

5 Manufacturing manhood

The culture of hegemonic masculinity in Taiwan's labour movement

Ming-sho Ho

Taiwan's workers built the so-called 'economic miracle' with their own hands, but they were seldom allowed to speak their minds. There was a widespread stereotype of workers as docile and diligent, and this perception was reinforced in the popular culture. Two widely popular songs were representative. 'An Orphaned Girl's Wish' (1959) told the story of a young rural woman's journey to Taipei in search of a factory job. Without any marriage prospect, the narrator sang of the need to earn her living in an unfamiliar city. For her happiness in the future, she was willing to 'work at less well paying jobs for three or five years'. While 'An Orphaned Girl's Wish' depicted the gloomy background of rural proletarianization, 'Only Hard Work Can Lead to Success' (1988) was more uplifting and especially popular among self-made small-to-medium businesspeople. The lyrics encouraged the audience to keep faith even when facing adversity, because ultimately 'thirty per cent is determined by Heaven, but seventy per cent is determined by hard work'.

The absence of workers' authentic voices was due more to their subordination in a non-democratic regime that relied on cheap labour to earn foreign reserves and that outlawed labour activism for the sake of political stability (Deyo 1987). Hence, the seeming docility and diligence were only a means of survival rather than an innate virtue. With the waning of authoritarian control, Taiwan's workers gained the opportunity to raise their own demands. The late 1980s witnessed a massive wave of labour insurgency. While many studies have documented the consequences of the recent labour movement (Chu 1996, 1998, 2003; Ho 2003; Hsu 1989; Wang 1993), little attention has been paid to the question of workers' own cultural image. If the stereotype of docility and diligence was a coerced imposition, what kind of role did Taiwan's workers aspire to play? Workers obviously wanted to carve out a larger share of the economic pie, but which cultural claim did they raise in order to justify their collective effort? Democratization could be seen as a situation in which existing values were profoundly revalued. During the political transition, what was the workers' own self-projection? What kind of recognition did they seek to obtain from other members of society? In short, this chapter aims to understand the cultural meaning of Taiwan's labour politics in the last two decades.

This chapter calls attention to the fact that Taiwan's labour movement is not only male dominated but that it also persistently projects a highly gendered culture

of masculinity. As a result, there is a strange cohabitation, in that militant labour activism exists alongside conservative gender practice.

Historically, unions sought to restrict women's employment, limit their working hours, protect the positions of skilled male workers, and outlaw female membership, and thus exacerbated the existing gender segregation (Brenner 1998: 5; Buhle 1999: 129; Hartmann 1976: 153–67). There were some unions that encouraged female participation, but, even in these cases, the concentration of women in low-skilled and low-waged jobs was still accepted as it was (Strom 1983). Even in revolutionary unionism, the given gender role was preserved rather than overthrown (Schofield 1983).

Research on Taiwan's union movement confirmed a similar pattern of gender politics. Labour unions were largely dominated by male leadership and cared little about women's issues (Chiang 2001; Chu 1996). On the other hand, Taiwan's labour movement organizations, staffed by younger and educated activists, tended to be more progressive than labour unions and they were critical of this phenomenon. Their publications documented many instances of gender discrimination. For instance, female members were often discouraged from decision making, because it was claimed that 'women did not understand unions'.¹ More often than not, women were assigned routine and trivial tasks, such as 'ordering lunch boxes at a mass rally'.²

Taiwan's labour union movement takes as its cultural norm a particular gendered culture, which I call militant masculinity. Union leaders are motivated by this role expectation and seek to mould their movement accordingly. Militant masculinity falls into the category of hegemonic masculinity that views females as subordinate and thus results in gender repression (Donaldson 1993: 645). As stressed by Connell (1995: 67–8), masculinity is a form of social organization as well as a relational product. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that Taiwan's workers adopt this gendered culture for certain historical reasons in order to interpret their repression as being castrated and feminized, and their movement as rejuvenated manhood. Labour unions do not develop *ex nihilo*; existing cultural tradition is critical in shaping the character of a union movement. In Taiwan, the protracted authoritarianism has erased the collective memory of previous waves of radicalism. Without the support of cultural alternatives, workers have to rely on the commonality of their gender role to build their solidarity.

For field data, I studied a local branch (hereafter Local One) of the Taiwan Petroleum Workers' Union (TPWU). Local One represents the workers of three petrochemical plants in the Kaohsiung area, all employed by the state-owned China Petroleum Company (CPC). In the late 1980s, the rank-and-file dissidents seized control of the labour union in spite of harassment from the Kuomintang (KMT) party branch, security personnel and the management (Huang 1991; Wu 1996). From then on, they have been able to launch a series of protests that are still ongoing. I came to know the leaders of Local One in 1999 when I volunteered to assist their electoral campaigns. Later, the field research was carried out in 2002–4, and the interview data were obtained mainly from union leaders, members, retired workers and their family members.

In 2003, Local One had 5,453 members, 354 of whom were female. Female members were concentrated in non-productive units, such as the management office, auxiliary welfare facilities and schools. Factory operatives and engineers were male without exception. In spite of de facto job segregation, union membership was compulsory for everyone except the top-ranking management personnel.

