

The Concept of “Structure of Feeling” According to R. Williams and the Stratification of Class-oriented Labor Movements in Contemporary Japan: A Case Study on ‘A’ local union in Tokyo

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This research attempts to rethink the possibilities lying in the labor movements of contemporary Japan from the 1980s onward within the theoretical framework of the British cultural studies. The concept of “structure of feeling” according to Williams is reliable while attempting to account for the complexity of labor movements in contemporary Japan. Based on the above-mentioned theoretical approaches, within historical changes expressible through binaries such as “industrial society /working class, welfare state/corporate-oriented unions, neo-liberalism/somewhat hardly definable agents”, the present study focuses on “the residual” class-oriented labor unions in the hegemonic processes of Japanese labor movements as witnessed in “emergent” gender-oriented labor movements, “residual” class-oriented labor unions, and “dominant” corporate-oriented unions. Making use of the concept of “structure of feeling”, the present study examines the structure, the functions, and the stratifications of “A” local union based in Tokyo. (a)The main office and the NPO, (b) “a” branch, a small and mid-sized corporate-oriented union established in 1978, and (c) “b” branch born in 2007, a union whose members are registered temporary tour conductors have been the object of our investigations. The purpose of the present study is precisely to understand the dynamic interrelation existing between the three sections of “A” local union where antagonism and the “all equal workers” philosophy seem to coexist.

INTRODUCTION

The overall purpose of the present research is to scrutinize the contemporary Japanese labor movement beyond the 1980s in an era full of upheavals manifest in dichotomies such as industrial society-working class, welfare state-corporate-oriented unions, neo-liberalism-somewhat hardly definable agents.

The 1980s have been a transitional period towards the flexibility of labor in Japan. As of yet, the labor movement has been the focus of the social movement, but in the post-war period, beyond the year 1955, with the high economic growth and the creation of the spring labor talks the weight has been put on the economic struggles. On the other hand, with the economic growth, the labor movement took “an economic” focus, and outside the labor movement sphere, a new social movement with “a political” touch emerged.

However, beyond the 1980s, increased labor flexibility has been witnessed, following the breakdown of the transitional patterns supposed to replace the market which secured the economic growth. With the flexibility of labor, the number of non-ensured workers augmented. This situation led to the collapse of the bases underpinning the argument in favor of the separation between labor movements and the newly-born social movements.

As a matter of fact, taking their roots in the women’s movement and the civil society movement, new labor movements were on the rise since the separation between “the economical” and “the political” turned out to be futile. In other words, the class struggle within the working class of the industrial society was equally conceived as both an “economical” and a “political” phenomenon. On the other hand, corporate-oriented unions within the welfare state came to be considered as an “economical” element as opposed to the emerging social movements taken as a “political” phenomenon.

Besides, with neo-liberalist premises, the labor movement beyond the 1980s encompasses “economical” and “political” elements, though certainly different from the class struggle of the collective working class within the industrial society. The present research conceives such a hybridization of “the economical” and “the political” elements as a “cultural” phenomenon.

The “cultural” element we refer to here finds its premises in the “structure of feeling” according to R. Williams. This paper is a section of our investigation on “the ‘structure of feeling’ in contemporary Japanese labor movements: a cultural study of labor movements”. Williams establishes a hegemonic interrelation between “the dominant”, “the residual”, and “the emergent”. Relying on this scheme, the present paper divides the contemporary Japanese labor movements into “the dominant” corporation-orientated union (case study 1), “the residual” class-oriented union (case study 2), and “the emergent” gender-oriented union (case study 3).

Such a division intends to obey the historical changes undergone by the concept of “structure of feeling” according to Williams and examines the contemporary Japanese labor unions, which can in fact be spatially seen as generating, transforming, and maintaining antagonism. This paper circumscribes its focus on “the residual” class-oriented union (case study 2).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE CONCEPT OF “STRUCTURE OF FEELING” ACCORDING TO R. WILLIAMS

First of all, as our theoretical framework, we shall examine the “structure of feeling” according to Williams. We focus on this concept because it allows us to express the layers of experience. Thompson examines the ‘common experience’ of the pre-industrial society and the formation of the working-class (Thompson 1963). Relying on the English tradition of experimental theory, Thompson deals with the common experience of the formation of the working class, positioning experience between existence and consciousness.

