

The Anti-Sweatshop Movement of a Worker Center:
Organizing Activity for Restaurant Workers in San Francisco

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July 2012

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Introduction

Since the latter half of the 1990s, the rise of social movement unionism (SMU) has been suggested to indicate the revitalization of the labor movement.¹ One of the characteristics of SMU is its unique style of organization. Remarkably, while the organizational innovations of labor unions, which have been pivotal organizations in the labor movement, are being implemented, new types of organizations have also emerged and networks between labor unions and new organizations have been built. In the United States, labor non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and worker centers should be noted. This paper addresses the anti-sweatshop movement of a worker center in San Francisco.

As is well known, worker centers have been set up in various regions in the United States since around 2000, and they are very often based on immigrant communities (e.g., Fine, 2005; 2006; 2007). The scale of these worker centers is usually so small that they are likely to have limited influence, although worker centers are noticeable for their organizing activities for immigrant workers who were previously regarded as unorganizable. However, this paper tries to clarify that some worker centers are likely to overcome the resource limitations resulting from their small scale through associating with various organizations such as municipal institutions, research institutes, and other worker centers.

Furthermore, this paper also asserts that the anti-sweatshop movement of a worker center in San Francisco has a complicated nature—this movement does not only fight injustice and improve working conditions but also educates workers and, in so doing, organizes them. In addition, in this paper, the theoretical implications of the anti-sweatshop movement itself are addressed by referring to “neo-Polanyianism”, which is a theoretical trend that legitimatizes the rise of SMU and endorses the revitalization of the labor movement. This paper indicates that the anti-sweatshop movement can mean a critique against neo-Polanyianism. First of all, the organizational feature and activities of a worker center, which is taken as an example in this paper, will be reviewed.

¹ SMU can tentatively be defined as a labor movement that seeks to transform industrial relations to be more labor-advantageous and, in so doing, to remold various societal institutions (Yamada, 2008a).

A Worker Center in the San Francisco Chinatown—Its History and Activities²

Its History

An example case in this paper, Worker Center A (WCA)³ is based in the San Francisco Chinatown; therefore, it organizes Chinese immigrants.⁴ WCA is originally an organization for a social movement. It was established in 1972 and was influenced by the Cultural Revolution in China and the anti-Vietnam War movement, and it has officially identified itself as a worker center since 2001.⁵

Organization

WCA is an organization with several divisions—each division implementing specific tasks or programs. These include: organizing activities as a worker center, the Chinatown Justice Program, which seeks to improve inferior housing environment in Chinatown, a program for solving environmental problems, and a youth program in which young people are organized and educated as future leaders and/or organizers. The present membership is about 600, but if people who do not pay membership dues are included, the number reaches 1000 (from an interview with the incumbent co-director in August, 2009). The number of paid staff varies and is usually about 10 or so. Apart from the regular staff, some interns are often employed.⁶ The funds of WCA are derived from membership dues (20 dollars annually),⁷ funds from various

² This research is predicated on the author's fieldwork, which has continuously been carried out since March, 2007. For this worker center, the author periodically conducted interviews with two former and incumbent co-directors and a lead organizer. In this paper, the author analyzed this worker center based on these interviews, participatory observation of some meetings and rallies, and collected documents.

³ Of course, WCA is anonymous.

⁴ These Chinese immigrants primarily came from Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and other regions around there and, therefore, speak Cantonese. It is very common that immigrants from the same region and kinship, regardless of ethnicity, tend to gather and live together (e.g., Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Massey & Epinoza, 1997). This means that the migration process itself involves social networks among migrants.

⁵ For worker centers, there seems to be no qualifications except for the fact that they are non-profit organization. In other words, this means that the activities of worker centers can be very diverse.

⁶ Since the latter half of the 1990s, the American Federation of Labor—Congress of Industrial Organization, AFL-CIO) has called for college student interns in the summer recess, and it has helped them understand labor problems and become involved in union activities as one of the measures to revitalize the labor movement. This is the so-called “labor summer” program. Based on this program, labor centers, which are established at many universities for the research and practical education on labor problems, directly gather students and refer them to unions, worker centers, and NGOs. Worker centers and NGOs are often unable to employ paid staff and frequently prefer to employ student interns.

⁷ According to the author's interviews with the incumbent co-directors, even though WCA was not very diligent in managing its membership previously, it has recently checked whether or not its members pay their dues every six months. This situation indicates that worker centers often find it difficult to maintain their membership because their activities are often ad hoc and over in a short

foundations, funds from the municipality, and donations.

WCA continuously tries to organize new members by implementing various campaigns and programs. For example, in one campaign, it teaches laid-off workers why and how unemployment can happen, and it recommends them to join the membership at that time. Furthermore, in the youth program, WCA seeks to foster future leaders and/or organizers among youth members and to direct promising young people to recruit new members.