Cultural resources for Taiwan's labour movement

In his classic work, Thompson (1963) emphasized the formative role of traditional culture. Rather than an automatic outcome of the factory system, the advent of the British workers' movement was preceded by a cultural re-interpretation of English Jacobinism, Methodism and bourgeois political economy. Following the lead of Thompson (1963), students of working-class formation took a cultural turn. In France, scholars argued that the Revolution bequeathed radical republicanism whose anti-feudal discourses fuelled the protest against nascent capitalism (Aminzade 1993; Sewell 1980). The American Revolution made possible a cultural consensus of political liberty, which played a vital role in workers' critique of 'wage slavery' (Dublin 1979; Foner 1970; Montgomery 1993).

Non-political cultural elements also played a part in class formation. Neighbourhood mutualism provided a firm basis for workers' solidarity (Dawley 1976). Immigrant communities had a more visible boundary and their ethnic associations were conducive to workers' self-organizing (Cumbler 1986). Nationalism as an ideology that stressed the distinction between in-group and out-group members could be utilized in class mobilization. The fact that the Korean workers' movement was visibly anti-imperialist underscored the power of nationalistic sentiments among the rank and file (Koo 2001).

While Thompson's followers continued to explore the seminal role of traditional cultures for the class movement, it remained an unanswered question as to what happened to workers when their heritages were decidedly illiberal and their movement deviated from the standard 'proletariat-into-a-class' course as envisioned by Karl Marx. By studying the Indian jute workers in the colonial period, Chakrabarty (1989) unearthed the persistent influences of 'precapitalist culture', such as clientelism, personality cult and religious communalism, and as it turned out workers' protest was structured by these localized elements rather than an unequivocal class identity. In other words, Chakrabarty urged us to question teleology and universalism in studying class formation.

It was apparent that Taiwan's labour movement since the mid-1980s was deprived of underpinning by cultural traditions, even though its political ascendancy was uninterrupted. A study of the 1988 strike at the Far Eastern Chemical Fiber Company noted that Taiwan's workers did not possess a 'strong counter-culture' when compared to 'the West with its rich rights discourses and traditions in class conflict' (Chao 1995: 145). A union activist also told me that Taiwan's labour leaders were always embarrassed when visiting Korea. While Korean union

leadership traced their protest back to colonial repression, the story narrated by Taiwanese lacked such historical depth.³

In fact, a closer look at how workers described their situation revealed the fact that their language was permeated with the image of traditional rural society, as if they were utterly unfamiliar with industrial civilization. The labour union at the Far Eastern Chemical Fiber Company was arguably the strongest in the late 1980s. As one of its leaders put it,

As landowners hired sharecroppers to till their land, they spent money and provided delicious food, not because they cared about sharecroppers, but because they knew it was the only way to encourage the latter to farm and weed harder. How about sharecroppers? They were not enamored of their bosses either. They knew if they worked harder their diet would be better and compensation more.⁴

Likewise, a Local One worker of the Taiwan Petroleum Workers' Union described the bossy manners of their management in this way (TPWU Local One 1994: 76):

In ancient times, a slave had to be loyal to his master by submitting to his repression and exploitation. He was forced to carry out his duty without possessing any rights. He dared not complain and had to swallow every unpleasant thing. That's why people said 'a coolie had the ears to hear, but not the mouth to speak.'

What was particularly noteworthy was the fact that workers adopted the image of precapitalist labour regimes (sharecropping, slavery) to understand their contemporary situation. They seemed to lack the appropriate modern vocabulary with which they could speak fluently. In addition, the water buffalo, the most common farming animal in Taiwan, was often used as a figure of speech by workers to make sense of their experiences. In 1987, workers at the Taiwan Sugar Corporation (TSC) launched a protest they described as 'the anger of TSC water buffaloes' (Chen 1989). In 1992, Formosa Plastics workers published the handout 'We Are Humans, Not Water Buffaloes' to resist reorganization by the management.⁵ In 1995, postal workers in Kaohsiung raised the slogan 'Mailmen Aren't Water Buffaloes' to protest against their work overload.⁶

As pointed out by researchers (Hsiao 1992), the wave of labour protests in the late 1980s was not mounted by the first-generation workers but their descendants. Thus, it was even more puzzling why a predominantly rural image was accepted and used as a criterion of social justice, even though the ideal rural society had already vanished. The compulsion to use outdated language revealed Taiwanese workers' cultural poverty, which could be explained historically.

Undoubtedly, the prolonged political authoritarianism was the main culprit that prevented workers from utilizing radical traditions in Taiwan. In the 1920s, nationalism and left-wing doctrines flourished in colonial Taiwan. But the wartime

mobilizing regime in the 1930s put an effective end to these popular movements (Lin 1996: 70–7). Under the Kuomintang's control in the postwar era, colonial radicalism became a faded memory.