In the above-mentioned Thompson's conception Negri sees the risk of taking the working class as a unitary body, and thus, in order to examine the formation of a new subject of the labor movement based on post-Fordism, he brought up changes in Thompson's conceptual framework (Negri 2004). The concept of "multitude" finds its premises in the reality of difference, re-constructed under the elements of opposition between different and common experience.

However, with the concept of "multitude" Negri examines the formation of a new subject through the immaterial labor which symbolizes the transformation of the modes of production. This refers to the occurrence of a post-structural linguistic turn based on the affect and the language shifting the binary of mass worker/social worker (Negri 1988) to that of material labor/immaterial labor (Hart & Negri 2004), but naturally the formation of the subject stemming from an abstractive level of the intelligence of the masses. This level differs from the one that Thompson describes in terms of the constitution of the actual situation of the working class based on historical materials (documents). Relying on British cultural studies, the present paper has chosen a reflexive and experimentally different path from the one took by Thompson in order to understand the realities of the contemporary labor movement.

At this point, the concept of "structure of feeling" according to Williams reveals itself to be very fruitful since it stands as an oppositional element to the common-dynamic interrelation (hegemonic stratification). In the debate opposing Thompson to Williams between the 1960s and the 1970s, Thompson criticized Williams' cultural notion of "a whole way of life" arguing that this concept made the reality of class-struggle equivocal (vague), which led Williams to replicate that Thompson's view of "a whole way of struggle" cannot explain the situation of a society where class-struggles are less pronounced.

In reaction to Thompson's criticism of the 1970s, Williams subscribed to the expression of hegemony, thus re-conceptualizing his idea of "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977). Taking into account the whole scope of the society, Williams will re-define "the dominant", "the residual", and "the emergent" hegemonic interrelations, positing the concept of "structure of feeling" as the drive for "the emergent" in the inarticulate experience of the pre-stage of consciousness.

Furthermore, not to mention the working class, he will also consider women and races, the whole range of the marginalized of the society as the spring of "the structure of feeling". Therefore, this gives a leeway to the possibility of considering gender or race as a new drive for the productive force, 'the emergent' in the same terms as class. The present research makes use of the expression "structure of feeling", both as it has been conceived in the 1970s as the drive for "the emergent", and as the mentality of a certain group as it has been conceived between the 1950s and 1960s. In other words, it considers that being the origin of "the emergent", "the structure of feeling" respectively embodies the mentality of "the dominant", "the residual", "the emergent" groups at the same time.

This is not only because it explains that for the formation of a group and its present, the concept of "the structure of feeling" as the origin of "the emergent" is important, but also because within a group the hegemonic processes of "the dominant", "the residual", and "the emergent" exist. This paper considers each of these processes as embodied in the general frame of "the structure of feeling". Via such a theoretical approach, beyond the paradigm of common-different, this research inscribes the idea of "the structure of feeling" on the common-complex experience.

Borrowing from Thompson and influenced by Negri the present paper particularly investigates on "the residual" class-oriented union (case-study 2). We prepare a new descriptive terminology in order to reflect the transformation of the modes of production and the dispersion of the whole society.

First of all, reflecting the transformation of modes of production, we make use of Karl Marx's concepts of collective worker and the new individualized worker in order to focus on the place where the formation, the transformation, and the maintenance of antagonism occur. We use worker and non-worker to reflect the dispersion of the overall society and we utilize the dichotomy of material space/immaterial space in order to indicate the meeting place (the collective space). By utilizing such descriptive concepts and that of "structure of feeling", the present research intends to determine the place of the contemporary "class-oriented union" as "the residual" and its mentality.

