest in the school career and leads the student to abandon the studies without having any precise plan. Regarding household living, the problem arises when the family is not wealthy. Indeed, if the son or daughter does not manage to pass the entrance test at University, he or she usually starts a temporary work while keeping studying for the next year's test. As it can happen for every student, they must start working because their families cannot support them financially. Unfortunately, it is usual that they decide to give up studying and keep working as part-time workers and, as we already saw before, in Japan it is hard to switch from a non-regular to a regular work in the future. *"When I was a high school student, my parents told me that if I wanted to go on to a university, I must pay my own study expenses. After I failed in the entrance examination to a university, my mother suggested that I work at a hamburger shop near my house. At first, I expected to try to enter university again next year. But as time passed, I became more and more wrapped up in the part-time job at the hamburger shop and lost the will to continue studying."*⁹³ In addition, young people are nervous about their future because they know they do not have

⁹¹ PAFF, "Wakamono no ningenryoku o takamenai hikokumin senger" ("The Unpatriotic Movement for Not Raising the Human Ability of the Young"), October 26, 2005.

⁹² By lack the author means that teachers do not inform students about higher education or about working world. A rigid career guidance refers to the teachers' attitude of strongly push students towards a specific employment or education career, just basing the recommendation on academic performance and not on the student's interests. See Brinton, M. (2000). Social capital in the Japanese youth labor market: Labor market policy, schools, and norms. *Policy Sciences*, 33(3), 289-306; Honda, Y. (2005). 'Freeters': Young atypical workers in Japan. *Japan labor review*, 2(3).

⁹³ Quote from a Japanese girl of 21 years old. See Honda, Y. (2005). 'Freeters': Young atypical workers in Japan. *Japan labor review*, 2(3). Pag. 13.

the necessary skills because of the school system⁹⁴, they failed in the school to work transition and they know that the labour supply for graduates is decreasing. This argument and the direct testimony of the young Japanese girl can be considered another proof that the problem does not come from young people but it arises from the social, educational and economic structure that surrounds them and which prevents them to have a good instruction and a stable and regular work in the future. It is hard to decide whether one should accept a part-time work driven by need of money in order to pay back the educational debt or pay the fees when the family does not give its support. At the same time, one should not take a non-regular work that could prevent alternative and better careers in the future. Especially since for freeters is extremely hard to be hired as a regular worker as a result of the social negative impression against them, as we could understand from the testimony of the girl's father in the documentary "*Tokyo Freeters*".⁹⁵ In my opinion, another reason behind the non-hiring of freeters in firms could be that they are unskilled and the company might not want to invest time and money for the training of part-time workers. Therefore, it is hard for them to improve their abilities and this is an obstacle for their standard employment. It is a vicious cycle.

In the documentary "*Freedom and Survival- The Freeter Union*", Shimizu Naoko⁹⁶ highlights that the labour condition is unstable because of neoliberalism "*to the core*". She explains how The Freeter Union is about their lives have changed since the 1990s. Freeters' daily lives have become unbearable due to their unstable jobs that do not allow them to earn enough and provoke "*dry periods*" in which they are not able to pay their rents.⁹⁷ One interesting initiative implemented by the Freeter Union is to give booklets to people in which there is a list of the laws that do protect non-regular workers. These booklets are created in order to prevent problems non-regular workers can have with their employers about their rights, holidays and redundancies. The question is always the same: why would they choose to be employed as a non-regular worker with no rights and an unreasonable wage risking to have not enough money to pay for food, rent and have a normal and proper life? I think they have no choice if they have works for which they earn bad wages that are too low to settle down and have a family. "*Even when I really work, I do not earn a regular salary. I want a stable*

⁹⁴ Schools should provide basic abilities, internship opportunities and counselling services which are important in order to offer vocational guidance and information about job places. However, schools have shifted their resources away from work placement to the preparation for the college entrance exam. In addition, the cooperative relationship between employers and schools is deteriorating. See Kosugi, R. (2004). The transition from school to work in Japan: understanding the increase in freeter and jobless youth. *Japan Labour Review*; Yuki, H. (2004). The Formation and Transformation of the Japanese System of Transition from School to Work. *Social Science Japan Journal*, 7(1), 103-115; Ariga, Kenn, Kurosawa, Masako, Ohtake, Fumio, & Sasaki, Masaru. (2012). HOW DO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES IN JAPAN COMPETE FOR REGULAR, FULL-TIME JOBS? AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS BASED UPON AN INTERNET SURVEY OF THE YOUTH*. *Japanese Economic Review*, (3), Japanese Economic Review, Sept, 2012, Issue 3, p.(1).

