# RIVISTA DEGLI STUDI ORIENTALI NUOVA SERIE

## RIVISTA DEGLI STUDI ORIENTALI

### NUOVA SERIE

## Organo scientifico del DIPARTIMENTO DI STUDI ORIENTALI SAPIENZA, UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

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# TAIWAN: THE ORGANIZED LABOUR MOVEMENT AND ITS OBSTACLES

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University of Cagliari

In Taiwan, in the aftermath of the lifting of martial law in 1987, there was an emergence of organized labour protests and new and autonomous labour organizations, such as trade unions, labour parties and non-governmental organizations. Taiwan was a Newly Industrialised Country (NIC) ruled until 1987 by a single-party government (Kuomintang – the Nationalist Party) and characterized by Export-Oriented industrialization. The labour movement developed as part of a broader democratic movement which in 1986 had evolved into the foundation of an opposition political party (the Democratic Progressive Party - DPP). Starting from a critique of developmental state theory and from the concept of the state's political nature, the research aims at assessing the movement's major achievements and shortcomings through a perspective of social and political history based on the Gramscian categories of state, society, hegemony and subalterns. In particular, this paper argues that notwithstanding the achievements of an organizational autonomy from the oppressive social control of the Kuomintang party-state, the workers' movement encountered a major obstacle in the 'historical bloc' with specific ethnic and political characteristics based on the historical division between the People's Republic of China (mainland China) and the Republic of China (Taiwan). A further research hypothesis on the role of culture in the construction of capitalist relations is also put forward on the basis of Gramsci's interpretation of pre-modern social groups and ideologies. The paper argues that a direction along the lines of a comparative research between pre-modern and modern forms of belonging to social organizations could reveal more about the Taiwanese working-class and its relations with labour parties and trade unions.

#### Introduction

This paper describes the main steps of a research project on the formation and consolidation of an organized labour movement in Taiwan at the end of the Eighties, a time when waged workers had become the largest social force, amounting to 67% of the total workforce. This massive number of employees working in the industrial and service sectors was the main driving force of the economic process, and served to fuel the ambitions of the social Taiwanese 'economic miracle'. Starting from a perspective of social

<sup>\*</sup> I would like to thank Barbara Onnis, Margherita Sabrina Perra, Claudia Ortu, Chang Dae-oup, Matilde Adduci, Elisa Freschi and Camillo Formigatti, who read and commented the paper.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Yearbook of Labour Statistics Taiwan Area, Summary Analysis, Council of Labour Affairs, Executive Yuan, ROC, 1989.

and political history, the research aims to shed light on the actual capability of the newly-born labour organizations to gain ground in social and political autonomous representation, as a first step towards the achievement of broader social transformation. In particular, it intends to investigate the major limitations and setbacks encountered by the organized labour movement in the course of this process.

The research matter derives from a preliminary reflection on the encouraging premises of the Taiwanese labour movement – driven as it was by the goals of political and social emancipation of workers from a repressive and authoritarian single-party regime – and its initial disappointing outcomes. At its core is a theoretical and methodological intent to contribute to the current controversial debate on the nature of state and society relations in East Asia, centred mainly on developmental state theories.<sup>2</sup> Starting from the idea of the state's political nature, the research has drawn on Antonio Gramsci's categories of state, civil society, hegemony and subalterns as theoretical and methodological keys to analyze the newly born Taiwanese labour organizations' major achievements and limitations.

The research examines cross-checked materials coming from several primary sources which were integrated with five open interviews (carried out in 2005) with some of the 80s labour activists who currently belong to the major non-governmental labour organizations (Taiwan Labour Front – TLF; Labour Rights Association – LRA). The documents consulted included Yearbooks of Labour Statistics, official and unofficial trade union reports, labour activists' personal accounts and analyses of the movement, political leaders' public speeches, as well as election data and labour legislation history.

### THEORETICAL ISSUES

The existing literature on labour in Taiwan is characterized by a general lack of interest in the rise of the organized labour movement in the late 1980s. Indeed, the birth of labour parties and the rise of capital-labour disputes, strikes, independent trade unions and labour associations during the Eighties attracted little attention from scholars, most of them being labour activists themselves.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> As regards this debate, see the following contributions: C. Johnson, MITI and the Japanese Miracle: the Growth of Japanese Industrial Policy, 1925-1975, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1982; R. Wade, Governing The Market: Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialisation, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990; A. H. Amsden, The State and Taiwan's Economic Development in P. B. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer & T. Skocpol, eds., Bringing the State Back In, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 78-106; T. B. Gold, State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle, New Brunswick, M. E. Sharpe, 1986; H. J. Chang, The East Asian Development Experience: The Miracle, the Crisis and the Future, London, Zed Books, 2006; D. O. Chang, Fetishised State and Reified Labour. A Critique of the Developmental State Theory of Labour, IIPPE Working Paper, 2010, http://www.iippe.org/wiki/images/a/ao/Fetishised\_state\_and\_reified\_labour-daeoup.pdf; D. O. Chang, Capitalist Development in Korea: Labour, Capital and the Myth of the Developmental State, London, Routledge, 2009.