PREVIOUS STUDIES & RESEARCH QUESTION

Post-war Japan saw its class structure dismantled under the rule of the GHQ. Beyond 1955, the opposition between the "capitalist class" and the "working class" has waned, while the era of high economic growth has come.

As a matter of fact, "class struggle based labor disputes" in post-war Japan within private corporations in the 1950s and "class struggle-based labor disputes" in the Government and Public Workers Unions between 1970 and the 80s were marginalized. The present-day Japanese main labor movements are right-wing. On the other hand, during the 1960s new left movements emerged (student movements' activities), and with them replacing the old (marginalized) left unions, new labor movement's activities have risen.

The assessment of the existing research on labor movements in Japan reveals that until the 1980s, a structural polarity between "collaborative labor-management relations" and "class struggle-based labor disputes" was in place. This structure has turned into the opposition between the bloc of "collaborative labor-management relations" and the one representing social movement unionism. This explains the fact that in the literature on labor movements, the "class struggle-based labor disputes" has vanished.

However, this research defines the contemporary Japanese labor movements organized on the basis of class antagonism as class-oriented labor unions. Even if these movements are still marginalized to this day, the situation is taking new shape. This paper in a theoretical framework intends to examine the formation of such class-oriented labor movements with 'A' local union in Tokyo (about 800 members) as a case study.

THE DYNAMIC OF THREE PARTS: THE MAIN OFFICE & NPO, THE 'a' BRANCH, AND THE 'b' BRANCH

The present paper is a three-staged analysis of 'A' local union as the main office & NPO, plus the 'a' and 'b' branches. In fact, we believe that the three-fold composition of the 'A' local union perfectly typifies the contemporary Japanese class-oriented labor unions.

In order to focus on the antagonism and the collective space, while at the same time indicating the changes in modes of production, this research makes use of the binary expressions of collective worker/individualized-worker, worker/non-worker, material space/immaterial space as collective spaces.

Labor-management relations disputes within the enterprise justify labor union activities which take the shape of enterprise-oriented labor unions if their activities do not spill over the confines of the enterprise. 'A' local union maintains its community-based flavor as far as its base remains outside the enterprise while addressing the enterprise internal antagonism in which salaried workers are involved.

Such a conservation of the class-orientation spirit has historically been witnessed in the shift from the material space (physical space) of the 1960s to the immaterial space (virtual space) of the NPO blog of the 2000s. Along with the new left wing movements 'A' local union was established in the 1960s in the suburb of Tokyo where small and medium-sized factories agglomerated together, so activists from the new left wing became factory workers.

In the 2000s side-by-side with the NPO, the internet allowed the creation of the NPO blog which attracted new activists. Different from the collective workers labor movements who held their meetings in material spaces, such an immaterial collective space, was composed of activists among individualized workers with no meeting facilities.

This means that the class-oriented labor movement is not a monolithic phenomenon. It emerged and has perpetuated itself as a new left wing and an NPO antithetically to the traditional left wing. Consequently, class-oriented labor movement is not to be perceived as separated from the contemporary labor movement as, say, between a material space-based union and a newly normal social movement, but always intertwined.

Besides, both the labor and the labor movement bear these two-sided characteristics. Workers and activists from disparate backgrounds used to gather together in such a space and beyond the 1980s the disparity became more and more pronounced. Nevertheless, ‘A’ local union publication newsletter and party meetings came to develop a class-based consciousness visible in the motto of “all equal workers”.

Collective worker:	Main office: New left-wing activists (a senior group)
Non-worker:	NPO: volunteer
	‘a’ branch: Regular worker-non regular worker A union board -Part-time worker
Individualized worker:	‘b’ branch: Registered temporary tour conductors

The case study dealt with in the present paper is a linen supply labor company-based union (1978), ‘a’ branch, composed of about 100 collective workers in an industrial agglomeration. In 1978 its members held a 48 hour non-stop strike at an area where industrial factories agglomerated and, which ended up in the creation of the labor union. The small cottage utilized by the labor union is located inside the compound of the enterprise and the labor movement activities are held there normally on a daily basis.

