

Regulating the Market Risks: The Coalitions between Occupational Unions and CSOs in Taiwan*

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This paper analyzes craft-based unions founded after democratization in Taiwan, focusing in particular on how they cooperate with other civil society organizations (CSOs) and how coalitions develop to cope with the market risks faced by skilled workers. This paper asks whether these coalitions present any peculiarities or unusual dynamics beyond those designated by the state such as labor insurance. The study finds that these “new” occupational unions function as collective organizations of skilled workers, attempting to manipulate market relations by cooperating with other CSOs. Two strategies are identified in this paper: the Union of Community Servicewomen pursues a strategy of “market closure”; the Documentary Media Worker Union tries to establish coalitions with other CSOs by resorting to shared interests.

Keywords: *civil society organization, occupational union, Documentary Media Worker Union, Union of Community Servicewomen, Taiwan*

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Introduction

The development of Taiwanese labor unions is closely related to the historical context and characteristics of the nation's political regime. Since the Nationalist government assumed power in Taiwan in 1949, it has encouraged the development of labor unions to minimize labor protests and facilitate labor regulation. Nevertheless, it also exercised considerable political control of the unions by means of martial law and laws that have specifically regulated union activities. These laws have imposed severe restraints on union organizing and collective bargaining functions. Such political control sought to diminish the possibility of collective action by labor.

According to Taiwan's Labor Union Law, there is a dual system of industrial and occupational, or craft-based, unions. The former refers to unions that are composed of workers from a particular industry regardless of their occupation; whereas the latter consist of workers who share a common occupation or skill. Although membership of joining occupational unions are not as restricted as industrial unions, their main function has been to facilitate the provision of health insurance. Compared to industrial unions, because members of occupational unions do not work for a single employer or work at the same jobs or at the same locations, it is hard to organize or sustain strong collective bargaining units. As a result, craft unions always concern themselves only with the provision of health insurance instead of ensuring the rights of workers or advocating for better working conditions for their members. Their members do not expect more than health insurance from their unions either.

The trend of democratization in the 1980s and the loosening of political controls led to significant changes in Taiwan's social and economic environment. During this period, there was a rise in interest groups that promoted political freedom, human rights, and social issues such as labor benefits. Unlike traditional occupational unions, there are newer occupational unions that place more emphasis on coping with market risks (all kinds of risks regarding employment market such as unemployment, decrease in wages, and excessive working hours etc.) and guaranteeing member benefits. For example, they seek to secure reasonable wages and working conditions for members by influencing labor market prices or establishing standard labor contracts. Their strategy clearly differs from that of earlier occupational unions, that is, they try to find support or establish coalitions with other CSOs, especially in the face of market risks.

To illustrate the transformations after democratization and different types of coalition, in this paper I will introduce two new occupational unions. One is the Union of Community Servicewomen, established by the Pong Wan-Ru (P.W.R.) Foundation, which has tried to minimize the market risks for domestic workers through “market segregation” strategies such as professional training and guarantee of service quality. The other is the Documentary Media Worker Union, established in 2006, which tries to influence the price-setting of media products and ensure protection of labor rights.

These two occupational unions have different ways of cooperating with other CSOs, though both of their main goals are improving the wages of members and decreasing market risks. The Union of Community Servicewomen is directly established by a non-profit organization (NPO), the P.W.R. Foundation. In contrast, the Documentary Media Worker Union cares not only about their occupation interests, it also actively advocates for various social issues because of the “social spirit” of documentary film making.¹ Further, a certain proportion of documentary film directors share similar backgrounds with social activists, which not only creates more frequent personal interactions, but also strengthens the sentiments of friendship. By examining the different types of coalitions that occupational unions form with CSOs, we can better understand the dynamics of these occupational unions and examine whether these coalitions help alleviate the harm associated with market risks.

Theoretical Background

The first part of this section focuses mainly on state-society relations within an historical context and covers occupational unions in Taiwan. It will focus on “state corporatism” and the limited functions of the occupational union system within the Taiwanese historical context. Although industrial union manipulation by the state has always been a feature of corporatism in Taiwan,

¹ Under the authoritarian rule of the Kuomintang (KMT) government, documentary and other kinds of media were controlled by the state and served primarily as a tool of political propaganda. After the abolition of martial law, democratization trends made documentary topics more diverse. Several film makers also began to produce documentaries concerned with Taiwan’s social movements. For example, the Green Team was composed of a group of documentary workers who used mobile VCR cameras to document the opposition’s activities in 1986. The Green Team’s guerilla style of filmmaking resulted in the production of videotapes that allowed the opposition to break up the government’s media monopoly (Lee 2012). I thank Professor Ming-Sho Ho for pointing this out.

