論　文

Caring Relations: a care ethics perspective on the activism of women in non-regular employment in Japan and South Korea through documentary films

Hiu Tung YOW

The persistent prevalence of women in non-regular employment has long attracted much scholarly interest in its economic and gender implications. Existing researches have approached this phenomenon on a macrostructural and institutional level. Marxist feminists observed a collaboration between patriarchy and the rise of neo-liberalism in Japan (Ueno, 2017). Takanaka Emiko, a prominant figure in post-war Japanese women's labour research, criticised classsical Marxist economist for neglecting the role of reproduction in the capitalist model of production and, further argued the intertwined working between patriarchy and capitalism in creating a wage gap based essentially on a gendered job segregation (Takenaka, 1992; Forum labour social policy gender; 2020; Ida; 2021). Others have looked into the effectiveness of legislative efforts, notably the 1985 landmark Equal Employment Opportunity Law (Kamiya, 1995; Shibata, 2007) and recent government policies, in particular Prime Minister Abe's "womenomics" directive (Schieder, 2014; Dalton, 2017).

These macrostructures are indeed paramount in creating this prevalence of women in non-regular employment. However, the operation and reproduction of the structure depend, not only on the preconditions and discipling set by these macro forces and institutions, but also on individual agents, who form and inhabit the structure. Living within the structure, individuals are inevitably influenced by the surrounding structural norms. Yet, individuals should not be conceived as mere passive followers of structural norms. Since structural norms are temporarily embodied in individuals, individual agents carry the capacity of shaping the structure. Although individuals, accustomed to social norms, have a strong tendency to unconsciously practice the reproduction of the status quo, in

rare instances, could act differently to make gradual changes to the existing structure (Bourdieu, 1977). Such potential of the individual in shaping the structure, is important yet insufficiently recognised in existing literature, which tended to give weight to macrostructures. This calls for a need to apply a perspective from the individuals to understand how they conceive the structure, their predicament and their actions, but literature that inquired from the perspective of the individuals in non-regular employment remains little (Fu, 2011; Broadbent, 2009).

Contrary to the largely silent and compliant perception of female non-regular workers, many women found resourceful ways to cope with the precariousness of non-regular employment. Some women in non-regular employment in Japan and South Korea have organised themselves, despite exclusion from conventional entreprise-based unions, dominated by male regular workers. With their own union, women took collective bargaining, strikes and legal actions to strike for better working conditions, as well as the abolishment of the disparity between regular and non-regular workers who work the same job. While academic researchers have given little attention to the voice of women on how they view and negotiate with their non-regular employment, these progressive efforts by women were well-documented by journalists and documentary filmmakers.

Camera, Care and Society

In the past decade, a recent academic trend uses multimedia, such as television series, films and documentaries, as a medium to analyse various social phenomena with an ethics of care. Television drama, films and documentaries entertain us and more. Either imagined or non-fictional narratives, are reflective of, to varying degree, us and the society we inhabit. They inform and call upon us to reflect philosophically on dilemmas that we identified in our daily lives (Kupfer, 2012). Furthermore, from fictional television drama and films to reality-based documentary, camera captures a rich resource of visual and audio footage of people's voices, physical expression and interactions with others in specific context. Such characteristic serves ideally to care ethics' emphasis on human interconnectedness and contextual specificity. This offers a unique opportunity for scholars to explore the process of how people act and react in relations to other people and circumstances around

them. As a result, it captures a relational dimension of human actions, for care ethics to illustrate and analyse the practice and delivery of care in contextualised scenarios.

One way of using visual media with care ethics is to analyse the content regarding the portrayal of care. Scholars had looked into television and films on how care is performed by characters (Amy-Chinn, 2008), represented in various forms of media in respect of their historical background (Holdsworth, A., Lury, K., & Tweed, 2020) and how different scales of care for self, family, friends, community and nation, were conveyed to the audience in popular movies (Kupfer, 2012). In analysing televsion series, Laugier (2020) explored the formation of various relationships of care, between the production crew and the audience, the audience and the drama, characters and messages of the show, among the audience who are bonded together by a shared adoration for the show, as well as how influential messages of television drama could transcend into powerful symbols in real-life social movements.

Another dimension of ethics of care lies in media production. Production choices of what, who and how to feature in television drama and movies are, themselves, questions of care. Furthermore, documentary films, as framed narratives involving actual events and real people, carries an additional dilemma of care in comparison to fictional drama and films. Production choices such as, deciding the subject of film before and during the filming process, the method of filming and engaging documentary participants, as well as the post-production editing, release, ownership and the impact of the film, are filled with ethical considerations involving practical power dynamics between the director and documentary participants (Nash, 2012; Walukiewicz, 2018).

