Labor and Environmental Movements in Taiwan and South Korea

• Social Change in Asia
• April 17, 2019
“Social protectionist movements” (Polanyi) emerge in response to market expansion in order to protect labor or nature from commercialization

- With industrialization producers are alienated (separated) from the means of production, and turned into nothing but a commodity (labor sold on the market)
- With commercialization nature/land/water/air also become a commodity (commons were fenced, land bought, sold, rented, traditional rights abrogated, water appropriated, air fouled)
- Old forms of social organization (kinship groups, neighborhoods (parishes), guilds) were dissolved by the new relations of production
In Nov. 1970 South Korea Chun Tae-il immolated himself saying, “We are not machines. Enforce the labor code.”
- This didn’t start the labor movement in South Korea, but it was a galvanizing moment
- Back story: South Korea had a vigorous post Korean War labor movement that was suppressed in 1969, and also had extensive labor law (to look good for the UN in competition with North Korea)

In July 1970 Taiwanese farmers protested toxic chemicals released into their water

These are examples of protest patterns
- In South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s usually 75% or more of protests were labor protests
  - In South Korea labor protests peaked in 1987 in the wake of democratization
- In Taiwan in the same period the majority of protests were environmental protests
  - In Taiwan labor and environmental protests both began to peak and Taiwan moved toward democracy in the 1980s
Why compare South Korea with Taiwan?

• Historical similarities
  • Both Japanese colonies (Taiwan 1895-1945, Korea 1910-1945)
  • Divided after 1945 between Nationalists and Communists with Nationalist in Taiwan and South Korea
  • Post-war protégés of the United States (who gave them aid, advice, and favorable tariff treatment)
  • Initial authoritarian regimes (Taiwan 1949-1997, South Korea 1949-1987) that then democratized with direct election of President

• Structural similarities
  • Resource poor and densely populated
  • Industrialized at about the same time (1960-1990s) through export-led industrialization
  • Urbanized at similar rates (though South Korea more in larger cities than Taiwan)

• Differential sequencing of labor and environmental movements, then, unexpected if structural conditions cause the movements
Movement Power (page 16)

- Labor has the power of leverage in that workers are structurally indispensible for production
  - Victims are mistreated/underpaid wage workers
  - Laborer’s willingness and ability to withhold labor (go on strike) is their operational principle, so leverage is at the economic or corporate level
  - Organizing unions is the way this is done
  - This requires class solidarity

- Environmental movements have the power of universalistic ideas and broad persuasion
  - Victims are those who have suffered from pollution joined by the educated classes
  - They work by swaying public opinion through mass communications
    - This means working at the hegemonic (Gramsci) level where universalistic ideas elicit popular consent by elaborating lived experience and presenting a better way to live universalistic ideas
  - Organize usually as voluntary civic associations (NGOs)
  - This requires cross-class solidarity
Two movements, two countries

• Liu wants to challenge evolutionary explanations of social movement formation that think labor movements inherently must be first to develop in response to capitalist development only to be followed by other types of movements in post-industrial times (service economy)

• Grievance generated?
  • Then labor and/or environmental movement should develop depending upon how bad labor conditions are, and how by environmental degradation is (i.e. environmental Kuznets curve)
    • Corollary—industrial societies have class-based movements, post-industrial societies have new social movements (identity-based)

• Resource mobilization theory?
  • Grievance and the capacity to act don’t necessarily correlate, and it is the availability of resources (leadership, financing) that determines whether movements arise or not

• Discourse-based theory?
  • Traditions, conventions, local culture may provide discursive resources for successful mobilization

• Institutional theory?
  • Political opportunities vary in different kinds of society (democracy versus autocracy)
  • Different patterns of industrialization create different class structures (chaebol versus SMEs)
Liu’s argument

• Labor and environmental movements are based on different kinds of power
  • Labor—economic power
  • Environment—hegemonic power (ability to sell universal ideals)
    • Here Liu defines “ideology” as oppositional (counter-hegemonic)

• Thus you can’t explain their differences between the movements based on society-wide characteristics that would be the same for both movements

• However, institutional factors (degree of grievance, availability of resources, traditions and institutions) can all condition how these different movements develop in each case
  • One also has to consider the degree of threat that each type of political movement might present to the existing establishment
Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) & 2-way movement

• Movement from economic-corporate (guilds), to economic class, to a hegemonic level (Gramscian working class movement)
  • For example: move from hired labor to a self-conscious working class that pursues its political and economic interests (working class political party), to a hegemonic movement that benefits all (perhaps welfare state)

• Movement from hegemonic struggle over ideology, to an economic/corporate level, to a leverage movement (reverse Gramscian environmental movement)
  • For example: convince people that climate change is happening, create powerful NGOs, use the NGOs for political leverage and/or the regulatory state

• (Note that all of this discussion is a question of emphasis and proportion, rather than an absolute distinction between types of movement)
What to look for in social movements?

