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Master's Thesis of International Studies

**Self-contented Young Freelancers,
What Values do they Pursue?**

**- Focusing on the Changing Job Trends in
the South Korean Labor Market -**

자기 만족하는 젊은 프리랜서,
그들은 어떤 가치를 추구하는가?:
한국 노동 시장 내 변화하는 일자리 트렌드를 중심으로

August 2022

**Graduate School of International Studies
Seoul National University
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Examiner Park, Jeehwan

**Submitting a master's thesis of
International Studies**

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Abstract

This paper examines how recent job trends in the South Korean labor market have changed, particularly focusing on the increasing number of young workers voluntarily deviating from the salaried organization systems and working independently as freelancers. The research particularly focused on learning how their occupational values and standards have changed from the workers' own perspectives, and the following social implications that these changes deliver to the future Korean job market. Drawing on rich interview data collected with twenty-nine participants in the two largest cities of South Korea, Seoul and Busan, from August 2021 to February 2022, this article has three aims as follows. Firstly, the paper aims to grasp the underlying mechanisms and backgrounds of rising trends in non-standard employment, promoted by the combination of neoliberal flexibility embedded in the employment system, and the recent surging waves of industrial digitalization triggering multi-sided markets and the gig economy trends. Second, the paper details the work-life of voluntary freelancers (aged 20 to 39) with 12 different jobs to illustrate their real experiences as independent freelance workers in comparison to salaried workers. Throughout the interview, the young freelancers present how their occupational values/standards differ from those of the older generation; thereby, allowing us to reveal the rationales behind their decision to decouple from the orbit of standard employment. The interview results focus on the significance of 'sustainability', 'ownership/leadership', and 'freedom' at work, as proposed by young freelancers. Third, the paper highlights challenges confronted by young freelancers and covers how these challenges make them suffer in emotional and cognitive aspects. Combining the aforementioned three aims, the outcomes of the interview aim to provide bilateral understandings and multilateral implications on the changing job trends from the perspective and voices of the young freelancers. Building on the well-established literature that covers the impact of labor market flexibilization in Korean society, this paper suggests that the young generation (the millennials and generation Z) has occupational standards/values that are strictly self-identification-based, self-respected and self-interested; thereby, gradually becoming in pursuit of freer and more flexible workers.

Keywords: Non-standard employment, Young freelancers, Labor market trends, Gig economy, Gig workers, the Millennials/Generation Z

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Backgrounds and Aim

“APPLE’S AI TOP EXECUTIVE QUILTS OVER ‘WORK FROM OFFICE’ ORDER”. In the morning of May 9, 2022, the world’s top media channels — The Times and New York Post — delivered the surprising news that Ian Goodfellow, Apple’s top AI executive and world’s top billionaire salaryman has resigned after his company began to insist on ‘return-to-office’ policy and demanded its staff to work at on office at least three days per week (The Times, 2022). Goodfellow, who is one of the world’s top AI researchers, left in his goodbye note that *“I believe strongly that more ‘flexibility’ would have been the best policy for my team”*, and that *“Apple should initiate hybrid working for all American, European, and UK-based workers”*.

With the initiation of preparing for the post-Covid-19 era, corporations in most parts of the world now have begun requesting employees to come back to the office and work at their desks. On the one hand, it might sound hilarious to hear that companies actually have to *request* their workers to come back and work together. People in the older generations (the 50s and above) might not even understand what it means by *to request workers to come back*. On the other hand, when we turn to the workers’ side, many employees complain that there is no practical reason for them to go back when everything worked perfectly and smoothly under the remote working system. Many say that they cannot imagine themselves going back to the office if that is to be forever. According to Fortune, a survey of Apple employees conducted in April this year indicated that 67 percent were unhappy with its return-to-work policy (Wion News, 2022). One of the postings on Blind, the world’s largest anonymous community app for the workplace, scorchingly criticized that *“There are many Apple staff raging against the company’s decision. Apple requires its employees to be at their desk three days a week without giving out a sensible reason and they just gaslight their employees”*. Not surprisingly, the heightened tension between the employer and the employees over the work flexibility is rampant everywhere today.

The situation is no different here in Korea too. As COVID-19 quarantine measures eased in the first week of May, companies began to terminate the work-from-home policy and switched to office-based work. Analysts at Seoul Daily (2022) and SBS Broadcastings (2022) say that as the workers have experienced telecommuting systems for the past two years, they realized how successful and efficient they could be. Therefore, they found no reason to physically validate why they have to be in the office throughout the week. Most workers now find it less efficient,

unnecessary, and inconvenient in many aspects. To respond to the changes in the workers' preferences, companies also acknowledge that it might be difficult to fully return to pre-Covid-19 conditions, as it is becoming increasingly important to hear what their workers request. What they want now is higher flexibility and freedom at work. Companies are considering adapting new working systems that combine telecommuting and office work in a hybrid form.

It is true to some extent that a dramatic shift in people's recognition of 'flexible work' was a forced transition brought by the outbreak of a deadly global pandemic. However, it is also true that for the young generation, their desires for higher flexibility, greater freedom, and stronger independence at work were already reflected in every aspect of their careers and life. According to Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education & Training (2022)¹, it was found that the most non-preferred working environment among young workers is 'a company with overtime works (2.94 points of 4.0, or 75% of respondents)' and 'a company with difficulties/inconvenience to commute (2.74)'. Among the top five factors for non-preferable working conditions, four were related to flexibility and work-and-life balance. This indicates that young people would not consider working in a company without regular working hours or would consider leaving the organization if the working conditions disturb their personal lives.

In the same context, multiple surveys in Korea suggest that despite rising social concerns over severe job shortages and youth unemployment, examined to be 8.7% on average and 2.4 times higher than the total unemployment rate in the past decade (Korea Economic Research Institute, 2021²), many young Korean workers decide to leave their company within less than a year voluntarily and seek alternatives that better fit their occupation values and living standards. Korean society is experiencing a labor market mismatch of young workers choosing early retirement amidst job shortages. 49.2% of 500 corporates surveyed by recruiting platform Saramin (2021³) responded that MZ generation workers particularly show a higher tendency for early retirement and leave the company in about five months on average if the organization's culture or working regime does not fit with their preferences.

¹The data is based initially on Korean Education Employment Panel Data II(2020) and was reorganized by Choi and Yoon(2022) in their report "The least favored jobs by young people". Vol. 25-1. The report mainly elaborates on factors that trigger the resignation of young workers.

²According to the report, it is suggested that in the past 11 years since 2010, the average annual youth unemployment rate (aged 15 to 29) has been 8.7%, 2.4 times the total unemployment rate of 3.6%. Compared to the non-youth employment rate of 2.6% during the same period, it is 2.3%p higher. The report argues that Korea is at a vulnerable stage compared to the global pace in rising youth unemployment rate. In the past 11 years (2010-2020) since 2010, the average rate of an annual increase in the youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) is 0.76%, ranking 10th among 38 OECD countries. In addition, the average "youth unemployment rate compared to the total unemployment rate" is 2.8 times, ranking fifth.

³URL to the survey result: https://www.saramin.co.kr/zf_user/help/live/view?idx=108293&listType=news

Then, where do these large groups of the young deviators go? My research result suggests that one of the strong options these days turned out to be not just to change the organization but to change their employment types and join freelancing industries as an independent worker without any affiliations attached. While there are numerous reasons for shifting their careers, the biggest reason was to be decoupled from regulatory working conditions and to work in a freer and more flexible environment. They also desired to work under a system that gives lower pressures and lower mental stress with a lower degree of constraints. My examination suggests that it is more common for young Korean people to shift their careers from salary workers to freelancers rather than to initiate their jobs as a freelancer in the first place. This mainly was because Korean society is still more encourageable in promoting regular employment, both in and outside of schools, and because young workers too prefer to build at least a few months to several years of experience in an organizational system to explore the industry and market.

[Interview with Park JE (Female, 33) and Park EH (Female, 32)]

Reasons for voluntarily leaving Korea's top conglomerates and becoming a freelancer

Park JE: I did not expect to leave the company that fast when I first got it. But at the same time, I never thought the company would be the final destination of my career, but rather a stopover for 2~3years of career experience. Ironically, it did not take that long to decide to quit. Working in a large company made me feel like I was just a mechanical component to operating the factory. A component could be disposed of or replaced anytime. My tasks were limited to what my managers decided to do, my duties were limited to what the company ordered, and my ideas/opinions were never asked. Even though this could be a normal situation for an officer under contract, I had strong desires and dreams in my career to be a competent leader and owner of the job that I have put a lot of effort into achieving. I could not give up on that.

PARK EH: I wanted to have more freedom of choice and flexibility in my case. My organization was very hierarchical and stiff in terms of working regimes. For example, I was not allowed to leave the office until my boss left, be in front of the desk before my boss arrived, and wait for summer vacation until my boss decided when to go. I even had to choose the vacation dates when my boss would approve. I could not imagine myself working as a silent robot for the rest of my life.

Researcher: On the contrary, what is the biggest merit of working as a freelancer?

Park JE: So far, I feel much more satisfied and stable. One clear thing is that freelancing does grant me a higher level of responsibility, ownership, sense of accomplishment, and freedom of choice, all the factors I wished for in my career. Now, I feel more stable because I am motivated to develop my career in the way I plan and design, not just being ordered.

PARK EH: The biggest merit of freelancing is that I can keep my priorities. I plan to continue working even after getting married or having a child. I need to have a job with flexibility in terms

of time and space to do so. If not, I might have to give up on one side. As a freelancer, I have no worries about the sustainability of my job because I have complete control to adjust working conditions depending on my situation.

The strong rise of freelancers in the labor market is a global phenomenon that deserves attention from scholars, academia, and business. According to Mckinsey (2016), there are 162 million independent freelance workers in the United States and Europe (five countries including the United Kingdom), which account for 20-30% of the total working population and is predicted to increase in the coming decades continuously. For the top runner, the U.S., the number of full-time freelancers grew from 28% in 2019 to 36% in 2021, contributing over \$1.4 trillion to the U.S. economy, and it is projected that by 2027, 50.9% (86.5 million people), half of the total U.S. workforce, will be freelancing (Upwork⁴, 2022). Though Korea's freelancing industry is relatively in its infancy, its increasing trend is stood by numbers. According to Korea Labour & Society Institute (2021), the number of freelancers in the domestic labor market ranges from about 3.6 million to 4 million as of 2018, approximately 15.1% of the total domestic employees. Local newspaper New-daily predicts that by 2025, the number is expected to increase by 4.49 million, or 15.9%. Notably, as Korea is an elite IT country and a giant e-Commerce market, it is suggested that the freelancers working online accounts for 8.5 percent (ages 15 to 69) of the country's total employees (Korea's labor ministry and Korea Employment Information Service, 2021⁵).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, as non-face-to-face work trends have entrenched worldwide, the number of online freelancers, namely the gig workers⁶, has soared at an astonishing speed of growth. Untact work trends have invited new workers to the freelancing realm and given more significance to the industry. Two years since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the total unemployment rate in the OECD area fell to 5.2% in February 2022, dropping for the first time below the pre-pandemic rate recorded in February 2020(Figure 1). More importantly, reaching the lowest level since the start of the OECD unemployment data series in 2001(OECD, 2022). In Korea's case too, the OECD data showed that its unemployment rate in February this year fell markedly to 2.7%, marking the lowest unemployment rate since 2001.

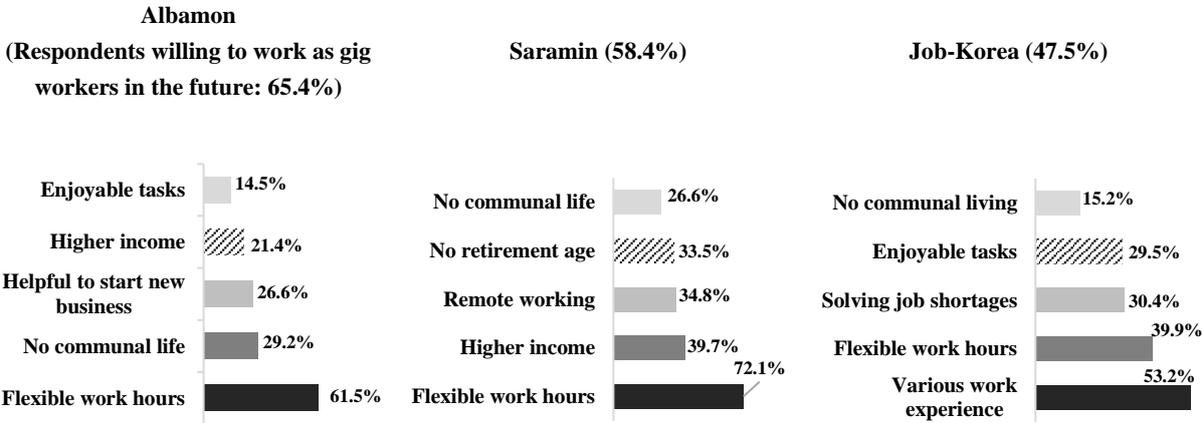
⁴ Upwork is a platform that allows clients to interview, hire and work with freelancers and freelance agencies through the company's platform. It is shown that freelancers registered at Upwork earned over \$2.3 billion in 2020 in categories including website & app development, creative & design, customer support, finance & accounting, consulting, and operations

⁵ Currently, it is estimated that there are 220,000 active gig workers, accounting for 8.5 percent(ages 15 to 69) of the country's total employees in Korea.

⁶ According to the definition presented by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce(2021), 'gig workers' are independent contractors or freelancers who typically do short-term work for multiple clients. The work may be project-based, hourly or part-time, and can either be an ongoing contract or a temporary position. To earn enough money to make a living, gig workers typically take on multiple jobs or gigs simultaneously. <https://www.uschamber.com/co/run/human-resources/what-is-a-gig-worker> (online access date: 22/02/08)

While a series of socio-economic factors support the remarkable progress in recovery, it has shed light on the drastic employment effect of remote working brought by digitalization to boost output and employment (Eurofound 2021; Korea National Statistics Office, 2022). An increase in non-face-to-face activities fueled the furtherance of digital transformations in business, thereby attracting people working in all kinds of industries to the digital-based work and promoting non-standard employment arrangements such as the gig works (Korea National Statistics Office, 2022, E-daily, 2022). Recent survey data collected by the three largest recruiting platforms in Korea — Saramin (2021), Job Korea (2021), and Albamon (2022) — suggests that more than half of the respondents in their 20s and 30s are willing to try working as freelancers or gig workers (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Survey on the Willingness and the Reasons to Work as Gig Workers
(A comparison of the three largest recruiting platforms in Korea)**



*Respondents Information: Albamon (1,188 people in the MZ generation), Saramin (1,247 young people) Job-Korea(around 2,000 people in the 20s and the 30s)

As the rise of young freelance workers is a worldwide phenomenon, it has a transformative impact on employment structures and the new demand and supply notions of the future labor market. Thus, there is a strong necessity to delve into the rationales behind it. This research examines how recent job trends in the South Korean labor market have changed, focusing on the increasing number of young workers voluntarily deviating from the salaried organization systems and working independently as freelancers. The research particularly focused on learning how their occupational values and standards have changed from the workers' perspectives and the following social implications that these changes deliver to the future Korean job market. Drawing on rich interview data collected with twenty-nine participants in the two

largest cities of South Korea, Seoul and Busan, from August 2021 - to February 2022, this article has three aims as follows.

Firstly, the paper aims to grasp the underlying mechanisms and backgrounds of rising trends in non-standard employment, promoted by the combination of neoliberal flexibility embedded in the employment system and the recent surging waves of industrial digitalization triggering multi-sided markets and the gig economy trends. Second, the paper details the work-life of voluntary freelancers (aged 20 to 39) with 12 different jobs to illustrate their real experiences as independent freelance workers compared to salaried workers. Throughout the interview, the young freelancers present how their occupational values/standards differ from those of the older generation, thereby allowing us to reveal the rationales behind their decision to decouple from the orbit of standard employment. The interview results focus on the significance of ‘sustainability,’ ‘ownership/leadership,’ and ‘freedom’ at work, as proposed by young freelancers. Third, the paper highlights challenge young freelancers confront and covers how these challenges make them suffer in emotional and cognitive aspects. Combining the three aims above, the interview outcomes aim to provide bilateral understandings and multilateral implications on the changing job trends from the perspective and voices of the young freelancers. Building on the well-established literature that covers the impact of labor market flexibilization in Korean society, this research suggests that the young generation (the millennials and generation Z) has occupational standards/values that are strictly self-identification-based, self-respected, and self-interested; thereby, gradually becoming in pursuit of freer and more flexible workers.

Literature Reviews and Theoretical Frameworks

a) Theoretical Frameworks

The reviews on existing literature in both Korea and abroad suggest that the definition of freelancer has not been universally agreed upon or unified among scholars and academia yet. Although independent work has a long history, it has never been clearly defined or consistently measured in official labor statistics. It has never found a comfortable fit within the labor market categories tracked by government agencies or multilateral institutions (Mckinsey, 2016). Particularly with the rapid advancement of online labor with almost zero transaction costs, the extension of outsourcing and diversified/multi-sided labor flexibility has been carried out

(Drahokoupil & Piasna, 2017; Kim and Park, 2021). The more diverse it becomes, the more complex and complicated it gets to define.

Firstly, on a broader level, ILO (2016) has presented four types of classification of non-standard employment⁷ that include the forms of freelancing activities (Table 1). ILO points out that the “non-standard employment” is a concept that encompasses the works that fell out of the realm of the “standard employment relationship”, understood as ‘a work that is a full-time indefinite, as well as part of a subordinate and bilateral employment relationship’⁸. Though ILO’s report has placed the non-standard employment in the residual range of standard employment, its classification has strong merit of suggesting the distinctive characteristics of the four categorization (Park, 2018).

Table 1. ILO’s Typology and Classifications of Employment

Types	Classifications	Definitions	Features
Standard Employment	Regular workers	to an employment relationship that is full-time, open-ended, and based on a direct subordinate and bilateral employment relationship between an employee and employer	
Non-standard Employment	Temporary Employment	Fixed-term contracts, including project- or task-based contracts; seasonal work; casual work, including daily work.	Not open ended
	Part-time and On-call Work	Normal working hours fewer than full-time equivalents; marginal part-time employment; on-call work, including zero-hours contracts.	Not full time
	Multi-party Employment Relationship	Also known as ‘dispatch’, ‘brokerage’ and ‘labour hire’. Temporary agency work; subcontracted labour.	Not direct, subordinate relationship with end user
	Disguised Employment/ Dependent Self-employment	Disguised employment, dependent self-employment, sham or misclassified self-employment.	Not part of employment relationship

Source: International Labour Organization (2016), p8

The distinct terminology used by each country and government makes it further difficult to make cross-country comparisons regarding the non-standard employment arrangements. As shown in Table 2, the typology differs by country and region. For instance, freelancers are commonly described as ‘independent contractors’ in the North American region, while in Europe, they could fall into one of the nine categories of newly emerged labor types. Scholars abroad

⁷ The classification of non-standard employment presented in this report follows the conclusions of the February 2015 ILO Meeting of Experts on Non-standard Forms of Employment (ILO, 2016).

⁸ ILO defined in the report that the ‘standard employment relationship’ generally refers to an employment relationship that is full-time, open-ended, and based on a direct subordinate and bilateral employment relationship between an employee and employer

also have presented their own yardsticks to define freelancing activities. Handy (1985) coined the term “portfolio worker” for those workers who create a portfolio of work for themselves. Born and Witteloostuijn (2012) suggested that the freelance career can be seen as quite similar to the ‘boundaryless career’ because a freelancer is probably the archetypical job hopper going from one project and employer to the next, never staying for very long in a single organization. Kitching and Smallbone (2012) defined freelancers as ‘those genuinely in business on their account, working alone or with co-owning partners or co-directors, responsible for generating their work and income, but who do not employ others. Mckinsey (2016)’s report on independent workers has suggested four key segments of independent workers based on their income needs, which are free agents, casual earners, reluctants, and the financially strapped⁹.

Table 2. Typology of Freelancers in North America and Europe Region

Country	Typology of Freelancers
North America Region (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; BLS ¹⁰)	Freelancers are typically described as an ‘Independent contractors’ who are identified as individuals working with contracts, independent consultants, or freelance workers, whether they are self-employed or wage and salary workers
Europe Region (Source: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2015)	Freelancers could fall into one of the nine labor types of newly emerged labor types in Europe (Type 1. employee sharing, 2.job sharing, 3. voucher-based work, 4. interim management, 5. casual work, 6. ICT-based mobile work, 7. Crowd labor, 8. portfolio work, 9. collaborative models) ※Type 6 and 8 share the closest meaning of freelancers with the aim of this research

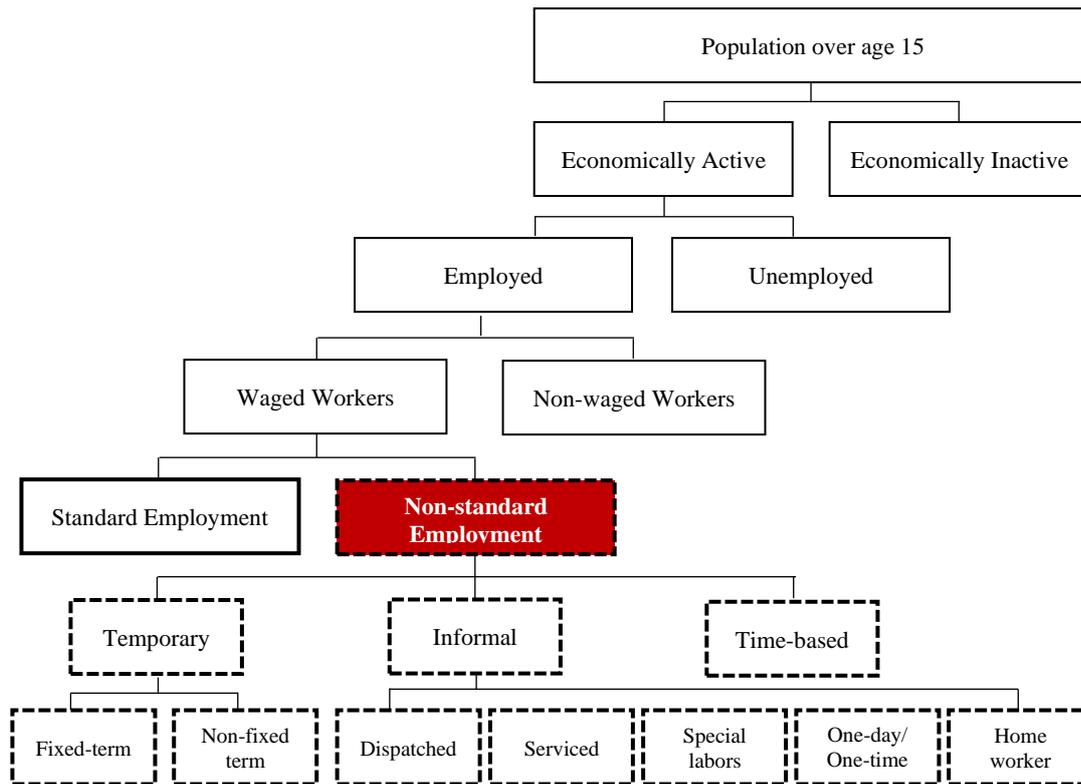
Source: Reorganized source extracted from Kim and Park (2021)

Korean literature too has made a lot of efforts to define the term. As Figure 2 shows the typology of the total labor market system in Korea, including the multiple types of non-standard employment presented by the National Statistics Office (NSO). However, many still found it difficult to find an appropriate place for ‘freelancers’ due to its diversity and complexity by nature. Earlier research by Park (2021), Kang (2012), Lee et al. (2019), and Cho (2021) recognized the difficulties in harmonizing the term because ‘freelancing’ is not a legally established concept but instead has occurred naturally in real-field and industrial sites. The very first discussion on non-standard employment was in 1992 by Kim, suggesting that non-standard employment could be seen as a residual category of standard employment.

⁹ The four segments presented by Mckinsey&Company’s report in 2016 are (a)free agents(who derive their primary income from independent work and actively prefer it), (b)casual earners (who use independent work for supplemental income and do so by choice), (c)reluctants(who derive their primary income from independent work but would prefer a traditional job), and (d)the financially strapped(who do independent work for supplemental income, but would prefer not to have to do side jobs to make ends meets).

¹⁰Accessible at: <http://www.bls.gov> (online access date: 22/03/17)

Figure 2. NSO's Typology of Korean Labor Market System



Source: Translation of a figure extracted from the Park(2018) that is based on NSO's Economically Active Population research in Aug. 2014

Later on as freelancing activities began to get more diversified, scholars such as Kwon (2007) described freelancers as ‘a person who can create value and earn economic returns with their own expertise’. Hwang et al. (2009) referred to it as ‘a person who works as a free agent without a fixed affiliation’. Recently, Korean society has embraced the terms such as portfolio workers, liberal professionals, free agents, and a one-man entrepreneur (Lee et al., 2019).

Due to the situation in which various terms appear and are mixed as such, I have set clear standards and distinction methods for this research. Firstly, I distinguished ‘non-standard employment’ from the ‘standard employment’ arrangement, then branched out two contrasting conceptual frameworks, the ‘salaryman’ and the ‘freelancer’. Aligning well with the purpose of this research, the two different concepts of labor - salaryman and freelancer - are distinguished by numerous contrasting features. ‘Salaryman’ in this research refers to a worker employed under a contract offered by an organization or company owned by a third party/person. The contract usually includes the worker's duty of affiliation, amount of regular/fixed salary, company benefits, retirement conditions, etc. At the same time, the terms specified could restrain the

workers' freedom of working hours, space, and duty in the light of achieving the business goals and maintaining the regulations of the organization. On the other hand, 'freelancer' in this research refers to a worker who works independently without any permanent affiliation attached. This does not include their attachments to freelance-based organizations or job matching platforms. Although the freelancing contracts might contain some restrictions, their degree should be lesser than that of the salaried workers. A freelancer works on a per-project basis with a high degree of independence and autonomy. These days, we are seeing a wide divergence of freelancers ranging from free business owners, moonlighters (second-job holders after hours), independent and skilled professionals (the talented), consultants, diversified workers (multiple-job holders), and digital gig workers.

Secondly, I recognized the tremendous differences between the free agency model (Fraser and Gold, 2001; Kunda et al., 2002) with a high level of autonomy and voluntariness and a marginalized model (Sematon, 2003) which lacks the two factors. As Jang (2017, 2021) indicated, there are two distinctive types of freelancers identified by the earlier research regarding voluntariness to work as a freelancer. The first type refers to professionals who choose to freelance for flexibility, work-life balance, autonomy, and professionalism. In contrast, the second type refers to a marginalized group who were externalized by the employer's decision and continue freelancing by needs/necessity. Of course, many freelancers range between enjoying considerable degrees of work freedom but having difficulty securing jobs. However, whether their decisions were voluntary or not is an obvious indicator that presents the job satisfaction rates. Therefore, this research only included the freelancers who decided to leave a salary-based organization and become freelancers and are self-contented by their decisions.

b. Literature Review (Research Significance)

Beginning with the three major significance of this study, it first acknowledges multidimensional perspectives and underlying diversities on expanding freelancing market, rather than merely viewing it as a single and unified deviation or a residual category of standard employment, as most of the earlier research often does. Second, this research highlights the recent phenomenon of structural shifts within the freelancing industries, from less-skilled, lower-paid, and insecure freelance workers to an increasing number of knowledgeable, higher-skilled, and stable young professionals in pursuit of a genuine career success, which is rarely covered in the academia yet. Third, in contrast to the dominance of quantitative research using absolute numbers and data to analyze the status quo, the research is strictly based on qualitative approach

that sheds light on the features of the multi-sided freelancing market. It delves into young freelancers' psychological and cognitive aspects by paying attention to their real voices and stories by themselves.

First, a 'work' is a core activity in society that reveals much about social order, how it is changing, and the kinds of problems and issues that people must address (Kalleberg, 2009). In accordance with the significance, various research has been done to interpret the changes in people's work life and the labor structure from standard employment to non-standard employment. The study by OECD of 26 European countries showed that about half of the jobs created between 1995 and 2013, and about 60% of those created between 2007 and 2013, were in non-standard employment, suggesting a substantial shift in the nature of the work (OECD, 2015). Kalleberg (2018) stated the significant change is centered on the proliferation of precarious works¹¹. Thus, the recent rise of precariousness holds great importance, not only for the work situations and career opportunities that workers can expect but also for broad macrosocial issues involving the role of the welfare state and the nature of the economic policy. Likewise, ILO (2018) also pointed out that there has been a recognition that the 'standard employment relationship (SER)' of formal, full-time, and permanent waged employment is becoming ever less the standard relationship over the past few decades. Given that the SER has been the key vehicle, its diminution poses challenges for the operation of regulatory frameworks and raises issues regarding working conditions, rights, and benefits.

While the earlier literature has well pointed out the necessity to pay attention to the flexibilization of employment, much of the literature has made little reference to the increasing diversities derived from the market expansions. Most extant literature has put too much emphasis on merely comparing the dual structure of the labor market or Standard versus. Non-standard employment, not directly concentrating on the rise of the non-standard section. Though a comparison could suggest a clear vision of differentiation, this could have a far-reaching effect in placing the non-standard under the standard employment or could be insufficient to cover the multifacetedness. In accordance with the strong rise, there needs to be an advancement in understanding the rise of the counterpart, non-standard employment, as we have done for the flexibilization of employment.

¹¹ Kalleberg and Vallas further elaborated that 'precarious work' indicates a work that is uncertain, unstable, and insecure and in which employees bear the risks of work (as opposed to businesses or the government) and receive limited social benefits and statutory protections.

