Book Reivew

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Leverage of the Weak: Labor and Environmental Movements in Taiwan and South Korea. By Hwa-Jen Liu. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. 225 pages.

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In this well-researched book, *Leverage of the Weak: Labor and Environmental Movements in Taiwan and South Korea*, Hwa-Jen Liu sets out to explain how social movement sequences came about in Taiwan and South Korea (hereafter Korea) and why the two countries experienced reverse movement sequences despite acclaimed similarities in their post-war development experiences. Through systematic comparisons of four movements in both countries, Liu carries out the inquiry through three areas of empirical questions concerning who were the early risers (movement emergence), the impact of early risers on latecomer movements, and the movements' life trajectories (p.39). Korea followed a conventional capitalist route, where the labor movement thrived in the wave of industrialization before the environmental movement. Taiwan's experience, however, suggests an anomaly, where the environmental movement arose first and accompanied industrialization. Latecomer movements (the subsequent movements), namely, the labor movement in Taiwan and the environmental movement in Korea, emerged a decade later and became powerful forces in challenging the state and the market only after the democratic transition in the late 1980s.

At first glance, comparing the labor movement with the environmental movement risks the problem of discrepant units of comparison by comparing an old social movement (class-based) with a new social movement (identity-based). Yet, as Liu forcefully argues, comparing the two movements is relevant, because they are epitomes of Polanyi's self-protectionist movement as a result of the commodification of labor and land

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in self-regulating markets. Although Polanyi's theorization of the double movement says little about how and in what order protectionist movements would come about or their dynamics, Liu fills in the gap with her theoretical construction of movement power and provides the mechanisms. Moreover, she goes one step further to examine movement sequencing. The question of sequencing is important, because it problematizes the conventional wisdom of linear sequencing based on the European experience that labor movements precede environmental movements.

Going beyond the existing social movement literature that centers on grievances, resource mobilization, and institutions, Liu develops the concept of movement power to account for the dynamics and patterns of how a social movement breaks specific institutional terrains and constraints. Liu maintains that "the causal link between structural grievances and early emergence of the movement is not direct but is mediated through the unfolding of different movement powers" (p. 90). In her formulation, social movements derive from specific sources of power and have different constituencies. A labor movement consists of a source of power based on leveraging one's structural position vis-à-vis that of others and about workers trying to leverage their structural positions in capitalist production organizing along class lines. The environmental movement, in contrast, rests upon voluntary assent to certain universal ideas, persuasion of the general population, and thus ideological power.[1]

Through the analysis and concepts of leverage power and ideological power, Liu provides the mechanisms and circumstances by which particular movements emerged in their own constraining institutional settings. She maintains that how different types of movements exercise their power explains the reverse sequencing and contrasting trajectories. In turn, the early-riser movement would have an impact on the subsequent movement when the latter selectively appropriates the legacy to exercise its own power (p. 9).

Liu then moves from the particular experiences of the cross-nation comparison of four movements and contends that the movement trajectories are heading on similar paths: The labor movement sets out to elevate itself over corporate structures to present its interests as the interests of all and fight on the ideological front, while the environmental movements in both

1 See Liu's first chapter for her insightful and meticulous discussion of the different sources of movement power.

countries have moved beyond ideological discursive capability building and have begun to reach down concretely to the grassroots level by addressing corporate economics. Thus, the trajectories of both types of movements are similar, as they move towards cross-movement fertilization, addressing broader constituents and maximizing their power base by expanding to the realms of either ideological power (in the case of the labor movement) or consolidating grassroots constituencies in the face of maturation and bottleneck (in the case of the environmental movement). The author concludes by projecting the possibilities of cross-movement alliances as the solution for the future.

The organization of the book illustrates the author's ambition to engage with theories beyond debates in the social movement literature and to navigate between theories at different levels. Instead of dedicating a chapter of its own to each movement, the author organizes the chapters according to specific themes (from movement formation to the legacy of early risers and movement trajectories). She compares the four movements systematically throughout the book. By bringing the experiences of latecomers, namely, Taiwan and Korea, to the forefront, Liu challenges and problematizes the universal sequencing of the labor and environmental movements that is based on the experience of advanced countries and the western-centric theories of the social movement literature. Moreover, the story does not end with the particular experience of social movements in the two late industrializers, as Liu takes the particular experience to engage in multiple-level theory building. The book sheds light on the distinctive features of the two societies, as situated by the author's case studies. Moreover, Liu addresses the broader context of the transformation of late industrializers in the face of the degradation resulting from market capitalism, and she identifies the structural conditions under which specific protectionist movements could occur through her theoretical engagement with Polanyi's and Gramsci's theories.