In the initial years of the Kuomintang's rule, workers rose up to resist the officials' corruption and predatory acts upon the colonial industrial assets (Chang 1991). During the February 28 Incident of 1947, workers protested for native control and non-discriminatory treatment. However, as the Kuomintang launched a series of acts of military repression, dissident workers were murdered, interned and fired. And the result was that workers became leaderless and demoralized (Ho 2007). In the 1950s, the party-state was implanted in the factory. Police and security agents were watchful in monitoring anti-government sentiments. The Kuomintang-controlled labour unions and welfare associations were a vital channel to dispense favours among the politically loyal workers (Lin 1999: 60–5). In sum, political repression was effective not only in severing the historical link between workers and their radical traditions, but also in closing the possibility for creating a new one.

The early 1970s witnessed renewed social concerns among intellectuals, as seen in college students' participation in social service in rural areas and their engaged debates on social problems. These intellectual interventions followed the tradition of Chinese literati in acting as a social conscience and refraining from establishing a link with the masses for whom they spoke (Huang 1976: 103–4). In the late 1970s, intellectuals' social concerns took a political turn. In the magazines *Melidao* (Formosa) and *Xiachao* (China Tide), there were comments on the workers' plight. Nonetheless, intellectuals still kept at arm's length from workers, and there was no evidence that workers were in any way influenced by these political criticisms.

In the early 1980s, political opposition re-emerged after the suppression of the Formosa Incident. With channels of dissident magazines and brief 'freedom of speech' during the electoral period, their voices started to exert a wider influence. According to Fan (2000), most independent union leaders were inspired by political opposition. These activists' initial enthusiasm was devoted to the electoral politics outside their factory, and only later did they begin to pay attention to their own labour unions. In other words, political opposition provided the cultural resources for the labour movement. Here, the impacts of political opposition consisted of two dimensions. First, opposition politicians criticized the Kuomintang's party-state control, which was parasitic on many social organizations. For workers, this criticism was resonant in that the Kuomintang's party branch controlled the labour union, which failed to speak for the rank and file. Party members were systematically given favours so that they enjoyed advantages in annual evaluation and promotion. In the workplace, anti-party-state discourse legitimated the call for independent unionism and self-organizing among workers.

In the late 1980s, opposition took a nationalistic turn, as it became increasingly vocal in criticizing the Mainlanders' political monopoly (Wang 1996). In state-owned enterprises, this criticism found a receptive audience, since native workers had long resented the unequal ethnic division of labour. Mainlanders,

mostly being Kuomintang members, were given preferred treatment and positions regardless of their qualifications. Thus, nationalism could also serve as a lightning rod to galvanize workers' collective action.

As seen in the preceding, the cultural resources for Taiwan's labour movement were poor. What the dissident workers initially did was to borrow the opposition's political rhetoric directly. In this way, fighting for independent unionism became an extension of political opposition. The borrowed discourses played a critical role in stimulating the early wave of workers' protest, but their limitations soon became obvious. The anti-party-state discourse drove home the notion that workers should manage their union rather than the Kuomintang cadres. But what workers should do when they succeeded in wresting control of the union was still a question. True, the parasitism of the Kuomintang's party branch reinforced workers' subordination, but it was not the main culprit.

Nationalism called forth ethnic solidarity among native workers, but for their Mainlander colleagues this mobilizing frame had a divisive result. Since the rise of independent unionism, ethnic politics has been an ever-present ghost. In 1993, the Kuomintang government nominated a native politician as president of China Petroleum Company for the first time since its foundation 47 years earlier. This decision angered the Mainlander-dominated top management, who sought to collaborate with some union leaders. Though this 'unholy alliance' was justified under the name of 'anti-privatization', clearly this was an aftermath of the intra-Kuomintang struggle between the native mainstream faction and the Mainlander non-mainstream faction. Not surprisingly, they used the 'Three Principles of People', the official doctrine of the Kuomintang, as their rallying cry. The nascent labour movement at that time was seriously divided over the priority of Taiwanization and anti-privatization.⁷

As a mobilizing device, both anti-party-state discourse and nationalism were defective, in that though some workers might be motivated to support independent unionism, others were discouraged. Without other cultural resources, workers had to rely on their most primitive common identity to construct their solidarity.

The Taiwanese labour movement's gender politics

Taiwan's labour unions were mainly concentrated in the blue-collar trades that were numerically dominated by males, such as the steel, petrochemical and transport industries. Among the white-collar professions, only the banking sector was unionized to a significant extent. As a result, the culture of masculinity that underpinned the labour movement further deepened the existing gender gap. Take the Taiwan Confederation of Trade Unions (TCTU), which was the national federation of independent unions, as an example. In 2004, there were 56 directors and supervisors, but only three of these were female.⁸

However, the fact that male workers predominated in the union leadership did not signify that female workers were satisfied with their working conditions. Since the mid-1990s, female workers have launched many drastic protests against the

growing wave of factory closures. Protests against sexual discrimination in the workplace emerged in the late 1980s, but it was noteworthy that when the affected female workers sought external assistance, they turned to women's movement organizations rather than male-dominated labour unions. The campaign to legislate gender equality started in 1987, when the feminist Awakening Foundation presented their draft to the Legislature (Liang & Ku 1995: 115). However, prior to the high-profile resistance on the part of business in 1994, labour unions paid little attention to it (Chang 2000: 379).

The form of class politics was articulated through language (Jones 1983: 7). Hence, a closer look at the language used by Taiwanese labour leaders reveals their mentality.

