

Youth Unemployment and Labor Policy in Contemporary Japan

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Abstract : In this paper, first I try to sketch the changing Japanese labor market after 1990s, and then examine the so-called “Job Café program” in detail, which was initiated in 2004 by central and local governments to help young people find suitable jobs, and finally investigate the possible direction for future labor policy as an important tool for revitalize the local economy. Latter half of 1990s witnessed the high unemployment rate among the population aged twenties in Japan, and the number of ‘shinsotsu-mugyo’, i.e. population not at work after completing high school or university, NEET (not in employment, education or training) and ‘freeters’ have grown rapidly. “Job Café program” was initiated as a public response to the increased youth unemployment, aiming at assisting young people’s transition from education to career. In the Job café program, job information service by MHLW, information service for high school students and university students by MEXT, placement service of career internship by METI are integrated into one service, and are provided by local government initiative, therefore named as “one stop service of employment”. Although it is highly appreciated for one stop service, the Job café program has criticized for paying too much attention to the performance of projects, such as the number of users, and the number of successful job matching. At the final section of the paper, more practical spatial unit for executing effective regional plan on local employment and more empirical research on job search behavior are discussed.

Keywords : Job café program, youth unemployment, local labor market, Japanese labor practice, deregulation

1. Introduction

After the corruption of bubble economy in 1990s, unemployment rate in Japan has raised up sharply, and both the central and local governments began to place more emphasis on labor policy than before. Faced with the economic recession, employers refrain from

hiring the newly graduated young workers to lessen the fixed labor cost, and chose the strategy to deploy casual workers instead of full time workers, i.e. adoption of numerically flexible strategy in labor. The reasons why employers adopted such strategies can be explained in two ways. First, when employers

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must choose between two alternative employment strategies to cut the labor cost, i.e. dismissing the middle aged workers with rather high labor cost and hiring the newly graduated young workers to replace the middle aged workers, or continuing employment of the middle aged and suspending of hiring the newly graduated young workers, strict control of dismissal by labor laws and long tradition of Japanese management system emphasizing long term stable employment relationship between workers and managers forced managers to choose the latter option. Second, although deregulation of labor market is undergoing steadily in Japan for the last two decades, the deregulation of labor market has affected more on the peripheral workers than on the core work force. Therefore, the working condition of the core work force with traditional Japanese style labor practice is kept intact.

Central government in co-operated with local governments has invested large amount of money into various public capital to revitalize the local economy during the 1990s. But due to the accumulated deficit of government finance, central government shifted its fiscal policy from expanding expenditure to shrinking expenditure. At the same time, revenue transfer of tax from central government to local governments has decreased substantially. So far, main measures to stimulate local economy by local governments were government investment into public capital such as constructing roads, fishing port, airport, and varied local infrastructure to attract the manufacturing plants in the region. Because Japanese manufacturing companies have been rapidly relocating their production bases into the

east and southeast Asian countries for cheaper labor cost and the net effect of public investment has been decreasing due to the saturated infrastructure in local economies, the power of public investment to create new jobs has been declining. In cope with such situations, local governments began to cut the public investment and to set out varied employment projects to create new jobs. So far it was widely accepted in Japan that only central government is responsible to the employment policy. But within the last decade, many local governments also set out various attempts in order to create jobs. For example, in 2002 Tottori prefectural government embarked new project to cut public servant's wage and to employ new staff such as elementary school teachers, school librarians, and counselors for domestic violence. As a result, about 1,500 jobs were created by this project. Tottori prefectural government named this project "New deal project for job creation in Tottori". Another attempt was initiated by Hyogo prefectural government, where over time work of government officers was reduced, and saved fund from this was used to employ young workers as part time or temporary basis. This project can be seen as a kind of work sharing policy.

