

Youth members' views of their works, co-op management and their neighborhood in Japan workers' cooperatives

~ from the report of the Survey of members' and staff's work and livelihood in 2001
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OKAYASU Kisaburo

e-mail: okayasu@rivo.mediatti.net

URL : <http://www.coop21.info/>

General Director, JICR*

JICR*: Japan Institute of Cooperative Research

2-11-6 Naka-Jujo, Kita-ku, Tokyo 114-0032, Japan

Phone +81-3-5963-5355, Fax: +81-3-5963-5366

INTRODUCTION

The Central JIGYOUUDAN, the primary member co-op of JWCU, the Japan Workers' Cooperative Union, surveyed its members' and staff's* work and livelihood last autumn.

*Staff: those who are engaged in a special type of occupation and are coordinator for promotion of co-op movement and business.

In this survey we used a questionnaire with over 150 questions to fill out. 1593 members or 64% of all members, from teenagers to eighties, replied. In staff case, 73 persons replied (rate 60%)

Before this discussion, I considered under 39 years old as "youth" to analyze their answers. I wish to sound of their views of their "works," "co-op management" and "their neighborhood."

WORKRES' CO-OP AND YOUTH MEMBERS

Workers' cooperatives are characterized by a wide range of ages of worker members. In this survey, members are between teenagers and eighties. The members are classified into three groups by age; the first is under 39 years old as "youth", the second is between 40 years old and 59 years old as "middle aged persons", the third is over 60 year old as "older persons."

The percentage of youth is 18%, that of middle aged persons is 50%, and that of older persons is 32% of all members. It is in this decade that the ratio of youth members has been increasing.

The proportion of men to women is 38:62, or women are a great majority, especially 87% of members in the business area of “care and social being” are women. As the percentage of members in this area is only 13% of total number of members, the ratio of women workers will increase in the future.

In the case of staff, 52% is youth, 42% is middle age and 4% is older persons, or the youth compose the majority of the staff group. The proportion of men to women is 6:4, or the men are a majority. Over 90% of youth staff graduated from 4-year-university courses.

DIVERSE WORKING PLACES

A workers' cooperative such as the Central JIGYODAN has diverse types and places of business. This diversity makes the youth members work in a variety of places.

According to job classification designated by JWCU, 34% of the youth members work in “DELIVERY”, 24% in “FOODS”, 17% in “BUILDING MAINTENANCE AND CLEANING”, 10% in “CARE AND WELL BEING” and 14% in other types of business.

“DELIVERY” means delivery centers of citizen consumers’ cooperatives. Examples are Co-op Miyagi, Co-op Kyoto, Co-op Kagoshima, by which the Central JIGYODAN is entrusted and contracted.

“FOODS” includes providing meals for inpatients in public hospitals, catering, home delivery service, food processing in agricultural cooperatives. Examples are JA Kagoshima, JA Onga (Fukuoka).

“BUILDING MAINTAINANCE AND CLEANING” is run mainly in hospitals of Medical Co-ops and members of the Democratic Medical Institute Union.

Others include Park maintenance and gardening, constructing, recycling, and office work.

75% of youth members reach work every day within 30 minutes. In Japan this situation is called “home nearby work place.” In the case of staff, longer time is spent in commuting, for their regional head offices are usually in big cities such as Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, and so on.

“NEW FRIENDS”, “NEW KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS” – HAPPY AT WORK

The results of the answers to the question of “Which did/do you feel glad to in your working?” is shown in **table1**.

The answer “getting new friends” got 56% responses while “learning knowledge and acquiring skills” got 32%.

To the question of “Are you happy at work in your workers' cooperative?”, almost 70% of youth members answered “yes” as shown in

table2 and the first three reasons for the “yes” answer of the youth members are “appropriate working time and day”, “Good human relationship” and “suitable for me.”

In the case of youth staff, over 80% of them answered “yes to the same question.” These answers show the characteristics of a workers’ cooperative and its youth members and staff.

KEEPING ON WORKING OR NOT IN THE CO-OP

The answer of the members and staff to the question of “Do you want to continue to work in the workers’ cooperative?” is shown in **table3**.

Nearly half of all the respondents answered “yes”, however only 30% of the youth members answered “yes.”

I will discuss on the discrepancy between “happy at work” and “keeping on working” in the co-op. There is difference between the “yes” answers of the youth members and the staff. The older member/staff is, the less different. It can be said that youth worker is finding their promising.

In fact, this answer is different between 20s and 30s workers. As 20s have recently taken part in workers’ cooperative, moreover many of them started their worker life at this cooperative, youth look vacillating between hope and fear. Among 20s the vote of “move” exceed “keeping.”

YOUTH AND THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS/ COMMUNITIES

What do youth workers in the workers’ co-op think of their neighborhoods or local communities?