Activities

The reason why WCA was officially established as a worker center in 2001 was that it supported laid-off workers in the electric and the apparel industries. WCA publicized the injustice of these lay-offs and won back-wages for these workers. For apparel workers, the amount of one million and three hundred thousand dollars was repaid for unpaid work. Because this was the first activity as a worker center and became the prototype of activities for WCA, the primary activity of WCA has been to organize workers in manufacturing until recently.

However, these activities are likely to be passive because it is not until workers are dismissed and companies are bankrupt that WCA starts campaigns through lawsuits. Therefore, to solve this problem, WCA carried out research on what kind of occupations people have in Chinatown, and it found that many Chinese workers work in restaurants.⁸ As mentioned later, many restaurant workers cannot earn the minimum wage in the city of San Francisco.⁹

This is why WCA does not only pursue organizing restaurant workers in Chinatown but also makes public the inferior working conditions in restaurants in order to obtain supports from the public and to overcome the resource limitations of worker centers. In short, unlike labor unions, worker centers cannot necessarily obtain enough fruits, even if they organize each shop and force its management to accept the demands of workers. For that reason, WCA shifted its strategy and has sought to publicly ask the municipality to use its budget to improve the inferior conditions of workers.

Furthermore, the fact that WCA took restaurant workers seriously should be concerned with relationships with labor unions. Briefly, while the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, Textile Employees—Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Unions (UNITE-HERE) local 2 has conventionally carried out

time. This is completely different from the situation of labor unions, whose activities are usually so routine and periodical that it is easy for labor unions to seize their membership.

⁸ The research done in 2004 made it apparent that 12,000 among Chinese workers were working in restaurants in Chinatown. It also showed that 12 to 13 percent of Chinese workers were doing so in some districts.

⁹ As of November 1, 2011, the minimum wage in San Francisco is fixed at \$9.92. This is the highest level in the United States.

organizing activities in San Francisco, it has primarily tried to organize hotel workers and, contrary to its name, has hardly ever targeted restaurant workers. To put it another way, even if WCA organizes restaurant workers in San Francisco, it does not invade the jurisdiction of local 2. In fact, WCA has good cooperative relationships with some labor unions including local 2 and worker centers, and it does not have any conflicts with those organizations.¹⁰

Characteristics

Besides the above activities, the training and education of workers are also unique characteristics of WCA. First, as mentioned previously, in the youth program, the history and current situation of Chinese immigrants in the United States has been taught to youth members. For example, eight promising youth members were sent to Hong Kong and Guangzhou to build their identities as Chinese immigrants, to learn the situation of Chinese workers, and to form their consciousness as workers.¹¹

Furthermore, for training, two activities are important: leadership development program and job training. The leadership development program, which is based on that of labor unions but customized for Chinese immigrant workers, consists of raising consciousness and upgrading organizing skills. In this program, the whole social structure is also taught so that workers fully understand it. Qualifications for participation in this program are not necessarily definite. Nevertheless, some members are particularly well qualified for this program. For example, they were active in former campaigns, they had experiences of organizing, and they are very honest and earnest in their service for the Chinese community. The training period in this program is about four to six weeks and the training is scheduled all year round.

The other training program, job training, is offered by the San Francisco Labor Council, and is free. This program includes a course of English as a Second Language (ESL). The aim of job training is for workers to obtain the best jobs possible, for example, as restaurant workers, through upgrading their skills. While some restaurant workers, many of whom are recent immigrants, can get temporary jobs with restaurants in Chinatown, the working conditions of those jobs are extremely poor if they do not have any skills. The job training program is an attempt at ameliorating this situation.

In the above, we have briefly reviewed the history, organization, activities, and characteristics of WCA. As already mentioned, this paper addresses the anti-sweatshop

¹⁰ These cooperative relationships are mediated with the San Francisco Labor Council, which was established by the AFL-CIO. Furthermore, WCA has formed ad hoc coalitions with various worker centers. For example, the *May 1st* is one of these coalitions that demand the expansion of immigrant rights.

¹¹ This activity stems from an association with a NGO in Guangzhou to oppose the World Trade Organization. The author had a chance to join a meeting for participants in the trip to report their experiences. In the meeting, after a video recording the looks of participants in the trip was shown, attendees of the meeting were divided into several groups to discuss various questions—for example, what kind of things could they do for workers in China?

movement of WCA, which is a part of organizing activities for immigrant workers. In the following, we will examine the process of this movement.

The Process of the Anti-Sweatshop Movement: Research, Policy, Vision, and Movement

General Background

Generally speaking, transnational associational activities tend to be pursued in SMU. The anti-sweatshop movement is representative of these activities. The definition of a sweatshop is not actually precise, but it is regarded as a shop characterized by low wages, poor working conditions, and *personalistic* oppression: all conditions which were prevalent in manufacturing in the 19th century. While shops or factories in manufacturing were originally typical of sweatshops, some shops in the service industry are also currently regarded as sweatshops.