At one end of the spectrum, it has been argued that there was in fact no real chance nor any basis for the formation of an autonomous and organized labour movement, which at best was defined as 'weak and inconclusive'; I have, as a matter of fact, frequently been asked what point there was in studying it 'if in Taiwan there was no real labour movement to talk about'. As a typical East Asian model of development, characterized by high rates of growth and political authoritarianism, Taiwan's economic boom has been a privileged case study for developmental state theorists. Their main argument - although it must be said that there are various and different nuances – is that an autonomous and independent state is the best guiding force of economic development because it places national interests before any interests and demands of specific social groups. Within this perspective, the repressive Taiwanese corporate state that drove Taiwan's economic transition towards capitalist industrialization succeeded in keeping the two modern social classes of capitalists and workers strongly dependent on its developmental economic policies. This asymmetrical relationship between a strong and independent state versus weak and dependent social classes thwarted the formation of autonomous social organizations that strove to represent the interests of specific social groups before national political power. In other words, Taiwanese political authoritarianism under the Kuomintang's (KMT) single-party rule and its developmental and re-distributive policies can be considered the main reasons for what has been described as 'weak labour' and for the limited attention to its autonomous organizational efforts.3

In the centre of the spectrum, it has been argued that there actually were documented reasons for workers' discontent, which was indeed extensive enough to induce the organization of a social movement, but workers were weak and fragmented and thus unable to build up an effective movement. In their sociological analysis, Kang Chao and Chu Yin-wah did in fact challenge the idea of the re-distributive nature of Taiwanese developmental policies, pointing instead to Taiwanese industries' exploitative working conditions. They explained it with reference to workers' behaviour but would not however go beyond the basic above-mentioned definition of 'weak labour' in their search for a proper explanation of such weakness. According to Chao's scrutiny of one of the movement's largest strikes that spread at the Far Eastern Chemical Fiber Plant in 1989, it was the lack of a sense of community, the persistence of conservative thinking and the lack of communication between the inchoate trade union and the workers that impeded the movement's growth. On the other hand, Chu asserts that the principal sources of workers' passivity were to be found in Confucian docility and group loyalty.4

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See also in particular R. Wade, Governing The Market: Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialisation; A. H. Amsden, The State and Taiwan's Economic Development.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Kang Chao, Labor, Community, and Movement: A Case Study of Labor Activism in the Far Eastern Chemical Fiber Plant at Hsinpu Taiwan 1977-1989, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1991; Chu Yin-

At the far end of our spectrum, in his critique of developmental state theories Dae-oup Chang acknowledged that workers' ability to organize themselves autonomously did indeed play a key role in demolishing the Kuomintang repressive, corporative state and proposed a new theoretical perspective as a basis for his analysis. 5 One of the points he makes is that in order to understand the role played by workers in economic development and political liberalization, it is necessary to re-think the categories of the capitalist state and capital-labour conflicts in Marxian terms. If we bear in mind that capital-labour relations are inherently conflictive due to their exploitative nature, and that the capitalist state is not class neutral but is rather the political and historical reflection of the class conflict itself, we would never define the Taiwanese state as an autonomous, independent or developmental separate actor. If capital-labour class relations are not brought into the picture they can not by no means be viewed as 'classes' in a relational sense, but are more simply "social groups' with different economic functions".6 Consequently, in developmental state theory, the state merely acts as an interface for relations between "commodity owners who lack any imminent reason to be agents of social change". 7 At the basis of this conceptual framework is a specific understanding of labour as being a disempowered and depoliticized group.8 Analyzing society through the prism of class relations would suggest, instead, that state political and social transformations are the "products of a sequence of historical interactions in which capital, labour and the state are contesting..." actors.9

In this research work, the analysis of class relations is the starting point for investigating the Taiwanese labour movement's achievements and shortcomings in the struggle for political and social change. Viewed from this perspective, the Gramscian concept of 'war of position' is the key analytical tool, given that in Gramsci's theoretical framework, a war of position is one between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic values that takes place in modern and capitalist state-civil society systems where state (political society) and civil society are a single entity. 10 'Subaltern groups', such as the working class, may develop counter-hegemonic movements and make headway in forming social and political autonomous representation in order to set up resistance to the absorbing logic of the dominant class and elaborate their own hege-

WAH, Democracy and Organized Labor in Taiwan: the 1986 Transition, «Asian Survey», XXXVI, 5, May 1996, pp. 495-510.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> For another critical examination of the Taiwanese labour movement see HSIAO HSIN-HUANG MICHAEL, The Labor Movement in Taiwan: a Retrospective and Prospective Look, in D. F. Simon & M. Y. M. MICHAEL, The Labor Movement in Taiwan: a retrospective and 1 respective 2001, 1840, eds., Taiwan: Beyond the Economic Miracle, London, M. E. Sharpe Inc, 1992, pp. 151-167.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See also D. O. Chang, Capitalist Development in Korea, cit., chapters 1-4.