• Protest activities
  • Note Weller’s ladder of protect escalation

• Organizations
  • May be religious (Weller’s discussion of temple and lineage organizations in Taiwan would be a discourse-based resource mobilization theory)
  • May be unions or NGOs or ministries

• Collective consciousness or beliefs
  • For labor movements (class consciousness, belief in unions)
  • For environmental movements (importance of nature, wildlife and wilderness; ideas of well-being related to clean environment)

• Note that in Taiwan and South Korea these two movements are understood in the context of “democratization” but what about PRC?
When does a *movement* emerge?

- Protests outside institutionalized activities markedly increase
- Formation of a new (counter-hegemonic) consciousness
  - These must be synchronized for it to be a social movement for Liu
  - ‘everyday forms of protest’ (James L. Scott) can be excluded as not rising to the level of “movement”
  - Mere foundation of an organization (without protest) also excluded as not rising to the level of “movement”
- So look closely at escalation of protests, and the struggle to carve out a new intellectual vision that takes hold in society
Stages of Movement Development

• Premovement stage
  • Protest activities without systematic reflection on the issue
  • Activities emerge from immediate lived experience, and are justified in terms of existing ideologies
    • For example, farmers complaining of economic loss due to environmental damage, or damage to private property
    • Emphasis on “legality” under the capitalist system (i.e. Korean labor law)

• Korean Labor Movement
  • Chun Tae-il’s immolation in 1970 mobilized society
  • Workers inspired, students radicalized, liberal Christians mobilized

• Taiwan Labor Movement (by contrast)
  • 1984 coal mine disasters made publicity, but activists appealed largely to the legal system
  • Worker action (strikes, slow downs) only occurred in 1987-8 at which point Liu would call it a movement
Environmental Movements

• Intellectual thought and newspaper discussion of pollution began in Taiwan and South Korea in the 1960s, but did not connect with a movement at that time

• Green thinking in Taiwan was spurred by environmental disasters
  • 1976 oil spill, 1978 hydride gas escape with multiple casualties, 1979 contaminated cooking oil harms thousands

• Green thinking in South Korea was spurred by Onsan illness
  • Onsan a port south of Ulsan (Hyundai Heavy Industries) where chemical industries were centered by government plan from 1972
  • Gas leaks in 1982 and 1984 hospitalized hundreds, and from 1985 newspapers reported hundreds of residents with an unidentified disease
  • Predecessors of the Korean Federation for Environmental Movement 환경운동연합 brought attention to this cluster that is thought to have been Cadmium poisoning (first identified in Japan in 1912 as itai-itai disease—neuralgia in spine and joints—in Toyama Prefecture)

• From this time contending discourses on the environment became widespread and legitimated further protest activities
  • Discourse of minjung 民衆 (Korean), caogen 草根 (Chinese “grass roots”), minjian 民間 (popular) became common
Synchronization of thought and action

• Labor movement
  • Protest activities led to elaboration of oppositional consciousness and counter hegemonic thought
  • Working class consciousness developed through labor activity
  • Intellectual activity on how to sustain and strengthen the movement

• Environmental movement
  • Dissemination of environmentalism important for starting the movement
  • Protests followed from publicity about horrific pollution and environmental accidents
South Korean Concentrated Industrialization

- Light pink, orange—industrial cities
- Blue—other cities
- Dark pink—smaller cities
- Workers, pollution, and disputes largely in orange areas (Seoul, Inch’ŏn, Pusan, Ulsan)
- By 1974 44% of South Korea’s industrial workforce in Seoul and Pusan, by 1984 50% in Seoul and 40% in Taegu/Ulsan/Pusan/Ch’angwŏn
Taiwan dispersed industrialization

- Taipei only really large city
- Taizhong, Tainan, and Gaoxiong only other large cities
- 1971 50% of manufacturing outside cities through subcontracting
Consequences of industrialization pattern

• In Taiwan, many industrial workers lived at home in rural places and commuted to work nearby
  • Laid off workers could be reabsorbed by the farm economy
  • Many small enterprises spread pollution around, and being small and undercapitalized meant they probably didn’t invest in pollution control equipment