In the United States, the anti-sweatshop movement was launched by student activists and associated groups rather than labor-related organizations. Many famous universities sell original branded apparel goods. In many cases, these goods are also produced by famous brand-name manufacturers such as NIKE and Reebok. However, with globalization, their production is often outsourced to small subcontractors in the peripheral region in the world-system. These subcontractors are often sweatshops.¹²

Conscientious students who cannot allow apparel goods with their universities' logos to be produced at such sweatshops have built a network-style organization named the United Students against Sweatshops (USAS).¹³ The USAS forced transnational corporations of brand-name apparel makers to publicize where their subcontractors were located and to supervise them by way of third party institutions. Furthermore, the USAS also obliged transnational corporations to establish codes of conduct that ensures that their products cannot be produced at sweatshops (Esbenshade, 2008). In addition, the USAS has sought to construct transnational solidarity with workers struggling at those subcontractors.¹⁴

Needless to say, sweatshops are not only located in the peripheral region. For example, employing immigrants from these regions, small apparel firms have been formed in "global cities" in the core region in the world-system (Sassen, 1999). These small firms are the same sweatshops as those in the peripheral region (Bonacich & Appelbaum, 2000). Thus, the anti-sweatshop movement in the United States has to

¹² It is reported that these subcontractors often employ child labor (Armbruster-Sandval, 2005).

¹³ This organization is supported by the UNITE-HERE (Featherstone & USAS, 2002).

¹⁴ For example, the supportive activities for the labor dispute are well known, which occurred at the Korean footwear factory, Kukdong located in the export processing zone, Maquiladora on the border of the US and Mexico. For transnational solidarity, also see Armbruster-Sandval (2005) and Cobble (ed.) (2007).

support immigrant workers in its own country, while it is also required to create transnational solidarity with workers in the Global South. This paper addresses the anti-sweatshop movement in this context.

Inception

As mentioned above, when WCA began to organize restaurant workers in Chinatown, it was already apparent that they earned lower wages than the San Francisco minimum wage. Nevertheless, with limited resources, a worker center such as WCA cannot afford to organize every restaurant in Chinatown. This is because WCA has adopted a strategy to publicize the realities of life for restaurant workers in Chinatown on the basis of wide research.

On the other hand, researchers in industrial medicine have recognized that there have been many labor accidents in the restaurant industry, where many immigrants are employed, and so they have also pointed out serious problems in working and health conditions (Minkler. et al., 2010). However, the turn-over rate in the restaurant industry is very high and so many workers are recent Chinese immigrants that research on the real situation in restaurants is very difficult, partly because of language limitations.

One of the methods used to overcome these difficulties is to designate restaurant workers themselves as surveyors and let them carry out research on their own workplaces and colleagues. Employing this method, at least language limitations can be avoided, and it can be easier to find informants through the social networks among Chinese immigrants.

Thus, partly because there happens to be a scholar who has done this type of research, that is, “community-based participatory research”, in another community and who is affiliated with the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2007, a research partnership for Chinatown restaurants was formed. The partnership consisted of WCA, the Work and Occupational Health Program at the University of California, Berkeley, the School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the Department of Public Health in the City of San Francisco.¹⁵ According to the author’s interviews with a lead organizer, the association with these research institutes was mediated by a female board member of WCA.¹⁶

When research is started, it is necessary to find eligible surveyors. First, the Restaurant Worker Leadership Group (RWLG) was organized. This had six

¹⁵ At this time, the steering committee was also formed consisting of twelve delegates from these partner groups.

¹⁶ This female member has also been connected with the UNITE-HERE local 2. Her personal network is mobilized when WCA tries to construct organizational networks like this research and organizing project.

members—five females and one male. These persons were the core members of WCA, whose networks are utilized to recruit surveyors. Then the members of RLWG were instructed in the basic principles of research once a week in eight consecutive weeks (Minkler et al., 2010).¹⁷ Additionally, a check list on workplace environment and hygiene¹⁸ and then research questionnaires¹⁹ were created, in which the comments of the members of RLWG were also included.

Finally, about 30 current and former restaurant workers²⁰ joined as surveyors, and they carried out this survey on 433 restaurant workers²¹ in 106 restaurants.²² In the end, the number of questionnaires was 103. Primary questions were concerned with physical and mental health conditions, injuries, sicknesses, working conditions, and

¹⁷ This instruction included basics on the health and safety of workplaces, the purpose of research, confidentiality, informed consent, and the basic concepts of research such as trust and validity, and so forth. The members of the steering committee also took part in this training.