In this sense, this research has its significance to translate the rising trends of freelancers from diverse perspectives rather than to merely viewing it as a single and unified deviation from standard employment, as most of the earlier research often does. In reality, freelancers vary in how they organize their work tasks, secure and handle clients, manage their compensation, and determine their degree of autonomy. Freelancers in different work settings might act differently (Kitching and Smallbone, 2012). My research acknowledges the great diversities underlying freelancing industries, in terms of contract methods/types, working conditions, degree of freedom and constraints, payment intervals, work schedules, etc. This has enabled my research to explore the conditional details of freelance employment thoroughly. Moreover, in the efforts to capture the impact of diversification on the business realms, many scholars have relied on the approaches that focused on the companies or the employers' stance, overlooking that, in fact, the diversities are carried out and formulated by the workers themselves. Based on qualitative data, this research features the impacts of great diversities on labor market trends from the workers' perspectives, giving further strengths to the individuals' voices.

Second, in a similar vein, scholars have focused too much on the socio-economic issues associated with an increase in the non-standard employment, which are traditionally considered as lesser-skilled, lower-paid, and insecure as a consequence of larger private and public sector organizations externalizing jobs (Kitching and Smallbone, 2012). Earlier research such as by ILO (2016), Jang (2017), and Lee et. Al (2013) has examined how the freelancers differ from the features of standard employment, mostly in socio-economic perspectives for being unstable and insecure; thus, inferior. For example, Eurofound (2015) suggests that the non-standard workers replacing the standard employment contract are mostly in low- and mid-paid jobs, causing a series of socio-economic problems in European countries. This means that our society still holds a biased perception of standard over non-standard employment, although the latter is becoming a mainstream phenomenon among young generations. Because the point of non-standard work has not received as much attention as it deserves these days, the relation between standard and non-standard could not be equally treated, nor could the latter be thoroughly understood. In fact, however, the trends in non-standard employment have been drastically shifted away from the insecure workers to higher-skilled, knowledgeable, and liberal professionals in pursuit of successful freelancing careers. This type of freelancer commonly refers to the "free agency" model (Kunda et al., 2002) or "portfolio" model (Smeaton, 2003), and is known to be higher-skilled and highly-compensated (Jang, 2017).

As Born (2009) suggested, what distinguishes liberal professionals from other self-employed individuals is that many freelancers sell their intangible professional knowledge or skills to firms or individuals based on a deferred service contract while most traditional self-employed people sell tangible products or services to customers. As ILO (2016) indicates, non-standard forms of employment are not new, but recently have become more common in occupations and sectors where they didn't exist previously, strongly boosted by the digital revolution and advanced technologies. Though there have been few literatures on professional freelancing careers such as by Born and Witteloostuijn (2012), they are still insufficient both in amount and quality to cover the great diversities of upstream freelancing jobs. Recent research in Korea by Kim (2019), Noh and Lee (2021), Park (2021) dealt with the rising phenomenon of freelancers working through online platforms and apps in Korea but the definition of 'skilled freelancers', 'platform freelancers', or 'platform labor' are mixed-up and mingled even among their research. This shows how much we lack a correct understanding of the new professional freelancing trends. There is a necessity to delve into the work-life of these liberal young professionals, both in Korea, a gig economy infant, and abroad. For our society to make further progress in the professional freelancing realm, it is essential to examine the recent phenomenon of structural shifts, from less-skilled, lower-paid, and insecure freelance workers to an increasing number of knowledgeable, higher-skilled, and stable young professionals in pursuit of a genuine career success, which is rarely covered in the academia yet. It has its own significance in learning the positive impacts of digitalization on facilitating the diversification of freelancing careers and grasping how the work styles of the digital-skilled freelancers differ from traditional freelancers.

Third, a majority of the existing literature reports an expanding trend of freelancers in terms of their absolute number, the share of the total working population, and the number of service areas that freelancers are engaged in (Kitching and Smallbone 2012; Lee et al. 2013, Moulda et al., 2014). A qualitative study with a wide range of young freelancers is relatively rare. Based on both demand for and supply of freelance jobs, as freelance work is likely to continue expanding in the future (Jang, 2016), there is a definite necessity for further research. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the work-life of gig workers in their 20s and 30s, a group accounting for the highest proportion of both the global and domestic workforce, through interviews. It has collected qualitative data to understand better how these young and liberal freelancers land a job, process contracts, and meet new clients based on their actual experiences. Particularly, this research takes a closer look at the features of psychological and cognitive preferences of young freelancers through a qualitative approach and adds a new perspective to

the extant literature. As the job trends among young people are strongly formulated and promoted by workers' movements, this research is significant that it adds flexible perspectives to understand further individual rationales behind yardsticks for job satisfaction, challenges, uniqueness, and so on.

Methodology

Participants Information

Profiles: This research is based on qualitative research with 45 online survey participants aged 20 ~39years old and 29 selected out of the survey participants for 1:1 interview. The interview ran in the period from the first week of August 2021 to the first week of February 2022. The 29 selected freelancers for interview consist of 16 females and 13 males from different age ranges (Age profile: 21~25 - 6 respondents, aged 26~30 - 9 respondents, aged 31~35 - 12 respondents, aged 36~39 - 2 respondents). The participants were chosen from the two largest cities in South Korea, Seoul (65%) and Busan (35%), to include interviewees with more diverse occupations. The author's personal background, being born and raised in Busan and now residing in Seoul, benefited enlarging the research area of the participants. The author's almost two years of freelancing work experience (as a freelance conference planner and research institute assistant from January 2020 to September 2021) gave a great advantage to inviting/selecting a wider range of interviewees and profiles, along with the effects of snowball sampling.

Occupational (Job) Information: With the diversification in jobs and channels, it is no surprise that almost all types of jobs could be freelanced these days. Even for traditional jobs that are to be physically carried out onsite, workers graft online services and technologies to raise the efficiencies and speed. While freelancing activities are found in a wide range of fields, the occupations of the interviewees for this research were narrowed down to having three commonalities in terms of the way they handle their tasks and assignments. First, the participants for this research were all online-based or gig workers. While they handle their business only online or in a hybrid form of both online and offline(in-person) manners, the online methods were far more dominant in their way of carrying out. Second, the participants were mostly engaged in short-term-based projects, showing strong preferences and tendencies for a temporal commitment and affiliation. They mostly renewed their contracts per-project with intervals of less than 4~6 weeks on average. Third, the participants were actively engaged in multiple

projects assigned by different employers at the same time. They are multiple jobholders. Therefore, their work intensity and workloads were fairly high but stable, even compared to those of the salary workers.

The occupations that fulfill the above-mentioned commonalities are jobs that used to exist in the traditional job market but have recently experienced sharp rises in online-based demands too. Thus, they have evolved in the way the tasks are carried out or how the employees and the employers mainly communicate during the process of implementation. Examples of such occupations are online translators/interpreters, web graphic designers, website organizers, online speech or PE instructors, YouTube video creators, contents producers, SNS marketers, online influencers, programmers, and virtual conference organizers/managers (More details about occupation information of research participants can be found in Appendix). Their jobs/tasks can be carried out at offline environment but have further evolved in the virtual systems. For this research, including the jobs above-mentioned, twenty-nine freelancers are selected from 12 different job sectors, ranging from marketing, education, translation, data analysis, design, event planning, broadcastings, gaming, fashion, etc. (Table 3).

Table 3. Classification of Interviewees by Profile and Job Sectors

Total Interviewee: 29 Freelancers (Selected from 45 online survey respondents)							
Classification		# of people.	%	Classification		# of people.	%
Age	21~25	6	20.7	Gender	Female	16	55.2
	26~30	9	31.0		Male	13	44.8
	31~35	12	41.4	Region	Seoul	19	65.5
	36~39	2	6.9		Busan	10	34.5
Classification of Interviewee by Job Sectors							
Sector	# of people.	%	Sector	# of people.	%		
Marketing	3	10.3	Health & Beauty	2	6.9		
Education	3	10.3	Online and IT	4	13.8		
Translation	2	6.9	Consulting	1	3.4		
Data	4	13.8	Broadcasting	1	3.4		
Design	4	13.8	Gaming	1	3.4		
Event Planning	2	6.9	Fashion	2	6.9		

Definitions

'Freelancer' in this research refers to a person/professional who is self-employed and works independently for multiple employers simultaneously without any permanent affiliation attached. A freelancer is not required for any long-term commitment to a particular employer. However, this does not include their commitments or attachments to freelance-based organizations or job matching platforms.

Designs

i. Surveys: Initially, this research started with conducting an online survey with 45 young freelancers to select candidates with appropriate motivations and backgrounds for 1:1 interview. The survey consisted of three different sections asking (i): total work experiences and freelancing careers(years, types, and motivations), (ii): a comparative questionnaire between prior experience as a salaried worker and current life as a freelancer in regards to overall job satisfaction and merits and demerits, (iii): examinations on preference for work freedom vs. constraints, efficiency vs. stability, short-term security vs. long-term sustainability, and leadership/ownership vs. responsibility. I selected 29 freelancers, seemingly appropriate for the interviews based on the survey results. As indicated in Table 4, the criteria to select suitable candidates were: (a) whether the freelancer has a prior experience as a salaried worker at an organization under a standard form of contract(to sort out salaryman-experienced freelancer), (b) whether the choice to work as a freelancer was by choice(voluntary) rather than by necessity(or involuntary), (c) whether the freelancer works through online, or at least in a hybrid form of online and offline(to sort out online/gig workers), and (d) whether the freelancer is fairly satisfied with the current job status and is willing to continue freelance work for at least more than 4~5years in the future(to pick up self-contented workers).

Table 4. Criteria for Selecting Interview Candidates	
(a) Salaryman-experienced	Freelancers with at least 6months of work experiences as salaryman affiliated to an organization under regular contracts
(b) Voluntary deviators/Voluntary freelancers	Freelancers who voluntarily left salary-based organizations and became freelancers by choice rather than by necessity (who were externalized by the decision of a company)
(c) Online-based (gig workers) or Hybrid	Freelancers who are familiar with online-based working environment (digital-friendly groups)
(d) Self-contented	Freelancers who are satisfied with their current job status as freelancers and is willing to continue their job in the future

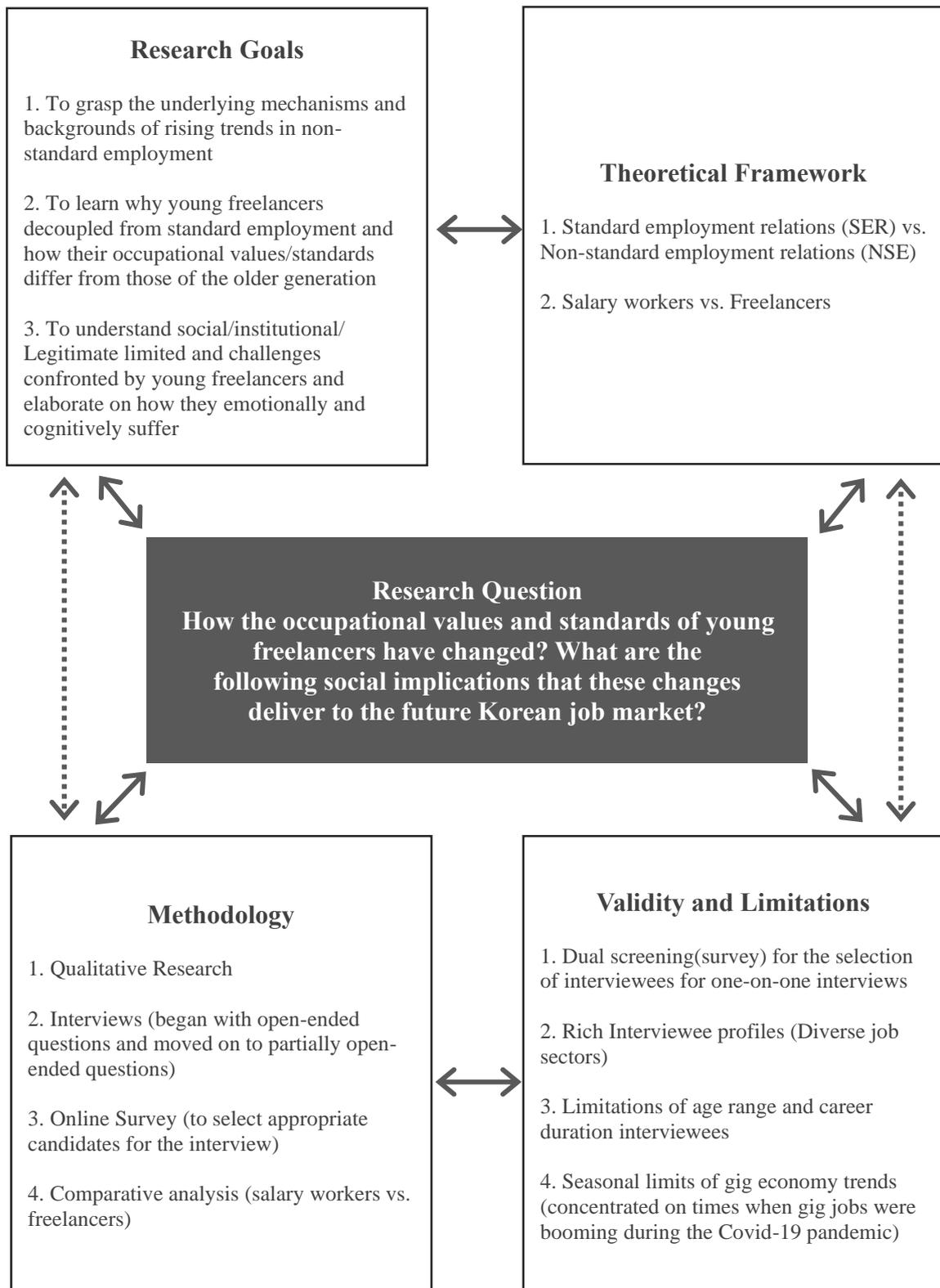
ii. Interviews: The interviews were conducted with 29 young freelance workers in South Korea for 7 months, from August 2021 to February 2022. While the official interview period ended in February this year, the author conducted short follow-up interviews through emails and messengers in March to complement some deficits. Both online and offline interviews were conducted for an hour on average. 19 of the 29 interviews were conducted by the online platform Zoom, while for the remaining ten interviewees, the author visited their offices or met them in cafes near their offices. Interviews conducted online were mostly recorded under the conditions that the interviewees agreed, while offline interviews were not recorded due to circumstantial reasons and were based on interview notes.

These interviews were semi-structured, as they started with open-ended questions, asking about ‘What are the biggest merits and demerits of freelancing careers?’, ‘What are the key determinants for career success as freelancers?’, ‘How was the reaction of your family and friends when you first announced your plan to leave a salaried job and begin freelancing?’, and ‘How much are you satisfied with your current status as a freelancer?’. My interview was followed by a series of a partly closed and open question, mainly on the comparison of work experiences as salaried workers and freelancers or on their plans in both career and life as a young freelancer (e.g., Do you think/feel working as a freelancing actually have offered you a higher degree of freedom or not, and why? In what aspects? Do you agree with the statement that a successful career should be based on stability and security?, Do you feel more stable when you work with a more extended period of contract duration or not? and Are you willing to change your occupation or employment type, back to the standard employee, if your situation changes(marriage, child, financial condition, family issues, etc.)? The direction and the depth of the interview differed by individuals depending on their responses to the surveys.

Though there have been difficulties in meeting people during the peak season of the Covid-19 pandemic in South Korea, most of the introductions and interviews were still done online, except for a few cases where I had to visit their work offices (mostly shared offices for freelancers) and see their conditions in person. Because the offices mainly were independently operated, the research was not as influenced by the regulations or constraints posed during the pandemic situation as initially expected. Furthermore, the young freelancers were relatively flexible regarding time for interviews, easing the interview schedules. More importantly, they were all tech-friendly groups, further helping the non-face-to-face interview processes.

iii. Data: Because there is a data deficit in accurately examining the freelancing activities in Korean society, it was not easy to find many adequate datasets that align with the intention of this research. Though some of the earlier studies had worked on identifying the stratification of freelancers' profiles recently, the criteria for defining the freelancers were too broad (including self-employed, contractors, dispatched workers, temporal/fixed-term workers, etc.) to use for my research, which focuses explicitly on 'professional/high-skilled and 'voluntary' freelancers. Therefore, for most of the numerical data, I took advantage of a high-quality dataset released by Korea Labor and Society Institute (KLSI)'s issue paper series in 2021, as it has a rich sample size. More importantly, the research efficiently categorized the freelancers into five models (model 1~5), the self-employed, special labor, temporary workers, non-waged laborers, and the professionals (with special talents).

Figure 3. Research Design¹²



¹² This research design is based on “interactive model of research design” (Maxwell, 2013: 4-10)

Thesis Structure

This paper begins by elaborating on the historical background of the rise of non-standard employment, specifically freelancers, in Korean society. As for the historical background, the research focused on the widespread neoliberal ideology penetrating the business realms during and post the IMF crisis in 1998. The initiation of the labor market flexibilization and non-standard employment arrangements is the trigger point for the substantial rise of freelancers across the industries. Then, the section delves into the soaring influence of the digital revolution and industrial digitization, which have facilitated the emergence of new labor types (e.g., portfolio workers, gig workers, crowd workers, platform laborers, etc.) in the gig economy.

In chapters 3,4, and 5, the paper goes beyond the statistics of labor market trends and dives into the daily lives of the young workers in the freelancer industry. In chapter 3, the paper discusses how the work-life of young freelancers is carried out, from the progression of new project searching and project landing to the signing of contracts. The part where the employment contract is covered includes comparing the conditions between salaried workers and freelancers. The chapter concludes by analyzing two features of the freelancing employment contracts, 'temporality' and 'diversity.' Particularly, it focuses on how these features are translated and embraced by young freelancers. In chapter 4, the paper illuminates the changes in the occupational standards/values appearing among young Korean freelancers. The standards are divided into conditional and emotional aspects, as expressed by the interviewees. By elaborating on both core conditional and emotional values in a career, the paper suggests why these young freelancers tend to focus more on the emotional consequences over conditional factors, thereby stressing the significance of freedom and flexibility. Chapter 5 highlights on the challenges commonly faced by young freelancers in Korean society, covering both intended and unintended consequences when labor market trends evolve faster than the regulations. While reviewing social/institutional/legitimate deficiencies in South Korea's freelancing industries, the chapter focuses on how the young workers psychologically and cognitively suffer from decent work deficits, leading to rampancy of instabilities and recognition difficulties in society. The final section presents the conclusion of the paper and some of the limitations of the research design that leave room for future research.

CHAPTER 2: THE RISE OF YOUNG FREELANCERS IN THE KOREAN LABOR MARKET

To commence, this chapter illuminates the historical background of non-standard employment, and more specifically freelancers, in Korean society. The widespread neoliberal ideology penetrating the business realms during and post the IMF crisis in 1998 is the primary background for initiating the labor market flexibilization and non-standard employment arrangements in Korean society. As for the strong rise of freelancers, the soaring influence of the digital revolution and industrial digitization is the trigger point that facilitates the emergence of new labor types (e.g., portfolio workers, gig workers, crowd workers, platform laborers, etc.) in the gig economy.

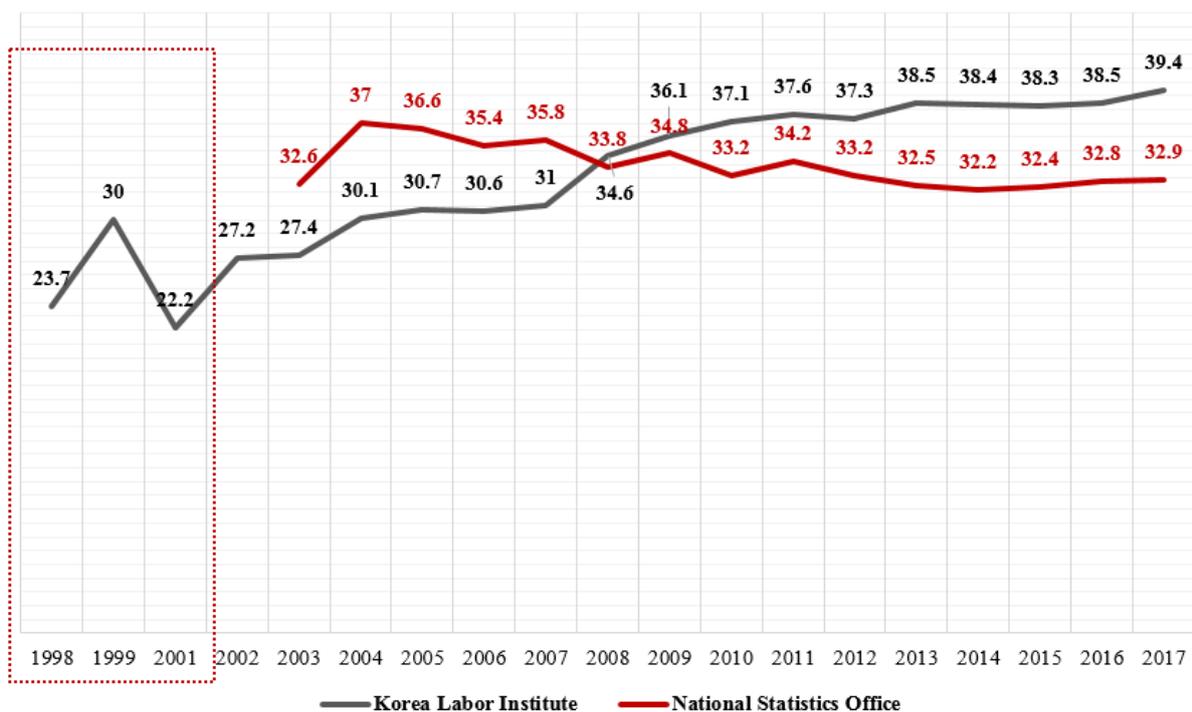
Historical Backgrounds: Neoliberalism and Labour Market Flexibilization

As International Labour Organization (ILO) suggests, "Non-standard forms of employment (NSE)" – also referred to as diverse forms of work – is an umbrella term for different employment arrangements that deviate from standard employment. NSEs include temporary employment, part-time and on-call work, temporary agency work, other multi-party employment relationships, disguised employment, and dependent self-employment. The recent trendy phenomenon of emerging homeworkers and digital labor platforms also falls under the NSEs category since it does not occur at the employer's premises. While the labor market dichotomization has been driven by diverse forces, including demographic shifts, labor market regulation, technology advancements, and macroeconomic fluctuations (ILO, 2016), the emergence of NSEs has its root from the way back history.

Non-standard work is not a recent phenomenon (OECD, 2018). In Korean society, discourse on privatization of public enterprises and state-run sectors, labor market flexibility, and various deregulation trends began to emerge from the 1980s, led by government officials who tried to accept and embrace the neoliberal economic trends that were becoming mainstream in the U.S. (Park 2018). In particular, in the late 1980s, democratization, the democratic union movement, and limitations on oppressive labor regulations took place, and market intervention gradually decreased. Then, in the early 1990s, Korea's socio-economic reorganization focused on chaebol-centered social structure and corporate-oriented employment. While its emergence was noted several decades ago, the financial crisis of 1997–98 forced a turning point in labor market flexibility. Economic depression resulted in a rapid increase in the unemployment rate

and the growth of non-standard workers. When Korea’s economy entered a crisis in 1997, owing largely to structural problems in its financial and corporate sectors (Balino and Ubide 1999), large corporations went bankrupt consecutively, and real GDP in 1998 dropped by 5.8 percent on a year-on-year basis (Lee, 2001). The IMF crisis caused almost 1.66 million jobs to be lost in 1998, boosting the unemployment rate from 2.6 to 6.6 percent at the end of the year (Lee, 2001; OECD data). As a part of the restoration plan, the Korean economy adopted structural adjustment programs and deregulation in employment, influenced by policy shifts toward labor market flexibilization imposed by World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)’s rescue packages. The restoration was effective to some extent, but the employment structure changed significantly, leading to a sharp increase in non-standard workers. Levitzer and Taylor (1991) present a theoretical model in which uncertainty in demand creates a labor market dual structure of having standard(regular) and non-standard(non-regular) workers. When demand uncertainty intensifies, companies increase the proportion of non-regular workers to reduce the burdens of uncertainty.

Figure 4. Percentage of Non-Standard Workers within the Waged Workers in Korea (Time Series from 1998 to 2017)

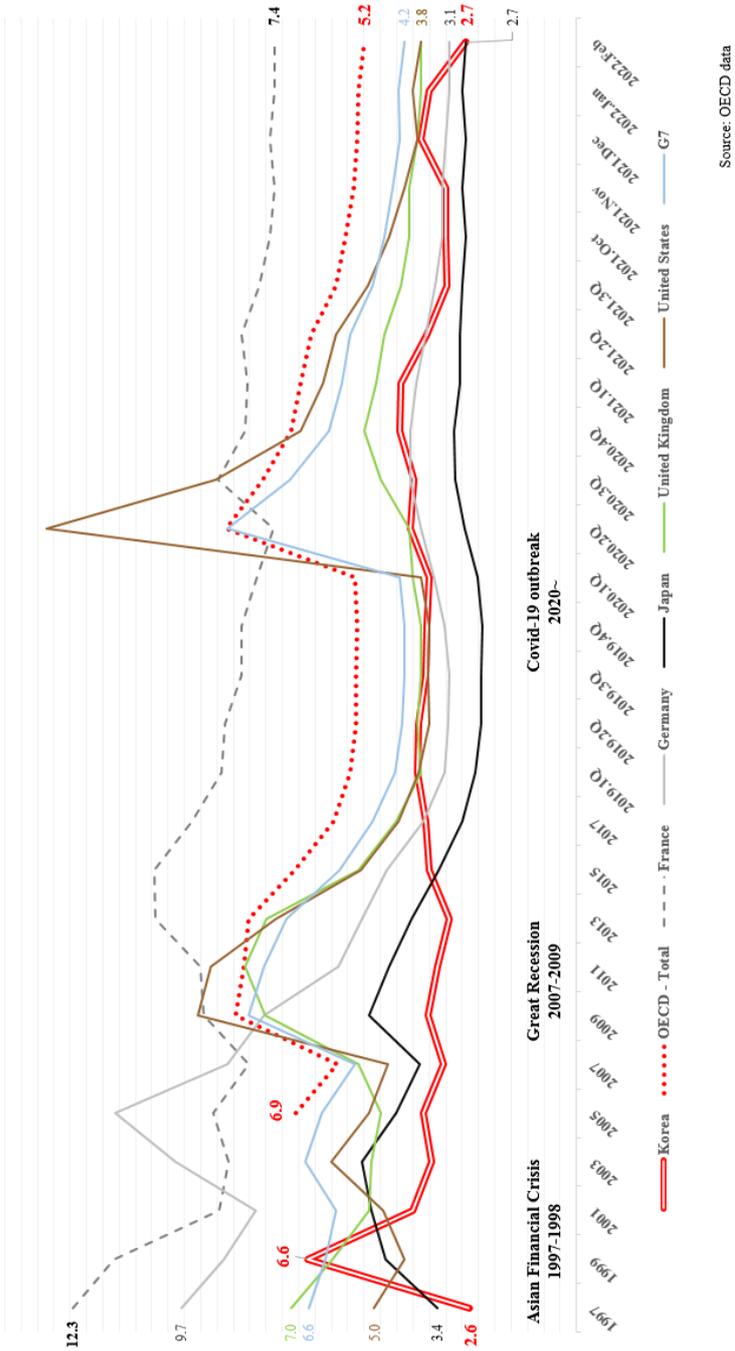


Source: Korea Labor Institute(Panel study data), National Statistics Office(Economically active population research)

As shown in Figure 4, the percentage of non-standard workers within the waged workers exponentially increased from 1998(23.7%) to 1999(30.0%), and then maintained a steady increased little by little to 2017(39.4%) as indicated by Korea Labor Institute. While the data by

Korea Labor Institute suggest that total number of non-standard workers have steadily increased since the early 2000s until the recent years, data by the National Statistics Office presents that it has maintained a similar level for the past two decades. Scholars suggest there can be data gaps since the range of non-standard employment has not been clearly set and distinguished throughout the history in Korean society.

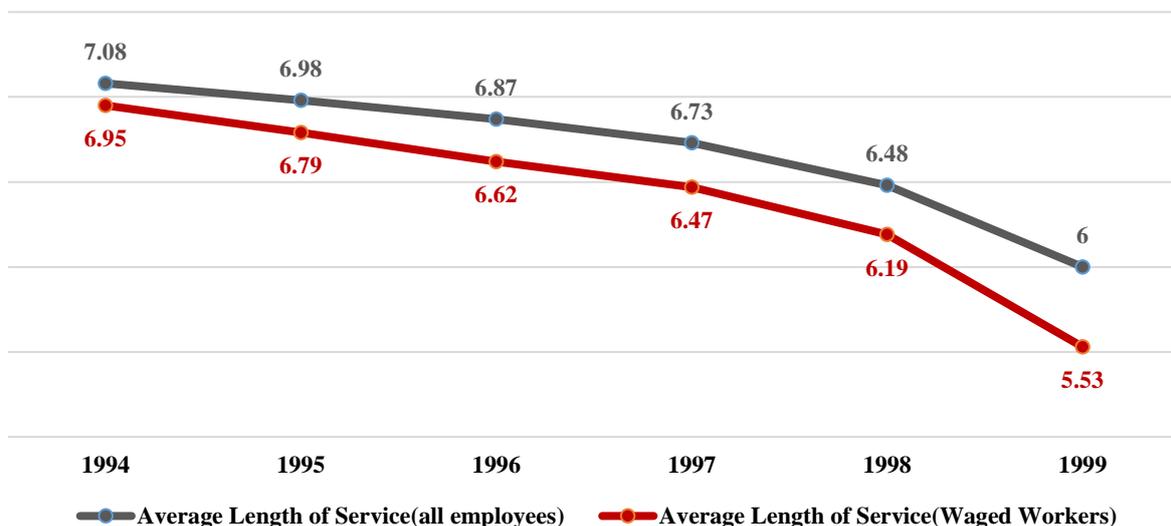
Figure 5. Unemployment Rates by Countries in Time Series (1997-2022) by percentage
 (Reorganized graph using OECD data by the author)



Source: OECD data

During the post-crisis era, job insecurity still lingered as a significant socio-economic issue in Korean society. The period without a lifetime job has come (Lee, 2001). Inequality in many aspects of job quality (e.g., wages and benefits) widened between dual dimensions of employment (Ha and Lee, 2013). As Keum and Cho (2001) suggests, the data from Korean Labor Panel Survey¹³ demonstrates that the average value (length of years) of the service period has been decreasing since the mid-1990s (Figure 6). The length of service for all employed people continued to decrease from 7.8 years in 1994, and decreased by 15.3% to 6 years in 1999. This phenomenon is more clearly revealed when the analysis target is limited to wage workers. The length of service for wage workers fell by 19.6% during the same period. After the financial crisis, the decline in average service period became more pronounced. The proliferation of precarious work, meaning that their works are uncertain, unstable, insecure, and limited to receiving social benefits and statutory protections, led to dramatic changes in the worker's perceptions of jobs and employment.

