Non-Regular Employment in Japan: Continued and Renewed Dualities

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ABSTRACT
Analyses of Japanese employment practices have previously focused almost exclusively on regular employment, relegating non-regular employment to a role as employment buffer. However, recent years have seen a rise in non-regular employment and this requires a renewed analysis of its role and importance. This paper provides such an analysis and presents two major findings. First, it argues that a renewed duality in the labour market provides important advantages to non-regular employment. Not in terms of flexibility, as suggested by previous interpretations and dual labour market theories, but in terms of costs. Secondly, the implications of this advantage differ between industries; differences that include strategies like subcontracting and outsourcing which enable firms to achieve similar advantages. The paper analyses the underlying duality and the consequences it holds for the employment opportunities in the Japanese labour market. It concludes with several insights in labour market dualism that the Japanese case provides.

KEYWORDS
Dualism, employment practices, human resource management, Japan, non-regular employment
INTRODUCTION
Since the 1990s the human resource management of Japanese firms has once again become an important topic of discussion. The long-term lack of economic growth, together with structural developments like the decline in domestic manufacturing and the ageing of the population, have renewed the debate on the efficiency of employment practices and the need for change (see e.g. Ornatowski, 1998; Holzhausen, 2000; Watanabe, 2003). This is a far cry from the critical acclaim of earlier years when the ‘Japanese model’ came to be associated with economic success and inspired debates on the ‘Japanization’ of industry (e.g. Oliver and Wilkinson, 1992; Womack et al., 1990). At the same time, the employment practices continue to be acknowledged as a model for ‘high-performance management’ (Doeringer et al., 2003) and their influence lingers on in models like that of ‘the flexible firm’ (Atkinson, 1987). Insights in their functioning and efficiency are therefore likely to extend beyond the Japanese situation.

One of the changes in employment practices that stands out is the rise in non-regular (part-time, seasonal, temporary) employment, a development that fits similar trends in other industrialised economies (see e.g. Felstead and Jewson, 1999; Auer and Cazes, 2003). This rise is particularly striking as non-regular employment in Japan has long been treated as ‘the passive residue of the mainstream of industrial relations in Japan’s large enterprise sector’ (Chalmers, 1990: 3). To the extent that its role has been included in previous analyses, it is as an ‘employment buffer’ to protect the long-term employment of the regular employees in the internal labour market (see e.g. Rohlén, 1979; Odagiri, 1994; Usui and Colignon, 1996). However, the rising percentages of non-regular employment suggest that this explanation is no longer sufficient and this paper addresses this lacuna. It accepts the dualism between regular and non-regular employment as implied by the buffer explanation and theories of labour market dualism (e.g. Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Berger and Piore, 1980). But it argues that this duality, constituted by the specific regulations and practices within the Japanese labour market, offers advantages in terms of costs rather than flexibility.

The paper is structured as follows. It first gives a description of the underlying study and the traditional ‘buffer’ role ascribed to non-regular employment in Japan. It then explains the rise in non-regular employment by the advantages it offers in terms of costs. In addition, we also see important differences between industries, extending beyond direct employment issues to strategies like subcontracting and outsourcing, and the subsequent section addresses these differences. The paper then interprets the findings in terms of a continued but renewed duality and discusses its consequences for the employment opportunities in the Japanese labour market. Conclusions follow on dualism in Japan and analyses of labour market dualism.

STUDY DESIGN
This paper is based on an extensive study in 2002/2003 on changing employment practices in response to the economic problems in the 1990s and the early years of the 21st century. The study was held among major Japanese firms, resulting in case-studies of firms in four different industries: three in automobiles, two in construction, six in electronics, and three in retailing. The case-studies were based on interviews with representatives of the firms’ human resource departments and additional data. At the initial stages of the study, interviews were also held with line managers but they provided little additional information as the questions concerned employment policies and were not repeated in the latter stages of the study. A list of case-study interview questions was developed based on the existing literature. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed the flexibility to explore the specific situation of the company while making sure that the core topics (e.g. the different types of employment contracts, the criteria for evaluation, the issue of lifetime employment) were discussed in all interviews. Because the interviews took place during a six-month period it was possible to test formulated hypotheses during subsequent interviews. Most interviews were held in Japanese, a few in English. During most a Japanese assistant was present, both to assist in case of misunderstandings and to discuss the outcomes afterwards. The interviewees were also asked to fill in a questionnaire with additional questions and to provide documents concerning the firm’s human resource management like evaluation forms. The information thus obtained was augmented by existing labour market statistics and Japanese studies on changes in human resource management. This is particularly relevant for the current paper which tests the issues raised during the interviews against labour market statistics. Finally, interviews with representatives of the employers’ organisation Nippon Keidanren and the trade union organisation Rengo provided additional context.
PAST INTERPRETATIONS OF NON-REGULAR EMPLOYMENT