Since 1980s successive LDP conservative cabinets following after Prime Minister Nakasone have pursued neo-liberal policies, and promoted deregulation and privatization emphasizing market mechanism. In 1990s, the deregulation has deepened to reach to the labor policy, and the flexible deployment of labor became widespread in Japan. Such trend towards flexibility is a common phenomenon in

advanced economies within a few decades.

As mentioned above, labor market in Japan has experienced drastic changes in recent years. Therefore in this paper, first I try to sketch the changing Japanese labor market after 1990s, and then examine the so-called "Job Café program" in detail, which was initiated in 2004 by central and local governments to help young people finding suitable jobs, and finally investigate the possible direction for future labor policy as an important tool for revitalize the local economy.

2. Changing labor market in Japan after 1990s

It is preferable to describe the main features of Japanese labor market before showing the change of Japanese labor market occurred after 1990s. It is widely acknowledged that so called Japanese labor practice has following features. First, both of the office workers and the manual workers tend to adhere to the same job for long time, to show low turn over rate, and to get age based wage. In other words, internal labor market is highly developed in Japanese economy. Second, most of the school leavers of high school and university start working altogether in April, and newly employed persons for the large companies are almost exclusively high school and university graduates, and aged workers with comparatively high wage are compulsorily retired when they reach at some fixed age. Third, there exists great divide between full-time workers and casual or part-time workers in employment conditions such as wage, job security, fringe benefit and various

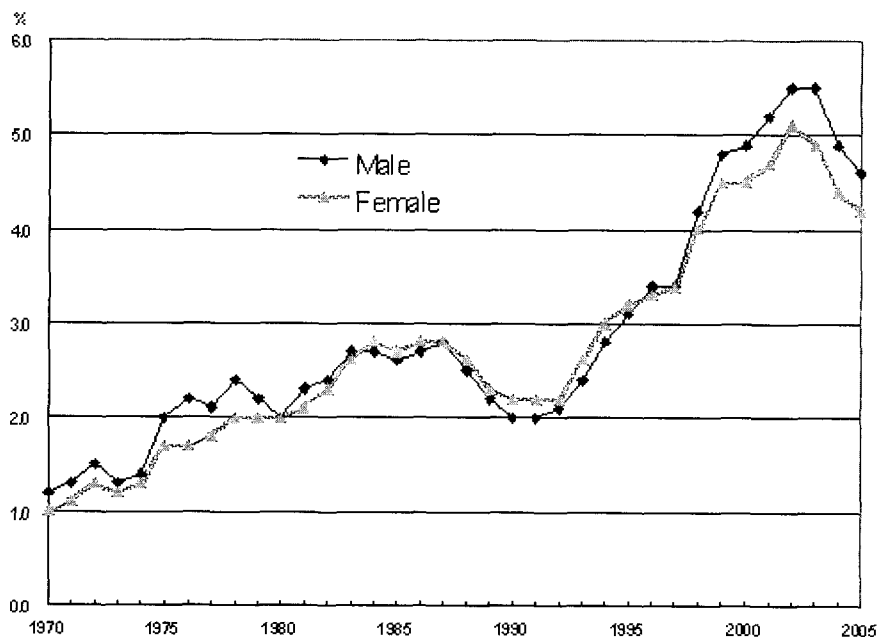
allowances. Japanese labor market is sometimes seen as dual labor market or segmented labor market.

In 1990s, business managers stopped new employment and shifted from ongoing age based wage system to performance based wage system. At the same time, the central government promoted deregulation of labor market in various ways. Previously business chance of job placement companies was strictly controlled by government, but gradually after 1980s, more and more job placement activity is open to the business. Government control on deployment of contract workers also eased, allowing companies to employ contract workers for up to three years. Also discretionary working hour system is widely adopted in many jobs. In 1987 discretionary working hour system was introduced in workers engaged in research division of the companies, and in 2000 it is applied to other divisions such as editing, management, and planning. Workers employed as discretionary working hour system are not followed by working hour control such as 40 working hours limit a week and 8 working hours limit a day. As a result, stable Japanese labor market has changed gradually (Tachibanaki, 1998; Dore, 2005). First, the number of unemployed, particularly young unemployed, has reached to an unprecedented level. Second, turn over rate among young workers has been rapidly rising. For instance, about 70% of workers who have just graduated from junior high school are said to quit their jobs within three years. About 50% of workers who have just graduated from senior high school are said to quit their jobs. About 30% of workers who have just graduated from university are said