I would argue that occupational unions are also influenced, and to a certain extent, confined by the framework of state corporatism.

The second part focuses on the development of civil society and union-CSO coalitions, including the context within which they have made their appearance. I expand on the literature to show that occupational unions under democratization not only provide health insurance or enforce state policy. They also seek to minimize market risks by cooperating with other civil organizations. These coalitions also have expanded the possible roles of the occupational unions.

The Continuance of State Corporatism in Taiwan

When the Nationalist government first settled in Taiwan in 1949, the situation was tense. On the one hand, the government was wary of an attack from China and on the other hand, it had to establish its legitimacy in Taiwan. From 1947, martial law was enforced, and unions were appropriated into a system of “state corporatism,” in which all union activities not sanctioned by the state were terminated.² “Corporatism” means the institutional arrangement of state-society relations. Within the policy process, the state plays an active role so that social interests are regulated by and under the control of the state. This means that the state authorizes labor and capital to establish groups or organizations to bargain over wages, benefits, and working conditions.

Within the Taiwanese context, the government faced a legitimacy crisis in the 1980s, and popular pressure forced it to loosen its political control. Anti-government activities and various types of labor movements were gradually taking shape to challenge the government’s authority. The government’s old management style could no longer cope with the demands of emergent social groups. This political opportunity structure further contributed to the burgeoning of social movements and, along with the surging of labor movements in 1987, lead to the abolition of martial law. Thus, it is fair to say that the development of the labor movement and the provision of health insurance of occupational unions in Taiwan closely relate to the processes of political democratization.

Taking Robert Dahl’s (1971) well-known concept of a liberal democracy

² Philippe Schmitter (1974, p. 93) defines corporatism as “a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered, and functionally differentiated categories, recognized, or licensed (if not created) by the state, and granted a deliberate representational monopoly.”

as a benchmark, Taiwan can be said to have completed its democratic transition with the direct elections for the National Assembly and the Legislative Yuan in 1991 and 1992.³ The presidential election by direct popular vote in early 1996 and the regime change in 2000 further indicate that Taiwan has entered a phase of democratic consolidation. Since then, its democratic consolidation has made remarkable progress, especially in the realm of institution building and the emergence of civil society.

If Taiwan's democratic transition has been a real success, why do labor unions not carry out important functions like collective bargaining nowadays? In fact, most industrial unions still lobby the state rather than mobilize members to act collectively. At the same time, the state still assumes the important functions of occupational unions and limits the unions' functions to ensuring workers' labor and health insurance. Labor and health insurance has thus become an important policy tool used to control workers and has transferred the role of occupational unions to routine welfare delivery and policy implementation units rather than the organizations representing and fighting for workers' rights.

This configuration of state and union functions can be explained from two perspectives. The first one is "path dependence" in historical institutionalism. This view suggests that previous historical processes determined the formation and development of unions in Taiwan and will continue to be constrained on its current developmental path. Hence, the process has produced a series of "self-reinforcing sequences" (Mahoney 2000, pp. 508-509). These sequences impose an institutional limit that will not change even after democratization and dramatic growth of the labor movement.

Second is the idea of "consolidated democracy." Researchers have paid much attention to whether Taiwan has experienced a democratic consolidation, which, according to Juan Linz (1990, p. 158), is a system in which actors, forces, and institutions see no alternative to democratization and no institutions or groups have a veto over democratically elected decision makers. Thus, democratic consolidation, with new rules and institutions, enhances the probability of the survival of a democracy by eliminating the residues of the authoritarian system that are incongruous to democratic governance. It seems, however, that Taiwan has not reached this stage. In fact,

³ According to Dahl, a regime can only be called a liberal democracy if there exists: "1. the freedom to form and join organizations; 2. the freedom of expression; 3. the right to vote; 4. eligibility for public office; 5. the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes; 6. alternative source of information; 7. free and fair elections; and 8. institution for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference". (Dahl 1971, p. 3)

since 1989 when the government forcibly suppressed the protest against the Far Eastern Chemical Fiber Plant (Ho 2006a, p. 114), the labor movement militancy has been declining, as has union size and influence.

It would be wrong to claim that Taiwan's labor movement was nothing more than a failure. In fact, in the 1990s, through partisan competition and persistent campaigning, it successfully achieved political gains and legal reforms such as union rights of resorting to strike, higher wage increases, workweek reduction, and a slowing down in the pace of privatization (Ho 2006b, pp. 133-136; Lee 2011, p. 103). The crisis of Taiwan's labor movement is more about its weakening protest capacities (Lee 2011, p. 8). In other words, Taiwanese workers and unions are less "militant," but they have obtained significant protective measures through party politics (Lee 2011).