As mentioned in the introduction, past analyses of Japanese employment practices have largely ignored non-regular employment. Instead, they have focused almost exclusively on regular employment as defined by the internal labour market in the typical Japanese firm. The long-term employment governance offered by this internal labour market enables the development of broad skills through job rotation and on-the-job training and is seen as a major factor behind the success of Japanese manufacturing firms (see e.g. Aoki, 1988, 1990; Itoh, 1994; Koike, 1995). The rise in non-regular employment suggests that its efficiency has diminished but an analysis of the internal labour market and the changes therein is unfortunately outside the scope of this paper (see Keizer, 2005 for such an analysis). Instead, it will focus solely on the advantages that non-regular employment can offer.

However, one aspect of the internal labour market is essential for any analysis of non-regular employment. The core element of this internal labour market is lifetime employment (shūshin kōyō), defined as the as ‘the practice whereby a worker is hired immediately after school and is expected to stay with the same firm until retirement’, while ‘[t]he firm, in return, is expected to retain him until the age of mandatory retirement (typically 55 to 60) regardless of business conditions’ (Odagiri, 1994: 48). While it can be said to originate from post-war agreements between employers and labour unions, the practice of lifetime employment became widely supported during the subsequent decades of high economic growth as one of its major cornerstones. The practice became widely implemented and aspired to and came to be seen as the defining characteristic of the (human resource) management at Japanese firms (Matanle, 2003). Moreover, support has remained strong in spite of the difficult economic circumstances. Research in 2003 found that most firms supported its (basic) continuation (36.1%) or partial adjustment (40.0%), with only 15.3 per cent pleading for a fundamental review (Japan institute of Labour, 2004a).

The offer of lifetime employment can obviously not be unconditional as firms need the ability to reduce employment in response to weak demand. The strategies that Japanese firms have developed to do so illustrate the role that is traditionally ascribed to non-regular employment. It is seen as an employment buffer to enable the reduction of labour input while upholding lifetime employment (Odagiri, 1994). Reorganisations during previous periods of economic difficulties testify of this importance (see e.g. Rohnen, 1979; Usui and Colignon, 1996) and recent adjustments confirm this. Among the firms that reduced employment in 2002, 29.7% per cent decided not to renew contracts for contract and part-time employees (Nihon rōdō kenkyū kikō, 2002). At the same time, this percentage is rather low compared to those of other strategies like natural attrition (81.6%), employment restraint (76.9%), and voluntary and early retirement (34.2%). This provides an early indication that the buffer interpretation of non-regular employment might require adjustment.

In spite of its possible limitations, this interpretation of non-regular employment as a ‘buffer’ underlines one important aspect. Regular and non-regular employment are not just alternatives but define one another. The definition of regular employment, as determined by the internal labour market, has a major impact on the role of non-regular employment as this constitutes a natural complement to the ‘promise’ of lifetime employment to regular employees. As we will see in the remainder of this paper, this complementary role continues to characterise non-regular employment within the Japanese labour market.

NON-REGULAR EMPLOYMENT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The data do indeed show a strong decline in regular and rise in non-regular employment. This trend has been a long-term process that originates from the 1970s (Gordon, 1985). However, as shown in table 1, the rise in non-regular employment has been particularly striking since the 1990s, from 20.8 percent in 1993 to 30.3 percent in 2003, with an acceleration of the trend since the late 1990s. This is particularly striking given the continued support for lifetime employment, making the replacement of regular employees a largely generational project (Imai, 2003).