This article seeks to study the activism of women in non-regular employment in Japan and South Korea captured through the lens of documentary films, with an ethics of care. Documentaries offer a distinctive and detailed insight into the interactions among the women and with different parties in work and activism. Focusing on people's emotions, voices and interactions with others, care ethics would inquire the prevalence of women in non-regular employment from the women's perspective.

The article explores how women formed various caring relations in their experience in non-regular work and activism, and analyses how these rays of caring relations helped women to derive meanings and values in their struggle

with the precariousness of non-regular work, as well as the risks and challenges in activism. It hopes to analyse women's experiences of taking collective action as a union, in order to explore a more comprehensive understanding on the meaning of work and activism, and the ways women found empowerment among themselves through a sisterhood based on collective strength and shared resources (Hooks, 1983).

Research Methodology

This article analysed two documentaries, *Metro Ladies Blues* and *Weabak*, on the union activism of women, who worked as non-regular workers in metro shops in Tokyo, Japan and in supermarkets in Seoul, South Korea. Among the diverse ways women responded to the structures of gender and non-regular work, both documentaries presented how these women in non-regular work reacted through union activism.

Metro Ladies Blues, followed the activism of four mid-aged women working as shopkeepers at small shops in Tokyo Metro stations. As non-regular workers, these women started their activism in their 60s with no prior union experience. The directors, Matsubara and Sasaki, followed the women's collective bargaining efforts and strike in March 2013 to abolish the mandatory retirement for non-regular workers, and to establish a reemployment system to allow willing non-regular workers to continue working after reaching 65. The initial documentary release expanded into three updated additions. The directors continued to follow the women's latest development, as the women took legal actions and subsequent appeals against the company, on the basis of violation of the then Article 20 of the Labour Contract Act. The law regulated the same entitlement of working conditions to employees working at the same job responsibilities regardless of the duration of employment. The film also featured the women in private settings, such as union social events, gatherings, daily lives including work, groceries shopping and home-visits from 2013 to 2019.

Weabak, a 2009 Korean documentary directed by Kim mi-re, featured the 510-day strike of women, who were previously employed at one of Korea's major supermarket chains, Homever Outlet. Days before the enactment of the Non-Regular Workers' Protection Bill in 2007, which mandated non-regular workers who had worked two consecutive years to be hired as regular workers, the

holding company of Homever Outlet, E-land Group, dismissed without prior notice, many its non-regular workers. A majority of these workers were women who had worked for years, as part-time workers at the registry, storage and deli section of the supermarket. Having their livelihood depended on this part-time work, these women organised themselves in a union to launch a sleep-in strike at the stores they worked in. For many of the married women who participated, it was their very first time staying overnight outside since they got married.

The director took a gender focus in the labour movment and highlighted the marginalisation of women in the workforce as non-regular workers, as well as the specific struggle women faced at home and in public, when conducting activism in a still deep-entrenched patriarchal South Korea and its male-dominant union culture. This 510-day strike, which lasted as one of the longest strikes in South Korean history, came to a mixed conclusion. In a deal with the new company who acquired their previous employer, most women, except for key union figures, were rehired, on the condition that they would not conduct any union activities in the following three years. From the beginning of the strike till the end, the documentary told a story of women fighting for the right of non-regular workers, and in the process, breaking away from the traditional familial role and find new space, roles, and bonding through work and activism.

Care ethics' notions of care and caring relations were used to examine these two documentaries. The analysis focused particularly on the verbal and physical interactions among women, between the women and their family, friends, clients, co-workers and fellow activists in work and activism.

Care Ethics as a research lens

A common analogy compares theories to spectacle lenses that enable people to see the world from different perspectives. Coincidentally, camera is also a lens, and the way camera frames selective narratives of social issues and events shares many similarities with academic theories.

Ethics of care is concerned with a distinctive moral reasoning based on notions of care and empathy. Critical of the conventional ethical assumptions on universal moral principles and the autonomous individual, care ethics draws attention to the interconnectedness of human relations and the highly contextual

nature of individual actions, as people make decisions in response to particular situations balancing their own and the need of others around them.

Care ethics is often accredited to Carol Gilligan, whose 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*, rebutted claims of women's inferior morality due to their preoccupation with intimate relation. She argued on a different, yet equivalent, moral reasoning based on notions of care and empathy, that existed along with the morality of justice and rights. By socially constructed gender expectations on girls and boys, the moral reasoning of care has become more commonly associated with women who are engendered to be more attentive to the feelings and needs of others in their developmental stage. Such patriarchal construct has not only resulted in the separation of the moral reasoning of care and justice into that of women's and men's morality, but the triumph of men's morality and a fundamental devaluation of women and their gender attribute of care, empathy and connectedness with others.