¹⁸ This list was to clarify the number of employees and their gender composition and the presence of dangerous materials, and to verify the followings—whether or not labor law was mandatorily announced in workplaces, and whether or not safety equipment to reduce danger and injuries was in place. This list was originally created by the Occupational Hygiene and Safety Program at UC Berkeley and, taking into consideration the comments of RWLG members, then completed (San Francisco Department of Public Health, 2009).

¹⁹ The author had a chance to participate in the meeting about creating questionnaires on August 13, 2008. Six workers who seemed to be the members of RWLG, a professor of UC Berkeley, and a female board member of WCA (see footnote 15) were the main participants in the meeting. Two staff members of WCA were chairpersons, and one of them acted as a simultaneous interpreter. Therefore, the discussion was in English and Cantonese—all the workers spoke only Cantonese. The agenda was as follows. (1) The selection of questionnaires. At this time, there were 101 questionnaires. (2) Whether or not the former jobs of informants should be asked about. Although workers insisted that this question was so delicate that it should be omitted, the staff of WCA asserted that this information was needed to support restaurant workers because they were likely to have different views of the problems they faced, depending on what kind of jobs they had experienced. (3) The amount of remittances to China. Although workers also insisted that this question should be omitted, a female board member made sure that the results of this research would be published anonymously. She also requested workers to confirm that the aim of this research was not to invade the privacy of informants but to classify Chinatown restaurants on the basis of their working conditions and the safety of served cuisine. (4) The training for surveyors. It was reconfirmed that the purpose of this research, their roles, measures to deal with supposed difficulties, and the like should be made explicit to surveyors. Workers were assigned as “homework” to write documents explaining the intention of this survey to informants and demanding their help. Some workers read out their already written documents. (5) Schedule. At this time, the pilot survey had been finished, and the official survey was planned to be conducted in September 2008.

²⁰ All surveyors were over 18 years old and they were or had been employed in Chinatown restaurants within the past 24 months.

²¹ The research results also showed that typical restaurant workers were relatively recent immigrants, middle-aged, and the supporters of their families with children. Regarding gender, female workers were the majority (69%). Regarding age, 43% were in their forties. Regarding jobs, kitchen workers were the most numerous (31%). Furthermore, 86% were married, and 50% had only a high school diploma or had not graduated from high school. Workers who could not or could hardly speak English represented 79%. While workers who had obtained the United States citizenship numbered 44%, workers residing in the US for less than five years also numbered 45%. Regarding residence, workers living in Chinatown or around it represented 70%.

²² According to the author’s interview with an incumbent co-director, many restaurants were medium or large scale ones with 10 to 50 employees.

the demographic features of workers. In the following, the results of the research will be reviewed (WCA, 2010).

Reality

Briefly, the results show that many restaurants in the San Francisco Chinatown were nothing but sweatshops (WCA, 2010; Minkler et al., 2010). Regarding wages, it was made explicit that one out of every two informants did not earn the minimum wage. Furthermore, it also became apparent that wages were often unpaid²³ and delayed, and that tips were regularly confiscated. Regarding working hours, 42% of informants worked more than 40 hours a week, and a half of them did more than 60 hours a week, but they were not given any breaks, including breaks for meals. Regarding safety in workplaces, many informants had been injured and worked in dangerous workplaces, while 64% of them had not been properly trained.²⁴

Workers in these workplaces felt highly stressed. 72% of the informants were charged with much responsibility, and were asked to work longer. Furthermore, 42% of informants were yelled at by supervisors, colleagues, and customers. Regarding health care and time off for recovery from injuries, only 3% of the informants received health care paid by employers. Although paid sick leave is allowed in San Francisco,²⁵ pay was confiscated for such leaves. In addition, 81% were not allowed to have paid vacation time.

Conscientization, Subjectivity, Organizing

Besides making apparent the real situations of restaurants in Chinatown, WCA considered this research project to be a means of training their members and organizing new members. As already indicated, WCA pays much attention to training and educating their members. In so doing, WCA owes its basic idea and method on training and education to *the Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire (1972).

Paulo Freire is famous for his idea of “deschooling” as well as Ivan Illich. According to Freire, official schooling only forces people to have dominant value consciousness like consumerism, and so it does not enable socially disadvantaged persons to recognize the problems they face and to act to solve them. Therefore, he asserted that *deschooling* should be pursued.

Opposed to official schooling, Freire stressed that a true education program could let the oppressed “conscientize” their own social situations through “dialogue” with “instructors” and, in so doing, “humanize” themselves through changing their

²³ Many workers were not paid for their work during a month or two after their employment started. Additionally, 31% of those workers who had such an experience were not finally able to obtain their wages for the work they had done in these periods.

²⁴ For example, 48% of workers had been burnt and four out of ten workers often received cuts. Furthermore, 17% of them had tumbled and experienced falls.