Figure 6. Changes in Average Length of Service in Korea



Source: Korea Labor Panel Survey Data
Unit: years

During this time, neoliberalism, an economic and policy doctrine that equates marketization with the furtherance of worker's freedom and individual choice at work (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2018) began to take place in Korean society. Neoliberalism is founded on assertions

¹³ The first survey of the Korea Labor Panel Study was conducted from June to October 1998, and the second survey was conducted from July to November 1999. In the first year of the Korean Labor Panel Survey, all respondents aged 15 or older were asked about their past employment experience. Specifically, all jobs (workplaces) that have worked for more than two months on average for more than 15 hours a week from the age of 15 are asked about "starting period", "retiring period", "industrial", "job", and "work status".

that human well-being and progress can best be secured by increasing entrepreneurial freedom, individual responsibility, property ownership, and free trade, while at the same time keeping government and state involvement in economic affairs to a minimum (Harvey, 2005). However, many theories that translate the relations between neoliberalism and labor market situations have opposite views by arguing that the widespread of neoliberal ideologies facilitated the unstable employment structure in the Korean labor market. As Jang et al. (2019) argued, the neoliberal labour market theory believes that the Korean labor market changed to a neoliberal system in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis, and such change has influenced the rapid growth of non-standard employment, including the freelancers, later on. That is to say, as Korean society has become increasingly neoliberal since the economic crisis, the labor market has changed in that way too, with accompanying side effects. Neoliberal policies are also accused of economic and social consequences of reducing access to social security and increased social inequality (Muller, 2013; Piketty, 2015). Foucault (2008) and Mirowski (2014) pointed out that although inequality is not an unintended result, itself is an important feature of neoliberal politics because it was supposed to serve as a mechanism to increase positive competition and raise productivity in the market.

In recent years, however, there have been various socio-economic perspectives, both positive and negative, on a critical principle of neoliberalism and its relations with the non-standard employment growth. The proponents for expanding neoliberal ideologies believe that flexibility promotes free competition and that free competition would ultimately lead to market vitalization and national prosperity. This could be true to some extent because free laborers could be strong productive agents in a free market economy. On the other hand, the opponents argue that the plan had miserably failed, leading to labor market segmentation and uncompromising gaps among the workers. The existing literatures demonstrate that the spread of neoliberalism has been a fatal mistake in the global labor market, as there are billions of precariats who work with instability and are lingered as unskilled with low wages for their livelihoods, including non-regular workers, job seekers, migrant workers, disabled people, and retired seniors. Until today, the negative perspectives in Korea mostly focus on the massive emergence of unstable and insecure workers who have involuntarily become the non-regulars being pushed out. It is said that neoliberalism led to the emergence of the precariat (refers to precarious proletariat) in the labor market (Na, 2018). Another criticism points out the detrimental social-psychological effects caused by inequalities and insecurities among non-standard workers. Previous research has shown that the social factors have a significant impact on individual's well-being as well as

their physical and mental health (Beaker et al., 2021). The precarious work has made the availability as well as the quality of jobs more risky and uncertain, also affecting the many non-work domains of the workers, including individual health and well-being (e.g., owing to mental stress, poor physical health, and uncertainty about educational choices), family formation (delayed entry into marriage and having children), and the nature of social life more generally (community disintegration and declining social cohesion) (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2018).

Consequently, unstable employment has dramatically influenced how Korean employees think and behave. There are two contrasting views on how neoliberalism has affected workers' occupational value, happiness, and job satisfaction. On the one hand, it is argued that the individuals are harmed by neoliberalism because this ideology promotes competition and intense survival games (Muller, 2013; Piketty, 2015), which in the process undermines happiness, comfort, sense of solidarity, and social security. Especially in the case of traditional types of non-standard workers such as contractors, neoliberal ideologies are blamed for making every member of the society compete to survive while minimizing the society's responsibility for the negative outcomes (Han, 2015). People would be less satisfied with their careers being unstable and uncertain. Kim et al. (2010) also pointed out that individuals are forced to immerse themselves in fierce competition by exhibiting a maximum level of freedom for self-training, self-management, and self-branding. Workers are forced to present their talents and abilities to get decent jobs and accomplish quality work and life under reinforced capitalism. They are pressured to consider themselves an independent businessman solely responsible for their actions; thereby debilitating a sense of connection to others and triggering loneliness in a society (Adams et al., 2019).

Despite criticisms, neoliberalism has now become the dominant ideology in many parts of the world (Becker et al., 2021). Therefore, on the other hand, it could be equally argued that neoliberalism will generally be beneficial by making individual workers happier and more satisfied with their jobs because this ideology encourages individuals to strive for self-actualization, personal growth, and happiness (Adams et al., 2019). In recent years, as diversification of jobs and lifestyles takes place, Korean society is seeing exponential growth of young workers voluntarily deviating from the orbit of standard employment and pursuing to be non-standard workers, the free workers, for self-actualization. Hence, positive perspectives on neoliberal flexibility are gradually gaining more support. These days, many scholars say that every worker is encouraged to have the mindset of running their own business to thrive and

survive, in the process fostering strong entrepreneurship, independence, and leadership - the core qualities to succeed in business. Being dynamically exposed to liberal settings, the young generation in particular desires deregulation, deviation, and freedom at work. Scholars like Harvey(2005) and Pfeffer & Baron(1998) say neoliberalism encourages employers to adopt a flexible conception of the firms that dismantles long-standing provisions for internal labor markets, in favor of radically individualized forms of employment and measures that can maximize shareholder value and achieve greater numerical and functional flexibility. In this regard, the positivists suggest that neoliberal flexibility would attract more young workers' participation in a freelancing career in the future.

Rise of Young Freelancers and Gig Economy

Though the definitions or distinctions of freelancer labor vastly differ by each country's standard or social context, the number of freelancers generally referred to as a person who works freely without a fixed affiliation is increasing across the globe. Particularly, an exponential rise in numbers of young freelancers is simultaneously taking place with tremendous market expansion focused on online.

According to Mckinsey (2016), there are 162 million independent workers in the United States and Europe (five countries including the United Kingdom), which account for 20-30% of the total working population and is predicted to continuously increase in the coming decades. The estimated number of freelancers was the highest in the US with around 68 million, followed by Germany (21 million), the UK (14 million) France (13million), and Spain (12million) (Figure 7). Mckinsey's report added that extrapolating its survey results across all EU-15 countries yields an estimated 60 million to 94 million independent earners. For the top runner, the U.S., it was found that the number of full-time freelancers grew from 28% in 2019 to 36% in 2021, contributing over \$1.4 trillion to the U.S. economy, and is projected that by 2027, 50.9% or 86.5 million people - half of the total U.S. workforce, will be freelancing in the United States (Upwork, 2022). The dominance of freelancing careers is also displayed in the corporation's employment proportion. Google has more freelancers, 120,000 (54% of the total workforce) contractors/freelancers, than permanent employees on its payroll, around 102,000(46%) as of 2019. Hayden Brown, the president, and CEO of Upwork, pointed out that the young workers have seen those experiences of older generations and learned that they should not put all their

eggs in one basket, meaning working for a single employer/company is not actually a low-risk proposition.

Figure 7. Numbers and Stratification of Independent Workers in the U.S. and Europe

United States (68 million independent workers)				Germany (21 million independent workers)			
	Primary	Supplemental			Primary	Supplemental	
By Choice	Free agents 22m (32%)	Casual earners 27m (40%)	72%	By Choice	Free agents 6m (29%)	Casual earners 9m (42%)	70%
By Necessity	Reluctants 10m (14%)	Financially Strapped 9m (14%)	28%	By Necessity	Reluctants 2m (11%)	Financially Strapped 4m (19%)	30%
	46%	54%			39%	61%	
United Kingdom (14 million independent workers)				France (13 million independent workers)			
	Primary	Supplemental			Primary	Supplemental	
By Choice	Free agents 4m (32%)	Casual earners 6m (42%)	74%	By Choice	Free agents 4m (29%)	Casual earners 5m (39%)	68%
By Necessity	Reluctants 2m (12%)	Financially Strapped 2m (14%)	26%	By Necessity	Reluctants 1m (10%)	Financially Strapped 3m (21%)	32%
	44%	56%			39%	61%	
Spain (12 million independent workers)				Sweden (2 million independent workers)			
	Primary	Supplemental			Primary	Supplemental	
By Choice	Free agents 3m (26%)	Casual earners 4m (32%)	58%	By Choice	Free agents 1m (33%)	Casual earners 1m (41%)	74%
By Necessity	Reluctants 2m (22%)	Financially Strapped 2m (20%)	42%	By Necessity	Reluctants <0.5m (13%)	Financially Strapped <0.5m (13%)	26%
	48%	52%			46%	55%	

Source: McKinsey & Company(2016). Independent work choice, necessity and the gig economy
*Numbers may not sum due to rounding

For Korea, according to Korea Labour & Society Institute (2021), the number of freelancers in the domestic labor market ranges from about 4millions (model A) to 4.7 million (model B) as of 2018, which is approximately 15.1 to 17.8% of the total domestic employees (Figure 8). Another survey by the newspaper New-daily predicts that by 2025, the number for model A is expected to increase by 4.49 million, or 15.9%. Though the research has broadly included self-employed and special laborers, the incremental trends for the past decade indicate that freelance activities would continuously significantly impact the Korean economy, business sectors, and its labor market.

Figure 8. Changes in the Number of Freelancers in Korea Labor Market

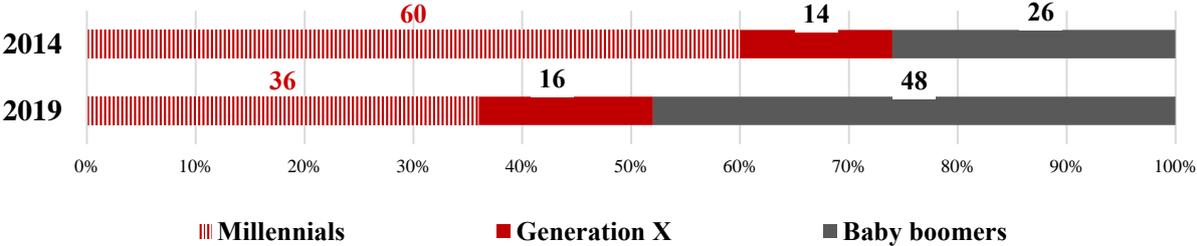


Source: Korea Labour & Society Institute(2021). Issue Brief Series on Freelancers. Vol. 154 (2021-13)

Both because of and despite Covid-19, the freelance revolution is thriving as “Covid-19 has accelerated freelancing, making it more mainstream and creating both opportunity and greater competition (Forbes, 2021)”. For the past two years, workers had to retreat to their homes for social distancing, businesses rushed into digitalization and disentangled their workers from ‘where’ they should work and ‘how’ they should work. In the process, many workers realized that flexibility could bring tremendous efficiency, life benefits, and comforts while providing a new kind of sustainable job stability in some aspects. The corporate world has changed more in the past two years than in the past twenty years, as the Covid pandemic made people realize that they can work better and communicate freely in non-connected ways too (Kanakaraju, 2021). Though the pandemic situation might have presented operation and economic difficulties to companies or workers, it has taught people that freelancing, including telecommuting and remote working, operates and performs well, sometimes even better. According to a study by Edelman for Upwork (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has the double effect of pausing work for existing freelancers and prompting others to start freelancing. The newly joined freelancers also include millions of job losers from regular employment being left out during the pandemic crisis. This indicates that with the onset of the Covid-19 situation, the companies sought ways to reduce manpower costs and transaction fees. The opportunistic infant companies or the startups sought new growth model possibilities. The situation had created more room for freelancers to work with more diverse employers and for a wider variety of projects.

Upwork’s yearly report announced that many Americans freelanced amid the COVID-19, contributing \$1.2 trillion to the economy. This increase was fueled by an influx of younger, highly-skilled professionals seeking flexible alternatives to traditional employment. As more and more young professionals emerge and dominate the labor market, it creates new working cultures and atmospheres in employer-employee relations. Young workers now constitute the highest percentage of the global workforce and have a far-reaching effect on the worldwide labor market trends. Growing up in neoliberal settings, young workers are exposed to the various benefits of digital technology advancements, flexible employments, and diversification of in-school curriculums and out-of-school training opportunities, thereby displaying distinctive preferences/values toward employment and careers. As of 2019, the young workers makeup 61.5% of the global population (31.5% for the millennials and 32% for Z) and are expected to represent about 75% of the global workforce by 2025(Bloomberg, 2018; Mark, 2017). In the case of Korea, the proportion of millennials in the core productive population (people aged 25-49) is expected to increase explosively from 48.2% in 2017 to 83.2% in 2025(National Statistical Office, 2020).

Figure 9. Percentage of Millennials in Korean Company POSCO’s Workforce



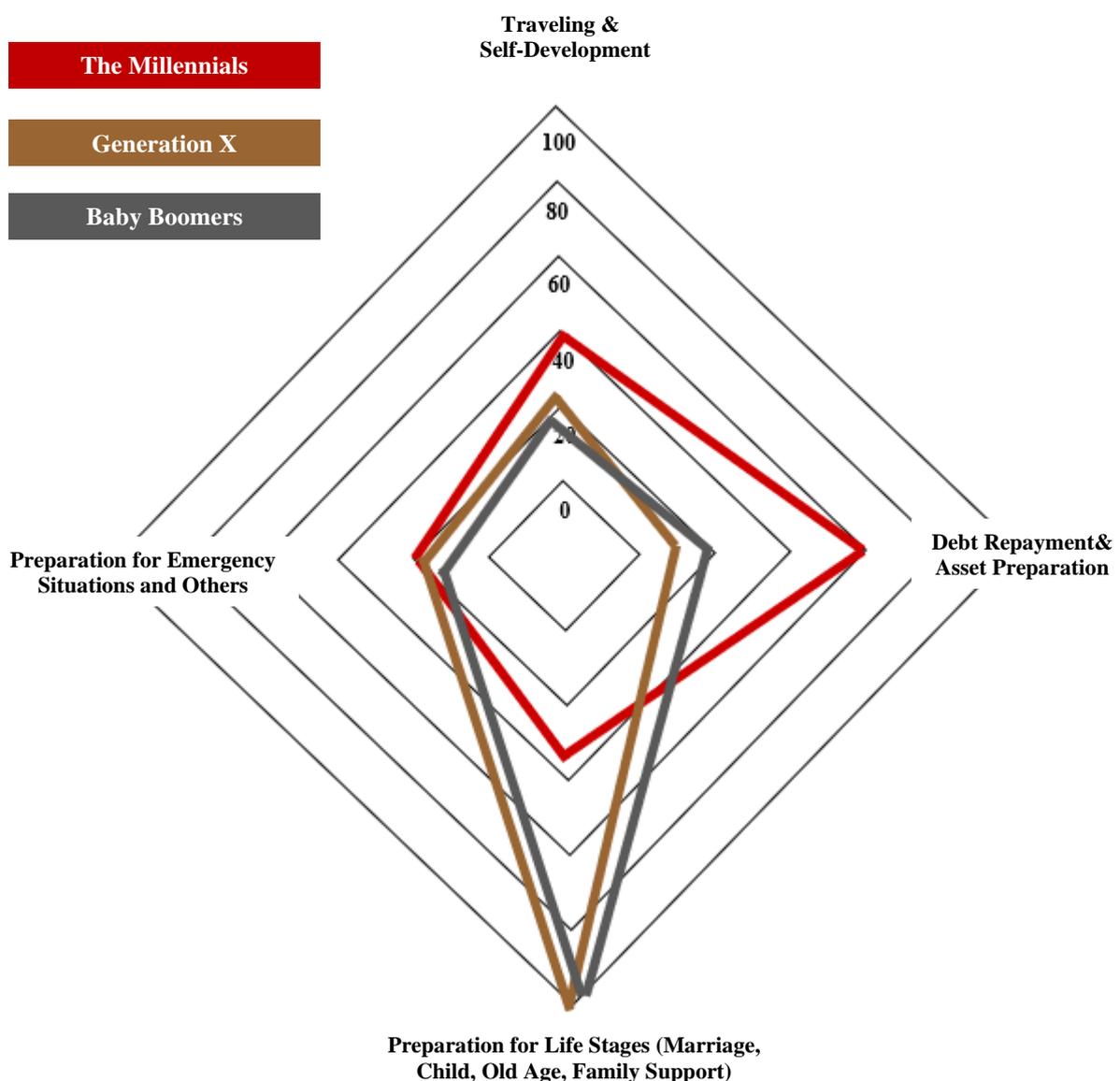
Unit: % , Data: Posco(2019)

For instance, POSCO, one of the largest manufacturing companies in Korea, showed that the percentage of millennials in its total workforce is expected to increase up to 60% by 2024, which is almost a doubled-percentage compared to that of 2014 (Figure 9). Therefore, what the young workers care for in their career development and value at their workplaces would matter how the companies should respond to their employees. Notably, my research showed that the young workers’ occupational values are influenced/inspired by various outside school opportunities, including internships, extra-curricular activities, overseas exchange, specialized corporate programs, and online communities. A dynamic environment has instilled young generations with flexible perspectives for careers, encouraging them to embrace diverse employment types and jobs, for some found to be the freelancers here. Their distinctive occupational values are also related to how different their life values have formed compared to

older generations (generation X and baby boomers). For instance, it was shown that their purpose of financial saving is different from that of the older generations (figure 10). They have relatively low levels of saving goals for life plan preparations, including marriage, childbirth, and old age preparations, while displaying high self-investment (self-development/training and traveling) and personal asset buildings (cars, housing, loans, and business funds). Interviewees for this research too commented that they generally feel satisfied with their salary if they can afford to pay for short-termed life plans that they are currently up to, such as travel, shopping, and studying abroad. Because they concentrate on self-standard/ self-satisfied matters, it is natural that salary is not their priority in selecting jobs. But instead, other conditional factors such as workload intensity, working hours (work-and-life balance), and work values would matter.

Figure 10. Purposes of Financial Savings by Generations

Source: Newsis,(2020), Data: Hana Research, KPMG



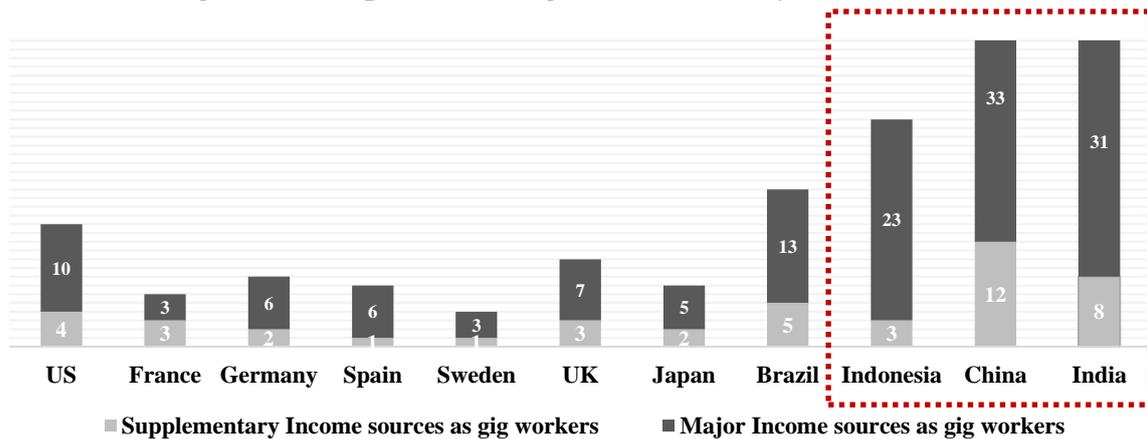
Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Digitalization in Labor Market - Industrial Structure Change

For more than two decades, the world's major economies have had to contend with labor displacement from automation, reducing the demand for workers in the manufacturing sector to digital technologies and innovations. This has brought an unprecedented level of changes in the industrial structure and labor market trends (Kwon, 2021). Particularly for young workers, their participation in freelancing careers has its roots in the powerful transformation in industrial structure with the surging waves of the 4th Industrial Revolution, from industry 1.0 to 4.0 — AI, Cyber-Physical Systems, advanced robots, IoT, Cloud Computing, and Economy. Within the context of 'Industry 4.0', work organization and work processes will continuously change, along with ongoing automation and real-time oriented control of production (Spottl and Windelband, 2021).

While the previous Industrial Revolutions moved much of the workforce from self-employment to structured payroll jobs, the recent digital revolution may be creating a shift in the opposite direction again (McKinsey 2016), with a massive tech-driven shift away from permanent office-based employment to independent free workers. More specifically, the penetration of the digital revolution in our society has led to the emergence of new demand and supply notions in the digital labor market, or in the so-called 'gig economy, the trend that work uses online platforms to find small jobs, sometimes completed immediately after request, essentially, on-demand (Balaram et al., 2017). While some may contend that the ascent of the gig economy is only a business prevailing fashion, there is no denying that there has been a significant increment in multiple kinds of independent works in the recent years (Ismail et al, 2019).

As shown in Figure 11, BCG and Future of Work (2018) revealed that the proportion of gig workers in the total working population marked above two digits in the major countries, including China (45%), India (39%), and Indonesia (26%), and they are to continuously increase in the future, fueled by the thrives of big technology companies. It is also suggested by PwC (2021) that up to a fifth, or 15~20%, of the workers in financial services could be gig economy employees by 2026, which is almost tripled from the current 5%, driven by continuous cost pressure and the need to access and secure digitally skilled talent pools.

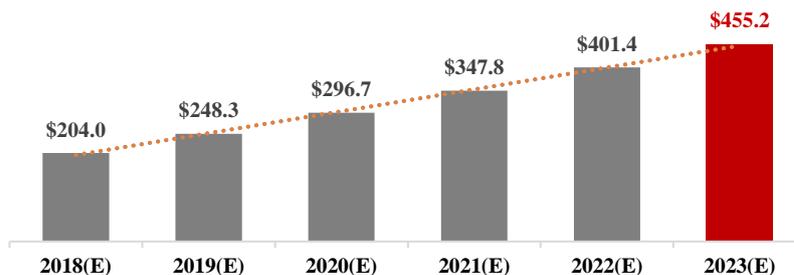
Figure 11. Proportion of Gig Workers in Major Countries



Source: BCG, Future of Work(2018), Unit: %

As Figure 12 shows, the outstanding performances of high-tech corporations and gig jobs are also found in the enormous amounts of gig transactions in recent years. Mastercard (2022) suggested that the global gig-economy transactions are now estimated to be around \$401 billion with a continuous increase since 2018 and are expected to grow by 17% a year to approximately \$455 billion by 2023 in Gross Volume transactions.

Figure 12. Projected Gross Volume of the Gig Economy (Billions USD)



Source: Mastercard. Data extracted from its report 'Gig Economy Outlook and Needs Assessment a growing Gig (2022)'

Studies on freelancers in South Korea indicate that the growing incidence of online freelance work is very much similar to the reasons found in advanced freelancing countries - the changes in industrial structure toward digitalization (Hwang et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2013). The influence of digital technology and services is penetrating Korean society, backed up by the developments of high-tech solid business models and participating young generations. According to a report published by Korea's labor ministry and Korea Employment Information

Service (2021), there are about 220,000 gig workers for online platforms, accounting for 8.5 percent (ages 15 to 69) of the country’s total employees.

Compared to the major gig economies such as the US and China, the Korean gig market is still in its infancy. However, it has surged more than 50% from a year ago, showing an astonishing speed of growth. Although accurate statistics on the size of the domestic gig economy have not yet been compiled, the Bank of Korea (2019) announced that Korea’s gig economy will have grown to the world's top within a few decades, as the country is one of the top technology elites and a giant e-commerce economy. In particular, the rising popularity of job match platforms for freelancers facilitates a fast growth of the domestic gig market. It is found that platform such as Soomgo (Figure 13-1), K-mong, and Class101, the three largest platforms for connecting freelancers and employers, saw their monthly net users (monthly activity user; MAU) increase by 30% to as much as 100% in 2020, comparing the rates to the same period last year. The number of transactions showed a similar level of increase too. K-mong (2022) recently revealed that its daily trading volume of services exceeded 100 million won in 2018 and its number of corporate clients doubled last year amid COVID-19, fueled by an increase in telecommuting and non-face-to-face work (Figure 13-2). Soomgo has also seen the number of quotes made by personal service providers surge up to 193.1 percent and 37.5 million cases last year (Pulse, 2021).

Figure 13-1. Soomgo’s Total Transaction Costs

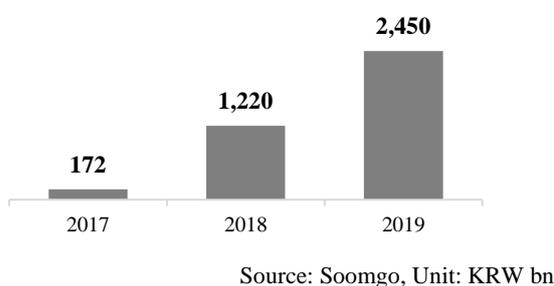
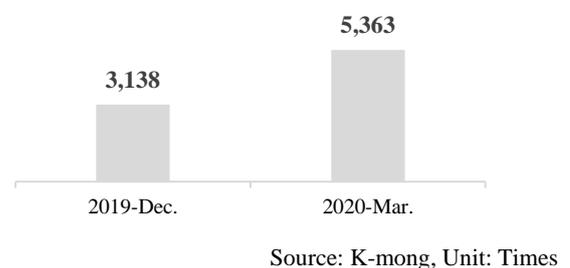


Figure 13-2. K-mong’s Total Numbers of Transactions



In recent days, the gig economy has attracted a tremendous number of workers and employers for its advantages of providing ubiquitous access to services/works in real-time, creating large-scale marketplaces for dozens of services, and lowering the transaction and administration costs near zero. Particularly, low marginal costs invite young people to the free workers’ realms since the entry barriers are low. Young workers also find gig careers attractive for their flexible working environment with a high level of control and autonomy that comes

with a high degree of freedom from short-term work durations and non-affiliated status. Not surprisingly, most gig workers were found to begin freelancing careers by their own voluntary choices rather than by necessity (72% of the US independent workers and 68% for EU-15 countries were voluntary freelancers; McKinsey, 2016). Also, these gig workers were reported to have high levels of job satisfaction compared to the traditional workers in general.

The advancement of digital platforms and services brings a transformative effect when applied to the labor market, which has significant ramifications for policymakers, companies, and individuals alike (McKinsey, 2016). In the gig economy, the availability of remote work, flexible conditions, and a real-time assignment have presented work opportunities with a considerably improved market environment for freelance-based transactions (OECD, 2016; Jang, 2016). As Kessler (2018), the editorial vice president at Quartz said, the rise of the gig economy has enabled people to graft their hobbies onto professionalism and talents, creating a blue ocean for special labors. In response, companies too pursue new transformations in organizational culture, working regimes and seek new business expansions through hiring new types of employments (Kartajaya et al., 2016). Companies eagerly seek young and talented professionals capable of fully utilizing novel digital tools and systems and generating profits. As a part of such efforts, firms hire more skilled freelancers to enhance their flexibility in responding to changes in market conditions with minimal costs and to respond to the transition progressively (Jang, 2016).

In this sense, digitalization also has affected the demand for and supply of skills in the employment market. New skills are needed for newly emerging jobs or tasks, whereas other skills will become less relevant as specific jobs and tasks experience decreased demands (Eurofound, 2021). In the digital era, young workers are continuously encouraged to develop soft employability skills and creativity and are required to have innovative mindsets to fulfill the companies' demands. Skills needs in the digital age relate not only to digital skills (such as being able to handle ICT or conduct data analytics) but also to occupational skills and transversal skills (such as creativity, decision-making, and social skills such as communication), with requirements driven by the digital transformation of job profiles and work organization (Eurofound).

Fortunately, the millennials are the first digitally native generation to grow up with the digital devices surrounding them. Therefore, these tech-savvies are more accustomed to communicating and working through virtual platforms featured with remoteness and broad

flexibility. They express and share their opinions through SNS, personal virtual space with customization and freedom of expression features. This led to the phenomenon that these young workers prefer to work with more autonomy, freedom, and flexibility, particularly in time and space. They desire a self-led and self-planned work environment. This translates into a rising phenomenon of young freelancers who are talented and competent but liberal and independent at the same time with wider choices in jobs and employment types. Accordingly, our society is seeing an increase in 'talented but liberal young professionals,' seeking greater freedom and autonomy to determine the allocation of work and leisure (Jang).