What results is a very sophisticated book with a methodologically rigorous and meticulous treatment of theoretical constructions at many levels. It is an excellent illustration of what a comparative case study can accomplish.

In what follows, I would like to undertake to bring the regime type, a structural condition discussed in Liu's book, and the variations in state-society relations to the forefront to engage with her research questions concerning the reverse sequencing of movement emergence, the early

risers' legacies, and movement trajectories. I should make it clear that the questions and comments here are intended to push the author to tease out and elaborate the significance of her argument; in no way are the questions meant to undermine the validity of the author's analysis.

A key thrust of Liu's argument is that these social movements arise in response to the degradation of market capitalism and industrialization. Yet, when examining the evidence, the target of these social movements was often an authoritarian regime. It follows that the role of the state (including its organizational characteristics and its capacities) is particularly relevant in understanding the emergence of social movements in authoritarian countries. The state, for example, was highly involved in organizing the economy in Taiwan and Korea, as they are epitomes of the developmental state. Second, social movements in authoritarian regimes tend to target the state, as these societies lack intermediate organizations (and varieties of them) to channel and diffuse conflicts. This leads to my point on the necessity of attributing more weight to the regime type when examining a social movement's formation and the relationship between the state and vanguard movements among late industrializers.

Regime type and patterns of state intervention

A key argument in the book is that distinctive structural grievances, namely the patterns of industrialization and the patterns of state intervention in conflict management, account for how reverse movement sequencing emerges in Taiwan and Korea. The emergence of social movements was mediated by different types of movement power, either leverage power in the cases of the labor movement or ideological power in the cases of the environmental movement. Liu meticulously illustrates the different patterns of industrialization in both countries both spatially and organizationally and gives a detailed analysis of the different state responses to social movements in the 1970s and 80s in Chapter 3.

Reframing the argument, I could say that the nature of the state[2] (such as regime types, organizational characteristics of the state, and the state's repressive capacity) and the structure of the society (as expressed in the patterns of industrialization and varieties of intermediate organizations) that

2 Here I am borrowing the concepts from Zhao (2001) and his usage of state-society relations in studying social movements to illustrate my point.

were contextualized in different ways explain the variations in the emergence of the types of social movements, their sequences, and their trajectories. In other words, the variations in sequencing and the patterns of movement formation would be the result of variations in state-society relations. This claim can be supported by the fact that Liu also points to the importance of the regime type in understanding the vanguard movement at the end of her book, when she extends her cases for broader comparison: Taiwan's party state resembles the state socialism of Eastern European countries with the presence of much stronger environmental movements. The repressive Korean military regime parallels movement experiences in South Africa and Brazil, with labor movements playing the leading role (p.162). Moreover, as she well puts it, different regimes may have different "Achilles's heels," or different compositions of their legitimacy, and thus could be more tolerant of certain demands than others (p. 162). Following this line of analysis, if the nature of the state and the societies and the domain of state-society relations could have accounted for the types of social movements emerging in the wake of industrialization, what explanatory value does the concept of movement power add to the analysis? Can an analysis based on state-society relations answer the questions that the author sets forth?

Legacies of the early-riser movement on the latecomer movement

One of the key claims that Liu advances in studying reverse movement sequencing and trajectories is that the specific manner of the rise of the vanguard movement will impact subsequent strategies of latecomer movements, both directly and indirectly (see chapter 4). For instance, Liu argues that the most pronounced early-riser legacy on labor movements in Taiwan probably had to do with the latter's participation in politics. The early-riser legacies elucidate why Taiwan's labor movement chose the electoral path to advance its interests, while "organize or die" became the universal motto for labor movements elsewhere (p. 126). In contrast, the Korean environmental movement, unlike its counterparts elsewhere, organized aggressively but did not participate in electoral politics for 20 years after its emergence, despite possessing a high level of public support and discursive capacities. Moreover, the states' responses to the latecomer movements were influenced by their experiences handling the early-riser

movement.

The latecomer movements would likely follow the early risers in terms of strategies in their own national context. Yet when situating the two types of social movements in a grand scheme of state-society relations in both countries, given the structural constraints of an incorporatist approach in the Kuomintang (hereafter KMT) regime and the exclusive approach of the Korean state, the latecomer movements in Taiwan (the labor movement) and Korea (the environmental movement) may have headed in that direction regardless of the early-risers' experience. Following this line of argument, is it really the early-riser legacy or is it the different structural constraints confronting both countries that explain how a movement breaks out and what form it may take? Put bluntly, does the early-riser legacy really matter? Liu also acknowledges that the latecomer movements could not simply replicate the early-riser strategies, as they operated under different power bases and constituents in which they were rooted and responded to different constraints (p. 128). If this is so, then it leaves readers baffled as to why and whether the early-riser legacy matters.

