

**Labour Identity and Union Strategies in Taiwan:
A Case Study**

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Industrial Relations in Taiwan

For many decades the Nationalist government (the Kuomintang, KMT) dominated industrial relations in Taiwan as an authoritarian and conservative government, enacting all kinds of labour legislation, manipulating trade unions as supplementary means of authority and even intervening in industrial conflicts. The logic of its ruling, as Öniş (1991) analyses, was that a smaller group of the political and business elite could better formulate and rationalise the political economy. The industrial policy which was developed through cooperation and interaction between these politicians, bureaucrats and business leaders resulted both in industrial peace and in industrial relations which lacked the 'voice' or autonomy of trade unions. Unions used to play the weakest role until the 1980s, being subject to the state as well as to capital (Chen et al., 2003, Lee, 1999, Shieh, 1997, Wu, 1999).

Deyo (1989) addresses three factors which have produced the silent Taiwanese labour movement: the Confucianism embedded in the culture and society, speedy industrialisation and economic growth, and governmental manipulation of industrial relations. From the 1950s, in order to grow the economy rapidly but steadily, the Nationalist government implemented a national industrialisation policy by developing strategic industries, including transportation, electricity, petroleum, petrochemistry, steel, and telecommunications, as state-owned and public enterprises, on the one hand; and helped trade unions to take root in these enterprises, on the other. Trade unions were employed as peripheral institutions to support political, economic and ideological strategies of the state instead of representing the collective power of workers (Chen et al., 2003, Lee, 1999). Consequently, Lee (1999) argues that the industrialisation from 1950s to 1970s in Taiwan took place without any form of labour movement.

The enactment of the Labour Standards Act in 1984 and the lifting of martial law in 1987 were two landmarks of industrial relations in Taiwan by the 1980s. The state began loosening its limits of industrial relations as well as setting up the Council of Labour Affairs in 1983 (Chen et al., 2003). The fundamental and core of the national labour legislation in Taiwan is the Labour Standards Act announced in 1984 and modified in 2002, which is enacted to provide minimum standards for working conditions, protect workers' rights and interests, improve relationships between employees and employers as well as promote social and economic developments.

Terms and conditions of any agreement between an employer and a worker shall not be worse than the minimum standards provided by this regulation.

In addition, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) established in 1986, one year before the lifting of martial law, was the first opposition party in Taiwan. It was pro-labour and it initiated all kinds of social movements concerned with political justice, human rights, the environment and so on, aiming at defying the absolute authority of the KMT as well as pursuing the freedom of politics and democracy in Taiwan. After participating in some local and parliamentary elections, the DPP won the presidential election twice, in 2000 and 2004, and were expected to transform Taiwanese industrial relations and to generate independent trade unionism (Chen et al., 2003). During the eight years of its rule, the DPP government aimed to mitigate the tension in workplaces, announced a policy of building a partnership between labour and management, amended labour legislation and reinforced the mechanisms for non-union worker representation. However, the KMT took back the presidency after the elections of May 2008.

Democracy and liberalisation have gradually transformed the industrial relations system as the voice of labour has emerged (Rice, 2006). However, both the KMT and the DPP chose the same approach, state corporatism, to intervene in industrial relations (Chang and Bain, 2006). Reforming the labour legislation has been an ongoing process, no matter which party governs. After two rotations of political parties in 2000 and 2008, the three labour laws, as the pillars of collective rights, have been substantially modified, whilst the amendment of the Collective Bargaining Agreement Act was first passed in January 2008, followed by the Settlement of Labour Disputes Law in July 2009 and eventually the Labour Union Law in June 2010. These significant modifications have been implemented on 1 May 2011 and are expected to bring a new era of industrial relations. Trade unions are empowered but also challenged by the revised legislation at the same time, and have to strategically survive in the new era.

Identity at Work

Identity shapes the way we act, prepares us how to respond to the environment, and differentiates us from others. It emerges from close relation with specific circumstances which at the same time limit existing sources of definitions and conceptions as well as the creating process of identity. Sociologically, identity includes concepts of self as well as concepts of roles and reference groups, and this sense of identity helps people not only defend against challenges from outer control but also helps them to interact with other people who could help them in their defence. In addition, identity is the foundation on which we can be against outside control but also empower ourselves to gain same interests within organisations. People struggle to

exert control over their environment and fight against pressures to define their identity for them in order to sustain their identity (Thompson and McHugh, 2002).