⁹⁵ Her name is not revealed. See the docufilm "*Tokyo Freeters*" (2010) directed by Marc Petitjean and produced by Delphine Morel TS Productions.

⁹⁶ Shimizu Naoko is the chairwoman of Part-timer, Arbeiter, Freeter & Foreign Workers (PAFF).

⁹⁷ Freeters can be kicked out of their houses and therefore, the Freeter Union is building the freedom and survival house for non-regular workers who need a place to stay.

life. But it is difficult. I am thinking about how I can keep living in this poverty”; “We just want to live normally”.⁹⁸

Table 7 shows the level of lifestyle satisfaction of regular and non-regular workers in early-prime-age and in mid-prime-age both males and females. On the left side the graph represents the level of satisfaction of regular workers, while on the right of non-regular workers. In an overall comparison between left and right sides, non-regular workers (both males and females) are more “dissatisfied” or “somewhat dissatisfied” with their condition than the regular counterpart. The percentage of respondents who said to be “dissatisfied” or “somewhat dissatisfied” among non-regular workers was, for males, 51.8% of early-prime-age non-regular workers (in the regular counterpart 32,8%); 56.3% of mid-prime-age non-regular workers (their counterpart 31,7%); for spouseless females, 41.4% of early-prime-age non-regular workers (regular ones 22%) and 47.7% of mid-prime-age non-regular workers (regular ones 25,8%).⁹⁹ By relying this official data, there is no doubt that the majority of non-regular workers of every age and sex is not satisfied with his or her lifestyle. And I firmly believe that nobody would put himself in such condition voluntarily but only due to external factors that did not give other choice.

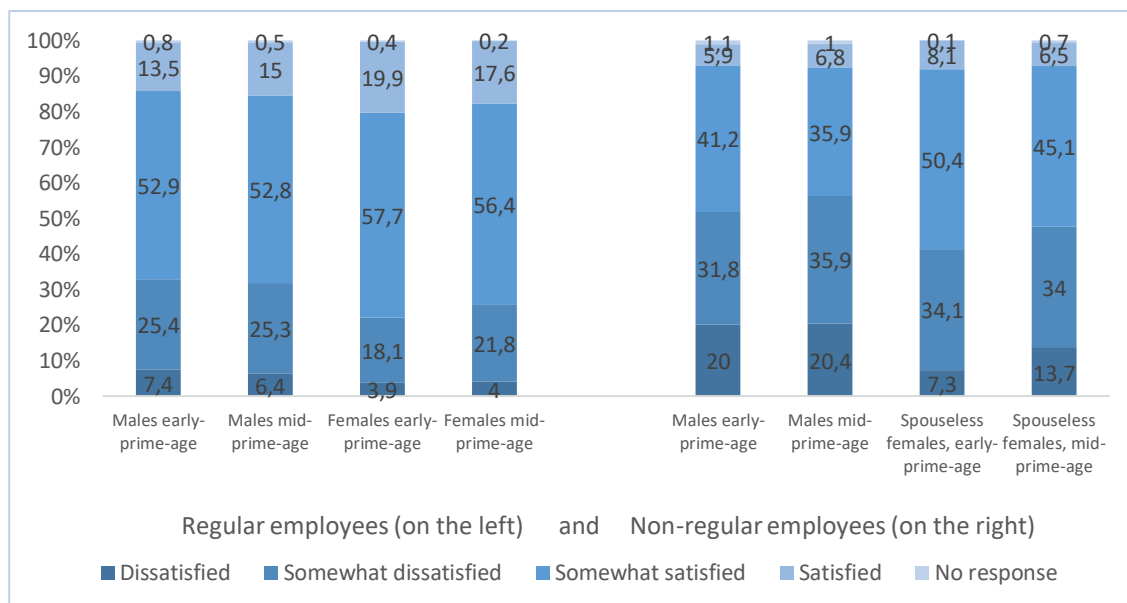


Table 7 Level of lifestyle satisfaction of Regular Employees and Non-regular employees.

Source: Questionnaire Survey on Vocational Careers and Working Styles, JILPT.

Note: This figure shows responses to the question “Are you satisfied with your current lifestyle?”