In regards to occupational unions, since many occupational unions were also created by the Kuomintang (KMT) government and have served as units for political mobilization, the linkage between occupational unions and the ruling party continues. In addition, to guarantee the well-being of individual workers, labor insurance was adopted for workers in 1950. Since then, the KMT government has assigned occupational unions in different cities the role of insurance agents. As a result, they have functioned as "officially licensed insurance agents and did not engage in activism on workers' behalf" (Ho 2006a, p. 112)

Occupational unions, though, operate differently from industrial unions which are also controlled and regulated by the government. As mentioned, unlike Western unions, which focus on workers' rights and collective bargaining, occupational unions in Taiwan have become the basic units responsible for welfare and health insurance. Under state corporatism in Taiwan, they can hardly influence market behaviors, or set the price of certain occupations in the market. In this situation, individual workers have no other way to make a living but to yield to market logic. Under this regime of market despotism, because employees must sell their labor ("skills," in this paper), employers can maintain tight control and lay off employees at will. As a result, workers must either choose to obey this mechanism or "exit" and choose another occupation (Shieh 1999).

Civil Society and Union-CSO Coalitions in Taiwan

Within state-society relations, civil society is a distinct area of governance between the private and the public spheres. It consists of voluntary associations representing various interests and values, whose members are

free to enter and exit. Scholars tend to agree that the emergence of civil society in Taiwan has resulted from the de-structuring of the “party-state” mechanism and the emergence of civil society organizations (CSOs). The term “CSO” is broad and always links to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), advocacy groups, and philanthropic foundations, all of which are types of social groups within civil society. According to Holloway (2001, pp. 5-6), CSOs generally “are driven by values that reflect a desire to improve lives; contain elements of voluntarism; have private and independent governance; have a clearly public purpose to which they hold themselves to be accountable; and are formally constituted in law or have an accepted identity in the culture of the country.”

Since the end of martial law in Taiwan, various social movements have spun off non-profit organizations or CSOs. Economic growth and political liberalization have also contributed to the rise of social protests and led to the emergence of a civil society concerned in particular with the environment, labor, minority and human rights issues.

Diamond (1999, pp. 218-221) points out, “democratic civil society will limit the government power and maintain the state’s accountability to the law in a manifestation of vertical accountability.” Nonetheless, Taiwan’s democratization had its “top-down character” (Levitsky and Kay 2010, pp. 309-310). Although the 1996 election is often said to mark the completion of Taiwan’s democratic transition (Tien and Cheng 1999, p. 45; Rigger 2000, p. 137), the regime remained competitive and authoritarian in the late 1990s due to unequal access to resources and media disparities, which made it difficult for the opposition party to defeat the ruling party (Rigger 2000).

Hence, before 2000, civil society in Taiwan was still weak and immature compared to its counterpart in Western countries, “lack[ing] organizational robustness as well as [a] broad grassroots base.” (Lin, Liao and Fields 2005, p. 9) Although social movement activists were pivotal in sparking democratic breakthroughs, these grassroots alliances collapsed shortly. Prospects for coalition building within civil society were slim, and fragmentation undermined societal actors’ political leverage (Chu 1992). The government was still in the process of expanding its influence on society. The other reason why the civil society in Taiwan is weak has to do with Taiwan’s long history of one-party rule and its experience under martial law with the strong all-encompassing state. Although Taiwan is a democracy with free access to all kinds of information, the public is still “used to having a strong state as its source of education and information” (Lin et al. 2005, p. 84).

Were there any distinct improvements after the change of political

regime in the post-2000 era?⁴ Given the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was formed as an alternative party to ensure constitutional support for freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association, it was expected that relations between the government and social groups would improve. Unlike the previous government, which implemented a top-down style of governance and was inclined to view civil groups as troublemakers, the DPP was much more prepared for widely dispersed social participation. For example, the DPP government opened some policy channels, and social movement activists were given chances to work within the government as well.⁵

Even though the democratization provided several channels for interest groups to appeal their demands, the political space was still limited. Since it was impossible to challenge the state directly, unions recognized that they had to carry out different strategies. During the first few years after democratization, the union movement took two divergent paths. On the one hand, several new unions were founded in factories or large-scale private enterprises like Formosa Plastics and Tatung; on the other hand, in some existing unions the union organizers began establishing relationships with other CSOs. For example, from 2000, the “unemployment problem” has always been the focus in Taiwan, the economic austerity has brought workers and other groups such as peasants together in recent years. In the annual Autumn Fight⁶ and other large demonstrations, labor movement activists continue to forge coalitions that integrate the student movement, environment issues, foreign labor or other human right issues (Lin 2004). Different groups and issues have been included to rally against the state and capital. For example, in the 2011 Autumn Fight, more than 40 protest groups from across the nation representing labor unions, gay rights, peasants’ rights, environmental concerns, anti-nuclear movement and housing rights gathered together. The groups all have separate demands, but they collectively represent a broader fight against social and economic injustice and ask for a fairer share of the nation’s wealth.