First, to the question of “do you have acquaintances with your neighbors?”, over 40% of the youth members answered “yes” while only 16% of the youth staff answered the same as shown in **table4**.

Second, the kinds and degrees of acquaintances with their neighbors are shown in **table5**.

Youth members’ connections with their neighborhoods are statistically better than that of the youth staff. It reflects above mentioned “home nearby work place.” This youth members’ connections will be a strong power to create a cooperative which could devote to community development.

Finally, the youth workers’ answers to the question of “do you think that community* remains in your neighborhood?” which is shown in **table6**.

*The word “Community” in the questionnaire means that there is mutual help among the residents and their support each other.

Nearly half of the youth members replied “I can’t say yes or not” and “No answer.” Nevertheless 30% replied “yes.” In the case of the youth staff, half of them replied “yes.” This ratio is higher than the average of all the respondents.

LOCALLY SOCIAL ACTIVITIES IN YOUTH MINDS

To the question of “do you have a future plan of a local social activity in your mind?”, 14% of the youth members replied “yes” and 47% of the youth staff answered the same as shown in table7. This result is interest of us.

It is reflected by the fact that most of the youth staff frequently get in contact with neighborhood associations, shopping districts and local governments, and by natural consequence, they get many valuable information from many persons and organizations in the local society. It is reassuring for the future.

What kind of local social activity is in the young worker’s mind? I will pursue their contents filled the questionnaire by 45 youth workers (31 members and 14 staff).

33% of youth workers wrote social welfare including on older persons and persons with diverse abilities, 22% of youth wrote relations to children and education, 20% wrote relations to environment protection and keeping a town clean, and others did relations to hobby, culture and recreation.

ACTUAL FEELING ON PARTICIPATION IN MANAGEMENT

The Central JIGYODAN is based on “management and operation by all workers members” as one of the principles of JWCU. It means that “We should make a decision our future of working and cooperative through investment, working and management together.

To the question of “do you have a sense or an actual feeling of participation in the management and operation?”, 20% of the youth member answered clearly “yes.” Is it high or low percentage? I have no idea because of no benchmark in comparison with other type of cooperatives.

In the case of the youth staff, nearly three fourth replied “yes.” This high level of their actual feeling supports a workers’ cooperative movement.

MANAGINGPOSTS YOUTH TAKE IN CENTRAL JIGYODAN

In order to run a workers’ cooperative, several posts was formed. We observe on it relation to youth workers as shown in table9.

According to the result of the questionnaire on it, there is no or little difference between the “position taking” ratio of the youth and the all members.

In fact there is difference between the director taking ratio of the youth and all members. This is effected by no director in 20s staff.

On the whole, the “position taking” ratio in table9 resemble the answer “yes” ratio in the table8. I don’t think it the accidental nature. As I expected, it cannot be denied that one’s actual feeling of participation in management increases when he or she take a official position.

If so, a new leaders-system in which many leaders exist should be developed --- every member is to be a leader depending on the situation, for everybody has at least one thing that he can do well. It is a higher standard of participation in the management and operation than a traditional management that formed hierarchy.

YOUTH WORKER AND OTHER COOPERATIVES

Table10 and table11 show the answers to the question of “are you a member of other cooperatives such as consumers', medical one?”

27% of youth members and nearly 70% of youth staff are also members of other cooperatives.

YOUTH AND ICA STATEMENT ON COOPERATIVE IDENTITY

Table12 shows the acquaintance degree with ICA Statement on cooperative Identity.

Only 6% of youth member know it a little, but over half of youth staff know it a little and 5% know it well. Youth staff can play leaders now.

TALKING ABOUT YOUTH PARTICIPATION

A relationship between cooperatives and youth means in practice a theme of “cooperatives and youth participation.” It should make a reference not only to youth member participation in existing cooperatives. It is more important for us to emphasize the youth's active involvement in the cooperative movements.

I will discuss on youth participation through two approaches. The first is wider participation in existing co-op, and exchanges with other coops. The active range of youth as leaders of tomorrow should be spread vertically and horizontally. It is a very practical policy to back up the potential self-growing power of the youth.

The second is to improve the cooperative movements social responsibility. It should provide young people with solutions to various problems and promote their welfare interests.

In Japan, a NPO (non-profit organization) once became the center focus of public attention as a job-creating organization, but now it appears that an NPO staff cannot earn enough money to make a living. Therefore, there is a need for coordination among cooperatives including associated work cooperatives, viz. workers' co-ops, interest various fields including the local governments.

The cooperative movement would be attractive to the youth if it could provide solutions to young people who are seeking their new ways of life and new working styles.

The people who can fully convey the attractive points of the cooperative movement to the young people are also the youth. The future of the cooperative movement will depend on the present youth leaders who will bring the message to the next generation.

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