Personal identity comprises definitions and conceptions people have found to exactly represent them based on their previous experiences, whereas social identity contains the arranged position between their personal identity and the definitions and conceptions demanded of them in their present social contexts (Thompson and McHugh, 2002, Watson, 2008). Self-identity and the identity others attribute to individuals are another set of terms, whilst self-identity is how one builds up the concept of the self (Leidner, 2006, Watson, 1995, Watson, 2007). Alternatively, identity embraces individuality concerning personal lifelong participation and individual composition of social connections, as well as collectivity focusing on common recognition with others, such as class (Leidner, 2006: 426). In general, identity can be defined as two distinguishing aspects: one aspect is from individuals themselves or from internal, so-called personal identity, self-identity, individual identity; the other, which may be collectively-originated, is from the external social contexts outside individuals and from the interaction with others, namely social identity.

Both sociologists and social psychologists are quite interested in social identity; however, sociological analysis, emerging from symbolic interaction, mainly focuses on the structure, but social psychological perspectives pay more attention to the process of identification (Capozza and Brown, 2000). To go beyond the distinction of personal self-identity and social identity, Watson (2007, 2008) suggests that we have to consider both kinds of identities at the same time, because ‘self identities’ are indeed ‘social’ phenomena (Watson, 2008: 130)’. He defines social identity as external cultural occurrences of individuals and as contributions to personal identity. People normally accept their identities as true without proof, and only when they experience marginality of their positions, such as encountering different cultures, will they arise the notion of identity and act as what they should act (Watson, 2007). To study identity in organisations, individual identity and organisational identity are two main concerns. Individual identity is how members locate themselves in the organisation where they behave and interact with others, and organisational identity defines the way the organisation identify itself (Brown, 2001). However, to better understand identity in organisations, Kreiner et al (2006) argue that boundary dynamics have to be applied within and between individual and organisational identities.

Work is an important foundation of identity since human beings learn to transform to who they are from their own working experiences. Organisations are endless processes of identifications and divisions at work (Koot and Ybema, 2000). Reviewing the interconnection between the sociology of work and identity, Leidner (2006: 431) addresses four theorising aspects of analysing identity at work. First, individual is usually shown as advantageous goods on the labour market from

personal training and development and different sorts of work in the market involve specific skills and individuality. Then, career becomes an idea which always directs people to how to arrange their living and construct their identity, so everyone constantly acquires knowledge of how to achieve success through individual movements. Thirdly, many kinds of cultures, compliances and preferences build identity through the work of different people which is a main concern of constructing others' distinctiveness. Finally, one person's roles of both worker and customer should be close and vague, as his or her understanding of being a customer may relate to or have impact on his or her working experience.

Drawing on her conceptual framework from the critique of sociological and social psychological literature, Westenholtz (2006) suggests that discussion of work and identity ought to go beyond the differentiations between actor and structure as well as micro and macro. Identities are 'socially constructed stories about individuals and their surroundings as they engage in social work practices' (Westenholtz, 2006: 1018). Differentiation of actors and structures as well as micro and macro levels is not creative and explanations of both sets rely upon each other. Taking some IT workers for example, emerging identities at work arise from meaning arenas which are unstable structures. Each person may at the same time have multiple identities at work derived from the surroundings and contexts, and individuals can switch between various identities since they have their own genuine channels between identities (Westenholtz, 2006).

To argue that work remains a domination of identity regardless of the changing natures of employment relations, Doherty (2009) observed different organisations in Ireland, including bus company, governmental division, bank and supermarket, where contradictory characteristics of work exist, for example permanent in opposition to temporary workers, full-time versus part-time, blue-collar against white collar and so on. The research evidences show that workplaces are still the arena where employees gain and accomplish their personal and social identities despite the new forms of employment, but their voice at work is actually a new challenge. Workers may be detached from the organisation and collective representation, especially trade unionism, has to be adapted to the irregular features at work (Doherty, 2009).

Baughner (2003) examined worker identity among workers who joined in employee participation schemes in a General Motors plant in the United States. He considered some classic theories: a Marxist view of participation as a form of political manipulation; another Marxist view as workers identifying with management through their quasi-supervisory roles; Weberian analysis of class established by background as well as struggling for collective identification; and Durkheimian viewpoint on construction of a mutual perceptible between labour and management. According to Baughner's analysis, those employees who participated in the management became a 'man in the middle' in the workplace, feeling the tension between upper management and the rank and file. However, more than three-fourths of his interviewees believed

that their main responsibility was to represent their team members whilst they are positioned between operators and management. Eventually, the Durkheimian perspective on workplace norms is the most important factor in constructing workers' loyalties (Baugher, 2003).