For instance, it could be argued that the regime type would have affected how social movements organized, like the KMT's incorporatist approach in explaining how the forms of Taiwan's labor movement were co-opted into the system regardless of the early-risers' legacy. The KMT would have responded much more harshly toward the labor-movement because of its political baggage from having had an anti-communist past (or what Liu terms its Achilles's heel) in spite of its prior experience in dealing with the environmental movement. The environmental movement was able to become the early-riser in Taiwan, because the livelihoods of farmers and fishermen were being threatened by decentralized rural industrialization and the authoritarian regime considered environmental protests less threatening.

All in all, could it be that that the regime type and the pattern of industrialization establish how these movements occur and their strategies? Is it truly the legacy of the early-riser movement that would have an impact on the latecomers' strategies, or could it be the distinct structures of the state-society relations that shape the dynamics of social movements? For instance, could the potent force of Taiwan's labor movement led by union workers in Taiwan's state enterprises have been the result of the type of regime control and patterns of development strategies in a system where decentralized small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) did not favor the

organization of workers? In contrast, Korea's repressive military regime generated a vicious cycle of repression and resurgence in the direct confrontational style of the labor movement and self-organization and a culture of militancy (p. 109). Large plants and the pattern of centralized industrialization were conductive to labor organizing activities. Therefore, the differences in sequencing and dynamics were partly the result of the different natures of the regime governances, with an exclusionist approach in Korea that resulted in direct confrontations and an incorporatist strategy of the KMT that led to a pragmatic approach to social movements through participation within the system. In other words, how can the author's account be reconciled with the conventional account of the strategies and rise of Taiwan's labor movement?

Movement trajectories and erosions

In Chapter 5, the author compares the life trajectories of the labor and environmental movements in both countries and suggests that the concept of movement power is useful to understand the trajectories of a movement when each movement strives to maximize its power, reach its limits, and reorient itself by reconstituting its power basis. The author envisions cross-alliances and reconstitution of power bases as the solution.

Following my argument on state-society relations, can it be the restructuring of a movement that the author describes as a result of regime change from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one? Put differently, could the movement trajectories that Liu described be a result of regime change and changes in state-society relations that, in turn, led to the subsequent reorientation of the movement's dynamics? For instance, the author infers that the timing of the break out of latecomer movements coincided with the political opening in both countries. Thus, can one argue that it is the opening up of politics and democratization that change the dynamics of the alliances, as more activists are co-opted into the system? Moreover, as Liu acknowledges, both latecomer movements ran out of stream shortly after they arose, when the movements formed a truce with the state and private capitalists in the 1990s (p. 123). It could be that the opening of the political arena muted the movement's direct confrontational style, as seen in the reorientation of the Korean environmental movement.

Moreover, in relation to the reconstitution of movements, the opening up of politics in Taiwan means that laborers can begin to articulate and

present their sectoral interests as the general ideology in a context of decentralized industrial structure, so as to generate support from a broader audience. Democratization also means that the state is no longer the key target, as grievances and conflicts have become more diffused. The idea is that in authoritarian countries, large-scale social movements tend to develop where there are weak intermediate associations, whereas a society with a dense civil organization and intermediate associations diffuses conflicts with cross-cutting identities. Following this train of thought, it is plausible that the changes in movement strategies and trajectories discussed by Liu occurred in the broader context of regime and social change. How would this simple alternative argument fare with the author's argument about movement power? Could the old school concepts, such as regime type and state-society relations, do the same job? To what extent does the concept of movement power provide a better account?

I should add that my analysis may have simplified the nuances and insights in Liu's book. The purpose here is to bring the role of regime type to the forefront in Liu's narrative and to engage with the author about the explanatory power of her concept of movement power in relation to the two cases. By no means should my reinterpretation undermine the validity of Liu's key arguments. I strongly urge readers to read every chapter carefully, as the book is full of insights at different levels. It is required reading for not just students of social movements, but for anyone who is interested in East Asia and the Social Science disciplines. Liu's bringing the East Asian cases of Taiwan and Korea to the world map of the social movement literature deserves applause. It is a book from which everyone will find a message to take home.

References

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