The work category among the members is diverse ranging from production, sales-management, clerical workers, regular workers, retirement (shokutaku) to part-time workers, but they entertain a strong allegiance to the “all equal workers” slogan. They engage in a two-dimensional collective activism, i.e. fighting for their cause and enjoying “together”.

Despite the slogan “all equal workers” middle-aged women part-timers have seen themselves marginalized. Their request for “equal pay for equal work” has been turned down by the union board. This means that, while hampering the efforts deployed by part-timers to request “equal pay for equal work” on the one hand, the board members of ‘a’ branch come to the rescue of non-regular workers of ‘b’ branch via the activities initiated by the main office, namely ‘A’ local union, on the other. Such a state of affairs reveals a Janus-faced behavior which consists of oppressing the part-timers inside the branch and assisting the dispatched workers of ‘b’ branch within the general frame of the broader ‘A’ local union. The maintenance of such an old class mentality within ‘a’ branch is an important element to explain the emergence of the regrouping of the individualized workers witnessed beyond the 1980s.

The 'b' branch is a union of registered temporary tour conductors who coordinate travel schedules and assure the management of the transportation of passengers. On sightseeing spots, each member alone attends to tourists in Japan and/or overseas. Their work is very flexible both in terms of time and space.

According to the Survey on Temporary Tour Conducting carried out in 2006, "because I do not need to be at a working place at fixed hours", "because there's no need to work within a structured environment or an organized body" are the motivations tour conductors gave to choose their job, an indication that flexibility in time and mobility in space were decisive in the selection of the work.

However, "minashi roudou" constitutes the source of disputes registered tour conductors are involved in. The idea of "minashi roudou" refers to the situation in which working hours are materially difficult to determine to the point that there are no other possibilities than to be subjected to a labor time prescribed in advance. Labor disputes at 'b' branch have revealed that the flexibility in time and the mobility in space that motivated members to become tour conductors turned out to be a reality of low wages and unsecured working conditions. The individual worker who dreamed of freedom has been thoroughly dispersed, but at the same time temporally and spatially bound by the rules of capitalism.

The registered temporary tour conductors who are stripped of a physical (material) working base find their collective space in the blog. On such a meeting space labor disputes repeatedly occur. Activists of the new left wing and the ordinary workers of the 1960s, had agreed upon the motto of "all equal workers" based on class antagonism as collective workers, and for them the antagonism was focalized on the material (physical) spaces which are the enterprise and the local community. However, for individualized workers like registered temporary tour conductors of the 2000s, who do not have such a base, the antagonism is individually expressed via a collective immaterial space allowing them to relate to each other.

TEXT

"A tour conductor working 18 hours a day"
6:00 -7:30 : breakfast at a hotel (Marseilles)
... (omission)
22:40-24:30 : giving directives and listening to passengers, contact/arrangements with the hotel side, writing the account of the flight

REACTIONS

A tour conductor, searching I bumped on you
...(omission)
Is there anybody out there to consider our misery???? (6 month on the job)

The grim reality is that, 2 to 3 years on this job you're disposed of. (veteran tour conductor)

The present research has focused on the respective collective space proper to collective workers and individualized workers. In other words, we have looked into the emergence and the management of antagonism within such collective spaces. Collective workers resolve to go beyond the enterprise, thus, maintaining a class-orientated mentality through the material space represented by the local community. For individualized workers such as registered temporary workers, the blog of the NPO represents the collective space.

However, it goes without saying that the gap between antagonism expressed through an immaterial space and the one experienced in a material (physical) working environment is big. Thus, antagonistic relationships among individualized workers take different shapes comparatively to that lived by collective workers.