⁴ As an opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won the presidential election in 2000. The historic election in 2000 put an end to 55 years of the KMT rule, and signaled the consolidation of democratic regime in Taiwan.

⁵ According to Ho (2005, pp. 408-409), “the most obvious political channels were the positions of cabinet minister. Further, beneath the ministerial level, many junior activists also found opportunities to work as assistants or aides, and social movement organizations also found it possible to take part in some ad hoc governmental committees.”

⁶ “Autumn Fight” is an annual protest mobilized by the CALL (the Committee for Action of Labor Legislation), to demonstrate worker’s power and challenge the state.

The connection between different civil society groups reminds us of the discussion of social network theory, especially about the pattern of ties linking the members of a society—ties that “connect persons, groups, organizations, or clusters of ties, as well as persons.” (Wellman 1983, p. 157) In addition, social networks also involve the transfer or exchange of information, advice, resources, or more tangible things like goods and direct services (Cook et al. 1983; Cook and Emerson 1978; Uehara 1990). Through cooperation or exchange of resources in the social network, individuals can rely on each other and maximize their advantages (Haines 1988).

To compete for resources, people might use collaborative or cooperative networks and ties to gain access to these resources. Relevant social network studies have emphasized the pattern of links between interest groups, the linkage of these groups to resources through networks, the extent to which contending groups mobilize, and the structural possibilities for coalitions and competitive relations (Degenne and Forsé 1999; Granovetter 1973; Marsden 2000; Tilly 1978; Wasserman and Faust 1994).

The goal of this paper is not to review the field of social network thoroughly, nor to apply the literature to my two cases. Instead, my focus is how coalitions between occupational unions and CSOs help ameliorate the negative effects of market risks. In other words, this paper focuses more on “descriptions” of the social ties that compose the coalitions and highlights the different coalition “strategies” that I discuss in the following sections.

Method and Data

Case Selection

In this paper, I chose two unions as case studies. One is the Union of Community Servicewomen, which has four branches and over 5,000 members in Taiwan;⁷ and the other is the Documentary Media Worker Union, which has about 455 members (according to the report of the council meeting on July 29, 2015). The former was established by a CSO (the P.W.R. Foundation) to protect female domestic workers’ rights and benefits. This union looks after the employment welfare and labor rights of domestic workers. The latter was set up in September 2006 to unite documentary

⁷ See “introduction about the union,” website: <http://www.pwr.org.tw/service2.html> (accessed September 24, 2015).

workers and guarantee their rights, improve their working conditions, increase the price of their products (documentary films) no matter they are wage laborers or independent contractors, as well as enhance the dignity of their profession.

I chose these two unions because both of them were established after democratization. If we go back to the above discussions of political democratization, we know that although the influence of the state corporatism continues, changing social environments must have created some dynamic components of social change. By focusing on different strategies of coalition from these two cases, this paper will illuminate how these “newly” formed occupational unions reach their goals, that is, reduce the negative effects of markets.

Research Method

In this paper, the research method was adopted from the literature review, participant-observation, and in-depth interviews. In the literature review, I chose publications (including e-papers) of the two occupational unions mentioned. I used these to gain information on their regulations and goals. The interview data in this paper were mainly collected from 2008 to 2010.

Through the participant-observation phase, I established relationships with the two unions to observe their practices and the interactions between members, and between members and union organizers. I also took every opportunity to engage in union activities, such as employment training courses, meetings of the members of a council or members’ conventions. For example, I set up electronic blog posts⁸ for the Documentary Media Worker Union, managed projects, and performed favors for the Union of Community Servicewomen.

After the participant-observation, I selected 20 union organizers and general members for in-depth interviews.⁹ Interviews centered on the roles, functions, and members’ general knowledge of unions, as well as on their opinions about work, interviewees’ awareness of workers’ rights, union participation, and expectations for improved welfare unions. I also asked people about their interactions with other CSOs and their opinions of union-CSO coalitions to clarify how the new occupational unions function and

⁸ <http://docworker.blogspot.com/> (accessed September 24, 2015).

⁹ For more information about the interview questions and interviewees’ responses, see Li (2008, 2010).

their strategies of minimizing market risks.