Table 1 also introduces some of the major types of non-regular employment in Japan. Non-regular employment in Japan takes various forms, sometimes comparable to types in other countries but often with specific implications. Table 2 list the definitions of the most prevalent types. However, they are not always defined consistently. ‘Shokutaku’ is used to denote two rather different types of employees while part-time and arubaito...
Jobs can be quite similar and are not always distinguished. Most importantly, the category of part-time (pato) employment not only refers to employees with part-time contracts but also to all types of non-regular employment together. In the remainder of this paper the term is used in its strict meaning but even this definition hides an important distinction. The Part-Time Work Law defines part-time workers as those workers whose scheduled working hours are shorter than those of regular employees in the same workplace. Usually 35 hours is taken as the dividing line in this respect (Araki, 2002). However, many part-timers work more than 35 hours. Legendary is the group of so-called ‘pseudo-part-timers’, employees who have a part-time status but work about the same number of hours as full-time employees.

A major initiative to capture and accelerate the rise in non-regular employment, apparently inspired by the model of the ‘flexible firm’ (Atkinson and Meager, 1986; Atkinson, 1987), has been the development of a ‘multi-track personnel system’ by the employers’ association Nikkeiren (Nikkeiren, 1995, 1996). This system, which has received major press and continued support by Nippon Keidanren, proposes a reorganisation of the corporate ‘employment portfolio’ into three groups of employees: (1) a core or ‘elite’ group of long-term employees, (2) a group of specialists for dealing with specific problems, and (3) a peripheral group for simple routine tasks. The groups have their own type of employment contracts and rules for promotion, remuneration, training, etc. Table 3 gives an overview of their typical characteristics.

The third track consisting of a flexible workforce appears to correspond to the rise in non-regular employment. However, the growth of this group may not be caused primarily by a need for flexibility as suggested by the Nikkeiren proposal and the model of the ‘flexible firm’. Table 4 lists the reasons firms provide for hiring non-regular employment and shows the ‘need to control labour costs’ to be most prevalent. The case studies confirmed the dominance of cost rather than flexibility considerations. The weak economy and the subsequent need to reduce labour costs are crucial in this respect. This development has been supported by increasing cost differences between regular and non-regular employment during the 1990s, a trend that actually goes back even further (Kezuka, 2001). The hourly payment for part-time as a percentage to that for regular workers diminished from 70.9 to 65.7 per cent for women and from 55.4 to 49.9 percent for men between 1989 and 2003 (Nihon rōdō kenkyū kikō, 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Percentages of Employees by Type of Employment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-timers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arubaito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<table>
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<th>Table 2: Definitions Different Types of Non-Regular Employment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Part-time workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arubaito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shokutaku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispatched workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kōnai) ukeai</td>
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</table>
In addition, a large group of part-time employees holds relatively stable employment. 63.2 per cent of the part-time workers in 1995 had a contract without a fixed term (Kezuka, 2001). Moreover, even employees with fixed-term contracts often have relatively stable employment because of repeated contract extensions (Ibid.). This has important consequences because Japanese case law interprets a repeated extension of contracts, or even a reasonable expectation of continued employment, as sufficient to treat a refusal of renewal as dismissal and thus amenable to the case law concerning proper dismissal (Araki, 2002). Passet (2003) refers to these part-time workers as ‘quasi-regular-employees’. In accordance, the use of part-timers has changed from pro- to counter-cyclical in recent years (Passet, 2003). Instead of using non-regular employment as a buffer, reducing their number in the face of weak demand, firms have actually increased such employment to reduce labour costs. It confirms that reasons of costs dominate those of flexibility.

At the same time, this conclusion must be qualified. Flexibility remains an important issue as shown by table 4 which lists the need for additional personnel on a daily or weekly basis, workers for extended business hours, and workers to meet temporary or seasonal demand. Moreover, the protection remains second-rate compared to that of regular employees and non-regular employees can still be expected to function as an employment buffer in case of severe economic circumstances. Finally, we must distinguish between the different types of non-regular employment with, for instance, additional considerations when hiring dispatched workers. However, the dominance of the need to control labour costs is striking.

Non-regular employment at the industry level

The previous section did not differentiate between industries and suggested, just like the Nikkeiren employment portfolio and the idea of the flexible firm, a change in employment strategy across most if not all sectors (Pollert, 1988). To some extent this is indeed the case for jobs in the so-called ‘general’ or ‘auxiliary’ employment track (ippanshoku). The jobs in this track are relatively unskilled with limited possibilities for promotion and are to be distinguished from those in the ‘comprehensive’ or ‘career’ track (sōgōshoku) that usually leads to positions in management.
(Kyotani, 1999). The jobs in the general employment rack are an obvious candidate for replacement by non-regular employment types and various firms have indeed replaced or are replacing the (female) employees in this track by non-regular employment, in particular dispatched workers.