to quit their jobs. Third, numbers of workers employed at unstable conditions such as part-time workers, casual workers, contract workers, and 'freeters', i.e. young workers who move from one part time job to another continually and do not settle down into stable jobs at their own wills, has been growing, and increasing number of youth staying at NEET, i.e. not in employment, education, and training, has become urgent topics for the policy planners and the academic researchers.

Fig.1 indicates the unemployment rate of Japan for male and female between 1975 and 2005. Before the bubble corruption in 1993, Japanese economy has achieved full employment for more than three decades. Unemployment rate in Japan has reached highest between 2002 and 2003 with over 5%.

High unemployment rate is a compounded result of economic recession and labor market deregulation. Deregulation of labor market has hit more seriously on the peripheral workers than the core workers. Japanese companies faced with economic recession also prefer the skilled workers to the newly graduated young school leavers to employ. This means that internal labor market of Japanese economy has gradually weakened its role, and Japanese companies became unwilling to invest their resources to develop workers' skill on the job training. Although at the first look Japanese labor market has becoming more flexible than before, it should be reserved that the heightened flexibility of Japanese labor market may be caused by a demographic factor with middle aged workers (aged fifty-five to sixties)



Source: Statistics Bureau: "Labor Force Survey"

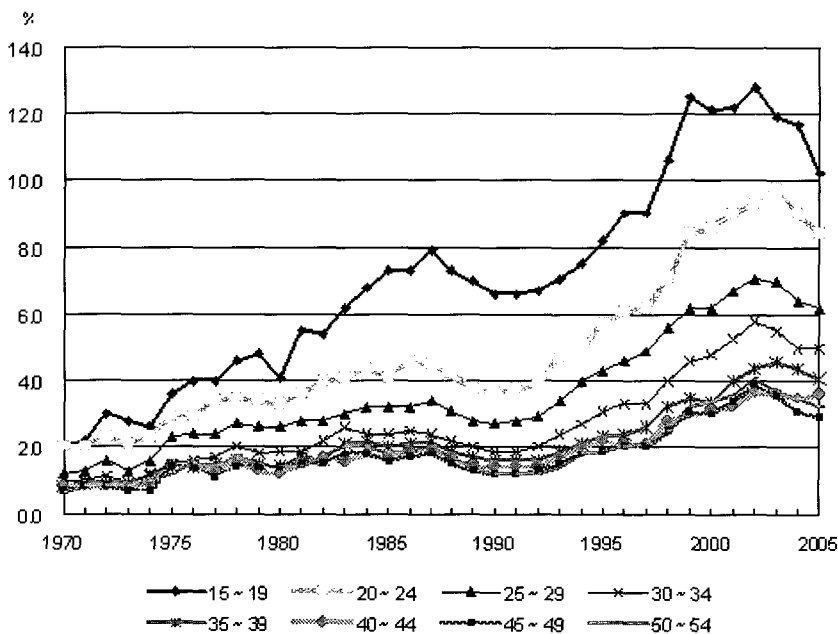
Fig. 1 Unemployment rate in Japan by sex (1970-2005)

constituting large share in most of the Japanese companies due to the baby boomer effect (cohort born between 1947 and 1951). In addition, it is probable that the heightened flexibility of Japanese labor market is a temporary phenomenon caused by prolonged economic recession in 1990s.