Challenging the concept of the conventional masculine "right" and "justice" orientated morality as the prototype and sole legitimate form of moral reasoning, care ethics calls for a re-evaluation of the significance of relational care and recognising care an alternative but equally legitimate moral response to our ethical and moral dilemma. Rejecting a search for universal moral principles, care ethics approaches moral issues in a relational and context-specific manner. Since individuals are bounded to certain belonging to a group or community, they are fundamentally related to others. Their decisions and actions must be considered within a particular scenario involving themselves and others. Thus, care ethics conceptualises a caring approach to morality as people being attentive, listening and responding to the concerns and needs of others.

In *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Nodding (1984) further developed care as a common human moral orientation to which, she argued, must be nurtured in our moral development. The socially constructed gender role has made it taken for granted that it was first and foremost a woman's responsibility to care for others, while in fact, care was capable by both men and women. Since all individuals regardless of gender have an affective response to the emotion of others and shared the experience of being care for as a child, they have both the capacity and an ideal to care for those around them. Considering care as the basics of human existence, a caring

relationship entailed a reciprocity of care between the "one-caring" and the "cared-for", though not necessarily always in the same manner or of symmetric weight. As the act of caring must take place in a relational context and each caring relationship carries its own personal and situational specificities, care must be understood contextually rather than as a universal principle. As a result, it is essential to pay attention to all parties' concerns, so as to appreciate the uniqueness of each relationship.

While it is still debatable to define care ethics purely as a moral theory, many advocates are more inclined to consider care ethics "a mosaic of insights and value the way it is sensitive to contextual nuance and particular narratives rather than making the abstract and universal claims of more familiar moral theories" (Held, 2006). Indeed, the emphasis of the interconnected individual and the attentiveness to the relational and contextual dimension of a particular issue had shed light on theoretical and empirical approaches across various academic fields, not limited to care-apparent topics such as the delivery care in the private household, and specialised care, such as medical health, education, and social work. The application of care ethics can also be seen in the societal allocation of care responsibility in political theory (Tronto, 1993), in international relations (Robinson, 1997), and the practising of care in our everyday lives with family, friends and neighbours, at work, in society, with the natural and political environment (Barnes, 2012).

Robinson (2006) asserted the importance of incorporating ethics of care in labour studies, particularly regarding women and work in our globalised economy. She argued a deficiency in the existing right-based approach in addressing worker's justice, particularly that of women workers. The narrow liberal-individualistic ontological assumption of work and workers in the right-based framework, is gender-blind, decontextualises the nature and context of work, and neglects the dynamics of human relations and their relational power. Care ethics offers a better normative framework that takes consideration of the multifaceted dimensions to a person's life, as workers, careers, women, wives and mothers. Focusing not on a standardised set of rights but on the fulfillment of basic needs, care ethics can investigate the strategies devised by women to cope with the increasing burden of wage and non-wage work. Advocating attentiveness, responsiveness, and assuming a continual responsibility of care in government policy-making and corporate culture, she called on the potential of

care ethics as an antidote to global neoliberalism by providing an alternative discursive moral and policy framework to moderate the scale and intensity of market value.

The relational dimension of employment and how it shapes the meaning of work and the experience of precariousness for low skilled and underpaid care workers have also been explored. Stacey (2005) found a complex and often contradicting relationship with work among the low-wage home care workers in the United States. Despite obvious constraints, such as overwork, increased risk and physical and emotional strain, workers also described different sources of rewards in their narratives on work, most notably a special bond established from spending extensive time and effort caring to their clients' needs which they took great pride in. The reward of pride and dignity derived from the ability to "dirty" work others would avoid, enabled workers to negotiate the constraints of work and make meanings to continue this much stigmatised and less materially rewarding profession.

Similarly, Van Bochove and Zur Kleimsmide (2020) argued that the dynamics of a care network had a great effect in mitigating the experience of precariousness in migrant live-in care workers in the Netherlands. A functional care network, which involved a variety of factors and stakeholders around the migrant worker, such as the financial situation and medical needs of the client, relationship with client's family, coordination with medical professionals and social workers, social support in host and home country, would alleviate risk of precariousness in work.

Applying a focus on the relational dimension of human actions, people's emotions and voices in the two documentaries on the activism women in non-regular employment, care ethics offers a bottom-up approach to listen to how women made decisions, experienced and made sense of non-regular work and activism.