However, industries show strong differences in their use of non-regular employment beyond this shared strategy. As in other countries, the importance of non-regular employment in the retail and restaurant industry stands out. Its percentage of total employment in the 'wholesale and retail trade' and the industries of 'eating and drinking places and accommodations' in the first quarter of 2004 was respectively 44.3 and 63.4 per cent, compared to just 17.7 and 21.4 per cent in construction and manufacturing (Japan Institute of Labour, 2004b). Moreover, the developments in these industries are particularly striking as the distinction between regular and non-regular employees does not always coincide with the one between core and peripheral employees. Gadrey et al. (2001: 175) describe how part-timers are sometimes considered part of the core workforce, albeit as 'permanent employees with inferior occupational status (and pay)'. This existence of 'core part-timers' was confirmed by the case-studies of two major retailers and one restaurant chain. All firms had increased their use of part-timers to reduce labour costs but had also extended their responsibilities and career opportunities. One major retailer had established sales sections managed exclusively by part-time employees. Since the performance of these sections had shown a positive trend, the firm was planning to extend these initiatives in the future and theoretically part-time employees can now become store manager. The other firms studied in these industries showed similar initiatives with changes at the restaurant chain even more far-reaching. Besides increasing the percentage of part-time employees (no distinction is being made between part-time and arubaito) to about 90 per cent, the firm introduced a single 'candidate system' for all employees. Part-timers can now become manager and employees can even switch between a regular and part-time contract. At the same time, it will be obvious that most part-time employees are not interested in having a 'regular' career as they are not willing or capable to invest the necessary time and energy. It was estimated that about 10 per cent of part-time employees were interested in the extended career possibilities.

In comparison, and as indicated by the percentages, the role of non-regular employment is less dominant in the other industries included in the study. Both the continued efficiency and the well established character of the internal labour markets within these industries make a rise in non-regular employment inefficient or difficult to achieve. This holds in particular for the automobile industry which remains strongly dependent upon regular employment. However, we do see some interesting developments. For instance, the electronics industry, traditionally an industry whose success depended upon the broad firm-specific skills of regular employees, has achieved important progress in standardisation and this has widened the possibilities to hire non-regular employment. An interesting aspect is the importance of ukeoi employment, employees who are employed by a subcontracting company but work at the facilities of the client firm. This now constitutes a substantial share of employment at certain firms (e.g. about 25 per cent at one of the study's firms). Construction presents yet another situation. Non-regular employment is limited and mainly concerns temporary and or daily workers at the construction sites. However, the economic circumstances in the construction industry have been very serious and firms have achieved cost advantages by an increased use of one-year contracts at the regional level. If of sufficient ability, these employees are offered an open contract with lifetime employment but their status as branch employees continues to offer cost advantages.

This quick overview shows various characteristics of the rise in non-regular employment. It illustrates how the importance and character of non-regular employment differs between industries; with each industry achieving a specific constellation. Non-regular employment can offer important advantages but industry circumstances determine to what extent this is the case and which types of non-regular employment develop. This shows the danger of interpreting sector shifts as changes in the human resource management of firms. It appears that the growing importance of the service sector is a more important cause of the rise in non-regular employment and, for certain industries like automobiles, we can concur with Pollert's (1988: 288) conclusion that '[f]or manufacturing, the key sector for the current “flexibility” debate, the inclusion of part-time work as part of the ‘flexible firm’ periphery is inaccurate'. Secondly, the distinction between regular and non-regular employment is often too simple as illustrated by the (secondary) internal labour markets for part-
timers in retail and regional employees in construction. These groups have characteristics ascribed to both the core (e.g. security and importance certain skills) and the periphery (e.g. low pay and limited chances for promotion). Moreover, the definition of the different groups and their working conditions are dynamic.

Finally, the differences between industries do not remain limited to non-regular employment. Industries have been able to achieve similar advantages in terms of costs and flexibility through subcontracting and outsourcing. For instance, the construction industry has always made extensive use of subcontractors and equipment installers for outsourcing. A similar situation has developed in the electronics industry where standardisation and modularisation have inspired a rise in electronic manufacturing services (EMS). In addition, ukeori relations can actually be considered as some hybrid between non-regular employment and subcontracting. This role of subcontracting and outsourcing suggests a similar duality as constituted by the differences between regular and non-regular employment. The remainder of this paper therefore discusses the continued relevance and implications of the duality thesis for the Japanese economy and, in particular, its labour market.