Meanwhile, criticisms point out that the tech-based industrialization has created a severe dichotomy between the higher-skilled and low-skilled routine workers and divided them into upstream soft-skilled and downstream heavy-skilled workers. As a result, our society is seeing uncompromising gaps and inequality not only between standard and non-standard but also within the non-standard employment arrangements. Our society is experiencing a hierarchical dichotomization that triggers a productivity-driven income structure and concentrated capital distribution. In particular, the digital skill gap is widening into the social and economic gaps, causing new polarization.

As Kessler (2018) states, "The gig economy has affected many people's lives. There were rich people, poor people, powerful people, and weak people. In addition, this was a life in which freedom, flexibility, and economic benefits were guaranteed for some, and for some, it was only a choice of bad faith about unemployment and job loss". This indicates the necessity of having appropriate social and institutional support for preventing and compromising skill gaps in the digital era by providing education and training support to working people inclusively. Such challenges related to the education and training opportunity deficits will be discussed in chapter 5. Subsequent chapters will cover how these talented but liberal freelancers carry out their work and maintain their status as productive and professional workers in the competitive labor market.

CHAPTER 3: WORK SECTION – PROGRESSION OF WORK FROM PROJECT LANDING TO CONTRACT

In this chapter, I summarize how freelancers progress their work from project searching and landing to contract signing. I first delve into how freelancers get a new project and land new jobs using two different channels - personal connections and online platforms. Next, I cover the process of employment contracts, mainly comparing the conditions between salary workers and freelancers in Korea. I conclude by highlighting the features of the employment contracts for freelancers – ‘flexibility’, ‘temporality’, and ‘diversity’. I cover how these features are translated and embraced by young freelancers. My ultimate aim for the interview is to figure out the reasons why young freelancers decided to voluntarily decouple from a stable life as salary workers, and whether, after the deviation, they actually became freer at work and in life.

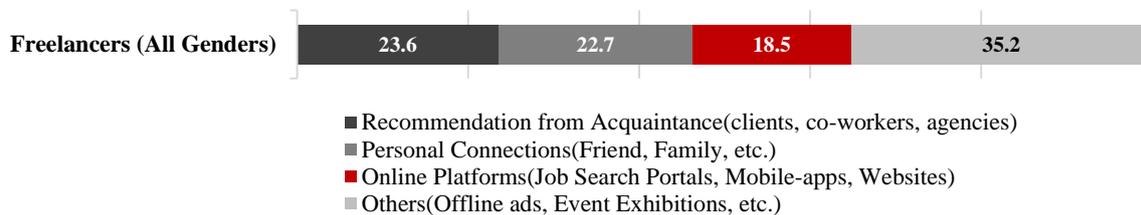
3-1. Selection of Work (Project Landing)

A selection of work is the first step to commencing a new project for freelancers. Because they do not belong to a particular affiliation or organization, they independently discover new project opportunities to sustain their lives. When the methods for finding new jobs/projects were limited to offline channels (e.g., recommendation from acquaintance, personal connections, offline events), freelancers relied on a few fixed ways and worked with regular clients. In recent years, however, freelancers work with many unspecified and random clients through different ways of approaches such as platforms, online communities, chat messengers, and social networks. As evidently shown in the exponential growth of job matching platforms and apps in Korea, online channels are attracting more users who want to get a job, meet new clients, and land to a project through them. Exposure to diverse channels has enabled freelancers to build more diverse portfolios and client database, which could be assets for self-branding and self-promotions. Then, who does usually use these online platforms for job searching? And what are the advantageous over traditional methods?

Kim and Park's (2021) research (Figure 14) on the method of getting new assignments by freelancers suggests that the most common way is through recommendations (23.6%) or personal connections (22.7%). This includes their connections at work (e.g., co-workers, former clients) and intimate relationships such as family, relatives, and friends. On the other hand, this research showed a relatively lower rate, 18.5%, in online platform usage. It could be implied that because the participants for the study were freelancers in all types of work (including self-employed, special labor workers, temporal workers, day labor workers, contract-based workers,

and professional freelancers¹⁴), their ways of finding jobs were rather traditional compared to the newly identified groups aggressively working online. They also carry out physical labor on-site (offline), raising the possibility of meeting new clients.

Figure 14. Methods of Getting New Assignments by Freelancers
(All types of freelancing works in both offline and online industries)



Data: Kim and Park (2021). Korea Labour & Society Institute.

My research, however, suggested that young generations rely on both offline (recommendations/introductions) and online (platforms, portals, websites, SNS), while they often combine the two and create a synergy effect. For instance, young freelancers use online channels such as social networks, blogs, public chatting, and communities to widen their networks and get job introductions by them. One of the interviewees, who now works as a game sound designer, shared multiple times of experiences of meeting potential clients through online game communities. Furthermore, young freelancers had a diverse experience of getting jobs online through attending job-related seminars/events (e.g., international job fair on Zoom, virtual job mentoring programs) or promoting themselves through YouTube videos or blogging. This indicates how digitalization has changed young people’s way of maintaining their jobs and developing their careers.

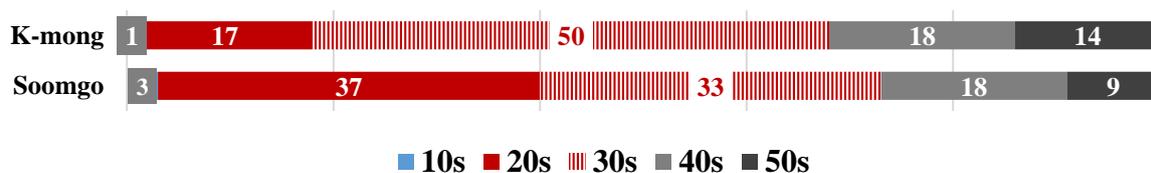
Though this research intentionally focused on freelancers active online, it was found that they do not necessarily have digital-related jobs or work on tasks that are 100% online-based. Some, such as designers, translators, instructors/educators, and marketers, still have duties that need to be carried out physically offline. However, they still heavily rely on online portals and platforms to promote and brand themselves, interact with new people, and widen their client database. They also obtain helpful information about market trends from portals. They were getting many new assignments signed online. The young workers who are the digital native

¹⁴All types of workers in this research refers to the following types of freelancers in Korean: 자영업자, 특수노동자, 임시직, 일용직, 계약기반직, 전문 프리랜서

generation regard online as the most comfortable and convenient means for job searching. The dominance of young workers in the platforms demonstrates their heavy reliance. According to a survey on the user age ratio of recruiting platforms in Korea (Figure 15), K-mong and Soomgo, it was shown that the users in the 20s and 30s account for the highest proportions predominantly. The ratio of the users in their 20s and 30s was 67% for K-mong and 70% for Soomgo. Their predominance in the platform market again reflects the vital characteristics of the 2030 generation, who actively use digital platforms to display their talents, interact, and develop their careers.

Figure 15. User Age Ratio of Recruiting Platforms in Korea

***Users in 20s and 30s: 67%(K-mong), 70%(Soomgo)**



Source: The Data Incubator (data collected from May-August 2021), Unit: %

Job Procurement through Connections: While each method for job procurement has its own merits and downsides, meeting new clients through connections is considered the most standard way among the older generations. Born and Witteloostujin (2013) have identified that building solid relations with agents and putting effort into building and maintaining a network significantly influences freelancer career success. Their research on testing the freelance career model suggested that the two most important social capital variables proved to be managing agencies and network activity. Compared to other approaches, many freelancers say that building networks increases the probability of finding good clients and leads to solid contract relationships (Jang, 2016).

Freelancers who physically work with skills prevalent in the traditional labor market, such as educators, painters, art performers, and physical trainers, say that they have a higher chance of getting a new task or contract resigned when their acquaintances introduce them to clients. Recently, these freelancers have taken advantage of online channels to widen offline connections, as there are various ways to meet clients through online communities, social networks, or online events such as career seminars. The interview results suggest that freelancers feel more secure and stable when they already have information about employers and vice versa

through connections. Further, freelance workers are more motivated and acknowledged and be treated nicely by their employers once they are introduced as skilled workers by their acquaintances.

“Last year, one of my regular clients recommended me to her former colleagues who work in another company, and naturally, I got to work with a new client. Since the beginning of the contract, the new client expressed deep trust and expectations by saying that they heard many good things about my work and talents. This made me feel strongly motivated to work harder. Most importantly, I did not want to lose two clients because I lacked skills/professionalism. The new client did not ask much about my portfolios during the interview and was already ready to sign up for the contract. It was much easier than the last interview I had through online applications. Employers seeking freelancers online are more defensive, conservative, and inquisitive because they are working with random applicants with no information. And the best part is, I got a new client without paying any cost.” - *Male, 34 / Freelance video content designer*

On the other hand, some interviewees pointed out the downside of job procurement through connections by mentioning that the approach has a too narrow and limited range of clients and work portfolios. To further build up various work experiences, young, ambitious freelancers have to seek new job opportunities in newly emerging channels online.

“I usually meet with new clients during work through an introduction/recommendation of my colleagues or clients. While I do not need much effort to get a new job this way, I regret that I did not work more on self-promotion through diverse channels. I recently applied for a position at a government institute and failed because my work experiences are limited to private companies, where most of my clients belong. I regret that I was laying myself back and did not make efforts in another way.”- *Female, 31/ Freelance Translator for seminars/parties/events.*

Job Procurement through Online/Platforms: As mentioned above, a substantial rise of job-seeking platforms/mobile apps has promoted the proliferation of online laborers and massive job opportunities in the freelancing market. For instance, Soomgo, one of Korea's largest and original platforms for on-demand freelancing jobs, has more than 700,000 registered freelancers from 700 fields, from simple cleaning and painting to data coding, video editing, psychological counseling, and instrument lessons, and so on. This suggests that in today's environment, freelancers who work in traditional labors(carried out on-site with physical labor offline) and emerging laborers heavily rely on online channels for job procurement. Particularly, the demands for non-face-to-face job searching/matching continuously rose since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. As of the third quarter of 2021, the number of prices offered to customers was 37.52 million, a 193.06% increase from last year's same period. Similarly, the

number of requests seeking freelancers at Talent Bank, a job matching platform, increased by 170% of the previous year's demands in the first half of 2021(Maeil Kyungjae, 2021).

I met a lot of interviewees with both experiences of finding jobs through connections (reached both on/offline) and platforms(online/apps). It was shown that young freelancers adept at online surfing strongly prefer the latter approach. Online channels raised diversity, time/cost efficiency, and accessibility of the workers. The combined package of these benefits has actively encouraged more people to try out new types of employment in recent years. In particular, my interview results showed that young gig workers desire to work in a bigger pool as large as the size of the expanding gig economy rather than linger within the traditional boundaries. Young freelancers were willing to take the risk of working with random and unknown clients out there because the benefits are more extensive and more diverse. They aim to experience various circumstances/conditions and achieve better opportunities for self-development, self-training, and self-branding. Also, building diverse experiences was considered an essential option to achieve long-termed career development and maintain their status as competent workers.

“In most cases, I find a new project by registering my CV or sending self-marketing emails/messages through platforms. I prefer to meet with clients from diverse backgrounds because these days, career diversity is very crucial for self-branding. If I were to compare, finding clients through connections is like playing at a swimming pool with many neighbors you already know, while using online platforms is like walking on a beach with an expectation that you will never know who you will meet. I prefer my career to be more like the latter. Particularly, the wide range of client databases would be an important asset for me because I wish to start my own business someday.” - Female, 23/freelance web graphic designer.

Furthermore, online platforms are advantageous for being fast and straightforward when signing new contracts. Although the intervals are on an irregular basis, this allows freelancers to get multiple contracts simultaneously and helps them maintain stable incomes within the amount they need for living. It was found that both the workers and the employers find it inefficient to spend a lot of time on contract per project because the work durations are extremely short and instant for most of the freelancing tasks. The point of working on short-termed tasks was to get them done without being attached to any complications. In particular, it was easy to shorten the procedures for contracts online because a variety of systems within the platforms could be considered as the beginning process to negotiate for contract (e.g., sending inquiries through app chats, adding clients to favorites, clicking the ‘resume submission’ button on the website, negotiating working conditions through messengers).

“When I first began this job, I sent DMs and emails to almost 200 pages. Two hundred pages sound a lot but sending them took less than two hours because the platforms had a list of clients, all of their contacts, and a ‘quick send’ button to send them my proposal with CV. Also, the conditions for each project are openly displayed on the website, which helped me sort out the positions that fit with preferences/standards. I can also link the online CVs to my public SNS account that has details about my career, so I do not need to spend extra time on creating and sending portfolios. Now I think, if the systems were not as simple as they are now, I might not even have tried to send them that much in the first place, and the outcomes would not have been this good.” - Female, 30 / freelance SNS marketers/Influencer for cosmetics.

“I have been getting new clients through a mobile app for the past four years. At first, I was concerned that the service might be poor compared to the user fees. But soon, I acknowledged the great advantages of time efficiency, real-time service, and various databases that the app provides. All I need to care about is how to negotiate with clients. Thanks to the high efficiency of the system, I can concentrate better on finding a client and working conditions that best fit with my standards.” – Male, 29 / Business Consultant (company branding advisor)

Moreover, getting jobs online is often considered a compact and straightforward process with more formality than getting introduced through families or friends. There are advantages that the workers could benefit from by working with clients who are not intimate or familiar. The close relationships could drag informality into the work processes and blur the boundaries between private and public matters. In contrast, these young freelancers are project-centered and outcome-oriented workers; thus, they prefer to have a clear-cut relationship with their employers to remove unnecessary inconveniences during the project.

“I feel very uncomfortable when some employers try to skip the formal process of signing a contract or negotiate the price orally. Some sent text messages asking whether the price could be adjusted at 9 pm to my mobile. This usually happened when I was introduced to the client through close connections in an informal way - through lunch and dinners or hangouts. It is also not easy for me to reject the suggestions when my connections are too intimate and personal.” - Male, 37/ Data Analyst

Among 29 freelancers I interviewed, 26 of them had experience landing a new job/project through both connections and online platforms. Three people did not get any introduction yet because they are relatively new in the freelancer realm. Both ways have pros and cons, while young freelancers are more used to contacting/communicating with their employers/clients online. They are more proficient at expressing and branding themselves online. They considered online searching a standard way to excavate new projects for simplicity, efficiency, and diversity. Job seeking opportunities through connections could be safer, easier, and more comfortable, but there are certain limits to sustainable career development and portfolio building. Especially when dealing with an occupation sensitive to market trends, young

people rely on online sources/channels to acquire information and know-how. As the limitations of traditional approaches could not fulfill the high standards of ambitious young freelancers, the future labor market is expected to see a continuous increase in job procurement trends through various platforms, communities, and apps.

3-2. Progression of Contracts (Contract signing)

After landing a new project, signing an employment contract is the next step to proceed. How freelancers get new projects through which channels affects how their employment agreements are carried out. Contracts are the most fundamental element of a good employment relationship for both the employer and the employee mainly because it is the only practical legal protection device that both can rely on if a problem occurs. Employment contract matters in every case.

Employment Contracts: An employment contract outlines an employer's and employee's rights, responsibilities, and obligations during a period of signed employment (LawDepot, 2022). Employment contracts are paid bilateral agreements agreed to provide labor/service between workers and employers, under the condition that the employees will be delivered/compensated. The compensation can be salary, company benefits, and welfare. However, these contracts are not usually made between entities/parties in equal positions. Historically speaking, a system of employment contracts was initially established to allow the subject of labor to be free from feudal status when civil revolutions took place in the 16th and 17th centuries of Europe (Kang, 2012). In a reality, however, the workers who had nothing but skills/labor were subordinated to the liberal system of contracts for economic reasons. Subordination was their way of survival. Still, in contemporary society, where the capital flow is based on the free exchange of goods and services between owners and users/customers, labor relations are not always equally formed between the two entities. Labor is often treated as a commodity/product, the commercialization of labor. The nature of labor contracts enforces constraints on the working regimes. Because these labor contracts have legal effects, it has to be clarified, well-defined, and sufficiently agreed upon between employer and employee.

Features of Salaried Work Contracts

I began by understanding how young workers embrace and translate their past working experience as salary workers under the standard contracts. The interview focused on comparing workers' experiences as two different employment types — salary workers and freelancers — under contrasting systems. A comparison would provide a better insight into understanding the reasons for their decoupling from the standard labor contract despite having a high level of stability and regularities.

The contracts for salary workers in Korea are standardized labor contracts strictly under the protection of national labor law. It is generally stipulated to clarify working regimes, conditions, and salaries. If arrangements are not properly followed, both the employer and employee are obligated to take full responsibility for the consequences. Standard labor contracts include clauses that provide obligations and protections to employers and workers. For instance, labor contracts that set working conditions that do not meet the standards prescribed by the laws are invalid for both entities (Article 20 of the Labor Standards Act). Also, for standard contract workers, if the working conditions are different from the stated conditions, the worker may claim compensation for damages caused by the violation. The contract may be canceled immediately (Article 23). On the contrary, the workers are not entitled to receive any compensation/wage/benefits if the specified working hours, locations, and duties are not carried out properly (Article 22). As suggested, both protections and constraints obviously coexist for employers and workers in standardized contracts.

Feature 1. Co-existence of Stability and Constraints: The standard employment contracts for salary workers are detailed and minutely determined by specific clauses. Structurally speaking, the terms intend to regulate the working conditions and regimes of the workers. At the same time, the terms and regulations raise stability, security, and regularity of both the employers and employees. However, the minutiae of the contract accompany constraints and rules applied to the workers, which sometimes could be unfair under the unequal nature of labor contracts. The standard contracts could be a seemingly fair trade based on the exchange between wages and labor. Still, the intended controls and constraints often lead to imbalances between the two contracted parties (Screpanti, 2008). Both Marxist and non-Marxist sociologists (e.g., Giddens, 1981) agree that general labor contracts in the hierarchical structure of capitalist society fundamentally lack balance because employers pay wages in return for the production of

labor, the amount of wage is decided by the employers, and consequently evaluate the surplus value produced by labor.

My examination suggests that the workers were often demotivated and depressed by the regulatory systems connoted in the contracts. While the workers are expected to benefit from a certain level of stableness and stability, excessive constraints have created an inflexible environment that triggered workers' complaints and a sense of deprivation. Particularly, the interviewees had an experience of feeling unfairly contracted when the amount of salary is fixed while the workloads are flexible and work intensity fluctuates. Interviewees with overtime work experiences pointed out that the unfairness within the standard employment contracts is rampant and severe. Salaried workers cannot leave the office earlier than the contract's designated hours, but they are often asked to stay longer. They are not allowed to work less than their mandated duties but are implicitly pressured to work more and harder. They are not allowed to deviate from the assigned work locations but are often forced to work outside the expected boundaries. Being disadvantageously treated, contracts for these workers have often been considered as means to justify mistreatments by their employers. In short, they suffered from the pains that come from the co-existence of high stability and constraints as salary workers.

“When my company had worked with Japanese clients, I was the only Japanese speaker in my team doing all the work of translations, going on business trips, and taking care of transactions. I did overtime work throughout the whole month. But the wage and compensation were the same, as specified in the contract. I began to doubt the necessity of working under a regular contract with a fixed pay system that lacks flexibility and disregards individuals' contributions. It made me feel unfairly treated. Initially, I agreed to the contract because I did not expect much overtime work. I was not okay with doing labor without compensation and thought it was unfair labor. Because I could not change the system or the contract, I chose to change my job.” – *Male, 31 / Freelance Computer Programmer, Former Sales Associate(full-time) at a Local Electronic Company*

Feature 2. Co-existence of steady work and humdrum existence: Over 90% of the interviewees agreed that the constraints in the contract have a duality of providing both comfort and tediousness in their work life. Prior salary workers suggested that while the contracts guarantee a steady routine, it leads to a humdrum work-life, giving them a sense of boredom and lethargy in many aspects. The guidelines/rules were all set, and they just needed to follow. The fixed contract has created a work environment where no one needs to take the lead or outstand. There was no need to think outside the box, and they were not even encouraged to do so. It was suggested that it is totally up to the workers' mindset on how to accept the double-sidedness,

while for those who chose to leave the salary-based organization, the tediousness at work was unbearable.

“Especially in a public institution where I worked for 4years, I rarely had overtime work and was able to leave my office on the dot. It was a very comfortable and stable work life because I could plan what to do after 6 pm. I had KalTae Life (means leaving the office at 6 pm sharp in Korean). But at the same time, there was no need to rush or make extra efforts because no matter how fast I completed the tasks, my working hours and monthly wages were set the same. My parents and I initially thought this could be an excellent lifetime job. 3years later, one day, I saw myself always waiting for the clock to point at 6 pm all day. I packed my stuff from 5:45, left the office at six sharp, and the next day the same routine was repeated. I was not too fond of the way I was becoming. At some point, I felt like I was in the double-edged safety net that gives you both safety and lethargy. Later on, when I realized that I had to physically be in the office no matter how much work I had, I felt regulated in the office. But I never asked for any alteration and was not allowed to do so because that was not what I signed up for. I had no choice but to quit and change my job.” - *Male, 38 / Freelancer Radio News DJ, Online Translator, and Speech Instructor (Three job holder), Former Researcher at Governmental Agency*

In summary, the contracts for salary workers are very detailed and determined. While salary workers have stabilized careers, the fixed conditions were regulatory and did not align well with the flexible values of the young people. Although standardized law enforcement has created a safety net for the well-being of the workers, young freelancers choose to be free workers without such protections. Ironically, our society is experiencing a paradoxical phenomenon of people deviating from the safety net and choosing to be independent agents. Why is this happening? Some might have chosen to be a freelancer because such a safety net was not what they wished for. Maybe for some, the safety net deteriorated into a stifling room with fetters. Then, how are contracts for freelancers differ from those of the salary workers? How do the freelancers translate and accept such differences in contracts?

3-3. Features of Freelancing Contracts

How young freelancers digest and embrace the features of freelancing contrast reveals how their priorities at work have changed. It suggests why young freelancers are showing high levels of job satisfaction despite their suffering from instability and uncertainty in the nature of freelancing contracts. As a starting point, it is essential to acknowledge that the labor contract system for freelancers is very different from that of salaried workers in Korea. From a legal point of view, freelancers are not categorized as ‘worker/labor’ under the Employment and Labor Act

in Korea. This means there is no legal labor protection for them. The employers, usually the business operators, are not obligated to sign a labor contract with the freelancers. Although they do so, there is no standardized format guided by the law (Park, 2011; Park, 2021). So, their working regimes and wage systems are dynamic and are applied to various laws differently. Despite legal deficiencies, employment contracts are equally crucial to freelancers or even more significant in some aspects. I found it interesting and ironic at the same time that contracts could be a more critical means to freelancers than to salary workers, as a new contract is what makes their salary. A new contract leads to production and outcomes. It is a means of survival. In this sense, they have to continuously get contracts signed, continue their job, and sustain their living throughout the year (Kim, 2019). Freelancers must ensure that the contracts are adequately written and collectively agreed upon.

Feature 1. Liberal Flexibility

My examination presents that liberal flexibility is the most significant merit of freelancing contracts for young workers. Its flexible attributes have granted them higher freedom of choice and independence not only to the employers but also to employees. It was found that young freelancers regard the volatility of the contract as a positive factor that allows them to freely display their preferences and standards at work, not just to follow what is decided by the company. Though they know that its flexibility indispensably brings instability/irregularity to their work life, freelancers still highly value freedom. Flexibility on the contract lets the freelancers decide when to work, where to work, and how much to work. It has also offered them a sense of stability by granting them a more vital ability to self-control in setting their work style and planning their career paths. As mentioned in chapter 2, young freelancers who grew up in neoliberal settings are firmly eager to design their careers to protect their priorities and core work values. Therefore, liberal flexibility in the contract is recognized as room for making positive changes in their work life.

Flexibility in priorities: "When I was a full-time associate for a local electronic company, my working hours and location were always designated, and so were my duties. My payment was fixed. After a few years, I naturally tended to think and act rigidly. I was overly obedient and dependent on the regulated conditions. As a freelancer now, I have complete control over my work, allowing me to plan my life with more substantial ownership. Under a flexible environment, I can think more creatively and innovatively and come up with more original outcomes. It raises productivity and performance by encouraging me to take a lead on trying new things." - Male, 32/ Freelance Electronic Device Developer and Researcher

Flexibility in workload: "The biggest benefit of life as a freelancer is that I can take advantage of flexible workload control. It is very different from my life as a salaried man when I had to undertake all of the given tasks no matter how much or how diverse, regardless of my situation. The company unilaterally commanded the workloads, and I was treated as disposable labor without a voice. Now, my work-life is more stable as I can decide how much to work. I feel assured that I can continue this job even when I am older, get married, or get sick. I feel relieved that I do not have to worry about me not being able to manage an unpredictable number of duties/tasks when something changes in my life." – *Male, 28 / Freelance Speech Instructor and English Tutor*

Flexibility in working hours/space: "I am a night owl, so I prefer to wake up late, spend an easygoing morning, and do my work at nighttime. I can concentrate better, perform better and think better. But when I worked as a salaried man, my daily schedule was always adjusted to the company's schedule and for the good of the team. I felt like 5 days of weekdays were all about work, and my personal life did not exist. But now, my schedules are all about me. My working hours are adjusted to support my preferences and encourage me to do what I love. This good balance gives me a belief that I can plan my life in more diverse ways (e.g., relocation to other cities, study abroad, graduate schools) – *Female, 21 / Make-up Artist, Beauty Consultant, and Part-time Instructor for Beauty Products*

It was also found that young freelancers are motivated for self-discipline and self-development within the flexible contract environment. The freelancing industry is strictly merit-based, outcome-aimed, and a productivity-driven journey. Nothing is guaranteed. The quality of the outcome is immediately evaluated. Therefore, the instability contained in the flexible contract has created a performance-driven environment that encourages workers to continuously develop their skills and talents and survive. This contrasts with their experience of working stably as a salaried man, in which they felt tediously bored and lethargic. Because they wanted to deviate from their humdrum lives, the young freelancers accepted/embraced flexibility as a strong motivator and enjoyed the risks. They always want to achieve more and produce better. As most young freelancers have long-term career plans to maintain their careers, they are satisfied with an environment that promotes competition and training.

I met Chang (Female, 28), a freelance SNS marketer and influencer. She prefers to work in a project-oriented environment and is willing to take risks if she can achieve better outcomes. She commented that the changeable nature of the freelancing contract motivates her to perform better and be independent. For example, she recently started to upload marketing posts in English because one of my regular clients offered her a higher wage, almost doubled, for foreign-language postings. Now, she is also thinking of learning basic Japanese for a new posting. She compared it with her experiences as a regular salaried employee.

“In some ways, I feel so accomplished and motivated that this industry has a flexible contract that allows a negotiable wage system. My salary was always fixed in my former company, so I did not feel much motivation to try something new. I felt demotivated whenever I was asked to try something new because I would get the same payment amount anyways. Who wants to work more and get the same pay? I had a zero motivation. In the freelancing realm, my labor is my wage. There is no free rider in this industry, which I like about it. The contract rewards you as much as you have worked. I am more recognized and appreciated for the outcome I have performed. This makes me be more inquisitive about new projects and learn something new too”.

Chang introduced me to her shared office workmate, Park, who works as a freelance novel translator and interpreter for international seminars and events. Likewise, Park has continuously developed her professionalism and program skills since she began working independently.

“I totally agree that you can never be a free rider in this industry. Most of the contracts are one-time based for freelancers, and the next contract is not guaranteed. Everything is irregular and unfixed. Employers have stricter standards in evaluating my work every time they are done. It is very different from the life of salaried workers whose contracts are sustained without termination unless there is an exceptional circumstance. I did not care this much about the quality of the job as they were not really related to my employment status in the way they are now. As a freelancer, I can see myself developing and progressing day by day as I work with new clients for a new project.”

Table 6. A Comparison of Contract Conditions (Salaried vs. Freelancers in Korea)

Conditions		Salary Workers	Freelancers
Employment Conditions	Type of Employment	Standard employment	Non-standard employment
	Legal Validity	Yes	None
Contract Conditions	Modes of Contact*	Fixed Format (Written document, officially sealed)	Unfixed Format - Diverse (written, online, oral, messages, texts...)
	Extensions of Contract	Fixed status (Extension/Negotiation for every 1 year)	No extension or Re-contracted (upon the completion of each project)
	Contract Terms	Fixed status (Long-term based)	Temporal status (Short-term based)
	Standardization	Yes	None
Work Conditions	Work Constraints	Yes or high	None or low
	Work Hours	Fixed / Not flexible	Flexible
	Work Location	Fixed / Not flexible (Designated common workspace)	Unfixed / Flexible (Designated workspace ordered by temporal employer or free location - home, cafes)
Payments/Wages	Payment Intervals	Fixed	Unfixed / Flexible

		(monthly wage, annual salary)	(payment upon the completion of project)
	Payment Amount	Fixed (Prior-determination through contract)	Unfixed / Flexible (Prior/Post-determination by workload and hours)
	Payment Raise	Possible with High Possibility	Not Possible or Low Possibility
Benefits	Insurances	Included (medical insurances, employment insurances, health insurances, industrial accident compensation insurance)	Not Included
	Severance Pay/ National Pensions	Included	Not Included
	Employee Benefits	Included (meal breaks, social security, perks and bonuses, pay raise, health check-ups)	Not Included
Holidays/ Vacations	Number of Holidays	Included and Fixed	Not Included
	Paid Vacations	Included	Not Included
Work-related (Projects)	Duties/Tasks	Not specified with details	Specified for contracted project
	Project Due Date	Not Included	Included

Source: A summary of multiple sources combined by the author

Feature 2. Temporality (short-termed contracts)

My research result suggests that freelancers find the ‘temporality’ of the contracts as another great advantage of freelancing. Because the duration of contract agreement is short, usually one time-based or short project-based, they could maintain short-termed working status with the employers. Despite the possibilities for unstable work environments, freelancers prefer more temporary contracts than long-term ones. This is because they are often required to abandon certain levels of freedom and independence in both work and life during contracts. Young freelancers showed a strong tendency toward short-term assignments to maintain their liberal status as free and independent workers. They were confident that being freer was what they aimed for when they left their companies. Moreover, as they tend to work more on short-term assignments, the more the industry changes into a temporal labor market too. As time goes by, temporality has become one of the representative natures of the freelancing market these days.