Fig.2 indicates unemployment rate by age group between 1970 and 2005. It is worth noting that 1990s witnessed the high unemployment rate among the population aged twenties. As a result, the number of 'shinsotsu-mugyo', i.e. population not at work after completing high school or university (in Japanese definition of employment status, those are classified as not labor force), NEET (not in employment, education or training) and 'freeters' have grown rapidly. Government officers and academic

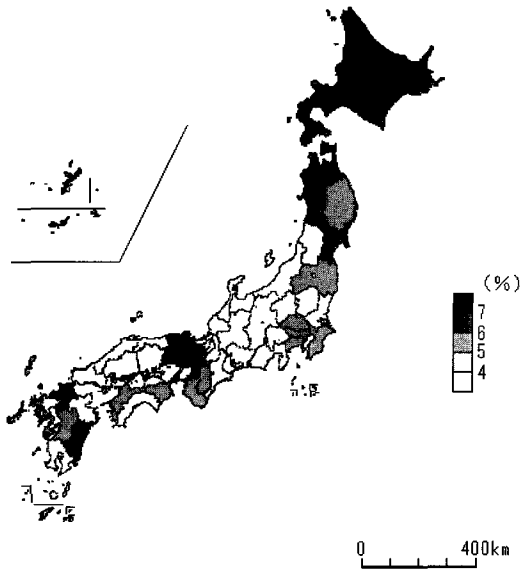
researchers strongly feel urgent necessity to cope with increasing young population not in employment (Okubo,2002: Kosugi,2002; 2003: Honda,2005: Genda,2001: Genda and Maganuma,2004).

Unemployment rate of high school leavers is much higher than that of university graduates. Fig.3 indicates the regional variation of unemployment rate by region. From this figure, prefectures with higher share of labor force employed in manufacturing (Ibaragi, Tochigi, Gunma, Nagano, Shizuoka, Aichi, Gifu) show lower unemployment rate, while prefectures with higher share of labor force employed in tertiary sector (Hokkaido, Miyagi, Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Fukuoka, Okinawa) show lower unemployment rate (Yugami,2005; JILPT,2004). Ota(2005) pointed out that out-migration of high



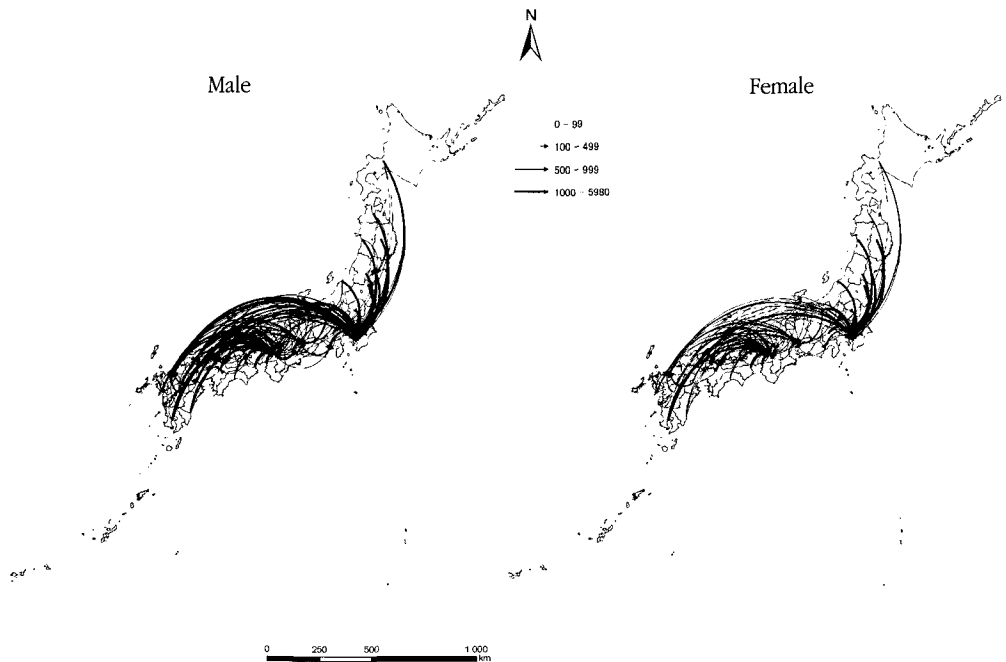
Source: Statistics Bureau: "Labor Force Survey"

Fig. 2 Unemployment rate in Japan by age group (1970-2005)

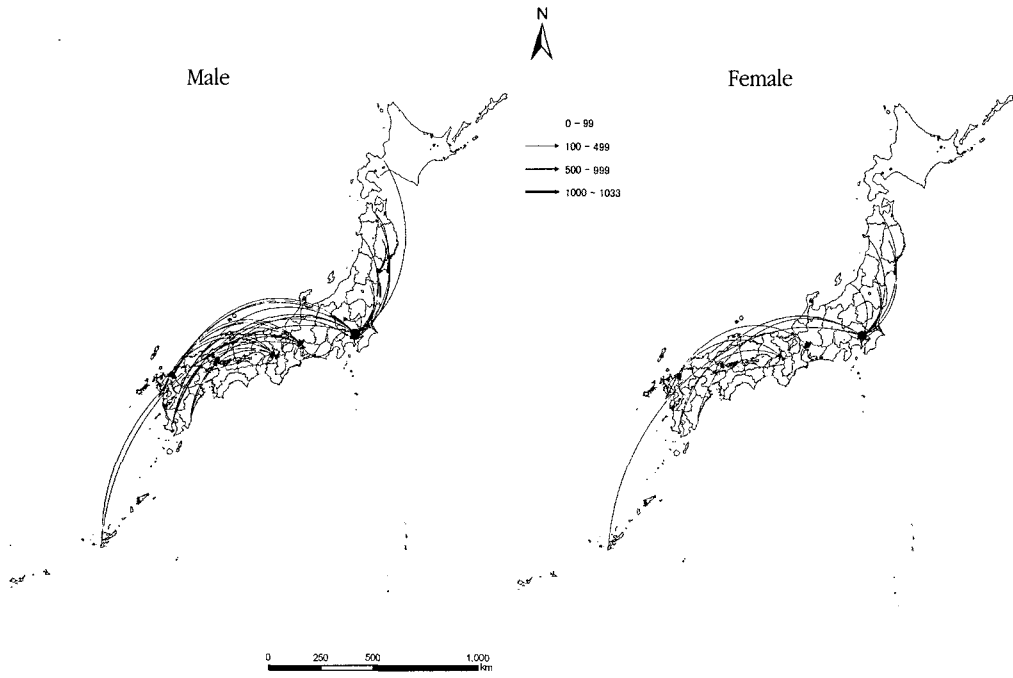


Source: Statistics Bureau: "Employment Status Survey"
 Fig.3 Unemployment rate by pre Feature(2002)

school leavers to other prefectures in order to get jobs is decreasing during the past four decades, and the reason lies in loss of good job opportunities in metropolitan prefectures for high school leavers. Fig.4 & Fig.5 indicate the out-migration flows of school leavers to get jobs in Tokyo for 1966 and 2004. In 1966 when Japanese economy is boosted in the midst of high economic growth, out-migration of high school leavers to metropolitan areas including Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya has reached to unprecedented level in its history. After the oil crisis, Japanese economy shifted from high economic growth to stable growth, and more and more high school leavers entered universities and colleges, the number of children per household was decreased gradually. As a



Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology: "School Basic Survey"
 Fig. 4 Out-migration of high school leavers to Tokyo to ger job(1966)



Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology: "School Basic Survey"
 Fig. 5 Out-migration of high school leavers to Tokyo to get job(2004)

result, out-migration of high school leavers to get jobs has decreased. Total number of out-migrated high school leavers to get jobs outside their own prefecture was 251,418 in 1966, but in 2004 corresponding number was only 36,655, approximately only one seventh of that in 1966. Ota(2005) analysed regional variation of youth unemployment rate by using job matching rate of high school leavers and job opportunity rate, i.e. number of job opportunities divided by number of the unemployed. Because number of high school leavers to get jobs immediately after graduation has drastically decreased, it is problematic to analyze regional variation of youth unemployment by using only high school leaver data.

3. Outline of "Job café program" and its evaluation

Within the past decade in Japan, many local governments began to undertake youth employment program independently from central government. Among them the most famous is "one stop service of employment (Job Café program)". To name some other programs, work sharing program by local government, job training by local public body closely fitting with local economy, and subsidiary spending to the companies that employed junior high school and senior high school leavers (Ota,2005). Job café program is carried by prefectural governments, and is subsidized by Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Ministry of Health, Labor

and Welfare (MHLW), and Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in co-operation to provide one stop service in relation to employment for the youth. This is a three year program started in 2004, after 2007 subsidy from central government will be ceased. Local governments are expected to continue the program by their own financing. In 2004, total subsidy from central governments amounted to 49.4 million Yen. Central government recommended every prefectural government to set up the job café, and more subsidies are allocated to 15 model regions. The service of job café is mainly provided for the young less than thirty years old (some of them are exceptionally accept up to thirty-five years old). The service provided by job café included information service on employment, provision of seminar to support job matching, counseling on job search, vocational training for career up, placement service of career internship, and so on. Job café program intends to provide comprehensive service for the youth in one facility, which was previously provided at many independent facilities.

One of the unique characteristics of job café lies that the receptive population of job service is limited to the youth (Kojima, 2005; Takahashi, 2005). In job café program, job information service provided by a public employment security office under the supervision of MHLW, information service on employment and counseling service on job search for high school students and university students by MEXT, placement service of career internship by METI are integrated into one service, and are provided by local government initiative, therefore named

as “one stop service of employment”. Since ongoing job related services provided by public bodies are often felt formal and unfamiliar to the youth, job café service center pursues to create more familiar atmosphere like café, and attempts to attract more youth.

So far in Japan, public support for job placement for the unemployed is only provided in a public employment security office on a free charge basis, while job placement service by private companies are strictly restricted to twenty-nine jobs indicated in a positive list by law. In 1997, along with a series of deregulation programs on labor market by Japanese central government, job placement service is open to the private companies except some limited jobs, indicated as a negative list by law including clerical and sales jobs and security job for school leavers, jobs in agriculture, fishing, forestry, transportation, communication, skilled engineer, mining, manufacturing, construction, manual workers.

As we showed in Fig.2, unemployment rate of the youth is the highest among all age groups in recent years, and job placement for the youth is becoming particularly important task for the central and local governments. Job café program is now undergoing as a public response to the increased youth unemployment, aiming at assisting young people's transition from education to career.

From 2004, job café center is set up in turn, and in 2006 every prefecture has job café center. To name some representative activities of job café centers designated as 15 model regions, the job café center in Gunma Prefecture is run by university students NPO (Non-profit

Organization), which makes it easy for the youth to assist youth job placement by themselves. The job café center in Ishikawa Prefecture provides career seminar for the youth, where young business persons talk and give advice to the young job seekers. In the job café center in Osaka Prefecture, job training program for fostering the innovative small entrepreneur is provided. In the job café center in Ehime Prefecture, the center is located in city center with easy access, run in cooperation with shopping mall, and staffed by university students.

Evaluating job café program, it is highly appreciated for one stop service, i.e. comprehensive service provision at one center, and most of the job café centers are regarded as easily accessible for locating in city center. Users also highly appreciated job café centers for opening late hours and weekend. Some centers provide programs in cooperation with high schools and universities, but the detailed contents of the programs are varied from one prefecture to another. It is scheduled that the subsidy to the job café program from central government will be abolished in 2007, but at this moment it is difficult to predict whether the program can survive after 2007 because most prefectural governments have no clear vision for financing the job café program. It is expected that the possibility of survival of job café program will depend upon the will of each prefectural government. Due to the subsidy program, the job café program has paid too much attention to the performance of projects, such as the number of users, and the number of successful job matching, and time consuming

counseling for NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) tend to be avoided. As for the vocational training, most of the training programs provided by job café programs are short term, with weak linkage with curriculum in high school and university.

4. Possibility of employment program as an regional economic policy

According to Ota(2005), it is necessary for local initiative employment policy to include "local conformance" and "participation of various actors". "Local conformance" means that employment policy initiated at local level is more effective than standardized one designed at national level, because local initiative makes possible to consider the local conditions of industrial structures, infrastructure at region, work conditions. Indeed, OECD countries are now promoting decentralization of employment policy. "Participation of various actors" means that by involving many actors such as employers, teachers at schools, the youth, and local community as well as local governments, it is expected that local employment policy can be more effective. Because unemployment of youth is observed in the transition process from family and school life to working life, it is essential to deepen mutual coordination among those actors.

But is it possible to give a clear practical definition of "local labor market", in other word, what is the meaningful spatial unit for executing the local employment policy? The job café program is carried out by prefectural

government, with the subsidy from three ministers of central government. Therefore, the main target of the program is the young workers staying at their local, especially high school leavers at metropolitan regions and non-metropolitan regions and university graduates at metropolitan regions, it seems necessary to include young migrant workers, who have moved from non-metropolitan regions to metropolitan regions to enter the university and colleges, and moved back to their home regions after completing higher education or some years work experiences in the metropolitan regions. There should be a wider area of job search in university graduates of metropolitan areas, when compared with high school leavers, and the university graduates do their job search beyond their local prefectural boundary. Motani(2005) have analysed local employment at metropolitan area by using conurbation area (conurbation area is equivalent to the commuter catchment area where commuters to central city are beyond 10% of all the workers in a municipality) defined by Kanemoto and Tokuoka(2005). But it seems quite difficult to carry out the employment policy at the conurbation area, because a conurbation consisted of many municipalities have no practical manoeuvres to take the policy program into actions, and it is extremely difficult to coordinate the policy program among the different municipalities.

Ota(2005) has proposed to make up the local employment program at block area, i.e. Tohoku area or Kyushu area, in national land planning, and to provide information service on employment and job matching service within each block area. His idea is based on the

observation of “stickness” in school leaver movement that in contemporary Japan out-migrants of school leavers prefer to move to nearer prefecture from their home prefecture than to move to large metropolitan areas such as Tokyo and Osaka.

To find the most effective level of local employment program, it is quite important to examine the out-migration behavior of the high school leavers when they enter universities and colleges, and to refer the previous studies on return migration from metropolitan areas to their home prefecture after completing higher education or some years work experiences. As for the out-migration of high school leavers to get jobs, most of the high school leavers of metropolitan areas find their jobs in and around their home prefecture, while some high school leavers in non-metropolitan areas move to large metropolitan areas to get jobs. Compared with the three decades ago, the volume of the out-migration flow in recent years has drastically decreased. As for the out-migration of the high school leavers to enter universities or colleges, large amount of high school graduates move from non-metropolitan areas to metropolitan areas, with more male student moving out of their home prefecture than female students. Substantial number of out-migrated students from non-metropolitan areas to metropolitan areas when entering universities or colleges return back to their home prefectures after completing higher education of some years' work experiences in metropolitan areas.

Case studies of Nagano Prefecture and Miyazaki prefecture on return migration of the youth from metropolitan prefectures to non-

metropolitan prefectures are reported in Esaki et al. (1999) and Esaki et al. (2000). These studies have shown that 1) the oldest sons show the stronger tendencies to make return migrations than the younger sons, 2) the high school leavers do return migration than the university graduates, 3) the married husbands with wives whose origin is the same prefecture as their husband do return migration than those with wives whose origin is different from the husband. They found that the obstacles to the return migration are lack of jobs, the problem of education for their children, and job opportunities of their wives.