Since the mid-1980s, labour activists had used the term *yanji* (castrated chicken) to describe the unions that were firmly controlled by the Kuomintang (Chang 1987: 68–9). A *yanji* was good-looking but useless; these unions served only as decoration and were unable to protect their constituency. *Yanji* became the worst epithet one might attach to a union. In the eyes of labour activists, a healthy union should possess manly virtues, such as independence, strength and readiness to fight.

In Taiwan, a man's impotence was a shameful disgrace for the victim and he was a laughing-stock to others. Virility was a man's honour that had to be defended from time to time. No wonder Taiwan's labour movement often used the cultural image of impotence to ridicule its opponents. The Council of Labor Affairs (CLA), the highest labour administrative agency, was frequently criticized for its pro-business stand and inability to protect labour. On many occasions of protest, labour activists played on the homophonic acronym *laowehui* by twisting the second character. As a result, the Council of Labor Affairs was rechristened as the Council of Labor's Impotence.⁹

In 1994, a labour activist group staged a protest against the pro-government Chinese Federation of Labor for its weak posture. In order to depict the federation as a coward, the organizer made a public show of presenting it with 'four treasures', which were *yanji*, *juanjiaoxia* (weak-legged shrimp), tofu and a vase; all these items symbolized unworthy feminine qualities. The angry activists chanted the slogan, 'Zhuanchong meichong gongren songchong' ('The CFL has no balls, workers will give it balls'). Further, since the Chinese Federation of Labor was then the sole legal national federation of labour in Taiwan, its equivocation and dodging were more serious crimes. Thus, the protesters accused the federation of *chi ruanfan* (eating soft rice), which traditionally meant a depraved man living on his woman's earnings, usually from prostitution. Eating soft rice was one of the worst insults to be directed at men. Using this harsh term had the effect of destroying the Chinese Federation of Labor's legitimacy by denying its manhood.¹⁰

With the participation of few women in the labour movement, the unmanly qualities were generally associated with timidity, irresoluteness and weakness. They were often employed as terms of abuse against the opponents. In building interunion coalition, masculine cultures and rituals were often the means of expressing labour's solidarity. In the late 1980s, when some independent unions in northern Taiwan organized a coalition, they immediately called the new organiza-

tion *xiongdigonghui* (brotherhood unions).¹¹ One activist explained the coalition building in a way that was unmistakably resonant with male workers. As he put it, coalition was no less than the *huantie* (exchange of invitations) between unions.¹² Exchange of invitations was the common ritual practice among adult males, which made them sworn brothers with the obligation to help one another in need (Harrell 1982: 129). Undoubtedly, this kind of organizing activity borrowed heavily from the highly gendered cultural resources and resulted in the further marginalization and alienation of women in unions.

While some union leaders might be content with the current situation, the labour movement organizations, which were staffed mainly by ex-student activists, were certainly not. Both the Workers' Legislative Action Committee and the Taiwan Labor Front have published special issues on women and unions in their periodicals, with a view to encouraging more female participation.¹³ In addition, some white-collar unions adopted a more progressive stand to address the gender issue. For example, one banking union reserved one-third of seats of directors and supervisors for women.¹⁴ Another telecommunication union set up a women's commission to serve its female members.¹⁵ Nevertheless, these cases are few and far between.

In short, Taiwan's labour movement was characterized by an underlying masculine culture. Most labour leaders took it for granted and continued to employ highly sexist language. To understand this tacit consensus, it would be instructive to get down to the level of the life experiences of workers and unionists. An in-depth case study specifies those microprocesses of sexism on the shop floor and union office, as well as their implications for gender politics.

'Castrated workers': the contradiction between patriarchy and workers' subordination

According to Edley and Wetherell (1995: 103), contemporary male workers experienced a profound sense of contradiction. Masculine pride was built on the capacity to bring home the bacon. Yet, workers felt powerless and alienated in the workplace. In other words, the capitalistic reality flew in the face of the patriarchal expectation. To be sure, the contradiction in question varied with different labour regimes. In Taiwan's state-owned enterprises, it was a persistent feature that staff (*zhiyuan*) and workers (*gongyuan*) formed two distinct status groups with different career paths. Prior to the rise of independent unionism, workers' manual jobs were deemed as dirty and unworthy, and only the white-collar staff could enjoy better treatment from their company.

In the China Petroleum Company's Kaohsiung Refinery, the status gap between staff and workers could be seen in the following dimensions.

Authoritarian management in the workplace

A common complaint among workers was that they felt that they were being treated without dignity. Their superiors gave orders as if they were mandarins.

Workers were needed to get the jobs done, but they were not supposed to raise questions. When a decision was made, it was usually the case that personal situations were not taken into consideration. Take the practice of attendance inspection (*zhajin*) as an example – a worker claimed,

The higher officials are, the more wisdom they are supposed to have. Is it reasonable that they execute the company's orders with such haughtiness? Look at how the attendance-inspecting teams behave! They are rather like the government's soldiers trying to round up bandits. Are we, the manual workers, thieves? Should we be examined one by one by these mandarins?