An Analysis of Women's Voices
Women's experience in the non-regular work

The working environment and conditions of non-regular workers at the frontline of the retail industry were unquestionably tough, as these women in non-regular employment in South Korea and Japan spoke a similar story of long

hours of physical and emotional drain. These South Korean women worked at supermarket cashier described the physical exhaustion, such as aching legs and sore throat from standing for all day at cash registry at the supermarket, as well as the emotional intensity of staying focused to keep the lines at the cashier running smooth and fast, keeping a friendly smile and always saying welcoming and farewell lines to great all guests. The women shared what Hochschild (1983) termed "emotional labour", which demanded a management of their feelings and emotional expressions to meet their job requirement. The company implemented a strict point system that publicly evaluated workers on their compliance to customer service requirements and disciplined them from causal chats with co-workers, creating much psychological stress. Another source of emotional strain came from customers, as these women working at cashiers were at the forefront of handling customer complaints in the event of company policy change. Women often had to apologise personally on behalf of company policy, giving intense emotional labour in this seemingly low-skilled job.

The metro shop ladies in Tokyo, in a self-written parody song, also told of their long working hours which began before dawn, when they had to commute to the metro station where they work, so to get the shops ready for business before the arrival of the first train. As women were responsible for running the stores solely, they had to carefully manage water intake to avoid toilet breaks that would leave the stores unattended. These metro stores, where women worked inside facing customers, were small cubicles with strong lighting installed to showcase the merchandise such as drinks and snacks, newspapers and magazines and cigarettes packed around the shopkeepers. Those strong white light radiated heat made staying in such compacted space for long hours hot and unconformable. For years, these metro ladies had to stand in these hot cubicles for the whole day, till the union negotiated with the company to arrange chairs for workers to sit and take rest.

The inequality between non-regular workers and regular workers who worked at the same duties with almost the same number of hours alongside each other was described as a discrimination based on their non-regular status. In both cases, the disparity between non-regular and regular workers at the same post was sizeable in terms of salary, bonus, subsidy and benefit. Regular workers were paid a higher monthly wage with entitlement to bonus. Whereas

non-regular workers were paid a fixed hourly-wage with limited or no entitlement to bonus and other fringe benefit, and their contact were subjected to flexible termination at the company's discretion.

The inequality between regular and non-regular workers was material but also psychological. Despite working at the same workplace at the same job, the fact that non-regular workers were treated less due to their employment status had made them felt devalued and unappreciated by the company, which harmed their dignity deeply. The Japanese metro ladies, who were completely unaware of such system at the point when hired and even years after working, considered such arrangement not only to be unfair, but also felt deceived by the company into accepting their employment terms.

If one considered only these described subpar working environments and conditions, it seemed odd that women would even want to continue to work in these unfavourable jobs. Nonetheless, women in the two documentaries fought vigorously for the chance to work. The Japanese metro ladies had negotiated as a union for extending employment in order to continue to work after reaching the retirement age of 65, while the South Korean women who were dismissed by the company before the impending non-regular worker's law, fought at length to retain their jobs.

A convenient answer to the question why these women wanted to work would say that these women had no better options than to work and settle with such poor and unequal working conditions. However, this neglected the fact that these women had fought for the opportunity to work, and to work in better working conditions. Furthermore, it denied any possibility that women can find any meaning from work, simply because of the poor working conditions. Despite the poorly and under-remunerated nature of non-regular work, there must still be other reasons to explain why women worked hard for the limited earnings, which might reveal a more complex relationship between women and paid work. Apart from money, women also described the non-material gratification from work, from finding a new role for themselves outside traditional familial responsibilities, newfound relationships with colleagues, clients and society via work, and uncovering a sense of self. Exploring both monetary and non-monetary aspects of work would form a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of paid work to these women. It is precisely because women find meanings in even such difficult working conditions, they fought hard for the

opportunity to continue working under better working conditions through activism.

Activism, requires much effort in planning, coordinating and uniting people to take collective actions, and carries many risks for those who participated with no certainty of resulting in the triumph of workers and substantial material gain. The South Korean women's 510-day strike, failed to secure a return to work for all, as core unionists were dismissed in exchange for the rehiring of the most women. Whereas the lawsuits of the metro ladies had secured some success in gaining greater public attention and a few recognitions from the court on the unjustifiable unequal treatment between regular and non-regular workers, while still unable to claim a full victory for their case.