²⁵ In San Francisco one hour of paid sick leave per 30 hours is mandatory for all workers.

relationships with society and solving their problems. For example, by choosing materials that enable people to recognize their situation and practice literacy education,²⁶ people can not only become literate but also aware of the structural problems and their presence in the society.

The education and training practiced in WCA is based on such an idea. While the check list and questionnaires were created through discussion in the RWLG and the steering committee, the workers themselves basically had to recruit surveyors and contact informants. At that time, workers had to explain adequately the point of the research to the surveyors and informants, and, to do so, they were also required to understand it properly. Furthermore, both surveyors and informants were afraid to ask and answer the questions about their bosses. This is because in the Chinese community, which is rooted in the limited location of the San Francisco Chinatown and constructed of dense relationships, people involved with this research could easily be identified, even if anonymity in research is ensured. Therefore, many workers had tendency to decline to participate in such research.

Nevertheless, based on this idea of education, it is the result of “conscientization” and “humanization” to overcome such fearfulness. In addition, this research activity reconfirms the social networks among the members of RWLG, recruited surveyors, and informants, and aims at organizing people in these networks, at least surveyors as potential members of WCA. By implementing one project collaboratively, they can strengthen their collective identity. In fact, some surveyors joined WCA after participating in this research.²⁷ In short, by grasping the “objective” situation through research activity and making explicit the main cause of the movement, WCA also *educates* its members and *organizes* them *internally* and *externally*.²⁸

Policy, Vision, Movement

In this way, while the research data were collected, WCA at first must be deliberate to publish them. There were two reasons for that. One reason is derived from power relationships and cultural tendencies in the Chinese community in Chinatown. In short, publishing this research result could lead to revealing, as it were, the “secrets” of Chinatown, and, therefore, there would be vast opposition from the Chinese community. Given that restaurant owners who break the minimum wage law

²⁶ For example, by making use of photographs and sketches to visualize the reality of *favela*, “instructors” give assignments on problems such as poverty and exploitation there and discuss them with people. In this practice, people can obtain literacy more efficiently.

²⁷ From 30 surveyors, in which WCA members were already included, five new members joined WCA.

²⁸ While *external organizing* means involving new members in organizations, *internal organizing* means activating organizations through giving members their roles and making them identify themselves with organizations.

are also the same Chinese, Chinese people might not feel like making explicit the disinterest of their bosses. Above all, workers participating in this research were likely to be dismissed, and WCA could be alienated from Chinatown, if it published the results.²⁹

For this reason, WCA had to have meetings with primary business leaders in Chinatown to get them to understand the significance of this research, and asserted to them that observing the minimum wage law could lead to expanding the consumption by workers and result in a profit increase for the management. Finally, while some business leaders were opposed to the publication, WCA judged—given that the violation of the minimum wage law could not be justified at all—that it could win public support, and it decided to publish the result and begin the campaign.³⁰

The other reason is the likelihood that ethnic groups could clash with each other. Just as in other regions in the United States, in San Francisco, African Americans are situated at the bottom of the ethnic strata,³¹ and other immigrants including Chinese belong to the higher strata than African Americans. Therefore, generally speaking, it seems that African Americans tend to envy Chinese. Similarly, other ethnic groups, including African Americans, are likely to react to WCA, if it publishes the research result only with the aim of improvements in the situation of the Chinese.

To deal with this issue, WCA chose to campaign by building an alliance, that is, by forming the Progressive Workers Alliance with other worker centers, each of which was also based on an ethnic community. This alliance is made from worker centers organizing African Americans, Filipinos, Latinos, and queers, and other groups.

Thus, the report of the research result was published in September, 2010, and included data verifying that many restaurants in Chinatown were sweatshops, and policy suggestions to ameliorate the working conditions. These suggestions were aimed at San Francisco, the State of California, and the Office of Labor Standards Enforcement of the Federal Government. Concretely, these suggestions were as follows: reinforcing control over the breaks of laws based on investigation, strengthening the association of the municipality with community-based groups, increasing the budget for control reinforcement and staff in the department, reinforcing penalties against the breaks of laws and establishing new regulating laws, improving education and simplifying the process of dealing with grievances,³² improving

²⁹ In fact, some owners, who alleged that WCA was a “dubious” group, dissuaded their workers from being connected with WCA, and, therefore, some of them did cut their ties with WCA.

³⁰ Indeed, after publishing the result, according to the author’s interview with a lead organizer, there was no backlash against WCA.

³¹ Related to the *inner city* problem stemming from deindustrialization, it is well known that the *underclass* usually consists of African Americans (Wilson, 1987).

³² In addition to simplifying bureaucratic procedures, this suggestion is based on the fact that disadvantaged workers are current Chinese immigrants. They do not know how to consult with the authorities and they have tendency to refrain from suing because it is difficult for them to communicate in English.

workers' rights by protecting workers against retaliation by employers, and strengthening collective programs for reclaiming unpaid wages and increasing the budget for these programs.