First of all, 'b' branch members do not agree with the "all equal workers" put forward by collective workers. They stress upon the "I" versus the "They" distancing themselves from the labor union. Different from collective workers in terms of working environment experience, without colleagues at the working place, they enjoy no warm friendship with their peers. Working alone in independent environments, they see themselves too different from collective workers who brandish the "all equal workers" motto.

Secondly, where is the "enemy"? In the labor-management relations, the registered temporary tour conductors find themselves sandwiched between the temporary agency and the employer. This means that at collective bargaining or in case of labor disputes, the counterpart is not the travel agency, but the temp agency. With the deregulation of the Worker Dispatch Law, affiliated groups pooled into temporary agencies, which resulted in the fragmentation of the labor-management relations which used to be previously unified.

In fact, the deregulation occurred after the capitalist class/working class structure has been dismantled, but the labor-management relations remained fluid, which puts the registered temporary conductors in front of an (invisible) enemy they cannot find. This state of affairs drove registered temporary tour conductors to choose the negotiating path and to seek the solutions to their problems in joining the labor unions of collective workers who brandish the "all equal workers" status. By replacing the red flag with an orange one, and against their will, by giving their approval to join in the group behavior they have managed to find solutions to their labor disputes so far.

CONCLUSION

The present paper investigated on "A" local union utilizing the concept of "structure of feeling" in a "residual class-oriented union". The "structure of feeling" is an appropriate notion to express a complex experience rather than a common experience within labor unions. This should not be conceived as a monolithic order of things, but rather as a dynamic interrelation between "the dominant", "the residual", and "the emergent".

Presently, the core members of the main office & NPO regroup activists of the new left wing of the 1960s and the people who started as NPO volunteers in the 2000s. Activists of the new left wing have made possible the establishment of a class-oriented union, which developed into "A" local union as "the emergent" "structure of feeling" at the period that saw the leftists marginalized in the 1960s.

However, activists can be divided into those of the new left wing, the "dominant" category perpetuating a class-oriented mentality, those who take the "all equal workers" class-oriented stance, NPO volunteers, and collective workers of "a" branch. Collective workers who strongly adhere to the "all equal workers" philosophy represent the "dominant" group in the structure of "A" local union.

Class antagonism within "A" local union is subsumed thanks to the adherence of members to the "all equal workers" philosophy which covers an area spreading beyond the confines of the enterprise. Except, NPO volunteers, collective workers meet at a material space which is

the enterprise or the local community. NPO volunteers gather at the material space which is the local community making use of the NPO blog.

Conversely, the “b” branch members, registered temporary tour conductors find their collective meeting space in the immaterial space which is the NPO blog. They remain skeptical towards the “all equal workers” ideal while they express doubts about class antagonism with their unanswered question “where is the enemy?” They convene at the NPO blog, but they are different from NPO volunteers who readily agree with the “all equal workers” philosophy. Comparatively to NPO volunteers who easily and intellectually conceive antagonism, the “b” branch members perceive it as an incongruity since they face labor dispersion and experience labor disputes.

The state of affairs referred to supra, led us to categorize registered temporary tour conductors as individualized workers whose collective space is immaterial, which sets them apart from collective workers who enjoy a material collective space. NPO volunteers have been categorized as collective workers. It might be mentioned, though, that in order to practically address their labor disputes individualized workers have no choice but to conduct negotiations with collective workers. As a matter of fact, their labor disputes are dealt with in a material space.

The “residual” of the “A” local union is the group of middle-aged women part-timers. As being part of the enterprise as a material space, we have categorized them as collective workers, but as non-regular employees, they are the marginalized of the “a” branch union. “A” local union is a class-oriented union with both collective and individualized workers, but when it comes to the “the emergent” and “the dominant the issue of gender remains unaddressed, and the dichotomy of class/gender persists.

Having said that, “A” local union is an example of a residual class-oriented union in which “the dominant”, “the residual”, and “the emergent” elements are dynamically interwoven. Such a dynamic interrelation of the “structure of feeling” within “A” local union can be well conceived as the paradox and negotiation in the notion of class antagonism.

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