Identity and Trade Unions

Trade unions are agents of class struggle since employment relations consist of making best use of labour and lack of protection of labour, and workers' identity is a component of class consciousness. However, each person has numerous identities and different identities play different roles with different conditions. Individuals have identities of work and non-work at the same time, but non-work identities such as community may weaken class identity. It is difficult to know whether workers may act collaboratively or against. Besides, who to oppose to is always not easy to distinguish (Hyman, 2001).

Social identification is an important factor of mobilising collective actions. According to John Kelly's framework of mobilisation theory (1998), social identity helps individuals to identify themselves as members of a particular group, whilst this sense of belonging consists of collective interests and values. Behaviour of group members will be influenced by some stereotypes of the group, since a group is featured by its own ideologies and values. Social stereotyping results in social attributions, which helps members to reassure their identification with the group so that they may perform collectively. However, collective action relies on social identification, but other factors, such as cost-benefit calculations, leadership, and so on, determine the eventual occurrence of a collective action (Kelly, 1998).

Collective action of union members comes from the basis of individual participation. Kelly and Kelly (1994) surveyed a group of union members in London to examine some social psychological factors related to collective action, such as group identification, collectivist orientation, outgroup stereotyping, perceived intergroup conflict, egoistic and collective relative deprivation, and political efficacy. The sense of 'we' as a particular group in contrast to 'they' who have different and conflicted interests is quite important to union participation. Hence, they concluded that personal identification with the union and individual awareness of industrial relations between labour and management in fact heavily determine individual involvement in union activities. Collective action emerges from individual recognition with the union.

Following Kelly's work on mobilisation of union members (1998), Cregan et al (2009) conducted a survey of members of an Australian union in order to examine how social identity and transformational leadership, which are two elements of Kelly's theory, influence union organising. Social identification of workers facilitates union members' participation in different union activities. Transformational leadership of local union representatives influences member's participation and trustworthiness.

Besides, they demonstrated that social identity is an important factor of mobilising union members, especially mediating the influence of transformational leadership of union. Social identity and transformational leadership therefore generate mobilisation of trade union members.

Moreover, Blader (2007) discusses the impacts of two social psychological factors, social identification and procedural justice judgements, on whether workers support formation of unions with two empirical studies in the United States. He concludes that identification with the union is an important factor of unionisation in spite of various economic concerns, though identification with the broader employment relations has less influence on union certification. Social identity remains a mediating factor of procedural justice judgements in the process of certifying a union when economic factors have fewer impacts than the two factors.

From formation of trade union to mobilisation of union members, identity is a fundamental element throughout union activities. Prior to mobilising collective action, it is important to discuss individual identification with union. However, researches on the combination of identity and trade union are relatively fewer. Hence, one main theme of this research is to look into the relationship of individual identity and trade union organisation in workplace.

Identities at Work in Taiwan

To understand workers' identity in Taiwan, Wu (1996) analysed the data collected in 1992 in conjunction with an international project. He studied the causes of class identity, and further treated class identification as independent to check its relations with other features of class consciousness, including class opposition, class totality and the conception of an alternative society. The results indicated a relatively strong identification with working class, but people identified class mainly based on objective economic terms. Apparently, the lack of voice of workers was not due to the absence of class identity, but Taiwanese working class did not have consistent attitudes towards other aspects of class consciousness.

Wu (1996) argues that worker identity in Taiwan is in reality a 'hollow identity'. People may have high awareness of class stratification but they do not have class consciousness, mainly because the term 'labour' in Chinese is widely used by the state to regulate worker welfare. Furthermore, workers generally believe the unfairness of capitalism in society without much opposition. The majority of labour force work in small workplaces with close relationships with management and are less aware of any industrial conflict. The sense of being working class is raised by social and public policies instead of from conflicts of labour and management. The relatively high class identity does not imply class struggle in Taiwan.