⁹⁸ First quote from Eriko Fuse, a Japanese girl who is 28 years old and has been a freeter for the past ten years. Second quote from Karin Amamiya, she was a freeter and describes that she was just like a throw away worker who could have been replaced by anyone anytime. Now she writes books about freeters in order to denounce inequalities. See the documentary “Tokyo Freeters”.

⁹⁹ JILPT (2017). Labour situation in Japan and Analysis: Detailed Exposition 2016/2017. Tokyo: JILPT.

In “*Tokyo Freeters*” Hiroki Iwabuchi¹⁰⁰ explains that when he was about to graduate a publishing company wanted to offer him a job. Unfortunately, he did not have the diploma yet and everything was cancelled. Six months later he obtained his diploma, but the hiring period was already over. At the time he was already working part-time and, after this missed opportunity, he kept working as a part-time employee. This is another example of how an unsuccessful transition from school to work can mark your career path forever. Even in this case one should not say that the fault is Hiroki’s because he did want the job and after the first refusal, he tried again but discovered that the hiring period was over. However, media and people of the previous generation would claim that he was too lazy to change his employment or unwilling to have a normal life.

To sum up, the first part of the chapter demonstrated the common thought people and media have towards *freeters*: they are lazy, ambitionless, do not want to marry or have a family, do not respect older generations and do not care about finding a good and stable job and help the economy of their country. In contrast, I think that *freeters* should not be blamed because it is clear, from the interviews, testimonies and data, that they are in non-regular employment involuntarily and do not want this kind of employment and life. They would like to have a regular job with a regular wage that would let them have a personal house, with no rent problems and in which they could create a family. If they wanted this lifestyle, they would not have complained about their satisfaction (Table 7). Instead, they are frustrated because they are economically unsure and not able to build a successful working career. According to Makoto Yuasa, till the 1990s the Japanese society had three “umbrellas”. The first one was the State which had the task to protect the industry. Under this main umbrella there were the corporations, each of them had its own umbrella. Underneath, the sub-contractors and the lifetime employees who had their umbrella for them and their families. However, when the three umbrellas closed, there were people left out the system.¹⁰¹

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analysed the emergence and growth of the Japanese non-regular workers known as *freeters*. It has analysed the factors and the reasons behind the emergence of young non-regular staff since the 1990s onwards. This thesis’ aim was to contribute to the existing literature about *freeters* by using newer, official

¹⁰⁰ Hiroki Iwabuchi directed an autobiographical film in 2009. Its name is “*A permanent part-timer in distress*”. In the film he is a permanent part-timer who on weekdays does menial work at a factory for 1,250 yen an hour, and on weekends takes on casual temporary work in Tokyo. He joins protests organized in order to conquer rights for non-regular workers. “*This is a documentary of the year I spent doing temporary work from April 2006 to March 2007. The film documents days spent thinking about whether there was any value in the life of “permanent part-timers,” labelled as losers and slaves, and wondering how long this would last*” Hiroki Iwabuchi.

¹⁰¹ See the docufilm “*Tokyo freeters*” (2010) directed by Marc Petitjean and produced by Delphine Morel TS Productions.

data from The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, Tokyo (JILPT) and from The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). Compared to other studies, another change has been to consider direct interviews and testimony by *freeters*. In this way, this thesis has challenged the prevailing views that consider the origins of the *freeteer* phenomenon in the negative attitude young people have towards work. In the existing literature is clear the sense that *freeters* just desire an alternative lifestyle in which regular work is not considered an option. Therefore, young people should be blamed because they differ from the Japanese idea of *salaryman* and represent a risk to the future of Japan. However, in this thesis I demonstrate that the economic background should be considered more and that the neoliberal policies implemented by the government have altered the Japanese labour market and have created non-regular workers and a great gap between new and old generations. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, I do consider *freeters* as poor victims of economic recession, company restructuring and neoliberal reform. When their generation was entering adulthood in the end of the 1990s, the Japanese labour market was changing in a way that made their job opportunities harder than the ones their fathers' generation had. Changes I have analysed regarded the employment system, and the labour market in general and then I have also pointed out how the changes in the institutions that should have helped the transition from school to work have worsened the situation. Young people did not choose to become *freeters*, but the choice was made for them by the socioeconomic system. This is clear if we consider the level of dissatisfaction among young non-regular workers, their testimony and the fact that they organise protests in order to fight against neoliberal policies and against the idea that their unstable condition is their fault.

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