Furthermore, in this report, WCA suggested to the City of San Francisco an economic policy for supplementing the above suggestions. Concretely, the policy is as follows: investment for the diversification of the economy in Chinatown, an economic development program for ensuring a "living wage" and high labor standards, investment for stabilizing small businesses and making employers observe the law, and implementing a marketing program for sightseeing visitors in order to protect employers who observe the laws.

In addition, interestingly, WCA has not only made these suggestions but also has some visions on what Chinatown should be like. Some of them are to suppose that WCA itself will participate in policy making. Concretely, the following policies are conceived: a job training system for the needs of community, establishing a local currency and the barter system in Chinatown, building a community kitchen to supply healthy and safe meals, establishing workers' collectives, and creating laws prohibiting arbitrary dismissal.

As well as making these suggestions and policies, WCA coordinates the Progressive Workers Alliance mentioned above, and, as a result, uses what few resources it has in organizing a campaign to establish a law regulating employers who pay less than the minimum wage and reinforcing penalties against such employers. WCA has already begun to conduct the petition campaign for the Board of Supervisors³³ in San Francisco in order to create the Wage Theft Prevention Act, and it obtained affirmation from all the Supervisors on August 2 in 2011. Afterwards, the Mayor of San Francisco also confirmed its establishment on September 20, 2011. It can be said that WCA is succeeding in implementing a social movement to create social institutions to protect the rights of workers because it has persuaded the public that the "wage theft" problem is not limited to Chinatown but is a universal problem with which all low-wage workers are confronted.

Characteristics

So what are the characteristics of the anti-sweatshop movement of WCA? First of all, it can be pointed out that this movement can overcome the constraints of scarce resources, with which immigrant community-based worker centers are generally faced, through building networks with other organizations. In other words, by transforming the issue of breaking the minimum wage law, ("the wage theft") in Chinatown into a universal and public problem, WCA has succeeded in coordinating a wide social

³³ In the United States, the council is usually a legislative body of city. However, since the City of San Francisco itself is also a county, the upper level of the municipality, the legislature is set as the Board of Supervisors.

movement. This point can be instructive for the activities of worker centers, which are often regarded as limited because of their small scale.

Second, this movement was carried out as research activity, in the process of which the association with scholars in universities and municipality was realized. Starting as research activity, the movement enabled WCA to make an objective assertion and to acquire the resource of special knowledge from intellectuals. This means that this movement, even if its extent might not be so large, also has the nature of “new social movements (NSMs)”, which mainly the new middle class join. As Yamada (2008a) pointed out, SMU, unlike the conventional labor movement, tends to be similar to NSMs. In this regard, the anti-sweatshop movement of WCA can surely be included in SMU.

Third, this movement is not only a social movement *externally* but also an educational and organizing activity *internally*. Generally, since worker centers organize current immigrants, they are inclined to enthusiastically train workers and to foster leaders. This is because education and training is indispensable to organizing immigrants, who are not often officially educated and do not have the ability to communicate in English.

The fact that the anti-sweatshop movement of WCA, with these similar characteristics, practices its own *deschooling* and pursues constructing members’ subjectivity and organizing internally shows the great uniqueness of this organization and its movement. In the above, we reviewed the implication of this anti-sweatshop movement as SMU. In the following, its theoretical implications will be examined.

The Theoretical Implications of the Anti-Sweatshop Movement: The Critique of Neo-Polanyianism

Neo-liberalism

As is well known, the process of globalization is endorsed by the ideology of neo-liberalism. Given that neo-liberalism is an ideology that legitimates the pure operation of markets, the preponderance of such an ideology is likely to lead to blaming the protection for workers, social security or welfare, and so forth for restricting the market mechanism. In fact, in globalization, competition among corporations is so keen that discourse based on neo-liberalism is often mobilized in justifying the conduct of employers in remolding industrial relations.

In this way, if neo-liberal discourse is prevalent and it expands market relations in society, regarding industrial relations, the protective code for workers, which was institutionalized through the organizational activities of workers, will be abolished, and industrial relations will be transformed to be regulated by the external labor market to a similar extent in the 19th century. In short, such industrial relations will be

characteristic of *complete* wage relations and the *maximized* tendencies for workers to depend only on their wages. As was indicated (Offe, 1987), the policies of the welfare state, on the other hand, have regulated these tendencies and *decommodified* the labor force. However, it can be mentioned that neo-liberal labor policies are against these policies and seek to *recommodify* or thoroughly *commodify* the labor force.