(TPWU Local One 1998: 2001)

Facing these indignities, workers dared not raise their objections because their promotion, annual evaluation and job transfer were all at their superiors' discretion. Before the rank-and-file workers were able to exert control over their union, a manager's authority was unchecked and he could be as arbitrary as he wanted.

Differential treatment in company welfare

Most of Taiwan's state-owned enterprises were built on the industrial legacy of Japanese colonialism. At that time, in order to accommodate Japanese managers and technicians, a company town design that integrated working and non-working lives spatially was a common feature.

In the Kaohsiung Refinery, employees were entitled to enjoy company welfare provisions, such as company living quarters, kindergarten, primary school, high school, clinic, library, barber's shop, crematorium, laundry and sports facilities (swimming pool, golf course and baseball field). These remarkable benefits made a China Petroleum Company job very desirable, but also deepened the status gap between staff and workers. Staff lived in spacious single-family houses with garden, while workers were accommodated in crammed townhouses or apartment units, which were also closer to the noisy and smelly production facilities. In the company clinic, doctors were willing to dispense expensive medicine for staff, while they were niggardly towards workers. As a result, the status distinction was extended beyond the factory compound. A worker remained inferior even when he was off-duty.

Furthermore, since company welfare was extended to the employees' family members, the 'separate and unequal' system was also experienced by workers' dependants. It was a frequent complaint that teachers at the company school gave preferential treatment to the children of high-ranking staff. In company-sponsored club activities, staff and their family members were usually the leaders, while workers played the role of followers or volunteers.

In the past, 'factory as one family' (*yichang weijia*) was the official ideology in Taiwan's public sector, and the generous provision of company welfare provided the material basis for this claim. Nevertheless, once employees' daily lives were systematically organized by the company, the staff-worker distinction became fixed and universalized.

Culture of authority in informal relations

In the China Petroleum Company, workers did not receive promotion because of better performance, but by flattery or bribery. In the past, 'giving a red envelope' that contained cash was the most direct way to obtain discretionary favours from their superiors. If workers were short of money, they could provide services in kind, such as house cleaning, chauffeuring and pick-up, in order to make a favourable impression. In this way, workers' personal subordination was even more consolidated and the official authority was extended to every aspect of life. There were many articles in the union paper that criticized this phenomenon:

[Workers] are easily bought off and became opportunist. For some small advantages, they become informants and use their reporting as merits.

(TPWU Local One 1994: 55)

Being a good drinker is rewarding. If you can follow your superior like a loyal dog, drink wine and say good things, you will have the best score for the annual evaluation, in addition to merit points and bonuses.

(TPWU Local One 1994: 320)

In other words, a competitive game for personal favours, as diagnosed by Walder (1986) in China's industry, was also prevalent in Taiwan. As every colleague became a potential rival, workers became increasingly isolated and subservient to the management.

In sum, authoritarian management, differential treatment in welfare and a culture of authority all added to workers' loss of dignity. For them, there was a cruel choice: if they were willing to be submissive, they could trade their masculine pride for better living conditions; if they were insistent upon their manhood, they and their family would suffer from material deprivation.

There was evidence that workers viewed their personal plight through the prism of patriarchal culture. Yang Ching-chu, the novelist who used to work in the China Petroleum Company's Kaohsiung Refinery prior to his imprisonment for political activism in 1980, described the staff-worker relationship in similar terms. In 'The Low Caste' (originally published in 1971), Yang told the story of a China Petroleum Company temporary worker Tsushu, who had been in charge of collecting rubbish in a residential area for 30 years. He was not promoted to the rank of formal employee, so he could not enjoy company welfare and retirement benefits. Since his work was dirty, almost everyone looked down on him. What was noteworthy was the fact that Yang used an episode involving women's menstrual blood to accentuate Tsushu's inferiority.

He carried an iron rake and broom on the way to the rubbish can in front of the house. He opened the lid and swept the rubbish. As he stuck the rake into the rubbish pile, sanitary 'tissues' stained with blood came into his sight all of a sudden.

'Seeing women's menstrual blood at the first house means a bad day,' he mused.

(Yang 1992: 81)

Tsushu was such a loser that he even imagined that if he could receive extra compensation for taking care of those unclean objects to 'expel the bad luck', he might have earned a considerable income over the years. Being such a good-for-nothing, Tsushu could not have a 'normal' life. He was childless and unmarried. At the end of the story, Tsushu was suddenly laid off by the company. Helpless and worried, he threw himself under the wheels of a company car in the hope that his death could bring some money for his ageing father.

Obviously, Tsushu's tragedy was representative of all China Petroleum Company workers. Manual work was humiliating, just as cleaning women's menstrual blood was ignominious. Workers belonged to the low caste and had to forsake their manhood.

In another story, 'Promotion' (originally published in 1971) by Yang, a worker was at a loss as to how to please his superiors. His colleague revealed the secret of 'massaging balls' (flattery), but he was even more confused by the term. To make fun of this poor fellow, his colleague said,

'You want to learn how to massage balls? It's really simple. Come here, I'll tell you how.' Ah-ch'uan put his hammer [down] and ran over to demonstrate for Old Feng. 'Go over to the barbershop and get the manicurist to do your nails up bright and shiny and put on polish. Then pick a time to run over to your boss's home. Tell him to sit on the couch and lean back. Put a footstool under his feet so they're raised high. Squat in front of his lap, grasp his dropping [*sic*] nuts in both hands and lift upwards. That's how you do it. Damn, isn't that simple, you jerk?'