Most of the freelances interviewees showed a strong preference to work in an environment with as few constraints as possible. "Freedom and flexibility are what freelancing

is about. I chose this job not to be affiliated with a certain organization. Once I complete an assignment, I am done for the day or week!". They stressed that it is not about finding a more accessible and comfortable way to work with a lighter work responsibility. What they pursue in their career is a guaranteed work environment with flexibility and freedom, which grants them a higher level of independence and ownership. However, long-term projects or contracts often deter their willingness to do so. They are frequently asked to be overly engaged in the jobs, even to the range that is outside of their responsibilities. They are also expected to show a more profound commitment when bound by contracts with longer durations. It was also suggested that freelancers are motivated to work harder under short-term contracts because the wages are given in short intervals, right after the completion of the project. Their performances were evaluated immediately. In contrast, long-term freelancing jobs could be relatively demotivating since the intervals for payment are longer, as the workers have to wait until the whole project is finished. It takes a longer time for the project's outcome to come out.

Meanwhile, a report by Kim and Park (2021, p9) has presented a surprising fact that the average total working hours per week for freelancers is higher than that of the average total for the economically active population. While the average total working hours for freelancers have gradually decreased since 2004, they are still higher than the average working hours of all employed (44.8 hours). This made me question 'how the freelancers working with one-time/project-based contracts could show a higher number of working hours than the average population, including the full-time salaried workers. My examination has found that just because young freelancers work on short-term labors/services does not indicate that they work less than others. In contrast to the stereotype that freelancers work freely and in a relaxed manner, most young freelancers were found to be highly passionate about implementing as many projects as possible and raising higher productivity. They desire to earn a higher salary and build broader work experiences in the given settings. A temporality of contracts could create time gaps between one contract and the other but freelancers actively constantly find new job opportunities. Most freelancers work on multiple projects with different clients simultaneously and look for the next project to undertake consecutively. The duplication of numerous projects is consecutively-connected and takes place in non-stopped series. This indicates that their intentions for freelancing were not to be physically free workers but to work in a freer environment where they can display psychological flexibility and openly present their preferred way of work and values.

Recently, platforms and mobile apps have enabled the system for minutes-based contracts in real-time. Their contract period can be from when the workers immediately accept the service request to when the provision of service is completed (Park, 2021). Or, it can be a few minutes, an hour, a half-day to a few days. With the strong rise of the gig economy, the instantaneous nature of gig jobs has enabled young workers to simultaneously work on a number of projects with high efficiency and in a time-saving manners.

Out of 29 interviewees participated in this research, only six responded that their contracts are long-term based (e.g., quarterly, or yearly-based), while the rest of 23 people usually work on short-termed projects (e.g., one-time, or week-based, month-based jobs). They sign a new contract every time they began a project. It was revealed from the research that there could be two big reasons to explain why the freelancing contracts are becoming more temporal and short-term based these days. The first reason is due to the nature of the labor type. Most of the jobs done by short-term contracts were tasks that were externalized by companies for their simplicity or lower demands. It did not necessarily require a long-term labor contract. It was tasks and duties that could sufficiently be done within a day or a week. Therefore, both the employers and the workers prefer to have shorter contracts for efficiency, convenience, and cost-savings reasons. The second reason was related to the overflow of freelance labor in some industries. These days, companies have too many options for alternative workers who can replace the jobs the freelancers provide. Therefore, there is no need for employers to sign up for a long period of contract with a single freelancer than necessary.

It was found that the Covid-19 experience has encouraged people to prefer more on short-term-based jobs to secure income stability under special circumstances. For instance, twenty-nine-year-old conference planner Song JY worked as a freelance wedding planner for two years and recently has shifted to a one-day-based conference planner. The biggest reason for the shift was the long duration of service and contract that she had to follow. Due to the peculiarity of the wedding event, once she signed a contract with a client, the preparation period was almost 10months to a year until the wedding took place. Often, she was not free to go on a long vacation or take a day off during the peak seasons. She also had to wait for almost a year to be paid, and recently when the covid-19 pandemic reached a peak in Korea, 70% of the contracted weddings were delayed, and so did her payments. “I had to worry about my credit card bills and rent because there was no cash coming in for almost two months.” Now, she works

for a day-long conference with six weeks of preparation periods. She feels less stressed and financially unstable.

“I really like that I get to receive my salary per project. I definitely feel motivated because I can instantly see the performance and outcome of my efforts. Also, my salary is far more stable than you can expect because I work with multiple employers. I sign two contracts per week and receive 2~3 payments per week. It is a rotation of new contracts going round and round as long as I keep my content of high quality and professionalism. When I go for a vacation during the summer, I can simply delay signing new contracts and flexibly come back when I want to.” - *Female, 25 / Colored cosmetics marketer for online blogs and cafes.*

“The fact that I can re-choose the conditions of the contract after one project is done gives me a sense of safety in some sense. The temporality of the freelancing contracts has offered me a chance to organize and choose a working environment that I prefer.” - *Female, 35/ Freelance Product Designer.*

Freelancers did acknowledge that the short-termed contracts give them uncertainty and instability to some extent. They also pointed out that the rampancy of one-time contracts triggers a negative image of freelancers as disposable and low-qualified labor. However, the young freelancers were more focused on the advantages of temporal contracts, as it granted them an unprecedented level of freedom and flexibility at work. As they intended to be freelancers with no complicated strings attached, they prefer to keep their priorities.

Feature 3. Diversity

Interviewees with young freelancers suggest that freelancers vary in organizing tasks, securing and handling clients, compensation methods, degree of autonomy, and whether freelancing is a primary or second job (Jang, 2016). Therefore, freelancers in different work settings might act quite differently (Kitching and Smallbone, 2012). Diversity is a significant feature of a freelancing contract that recognizes the underlying diversities within the nature of freelancing jobs. In reality, not all freelancers work in the same manner and conditions. Not all of them have the same preferences for work life. This suggests that society needs to recognize that freelancing activity is not a singular concept that deviates from standard employment. In this sense, there is a necessity to take a subdivided approach to learn how diverse they are and the way young freelance workers embrace such diversities.

a. Diversities in the working conditions: In contrast to the free and liberal image, it has been confirmed that not all freelancers are entirely free at work. Some freelancers were found

to work with heavy constraints for time and space, some with partial constraints on venue or time, while the others had no constraints at all. Therefore, physical freedom varies depending on whether a labor/service can be done in a 100% remote way, in a hybrid form of remote and non-remote (in-person), or 100% non-remote (in-person) ways. The interview results presented that freelancers with a certain level of constraints had occupations that have been already existing in a job market as full-time employment but recently have emerged in freelancing industries, usually with shorter working hours. However, since there are no changes in the way work and labor are carried out, the workers are still required to be present in the workplace during designated working hours. Many interviewees commented that unless the mode of labor dramatically changes through technology development or new skill adoption, a certain level of work constraints will inevitably exist for a particular group of freelancers.

Contracted for partial constraints for venue and time (a hybrid of office and online work)

“My company has hired me as a freelance translator because they do not need a full-timer for translation throughout the year. They only need someone to assist during the peak seasons. During the project, I am required to work at an office for 1.5 days mostly to attend meetings and share the progress with the clients, and I do the actual work of translating at home independently for the rest of the days online.” – *Female, 21 / Translator and Interpreter, Language Instructor*

Contracted for a full level of constraints on time and venue

"As a freelance math teacher, I never move to other locations other than classrooms at the academy. It is mandatory to be present in class and meet with students physically. So, there is zero flexibility when working as a freelancer belonging to a certain organization with restrictions. However, compared to the regular employee in the office, freelance teachers get to choose and adjust working hours at the beginning of every semester, or can take a long break, up to six months, if we would like to do so." – *Female, 29 / Math Teacher*

Diversification in the freelancing industry is facilitated as many young freelancers seek more ways to customize their careers based on their preferences/standards. Such diversification is further encouraged by diversification in life options such as marriage, relocation, study abroad, and traveling. For young freelancers, their career life is a way to manifest a solid economic and mental independence and is often considered a strong way of showing a self-actualized life (Cho, 2021). As elaborated in chapter 2 of this paper, freelancers in the millennial and generation Z are more confident in expressing their opinions. They are eager to design their life as they wish to. This applies to both their careers and daily life. Therefore, these workers are strongly eager to design their careers in the exact direction they plan, thereby leading to more diversified forms of work with personal reasons and goals behind them.

“I plan to start my own business within five years when I am 35. As a full-timer, it was almost impossible to have a plan B in my life. My work life was regulated, and I was mandated to follow the rules under the system of an employment contract. However, I strongly believed that everyone needs to start their own business someday, whether small or big, and I wanted to make it by the mid-30s. That is my plan and dream. I am now working as a freelancer in two different jobs. But even with two jobs, I can prepare for my plans without a big problem because I have the control to adjust the conditions under this freelance contract. I feel more planned and secured.”
– *Female, 28 / Freelance designer and art teacher*

I also met with Choi (Male, 25), who currently works as a freelance online PR officer with multiple agencies in Seoul. He also works as a freelance market researcher for an international organization based in Geneva. He said he had a life goal to work with foreign colleagues under a global working system. Though it is online, this freelancing job gave him a chance to do so without relocating overseas.

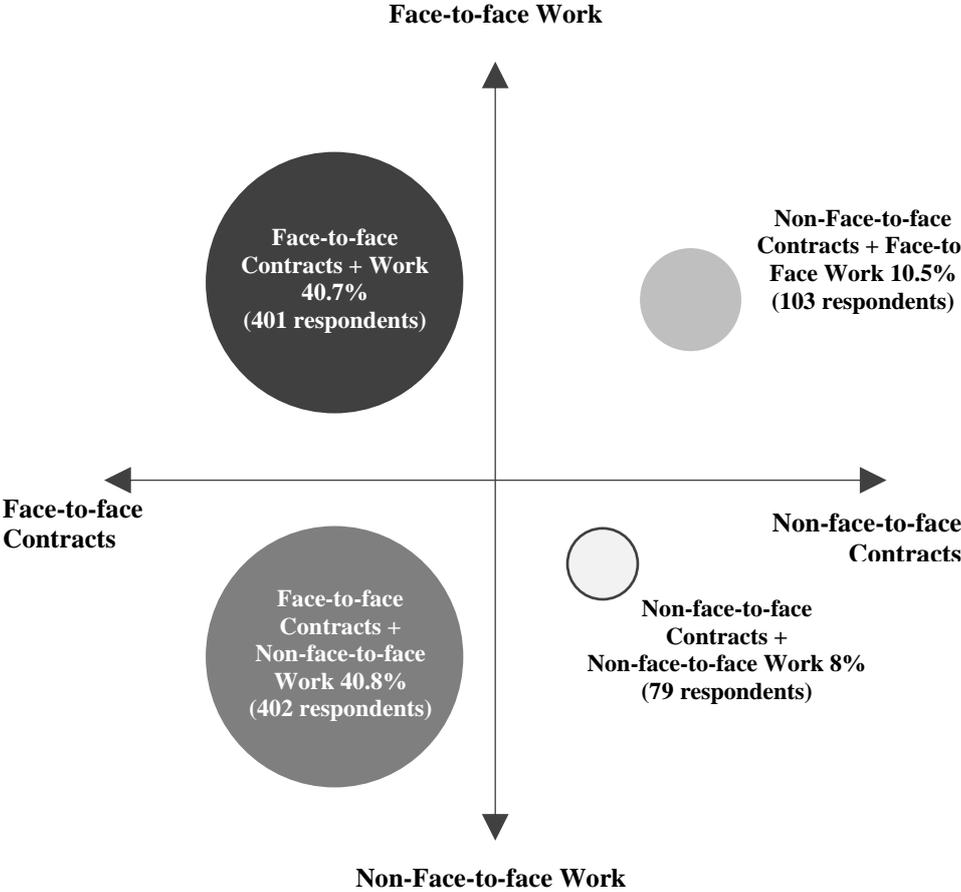
“I wanted to work for foreign companies with people from diverse backgrounds. But I wanted to find such a job without relocating overseas yet. My current job as an online market researcher is based in Geneva but I am allowed to physically stay in Seoul. I am grateful that the prevalence of online freelancing careers has enabled me to work in an unprecedented manner. I am grateful that I have reached one of my career goals.”

b. Diversity in the methods of contracts: Diversity of contracts exists in the way the contracts are signed too. The interview result suggests three different ways of contracts being signed - whether it is in a 100% face-to-face manner, a hybrid of face-to-face and non-face-to-face, or a 100% non-face-to-face way (Figure 15) For most freelancers, 81.5% had signed contracts through direct offline meetings(face-to-face) arranged through agencies, associations, and personal networks. On the other hand, 18.5% had signed through indirect ways (non-face-to-face) using job portals, mobile apps, and others. The methods of contracts are also related to how works are implemented. Among the 81.5% of respondents, half of them work face-to-face, while the other half work non-face-to-face. Those who work remotely usually work at personal offices, homes, shared offices, and cafes. The non-face-to-face job holders are online-based workers (gig workers) who get jobs, work online and get paid online. In some cases, online workers had initially signed contracts through face-to-face meetings, but once the one-time-based contract was repeated several times with the same employer, they changed it into non-face-to-face ways for convenience.

Among 29 interviewees in this research, it was found that 21 work through online channels (15 work online-only, and 6 work in a hybrid offline and online). Among the 21 online

workers, 20 of them had experience signing contracts through indirect methods, including websites, email, text messages, messenger chats, or oral. Many jobs carried out through online channels are prone to indirect contracts because the whole work process is designed to proceed through online systems such as using online signature systems and mobile agreements. In some cases, employers were based on online platforms, without having an offline space for offices.

Figure 15. Methods of Contracts and Means of Work (respondents: 985)

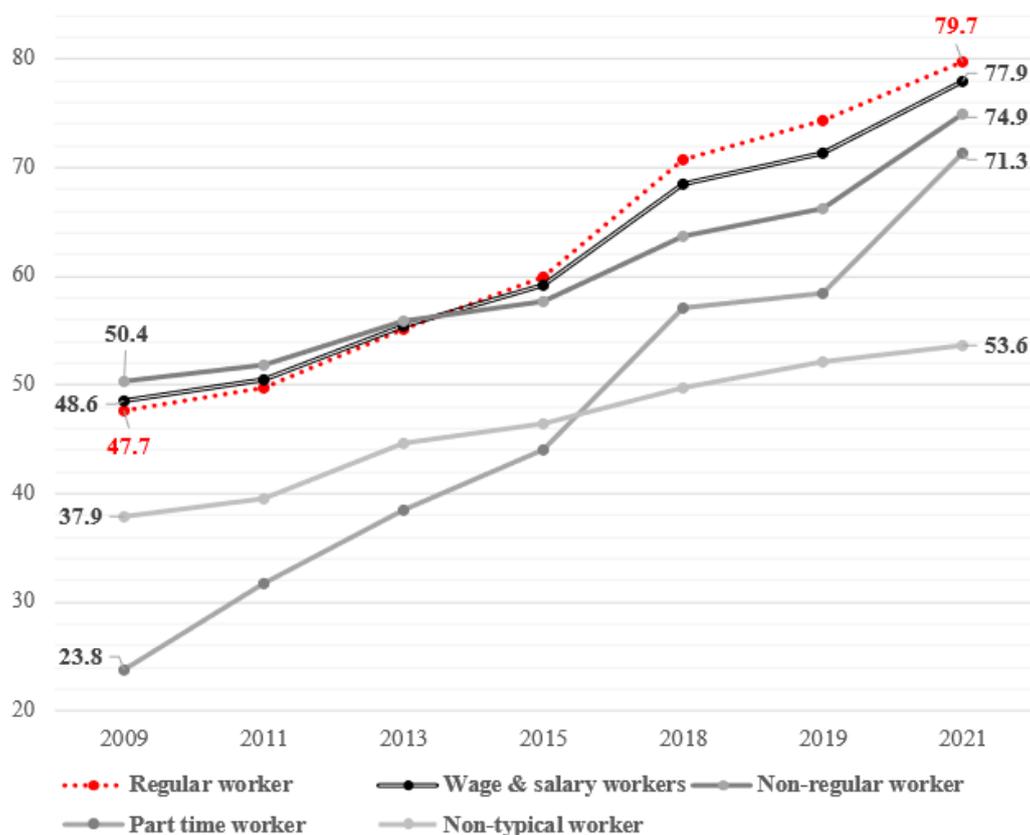


*Source: This graph is a translation of a graph originated from an issue brief by Kim and Park (2021)

The data by Statistics Korea (Figure 16) also shows that the percentage of labor contracts made in writing differs by employment type. Regular workers have shown the highest rate of 79.7% in 2021, followed by wages & salary workers (77.9%), non-regular workers (74.9%), part-time workers (71.3%), and non-typical workers (53.6%). Although the rates of signing written contracts for non-standard employment have continuously increased for the past several years, its average is still lower than that of regular workers.

During the interview, a majority of the freelancers commented that because the unofficial and informal atmosphere has been deeply entrenched within the freelancing realm, particularly with the overflow of online job opportunities, the employers might find shorter and easier ways to simplify the methods of contract and negotiation processes. This might trigger unreasonable situations or inappropriate contract conditions in some cases. This includes an informal format of contracts that do not fall under the category of law protections, a complete absence of an agreement, or a worsening of working conditions in the long term.

Figure 16. Percentage of Labor Contracts made in writing by Employment Types

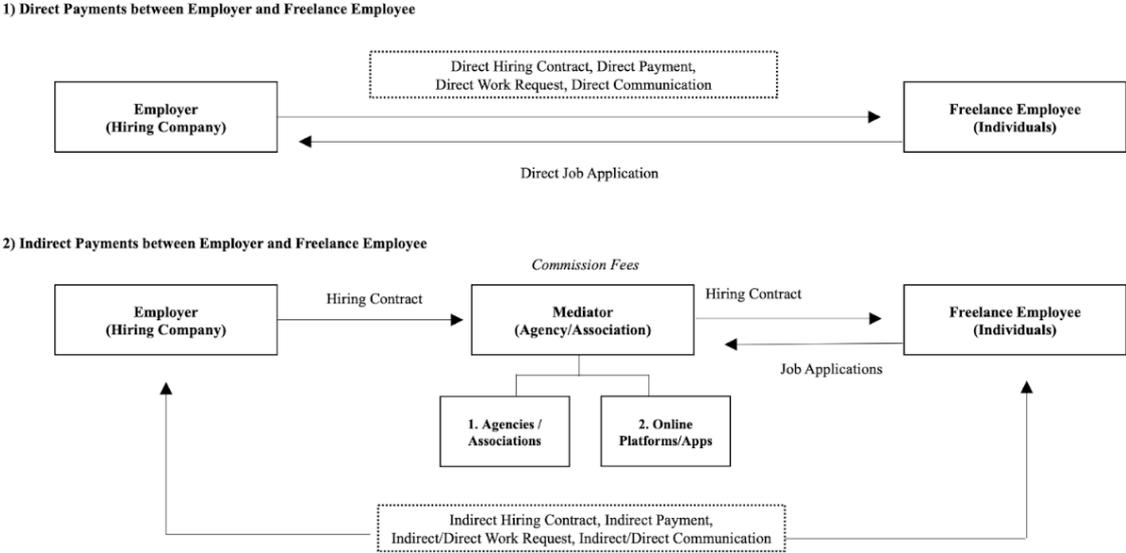


Source: National Statistics Office

c. Diversities in the modes/methods of payment: The modes/methods of payment also differ among different types of freelancers’ contracts. There are typically two different payment modes; the one is to be paid directly from the hiring company to the freelance employees. The other is to have a mediating connector, mostly agencies or associations, between the hiring company and the hired freelancer. The role of the agencies or associations is to provide an employment system (selection of workers, advertisement of hiring, management of applicants’

database, coordination of interviews, and contract procedures) for companies seeking freelancers with commission fees paid. When freelancers land a new project through middle agencies, the total wage gets reduced as the commission fees are a certain percentage of total payments given to the freelance workers from the companies. Recently, the strong growth of job matching platforms is replacing the roles of middle mediators by reducing the transaction costs for the workers. Interviews have suggested that such mediator systems are used more by freelancers based on one-time project workers or those with shorter contracts. Despite the costs, the mediators provide the convenience of removing time-consuming processes for self-advertising and self-PR for freelancers who continuously have to seek new projects. It also offers a systematic application/employment process with more guaranteed job opportunities.

Figure 17. Diverse Modes of Payment for Freelancers



The great diversity of working conditions in the contract suggests that it is more challenging to develop singular standards that are feasible and efficient for freelancers’ contracts. Vice versa, it also indicates that the lack of standardization has left too much space for diversity, and sometimes the diversity deteriorates into an entwined system without appropriate social measures and legal protections. The challenges of non-standardization in the freelancing industry will be dealt with in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4: VALUE SECTION: THE STANDARDS/VALUES OF GOOD OCCUPATIONS

This chapter illuminates the changes in the standards/values of good jobs appearing among young Korean freelancers. The standards are divided into conditional and emotional aspects expressed by the interviewees. For conditional aspects, respondents mainly compared their prior experiences as salary workers with constraints in the length of service (retirements) to their current freelancing status without any fixation on retirements. In the case of emotional aspects, freelancers stated the advantages of a freelancing career that endows a high degree of ownership, leadership and psychological freedom at work. It was shown that the conditional and the emotional aspects are intimately intertwined with each other. Furthermore, young freelancers focus more on the emotional consequences derived from the conditional factors of the workplace. The analysis aims to grasp what core work values the young freelancers have, what emotional/cognitive standards they desire, and what makes young people prefer to linger as freelancers in career choices.

4-1. Standards of Good Jobs - Conditional

Firstly, the most noticeable identity commonly appeared among young freelancers was the distinctive standards of good jobs in conditional contexts. The conditional elements of employment include factors such as employment status (contract types) (e.g., temporary, part-time work, self-employed/employee, formal/informal sector), wages/incomes (average wages, wage inequality and wage-related underemployment) and benefits, working time (longer, unhealthier and irregular working time, and time-related underemployment, and work intensity/

‘Lifetime Jobs’ over ‘Contracted Employment’

While the definition of ‘security’ differs by the kind of values that the individuals pursue, job security is a priority in choosing jobs for all. The research result showed that for young freelancers in Korea, job security does not simply refer to structural stability contained in the terms/clauses of contracts or the safeness of job preservations provided by a single company. Rather, young freelancers pursue job security that provides an environment where they can work stably, independently, and freely for a longer period than the regular employment contract commonly refers to. Their definition of job security required a higher level of sustainability. They also desire to be in a stable condition where they can exhibit their skills/talents and be

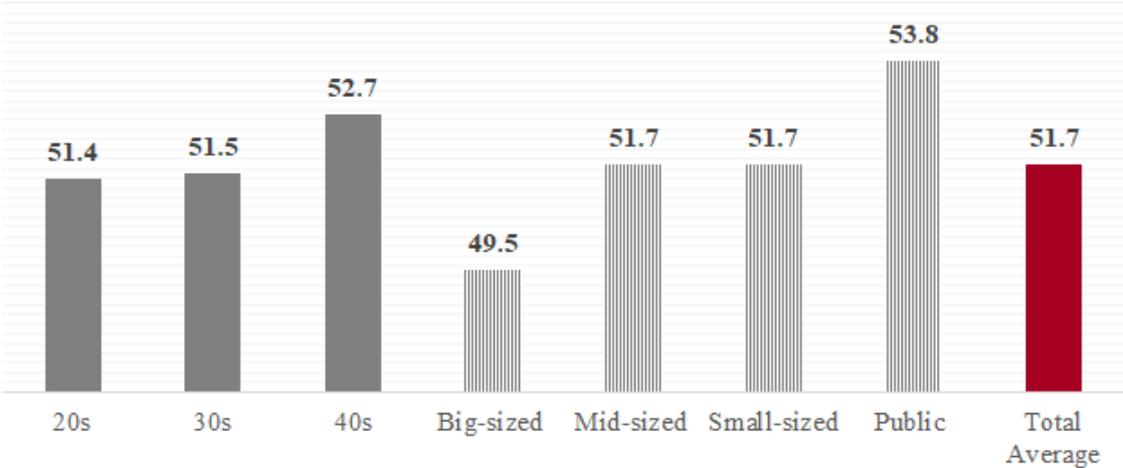
recognized/appreciated as a productive worker until the end of their careers - that is when they voluntarily wish to retire. It implies that even regarding the conditional aspects, young freelancers' occupational standards/values are attached to how their emotional/cognitive aspects are treated within and by the conditional circumstance.

The contract for salary workers assures their regular status as a member of the organization and to get regularly compensated for their labor. They get benefits as written in the contract. However, this does not guarantee that the company would hire them until the end or wait until the moment when the workers are willing to voluntarily leave. Salaried workers are conditionally accepted as members of the organization only until they are viewed as being productive and contributory. In most cases, such standard is based on their ages. The retirement system applies to everyone in every work, and the workers' age is the absolute criteria in enforcing the plan. However, young people argue that getting older does not mean losing their ability to work properly. Getting older also does not mean they do not need to earn a salary and be unproductive. The older they get, the more they need to earn for financial stability. Stuck in the incommensurable gaps between the values they pursue and the reality they are facing, young people choose to deviate from the orbit of standard employment and carry out an escape.

It was found that the young freelancers seek permanent job positions and lifelong titles that would enable them to work and be productive as long as they are willing to do so, or at least until they are capable of doing so. They expressed a strong will to continue their jobs and sustain living independently even in their old age. Young workers did not want their ages to be the absolute criteria for terminating their careers. Therefore, structural stability revealed in the contract does not really matter to them. In this sense, prior experience of being salaried workers unfulfilled their criteria of maintaining jobs sustainably. The conditional constraints within regular employment led to the collapse of morale to work. People were demotivated because they were hired under the termination system unilaterally decided by the company. They felt disrespected that their labor is considered disposable, their voices are not heard, and their future remains uncertain. Workers gradually lost their loyalty to devote themselves to the company. The interview results suggested that the demotivation led to deduction in productivity and efficiency of the work and abated teamwork and trust with the organization. Moreover, the anxiety, anger, anomie, and alienation produced by the spread of insecurity associated with precarious work have motivated workers to adopt protective strategies to defend themselves (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2018) and be alienated from the organization.

A survey by Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training(2020) showed that the average age of retirement is 52.6 at minimum and 61.9 at maximum in Korea. Another survey by job recruiting platforms suggested that the average retirement age expected by the workers is 51.7, a similar level (Figure 18). On the contrary, the National Statistics Office(2021) announced that about 68.1% desire to continue working even when they become older than 60 to 80 years. Several surveys by Korea Research, Joong-Ang News, and Korea Economy News suggested that the desired retirement age for young Korean people is approximately in the late 60 to the early 70 years old on average. There is almost 20 years of a gap between expectation and reality. Such gap deducts the overall job satisfaction of the young workers unless an alternative plan is provided for their old age career.

Figure 18. Average Retirement Age expected by Workers (2021)



Source: Job Korea and Albamon(435 respondents, 2021)

Freelance interviewees stated that they have directly and indirectly experienced job insecurity as salaried workers, which has triggered them to seek more sustainably secured options. According to the World Values Survey (2018), 81.9% of young Korean workers up to the age of 29 and 75.6% of people aged 30 to 49 answered that they worry about losing jobs or not being able to find a job again (Table 7). Regardless of the employment types, young Korean people had more significant concerns over job security than older people in their 50s do. Young generations commonly share long-term career plans and possess a strong will to sustain their jobs in the future. The interviewees expressed that within the three years of joining a company as a salaried man, they began to worry about not being able to continue their jobs even until their 40s. The reasons for concerns were diverse, including that their labors are replaceable by anyone at any time or that they do not have special skills/talents to insist on their stay.

Table 7. Degree of Concerns over Unemployment by Age

(Q. How much are you worried about losing jobs or not being able to find jobs again?)

Age Classification of the Respondents				
Level of Concern	TOTAL	Up to 29	30-49	50 and more
Very much	21.2%	31.9%	21.2%	16.2%
A great deal	52.0%	50.0%	54.4%	50.8%
Not much	20.6%	14.1%	19.5%	24.5%
Not at all	6.3%	4.0%	4.9%	8.5%

Data: World Values Survey(2018) (N: 1,245)

Most freelancers I interviewed stated that concerns over unsustainable stability persisted for several years and gradually affected their occupational values and standards for choosing jobs. When I questioned about the moment when they felt that their salaried jobs could not be an option for life, the most responded was seeing their bosses pressured to leave the companies once they became a certain age, regardless of their capabilities, situations, or long contributions. Some were advised to leave when their salaries reached the highest level and their contributions were significant after long service years. There was no room for negotiations or adjustments.

“If companies are to be lifetime careers, they should be able to guarantee that I can stay and work until I hope to do so, or at least, the end date should be bilaterally negotiable. But throughout 5years of service as a full-time market analyst at a local trading company, I never got an impression that my company would do so. Ironically, as time went by, and the longer I worked in the company, I heard that if I continued to stay, after ten years, I might be transferred to a small local branch that is located in a totally different city. After another ten years, I would not be welcomed in any of the small offices too. My bosses told me it was not a joke. I felt miserable if that would be the case for an old employee who worked with high loyalty and devotion for long years.” - *Male, 33 / Freelance market and consumer trends analyst, Former full-time market analyst at a local trading company for agriculture products.*

There were several factors that encouraged young workers to have a longer career plan in their old age compared to the older generation. While a prolonged life expectancy (centenarians) is commonly referred to as a strong social reason for prolonged life plans for all, people in their young age were more influenced by growing diversification in life options that they are exposed to (e.g., relocations, access to overseas, single life, YOLO mindset, etc.). Particularly, as marriage or childbirth now has become an optional life choice for these young people, they show stronger willingness to plan a life that is centered on career success and

job stability. They take lot of factors into their consideration to maintain a good and sustainable work environment. Further, young workers also mentioned about the pressures that they receive from rising labor competition in the capitalist society, where all people are required to be productive and fruitful.