Neo-Polanyianism

Karl Polanyi (1957) pointed out the negative effect of complete market relations. He also stressed that two other relations, *reciprocity* and *redistribution*, are required so that the economy may be *embedded* in society to function appropriately. Moreover, he asserted, if market relations are so disproportionately prevalent that society tends to discompose itself, the other movement will emerge, which restrains the expansive movement of market relations. In short, for market relations, two opposite movements usually occur in society. This is known as *double movement*.

In globalization, the present situation, in which neo-liberalism is preponderant and market relations are extremely expansive, can fit the case that Polanyi pointed out. In this situation, the built-in mechanism in society, the *double movement*, is likely to operate, and the stronger the tendency to mold social relations endorsed by neo-liberalism and to maximize market relations, the more expansive the movement to stop this tendency can turn out.

Based on this assertion, a theoretical trend seeks to grasp the current revitalization of the labor movement and SMU as a part of the *double movement*—neo-Polanyianism (e.g., Evans, 2008). If predicated on this trend, the greater the influence of neo-liberalism is getting, the more likely the revitalization of the labor movement will be to proceed. Naturally, such an optimistic view has already been criticized (e.g., Burawoy, 2010). However, the critique in this paper is not simply against optimism in neo-Polanyianism.

The Directionality of Double Movement

If based on neo-Polanyianism, the countermovement against the expansion of market relations as a part of the *double movement* should be the movement for the *decommodification* of the labor force.³⁴ This is because the expansion of market relations, regarding industrial relations, can be thought of as the complete *commodification* of the labor force and, as a part of it, the universal prevalence of wage relations. In other words, since market relations are crucial to the capitalist system, the molding of a countermovement against them requires *non-capitalist* social

³⁴ As shown from the estimation of Speenhamland Act, which was established in 18th century England, Polanyi himself seemed to consider *decommodification* as a supposed direction of countermovement. The Speenhamland Act defined the rule that a poverty allowance should be paid when a person's income, even though one has a job, is less than the price of a loaf of bread.

relations.

In this case, given that capitalism itself is a historical system, *non-capitalist* social relations are supposed to be *pre-capitalist* and *post-capitalist* social relations. Generally, while pre-capitalist social relations are, sooner or later, eroded in the course of capitalist expansion, these relations are supposed to be still widely present in the peripheral region in the world-system. For example, pre-capitalist social relations are characterized by producers or workers³⁵ still connected with the means of production,³⁶ *personalistic* relations in labor control, and the ideology of *paternalism* and/or *communitarianism*.³⁷

On the other hand, post-capitalist social relations conventionally tended to be represented by socialist social relations. Socialist relations are also characterized by producers owning their means of production. Needless to say, post-capitalist social relations are not necessarily limited to socialist relations. Without any change in the relationship of workers with the means of production, if it is to be noted that the social policies of the welfare state reduced the extent to which workers get their reproduction dependent on wages, these policies can be regarded as molding non-capitalist social relations. Moreover, taking their *historicity* into consideration, these relations can never be pre-capitalist social relations but post-capitalist ones.

In this way, as Polanyi asserted, given that the countermovement, which is part of the *double movement*, occurs against wage relations as a part of market relations, such a countermovement will orient itself to transforming industrial relations into pre-capitalist or post-capitalist ones. Moreover, in many cases, it is supposed that the post-capitalist transformation of industrial relations such as the *decommodification* of the labor force will happen.³⁸ Nevertheless, does SMU orient itself in such a direction?

The Critique of Neo-Polanyinism

Now let us review again the anti-sweatshop movement of WCA examined above. As already pointed out, many restaurants in Chinatown can be recognized as sweatshops. Regarding wages, even the minimum wage is not paid. Regarding labor

³⁵ In the process of the transition to capitalism, even though employment relations begin to be formed in the society, it is likely that wage relations are still incomplete and that workers are also connecting pre-capitalist social relations. This situation can be regarded as the articulation of modes of production—pre-capitalist mode of production and capitalist one.

³⁶ In this situation, even if wage relations are already connected, the extent to which workers get their reproduction of labor force dependent on wages can be less than in pure capitalism.

³⁷ It is to be noted that capitalist social relations consist of the following relations, particularly in industrial relations—producers or workers, disconnected from the means of production, get their reproduction dependent only on wages; bureaucratic control of workers is conducted on the basis of rules; the ideology of materialism and meritocracy are prevalent. For these *specificities* of capitalism, also see Yamada (1996).

³⁸ The attempt at the introduction of basic income, recently noted, can be understood as molding post-capitalist social relations. For basic income, see Fitzpatrick (1999).

control, as shown from the fact that workers are daily yelled at by employers, it is arbitrary, not based on rules, and is *personalistic*. Furthermore, these industrial relations are so *paternalistic* that workers are often not paid for one or two months after they begin work.