(Yang 1978: 107)

This passage vividly portrays the gender consequence of flattering one's boss. Simply put, 'massaging balls' was a thinly disguised form of self-prostitution, something a self-respecting male worker would never have done. Once a worker kowtowed, he gave up manhood as well as pride – he was socially castrated.

Unionism as reinvigorated masculinity

In 1987 the Kuomintang government lifted the martial law rule that had been in effect for 38 years. The political opening released a wave of labour protests. The China Petroleum Company workers were also encouraged by the new zeitgeist, as a group of dissident workers at Kaohsiung Refinery spearheaded the movement for an independent labour union. In 1988, a non-Kuomintang worker was elected as president of the Taiwan Petroleum Workers' Union for the first time in its

existence. Two years later, the union's Local One also came under workers' control (Ho 2003).

If workers experienced their subordination as castration, it followed that they expected from their labour movement no less than a collective reinvigoration of their damaged masculinity. When asked whether females could work in the refinery, the China Petroleum Company workers were adamant in their refusal. They insisted that their work was highly risky because they were constantly exposed to high temperatures, high pressure and a toxic environment, which made it impossible for female participation. One worker interviewed retorted to my inquiry with the question of how a woman could climb up a 100-metre-high chimney stack on a typhoon night. According to Willis (1977: 53, 2000: 43), male workers tended to view heavy and dangerous manual jobs as masculine, while white-collar work was weak and feminine. The same labelling process was present here. The China Petroleum Company factory workers were of the opinion that only their kinds of work were productive and deserved better treatment, while the administrative work of staff was merely 'sitting at a desk' or 'air-conditioned' – in a word, parasitic. As one disgruntled worker wrote,

Those mandarins in the air-conditioned offices should spend more time in the factory. They should put on the protection helmet, smell the oily odor, and listen to the noise of the machinery. Only by doing that will they understand who the factory workers are.

(TPWU Local One 1998: 201)

In their mindset, there were no idle personnel in the factory. If the company really needed to trim its payroll, it should fire those good-for-nothings in the office. 'They know how to use a computer and so should be able find a new job soon', whereas the factory operation was skill-based and irreplaceable.¹⁶ Another worker put it more bluntly – what staff did was just 'to dress up beautifully and wear lipstick'.¹⁷

Workers expected to reclaim their job pride, and they also wanted their newly controlled union to be militant, ready to stand up to the management. Interestingly, the same criterion of masculinity also affected how they selected the leadership. The worker who became the first Standing Director of Taiwan Petroleum Workers' Union's Local One in the non-Kuomintang era (1990–2) explained how his bravery in confronting the China Petroleum Company's General Manager won the trust of his fellow workers. During a 1988 meeting,

I criticized the company policy loudly and nobody dared to stop me. After my speech, the General Manager was bemused by my act. He responded by claiming that the CPC pay was good at that time and there was no sense in demanding more. Then I rose again. I said, 'We want equality, not more money. Is it reasonable that a CPC staff member could receive as much as eight hundred per cent more in salary than a worker?'¹⁸

According to another interviewee, the worker in question 'wore a moustache and looked like a tough guy', and so everyone believed that he would not betray his brothers.¹⁹ Clearly, workers wanted their union leader to be a real man.

The same masculine culture permeated the union's internal communications. It was usually the case that campaign handouts were called 'bulletins of battle' (*zhanbao*), while the 'list of heroes' (*yingxiong bang*) was usually a big poster with all the candidates' photos. The slogans used by the union leadership were inevitably masculine and militant, such as 'standing together and fighting on the same front' (*zhandouzhen zhangongxian*). In the union's papers, a clenched fist and a torch were frequent symbols, and the illustration usually depicted a warrior fighting a monster. The ideal image of unionism was expressed by a worker in a poem:

Union, Union . . .
 You are the embodiment of the multitude,
 Sparing nothing in fighting,
 Working for our rights,
 And advancing fearlessly.
 Thousands of voices from our appreciative and expectant hearts.
 (TPWU Local One 1994: 38)

With the rise of the independent union movement, the shop-floor machismo was also carried into the realm of collective action. Manhood now meant the courage to confront their bosses and a readiness to join a protest. If spineless submission to the management's authority is unmanly, there cannot be a better symbol of masculinity than standing up to management like a man.

Connell (1995: 68) emphasized that masculinity is always a relational product. On the one hand, it implicitly assumes the opposite image of femininity; on the other hand, it inevitably acknowledges the fact that there are always many cultural representations of manhood. In the case of Taiwan's petrochemical workers, there are two styles of masculinity before and after the rise of independent unionism.

Before the political ascendancy of labour, workers experienced social castration in that they were submissive and competitive for favours from above. Such a situation could be called 'castrated masculinity'. With an independent union, workers imagined themselves as brothers who fought the management collectively, and this was no less than 'militant masculinity'. Needless to say, the two masculinities were cultural constructs, interpreted and constructed, rather than raw social realities per se.