• In South Korea, industrial workers had to migrate to the big cities to work, and became concentrated in workers neighborhoods
  • Chaebol, large scale enterprises, concentrated pollution in a few places
  • Labor disputes were larger

• These patterns created different grievance structures and institutional resources in Taiwan and South Korea that conditioned the way these movements developed
Government intervention in Taiwan

• Taiwan under martial law (1949-87) “incorporationist” (Liu)
  • Guomindang 国民党 organized along Leninist lines (democratic centralism)
    • Single entity that supposedly represented all people’s interests had branches in each administrative unit down to the village
    • Needs discussed at lower levels and passed along to higher levels that then make a decision binding on lower levels
  • 1971 UNR 2758 transferred China’s UN seat to the PRC, and US transferred recognition to PRC in 1979 triggering a “crisis of legitimacy”
    • Government economic planning shifted from light to capital intensive industry
    • Policy of “Taiwanization” announced (incorporate native Taiwanese into the political system that had been dominated by those of recent mainland origin)
    • Local “service stations” 服务站 in rural townships and urban districts employing full-time party cadres
Management of Labor Disputes in Taiwan

• Labor
  • Effort to organize labor unions and incorporate them into the GMT system, planting party cells in factories of large corporations
    • Combination of party activists and security agents at workplaces dampened union activity
  • Liberal labor law put into place
  • SME’s labor problems dealt with by mediation and compulsory arbitration, and this is where protests took place
  • SOEs had Chinese Federation of Labor (KMT controlled) unions
Environmental Disputes in Taiwan

• Environment
  • Building on the land reform of 1953 Taiwanese small-holder (peasant) agriculture was highly developed and commercialized
  • Rural factories often flushed effluent into irrigation canals ruining land, and this caused rural environmental protests
  • Public nuisance arbitration committees 公害及藕粉调节委员会 organized in rural areas only in 1993
    • Without environmental regulations compensation could be arranged, but no solution to pollution emerged, so disputes continued throughout the 1970s
    • Scattered nature of the problems and disputes hindered the formation of national organizations, or a national solution

• Arguments about labor and environmental movements both are institutional and resource related arguments
Labor Movements in Korea

- Labor
  - Liberal labor law and corporativist labor movement (company unions controlled through the Ministry of Labor) worked until an economic crisis in 1970 led to massive layoffs and a wage freeze.
  - After 1969 repression of labor and in 1971 imposition of martial law:
    - Ban on demonstrations, appointment of 1/3 of legislature, wage and price controls, KCIA (organized 1961) more active to repress politics.
  - Compulsory arbitration didn’t resolve labor disputes. Why?
    - Wage and price controls part of “cheap labor for export” policy that didn’t give labor any benefits of economic growth.
    - Ban on strikes banned a right that Korean workers had gotten used to.
    - Military-style corporate governance antagonized workers.
    - Female democratic unions struggled against government unions for “humane treatment” 인간다운 대우
    - Kwangju uprising of 1980 motivated worker-student alliance, and anti-worker goon squads 救社団 created a violent atmosphere that led to labor opposition.
Environmental Movements in Korea

• Environment
  • Because environmental criticism was tolerated (was not considered political) by the government Korean activists disdained environmental activism
    • Activists (undonggwŏn 运动圈, hwaltongga 活动家) emphasized “political liberty, labor rights, and social and economic equity” and were proud of their sacrifices for the movement
    • Activists considered environmentalists to be elites coopted by the government (i.e. lured into cooperating with the government and tempering their demands because of it)
  • Rural pollution was an issue, but South Korean agriculture was less commercial and productive than Taiwan’s and most farmers wanted to move to the city to get factory jobs that paid better
  • Pollution, thus, more easily dealt with through relocation of populations located in polluted factory areas (Onsan)
  • Large chaebŏl in South Korea were harder to bring to heel than SME’s in Taiwan
Lessons of Chapter 3

• Environmentalism
  • Flourished early in Taiwan because of widespread SME pollution and failure of government incorporationist strategies in rural areas (Liu)
    • Was their an ethnic element here? (Sorensen)
  • Was late to flourish in Korea because of institutional constraints (pro-environmental forces constrained by gov’t window dressing, and lack of ideological charisma among activists)
    • Korean victims of pollution had exit options (move away with government support) that Taiwanese lacked

• Labor Movement
  • Flourished early in South Korea because top-down repression failed to respond to even modest demands of workers on wages and working conditions, and industrialization concentrated workers together
  • Taiwan workers couldn’t get leverage because of dispersed work places and incorporationist labor policies
    • Taiwan’s workers had an exit option (into agriculture)
  • These are not “grievance” explanations, but rather based on idea that institutional failure to address grievances causes early development of environmentalism in Taiwan and Labor movement in Korea
    • Patterns of industrialization conditioned how these movements developed and whether exit options existed
What about Japan Labor History?