Continuing and renewed dualities
Dualism refers to the awareness that society can be divided in two discontinuous segments. In accordance, the term ‘segmentation’ is often used to recognise the existence a more complex division than a simple duality (Dale, 1987). The two or more groups thus created are perceived as receiving an unequal treatment with a primary sector that contains the more attractive jobs and a secondary sector with jobs generally regarded as inferior (see e.g. Berger and Piore, 1980; Nishiguchi, 1994). Three types of possible discontinuities are usually distinguished: between different sectors in the labour market, between large and small firms, and between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ sectors of the economy. Crucial in the first two types is a focus on flexibility. Dualism is seen as an answer to the flux and uncertainty in any economic system (Berger and Piore, 1980). In the presence of regular employment, both subcontractors and non-regular employment are seen as an answer to this uncertainty. This is illustrated by the interpretation of non-regular employment as a buffer to protect the ‘lifetime employment’ of regular employees. In addition, the duality is also behind the Nikkeiren employment portfolio and the model of the flexible firm, which Pollert (1988: 283, 310) has described as a ‘micro dual labour market model’ and a case of ‘old wine in new bottles’.

The origin of dualism in Japan can be traced back to the period after World War I. At the time the labour market knew a strong fluidity, with both skilled and non-skilled workers frequently moving between employers. Large firms in the heavy manufacturing industries confronted this pattern by introducing various strategies, like firm-specific job classifications and in-house training, which would eventually constitute the basis for the internal labour markets with lifetime employment. To achieve the necessary flexibility these firms increasingly employed temporary workers, thus establishing the aforementioned pattern. Moreover, with regular employment predominantly limited to large firms, wage differentials expanded between various segments of the economy and the dualist thesis actually achieved its greatest fame in Japan by the claim that large firms exploited smaller firms. However, the dualism thesis has definitely lost momentum in recent decades. Many assemblers have developed long-term relationships with their subcontractors and bear a major portion of the risks involved. It is felt that the relationship between large firms and their subcontractors has changed from exploitative towards cooperative (Asanuma and Kikutani, 1992; Hart and Kawasaki, 1999). At the same time, more ‘dualistic’ elements remain relevant as shown by Nishiguchi’s (1994) discussion of subcontracting relations among automotive and electronics assemblers. His analysis also stresses the problem-solving ability of subcontracting partners, the focus of much economic literature during the 1980s and 1990s (see e.g. Williamson, 1985; Berggren, 1995; Dyer, 1996). However, it also acknowledges more ‘dualistic’ reasons for subcontracting. Technological reasons were most important but economic reasons, including direct labour costs, are still relevant. Once again, the inter-industry differences are interesting; while the importance of cheap labour was denied in the automobile industry, it was acknowledged by electronics firms. Flexibility appears of lesser importance as subcontractors did hardly function as a buffer against fluctuations in demand. Once again, this was particularly true for the automotive industry while some of the electronics firms did acknowledge ‘instrumental hiring’ in certain labour-intensive and low-skill segments.

This paper has shown similar developments concerning employment. Many non-regular
employees have achieved rather stable employment, suggesting a more cooperative than exploitative employment relation. At the same time, non-regular employment does offer important advantages in terms of costs and, to a lesser extent, flexibility. This raises the question to what extent non-regular jobs in the Japanese labour market are regarded as inferior, as a type of job one settles for. This consequence of segmentation has been widely debated ever since the dual character of labour markets was first established, in particular in relation to female employment (see e.g. Walsh, 1999). The reasons workers provide for taking non-regular employment, as listed in table 5, suggest a mixed outcome. Some employees do indeed ‘settle’ for non-regular employment. For instance, the inability to find regular employment is the most important reason for taking non-regular employment among male, dispatched, and shokutaku workers. On the other hand, the arrangements in the labour market agree to an important extent with the wishes and availability of various social groups; with male basic income providers, housewives and students concentrated in respectively regular, part-time and arubaito employment. Table 5 also lists various reasons that could be considered positive like the wish to cover household and school expenses (35.0%), convenient hours (30.9%), a short commuting time (28.1%), and additional money (24.6%). These percentages tend to be even higher for female and part-time employees and suggest a reasonably good fit between the demand and supply of the different types of labour.