Activism was a lengthy process in which women who participated had to manage various setbacks, challenges or even danger. In both documentaries, a most common and prominent challenge was financial difficulties, as participating in activism incurred risk of losing their jobs. Long term strikes meant a loss of income for their family, and filing lawsuits also costed them their earnings and savings. The share of housework was another pressing concern for most women as they struggled between the roles of wives, mothers and activists in a still deeply patriarchal society, where the burden of household responsibilities fell almost exclusively on them. Activism had also put some women in face of legal prosecution from the company and danger of confrontation with law enforcement. Facing the far more influential, financially capable and legally supported corporates, women drew strength from being connected to others and being supported by caring and being care for in various relationships formed in activism in order to endure these risks, uncertainties, challenges and setbacks.

Activism as Relational: Caring and Being Care for

"It's really not just our fight, but we want it to become a fight that connects all non-regular workers nationwide." The relational dimension of the women's activism was most evident in their appeal directing not only to the company but calling upon the society's attention on the general issue of regular/non-regular disparity. In their appeal, the women emphasised fighting on behalf of a wider community of non-regular workers throughout the nation. Their activism was

not only a fight for themselves but acts of caring for fellow non-regular workers, caring on the issue of inequality and poverty, and caring for the society by challenging such inequality. Seeking to connect to others, non-regular workers in general and the public, the women drew strength from fighting for a greater mission that was beyond them and connected them to the community of non-regular workers and the well-being of the society.

Care was demonstrated among the women themselves. Activism had first and foremost brought the women together to know and care for each other. Although these women worked for the same company, they might not know each other as their working stations and schedules were scattered. Joining the union united these women under a common cause. Through the process of activism, the plentiful of time women spent together allowed them to bond with fellow women, getting to know about each other's situations and to care for one and other. As none of them had any experience in unionising, we observed women talked to each other sharing their thoughts and doubts and gradually learnt to navigate their activism.

Sleep-in strikes could hardly be described as comfortable, but the women recalled a good time of solidarity as they wore their own union t-shirts, one by one they took the stage to talk about themselves, sang union songs, made and shared food to make themselves comfortable at the strike site. Women during the strike would take shifts so that they could take turns to go back home to take care of their family while keeping the strike going, and when their children had suddenly fallen sick, other women would take their shift. A woman noted down in a dairy in loving details of a hot rainy summer night, a fellow woman went to check if the tents were safe from the heavy rain while others were sleeping, and in the next morning, coffee was prepared as they chatted with each other before seeing off those who finished their shifts. Supporting each other through shared strength and resources created bonds over women and united them further along the movement. Women developed a mutual commitment and felt responsible for one and other to carry on the fight, even when the prolonging of the movement makes it difficult for many to continue.

The closeness between these women also allowed them to be responsive to other's needs. The metro ladies' union would have meetings at each other's homes and meals together after collective bargaining, where they talked causally from how they felt about the bargaining to their own daily lives. From

these frequent exchanges, this small union of four were able to respond promptly and accurately to Senuma's need for paid care leaves after her elderly mother had fallen ill, and to Hikida's urgency to extend employment after the retirement age to pay for her household and the livelihood of her and her unemployed son. The woman's words, "you are not alone. There are many allies" in a sense, could be understood as help from other unions and people who encouraged them on their actions, but women found allies in each other.

During their activism, both groups of women in Japan and South Korea had received support from others in the society. Strike of the Tokyo metro ladies was helped by other union groups which gathered over 100 members outside the company office building to show support. In the documentary, the women were invited to general union rallies to appear on stage and speak of their experience and thoughts about union activism. In more casual and joyous occasions, such as the new year party, the women performed a parody of a common kabuki play "*Shiranami Gonin Otoko* Five Men of the White Waves", which they re-arranged to tell their own respective stories and called themselves five women of the white waves. The women's later lawsuits were assisted by labour rights lawyers. The journalist and documentary filmmakers's concern on women's activism had further spread their stories on the internet and into theatre, and aroused even greater attention from the general public to follow these women's activism and the issue of non-regular work. Similarly, the South Korean women had the support of a national scale union, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, which provided both guidance and financial assistance to the women. Other allies such as feminist and lawyers' groups, party politicians as well as individual support from the members of the public, also paid visit to endorse the women's cause.

Besides public support, a few women found an equally important source of strength from their family. Traditionally, unionists were men who were not expected to bear household responsibility, yet these women faced a dilemma juggling between activism and caring for their families. Frustration arose when women were asked about their husband views or approval of their activism, or when family members gradually became dissatisfied with the women's absence from women to engage in strike. Women with supportive family members willing to share the household responsibility and offer monetary support for the women's activism, still at times shared a sense of guilt for their prolonged

detachment from their socially assumed care duties at home. Nonetheless, the emotional support and practical actions of share housework were indispensable for women's involvement in activism, particularly in the long run.