• Labor history
  • Sporadic strikes and union organization before 1945, but the legal system was anti-labor hindering development of a mass movement
  • During US occupation (1945-53) US changed labor law to enshrine a right to organize and encouraged union organization—this is the strongest evidence of synchronization of thought and action, but it came with an outside push
  • Until 1980s when unions began to decline there were four large labor federations, and highly ritualized “Spring push” each year to meet union demands
  • Since 1980s unions have declined as Japan has moved from a manufacturing to a service economy, and neoliberal reforms has led to many types of contingent labor
Japan Labor a semi-movement (Liu)?

• Protest activities?
  • Protests took place after 1945, but most labor protests took place within institutional structures put in place by the Occupation (legal unions, negotiation with management with guidance from Department of Labor), and had an almost ritual form (Spring struggle—shuntō 春闘)

• Organizational activities?
  • Unions powerful, but within a framework very structured by the state (enterprise unions organized into confederations)

• New collective consciousness?
  • Labor is conscious of a distinctive place in society, but since labor reforms came from the top down, and enterprises encourage family-like loyalty (uchi no kaisha うちの会社) maybe the synchronization of thought with action doesn’t reach the level of a social movement as Liu defines them
Japan Environmental Movement?

- Big Four Pollution Diseases of Japan
  - Minamata disease (methylmercury poisoning) & Niigata Minamata disease
    - Identified in 1956—leads to numbing, poor balance, mental defects, birth defects, death
  - Itai-itai disease (cadmium poisoning)
    - Mitsui Mining in Toyama Prefecture (eastern Japan near the Noto Peninsula)
    - Disease named in 1912, but its aetiology wasn’t understood until research 1955-60 identified Cadmium as the source, and the government instituted medical care and clean ups
  - Yokkaichi Asthma 1960-72
    - Mie Prefecture (where Ise Shrine is located)
    - Burning of petroleum and crude oil released sulfur dioxide that caused chronic bronchitis, pulmonary emphysema, and bronchial asthma following construction of first Yokkaichi complex in 1956
    - Appeared because of switch from coal to petroleum starting around 1955 and large petrochemical complex constructed in 1960 in Yokkaichi as part of “income doubling project”
    - Class action suit against Showa Yokkaichi Oil in 1970
      - At first raised smokestacks but this was ineffective
      - Then scrubbed sulfur out of the smoke, and this was more effective
  - (Yokkaichi Asthma has subsequently been identified in Mexico City and mainland China)
Political Action on Environment

• Anti-pollution activities didn’t develop into a “movement” until stimulated by citizen’s movements against the US Japan Security Treaty and the Vietnam War in the 1960s
  • People organized to pressure the government first for political reasons, and only later for environmental reasons
• LDP convened “Pollution Diet of 1970” in which 14 anti-pollution laws were passed at once (Basic Law for Environmental Pollution Control)
  • Air pollution improved dramatically in the years following this
  • Minamata disease wasn’t recognized as due to dumping by Chisso chemical until 1968
  • Even at late as the 1990s Japan didn’t fully comply with its own laws
Lifestyle Pollution Discovered

- 1977 Red Tide in Lake Biwa because of phosphorus contamination by detergents
  - Homemaker’s campaign to substitute soap for detergent
  - Recycling and other programs set up
- “Third Phase Movement”
  - After 1992 Earth Summit general environmental awareness began
  - After 1997 Kyoto Climate Change conference “Koko Forum” and NGOs began to work on climate change
  - 1998 new law on NGOs allows registration and national recognition
  - Now NGOs linked into international networks, export of pollution expertise to China to help prevent spread of air pollution across international boundaries
Los Angeles in the 1970s
States Adopting California Car Emission Standards & Top 20 Polluted US Cities
Discussion Questions

• What type of explanation does Liu have for the different timing of labor and environmental movements in Taiwan and South Korea (and can we extend it to Japan?)
  • Simple response to grievances (stimulus/response)
  • Resource mobilization
    • Ability of aggrieved to get together, finance a movement, be heard
    • Whether local cultural traditions provide resources that facilitate mobilization
  • Institutional factors
    • Political opportunity structure and/or cost of activism (repression)
    • Structure of labor and capital deployment