The consequences of militant masculine labour unionism

With independent unionism, workers earn better and more equal treatment from the company. Nowadays rank-and-file workers no longer experience such harsh discrimination as described earlier. However, by using this gendered culture as

a movement resource, the labour movement exacerbates the existing gender inequalities, which can be seen in the following two dimensions.

Exclusion of female participation

As already noted, the Taiwan Petroleum Workers' Union's Local One was sexually skewed, since most of its members were manual workers at the refinery. In 2003, 5,099 members were male and 354 female. Unsurprisingly, this gender disparity was reflected in the distribution of union positions. Since the new system of 1984, the union's Local One elected nearly 100 union representatives every three years, and the latter in turn elected 15 directors and 5 supervisors. The 20 directors and supervisors made up the core the leadership, but for the past 20 years no female member had ever occupied these positions, though there might be one or two female union representatives every three years. As far as I know, none of the male leadership ever raised an eyebrow regarding this phenomenon.

For the female minority, the rise of independent unionism brought benefits as well, since bonuses and raises were across the board. However, gender-related issues such as harassment and discrimination were never on the agenda of their labour union. Over time, female members grew alienated from union activities. Few of them were willing to take part in the mass demonstrations mobilized by the union. To be sure, female members' estrangement was a relatively new phenomenon. In the company-controlled era, the union sought to win employees' goodwill by hosting recreational activities, such as barbeque parties, organized excursions or mountain hikes. Many workers, male and female, attended these activities. However, the current union leaders thought less of these activities because they were viewed as a Kuomintang decoy to distract workers' attention from their own grievances. Instead, the union concentrated its attention on job-related issues and adopted a more aggressive posture. With this change of orientation, the union certainly became the champion of male workers' rights, but only at the cost of female workers' support.

The deficit of female participation further aggravated the existing sexism. There were two female staff working in the union office, but their employment status was somewhat different. They were not regular company employees, but were directly hired by the union. They earned a much lower wage than five other union staff, and they did not enjoy company welfare either. Being the only two women in the male-dominated world, they were assigned low-responsibility and routine tasks – for example, buying lunch boxes, arranging newspapers and so on. Furthermore, since the union was their employer, they had to rely on the union leaders' favours to keep their jobs, much like the situation that manual workers had suffered from prior to the rise of independent unionism. As a result, they had to run personal errands for union leaders, such as paying the credit card bills and so on. It was an irony that rebellious workers reproduced the same repression that they had complained about so loudly in the past. Probably it was because only women were victims this time that they failed to notice to it.

Conflict between union and family

To the best of my knowledge, none of the wives of union leaders welcomed their husbands' decision to become union leaders. Their opposition was not difficult to understand. First, in the initial stage, independent unionists incurred personal and career risks when voicing their grievances. One of the common ways the Kuomintang sought to thwart the attempt at organizing from below was to make a phone call or to pay a house visit to the wives to allude to possible discharge. For many housewives whose livelihood depended on their male breadwinners this tactic worked. As a matter of fact, one threatened union leader's wife became so mentally disturbed that she had to consult a psychiatrist (Wu 1996: 56).

Once dissident workers had consolidated their hold on the union, the threatening tactics faded. Wives still continued in their opposition until they gave up the hope of dissuading their husbands. Like many other forms of collective action, unionism is a time-consuming and labour-intensive business. When the union was still under Kuomintang control, the company-supported candidates were allowed to visit their constituency during office hours; but, for the rank-and-file challengers, they had to use their off-duty time. This certainly meant less time left for the family. Since the petrochemical plants operated 24 hours a day, an aspiring union candidate had to spend his extra time in the factory to get to know more co-workers. One union leader told me he had the experience of staying in the factory for several days just for a tea chat with his constituents. According to him, many were converted by his political talks and became staunch union supporters. But he also paid a price: his wife demanded a divorce because of his unionism zealotry.

Although one chose to take part just for a short period of time, the personal connection with union brothers still remained. One former union leader's wife told me she was fed up with the loud talking by her husband and his union pals in the middle of the night. She and her children were kept awake, and she worried about the latters' school attendance next morning. In spite of her complaints, her husband's friends came as usual and her house became a retreat meeting room for the union leadership.

Wives' negative attitude to the union also came from another source. Union activists were notorious for their *hehuajiu* (flower-drinking) ritual. Flower-drinking referred to alcohol consumption in a sex-service saloon, a practice common among Taiwan's adult males (Hwang 2003). Being a milder form of whoring, flower-drinking served to strengthen the participants' sense of unity, and hence was a vital mechanism of sociability to consolidate one's own faction members. In other words, flower-drinking functioned as 'homosociality among heterosexual men', which helped to strengthen the culture of hegemonic masculinity (Bird 1996: 120).

In the wives' opinions, unionism corrupted their husbands and indulged their many vices. First, the flower-drinking was costly, at least for the average workers in Taiwan. Second, frequenting these kinds of saloon gave their husbands the opportunity to develop an extramarital affair. Repeated patronage became a liaison, and sex-service women became mistresses. Undoubtedly, these illicit affairs gave rise to domestic troubles. I knew a union leader's wife who always insisted

on accompanying her husband whenever he went out for union business. She hovered constantly over her husband, but again in the beginning I was wrong in mistaking this for their deep affection. Another union leader I knew was literally thrown out of his house for his relationship with a saloon hostess.