“I want to maintain my status economically active even when I get older because my life after retirement would be long, almost half of my life. There is no way I can live without earning money. We are the generation of centenarians. I believe my second stage of life will begin by turning 50s. I expect my life options to be much more diverse by then. I have a lot of plans including relocation to one of the European countries or to relocate to other cities in Korea. I would need my solid job to earn money, spend time productively, and feel accomplished. Being a freelancer gave me time and physical flexibility to prepare myself for future options. Even though I do not know what I will do, I am pleased that I can prepare now, when I am young, healthy, and capable of learning new things more easily.” – *Male, 26 / Freelancer Artist and Designer*

“I am in my mid-30s but still do not have any plans for marriage. Being single, my career is at the core of my life plan. It is what matters the most in my life so far. I definitely would need stricter financial plans if I had a family to support. But, as a freelancer now, I am satisfied that the longer I work, the more I earn, and the more I build experience. I feel totally opposite from what I had experienced as a salaried man stuck in the regulatory work systems of being commanded and ordered.” – *Male, 33 / YouTube video creator and contents producer*

Furthermore, people during the interview often mentioned their experience of hearing about insecurities in salaried careers from their parents, teachers, relatives, or neighbors, almost all people around them. While salaried employment assures stability, the duration of stableness is transient and the degree of secureness is shallow. Some of the advice was based on their own painful experiences of undergoing early discharge or sudden layoff noticed by the company. As illuminated in the first chapter of this paper, young workers in Korea have seen many people in their parents' generation being advised to resign or laid off at a younger age than 40. Especially during the 1997 Korean Financial Crisis, when companies in Korea encountered the worst recession in the postwar era, unemployment rose from pre-crisis levels of 2% to 6.8% in 1998 and 8.1% in March 1999 (Hahm and Mishkin, 2000). Standard employment was neither stable nor secure throughout the nation. Gradually, people began to change their views on standard employment. The dramatic changes influenced the ideas of young generations in forming their occupational standards too. Such experience gave them great distrust, disappointment, and anxiety over regular employment contracted with a single company.

"My dad used to work in a trading company for agricultural products when I was elementary. But when the Korean financial crisis occurred, the company carried out a large-scale

restructuring, he had to suddenly leave. It was the most difficult time for my family. He started his own business with a past co-worker for survival, and it took quite a long time for him to settle down as an independent business owner. My parents and I still did not forget the difficult times we had. I have friends with similar experiences in their families or relatives. By the time I graduated from college, I had a strong thought that I would build career experiences as a regular worker for several years and begin my own thing when I am prepared. Life as a salaried worker is merely a step to learning how to work and operate a business. In the end, I will need to prepare for my career, and my parents will support my plan. It has been 2 years since I worked as a regular worker, but I never thought this company would be the final destination of my career.”- *Male 32, Associate at finance and account team of medical device company (salaried man)*

Lee (2015) also introduced in his book anecdotes of young workers who are highly concerned about the insecurities of regular employment. Lee suggests that the young generation is often being advised and encouraged to prepare for independent work arrangements even by co-workers in their companies. “Most office workers at my company are forced to leave in their early 50s and start doing things completely unrelated to the job they had before. Whenever I meet up with my managers for a casual dinner or drink, they always share their concerns about an uncertain future. They complain that they are afraid of starting a new job when they get old, although they might not have other options by then. They advised me to set the time when to leave in advance and prepare for the next step of my career. I knew it well from the beginning that the situation would be the same for me in 15 years. If I were to give advice, I would say the same”.

To sum up, as it is proven that working as a salaried man does not guarantee a lifetime career, many young workers are eager to secure their ways to survive and pioneer a lifetime job opportunity. Despite the higher uncertainties in their career, young workers want a career that can be sustained and continued until they get older. They wish to remain as productive and competent worker even when they get old. They care about being able to work freely and independently, and to exhibit their talents. They value how their emotional aspects are treated within the conditional factors of their jobs. Young freelancers crave job security that is sustainably long enough to last until the period they expect.

Precarious Regular Workers and Stable Freelancers

“My prior work life as a regular salaried worker was not close to either regular or stable life. It was more unpredictable than ever. My working hours were irregular, my work duties were unstandardized, and the working conditions were exploitative. My happiness was exploited too. It

was a life as a regular worker without actual regularities. I could do nothing but diverge from the pool”. – *Female, 35/ Freelance photographer and designer / Former, Editor at Magazine Publishing Company*

Another noticeable occupational value found among young freelancers lies in a comparative perspective of working conditions between the salaried and the freelanced workers. Standard employment, in principle, provide workers with high security in the labor market (due to its open duration), social benefits (e.g., social protection, unemployment benefits), and rights (e.g., representation rights). Life as salaried workers is expected to linger within the boundaries of stability and predictability. This is why, from a traditional perspective, job applicants are expected to have a stronger preference for standard employment as a full-time employee over non-standard employment as a freelancer.

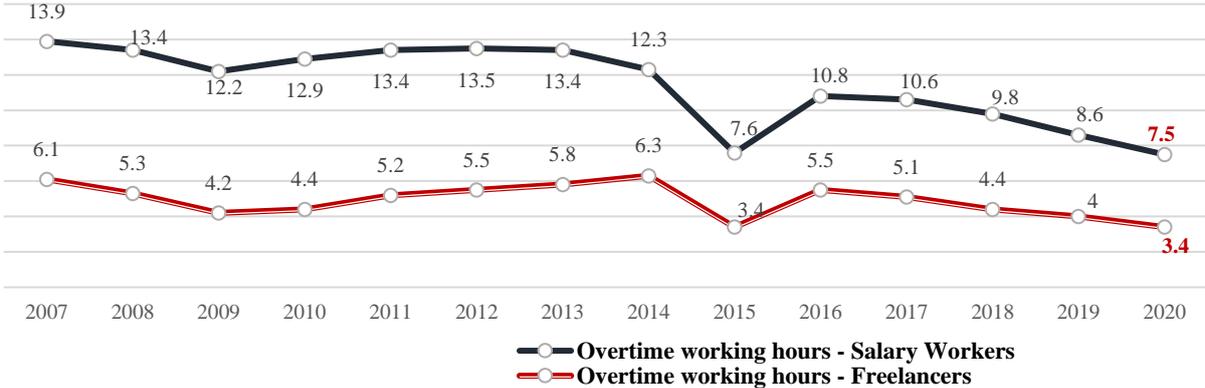
Recently, however, scholars like Asahina (2019), Kalleberg (2009, 2017), and Song (2018), caution that precarity and insecurity are rampant and far-reaching for every type of employment, especially within the standard employment arrangements. They are the ‘precarious regular workers’. Asahina (2019), who had written about precarious regular jobs in Japan, bluntly illuminated how precarity has permeated the work-life of young salaried workers.

“Japan’s case: Precarious regular jobs take the form of regular employment (permanent employment), but they are as precarious as non-regular jobs from workers perspective, and the workers bear the risk of employment instead of the employers. Furthermore, the degree of labor exploitation in precarious regular employment is also comparable to or even more severe than that involved in non-regular employment. These employers tend to hire a massive number of workers that they cannot afford to employ for the long term and exploit their labor force as much as they can. Often, workers have to quit voluntarily when they reach the limits of their physical or mental capacities. The employer does not expect this labor to reproduce because they can replace it by hiring new workers.” - Asahina (2019) p639-640

Asahina also presented three mechanisms – deception (meaning that workers are not accurately informed of the precariousness in-advance), coercion (workers are forced to follow the precariousness), and the worker’s reluctant consent – to explain the reasons for precariousness among regular workers. He suggested that these mechanisms are broad enough to be applied to cases beyond Japanese societies. He mentioned his experience of conducting interviews with 55 young people in Seoul and suggested that the precarious situations of Korean salaried workers are akin to those of Japan, presenting a global prevalence of precariousness in

standard employment. As shown in Figure 19, the Ministry of Employment and Labor (MOEL) suggested that salary workers have shown a much higher number of overtime working hours on average compared to that of the freelancers. In 2007, the overtime working hours for salary workers was 13.9 hours while those for freelancers was 6.1, showing 7.8 overtime hours of gap between the two different employment types. Though the gap between the two reduced to 4.1 hours in 2020, salary workers always have displayed a higher number of hours that the freelancers do.

Figure 19. Overtime Working Hours – Salary Workers vs. Freelancers



Source: Ministry of Employment and Labor(MOEL).
A Survey on the Actual Conditions of Employment by Type of Employment

Forced alternation of working hours and duties: I met with Choi(31/Female), a freelance game graphic designer and developer with two years of freelancing life. After graduating from college, she began her career as a full-time salaried designer for a gaming company for 5years. When she first received a letter of offer, she was very pleased that her first career began at one of the major game companies as a regular worker, which she had always wanted. She expected his next 5 to 10 years of career life to be stable, predictable, and pleasurable. On her first day of work, she was confused when the whole team was scheduled to have a meeting at around 6:00 pm when they were supposed to leave the office soon. Her contract had obviously specified her working hours from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm. Her team meeting was held for 2 hours and the meeting ended around 8:00 pm. Choi thought this would be an exceptional case for that day. However, it turned out to be a regular thing for 2~3 days of a week repetitively, and the whole team was naturally required to stay until 7~8pm for half of the week. Also, a month before the new game launch, Choi and his team members were required to work on weekends either in the office or at home for multiple times of revisions and discussions. Especially for Choi, her

work in graphic design needed a special program that was only available in the office system. She was required to go to the office whenever she had to work physically. But her devotion and sacrifice were never appropriately appreciated or compensated. Workers were forced to alter their working hours without even asking. Choi stressed that this work pattern persisted throughout the whole year, and she usually could not have any dinner plans after work. No matter when it was, her presence at the meeting was always required. She felt stressed and pressured by the enforcement.

“Some people might say 1~2hours of overtime is not much, and I should have to bear with it. But for me, the problem was not only about the hours of overtime work. What I did not like the most was the fact that I was forced to blur the line between working hours and off-duty hours, and my sacrifice was taken for granted. The working hours were forcibly changed without asking any of my opinions. The company never provided a corresponding compensation. Such violations were not included in the contract that I initially signed up for. I could not bear the fact that I was mistreated and disrespected at work.”

Also, her position was specified to be a graphic designer, and that was what she was expected to do and learn. However, she was often asked to come up with new sales ideas for upcoming promotional events and often requested to arrange restaurant meetings with some of the clients. Because such an atmosphere was already deeply entrenched within the company, she could not have complained or asked for alteration. But instead, she decided to leave the organization. The more she stayed, the worse the situation got, and the more the company asked. At this point, she thought of terminating her life as a full-time salaried employee at a company and decided to try something different, which turned out to be a freelancing career.

Forced deterrence on vacations and low wages: Before entering the freelancing industry, Song (24/Female), a freelance event planner, used to work at a small-sized exhibition company and a big-sized firm for one year each. She mentioned that though there are many freelancers in the event field, she wanted to join a company as a full-time employee because she wanted a stable income and regular work schedules for better stability overall. She said 2years at both companies was a nightmare. When she first signed a contract, both companies guaranteed to offer 7~10 days of annual leave. But once she joined the company, the condition was never adequately observed.

“Even before I joined the company, I expected to have a lot of overtime work because that is the usual case in this industry. But at least, I thought I was given time to go on vacation, take a break, and refresh after the events were over. But I was not given such a chance. Most of the exhibitions were held for a month in a row, and after the exhibition, planning for the next season started immediately. In particular, each team had a certain level of sales goal to achieve, so it was

impossible to go on vacation alone. Also, the contract had stated that additional wages would be paid at the end of the year for unused vacation days, but there was no such system implemented. I felt like I would be considered a strange person if I asked for additional wages because the system did not even exist”.

Song also said she was initially responsible for organizing six events per year, but when her colleague left, she had to cover up the vacuum by hosting two more additional events, and this lasted for almost four months. But her extra labor time and workload were not compensated. In the end, when calculating the working hours per hour, her average hourly wage was lower than that of non-regular workers/freelancers who were at least getting paid adequately on an hourly/daily basis. A year later, she realized that even though she stays, her life as a salaried employee would be neither as stable nor standardized as she had initially expected. She chose to restart my career as a freelancing planner.

The issues with the precarious working conditions were not only physical pain but also psychological sufferings which have harmed their rights and dignity to be respected as a member of the organization. The enforcement of precariousness made people feel that they were deceived and disposed of. Interviewee Choi and Song both argued that what matters the most is enforced alterations in the work that are unilaterally led by their employers. The price of sacrifice is always on the employee’s side. Consequently, the salaried workers are conditionally disadvantaged and emotionally hurt. According to a survey by Job Korea (2020), 40.6% of salaried workers mentioned overtime work and high work intensity that disturb personal life as the biggest reason for leaving the company. Following that, the workers mentioned future uncertainty (27.7%, ranked in the 3rd) and boring tasks (10.2%, ranked in the 5th) as the reasons for quitting their first job. Unfortunately, it was suggested that the difficulties are not easily solved even after relocating to a new organization. It was shown that 47.1% of salaried workers who have moved to another company (also a salary-based organization) are facing similar difficulties in the new workplace too (Job Korea, 2019). Therefore, it is no surprise that an increasing number of young workers who continuously face similar issues at work are considering not just changing the organization but changing their employment types.

Furthermore, it was suggested that nonfulfillment of contracts occurs more often in specific industries where overtime works are traditionally rampant. Usually, these are industries where they need to work strictly according to clients' requirements or where sales profits are proportional to their wages. Broadcastings, art, and performance-based job sectors that carry out real-time operations are found to be vulnerable to precarious working conditions. The companies

themselves are forced to change their regulations due to external coercion or pressures; thereby, creating physically and psychologically unbearable working environments for workers.

For freelancers, their employment contracts with the employees are much neater, shorter, and more straightforward. The conditions are primarily project-focused. Therefore, both the employers and the employees better observe the working conditions to implement the project successfully. Especially, because the contract duration for freelancers is short and mostly one-time based, they have an option to choose whether to work with the client again or not. Also, freelancers and employers can flexibly negotiate for contract revisions if an issue arises in the middle of the project. The adjustments are flexible because it is a one-on-one contract signed between an individual worker and an employer, and does not require any collective action. Therefore, if the working conditions and outcomes are poor, both parties can freely choose not to work again with that counterpart and terminate the relationship.

"Because most freelancers are temporarily employed to carry out certain tasks or specific projects, we are rarely required to work on tasks other than what is specified on the initial contract. Therefore, the working hours or workloads are well kept within the boundaries of expectations. If a conditional issue needs to be changed, I request a meeting with the employer before I sign the next contract. I feel more comfortable and safer in the way contracts are carried out." – *Male, 28 / Speech Instructor & English Tutor*

Young freelancers argued that as the high efficiency of flexible work life suggests, there could be many types of employment, other than the regular salaried workers, that better fit into the peculiarities of jobs. Therefore, our society should be flexible enough to accept the growing diversity in employment types and structures. If precariousness continues to stay in regular employment, the social recognition will gradually change too. In the long-term, it is expected that more young Korean workers will move towards a type of labor that would meet their standard of job stability and security regardless of the employment type or contract status.

4-2. Standards of Good Jobs - Emotional

According to Korea Labour & Society Institute (2020), it was found that the average job satisfaction rates for is 55.6 points with freedom and authority ranking the highest factor for job satisfaction (67.6 points) (Table 8). It was followed by personal aptitude and interest (64.6), over all environment (60.2 points), working hours (57.1), work-and-life balance (57.0), and self-development (56.3). These high-ranking factors indicate that freelancers consider emotional and

cognitive dimensions more significant than conditional factors (e.g., wage, work intensity, work hours) in the workplace.

Table 8. Freelancers’ Satisfaction Level Survey (2020, Points: 0~100)

Standards for Job Satisfactions					
Satisfaction points (Total Average: 55.6)	Wage	Stability	Hours	Overall Environment	Work-and-life Balance
	45.1	38.6	57.1	60.2	57.0
	Self-development	Freedom & Authority	Intensity	Aptitude& Interest	Evaluation System
	56.3	67.6	54.7	64.6	54.4

Source: Korea Labour & Society Institute

In the same context, as indicated in Table 9, the interview results revealed that for young freelancers, what matters the most is how they are emotionally treated within the given conditions at working rather than the conditions themselves. Their standards for a good occupation focused on self-identified values and strong individualities such as ownership, leadership, and freedom. This starkly contrasts with the values that were traditionally considered important such as company branding, high salary, company size, and stability.

Table 9. Q&As with 29 Freelancers (Research Interviewees)

(Unit: # of respondents, Total Interviewee Number: 29)

What made you choose your job(freelancing)?		What are the advantages of freelancing career over salaried?		What are the aspects that make you satisfied with your job?	
Talents/Skills	9	Mental Freedom	10	I truly enjoy my job (I love what I do for a living).	7
Aptitude	6	Ownership	7	I feel free and liberal.	7
New Challenge	6	Physical Freedom	5	I could have ownership and be a leader.	6
Potentials	4	Sustainability	3	I feel stable/comfortable.	3
Salary	3	Self-Development	3	I earn a lot	2
Achievement	1	Work & Life Balance	1	I feel accomplished/productive.	2
Stability	0	Work Efficiency	0	It has high potential.	2
Recommendations	0	Job Security/Stability	0	I feel acknowledged by others.	0

At the beginning of the interviews, I asked open-ended questions regarding their jobs to 29 freelancers. Some of the questions were ‘the reasons for choosing freelancing jobs’, ‘comparative advantages of freelancing careers over salaried life’, and the ‘aspects that they are most satisfied with their current job status’. The result showed that the biggest reason for choosing the job was related to their talents/skills and personal aptitudes. Young freelancers like to do what they are good at, and truly enjoying doing things that they are skillful at. Further, it was suggested that mental freedom is the biggest advantage that they value over salaried work life. Freelancers were satisfied that they are not being continuously ordered by someone or not being forced to be obligated to follow the regulations of the organizations. This can be translated into having an ownership at work. To summarize, ‘talent and aptitude,’ ‘ownership and leadership,’ and ‘freedom’ were found to be the important keywords for freelancers in their careers.

The shift in young freelancers’ preferences from conditional factors to emotional factors was also revealed in the way the recent job satisfaction surveys are constructed. Traditional surveys that were conducted by governmental organizations or public institutions focused on asking conditional aspects (e.g., are you satisfied with your salary? What are okay with the workloads/work intensity or working hours? What are planning to continue your job for the next 5~10years?). Recently, however, there are more diverse surveys conducted by portals or platforms(apps) that are mostly used by young workers. These recent surveys mainly focus on asking about workers' emotional and cognitive satisfaction at jobs. Combing the list of survey questions by Blind and Job Korea for the past three years (from 2019 to 2021), the most frequently asked questions were related to ownership, freedom of choice, freedom of expression, respect, accomplishment, and trust at the workplace (Table 10). These are keywords related to the workers' emotions derived from conditional aspects given at the workplace. Though conditional elements were covered, they were more connected to how the workers emotionally accepted and translated the given conditions from their point of view. Further, the survey questions ask about their satisfaction levels and how their satisfaction has been positively and negatively influenced by what factors at work (e.g., Do you feel that your contributions/efforts are well-recognized and appreciated by the evaluation or the compensation provided?, Do you feel supported enough to pursue a continuous self-development by a company?). Such structural shift suggests that the standards of happiness at work and criteria for good occupations have dramatically changed among young workers.

Table 10. List of Questions on Job Satisfaction at Surveys by Platforms (2019~2021)

Portals	List of Questions	
Blind	Ownership	Do you have an ownership in the decision-making process? Do you have the control to manage your own workloads or working hours?
	Freedom	Do you have freedom to operate your own projects? Are you allowed or welcomed to freely express your opinions? Do you work in an environment where freedom is respected in general?
	Support	Do you feel your future is supported/encouraged by the company? Do you feel supported by your co-workers in promoting the projects? Are you able to self-develop through the tasks you are handling?
	Respect	Do you feel respected enough as an employee of the organizations? Do you think your words or opinions are respected?
	Value	Do the values/aims of the project aligns well with your personal goals? Do you feel that you can prioritize values over profits at your current workplace?
	Trust	Do you feel that you can fully trust the decision of your company? How much trust do you have in the organization?
Job Korea	Freedom	Do you have freedom of expression(including complaints about the company)? Are you encouraged or allowed to be creative and original?
	Leadership	Are you encouraged or allowed to be a leader when necessary? Is leadership equally distributed in your organization?
	Support	Do you feel supported enough to pursue a continuous self-development by a company? Do you feel supported when you encounter difficulties at work by colleagues or the organization in general?
	Evaluation	Do you feel that your contributions/efforts are well-recognized and appreciated by the evaluation or the compensation provided? Do you feel that evaluation systems are adequately revised to reflect the changes in the work trends?
	Respect	Do you have a worker-centered communication culture? Do you feel that your words and expressions are respected at workplace?
	Accomplishment	Do you feel proud and accomplished from your job? How much do you value sense of accomplishment when assessing your job?
Trust	Do you trust that you will be protected by the company if an ethically inappropriate event happens?	

Why is this shift happening? What are the reasons for encouraging them to be emotionally centered and value pursuing generations? It is how they were nurtured and educated from a young age. As mentioned in chapter 2, these young generations grew up in a society where neoliberal flexibility permeated every aspect. They have different nurturing and educational backgrounds that contrast with many of the aspects displayed by the older

generations (generation X and baby boomers). Kim (2020) argued that developing children's self-esteem, which was popular in North American families in the 1970s and 1990s, has also begun to affect families in Korea in the 1990s. Young Koreans have grown up under an education that instills strong self-esteem and identities. Kim stated that self-esteem is a positive mind that enables one to believe that they are valuable, precious, and competent.

Consequently, the young Korean workers fostered in economic abundance value individual satisfaction and personal accomplishments over collectivist thinking/behavior. They were inspired to prioritize their values/standards from a young age and were expected to establish their principles in planning their lives. They were encouraged to be owners and leaders of their lives, not just to remain an inactive member of society. They say they value purpose and learning over the benefits and the outcomes. They think in self-directed manners and act independently. They act freely and speak freely at work and in life. They think creatively and pursue innovations (Bloomberg, 2018). One of the interviewees told me that her mom wrote her a letter on the first day of work saying that "Even if you are not perfect, you are still the most important person in your life, and don't let others disturb you." The increasing proportions of young populations in the domestic workforce indicate that their standards/values at work would have a far-reaching effect on changing how organizations manage their people.

Kim (2019) also pointed out that the peculiarities of each working generation are more noticeably distinguished in Korean society, where everything has developed and changed at high speed. Our society has undergone a compressed development at an unprecedented pace over several decades. "Since the post-war era, Korea has experienced a compressed but exponential growth. Each generation has experienced a starkly different society. The millennials and generation Z workers grew up in a community with exceptionally different levels of economic abundance, national power, global stance, and technological affinity. Therefore, it is 100% natural for them to think and act differently. What they value could be different from what their parent's generation has in the past, and what they pursue could be something new that the older generation has never thought of. The same logic applies to their career life (Kim, 2019)."

Table 11. Overview of the Working Generations by Characteristics

	Baby boomers (Born in 1945-1960)	Generation X (1961-1980)	Generation Y / Millennials (1981-1995)	Generation Z (1995~early 2000s)
Global standards (Year of born)	1940~1964	1965~1980	1981~2000	2001~
Korean standards (Year of born)	1955~1963	1970~1980	1981~1996	1997~early 2000s
Number of working populations (Korea)	7.8 million	8.7 million	11 million	5.2 million
Aspiration	Job security and Survival	Work-life balance	Freedom and Flexibility	Security and Stability
Career Values	Organizational – careers are defined by employers	Early ‘portfolio’ careers – loyal to professions, not necessarily to employer	Digital entrepreneurs – work ‘with’ organizations, not ‘for’ them	Career multi-taskers – will move seamlessly between organizations and ‘pop’- up businesses
Communication style at work	Telephone, Formal letters	E-mails and text messages	Text and SNS	Hand-held or communication devices
Communication Preference at work	Face-to-face ideally but combination of non-face-to-face if possible	Text messaging or e- mail	Online and mobile messaging	Virtual platforms (facetime)
Decision-making style at work	Face-to-face ideally	Online – but still would prefer face-to- face if time permitting	Online preferred and face-to-face if necessary for few situations	Virtual negotiations/ discussions
Work characteristics	Success and survival, competitions, Strong responsibilities, collective behaviors, Disciplined,	Prefers work-and-life balance but still feel obliged to obey under communal settings organization	Self-centered, self-value, and pursues true value/meaning from work	Multi-tasking, multi-talents, freedom of expression and actions
Catchphrase	You have to do what you don't want to do to succeed.	I want to be free, but still company is important.	I value myself the most.	We're not distracted. We don't lack concentration. We're talented multi-taskers.
Attitudes toward technology	Early IT adaptors	Digital Immigrants	Digital Natives	Techno-holics (entirely dependent on IT)

Source: Reorganization of data collected from Mckinsey (2016) report and a research conducted by Dr. Paul Redmond in 2013 (commissioned by Barclays)

Ownership and Leadership

A key feature of independent work is that individuals can exercise control over their workload and work portfolio, giving them a greater degree of flexibility than traditional workers who must work within parameters set by their employers (Mckinsey, 2016). As Kim and Jun (2018) said, if the older generation were forced to suppress 'what they wanted to do' and had to focus on 'what they had to do', the younger generations would put more weight on 'how happily they can work for themselves' and 'what makes them happy'. My research with young freelance workers suggested that they choose to be freelancers because they want to be owners and leaders at work rather than just being ordered/commanded. They claimed for a high degree of decision latitude, which includes an ability to choose/change the order of tasks, rate of work, or the methods to carry out. Their decision ranges even included whether to work or not if they do not want to. For young freelancers, having ownership and leadership means having a right to self-determination in making a decision and setting work plans on their own. They value purpose over profits for themselves and for the things they care about. They look into the organization's culture and see if they would culturally fit. If not, they give up and just leave to find other options that would better fit with their own. In this sense, their definition of ownership/leadership at work connotes self-identity, self-devotion, and self-loyalty.

According to Mckinsey (2016), its survey suggested that young people who actively chose their working style reported greater satisfaction than those who felt forced by circumstance. In order to find what satisfied them, freelancing has become one of the dominant options. Particularly, freelancers during the interview pointed out a contradiction in the organization that has made them leave from the standard employment. They argued that a stark contradiction exists between how they have been encouraged to act and think and what they have actually experienced at work once they join organizations salaried workers. Workers are asked to passively follow and obey the rules and abandon their proactive behaviors. Under the hierarchical structure, young workers cannot expect themselves to be the owners of their jobs but rather to merely support what the company aims for. Young freelancers said they felt emotionally defeated and invaded when asked to restrain their progressive/proactive attitudes and sense of ownership at workplace. In contrast, their current status as freelancers has granted them a strong sense of ownership/leadership from the beginning to the end. They have a right to decide how to work for what purposes. As independent workers, their careers would be more about themselves, aiming for what they would like to create and produce. Though some often

face financial difficulties and instability at work, they are still willing to take the risks. They would like to prioritize what they value and consider important in their life. In this sense, most of the voluntary freelancers showed higher job satisfactions not only in career but also in their overall life, compared to the days when they worked as salarymen.

"Since I was in elementary school, I vividly remember learning about the significance of having proactive mindsets, self-leading attitudes, and being independent. My parents and grandparents always emphasized the importance of having a sense of ownership and responsibility throughout my life. It was also written in the textbooks. It seemed as if those qualities were must-have requirements to be successful. In contrast to what I have learned over the past 20 years, my prior work experience as a salaried worker was nothing more than just being passive labor working under commands. I had to work exactly according to what my bosses decided. Everything was all about the goods of the companies. I felt like I exist for the organization's profit, and once the project is done, I have nothing left for myself." – *Male, 29 / Business consultant (company branding advisor), Former Marketing and PR Associate at foreign-based food and beverage company*

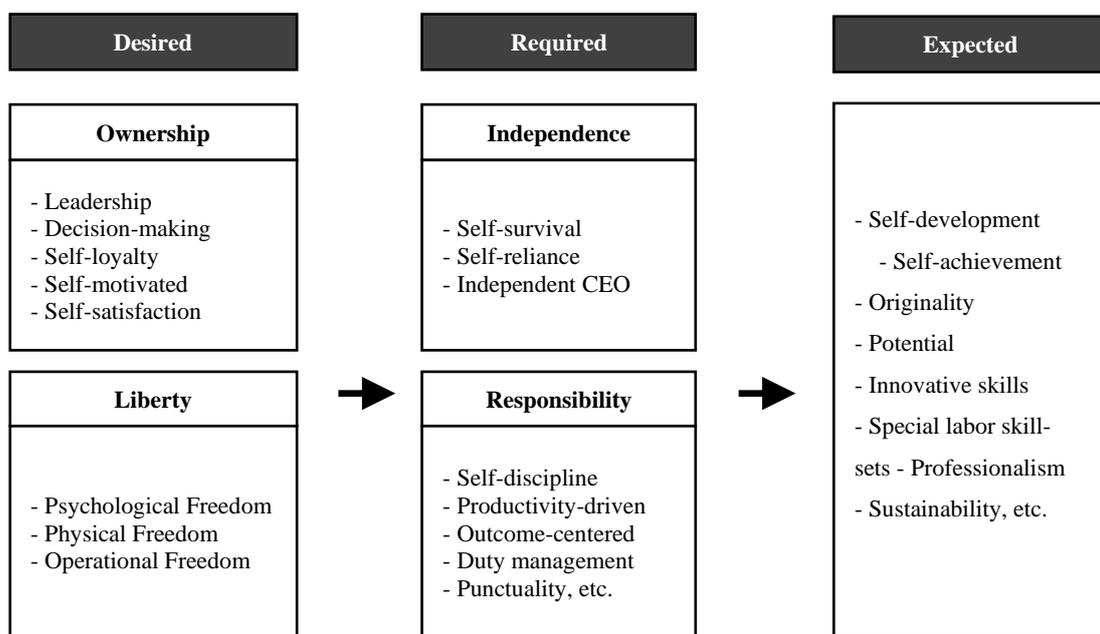
Chang (2019) argued that the young generations have spent a lot of time on self-examination and introspection; therefore, would know exactly what they want and how to achieve. These young freelancers were educated in the system that encourages diverse opportunities for self-examination and introspection. They know what they are good at, how to be better, and where to use those skills. The young freelancers have strong confidence in exhibiting their talents. Using those skills, they aim to be an active contributor who does productive things for the good of both the company and themselves.