Judging from this situation, capitalist social relations cannot be regarded as connected in these restaurants. There, *capitalist* social relations, at least some of them, should be replaced with *pre-capitalist* social relations in industrial relations. In short, the fact that Chinese immigrants of the same origin are employers and workers in industrial relations enables *personalistic* labor control to emerge and the ideology of paternalism to function well.³⁹ Furthermore, how on earth can workers live, when not only are they not paid *living wage* to cover, for example, health care expenses but do not even receive the minimum wage? Needless to say, such workers can only live through the reciprocal network of *communitarian* relationships among immigrants.⁴⁰

What can the anti-sweatshop movement of WCA be thought to do if these Chinese immigrant workers are involved in pre-capitalist social relations? As the slogan “Stop the Wage Theft” indicates, this movement pursues getting wages to be paid normally paid properly. Furthermore, demanding that the cost of health care should be paid by employers can mean an attempt at raising wages to a level equal to the reproductive cost of the labor force, and accusing employers of scornfully yelling at workers can also mean an attempt at introducing labor control based on legitimate rules. Above all, the ideology of *paternalism*, which legitimates the fact that employers are not required to pay wages for the first month or two because they kindly let workers have jobs—in other words, they take the trouble to help workers—should be totally opposed by this movement.

In summary, the anti-sweatshop movement of WCA does not pursue *post-capitalist decommodifying* of the labor force, as is supposed in neo-Polanyianism, but *capitalist commodifying* of it.⁴¹ Nevertheless, another point should be noted. That

³⁹ According to the author’s interview with WCA, these immigrants are not necessarily from rural areas of China. Many of them come from urban areas. Therefore, in the Canton region, where market relations or capitalist social relations are increasingly expanding, the mechanism of persistence of traditional social relations must be examined in another paper. Generally, in the core region in the world-system, the low-end service industry, in which immigrant workers are mostly employed, in regard to industrial relations, is supposed to replace *capitalist* social relations with *pre-capitalist* social relations. This is because immigrant workers have an *intimacy* with pre-capitalist social relations. Both employers and workers in Chinatown restaurants can have such *intimacy*.

⁴⁰ Current Chinese immigrants often live in single room occupancy (SRO) dwellings. As mentioned above, WCA tries to improve inferior accommodation circumstances. As many as ten people often live in SRO and they mostly share one toilet and one bath room. Nevertheless, even though they cannot earn more than minimum wage, these immigrants can live through finding jobs and sharing their small income with each other. Furthermore, it is to be noted that these reciprocal networks among immigrants are also part of a *communitarian* relationship nexus spreading to the peripheral region in the world-system.

⁴¹ In retrospect, the proper functioning of market relations, as is sought in neo-liberalism, is

is because this movement is also mediated with reciprocal social networks among workers—some of them were surveyors. If these social networks are endorsed by pre-capitalist communitarian relationships (Yamada, 2008b), it can be said that the anti-sweatshop movement of WCA seeks to remold industrial relations part of which are replaced with pre-capitalist relations into truly capitalist ones by way of pre-capitalist relations among immigrant workers.

In short, if *double movement*, as Polanyi expected, can happen, a part of it, that is, the countermovement against capitalism, cannot necessarily emerge to pursue the replacement of capitalism with post-capitalism, as the anti-sweatshop movement of WCA shows, but in fact *purifying* further capitalism of pre-capitalist relations.⁴²

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, based on the author's field work, the implications of the anti-sweatshop movement of a worker center in the San Francisco Chinatown are examined—*practical* implications for SMU and *theoretical* ones in the critical context of neo-Polanyianism. Regarding practical implications, this movement, as a part of SMU, shows the possibilities of worker centers—worker centers can take measures to overcome the restraints on those with small resources. The new middle class, as well as NSMs, support the movement. The unique view of education and organization, in which the training and education for membership are understood as a process of organizing, can help to expand and activate the organization.

For theoretical implications, in the context of critically understanding neo-Polanyianism, this paper has clarified that this movement does not orient itself to the *post-capitalist decommodification* of the labor force but resists capitalism through remolding industrial relations to *fully-fledged capitalist relations*. This finding will contribute to conceptually and fundamentally understanding the nature of SMU, the primary actors in which are immigrants.

Furthermore, in retrospect, even if based on neo-Polanyianism, this paper suggests that a countermovement as a part of *double movement* is likely to take various styles. Diverse movements in SMU, a part of which involves organizing immigrants, can be classified in terms of mediated and mobilized relations (pre-capitalist social relations) and oriented relations (capitalist social relations and post-capitalist ones). This also means that other forms of opposition in SMU, that is, pursuing post-capitalist remolding, should be promptly examined on the basis of case studies.

possible not only with prevalent capitalist social relations but also with the help of pre-capitalist social relations.

⁴² For another example, the movement trying to institutionalize the *living wage* can be regarded as a countermovement seeking to complete capitalist social relations.

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