Activism: To be seen and heard, and new engagement

These webs of relationships in activism brought women further to new places and to meet different people. Regardless of the outcome of activism, the progress and experience of activism to be connected and drawing a wider social attention from different people in society made women, who for long were undervalued and for the most part unseen and their stories untold, felt visible and acknowledged. Being seen and listened to, conveyed women a sense of dignity and meanings in their non-regular work and activism. Activism gave these women new engagement in life apart from family and work. The presence of union formed and organised by women enabled women to establish their own space in the male-orientated arena of unionism. Through learning about each other they build up their narratives and found strength as a collective to take actions. This new and unique experience enabled by the presence of a union of women was an achievement and through this collective, women also experienced personal growth, as the following quote from a booklet of the documentary (Weabak Sidestory Editorial Committee, 2011) showed,

"I didn't go much to other places apart from my home and for work. It was like being a frog in a well. From the moment that I began to join union activities, I went to a lot of different places, starting from Pohang (the Southeast of South Korea) to I don't even know where I haven't been before. I went to Japan as well. I encountered a lot of people, learnt about their ideas, went to demonstrations and heard their thoughts too, from that I gradually develop my own consciousness."

The sense of mission for others and society, and the deeper personal reflection women gained through activism, had enforced a sense of self as one woman commented, "regardless of the outcome, the action of revealing the problem itself carries meaning and is a proof of that we are living human being." Even though the ending of the women's 510-day strike did not meet its initial goal, a core union member who was laid off from work commented on her gain from the movement. "We didn't only have losses in the strike, but gain many things

as well. Honestly, the scope of my thinking has widened. I realised that capitalism, in essence, was controlled by the decisions of capitalists. These kinds of things helped me to look close into the roots of our society." Through these reflective thoughts, the experience and connections from the movement, hopefully, women can maintain their care for others and society in their different roles in life in the future.

Work: Money and what more can money bring

Indeed, many women began to work to earn income to support their own and their family's livelihood. The money women earned from non-regular employment, though limited, provided for women and their families to a certain extent. Contrary to a common societal perception that these women were merely working part-time to earn an allowance for their personal use, the wage earned by many of the women were the main, if not, an important source of income to sustain their household, to say the least.

Money was most likely to be the first and main motivation for women to seek work in the first place, but in the narratives of these women, seldom would they say they work to earn money but often "to make a living". This manner of saying would be implied that women valued the effect that the money brings to their and their family's livelihood, to sustain and improve "living" more than money itself. Money served as a mean to improve living rather than the end to why women work.

Care ethics offered alternative moral reasoning on the basis of care, as non-regular workers have an equal obligation as regular workers to care. Companies, which focused only on a contractual obligation to pay workers justly according to the agreed amount, neglected this dimension of how individuals, regardless of gender, work to take care of themselves and others. Companies have not only avoided their responsibility to care for their non-regular workers by paying as regular who worked the same job, but also, neglect the non-regular worker's obligation to care, in turn, tempered workers' ability to care properly.

Women, single or married, with children or other dependent family members often recited instances of using the money they earn to improve livelihood and alleviate financial drain. Among the four members of the metro ladies union, Hikida was working to support her live-in son as a single mother on top of

repaying the house loan and Senuma was making a livelihood as a single women with an elder mother with medical needs.

Ms KL, 55, spoke about using her earnings to put her daughter through university, "the money I earned, without ever putting into my account, was all used for this family. When the children were in university, my husband had difficulty gathering money to pay for their tuition fees. Frankly, when our daughter was admitted into university, he said, "what is the point of sending a girl to university," and did not give a single Korean won for her tuition. I earned the money for it. It was me who sent our daughter to university."

Women worked for their family to pay for various expenses, and from this, experienced a new way of caring. While traditionally, women stayed at home to be housewives and mothers providing and caring for the household through carrying out housework and taking care of the physical and emotional needs of their family members, working as a non-regular worker, though with limited money, had enabled these women to provide and care for their family monetarily, even at greater liberty to spend their earnings in what they consider fit for the family.

Many women did not feel their work at home was valued as they should. Whereas earning a salary, even though little and underpaid, from their work outside home, was a monetary valuation of their labour that could be used to care for their family. Ms KO, who started working for the first time at 43 following her husband's death, described receiving her first salary, "before working here, I had been a professional housewife doing housework at home, so it was my first experience formally receiving a salary. When women work outside, they would receive an envelope with the salary for the month. It is difficult to put a value on that. We women had always been working at home and we never got anything like that, but when we work at the workplace, the value of our work can be reflected from the salary we get such month and that is how we continue to work."