"I agree that people in my generation had more time and opportunity for introspection at home, schools, or anywhere. We were grown up in an environment that promotes talent development in the way we would like to be headed. We know what we are good at and how much we are good at. This gave me a strong sense of self-esteem and self-identity. Thus, young workers would naturally have strong egos for self-realization at work too. It is natural for us to want ownership of what we are good at. But realistically, most organizations would not welcome us as we are, or as we wish. Our style of living and working cannot easily fit with the organizational values. In the end, people like me will find a place to perform and be acknowledged better." – *Male, 27 / Freelance Data Analyst*

Then, what do these young freelancers ultimately pursue in the end? As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, I found that the most significant reason was related to their strong desires to continue having decent jobs and sustainable careers until their old ages. Without being an owner/leader of their career, they could not maintain stable status in their careers. In order to do so, they need better chances for self-development/achievement, originality/innovations, specially owned skills, and professionalism. Freelancing jobs have allowed them to build their

own assets for lifelong career development. Unfortunately, their experiences salary workers were far from achieving these qualities. There was no need to put extra efforts to be a leader in the organization because they were not encouraged to do so. Under regulated circumstances, they could not come up with innovative outcomes. They often felt being downgraded and underperformed.

Figure 20. A Structure of Young Freelancer’s Desired and Required Qualities at Work



“Being a freelancer means my labors and efforts become truly my assets. The more you work, the more you experience, and the higher your value gets. In the end, I will be able to upgrade my talents and better prepare myself for self-branding. As time goes by, I will be able to secure my position as a competent marketer stably and sustainably. On the other hand, spending three years as a salaried worker made me think that my skills and talents are degraded day by day. I was not given an enough chance to fully display my skills. I could not have any voice in decision-making processes, no matter what or when. I felt like I have lost a direction in my career.” – *Female, 28 / SNS Marketer, Influencer*

It was also found that lack of ownership has caused a reduction in the efficiency of work and has lowered productivity. Though the company forces workers to make outstanding performances, there is a great contradiction within the organizational system and culture that the company does not actually give their workers an adequate degree of decision-making powers, rights or ownership to outperform. Therefore, the workers cannot carry out the projects in

directions that they think are right, better, and more efficient. They often thought that they would not have done it this way if they had the right to decide, and the outcome could have been better. Within and in-between the contradictions, salary workers in companies often experience a sense of futility and frustrations. I met Lee (31, Female), a freelance costume designer who used to work at the largest fashion company in Korea. She shared how much she suffered from the contradictions within the systems in her previous work.

"What was most ironic and contradicting was that the workers were always pressured to plan better, design better, and sell more. However, the workers were never given a choice to decide how to plan, what to design, and what to sell. Executives did the decision-making, and the processes were prolonged and inflexible. Sometimes, even though I had a brilliant idea, I was not eligible to suggest any opinions. I was the one who conducted market research and analysis, but I was never allowed to implement what I had researched or found. Rather, my job was to report, and my duties were done. How inefficient and contradictory are they?" – *Female, 30 / SNS marketer, Influencer, PE trainer*

She felt demotivated and devalued and decided to quit. Currently, as a freelance designer, she works independently with multiple companies. She has full ownership to choose the clients and determine the directions of projects. The clients give her more rights and authority to express her ideas and creations, and view her as an independent and successful CEO of her own business. She is definitely more motivated and satisfied because she owns what she works on.

Freedom

Freedom is another significant cognitive dimension found among the young freelancers. Freedom can be divided into physical freedom and psychological(emotional) freedom at work. Because physical freedom has already been elaborated in chapter 3, this section will focus on emotional freedom of the young freelance workers. Freedom at work commonly refers to an environment where the body and mind are free without constraints. Young freelancers want a liberal environment and a flexible system to cope with. Their occupational satisfaction for freedom indicates to be in a condition that allows them to freely express their opinions/thoughts (freedom of expression), to freely think, suggest, and create (freedom of creation; freedom of ideation), and to freely change/modify the conditions if not preferable or efficient (freedom of alternations; freedom of choice)

While physical freedom is considered important, it was found that a majority of young freelancers signifies psychological freedom more, as it relates to their core identities, work values and ethics. Though they are not physically/conditionally free as they have initially expected, they

are still satisfied and pleased if they are granted a high level of psychological freedom in their careers. Several surveys showed that just because they became freelancers does not mean that they are entirely free at work, contrasting to what they have initially expected. Still, however, young freelancers showed a high level of job satisfactions and happiness as long as their emotional freedom is guarantee and protected. According to a survey on freelancer at media contents field conducted by Korea Labor Institute (2018), 38.2% of the respondents said they chose to have their jobs because they expected to work more freely. Comparing their perceptions before and after they had started their work, it was found that their perception of freedom dropped after when they actually began working. The reality was different. Though they were relatively freer than salaried workers, they sometimes had time-consuming tasks that required overtime work. Still, almost all responded that they are free at work and did have not many complaints in their minds. They were satisfied that they were eligible to make liberal choices and to set plans on their own freely. They compared their unfree working experience as a company officer, which did not allow them to choose a method or a direction of work. Young freelancers pointed out that lack of freedom hinders the demonstration of creativity and innovation in every aspect. Some naturally turn into passive workers losing competitiveness in developing their capabilities. This became a serious issue in their careers, as in a real meritocracy-based economy, all decisions are based mainly on individual’s performances and records.

Table 13. Changes in the recognition of freedom by freelancers

	Before starting to work(A)			After starting to work(B)			B-A(gaps)
	Low	Average	High	Low	Average	High	
I can freely use my working time.	5.6	26.9	67.5	10.8	33.2	56.0	-16.7

Data: Korea Labor Institute(2018), Unit: %

※The change in recognition before and after starting to work (B-A) was measured as the difference value after calculating the overall recognition degree as one value by multiplying each weight by -1, usually 0, and 1 for high.

“What I did not like the most was that my company is in charge of controlling my jobs and does not give me any freedom to choose, while the outcome matters to all. I was expected to be creative and innovate, while working in unliberal work settings.” – *Male, 31 / Computer Programmer*

"I prefer dangerous freedom over peaceful slavery, this is my favorite quote by Thomas Jefferson. I crave freedom at the workplace because I want to try new things to diversify life and for better commercialization of their talents. I need freedom of ideation and creation to better perform. When I was a full-time employee, I was not allowed to freely try something

new unless it is strictly for the company's good. My freedom was limited to the condition that I benefit the company and its goals. I naturally became timid and reserved because I consciously and unconsciously knew that I do not deserve freedom. I was becoming afraid of being criticized if I freely speak out. I did not like the way I am changing into, and wanted to make a change in my career, which ended up being a freelancer." – Female, 31 / Translator and Interpreter / Language Instructor

Interviewees also shared their experience of being offended by the regulations toward appearances and attires too. Their freedom of expression at work was violated, and they were emotionally attacked. Some companies had forcible rules on what people could wear and how they should look in the office. The respondents argued that the regulations are meaningless constraints that take away the fundamental right to enjoy the liberal expression for themselves. Especially, young females were humiliated and could not withstand the unreasonableness.

“Once, I went to an interview for a local investment bank, and everything seemed perfect before I got a letter of offer by email the next week. The email contained a regulation on my attire and make-up, saying I cannot wear outfits that are not achromatic colors - black, white, gray, or brown - and that I should not come to the office with no make-up. They added that it was for the image of the financial corporation, but in fact, it had nothing to do with my working abilities or the project itself. Most of my friends did not believe what I had received until they actually read the email. Since then, I always check if a company has a regulation against freedom of expression even though it is a right for all.” – Female, 29 / Math Teacher and Business Consultants(finance)

Claiming for freedom at work does not indicate that the young freelancers want to make their lives easier and be comfortable free agents. As mentioned, young generations have different priorities in the workplace than their predecessors, and ‘freedom’ is what they now wish for (Bruce, 2017). According to Ernst & Young’s Global Generations Research (2017), sixty-nine percent of all full-time workers cite a “boss who doesn’t allow [me] to work flexibly and freely” as a leading reason for leaving a job. At the same time, the report clarifies that a desire for flexibility doesn’t mean millennials don’t value collaboration or teamwork. They care much about such values, but they are more accustomed to being in a liberal environment and are more comfortable with speaking their opinions freely (Bruce). Interviewees for the research also argued that they want more freedom at work to try new challenges and have more opportunities to think from more diverse perspectives. To keep their careers organized and efficient under the liberal system, freelancers strive harder for self-discipline and self-management than the others do.

Furthermore, it was suggested that a freelancing career has released them from an excessive sense of belonging with the organizations. Being affiliated with a company inevitably led to psychological constraints that they belong under the system and are obliged to follow. It was stressed that they were being supervised. Most interviewees stated that no one would be able to continuously stay under the organizational system if their freedom is kept violated. Most of the people I interviewed are confident that they will not return to full-time work despite the instability or uncertainty that underlie in the freelancing industry. Life as freelancers has offered them a high degree of freedom for ideation, expression, and suggestions. Under the free labor contract, they relatively have a more equal relationship with their clients rather than being recognized as a subordinate worker. These qualities are important for young people who value strong identity and self-awareness. They wish to keep the boundaries of their lives and desire for a high level of freedom to make this possible.

"We need time to love, part ways, make friends, share some unexpected sadness, and overcome sadness. That's who I am. That's how people live. However, the company does not allow such a time. The best part of being a freelancer with is that I can be true to myself. It is one of the most important factors to being stable and happy. I could get sick as much as I wanted, not anxiously worrying about fast recovery and returning to work. What was more painful than going to work when I was ill was that I couldn't handle the pressures and sadness. When I was in my 20s, after the end of the relationship, I had to go to work with a smile as if nothing had happened, greet people, and act cheerful. Even though I fought hard with my family and felt heavy as if a stone had settled in my heart, I had to act like a normal person at work. I had to attend the meeting, answer the phone, conduct the meeting, and finish what I had to do. Every day except the weekend was a day when I shouldn't be sick or broken. It was pretty harsh and terrible when I think about it now as a freelancer living a totally different life. - *Do, 2020 'I'm a freelancer, but I am doing well'* p54-55

The changes in the standards of good jobs appearing among young freelancers suggest that they possess distinctive values towards careers — both conditionally and emotionally. Young freelancers put more weight on the emotional aspects, mostly toward self-directed ways, and consider their own standards/values significant in cultivating their careers. Lee (2020) presented that the characteristics of these younger generations did not arise overnight. The older generations have the same essence towards conditional comfort and emotional freedom. However, young workers who grow up and are educated under neoliberal system are more

encouraged to express themselves. They are more accustomed to showing themselves externally. Kim (2020) also stated that the older generation had to endure tremendous pressures from organizational culture, not wanting to cause any troubles in the company or the society. Many of them were suffering from poverty and hunger, and could not afford to care about other things but survival. Things have changed now and the young generations with new values and standards are dominating our society.

CHAPTER 5. CHALLENGES AND SUFFERINGS

The concluding chapter highlights challenges commonly faced by young freelancers in Korean society. It covers both intended and unintended consequences when labor market trends evolve faster than the regulations. Most social protection systems were initially designed with the archetypical full-time dependent employee. Work patterns deviating from this model – be it self-employment or online ‘gig work’ – can lead to serious coverage gaps (OECD, 2016). Scholars and academia point out that our society lacks understanding and support towards employment types beyond the standard employment relationships despite the multi-faceted benefits and ever-growing possibilities of freelancing careers. ILO (2018) report stated that the rapid emergence of non-standard employment is problematic because working conditions and rights have been conventionally based on standard employment, thereby not practically fitting with the conditions of all employment types. The umbrella of protective rights does not efficiently cover the actual needs of non-standard workers. Therefore, non-standard employment, especially the newly emerged free workers, is characterized by a higher degree of decent work deficits, including lower earnings, reduced social security coverage and poorer working conditions, fewer prospects for personal development, and less voice (ILO, 2016). The harmful conditions may account for the relatively short length of services of freelancers compared to regular workers in Korea (National Statistics Office, 2019). It is thus vital to understand the challenges that freelancers face these days.

What things constrain the continuation of freelance employment in Korean society? This section will concentrate on the deficiency in social protections, legislative responses, and social/institutional policies that negatively impact freelancing careers in Korea. The interview illuminates derived consequences of deficiencies, including low social insurance support, absence of guidance for contracts, and scarcity of certified education/training opportunities. The discussion focused on how the young workers psychologically/emotionally suffer from decent work deficits, leading to rampancy of instabilities and recognition difficulties in society.

Ensuring that these non-standard employment arrangements constitute “decent work” requires an array of policy interventions, including legislative reforms and strengthening other institutions that govern the labor market (ILO, 2016). The deficiency in social support derives from the gray area that the freelancers have fallen outside the scope of labor law protections and do not belong to a clearly defined category yet. This indicates that there could be an absence of

properness within the social treatment and the working conditions/regimes ranging from inappropriate dismissal to fiscal protections, tax regulations, contracts, fund supports, and even minor matters such as sick leave, holiday pay, and so on. According to a survey by Korea Labour Institute and Society (2021) that researched the areas where institutional and policy improvements need to be improved for freelancers in Korea, it was found that they take the legal support system (81.1 points) is the most urgent matter to be improved (Table 13). It was followed by establishing a career certificate system (80.8) and a standard contract guide (78.1). Subsequently, there was a high need for tax counseling support (77.5), official labor recognition (77.3), social insurance support (76.8), market monitoring (74.2), and contract implementation support (71.2). The result demonstrates that the decent system deficits in the social, institutional, and legal sectors are intertwined with various difficulties.

Table 13. Survey on the Areas for Institutional/Policy Improvements

	Areas for Improvements	Indicator points
Improvement on Contract Terms	Legal support systems	81.1
	Standard contract guidelines	78.1
	Market monitoring	74.2
	Operating public agency	62.3
Improvements on Implementation of Tasks	Support for tax consultation	77.5
	Support for social insurances	76.8
	Support for contract and work performance	71.2
	Support for psychology consultation	69.4
	Support for workplace	68.0
Improvements on Organizing Groups	Support for organizing freelancer groups	69.9
	Organizing social committee	10.1
Improving Awareness	Recognition of freelancer as worker	77.3
	A campaign to improve freelancer awareness	70.7
Education and Training	Establishing career recognition system	80.8
	Organizing education and training	67.6

Source: Korea Labour Institute and Society(2021)

*The higher points indicate higher necessities for improvements in the area

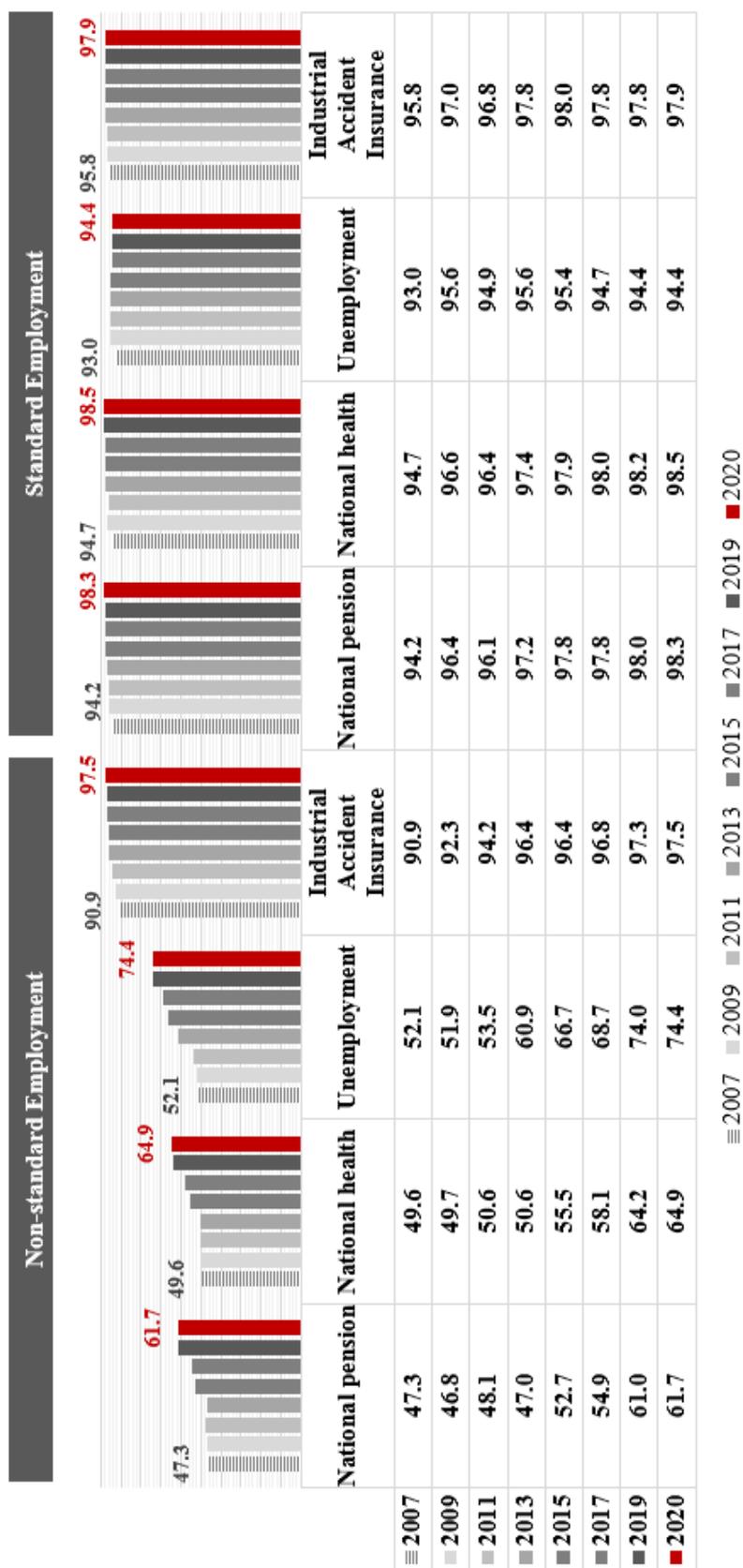
Deficiency in Social Insurance Support

It was found that the young freelancers suffer from social disadvantages that come from the social insurance support deficiency, leading to psychological instability and insecurity. Korean freelancers pointed out the beneficiary exclusions from the four major social insurances. The four significant packages in Korea provide a basic level of coverage to protect workers' rights against possible social risk and guarantee income. This includes industrial accident compensation insurance against accidents/harms, employment insurance against unemployment, health insurance against diseases/illness, and a national pension against old-age poverty. Most freelancers may not be covered at all or maybe covered in principle, yet are not eligible/qualified for the application criteria for the insurance benefits due to difficulties in certifying incomes and careers.

According to the Ministry of Employment and Labor (2020), non-standard employees without any social insurance and private insurance were 1 in 5(20.4%). Among them, the proportion of uninsured for national pension and national health insurance was pretty high, having only 61.7% and 64.9% being covered, respectively, in 2020. Insured workers for unemployment insurance were 74.4%, while those with the industrial accident insurance were fairly high, 97.5%. Fortunately, the coverage rate of social insurance for non-standard employment has continuously increased since 2007, showing a considerable increase in the past decade. To supplement the insurance deficit, freelancers apply for private insurance independently. The eligibility to receive social insurance benefits varies among freelancers depending on their level of income and labor types. This indicates that benefit inequality too exists within the freelancer group. The interview participants revealed the anxiety, instability, and insecurity that arose from the lack of social insurance protections.

“Before I started my freelancing career, I was not aware of the significance of social insurance because I took them for granted in my prior work as a regular worker. However, working without any social insurance and protection is far more anxious than I thought. It relates to wage, security, and safety - the triangular cores of a high-quality career. I feel psychologically deprived for not being embraced by the social/labor laws. Even though there is a low possibility for office workers like me to get into an accident, it is a problem of conceptual deficiency that I will not be protected or secured by any policies under any circumstances at work. Also, for financial aspects, even though my salary now is not low, I feel pressured whenever I think of not being able to receive national pensions after retirement. My parents and relatives often ask about my future plans already. It is always going to be solely myself who needs to be responsible for my life and the well-being of my family if I have one in the future”. – *Male, 34 / YouTube video creator and Contents producer*

Figure 21. Social Insurance Coverage Ratio by Employment Types (%)
(A comparison between non-standard vs. standard)



Source: Ministry of Employment and Labor

Freelancers particularly demonstrated the safety issues that come from the deficiency of industrial accident insurance, having only 24.8% insured in 2020(Korea Labour & Society Institute, 2020). The respondents stated that while the socio/legal protection against industrial hazards are preventative measures at best, it is critical if they are to sustain the job for a prolonged period until they get old. People agreed that compensation for safety should be one of the fundamental conditions across all types of employment sectors, especially because safety protection issues often trigger social anger and controversy in a case of breach or misuse of those protections.

“I mostly work in an office environment where severe accidents rarely occur, so I did not care much about the industrial accident insurance coverage at first. But if I am to maintain my career for 30 ~40 years, I do not think I can comfortably work in the absence of social protection against accidents for how long. No one knows what might happen, or I might be changed into a position that works outside or on-site. For physical security and psychological stability and to comfortably continue my career, I believe the social protection system must be revised.” – *Female, 33/ Freelance Translator and Interpreter*

It was also found that freelancers are not equally treated or efficiently funded by the government for stimulus checks under exceptional circumstances like the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the interviewees had an experience of feeling excluded and neglected when they encountered difficulties in receiving stimulus checks properly. For emergency coronavirus relief funds recently, even though the freelancers were included as beneficiaries, the applicable standards or procedures did not efficiently fit into the reality of freelancing careers whose payment intervals are irregular. The commencement of projects is sporadic. Project workloads highly fluctuate depending on the seasonality of the market. This led to a group of eligible applicants not being able to submit proof of income or work certificates that match the government’s standards. Young freelancers described it as an inefficient and discriminatory program.

“When I first heard that freelancers are also eligible for the emergency relief fund, I was thankful for our society being inclusive of all types of employment. However, I soon found some of the standards inefficient and discriminatory compared to the grant programs delicately designed for the regular workers. For example, in order to receive the emergency relief funds for Covid-19 situation, it was required that one should not have employment insurance, and the income of the applying month must have decreased by more than 25% compared to the average of the previous year or the same month last year. My friend had begun freelancing in August of the year before last and had the lowest monthly salary during that time. When he tried to apply for the Covid-19 grants last August, of course, his salary was higher than the previous year, when he first began freelancing; therefore, was not eligible for application. I

could not agree with the logic of the system because the system has excluded someone who should be qualified for financial assistance. – *Male, 37 / Freelance Data Analyst*

Many interviewees appealed that a discriminatory treatment in social protections and legal systems has led to a discriminatory social recognition and poor awareness of the freelancing careers by others, making them feel inferior and a sense of shame in many aspects. They suffer more from the difficulties that come from how society treats them. They particularly mentioned despair of not being acknowledged and appreciated as contributing community members, despite their strenuous efforts and struggles for career development. The poor social recognition influenced how they are viewed by their intimate relationships, including families, relatives, teachers, and friends. They also stated that poor treatment affects how employers view and treat them at the workplace.

“Inappropriate social, political and legal systems facilitate unfair employment practices that do not commensurate with the value/cost of labors that we provide to the employers. Once, I could not complete the project by the deadline because I was terribly sick and asked for a week off. But the employee did not believe that I actually had a health issue and cut the project off by saying how can a freelancer ask for another free time for relaxation during the project period. Being suddenly cut off, I didn't even get paid as much as I worked. Because the social system does not place us into the boundaries of protection and guidance, the employers also do not treat us with sufficient consideration and understanding. I can totally feel that their treatment is different from how they treat regular workers. – *Female, 24 / Freelance Wedding Planner and Fashion Designer*

“When I first told my professor that I decided to work as a freelancer, the first thing he asked was how long I will work as a freelancer, assuming that it is just a temporary plan until I get a full-time position. He added that my decision is abnormal and should consider coming back to the normal orbit soon. I was suddenly viewed as a weird person. I could not visit him again after listening to a harsh criticism he had made on my career” - *Male, 29 / Business consultant (company branding advisor)*

Freelancers in their 30s also shared experiences of having problems with their relationships or marriage, especially when encountered with an old conservative generation viewing them as freeters eating the bread of idleness. Stereotypes that view free workers as unproductive agents devalue their labors and efforts.

“When I was in a relationship with my ex-girlfriend, there was a moment when I had to seriously consider going back to a company as a full-timer. Once I heard that her parents and friends dislike me for being a freelance writer because I look indolent, not even asking how much or how long I work. They also assumed that I will not be able to financially support my family properly and criticized me as a bad candidate for a husband. Their thoughts never changed. Ironically, my parents also have similar thoughts about my job and do not prefer to

introduce me as a freelancer to their acquaintances until now.” – *Male, 32 / Freelance electronic device developer and researcher*

Unfortunately, a vast gap in social security access between standard and non-standard workers is a worldwide issue. The situation was not much different in European countries, where countries are well-known for their high social welfare and benefits rates. Although many EU member states cover some categories of self-employed through mandatory or voluntary social insurance coverage, coverage rates are low, resulting in significant social protection gaps for the self-employed workers (including freelancers). For example, most self-employed workers in Germany and Greece are excluded from sickness and maternity coverage. Only a few countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary) provide social insurance cover for self-employed workers in the event of unemployment (Williams and Horodnic, 2019). In the case of the U.S. too, the largest freelancing market, it was found that health insurance is a top concern for American freelancers (Freelancers Union, 2018). According to the Fifth Annual Freelancing in America report, while 84% of U.S. freelancers have their health insurance, most of them pay for it themselves, and the health insurance premiums for freelancers increase every year. This leads to concerns about the availability of an affordable healthcare system. It was also found that the freelancers in the U.S. do not feel represented by their government leaders, despite their tremendous financial contributions to the economy. In these aspects, the absence of appropriate social insurance support is an urgent issue to address. Designed at a time when standard employment dominated, social protection systems must evolve as the market trend changes (ILO, 2017).

Absence of legal guidance for standardized contracts

The absence of legislative guidance for standard contracts is another significant issue in the freelancing industry. As mentioned in chapter 3, the freelancers are not acknowledged as ‘worker/laborer’ under the Employment and Labor Act in Korea, thereby not having any standardized guidance by the law. There are also no contractual obligations for the employees. Young freelancers claimed that the absence of such has disqualified their rights to be fully informed of the detailed working conditions beforehand, leading to mistreatments or unfair working practices. ILO report (2016) indicates that as a minimum requirement, the workers should be informed of their conditions of employment before the effective beginning of their assignment. The report adds that providing information, particularly in writing, about the rights and obligations of the two different parties and liabilities in case of breach of those obligations

can be a step to establishing transparency and accountability in relationships with multiple parties. Therefore, mutual accountability is at stake for non-standardized employment contracts. Accountability is critical because it is correlated with transparency and sustainability and with keeping balance and harmony between the two parties.

It was elaborated that the binary structure of the labor contract dividing employee and employer further raises the necessity to set legitimate guidelines for contracts. Unfair treatment issues within the contract relations have already been raised in the existing studies and surveys. According to the survey conducted by the Korea Labour & Society Institute (2020), 49.2% of the freelancing respondents said they had worked without writing a contract, and the non-standardization has led to many derivative side effects even after signing the contract. They include demands for implementation of works not included in the contract (29%), sudden changes in work content (23.8%), requests for modification/revision of work without consultation (21.4%), not agreed termination of the contract (19.4%), and forced unfair contract conditions (14.1%). Among various freelance labor types, those in the art field and private business had more unfair contract treatments. Another survey by Seoul City Hall (2018) reported that the biggest reason for not drawing up a working contract was due to the entrenched industry practices (32.8%), while some said the employer did not prefer to write it (11.8%). This again indicates a lack of correct awareness about establishing proper contract systems in freelancing realms.

More importantly, the research results show that poor contracts are closely related to the unstable wage systems, provoking severe financial insecurity and future uncertainties. It is stated that freelancers' income disconnection or low-income problem leads to job insecurity and deduction in overall job satisfaction. Particularly, financial insecurity debilitates workers' belief in the sustainability of their freelancing careers. Lacking legitimacy, the non-standardized contracts for freelancers rarely include clarified terms on vital elements, including minimum wage protection, annual severance pay, payment intervals, overtime pay, etc. The absence of reasonable payment terms leads to diverse financial damages for freelancers. The wage issues include payment delays (30.6%), non-disclosure of payroll information (14.3%), non-payments of additional remuneration under project extensions (14.2%), not agreed reduction of remuneration (13.9%), wage non-payment (11.9%), and so on (Korea Labour & Society Institute, 2021).