Besides, the second circle of Taiwan Social Change Survey (Chiu, 1992) investigated Taiwanese social structures including occupational careers, class identity, class relations, social justice, and so on. Respondents were divided into two sets of questionnaires and all asked to indicate which category out of the six named classes they belong to: upper, upper middle, middle, lower middle, working, and lower classes. In Questionnaire I, 2377 people answered the survey and the results are upper class 0.6%, upper middle class 7.9%, middle class 39.7%, lower middle class 13.6%, working class 27.9%, and lower class 8.2% (Chiu, 1992: 218). The results of Questionnaire II including 1408 responses are upper class 0.6%, upper middle class 5.7%, middle class 38.6%, lower middle class 10.1%, working class 33.6%, and lower class 8.5% (Chiu, 1992: 242).

Based on the data from Questionnaire I of the survey, Marsh (2002) studied social class identity and class interest in Taiwan. He argued that social class identity is quite unimportant in Taiwan because people's attitudes toward class are not influenced by their class identity and in fact people might not choose one of the above classes if they had the option to say not belonging to any class category in the survey. Taiwanese subjective class identification is related to objective factors, such as gender, education, age, occupation and so on. Hence, Marsh (2002) would expect the development of class identification in Taiwan as changes in impersonal stratum would emerge.

Interestingly, Hsiao (1996) reviews the formation of working class in Taiwan since the 1970s from a series of literature by five writers: Yang Qingchu, Chen Yingzhen, Zeng Xinyi, Mo Shangchen, and Zheng Qingchu. They wrote many stories about workers, though workers are not the main concern of those stories but the tragedy and reluctance of the era. Stories mirror the transition of industrialisation and liberalisation in Taiwan, such as temporary workers struggling for a permanent post, rural girls making life in city, factory workers' awareness of and failure of union organising, and so on. Hsiao (1996) argues that their writings, albeit not academic work, still reflect the characteristics of Taiwanese working class, for instance disadvantages of temporary and female workers, unfortunate operators in factories, and subordination to as well as true belief in capitalism.

To conclude from those folk novels, Taiwanese workers have gradually transformed in decades from individuals to collective social class. Trade unions have slowly become an actor of defence for working class since the mid-1980s through awareness and acknowledgement of labourers. In addition, the objective societal separations were universally recognised by people without any question or doubt. In those cases of conflicts with management, workers only sought to better their circumstances within the social constitution but did not refuse or say no to it. For that reason, working class agree to the capitalism and believe in the social inequality (Hsiao, 1996).

Comparing his study with Burawoy (1979), Shieh (1997) researched subcontracted networks of workers and workers paid-by-the-piece in Taiwan and indicated that shaping the subjectivity of labour is a dynamic process of development. Work paid by the piece implies complete commercialisation of labour. Workers and employers have a common view of the labour and the labour force of piece workers as real commodities. Employers simultaneously doing piecework alongside piece workers regard them as their co-workers or partners and consider that there is a pure bargaining relationship of prices between them. Piece work labourers believe that the work-wage relationship is only an exchange on the commodity market rather than the labour market and agree not to be paid additionally for weekends or holidays. As a result, workers are not aware of that an employment relationship exists until a labour dispute occurs (Shieh, 1997).

Shieh (1997) introduced the notion of piece-working consciousness resulting from piece works and consisting of four aspects. First, workers view themselves as 'small bosses' taking charge of their own risk. Second, the 'labour only' consciousness makes workers regard their labour as pure commodities. Third, workers come to the factory when there is work but go home whenever there is no work, moving freely but actually standing by at times without pay. Virtually free consciousness is constructed. Fourth, the blurring of the employment relationship results in a specific class consciousness with which piece workers believe the contributors to the workplace are themselves as partners of the business, rather than the management who are the real employers.

From anthropological view, Simon (2000, 2005) observed the changing labour process of the tanning industry in Taiwan with two notions: technical and gender divisions. Tanneries used to be family-owned, small-sized and manual-oriented industry whilst men did more sophisticated work such as splitting leathers and wet tanning, but women and children's work were less skilled like drying leathers. Apprenticeship was part of the system of production, but masters always feared of giving apprentices high-skilled tasks to avoid mistakes and waste of materials. At the time, the class identity of tanners was really implicit since the division of masters and trainees came from the ownership of skills. Later, due to the development of technology and machinery, tanning industry became capital dominated. People could just buy machines and employee skilled workers to set up a factory, even the owner did not have much knowledge and skills of tanning. Former masters were hired working with common workers and a management class above was created. These masters viewed themselves as professional different from management and common workers, but experienced a process of proletarianisation. However, collective identity could not emerge amongst skilled and common workers, simply because they did not view themselves as a unitary class.