Rather than claiming this material contribution to the family as superior to the accustomed role of housework, this new experience of what one can do for their loved ones offered a novel sense of reward and affirmation for women. This sense of being able to provide for those they care for, to a certain sense, meditated the hardship of work.

Work: For Family and Relations beyond family

Family is an important consideration when women making decisions regarding their employment. When choosing between a better-paid job and one closer to home, some women opted for the latter because it allowed them to better fulfil their social expectations as wives and mothers. "At first, I worked at a catering company for around 15 years. The pay was good but since the workplace was at a wedding hall, I had to work during the weekends and till very late hours. My mother-in-law was very unhappy about this". Ms KL was asked by her mother-in-law to work somewhere closer to home. Even though the pay was less, she decided to quit her catering company work and worked at the supermarket instead so that she would make meals and take care of the family, which kept her mother-in-law happy.

Besides working for family, women discovered and established new relations with co-workers, customers, and society through work, and these newfound relationships had also become significant components of work for women. Women described the fun of knowing people at work and working together with co-workers, and other women found consolation withstanding the tough working condition, among co-workers who shared the experience. Ms MH recollected relaxing with her colleagues, "work was physically exhausting, but occasionally, I would go for a beer with co-workers after work before going back home. We did even not go to a bar, and it was just outside where we worked."

Interacting with customers was a frequent and main part of their job working at frontline service work. Particularly for the women working their station at the metro small shops, the one-on-one interaction with customers made their relationship with regular customers more intimate. Happenings with customers were included in the parody song that the metro ladies wrote, as they sang "occasionally there came a customer who always called me "Okasan (mum)", I never recalled raising you I thought silently. I got irritated but I pretended it was nothing." This event showed how women form relationships with regular customers and felt a sense of duty to the customers. Kanou described how she felt she had to keep her store open as usual even on the day after the 311 East Japan Earthquake. Even when the company failed to give instructions, she thought "for the customers, the shop must be kept open on its opening hours and it was from there, a sense of trust was born." On her last day of work after

spending 10 years with the company, Kanou told the bittersweet of working, "I started working after turning 55, so it was quite tough. But on the other side, it has been fun. The encountering with customers is fun. Now, there is a tint of sadness. There is still something not entirely accomplished."

Returning to women's experience of getting paid for her work as a non-regular worker, to engage in paid employment enabled women to connect to society and to finally be valued by society for their work. Although the non-valuation and undervaluation of the contribution of care work in the family to the sustainability of our society is heavily criticized by feminist, under the current social reality which the role and value of housework in the private were neglected, paid work, even if it was non-regular work, asserted women a role in the public sphere, and as workers, to be considered as a contributing member of the economy and society.

Work: Sense of self, Individual Freedom and Aspirations

Many women found work to have re-ignited their aspirations and to rethink what do they want to do for themselves. Ms JS, who was married and had three adult children, described herself as active during her youth and used to go wherever her feelings took her before getting married. After marriage, she had focused entirely on taking care of her new family, in-laws and later her children for decades till she decided to work again after all her children went to university and her in-laws had passed away. She found satisfaction from work by putting her skills to do her job well, getting to know people at work, and earning an income. Since she started working, "I began to think about what I have to do to make my dream come true from that point."

Other women found a sense of freedom in work, by taking a break from their conventional family roles as wives, mothers, and daughters, and to live as an individual who was defined not only by family and domestic life. It was not to undermine the value of family, as after all, these women had done so much for their family, but to say women can experiment with other roles. Work and paid employment had provided them with this opportunity to switch up their role, and to take a small break from a role of family and domesticity that had dominated their lives for decades, as the following quotes shows:

"I got married at the age of 25, and it was my first escape to get away from

my controlling father. The second escape was to work. Before that, I was not sure about what I could do, but work allowed me to discover a new side of self to get out there and have a try." *Ms KO*

"There are many people in the family so there is no space to be alone. Sometimes I would use work as an excuse to not go to some events with my husband's family or other family activity and at those times, I get to have the house to myself and those times, are true freedom. I felt like I can spread my wings." *Ms MH*

The ability to have different roles in life, allows reflection and exploration in a way that women can and are at liberty to develop their sense of self. With the freedom switching between different roles of housewives, wives, mothers and workers, women, find themselves in these new roles and experiences, to dream and to reach out to new aspects of life. The expansion of roles women can play adds new dimensions in their lives, and leads to further reflection on their sense of self and exploration on what women want to do in life, such as activism, where they find new role as activists and form even more rays of caring relationship.