However, we can question whether this contentment might be false. ‘Situational factors’ tend to constrain the choice for non-regular work. First, (female) part-timers are often faced with a lack of alternatives in the labour market because of domestic responsibilities as jobs within an internal labour market typically require a commitment that may be long and irregular (Dale, 1987; Walsh, 1999). A similar argument holds concerning the distinction between a ‘general’ (ippanshoku) and ‘career’ employment track (sōgōshoku) as discussed in the previous section. The demands of the career track, like heavy workloads, long hours of overtime, and a possible transfer to distant (foreign) sites, make that (female) employees with domestic responsibilities have little choice but to opt for the general track. Several writers (e.g. Whittaker, 1990; Kyotani, 1999; Broadbent, 2003) actually point out how firms have introduced the two different employment tracks to deal with the issue of female employment. Several reasons listed in table 5, like shorter working hours and/or days (23.2%) and the compatibility with other responsibilities (22.6%), subscribe to these arguments. Secondly, the choice for non-regular (part-time) employment is also reinforced by the tax and social insurance system and the family.

### TABLE 5: REASONS AMONG WORKERS FOR CHOOSING NON-REGULAR EMPLOYMENT (2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Non-regular workers</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>Temporary workers (arubaito)</th>
<th>Dispatched workers</th>
<th>Shokutaku</th>
<th>Contract workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Percentages; multiple answers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To use special skills or qualification</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better pay</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot find regular employment</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not want to be part of an organisation</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter working hours / days</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can work a convenient hours</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To adjust annual income or hours</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy job and low responsibility</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support household / pay school expenses</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatible with household responsibilities or other activities</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short commuting time</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically too weak to work as regular employee</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have extra money for one’s own Other</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

allowances provided by firms to their regular employees. Married women’s status as a dependent, with the advantages this offers, is lost when their annual income exceeds a certain amount and this contributes to the appeal of part-time work (Kezuka, 2001).

In accordance the mobility between regular and non-regular employment is still extremely limited in the Japanese labour market. The Japanese internal labour market is of the salaried type (Osterman, 1988) and tends to limit entry to recent graduates or certain employees during the early years of their career. The data do show a certain rise in mid-career hiring but this predominantly remains limited to young employees who can still be embedded in the organisation (Keizer, 2005). As a consequence, past experiences will determine the opportunities in the labour market and the segmentation therefore has a strong cumulative component (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Burchell and Rubery, 1990). It is very difficult if not impossible to find regular employment when one does not do so during the early years of a career or when one has left the labour market for a number of years. Moreover, it is exactly because of this limited mobility that Japanese firms have been so successful in organising their employees in a core and peripheral group. The closed character of the internal labour market, as illustrated by the fame of and continued support for lifetime employment, creates the strict distinction between regular and non-regular employees that contributes to the cost advantages as offered by non-regular employment.

As a consequence, the duality in the labour market cannot be accused of having created the traditional roles in the labour market but it can be said to confirm these roles. The closed character of the internal labour market, supported by the tax and insurance system and the company welfare provisions for married employees, frustrates the integration of women into regular employment. The developments that blend the strict segmentation between regular and non-regular employment (e.g. in retailing, at the restaurant chain, in construction) suggest greater possibilities for employees to move into regular employment. However, such developments are still quite rare and their continuation will be dependent upon their efficiency. Finally, in spite of the apparent stability of the arrangements, the rise in non-regular employment and the extended working hours and responsibilities do lead to unfair outcomes. Although part-time employees might perform jobs highly similar to those of full-time workers, this will not be perceived as such because of their status as part-time employees (Broadbent, 2003). In accordance, we see a debate on the fair balance in working conditions between regular and non-regular employees (see e.g. Kezuka, 2001).

Concluding remarks and wider implications
Non-regular employment has long played a role in Japan but changing circumstances, in particular the need to reduce labour costs in response to the weak economy, have clearly increased its importance. Non-regular employment has become essential and should be treated accordingly in analyses of Japanese employment practices. Part-time employment offers important advantages in terms of costs based on a duality in the Japanese labour market. This differs from previous interpretations of Japanese non-regular employment, the model of the flexible firm, the Nikkeiren employment portfolio, and theories of labour market dualism. They all stress the dynamic advantages offered by non-regular employment as a buffer to protect regular employment. We can therefore speak of a continuing but renewed duality in the Japanese labour market. Dualism is of continued relevance but costs appear more important than flexibility. Alternative strategies like subcontracting and outsourcing underline this interpretation.