In terms of gender division after factorisation, women who used to help their husbands had either stopped working as machine making was more dangerous, started

taking over soft management i.e. finance of the factory if their husbands were owners, or become temporary workers to help their families. Similarly, women did not see themselves as the same class as men in the factory as they were not professional or permanent workers. Male and female workers did not have a common sense of each other at work, so once more class identity could not reveal. Eventually, worker identity was 'hollowed out' though the relationship of capital and labour did exist (Simon, 2000, Simon, 2005).

Obviously, literature has represented the fact that Taiwanese worker identity is not originated from class struggle or industrial conflict. A fundamental problem is that people take the relationships of employees and management for granted so that employment relations are obedient and lack of labour voice. Therefore, this research will examine any transition of labour identity in workplace and argue whether and how the 'real' identification with labour can emerge in Taiwan. Moreover, as trade unionism is relatively weak in Taiwan, researches to combine Taiwanese worker identity and trade unions are short and underdeveloped, and even much fewer than western literatures. This research would like to draw a connection of workers' identification with their trade union by investigating union strategies in workplaces, which will be a contribution of this study.

Research Methods

This research features a case study of a large privatised enterprise in heavy industry, based in southern Taiwan and established in December 1971. It was initially established as a privately-owned corporation, but it came under state ownership in July 1977. Although it was again privatised in April 1995, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the government agency responsible for industrial affairs, remains its main shareholder. The company had established a strong reputation as a model of state-owned enterprises, and after its privatisation, it has remained a well-known corporation, with a reputation as a well managed operation. In October 2010, it had a market capitalisation of approximately 2 billion pounds. It employed more than 9,400 employees, most of whom were male production workers. Less than 2 percent of employees were female and over 50 percent were operatives. It has experienced a very stable labour force, with an annual labour turnover rate of less than 1 percent.

Its labour union was founded in December 1980 and its 9,300 members make it the country's largest single-plant trade union. The case union is located in the company's welfare building, where cafeterias, a grocery shop, book store and exhibition area, laundry, post office and bank are located. The union held its first direct presidential election in November 2001, the earliest of its kind in Taiwan. It is regarded by members as a union that looks after its members and their families, offering various welfare and fringe benefits, from pension schemes to children's scholarships. Initially, the case union was founded as a model union to assist the government to implement

labour legislation in the workplace and a means to support the nation and industrial development. In May 1993, the union for the first time joined the national demonstration of state-owned enterprises. It has transformed itself into an effective union, which plays a prominent leadership role in Taiwan's labour movement. In spite of the fact that trade unions have played the weakest part in the industrial relations system in Taiwan, the case union has been an outstanding model for shedding light on the autonomous development of trade unions. Analysis of the case union demonstrates how a stronger Taiwanese union can act to gain its recognition in the workplace.

I did participant observation in the main case in July and August 2003. I gained access through the union, which offers summer internships to university students majoring in industrial relations. In July and August 2003, I worked as an intern in the union with two other students to learn and help with the case union's routine operations, to interact with visiting members and to get involved in some events, such as a strike in the factory on the first day of my internship, and the off-site training camp for elected officers. I visited the manufacturing areas in the company of union officers, to learn about the production process and working conditions. At the same time, I lived in the employees' residential hall and participated in social life in the workplace. The company provides all kind of on-site entertainment and leisure facilities including a cinema, a gym, a swimming pool, tennis courts, and so on. Later I continued visiting the union for further data collection and carried on participant observation in 2007 and 2010. During each visit I spent a few weeks living in the company residence and working in the union office.

Between October 2003 and August 2007, following my participant observation, I held several interviews in the union office with the union president, the union chief secretary, 3 labour representatives, and 1 administrator from the Human Resources Department. The interview questions focused on the operation, problems and difficulties of the trade union, the implementation of non-union committees, and the roles and responsibilities of labour representatives. All interviews were recorded and conducted in Chinese and Taiwanese. I briefly explained my purposes at the beginning of the interview without providing interview questions in advance, and I let them tell their stories in their own ways.

I have conducted two surveys in the research case. The first survey took place in December 2007 when I visited the union and resided at the company accommodation for one week. A questionnaire was designed to understand the identity of ordinary workers and their interaction with the union. 21 questions were asked including 12 fixed-choice questions and 9 free response questions. The questionnaire was reviewed by the union secretary before the distribution to make sure the used terms are clear and understandable to workers. 200 copies were randomly given out to members visiting the union office and most of them answered during their visit but a few brought back to their office. At last 126 respondents answered and returned the questionnaire.