Women had a much more complex relationship with work, as work was both difficult and exhausting but at times liberating for women at times from their conventional role of housewives and chores of housework. Access to choices, was empowering for women, "going to work, how to say it … maybe freedom. Work is an exhausting thing but spiritually it was fun." Despite the less-than-desirable and unequal working conditions, when women in the documentaries were let go from their work, they were in pain and despair at the sudden loss of, financial stability, but also the intangibles relationships they formed through work as well as sense of self, freedom and aspiration. Refusing to accept and give up on these treasured relationships and values, became the important drives that united women to fight for work and for better ways to work through activism.

This observation, which a sense of self seemed to act as a foundation for further caring relation, echoes with feminist's understanding of autonomy with the interconnectedness of human relations in care ethics (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). This sense of autonomy that women experienced is not necessarily contradictory to the relational dimension of life and work. Autonomy, a certain sense of self, is essential for an individual to make decisions regarding their

lives, particular relational decisions, such as who to reach out to, changing existing and building new relationships.

Conclusion

Through analysing the documentaries on women's activism from a care perspective, this article presented and explored the relational dimension of the women's experience and making sense of their non-regular work and activism.

Applying care ethics in analsying women's work and activism under the documentary lens, rays of caring relationship were observed among women, between women and family, co-workers, clients at workplace and even with other members of society. While work and activism are orientated towards certain goals, the dynamics took place in the process of work and activism, which these caring relationships were formed and reinforced through acts of caring and being care for, was equally important in making sense of non-regular work and activism.

This relational dimension of women's work and activism reflected how women delivered and received care in these relationships with others even in a state of precariousness. Women had both drawn strength from the acts of caring for and being cared for by others, and these relationships of care were significant in helping them to negotiate and withstand the constraints, challenges and struggles of non-regular work and activism, and further facilitate the development of a sense of self, nurture the confidence and skills to act upon their aspirations in life. Moving beyond material incentives, the intangible values and rewards from the process of caring and receiving care, are crucial in work and activism. The activism of women sheds light on recognising the critical potential of care in building resilience and resistance. With care as a basic human capacity to women and men, this implication inspires future women's resistance and beyond.

Although these women's activism so far has yet to have a significant and far-reaching impact on eliminating the inequality between regular and non-regular work, nor overturning women's prevalence in this much stigmatised form of non-regular employment, the way women finding strength as a collective in activism prompted reflection on the transformation from resilience to a more revolutionary force of resistance. The potential of women as a collective in

initiating a resistance by and for women would be meaningful to the general feminist movement worldwide. To understand how to sustain women's participation in activism, future research would be recommended to explore the establishment of caring institutions in family, company, union to support women to seek greater change in the circumstances of women and non-regular work.

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Abstract

Caring Relations: a care ethics perspective on the activism of women in non-regular employment in Japan and South Korea through documentary films

Hiu Tung YOW

The continuing prevalence of women in non-regular employment has attracted much scholarly interest in its economic and gender implications. Existing researches, which focus predominantly on macro-structures, have given little discussion to the voices of women on how they view their engagement in non-regular employment. Yet, in reality, women have negotiated in various ways with these macro structures that shape their predicament in non-regular employment and their struggles were well-documented by media workers.

There is a recent academic trend to use virtual media, such as television, films and documentaries, as the medium for analysing society and social phenomena with an ethics of care. This method joins care ethics' attentiveness to the relational dimension of human interaction, and the characteristics of visual media, which captures people's feelings, voices and interactions with others extensively. This article analysed documentaries on the activism of women in non-regular employment, to listen closely to the voices of women and understand how they make sense of their non-regular work and activism.

Through analysing two documentaries', *Metro Ladies Blues and WeaBak*, audiovisual accounts of the collective actions by women in non-regular employment in Japan and South Korea, this article applies a care ethics perspective to inquire individual women's experiences in non-regular employment and their activism in a relational and contextual setting. In exploring the meaning of work and employment to these women, I moved beyond mere material motivation and the all-too-convenient answer of "no better option", to ask why these women decide to work and to continue to work in such poorly remunerated and insecure form of employment. Furthermore,

taking collective actions carries much uncertainty and does not necessarily result in the triumph of all workers and material gain. Here, I ask why women put themselves at risk of dismissal and danger of confrontation with law enforcement and legal prosecution to fight for their causes.

Conceptualising work and activism as fields of webs of relationships, the decision to work and to continue working entails not only material concerns, but also considerations for one's personal development, life goals and interests, for family, friends, co-workers and clients at the workplace, and even the general society. It is argued that these caring relationships are invaluable to women's making-sense of their non-regular employment, and help women, as agents, to negotiate varying levels of structural, institutional and contextual constraints, and to strategise different ways, despite their constrained positions, to mediate their lives around this low-pay and insecure form of employment and the challenges of activism.