Findings and Discussions

Directed by a CSO: Union of Community Servicewomen

In order to guarantee the rights of domestic workers and grant women the power of collective bargaining, the Pong Wan-Ru Foundation set up the Union of Community Servicewomen in 1999.¹⁰ Its members include nannies, housekeepers, live-in companions, and live-in care-givers. Because their goal is to promote employment among women, the union holds many professional training courses. Only those who pass the training courses are permitted to join the union and get a job introduced by the union.¹¹

The members of the Union of Community Servicewomen are mostly unemployed women who are typically single parents, of low academic background, older, and without skills or experience needed for the market. Career interruption has a negative influence on their re-employment. Mincer and Ofek (1982) have pointed out that the longer women interrupt their careers, the lower the wages they receive upon returning to work. Women lose their human capital when they exit the labor market. These deficiencies place them under greater pressure when seeking employment again and also limit their chances in the labor market.

These women could not enter the labor market previously because of taking care of housework or children. When their children grow up, they have more time available to earn an income to help family expenses. Therefore, they decide to engage in this flexible, part-time, and maybe “familiar”¹² work. Hence, the jobs which require little education or experience, have flexible working hours, and allow mothers to take care of their own children at the same time, have become the main choices for them.

Because housework in Taiwan is recognized as “low-wage” labor in the informal sector, there are no written work contracts, no minimum wages, no

¹⁰ As for the introduction, goals, and perspectives of the Union of Community Servicewomen, see the website: <http://www.pwr.org.tw/>.

¹¹ See the “FAQs about the Union,” website: <http://www.pwr.org.tw/service2.html#3> (accessed September 24, 2015).

¹² The “familiarity” of the work invokes the traditional structure of sex distinction, with the stereotypical image that “men are breadwinners, women are homemakers”: women are always responsible for housework.

guarantees of employment rights or labor conditions. Further, labor in the informal sector is not well regulated by the state. The government has not established standard working conditions for domestic workers and pays little attention to labor disputes in this sector, except in cases of extreme unfair treatment. Thus, long working hours and excessive workloads are common.

The Pong Wan-Ru Foundation has been promoting women's rights for a long time. In a workshop regarding union members' rights, the president of the CSO said:¹³

In this patriarchal society, we don't have any organizations set up for women's cooperation. That is why we want to establish a union. In the past we women were socially isolated; however, today we have this union. Once you have encountered problems, you can ask the union for help. When you belong to an organization with more than three thousand people like us, you are no longer an individual, and everyone has a sense of belonging.

The Union of Community Servicewomen, thus, works hand in hand with the Pong Wan-Ru Foundation. They work together to fulfill two main functions: one is to provide basic labor guarantees and benefits such as health insurance to help domestic workers escape from the uncertainties of the underground economy and to be controlled no longer by their husbands; the other is to unite these disadvantaged women through professional training, thus construct a sense of community and secure their welfare by the use of collective power.

Since the mid-1980s Taiwanese home and health care firms have sought to meet an increase in the demand for labor at lower cost through the use of foreign labor. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Labor, the country now employs more than 225,000 foreign home health aids and housekeepers (August 2015).¹⁴ These foreign domestic workers work longer hours at lower compensation than native workers and are viewed as a pool of low-wage labor. In fact, in addition to being cheap labor, these foreign workers are also subject to severe forms of labor control (Liu 2000, pp. 61-62). As a result, employers have gradually lost interests employing native-born nannies or housekeepers. In this aspect, "structural competition" exists between the foreign and native-born domestic workers.

In addition to the flow of foreign labor, competitive pressure on wages

¹³ Interview on January 13, 2008.

¹⁴ Source: <http://statdb.mol.gov.tw/html/mon/212020.htm> (accessed September 24, 2015).

also comes from other industries. For example, in Taiwan, cleaning work is mostly outsourced by the logistics industry, dispatch of human resources, and clean company. In other words, families hire workers to come in and clean their homes through commercial firms. These phenomena of hiring domestic workers through agent companies also demonstrate that the state doesn't have effective policies for regulation of domestic work.

To respond to these market challenges, the union notes the need to establish standards that would give it an advantage in the labor market for domestic work and ensure that a living wage not be eliminated through competition. The president of the Pong Wan-Ru Foundation mentioned a key concept: "holding the bowl together," which aims to enhance market share and monopoly status. Following the guideline of the P.W.R. Foundation, the union has tried to establish standards for the "profession."¹⁵

When it comes to "professional" occupations, images fill people's minds of long-periods of training and regulations and standards by which the profession can guarantee its collective "reputation" (Unwin 1938, pp. 4-5; Millerson 1964). Freidson also characterizes professions as occupation that secure full control of training processes, licensing standards, and labor processes (Freidson 2001, p. 127). "Professionalization" means acquiring market power through "occupational" or "market closure."¹⁶ The "closure" here refers to particular ties, which connect community members so that they have particular qualifications and power, thus controlling the supply of labor and restricting the share of the market (Larson 1977, p. xvi; Fligstein 2001, p. 53).