The second survey was distributed in December 2010 when I visited the union for one week and collected until February 2011. This survey targeted a specific group of union members, 801 squad leaders. The questionnaire consisted of 47 questions including 36 closed-ended questions and 11 open-ended questions, and was reviewed by the union president, the union chief secretary and the union executive secretary as the union just held the presidential election. However, the union agreed to distribute the questionnaire on behalf of me with a union president's memorandum to explain and encourage squad leaders to response. Eventually 231 respondents returned but 16 were treated as invalid questionnaire since one is not a squad leader and 15 people answered less than half of the questionnaire.

In addition, I continuously collected meeting minutes, official letters and internal documents for documentary analysis between July 2003 and December 2010 as I revisited the trade union regularly and gained full access to all documents in the union.

Findings and Analysis

Workers are the majority in a workplace and may be powerful and influential, but they are more powerful when they are properly organised by the union. Workers may not be well aware of their subordination to management but view their relationships as family or partnership. Meanwhile, workers may not understand missions and functions of a union since union membership was compulsory so workers automatically became union members regardless of their willingness or awareness. A large membership is not equal to a relatively strong power until trade union strategically mobilises its members. Therefore, the case union aims to be a real participant of workers' lives by offering a variety of services and welfare, such as discounted insurances, free legal advice and mediation, marriage gifts, scholarships for children education, subsidies of continuing education, mutual funds and so on. It looks after members and their families as well, so members constantly visit the union office and gradually identify themselves as union members.

The union offers a variety of services to members and their families. The president thinks it is vital that the union can look after members' lives, as he said, "*our members work hard in the company but may not have time to deal with some issues after their work. If we can provide them some help, they can save their time and visit the union. It is very good to see members around as it means we are helpful for them.*" Various functions of the union formalise part of workers' life in the workplace. Even if they do not know the main mission of the union, they know they can get various kinds of help or benefits from it. For workers, the union is part of their working life in terms of economic and social functions. If they need help but do not know where to go, they come to the union for advices. If the case company is a big family, the union is part of it and cannot be replaced or missed.

Most members come to the office for the services provided by the union, especially for purchasing or renewing insurances. Besides, members visit the union to shop discounted merchandise from external providers, or to submit various applications for subsidies and so on. A few workers come to ask questions or exchange information, though only 2 persons said they may come for grievance. Providing a series of services and benefits is a good way to attract members visiting the union, who may gain more understanding of the union from their observations and conversations with union officials and members during their visits. Members come to the union when they find it can assist their needs and save them some time and money.

Workers usually visit the union office for relevant affairs, such as applications, insurances, etc., but visiting the office can be fun as well. From the observation, quite a few members just stop by to say hi and chat with the union officials or secretaries when they are around the welfare building. They may just come to see who is around or get any latest news. People in the office are always ready and happy to talk no matter how busy they are or no matter a comer is a frequent visitor or a rare pop-in. Some members pop in with a few souvenirs or nibbles, sweets to share with everyone in the office, and officers are always happy to share with other members or visitors. It seems visiting friends rather than business visit and making some fun during work.

In general, workers have a good relationship with the union because the union offers many kinds of services and welfare related to their needs to provide help and save members time and money. Members may identify with the union simply because of the services and welfare. Workers are proud of working in a model enterprise such as the case offering better salary, good welfare and benefits, stable working environment and fine reputation. When they become union members due to compulsory membership, workers may not understand why they need a union until they get a chance to know it. Therefore, the union regularly invites new members to the union office for a briefing of union organisation and operation and encourages them to join union events or make use of union services and benefits.

The union sells its own t-shirts in order to accumulate the strike fund. Union t-shirts are always reasonably priced with good quality, so members are interested in ordering for themselves and their families. Apart from the uniform in the company, some workers started wearing the union t-shirts in the workplace. I always saw some employees had a union t-shirt on the top with the uniform trousers. Uniform is not only a managerial means, but also a symbol of pride. If dress is a symbol of identity, wearing union t-shirts in the workplace implies that workers may identify with the union. A huge number of members is not only a number on record but power when people identify with the union and the union represents them as a whole.