CHANG DAE-OUP, Fetishised State and Reified Labour, cit., p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> B. Fontana, Il filosofo democratico: la retorica come egemonia, in G. Vacca & G. Schirru, eds., Studi gramsciani nel mondo 2000-2005, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2007, pp. 241-271.

monic apparatus. In Gramsci's words, this process is 'disgregated and episodic' because it is constantly hindered by the action of the dominant classes' 'organic unit' formed and consolidated by the repressive tools of the state apparatus and civil society's tools for building consent (universities, political parties, schools, trade unions, mass media).<sup>11</sup>

## ORIGINS AND RISE OF TAIWANESE LABOUR MOVEMENT: BUILDING ORGANISED NEW LABOUR ACTORS

A workers' movement began to form in Taiwan during the late Seventies, as part of a broader pro-democracy movement – known as *dangwai* (literally 'outside the party') – whose main aim was to demolish the Kuomintang single-party martial law regime that had ruled Taiwan since 1949.

It is here important to recall that Taiwan was returned to China in 1945 after fifty years of Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945). At that time, the Republic of China was formally ruled by the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) although in the throes of a civil war between Nationalists and Communists, culminating in the foundation of the People's Republic of China in the mainland, following the KMT's defeat in the same year (1949) and its flight to Taiwan. Chinese mainlanders (waishengren in Chinese - 'outsiders')<sup>12</sup> the expression used to define those Chinese who arrived in Taiwan from the mainland with KMT troops from 1945 on – quickly replaced Japanese settlers in all leading political and economic positions. In 1947 their troops violently repressed a massive popular anti-KMT uprising in protest against the mainlanders' colonialist attitudes. Thousands were killed. 13 The Nationalist Party then suspended the 1947 Constitution which in 1948 was substituted by the 'Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion' and in 1949 it introduced a Martial Law which remained effective until 1987.

The Kuomintang built its government of the Republic of China in Taiwan (ROC), as well as its US-aid based economic development program, <sup>14</sup> on a radical anti-communist crusade founded on the absolute prohibition of autonomous associations, political activities and labour strikes. The repression of civil and political rights was legitimised by the emergency conditions of an enduring civil war between the two sides of the Formosan Straits. Commu-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> A. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, eds. and trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, New York, International Publisher, 1971, p. 160. See A. Gramsci, «Quaderno 7 (VII) 1930-1932», Quaderni del carcere, II, Torino, Einaudi Editore, 1975, p. 866.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Taiwanese natives, *benshengren* ('natives'), were mostly Chinese from past migration flows. Only a minority of them had maleso-polynesian origins.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> PENG MING-MIN, A Taste of Freedom: memoirs of a Formosan Independent Leader, New York, Rinehart and Winston, 1972, pp. 155-156.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> From the 1950s to the end of the 1960s, the KMT party-state in Taiwan was the beneficiary of substantial US military and financial aid that amounted to a total of 5.6 billion dollars. See M. T. Berger, *The Battle for Asia. From Decolonization to Globalization*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 240.

nists, workers and Taiwan pro-independence native activists were the main target of state repression.<sup>15</sup>

During the Seventies there emerged an ardent political battle between the KMT and the *dangwai* – Taiwan's strongest opposition force at the time, which in 1986 was to gain the official status of a political party, today's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). At its core there was the drive to eradicate the KMT authoritarian and corporatist state that had built a pyramid of political and economic privileges for the benefit of *waishengren* and the consolidation of their economic power. The democratic movement advanced a battle in the name of a *Taiwanization* of politics and a democratization of the political system. The DPP assumed the role of the party representing all those social forces excluded from the KMT sphere of privileges.

As mentioned above, the Taiwanese workers' movement emerged as part of this broader democratic movement. It began to form in the aftermath of the lifting of martial law in 1987 and its chief protagonist was the workingclass of state controlled and protected industrial sectors. This category of workers was employed in a state protected industrial sector consisting of strategically dominant state owned enterprises, KMT private owned factories and large private conglomerates owned by Chinese mainlanders' or former land-owning Taiwanese families. In an economy based largely on small and medium-sized exporting enterprises such as Taiwan was, this industrial sector constituted a small but strategic niche. 16 In contrast to those workers largely employed in small-scale family-owned factories – managed by means of clan and paternalistic rules rather than by formal laws or any system of labour unions – these workers were a privileged category. <sup>17</sup> They had the benefit of social security system and enjoyed higher level salaries and fair working conditions. 18 However, they were also the most repressed category of workers because the labour demobilising system of the martial law era and the KMT-state corporatist system of labour unions meant that those workers occupied in the state sector or in the private large conglomerates were more easily kept under control. 19 From 1949 onwards, unionisation was effectively KMT-driven, most successfully in large conglomerates of strategic sectors

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> S. RIGGER, Politics in Taiwan: Voting for Democracy, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> B. Cumings, The Origins and Development of Northeast Asia Political Economy: Industrial Sectors, Product Cycles, and Political Consequences in F. Deyo, ed., The Political Economy of New Asian Industrialism, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1987, pp. 44-83; Tung Chuan-chuang, The Rise and Fall of the Labor Movement in Taiwan: a historical structural approach, PhD Thesis, University of Georgia, UMI, 1996.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Shieh Gwo-shyong, