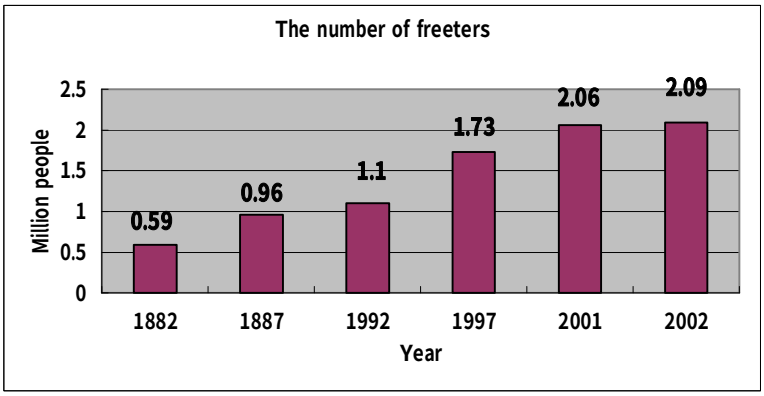
Freeters in Japan

The Ministry of Labor (2002) in Japan states that there are about 2.09million people who are called a “freeter”. The word “freeter”(free＋arbetiter) was made in the end of 1980’s by “From A”(part-time job hunting magazine) and has been spread since then. “Freeters” are young people (15-34 years old) who are not students or housewives, and who are willing to work but aren’t an employee of a company. Freeters in Japan totals about 3% of the working population (September 5, 2003) and have been growing rapidly during the several years in Japan, as is evident from the graph below.



(The Japan Institute of Labor, 2002)

The number of freeters has doubled in the past ten years and 21% of the young population is now freeters according to a survey conducted in 2001. Furthermore, the number of freeters is expected to continue to increase. This increase is likely to have a significant impact on the Japanese society. There are many reasons for the increase of freeters. In Sankei Newspaper (April26,2002.), reports say that a deterioration in the employment situation, a lack ness of students’ consciousness of their desired occupation,

and a decline in the students' determination to succeed are all factors which account for this rise.

First, the employment environment is a major factor in the increasing number of the freeters, which the Economy Society Policy says is deteriorating due to job tightness. Companies have been cutting recruitment of high school graduates since 1992, when they recruited 1.67 million new workers, and by 2002, it was 240 thousand, the worst number ever. In addition, according to a survey that the Recruit Work Research has preformed, the job openings in 1991 was peaked at (840 thousand), and by 1996, it had declined to 390 thousand . Japan's employment situation has worsened since 1993, "due to widespread corporate streamlining moves stemming from a recession after the collapse of the asset-inflated "bubble economy" in the early 1990's (October 30, 1996). To deal with the recession, many companies are cutting off regular staff and employing more part-time workers, many of whom are mostly freeters.

Second, students' attitude toward work has changed. 22.2% of the college students responding to a survey said that if they can not get a job with the company they want, they won't take a formal job. Of those 22.2%, some 25.3% did, intact, become freeters.[1] The percentage of the people who become freeters rise more among

[1] Mainichi Communications Survey " Consciousness of the College students" (2002)

the high school graduates. The Japan Working Research Center states that 37.2% of the high school graduates wish to become a freeter themselves[2](E.S.P.p73).

Although many students choose to become a freeters themselves, many people don't want to be freeter for the rest of their lives. According to the ESP's survey, 86.3% of men and 49.9% women of the freeter thinks that they need to be working in a full time job before they are 30 years old[3](E.S.P.86). However, 54.8% of new graduates who become freeters still remain so in their thirties (E.S.P.,p89). It seems that it is hard for them to quit being freeters once they become one. In sum, there seems to be a gap between the visions of freeters and the reality of the opportunities in Japan's society.

What makes it so difficult for them to quit a freeter? One problem makes it difficult for freeters to enter the work force is society's negative impression of freeters. The word itself has negative connotations, especially from educated people's point of view. A survey done by the Working Ministry Research Center shows that only 3% of the companies evaluate the freeter positively, while 30% of the companies evaluate the freeter negatively. It would seem that the companies view freeters as irresponsible and believe freeters are impatient and will quit the job sooner or later.

The freeters' duties are another problem. A survey done by the Cabinet Office

[2] Japan Working Research Center "Consciousness of the High School students deterring course" (2000)
[3] Soumusyou "Roudouryokuchyousa"

shows that 37% of the freeters can't use a computer, while only 23% of the permanent staff lacks this ability. This statistic shows that permanent staffs are better educated and possess more working abilities than freeters. On-the-job training used to be the companies responsibility, but now days most companies hardly educate the freeters. During work, the freeters are doing mostly subordinate duties. Accordingly, it is hard for them to improve their working abilities and that becomes a barrier for them to become permanent employee.

If the population of freeters increases, the Ministry of Education and the Labor Ministry agree that this trend could be a serious problem for society because they don't have enough working ability and don't have a social scale. They say that the freeters are just dependent on their parents and that if freeters don't stop increasing; the time will come when freeters take over the society (Sankkei October5, 2000). This could cause a lot of damage to the Japanese economy because freeters, having fewer work skills, will not help the economy grow. First of all as Matsusima (ESP p95-96) says, freeter themselves will have a big problem. Since freeters are not permanent employees, they can't participate in social insurances and will be in great trouble if they become ill or injured and need money immediately. They also have fear for the future because their work is not stable and they could be fired easily. This fear might make the

society become unstable. “It could end up end up into a bipolar society.”(Matsushima) The permanent employees will get even richer while the freeters will struggle to earn a living. The increase of unemployed and the increase of the unstable position of the part-timers may result in the increase of juvenile crime and other serious social problems. Additionally if freeters don’t have a high enough income, it could result in people remaining unmarried or getting married very late, having fewer children and reducing the population. The income of the part-time workers does not increase so they can’t save money and it makes it hard for them to start families.

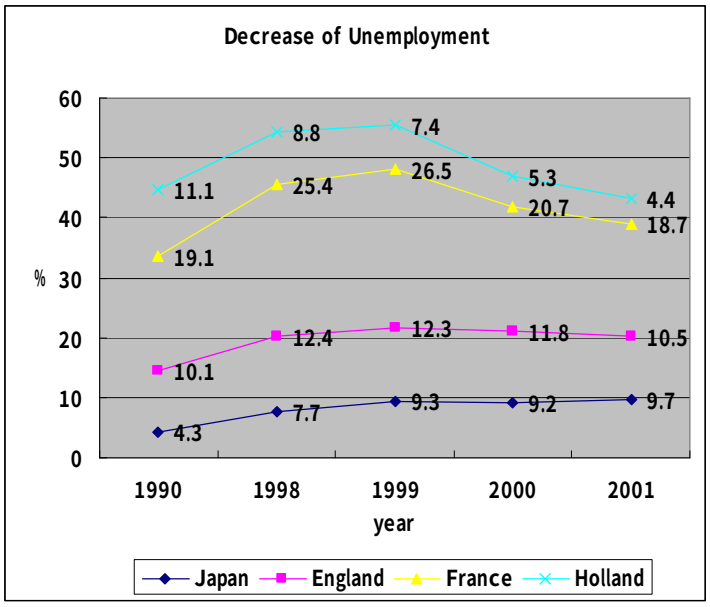
Although it is generally felt that freeters don’t contribute much to the society, there are some optimistic opinions as to how freeters can be effectively utilized to the society. One of the reasons the number of freeters is due to the recession, which has caused many companies to cut back on recruiting new graduates. Part-timers are convenient for them because their wages are lower and it is easier to adjust employment. Ai Electric Company’s president, Takahashi (2002)[4] has succeeded in using the freeters’ work force effectively. He has made a system called “Weekly Worker”, recruiting about 34 part-timers for a week-contract when the company is busy. He even gives the part-timers chances to promote as a permanent staff. Okuda Hiroshi[5],

[4] Magazine, Nikkei Venture 2002.02.01
[5] Sannkei News paper 2000.01.03 “The Advance to the Economy”

Chairman of the Nikkeiren says that there should be a system to let young people experience many jobs and employ them when they are in the 30's. In the U.S. many people change their occupation. Japan should be broad minded as well, welcoming people who have changed job. Ishihara Shinntarou (Nikkei Business 2002)[6] states that there are people who have ability and are willing to work, especially women who don't get hired. We need to make use of those people to benefit society.

A comparison of unemployment rates in foreign countries has some bearing on Japan's freeter trend. The unemployment rate in the U.S.A. is 5.8% according to a U.S. Department of Labor's Survey conducted in 2002. The unemployment of young people, aged 15-19 was 14.7% and aged 20-24 was 8.3% (2001). This rate is a lot lower than England which has the lowest rate in Europe. On the other hand, Japan's unemployment rate of the young people (age 15-24) has been rising since middle of 1990's and in 2002 reached 9.9%. Only 56.9% of the new university graduates can find a job[7]. A glance at the OECD's "Employment Outlook" chart below, it reveals that Europe has undertaken a sensible approach to the problem and reduced the unemployment numbers, whereas Japan unemployment has increased.

6 Nikkei Business 2002.12.23 Ishihara Shinntarou
7 Short Comment Japanese Economy No.57 2003.08



OECD's "Employment Outlook"

From a research that The Japan Institute of Labor has done, only 9% of the newly graduates in Europe are able to become a permanent employee and it is usual to work as a part-timer. 55% of the people don't have a permanent job even though it has been 4 years since they have graduated. Japan on the other hand, only 21.2% of the young people (15-30years old), excluding house-wives and students (2001). So, Europe's numbers of people who are part-timers are a lot larger than Japan, but it is not thought to be such a problem. Although Japan has a problem of increasing number of freeters, comparing to Europe and the U.S.A, just looking from the number of people who doesn't have a permanent job isn't as high. So, Japanese unemployment problem seems to be in a different part, rather than the numbers.

The environment of the employment system and the conditions of the employment is different in Japan. When the companies in Europe and the U.S. employ

the job-seekers, they not only look at the academic background but they also look at their working experiences. And the newly-graduates and the people who have been changing jobs are compared equally. There seem to be no disadvantages for the people who have been changing jobs, unlike freeters in Japan. In Europe the recruiting system is opposite to Japan and the newly-graduated could be in an unfavorable situation and very few people get hired as a permanent employee for the company. This is because they don't have much working experiences. To solve the disadvantages for the newly-graduated, they have a system called "internship". Internship is collaborated by many companies, schools and public institutions and they help students to have experience in work. Many of the newly-graduated students' recruitment are from the companies where they did the internship. As for Japan, newly-graduates had advantages in getting employed. The students didn't have to have any working experience to be recruited. The companies didn't care about having working abilities because they thought that it is better to educate them in their company. Japanese companies welcomed new graduates rather than the mid-career hiring. So, there seems to be a difference in the way Japan and other countries recruit employees.

In the U, S, the importance of the internship has began a century ago. Most students experience the internship at least once. For example, North Eastern University

has an interesting internship system. They are famous for the Co-operative Education: CO-OP, which promotes the students to participate in the internship. Their education goal is to have the students obtain the ability to work while they are in school so they can have more chances to have a better occupation. They have a faculty of Computer Science and many students who are majoring industrial technology are willing to participate in the CO-OP. There is a large difference between those students who have participated in the CO-OP and those who have not with the respect to the rate of informal promises of the employment. Massachusetts University in Boston (U-Mass Boston) has a different type of internship since the students average age is in the late 20's and most people are working and going to school at the same time because they have families. The University accepts working experience as a credit which is acceptable for the students who can earn living and get a credit at the same time. In the U.S. 85% of the University has introduced internship as a curriculum for the school. They have a very high consciousness of encouraging the students into the world of business. On the other hand more than 80% of the companies are doing the internship. The book called「Internship Bible」has over 100,000 Internship Positions and 「America's Top Internships」has over 18,000 Internship Positions and it shows how much effort the U.S. has put into the internship. Japan could learn something from the

internship system in the U.S.A.

The way people think about the part-timers is also different. The people in the U.S.A don't think that full-time workers are the only way to get employed. Part-time workers are acknowledged socially. And there are many working styles for them. Many people not only have an occupation while they are students and they go in and out of school many times before they get their academic degree. The labor economist, Robert Everns Jr (1987) has stated that the U.S.A has a concept of "transition" during the experience of employment, unemployment, education and other free time. They need a trial and error of time to get over the "transition" and finally find a suitable occupation for the students. The people in the U.S.A don't seem to take the unemployment and part timers that seriously because they empasize on the experience more.

The Ministry of Education in Japan who have been arguing about the unemployment of the young people, have agreed on the final consideration. They showed fear to the increasing number of freeters. They thought the way to solve the problem is to promote working experiences, like Internships (Sannkei News Paper Feburary2,2001). Recently the number schools and students who have experienced internship have increased in Japan as you can see from the graph next page[8].

[8]Ministry of Education, Koutoukyouikukyoku senmonn kyouikuka souzoukyouiku sinkousitu (高等教育局専門教育課創造教育振興室)

The number of schools doing Internships in Japan

School	Year 1998		1999		2000	
	Number of schools	rate	Number of schools	rate	Number of schools	rate
University	186 schools	29.9%	218	33.5%	281	41.9%
Junior College	81 schools	14.7	108	21.1%	127	23.4%
Technical College	48 school	77.4	52	83.9%	54	87.1%

Number of students participating Internships

School	Year 1998	Year1999	Year 2000
University	19,650 students	21,063	25,972
Junior College	3,453 students	3,570	3,547
Technical College	4,423	4,778	5,066

In August 29, 2000 the Ministry of Education has said that to solve the problem of young unemployment, activating the internship will be necessary. They have requested to companies to do more internships to allow the students to see the firm more. Although the internship in Japan is starting to thrive, the number of freeters is not declining. So, the internship would not merely help reduce the number of freeters and the solution to the problem must lay somewhere else.

The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) in Japan defines Internship as “a system that

allows the students to experience work according to their future carrier and their major in school". The work that they are allowed to do differs depending on the company. Some companies allow them to do some of the companies' work and give them reward, but most companies only allow them to look around the job and only watch. And it is difficult for them to obtain the working skills. One reason for not being able to have programs like the U.S. is because most companies have only short programs due to school which is hard for the students to skip. So most companies only offer short term Internship for about 2 weeks. This summer I experienced an internship in Japan for 2weeks. From my experience, 2 weeks was not enough to learn anything.

Whereas I recognize the disadvantages of the freeter, I think there is a way to solve the problem. As Ishihara Shinntarou and Okuda has stated, I believe that the best way to solve the problem is to make an effective use of freeter to the society. In order to contribute to the society, freeters need a better status and better impression. The problem lays in the fact that the freeters are not able to attain any working abilities and the image of the freeter. As mentioned before, only 3% of the freeters have good impression and many companies refuse to employ them permanently. There are many kinds of freeters in Japan. People who have a dream, who doesn't want to work, who want to have many experiences, and who want to work but can't. Helping people who are willing to work

get a permanent job will help reduce the number of the freeter. In order to get people who want to work out of freeter, we need to be able to give them a social status. A university student has a social status that is admired but freeter doesn't. Freeters' social status is called "musyoku (unemployed)". They don't even have a chance to apply for the internship. I believe that the internship should be more open to the freeters and let them have working experience. The system of the internship should give them credit for challenging many jobs that will able them to have a stronger status in the society. In addition, not just increasing the number of internships but the programs of the internships should also be revised too. The programs should last longer in order to obtain some working skills.

In conclusion, to deal with the problem of the increasing number of freeters, we need to use the freeters effectively and change the social impression of the freeters. Furthermore, the internship system in Japan needs to be changed. The internship needs to allow more people, not only students but also people who don't have a permanent job, to experience many kinds of occupations and help them raise their working abilities. We need a society where freeters are proud of having many job experiences and having many working abilities.

＜References＞

Cabinet Office 2003 .07 No.375 Kokuminn Seikatuhakusyo
[Economy Society Policy (ESP)] “Defureto seikatsu-jyakunenn furita-no gennzai”
[The Present of the Young Freeters] p88～p98

The Japan Institute of Labour (1997) No.102 p.50～59
“Oubeiniokeru gakkou kara syokugyou heno ikouki no sidou・ennjyo”

The Japan Institute of Labour（2000）
“Freeter no ishiki to jittai:97ninn heno hearing cyousa kekka yori”

Japan Working Research Center “Koukousei no ishikijittai cyousa”
[Consciousness of the High School students deterring their course] (2000)

Mainichi Daily News “October’ Unemployment 3.4%” (November 30,1996)

Mainichi Communications Survey
“ Consciousness of the College students” (2002)

Ministery Of Education “Internship Data”(November 02, 2002)
Retrieved October 04, 2003 from the World Wide Web
http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/14/11/021103.htm

Matsuo Ryo, Mainichi Shinnbun “Kouyakuni freeter taisaku”
(September 5,2003)

Nikkei Venture “Ai Dennsikougyou(freeter no katuyou)”
(Feburary 01,2002)

Nikkei Business “Ishiharasinntarou jyakunennsitugyouwo ureu”
[Ishihara Shinntarou’s worried about the Youngs’ Unemployment]”
(December 23, 2002)

Okuda Hiroshi, *Sankei Newspaper*
“Kotoshi koso Keizainomitoosito teigenn”
[He Proposes thatThis Year We Should Review the Economy]
(October 03,2000:Tokyo)

Robert Everns Jr “Academic Background and Occupation”
[Gakureki to Syokugyou].(1987)

Sannkei Newspaper “Stop the freeter” (October 05,2000)

Sannkei Newspaper (Janurary 03,2000).(The Advance to the)

Sannkei Newspaper “Monnbukagausyou saisyuuhiukoku freeter shikoukenenn”
[Ministry Of Education’s Final Report”] (Feburary 02,2001)

Sannkei Newspaper (April 26,2002)

Short Comment Japanese Economy 2003. 08 [No.57]
Retrieved September 24, from the World Wide Web
http://www.nikko-am.co.jp/comment/html2003/030825.html

U.S. Department of Labor “Bureau of Labor Statistics”
Retrieved September 22, from the World Wide Web
http://www.bls.gov/

Yashima Masami *Kawaru Wakamono to Syokugyousekai*
(Tokyo:Gakubunnsya 2001.4)

Zaidannhoujinn kikai sinnkou kyoukai keizai kennkyuujyo
Internshipsedono dounyuu niyoru sanngyoukoudokani kannsuru kennkyuucyousa
(Bunnkoudou innsatukabusiki kaisya: 1996) 10-39