The importance of cost advantages might be caused by the fact that weak macro-economic circumstances, and not so much the economic fluctuations themselves, have characterised the Japanese economy during the 1990s and early 2000s. We can therefore question whether this use of non-regular employment will continue when the economy recovers. However, the data do not yet suggest an end to the rise. Moreover, the dualism in the labour market is likely to remain strong as it is supported by the rules of the internal labour market, its relative fit to the wishes and availability of different social groups, and the tax and insurance system. This means that the advantages in terms of costs will continue. As a matter of fact, it is unlikely that the advantages in terms of cost have only become relevant in recent years and it appears that previous analyses of Japanese non-regular employment have been partial.

The discussion has also underlined important differences in the quantitative importance and type of non-regular employment between industries. Even though the advantages in terms
of costs, and to a lesser extent flexibility, are shared between industries, the use of non-regular employment clearly differs. These differences extend towards the use of subcontracting and outsourcing as the major alternative to non-regular employment. Industry characteristics matter and there is a real danger to interpret sector changes as a change in the employment strategies by firms. Instead, more detailed studies on the role of non-regular employment in various industries are needed. These studies should also address the developments that are likely to affect the Japanese labour market in the more distant future. For instance, what will happen when more and more women are no longer willing to settle for part-time employment? Or what will happen to the broad and high-level skills of employees when more and more are employed on non-regular contracts?

Another finding concerns the relation between duality and segmentation. The paper has illustrated how the duality in the Japanese labour market actually knows a rich segmentation, both within the internal labour market and among non-regular employment. Moreover, the boundaries of the different segments are continuously redrawn with transfers between the lower segments of the primary and the higher segments of the secondary labour market. The boundary between the primary and secondary market has grown permeable with the restaurant firm that enables employees to switch between regular and non-regular employment contracts as the most far-reaching example. However, the duality between regular and non-regular employment itself is not challenged and is essential in the creation of a rich supply of non-regular employment. The increasing use of non-regular employment can even be interpreted as an important strategy to uphold the internal labour market by limiting its number of employees. The continued support for lifetime employment, and the essential division it creates, remains the defining characteristic of the Japanese labour market and the stability and financial rewards this market offers are made possible by the limited possibilities for non-regular employees to enter. In this sense the labour market must be characterised as ‘dual’ rather than ‘segmented’.

The duality also defines the opportunities that the Japanese labour market offers to different groups of employees. This holds in particular for female employees. To the extent they prefer non-regular employment they are well served by the increase in demand and opportunities offered. However, the duality severely limits the options for women who might prefer regular employment but are not able to enter the internal labour market after graduation, to have an uninterrupted career for family reasons, or to combine the demands of the career track with domestic responsibilities. This problem is not specific to Japan (see e.g. Dale, 1987) but appears particularly severe here. The same duality that creates a rich supply of non-regular employment comes at the cost of limited mobility. It functions as a conservative force and a primary market or employment track for true part-time employment (defined by its limited number of working hours) remains unlikely. The developments in retail do indicate change, and in the long run firms need the additional ‘manpower’ to compensate for the ageing of society, but any fundamental change appears unlikely in the coming years.

Many of these findings can also improve our understanding of labour market dualism. The paper has, for instance, provided an antidote to approaches that provide a rather one-dimensional and context-independent interpretation of the rise in non-regular employment. Instead, it has illustrated the complexities of labour markets, the impact of national regulation and employment practices, and the continuity this guarantees. Another core finding has been the importance of costs, an advantage that has largely been ignored in previous analyses of non-regular employment. One wonders why these potential advantages in terms of cost have largely been ignored in the past. It appears that previous analyses assumed that the connection between the different labour markets would adjust their respective prices. However, in the face of the strong labour market regulation in Japan this does not appear to be the case. In particular the closed nature of the internal labour markets influences the balance between supply and demand in the two markets and this appears to affect their respective wage costs. More analysis is obviously needed in this respect to confirm these findings and estimate the extent of this ‘regulatory’ effect. Once again, industry specifics are likely to have an influence. Finally, this issue also links to the finding that the two types of labour market actually define one another, with the role of non-regular employment largely determined by the rules of the internal labour market. It is precisely because the Japanese internal labour market remains closed that certain employees who prefer regular employment have to accept non-regular employment in spite of the relative low pay and limited career chances.
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