To transform non-professional and low-skilled housework into a professional skill and gain recognition from society, as well as eliminate competition from foreign workers in the market, the union champions the value of housework and cultivates the professional status of houseworkers.

As mentioned, in order to enhance the "professional image" of domestic workers, members must pass professional training in all relevant skills and pass a test of efficiency and speed, after which they can enter the union and obtain a job. To meet these standards, the trainees should practice frequently to pass the tests, without which they won't get a union-secured job. A union

¹⁵ A profession usually involves a particular period of education or professional training, the provision of a service, and the capability to acquire economic interests and a monopoly (Evetts 2003, p. 397, 404).

¹⁶ Market closure,—Freedman uses the term "market shelters"—refers to a labor market lacking free competition, where occupational standards are developed and set to ensure higher security and control of the market (Freedman 1976, pp. 114-116).

organizer told me that in general, a quarter to fifth of the trainees are usually eliminated in each training class.¹⁷ In addition, the P.W.R. Foundation keeps track of the workers, supervises them, and provides occupational training and help when they are hired. The measures include telephone services and supervision to establish quality control. The consumer and union members can call to express their needs, questions, or complaints.

By setting professional standards and determining membership requirements, the union-CSO coalition creates boundaries to protect its members. This network closure thus is viewed as a source of particularly defined norms, which exclude those who are not embedded in such networks. Members of the union profit from the structural positions as the coalition network uses organizational resources to exercise control of a specific job market or avoid the market risks.

Coleman (1990) suggests that closed social networks can also create trust and enforce strong norms. In the case of the network created between the union and the P.W.R. Foundation, it provides members with strong ties, a sense of community, emotional aid, and close companionship on condition of market uncertainty. These ties encourage members to get to know people outside their families and provide them with social support and a sense of cohesion.¹⁸ A P.W.R. Foundation official told me:¹⁹

We have been trying to establish camaraderie between our union members. We invite them back for lunch or dinner and call them regularly. We want to know their working situation and their opinion. I feel companionship and support is very important for working women, which I think is also the core value of our foundation.

In sum, the union considers the possibility of changing a fiercely competitive market from the perspective of a civil society organization; it strives to work against the market mechanism and pricing tendency under global capitalism and argues for a reasonable wage structure and working environment. By cooperating with a CSO, the union is increasingly capable of maintaining professional training and the quality of its housework, and can “dominate and monopolize the housework market” to further protect the wages and benefits

¹⁷ Is the standard of selection realistic? Does it mean that those who are not selected are “unsuitable”? There are many questions about “fair” and “just” that need to be considered.

¹⁸ Mizruchi (1992, chap 3) defines cohesion as the conflation of “shared normative sentiments” and “objective characteristics of the social structure”.

¹⁹ Interview on May 14, 2010.

of its members.

Loose Connections to other CSOs: the Documentary Media Worker Union

The Documentary Media Worker Union was established in 2006. It is Taiwan's only occupational union with an internet forum and blog.²⁰ It does active publicity, in the form of documentary films and circuit lectures. More important, the union has tried to establish a "standard labor contract" as a starting point for price and copyright negotiations in the public sector and with media houses that outsource work to its members.

For most documentary workers, no matter who works for an enterprise or by contract or as an independent director, the biggest problem they face is having a stable source of income during periods when they are shooting a documentary. Documentary production can not be compared to the movie industry, since the former cannot be labeled as a mature and well-developed "industry" in Taiwan. Documentary workers are not employed by any particular employer, and the shooting sites and working hours are unpredictable. Employers do not have large production budgets as movie corporations do, and they must apply for subsidies or corporation projects from the government, media, or enterprises. Many documentary workers do "case," "outsourcing," or "contract" work. Their motto is "do and you'll get money; don't do and you won't get any money." There are usually no formal employment relations between the outsourcer and documentary workers. What the workers sell is the products that have been "manufactured" (filmed) which could be compared to the "labor only" mentioned by Shieh (1999). Because government culture budgets do not provide high subsidies for documentary films (the upper limit is 2 million NTD [approximate 60,000 USD] and this is taxed at 15%),²¹ development of documentary film is somewhat limited.

Because the process of documentary film making is typically outsourced, workers are not formally employed and left unprotected by Taiwan's Labor Standards Act. Although documentary work is a highly skilled and creative, it tends to be episodic, which makes it unstable in light of market competition. More important, once the documentary worker begins work on a project, the

²⁰ The blog of the Documentary Media Worker Union is: <http://blog.roodo.com/docunion/>.