Squad leaders were asked explicitly about their identities in the workplace. An interesting result is that identification with the enterprise is beyond identification with

the union. This implies a problem of workplace unions because a union is organised within a workplace rather than an industry or an occupation. Therefore, should the enterprise not exist, the union would not legally exist. Workplace unionism is limited from this view.

Besides, the case union publishes its website and monthly periodicals reporting its operation, providing information relevant to workers, and giving members a forum to speak out whilst members get rewards when their submissions are accepted. It progressively educates members who slowly grow a sense of employment relations and class conflicts. When a serious issue affecting the majority of workers occurs, the case union lets members know that it is the time it needs their help. Considering that it helps them a lot in many aspects, members and even their families feel it is their turn to feed back and they would like to support.

Taking the strike in 2003 focusing on the company merit system for example, one third of members joined forcing the management to respond immediately. The union led a successful strike in the workplace regarding a new policy of performance evaluation and the issue of official leaves for trade union officers on the very first day of my participant observation in July 2003. Around 3,000 members gathered, more than the management would expect.

The company implemented a new system of performance evaluation in 2002 which asked each unit to give 10% of employees the second grade. The union negotiated with the company a few times but still received members' grievances that some line managers kept the quota of the second grade at the evaluation in 2003. Moreover, the union felt suppressed by the company due to some officials dealing with two accidental deaths at work of members but being asked to take personal unpaid leaves rather than the paid leaves regulated by the Labour Union Law.

The union called an extraordinary general meeting of member representatives and invited the management to sit in who did not give good responses, so union representatives approved the action in the meeting. After the meeting, all union representatives took their lunch break and time between shifts distributing flyers to members, awakening the consciousness of unfairness, and showing their determination to confront with the company. Two days before the strike, the union president, officials and secretaries stood by the intersections, where members passed through during commutation, and held posters to remind the action. On the day, many neighbouring unions and local politicians joined to support the workers. It ended up with the general manager on behalf of the business presenting and promising to put down those issues in clear writing as internal memorandum.

To encourage members to participate, the union gave each attendee a small protest banner along with a bottle of water and a towel as it was summer. After the action, attendee could take a small protest banner to exchange a free union t-shirt which was

normally sold at 90 Taiwan New Dollars (approximately 2 British Pounds) to raise the strike fund. The distribution of these goods at the same time helped the union to count the aggregate number of participants. The union president believed, *“if we want a strike, we ought to succeed. Otherwise, we will lose everything. When two or three workers were gathering, none would notice them; twenty or thirty, well, the security pals could dismiss them in a few minutes; two or three hundred, the management might notice or call the police but would not take it serious; only when two or three thousand people were together, should the boss face the problem and solve it.”*

Labour dispute is the time to show how powerful the trade union is with two purposes. The union president said, *“we go for a strike for two reasons: one is to force the company to look upon us respectfully; the other is to prove to our members that we are definitely doing something important for them.”* However, the military strike is the last weapon of the union and must be successful. If the trade union failed to lead a dispute, there would be no possibility for its future since members would not trust it and neither the management would respect it.

Conclusion

Workers have multiple identities whilst their identification with trade union arises from their identification with enterprise as a result of the tradition of Taiwanese trade unions. Workers many think about their company before their union if they are not aware what a union is. Besides, workplace unionism may limit the development of trade unions since a union is unable to exist if a company is not surviving. Therefore, members of the case union have their union identity based on their business identity, so union identity comes after enterprise identity.

Prior to mobilisation, offering welfare is a vital way to connect workers and their union, since welfare is the most important concern in workplace.

Accordingly, the case union takes a soft and gradual approach to influence members' identities prior to throwing out those hard issues to workers. The tradition of Taiwanese labour identity is changeable provided that trade unions make more effort. Unlike many Western countries where trade unions may be established by workers' identity, Taiwanese unions founded with the past support from the government have to take a top-down strategy to generate a class identity with class consciousness to gain its recognition.

From an auxiliary means of the state and capital to an autonomous agent of workers, trade unions in Taiwan confront various challenges in the transition and need different strategies. Labour identity is an important factor of union acknowledgment but has to be transformed in Taiwan. However, in the Taiwanese context, it is not a trade union generated by labour identity, but trade union to formalise labour identity. Due to compulsory membership by the previous regulation, workers' identity does not

influence their participation in trade union, but trade union activities influence members' identities. Therefore, unions should consider the influence of work identity and implement strategies shifting it to root themselves in workplaces. How to mobilise labour identity in workplaces is currently an important lesson to trade unions in Taiwan.

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