Studies on job search when completing the high school or university, or when making job hopping after some years' work experiences, or when making return migration, will help us to deepen our understanding of the local labor market. We can name the studies on job search by Japanese geographers as Inagaki(2002: 2005) and Ito(2006), but their focus are placed on casual workers or part-time workers, and there are relatively scarce case studies on the job search behavior of core workers in Japanese labor market. It is essential for us to undertake the studies on job search further, by focusing upon the differences of job search behaviors between high school leavers and university graduates, or between the school leavers and the job hoppers, and the different job search behavioral pattern between the searchers with residential moves and those without residential moves.

Green et al.(2005) examined the job search behavior typically observed in young people, and Quin(1984) studied income difference

showed in accessibility of job search. Since in contemporary Japan, some researchers have pointed out that labor market segmentation of the younger generations by income classes is becoming prominent, we can explore the new frontiers of the study of labor by examining job search behavior and unemployment in region in relation to income classes and accessibility to job opportunities.

At the final section of this paper, we will outline the local employment programs of OECD countries and EU countries based on Hirata(2005). Reviewing the employment policy in other advanced countries will bring us many implications for advancing locally sensitive employment policy for future Japan.

Blair government in the UK is now working out the so-called "New Deal" program. Compared with other EU countries, the UK labor program is rather centralized. The labor program in the UK in recent years has paid more attention to equalizing the employability and the working desire between the regions. In Germany, local municipalities have traditionally taken responsibilities for the economic programs for the local revitalization, while vocational service provision has been responsible to the federal government. In recent years, more discretionary power of the vocational service provision is transferred to the local government, and the local employment programs are now under decentralization. The local employment programs in Denmark are characterized by three concepts, i.e. flexible labor market, safety net supported by large amount of unemployment benefit, and the active employment programs such as vocational training by public sector and

private companies, job placement service, and vocational guidance in accordance with the high flexible labor market. High turn over rate in Danish labor market with no fear of unemployment to the workers is based on the abundant unemployment benefit and fully equipped social security.

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일본 노동시장의 변화와 정책대응

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요약: 본 연구에서는 거품경제의 붕괴 이후 일본 노동시장의 변화를 개관하고, 점차 늘어나는 청년실업대책으로써 2004년 중앙정부와 지방자치단체가 공동으로 실시한 「Job-café사업」을 분석하였다. 그리고 지역정책으로서의 노동정책은 앞으로 어떻게 수립되고 실시되어야 하는가를 논의하였다. 일본에서는 거품경제의 붕괴 이후 청년 실업률이 상승하여 「新卒無業」과 「NEET」가 급격하게 증가하였다. 그 결과 졸업 후에 원활하게 취직할 수 있도록 하기 위하여 「Job-café사업」을 실시하게 되었다. 「Job-café사업」은 후생성의 구직정보 서비스, 경제산업성의 취직인턴정보 서비스, 문부과학성의 취업알선 서비스를 통합하여, 지방자치단체가 주도적으로 추진하는 사업이다. 정부의 각 부처별로 실시하던 사업을 지방자치단체가 통합하여, 이러한 서비스를 한 자리에서 젊은이들에게 제공하는, 소위「One Stop Service」이다. 「One Stop Service」에 대해서는 편리성에 있어서는 좋은 평가를 받고 있으나 그 이용자 수와 소개 건수 등 지나치게 실적을 중시하고 있다는 비판도 동시에 받고 있다. 마지막으로 「지역노동시장」의 개념, 혹은 고용정책을 실시함에 있어서 의미 있는 공간단위와 보다 구체적인 구직에 관한 연구의 필요성에 대하여 논의하였다.

주요어: Job-café사업, 청년실업, 지역노동시장, 일본식 고용관행, 규제완화

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