²¹ In Taiwan, the budget for documentary films is less than it in America, Europe and Japan. For example, budgets in these countries are 30 times larger per minute than in Taiwan, which means documentary workers in Taiwan are unlikely to have a large enough budget for producing their films.

outsourcer who is providing the budget gains artistic control and decides matters such as how to publicize the production, how to produce it, its length and form, and so on. In addition, the copyright is acquired by the project funder who makes a lump sum payment to the documentary director, which gives the funder total control of and profits from the production. For example, one documentary director told me when working with a producer as a team: “if we make a fuss about the copyright, the funder will find another producer.”

To improve labor conditions and secure their rights, a group of documentary workers decided to establish a union through which they hoped to introduce the concept of “labor” into documentary work. The group hopes that after achieving basic rights, it can then propose an equitable film contract, sufficiently large shooting budgets, and establish an outsourcing panel, even asking the outsourcer to share part of the copyright with them. In this way, the union negotiates a share of copyright proceeds, which means protecting the earning capacity of “professional skills.” As a result, the union is eager to advance the “standard labor contract” (the union version) and to set outsourcing rules and standards when negotiating with funding sources (public sector, media and enterprise).

Coalition networks can be culturally constructed around common statuses and purposes, which create collective “discourses.” Here we find a salient difference between the Documentary Media Worker Union and the other occupational unions. The Documentary Union connects with relevant CSOs to influence (or challenge) wages and labor conditions of “general labor” instead of just “documentary workers.” An executive director told me that the working class should unite to improve workers’ “general welfare.” He thought the working class and minority groups were politically weak and could easily be trampled on over policy issues and in the public sphere which was the reason why they have to cooperate with each other.²²

Because of its emphasis on the concept of labor as a collectivity, the union recognizes that work is closely related to social change outside of employment and that the issues of work are not solely confined to wages or working hours but also include all other social issues, be they the social conditions of minorities or peasants or environmental problems, etc. In other words, market risks provide the union with a structural basis for seeking coalitions. Based on these “common goals,” the union has sought cooperative networks with other CSOs. For example, it participates in labor-related

²² Interview on August 23, 2010.

marches (e.g. Autumn Fight, migrant workers' march and the protests generated by factory closures, etc.), and union organizers encourage members to join and support other social movements in Taiwan (e.g. gay pride parade, protests for human rights in the military, student movement, and Anti-Nuke demonstrations, etc.) One of the union's executive directors expressed the union's standpoint:²³

We actively participate with all kinds of social movements, such as movements that promote human rights, and environmental issues. Maybe other occupational unions do not pay much attention to social issues, but I feel... we need to show our support in the name of the union for some social issues... I think this is what makes a union different from other groups, that is, we have to show a certain extent of "social consciousness", and show our concerns for the disadvantaged or minority groups.

In terms of civil participation, we can see the Documentary Worker Union plays a role similar to a social activist group. No matter what CSO coalition or social issues with which it is concerned, it acts beyond its "occupational interests" to connect with other social groups.

Another union goal is to provide "professional" media knowledge and skills for other CSOs. A union representative told me:²⁴

We are planning to do some training workshops to help CSOs or NPOs. For example, we can provide with training courses and circuit lectures. Because in Taiwan most CSOs generally lack the ability to "document" the movement, this ability should be helpful for our civil...or social movement...

The main targets of the workshop are other CSOs and NPOs. The union tries to preserve and broadcast movement processes. In addition, through the media or documentaries, the union also connects with other social groups and has established a system for regularly communicating information about civil actions.

From the interviews, we can see the organizers of the Documentary Media Worker Union understand that they are most effective when they work together in coalitions with other CSOs, pooling their resources and coordinating their efforts. Also, coalitions offer effective mechanisms for

²³ Interview on April 13, 2008.

²⁴ Interview on May 22, 2008.

addressing advocacy issues. They combine skills, labor and resources, pursue common goals, and enhance their “voice” and “bargaining power” in the public sphere.

Conclusion: The Possibility of Union-CSO Coalitions as a New Form of Social Movement

Prior research on unions in Taiwan has usually focused on the “industrial union” as its object. Research on occupational unions has tended to concentrate on organizational affairs, health insurance, and financial functions, concerns that make cooperation with other CSOs seem impossible. In these studies, the “basic assumption” of occupational unions is the same: their main relationship is with “government,” and their purpose is to procure health insurance.

These studies ignore the dynamics of occupational unions; they neglect possible coalitions with CSOs, their different characteristics and purposes. Since the members of occupational unions have different skills and are in different occupations, they face different market challenges and risks. Yet they exist in a context in which the institutional heritage and path dependence of authoritarian rule channel social movements into a stable social order and system of government rule. These factors have encouraged some unions to seek new ways to reorganize the economic order and express their demands. Their situations symbolize that democratic consolidation has not been adequately realized in Taiwan. This in turn highlights the immature nature of Taiwan’s civil society and the lack of mechanisms that facilitate coalitions among different CSOs.