Wives' opposition highlighted the fact that unionism was mainly a form of masculine sociability. Deserting domestic chores had long been men's privilege. To the extent that drinking and whoring were institutionalized as a sort of socializing ritual among union insiders, there was simply no room for a female worker. Thus, the same cultural devices that enabled the male workers' movement deprived their female colleagues of meaningful participation at the same time.

There is no denying that independent unionism has brought about a more democratic workplace, where the sharp staff-worker distinction has become a faded memory. Workers were finally allowed to enjoy their legally endowed rights. Nevertheless, the uncritical reliance on hegemonic masculinity resulted in a highly sexist unionism that worsened the existing gender discrimination, inside or outside the factory.

Conclusion

According to Gutman (1977: 18), workers not only brought their labour power to the workplace, but also their ingrained cultural tradition. Under the factory regime, workers made sense of the new reality of class deprivation with the cultural terms that were familiar to them; as the political situation turned favourable, they constructed their protest movement out of the same ideational elements.

This chapter has argued that there was a hidden gender politics beneath Taiwan's labour movement. The cultural notion of masculinity was a key dimension to understanding workers' subordination as well as their tactical choice in the movement. In the past, management's arbitrary power, Kuomintang favouritism and material deprivation were all attributed to lack of manhood. Workers experienced the painful process of social castration. Once they were able to control the labour union, militant masculinity became the ideal projection for rebellious workers. At the same time as workers viewed the defiance of managerial authority as manly, they also transformed the union into a medium of male sociability.

In constructing workers' activism, the gender culture of masculinity became a ready-to-use mobilizing resource. Almost every male worker intuitively understood what it meant to be a man, so that there was no need to make efforts to instil a novel ideology into workers. The pre-existing culture of patriarchy provided an easy criterion of justice to assess their situation, as well as an orientation to guide their collective action. In a sense, militant masculinity functioned exactly as Kertzer's (1998: 66) definition of ritual, as 'producing solidarity without producing common consensus'.

For the future study of Taiwan's labour movement, two research questions are relevant here. First, what are the cultural resources for female workers? As already noted, women are not absent from labour protest. But, for them, the existing

patriarchal expectation justifies their subordination. Is there a functional equivalent of militant masculinity that may help women to identify injustices? Or is their sisterhood qualitatively different, so that there is no need for an imagined other to legitimate their collective action? These questions remain to be clarified by further research.

Second, can Taiwan's contemporary labour movement break loose from the limitation of militant masculinity and embrace a more progressive cultural orientation? As stressed by Fink (1994: 191), cultural modernism, including respect for individual autonomy and gender equality, also represents a motivating force in the twentieth-century labour movement all over the globe. Radical class politics does not have to rely on the old elements that, inevitably, are losing ground as society moves forward. With the spread of education, a more vibrant civil society and political democratization, progressive modernism has been increasingly instituted in our daily lives. In other words, modernity can be routinized and taken for granted. If so, the rise of a labour movement without patriarchal culture can be expected.

Notes

This chapter uses some of the materials previously published in Ho (2006). The author thanks the Taiwanese Journal of Sociology for permission to reuse the material.

- 1 Taiwan gongyun (Taiwan's labour movement), 3, December 1993: 104.
- 2 Laodongche (Labourer), 79, February 1996: 19.
- 3 Informal talk with a labour activist, 27 April 2005.
- 4 Cited from Huaxian zongzhang gonghui huigan (Union newsletter of Chemical Fiber Plant), 2, 1987: 2.
- 5 Laodongche (Labourer), 57, 1992: 22.
- 6 Laodongche (Labourer), 74, 1995: 19.
- 7 See Zili zaobao (Independent morning post), 21 May 1993 and Gongshang shibao (Commercial times), 21 May 1993.
- 8 See the Taiwan Confederation of Trade Unions website: <http://www.tctu.org.tw/html/org.htm> (accessed 3 March 2004).
- 9 Laodongche (Labourer), 64, 1993: 23.
- 10 Taiwan gongyun (Taiwan's labour movement), 8, 1994: 34–5.
- 11 Laodongche (Labourer), 28, 1989: 1.
- 12 Taiwan gongyun (Taiwan's labour movement), 7, 1994: 55.
- 13 Taiwan gongyun (Taiwan's labour movement), 3–4, 1993, and Laodongche (Labourer), 74, 1995.
- 14 Laodongche (Labourer), 84, 1996: 17.
- 15 Laodongche (Labourer), 87, 1997: 10.
- 16 Field note, 18 January 2000.
- 17 Interview, 20 January 2003.
- 18 Interview, 18 January 2003.
- 19 Interview, 12 August 2002. In January 1990, the dissident workers held a ceremony to celebrate their takeover of the TPWU Local One. An invited Kaohsiung City councillor also took note of the conspicuous moustache. In his speech, the newly elected Standing Director was compared to the Polish labour leader Lech Walesa for the toughness and fearlessness that was associated with the moustache, Taiwan shiyu laogong (Taiwan petroleum workers), April 1990: 23.

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