"I once received a contract that indicates that the remuneration for the manuscript will be deducted if I pass the deadline specified in the contract, even for a day(24hours). But the contract did not include any clauses for what company should endure in case of payment delay or sudden changes in workloads. I asked the company to adjust the deadline penalty to three days and made sure that I would get my payment within 72hours of project completion, or should be officially informed and agreed in the case of payment delay. Since then, I always carefully look at the parts that contain numbers such as amount, rate, and period. When the contract amount is high, I also get help from acquaintances with similar experience in the same industry." – *Female, 31 / Translator and Interpreter, Language Instructor*

Although freelancers do prefer flexible contracts for liberal working regimes, clear statements on payment are necessary for any type of employment. Particularly, freelancers during the interview urged the necessity of market unit price standardization by stressing the influence of rising labor market competition and shadowing meritocracy for freelancers. Lee, a freelance translator/proofreader with four years of working experience, pointed out that excessive labor competition has raised the issue of labor cost dumping for freelancers.

"I would like to urge the government to set a minimum unit price standard for each field/sector. This way, the issue of unstandardized contracts will be eased to some extent. It is a free-flowing market where freelancers in the entry stage usually have no choice but to flow into the platforms. Unfortunately, they often fall into the traps of low-wage and excessive labor in the competition-oriented platform environment and get financial disadvantages. I also feel the necessity of having legal standards to appropriately calculate our labor costs in accordance with the standards for the regular workers." – *Female, 32/ PE trainer and PE certificates instructor*

Another issue of non-standardized labor contracts is job insecurity resulting from the discontinuity and non-persistence of contracts led by the employer's will. Most of the arrangements for freelancers do not include terms regarding notice periods for contract termination. It also does not specify how the workers would be compensated if the contract suddenly terminates due to the employer's will. The discontinuation of a contract includes a situation when a freelance worker is forced to leave in the middle of the project and is disadvantaged for not being able to complete the work that they have put a lot of effort into. In some cases, their career was damaged too when they could not officially include the withdrawn project in their resumes. It was shown that while freelancers believe that their careers have long-term sustainability, the contract does not guarantee any job security at the moment of project implementation, thus, giving insecurity and uncertainties.

"While I was working for a series novel translation project, the publication company suddenly asked me to withdraw from the project and give the role to their internal staff due to budget issues. I already have invested a lot of time and energy on the project and did not want to stop. But I had no choice but to drop out. After the sudden withdrawal, my work schedule also got

ambiguous because I had already removed all other work schedules for the 3months of the series project duration. Later one, one of the companies even asked for the reason for the incompleteness of the project in my resume which made me feel bad because it was not my decision at all.” – *Female, 33 / Freelance Translator and Interpreter*

In his research, Chang (2021) stated that freelancers who did not experience unfair contract practices had statistically shown a higher job satisfaction than freelancers who did, which accounts for almost half of the research respondents. A survey (2020) also indicates that one of the critical factors that lower freelancers' job satisfaction is the unfairness in unstandardized contracts regardless of business type. It suggested that the public institutions are not much different from private companies in that 53.7% of freelancers who mainly work with private companies and 48.7% of freelancers who work with public institutions said they both experience unfair contract practices. The interview respondents stated that unfair treatment through the contract leads to various ramifications before and during the project implementation, thus, continuously making them feel unstable and insecure. Young freelancers feel deprived of not being eligible to receive support from social safety nets. The freelancers also worried about not being able to lean on social shelters under exceptional circumstances such as pandemics or diseases.

Deficiency in Education Opportunities for Skill Trainings and Professionalism Development

Since freelancers are free agents, it is important to continuously develop their careers through systematic skill/talent training education. People in the freelancing industry agree that the more skillful the workers become, the more their works are valued, and the longer they can work in diverse fields. Further, they stress that freelance workers should be able to access and collect information about changing labor market dynamics and catch up with the industry trends through educational opportunities or information exchange. Freelancers need education support for skill development, talent acquisition, and information sharing. The education system needs to anticipate future skills needs and, jointly with the business sector, adapt curricula to provide the required content using the most suitable delivery mechanism, including improving newer training methods (Eurofound, 2021).

In contrast, most freelancers point out that education systems and training opportunities are insufficient in Korea. This is primarily due to a lack of support by social/institutional systems that are not yet delicately designed to embrace the non-standard employments. The respondents also mentioned their experience of not being educated about career paths toward freelancing, both in and outside of school, which left them uninformed and made them feel distant.

Young freelancers strongly desire learning opportunities. They expected that it could lead to a chance to acquire a license that grants them an official certification for solid professionalism. Young freelancers in Korea are found to have a low percentage of owning permits in regard to their jobs. A survey by the Korean Society & Labour Institute (2020) also suggests that 31.3% of respondents were required to have professional licenses/certificates at their workplaces (17.7% national certificate, 13.6% private certificate), while about half (51.5%) were not. The certificates were found only to have the effect of qualifying the workers for job performance. Among the 29 interviewees for this research, 19 responded that they do not own any certificates/licenses related to their current jobs. The non-license holders stated that they have not considered getting a professional certificate yet because they did not have a chance to get one by themselves (40%), did not know what kinds of certificates are necessary (lack of information) (32%) or were not required to have one by the employers who merely view them as one-time employees (22%). Also, 55% of the 29 respondents said they have never received formal training for their jobs provided by public institutions, governments, or schools. Instead, almost all interviewees have experienced self-learning through online sources such as YouTube, portals, and blogs.

Most of the respondents pointed out that one of the problems for the learning deficiency is increasing skill gaps. Especially in the gig economy market, new skill acquisition is essential to meet the changing criteria of employers. Skills gaps could cause a lack of satisfaction for the clients and that of workers themselves if they cannot perform the high-skill jobs as expected. Many experienced inferiority complexes when compared to other skillful workers at work. Also, skill gaps could lead to undervaluation and depreciation for other works/services that they provide, even if they successfully take care of them, and would damage their professional images in the long run.

"For some of the projects, freelancers need to collaborate with others a lot, both with the freelancers and the regular workers at a company. This is when I feel a skill gap. Especially in this non-face-to-face era, most of the tasks are carried out and shared through online platforms. As new platforms and technologies emerge day by day, I feel the necessity to learn using them

proficiently. But it takes a lot of time and energy to learn them alone. I wish to receive some level of support on fostering such digital skills. They could be a workshop to learn productivity tools or collaboration programs together or support for new software purchases for freelance work, and renting space for a cooperative workshop or seminars on a regular basis." – *Female, 31 / Freelance Web designer, UX&UI designer*

Another problem of lacking education training is low flexibility in the workers' capacity to adeptly respond to market changes and solve problems in times of urgency. As independent workers, freelancers are limited in reacting quickly and efficiently to market fluctuations that often occur on large scales. Therefore, it is necessary to learn about market dynamics and changes and obtain information on trends. Online sources could also be informative but sometimes lack reliability and accuracy of information. For instance, in the era of a global pandemic, the ratio of income reduction caused by the COVID-19 was found to be 30 percentage points higher for non-standard workers (including freelancers) than regular workers. The shock of COVID-19 appears more intensively to the minorities who cannot flexibly respond to the unprecedented level of damages. During the interview, a freelance online marketer stated that if a market trend changes, a certain amount of capital is needed to develop new content that satisfies the new demands quickly. While companies/organizations can easily cope with these changes, an independent freelance worker does not usually have such capital. They would need a lot of time, investment, and research. If not properly prepared, one can fail. The government or local institutions' systematic training and curriculum could introduce them to new working strategies or invite them to a group community where they can find partners for collaboration.

Furthermore, it was suggested that young freelancers lacking professional training opportunities tend to depend on the convenience and technologies of the existing platforms, which could make them highly vulnerable to excessive technology dependability. Many scholars say the gig freelancers could fall into the perils of the gig economy and become platform laborers without possessing or developing their own skill sets. The workers would lose the power and motivation to navigate the paths for skills development. The increase of people working as freelancers rather than employees of organizations is mainly due to technology that allows workers to deliver services coordinated by apps. This could create a digital labor market that debilitates the significance of individual talents/skills. It is also noted that freelancers who only communicate and work through computers and communication devices may be exposed to new forms of instability compared to workers in established locations such as offices because the boundaries between work and life are ambiguous.

The Korean freelancing society is seeing a gradual emergence of cooperatives to deal with the challenges. Young freelancers in Korea gradually realize the importance of having a representative who can negotiate on your behalf, whether a group or a community. There is a sign of having cooperative unions or representatives to clarify their needs and keep their voices. As ILO (2016) states, collective agreements, which can be tailored to the specific sectoral or occupational circumstances to regulate the terms and conditions of employment, are another way forward to organize or bargain collectively. It is stated that the absence of union and social support, and welfare are all interrelated. Many welfares and benefits are developed and sustained by the union's work and voice. It is always the workers who demand the benefits. Respondents emphasized that in any industry, it is crucial to have certain representatives or delegate groups speak up for the benefits and generate specific power to negotiate on your behalf, especially when they are claiming support for the social and legal systems. Most of the time, the welfare or benefits are not massive but just in a reasonable size that workers deserve to receive compensation for their hard work. However, even a small compensation and benefits are not easy to achieve with the independent power of the worker. Furthermore, young freelancer workers felt the necessity for collaborative community and collective actions because Korean society lacks social acceptance and embracement toward new forms of labor. Most workers don't have their groups yet in the Korean freelancing community. Even if they have one, their unions are still in their infancy.

"We need a cooperative union/association/federation that allows freelancers to have bargaining power, such as supporting contracts or insurance, creating a system that allows us to receive benefits from career breaks or unemployment due to childbirth and childcare. We can develop new policies and propose them together. There is no way for a single worker to claim his/her needs against the social system." – *Male, 38 / Radio News DJ, Translator, Speech Instructor*

"I wish we, freelancers, also have a communal union that recommends keeping in touch with a network of other freelancers or independent business owners or entrepreneurs who do similar work, in order to have a professional group to lean on. We would be able to support each other, share emotional concerns, and comradeship, just like the salaried workers do with their colleagues at an office." – *Female, 31 / Translator and Interpreter, Language Instructor*

International organizations and labor institutions have struggled to tackle work deficits in appropriately adapting social protections for free workers. This may widely include making systems more flexible concerning contributions required to qualify for benefits, allowing for interruptions in contributions, enhancing the portability of benefits between different social security systems and employment statuses, and preventing the deliberate misclassification of workers from avoiding social protection coverage and ensuring adequate coverage for the self-

employed (ILO, 2017). Solid legislative responses and social policies are essential floors to improving their working conditions. The issue is not about making this work standard, but rather, the approach should be more about making all work and employment decent and inclusive. Decent work deficits across all employment relationships must be tackled (Williams and Horodnic, 2019). It is time to seek comprehensive policies (social safety net, standard labor standards, freedom of association, etc.) in terms of solid social protections instead of just promoting subject demand-based policies as we did in the past.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines how recent job trends in the South Korean labor market have changed, particularly focusing on the increasing number of voluntary young freelancers. A review of the existing literature on the trends of freelancers suggests that the demand for and supply of freelancers has been growing and is likely to continue in the future. The trend is promoted by the furtherance of labor flexibilization and changes in the industrial structures toward digitalization (industrial revolution 4.0). However, the extant literature mainly focuses on the negative aspects of working conditions, such as unstable income structures, insecure working status, and low social recognition, which further expand the precarious images of non-standard workers. The existing research (such as by ILO, 2016) places non-standard employment arrangements in a residual category of standard employment rather than assigning them to a distinctive category. Thus, based on a qualitative approach, this research adds academic value by establishing concrete views on distinguishing the features of freelancing activities. The research understands and assesses the rationales behind the booming freelancing trends from the workers' perspectives who voluntarily chose to be freelancers over salary workers. It aims to learn how their occupational values/standards have changed, thereby suggesting social implications to the future Korean society. The theoretical discussion highlighted the vagueness and unstandardized status of freelancers in today's labor market, which calls for the necessity to adequately place them within the boundaries of legislative protection and social support.

Throughout the interviews, I found that most professional/skilled freelancers are deviators from the standard employments at their young age. They voluntarily left the salary-based organizations and chose to be freelancers. It was a decision by choice rather than by necessity(needs). In most cases, they experienced life as salaried workers for 3~5years on average and decided to leave to seek options that better fit their job standards and life values. Due to social and educational backgrounds, it was very uncommon for young Korean people to initiate their careers as freelancers. Their choice of decoupling was mainly due to precarious working conditions as salary workers, accompanied by the coexistence of stiff stability and inflexibility under regulatory contracts. Based on the analysis, I propose that a good occupation for young and professional freelancers does not simply refer to a job with conceptual/structural employment stability under standard employment contracts. It also does not refer to the securitization of titles/positions designated by the company. Instead, the young freelancers strongly desire to have jobs where they can act as independent agents, think freely, and make a decision in flexible manners. They also wish to freely display their talents and maximize the

qualities of their outcomes. By playing a leading role in planning/organizing/managing their careers, these young freelancers desire to be recognized/appreciated as contributing members of society until the end of their careers, that is, when they want to retire, or at least until they are capable of doing so.

My examination also suggests that young freelancers signify emotional/cognitive values over conditional standards at work, mainly showing strong desires for ownership, independence, and freedom. Their priorities underlie psychological satisfaction and happiness derived from and within the conditional context. In the end, they intend to achieve more opportunities for self-development and self-training and succeed in becoming ‘talented but liberal professionals’ in the neoliberal society. This finding contrasts with the existing perspective that freelancers are always free and relaxed at work and are a group of non-standard workers pursuing mere freedom, comforts, and self-centered standards. A majority of the young freelancers were highly passionate about raising higher productivity, earning a higher salary, building wider networks, and experiences as much as they could. They cared much about whether the work environment they are currently involved in would allow them to achieve such qualities or not. Freelancing grants them a higher level of job satisfaction than what they had in their previous work life. Almost all interviewees for this research had firm and solid plans to continue their freelancing careers in the coming years.

Meanwhile, as we have seen from the multi-faceted challenges posed by both the society and the organizations, the depth of the instability/insecurity that young freelancers face is more profound than it seems external. This suggests that the young freelancers are bridging the gap between their ideals and the realities. While they expect to see improvements within society, they are also willing to live with the difficulties that underlie the nature of a freelancing career. My examination presents that though a freelancing career seems unstable from an outsider’s point of view, they have already decided to pursue a new lifestyle at the same time as they left organizations. They might be aware of the limitations and challenges that arise from instabilities but do not care as much as we expect. Moreover, since marriage has the most significant impact on the stage of life for young people in their 20s and 30s, being unmarried or unplanned for marriage enables them to make more independent choices and judgments in their lives than the older generations.

My research outcome also suggests that one of the strongest rationales behind their persistence in freelancing is a solid and broad emotional capacity that makes them affordable for pioneering their own life and career. These young freelancers are confident and sure that they can be responsible for the consequences they would make — whether good or bad. When the interviewees were asked about their reasons for continuing freelancing careers, the most responded were short and simple — “Why not?”. They had a strong mindset toward trying new things and experiencing diversified life. Notably, growing up amidst continuous diversification in jobs and employment types, they acquired strong ideas that *‘Jobs can be changed anytime if I want to, and therefore, ‘There is no need to pursue lifetime jobs at a single workplace,’ ‘Occupation is more than just earning a salary, ‘Everything is worth trying at a young age(freelancing is worth trying for),’ or ‘I can make a living no matter what I do(so, there is no problem doing things that I truly like)’*”. These kinds of open mindsets and self-confidence are also shown in their openness to diversifying their life plans. They believe that the more they are exposed to options in life, the more they would experience and benefit in the end. Thus, the young generation is no longer forced to stay within the boundaries of a standard orbit, what was once considered ‘normal’ — to graduate from college, get standard jobs, get married and have a child. Just like how much they are open to seeking employment, young people pursue a freer life and have their own stories in their autobiographies (e.g., choosing to be DINK or fabulous single forever, going on a study abroad or exchange students, working holiday experiences or permanent relocation to overseas). In short, their engagements in new and diverse careers are intimately intertwined with their flexible tendencies that appear in the other core aspects of life, such as education, family arrangements, or marriage. These qualities, directly and indirectly, affect the choice of each other and facilitates the furtherance of diversifications.

Their participation in freelancing is a natural outgrowth of distinctive educational and nurturing backgrounds that instilled strong self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-identities under neoliberal systems. As society sees more young generations with stronger self-identities in the labor market, it is critical for all stakeholders and multiple parties engaged (e.g., governments, local institutions, policymakers, corporations, individuals, etc.) to develop new management strategies. Particularly, businesses would need to extend their workforces by hiring more independent workers in the areas where they previously have not hired them and respond to the changing trends.

The promising futures of freelancing industries suggest policy implications that Korean society must work on developing/promoting inclusive social support and legitimate protections for non-standard employees in various fields, including virtual jobs. In particular, the landscape for labor policies for freelancing should be multi-layered and in-depth to consider the complexity of the industry. As the profiles and backgrounds of the workers are comprehensive and dynamic, the related policies should be accessible and affordable to all. As the working regimes are irregular, the policies should be well-balanced. However, there are few concrete plans on how the government or local institutions should array the social/institutional/legal guidelines in Korean society. Our society now stands at the tipping point of whether the policy arrangements can align with the progressive changes in freelancing industries or not. Recently, Korea has also shown little progress towards social protection improvements. Employment and industrial accident insurance took effect in 2020 and are applied to artists. The social insurance premium support system was introduced too. Two years ago, the Korean government announced its plan to use employment insurance for all special employment and freelancers from 2022. However, the coverage is still limited to workers in specific jobs and sectors (Chang, 2021). Therefore, even with the policy implementations, it is not easy for all workers in non-standard employment to be equally covered and benefited. This is mainly because the coverage and its range depending on the rules set out in national legislation and how they are implemented and enforced (ILO, 2016). In the end, it would create an unequal dual structure/system within the non-standard employees.

As for one of the recommendations, Korean society can benchmark several successful policy models and cases overseas, where freelancing industries are more advanced, entrenched, and recognized. Fortunately, many foreign countries are showing positive signs of improvements in the area. Beginning with our closest neighbor Japan, the government has announced its plans to extend a special insurance program to all freelancers who get injured or fall sick while working similarly to salaried employees (The Japan Times, 2021). Further, the Japanese government introduced its plans to revise the guidance to include freelancers under the labor-related laws if they are deemed to have an employer-employee relationship with a contracting company. In the case of the U.S., the largest freelancing country, eight states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have introduced “reporting time pay” laws requiring employers to pay their employees for a minimum number of hours when they report to work for a scheduled shift, even if the shift is canceled or its length reduced (ILO, 2016). The U.S. already has multiple regional unions for freelancers supported by local institutions. For instance, at the union, the freelancers

are informed of the possible options (e.g., Medicare, Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program; CHIP, Premium Tax Credits, etc.) and a list of considerations that they should be aware of before beginning their careers. In Australia, the government has introduced a wage premium for flexible work to redress the imbalance in wage systems (OECD, 2016). Germany and France are also improving their social insurance systems for free workers (Jang et al., 2017). As shown in the multiple cases abroad, it could be expected that Korea could follow the precedents and make positive changes in the near future. As the size of the market grows, so should the social systems. As ILO (2016) strongly argues, to prepare for a better harmonized and inclusive society, all countries should adopt, review and enforce national laws and regulations or other measures to ensure appropriate coverage and protection of all categories of workers and economic units. Our society should continuously collaborate and cooperate to find a balance among all types of workers with the policy and appropriate legislative framework supporting them.

Limitations and Future Research

From a realistic perspective, young freelancers are expected to encounter various challenges and limitations from unstable income, irregular assignments, and future uncertainties. Therefore, though young freelancers would style themselves as 'self-contented' and 'successful' freelancers, their standard of contentment might be only applicable to narrow ranges — that is, when they are still young and free. In this sense, I hereby point out some limitations in my research designs that call for the necessity to conduct diachronic research and continuously track the changes in their career and job satisfaction and priorities lifetimes.

Firstly, this research design is limited to the stories and voices of young freelancers in their 20s and 30s, mostly the young and free singles. Initially, young people were targeted for the interviews to invite digital connectors or gig workers. Therefore, they had to be chosen from a tech-friendly generation in their 20s and 30s. For my research, 27 of 29 interviewees were single and were unwilling to consider marriage or child seriously as part of their life plans. Hence, it is highly likely that their life plans and values are planned for a single-life or one-person household. They could quickly establish an independent life plan and exclude other external factors that deter them from being free. I suggest that future research look more carefully into whether conditional standards as freelancers are maintained even if they get older, in their 40s~50s, and are under economic pressures and emotional burdens that come from the obligation to support their own family and raise a child. As the emergence of young gig workers is a nascent

trend in our society, future studies should seek to clarify how their career life would be in 20~30 years or more from now on.

Second, concerning the young age range of the interviewees, there is a similar limitation in research design that comes from a short length/duration of professional experience as freelancers. The interviewees, on average, have three to five years of freelance experience and nine years at maximum. It is still an early stage in their total career spectrums. Therefore, their freelancing experiences could be narrowed and prejudiced to junior-level jobs. High satisfaction from flexibility and freedom at work could be temporal for freelancers in the early stages of their careers. It is recommended that future researchers investigate whether a higher level of freedom and flexibility at work would always be positive factors in maintaining their jobs or developing a successful career throughout the long years.

Third, there is a limitation in this research that it is designed during the times when the gig economy is at its highest peak of popularity, fueled by the non-face-to-face trends in the Covid-19 pandemic era. There could be possible challenges that come from the organic nature of rapidly changing industry trends in the gig economy and their influences on the flexible labor market flow. It could be argued that gig workers' job stability and security overly rely on the platforms, creating a new form of 'dependent relationship.' Some pointed out that gig workers may end up enjoying few of the advantages of self-employment but would lose their control over flexibility and autonomy and suffer from many of the drawbacks, including the risk of demand fluctuations, unpaid down or waiting times, and patchy social protection coverage in the digitalized industry (OECD, 2018). Therefore, future research should address how the changing nature of digital industrialization and economy would affect the status of online-based workers and how the freelance worker's dependency on the platform could maintain a well-balanced relationship as a 'user' who needs to find jobs and 'marketplace' to provide them with job opportunities, not going beyond than its role as facilitator.

Though this study could not afford to deal with every conditional factor, such as economic status, family background, or education level, it has its significance in covering the real work-life of young freelancers, taking their psychological motivations and conditional rationales behind their career shifts (from salary workers to freelancers) into the consideration. It went beyond the socio-economic perspectives of non-standard employment based on absolute numbers or in comparison to standard employment, which is commonly covered in the extant literatures. I figured it is more adequate to analyze and understand the rise and fall of a social

phenomenon by focusing on the changes in ideas, values, and mindsets of the directly engaged people. Our society needs to take a different stance and approach in grasping the trends of freelancers' rise and clearly distinguish them from the qualities often used to analyze standard employment. Its impact on the business realm is new but significant. Its rise in the labor market has been steady but continuous. Its dynamic nature is distinctive but keeps evolving. Finally, at a broader level, the issue regarding the rise of non-standard workers is going to be about securing decent work that is productive and delivers a fair income, that ensures security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives, and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men, — compounding almost all complex but significant social issues of our future society(ILO, 2016).

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Appendix. Interviewee Information

Age	Sex	Marital Status	City	Job Sectors	Occupations (Freelancer)	Former Occupation (Salary Worker)	Freelancing years
21	Female	Single	Busan	Health & Beauty	Make-up Artist/ Beauty Consultant/ Beauty Instructor	Sales staff at local cosmetics company	0.8
23	Female	Single	Busan	Design	Web graphic designer / Website constructor	Designer for Children's book at publishing company	1
24	Male	Single	Seoul	Gaming	Game Sound Designer/ Advertisement Sound Advisor	Sales associate at the largest gaming corporate	2.5
24	Female	Single	Busan	Event Planning	Wedding Planner / Fashion Designer	Associate at exhibition company	2
25	Male	Single	Seoul	Online and IT	Online PR & marketing officer	Marketing associate at foreign-based beer company	2.5
25	Male	Single	Seoul	Health & Beauty	Colored cosmetics marketer for blogs and cafes.	Associate at admin office of local female product company	3
26	Male	Single	Seoul	Fashion	Artist/Designer	Designer for male shoes company	3
27	Male	Single	Seoul	Data	Data Analyst	Researcher at local manufacturing company	2
28	Male	Single	Busan	Education	Speech Instructor/ English Tutor	Human resources associate at local pharmaceuticals company	3.5
28	Female	Single	Seoul	Design	Freelance designer/ art teacher	Designer for female clothing company	2
28	Female	Single	Seoul	Marketing	SNS marketer/ Influencer	Marketer at local telephone company	4.5
29	Male	Single	Busan	Consulting	Business consultant (company branding advisor)	Marketing and PR Associate at foreign-based food and beverage company	2
29	Female	Single	Busan	Education	Math Teacher / Business Consultants(finance)	Finance Analyst at local investment bank	3
30	Female	Single	Busan	Marketing	SNS marketer/ Influencer	Associate at producing team of broadcasting agency	3.5
30	Female	Single	Seoul	Marketing	SNS marketer/ Influencer/ PE trainer	Market researcher and Analyst	2

Age	Sex	Marital Status	City	Job Sectors	Occupations	Former Occupation	Freelancing years
31	Female	Married	Busan	Data	Game graphic Designer/developer	Salaried designer for a gaming company	3
31	Female	Single	Busan	Design	Web designer/ UX&UI designer	Programmer at local IT company	2
31	Male	Single	Seoul	Online and IT	Computer Programmer	Sales associate, local electronic company	4
31	Female	Single	Seoul	Translation	Translator and Interpreter/ Language Instructor	Admin staff at accounting department of manufacturing company	4.5
32	Male	Single	Seoul	Online and IT	Electronic device developer/researcher	Researcher and developer at local electronic company	2
32	Female	Single	Seoul	Education	PE trainer/ PE certificates instructor	Physical therapist at hospital	4
32	Female	Single	Seoul	Event Planning	Event planner	Associate, marketing & Communications	4
33	Male	Married	Seoul	Data	Consumer market trends and data analyst	market analyst at a local trading company for agriculture products.	3
33	Female	Single	Seoul	Translation	Translator and Interpreter	Overseas marketer at global FMCG company	4.5
34	Male	Single	Seoul	Online and IT	YouTube video creator and contents producer	Associate at trading company	2
35	Female	Single	Seoul	Design	Product designer	Fashion magazine editor	6.5
35	Female	Single	Busan	Fashion	Fashion Consultant / Online	Editor at Magazine Publishing Company	7.5
37	Male	Single	Seoul	Data	Data Analyst	IT developer and researcher at IT company	8
38	Male	Single	Seoul	Broadcasting	Radio News DJ	Researcher at governmental agency	9

Korean Abstract

본 연구는, 최근 「안정적인 월급쟁이(정규직)의 생활을 그만두고 프리랜서로 전환하는 젊은이들이 증가하는 현상」을 중심으로 국내 노동시장의 변화 동향을 연구하였다. 특히, 질적 연구를 통해 근로자의 입장에서 그들의 직업관, 가치관, 기준이 어떻게 변화하고 있는지, 더 나아가, 이러한 변화가 한국 노동시장에 제시하는 시사점은 무엇인지 알아보았다.

본 연구는 2021년 8월부터 2022년 2월까지 약 6개월에 걸쳐 서울과 부산에 거주하는 29명의 프리랜서를 대상으로 진행한 인터뷰 결과를 기반으로 한다. 본 연구의 목적을 세 가지로 간추리면 다음과 같다. 첫째, 이 논문은 전 세계적으로 증가 추세인 비표준 고용(non-standard employment)의 근본적인 메커니즘과 배경을 파악하는 것을 목표로 한다. 대표적 배경으로는 한국 사회 내 신자유주의화가 가져온 유연화가 고용 구조에 미친 영향을 먼저 다루고, 더불어 최근 확산하고 있는 디지털 산업 혁명이 이끈 노동시장의 다각화와 각 경제 현상을 다루었다.

둘째, 이 논문은 12개의 각기 다른 직업군에 속한 청년 프리랜서(20~39세)의 일하는 방식을 살펴보고자 한다. 인터뷰 대상자 모두 과거 월급쟁이(정규직)로 생활한 경험이 있다는 점을 감안하여, 그 당시 직장 생활과 현재 프리랜서로서의 삶을 비교한다. 두 고용 형태 간에 어떤 점이 가장 다른지, 프리랜서의 삶을 택한 이들의 직업관은 어떤 가치를 중요시하고 있는지, 궁극적으로는 표준고용형태의 궤도에서 벗어나기로 한 과감한 선택의 배경은 무엇인지 공유한다.

셋째, 이 논문은 젊은 프리랜서들이 직면하고 있는 문제점과 어려움을 다루고, 궁극적으로는 이러한 문제들로 그들이 어떻게 심리적으로 혹은 사회 인지적으로 고통 받는 지를 알아보았다.

앞서 언급한 세 가지 연구목적에 종합하여 정리하면, 본 인터뷰는 젊은 프리랜서들의 시각과 목소리를 통해 변화하는 직업 동향에 대한 상호이해와 다자적 시사점을 제공하는 것을 목표로 한다. 마지막으로, 본 논문은 한국 사회 노동시장 내 고용 유연화의 영향을 다룬 현존 문헌을 바탕으로 젊은 세대(밀레니얼 세대, Z세대)가 자기 정체성(self-identification), 자기 존중(self-respect), 자기 이익(self-interest)을 지키기 위해서 엄격한 직업관과 가치관을 가지고 있으며, 이런 현상이 지속된다면 더 많은 젊은이가 점차 직업/노동 자유화를 추구하게 될 것임을 시사한다.

키워드: 비표준노동, 청년 프리랜서, 노동 시장 변화, 각 경제, 각워커, 밀레니얼 세대/ Z세대.