Considering the limits of past research, this paper turns its focus towards the “occupational union.” I describe what situations and risks skilled workers face in their specific occupational market and how different occupational unions develop different coalition types with other CSOs in the face of market challenges. For example, the Union of Community Servicewomen, following the P.W.R. Foundation’s guidance, employed “professionals” to create a market closure from other profit-seekers and monopolize the domestic work market with reasonable prices to secure members’ wages and rights. The Documentary Media Worker Union, on the other hand, tried to extend member benefits by bargaining with funders pushing for cross-class/social movement alliances to advocate for a left-wing program of political change. These behaviors aim at influencing “market” relations on behalf of

members' interests, reducing market risks, and thus protecting the benefits of members.

Can we conclude that occupational unions in Taiwan have become more autonomous? Probably not. It should be noted that the two cases discussed in this paper have their own characteristics: women's rights centered in the Union of Community Servicewomen; in the Documentary Media Worker Union, members are relatively young and highly educated. The goal of this paper is not to claim that these two occupational unions have created significant changes to the occupational union system in Taiwan. Instead, I would rather see these two unions as a "start." These two cases may not be parallel with other occupational unions, nor can they predict the developmental patterns of future occupational unions. In a realistic sense, the strategies of union-CSO coalitions still face many challenges such as market competition from other outsourcing recruitment agencies. It does not necessarily mean, however, that an overall assessment of Taiwan's occupational union should be pessimistic. With an awareness that the occupational union have "functions" other than health insurance, we can expect that union-CSO coalitions will enhance the autonomy of occupational union within particular occupational markets.

From the two cases discussed in this paper, we can see how these alliances are related in a generalizable way to democratization and civil society. One direct element is the timing of these unions' establishment during the recent period of democratization. In this structural context, the most evident characteristic of democratization is the loosening of state control, which led to civil consciousness and the development of social movement network. Under state corporatism, the state could enforce through a system of labor relations direct and strong control over the labor market and wages/prices. Under such circumstances, unions have little power to negotiate and cannot alter market relations.

Although state control may persist even after democratization, the diversification of the social environment allows for the rise of many types of interest groups and contributes to different logics of thinking. As seen in the cases discussed in this paper, member participation and unions' goals have changed, which means that occupational unions have changed to a certain extent. More important, the differences are not in the numbers, organizational scales or resources, but in that these organizations have gradually evolved so that they combine with different CSOs. Thus, coalitions with similar CSOs have become much more common.

The coalitions not only strengthen the collective identity of their

members, but also form a collective subject (“workers”) through the construction of that identity. These behaviors create “labor consciousness,”²⁵ “recognition,” and “participation” different from those that had been held before. In the two cases discussed, union members are not only interested in health insurance but also in their identity as workers and in their labor rights. The members may gradually realized that they can guarantee their labor rights only by participating in such an arrangement as the union, which is the meaning of “social democracy” or “social movement unionism.” Here, the unions play an important role in establishing the members’ labor consciousness.²⁶ The reason why the members have a view different from those traditionally held is that what the unions do now is different from what “traditional” occupational unions did. These differences stimulate different expectations and the members hope to acquire more welfare and rights through participation. To the members, joining the occupational union now holds a different meaning.

As work modes become increasingly diverse, atypical employment is becoming the norm, and a growing number of workers are contributing to the development of occupational unions. If, today, we find some meaningful variations in these “new” occupational unions, then what do these variations mean to the individual worker and to the political environment and market? Do the union-CSO coalitions demonstrate their influence as a new form of “civil organization”²⁷ or social movement? In addition, are these coalitions conducive to the “formation” or even “consolidation” of labor consciousness, and could they bargain with the state and employers? What kind of change and influence will they bring to the power relations between labor organizations and the state and to the civil society and civil consciousness? All of these questions need to be explored with more empirical cases in the future.

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²⁵ The labor consciousness I mention here relates to the individual, and includes recognition of one’s own labor conditions and labor rights, and hence is different from collective “class consciousness.”

²⁶ In general, previous literature agrees that the appearance of “consciousness” leads to the formation of “organization”; recent studies, however, recognize the organization will decide individual consciousness; for example, Burawoy (1985) points out that the productive organization will “create” the consent of workers.

²⁷ The “civil organization” mentioned here closely relates to the concept of “civil engagement,” which means the members of an organization possess civil consciousness, recognize what the organization does, and actively participate in it.

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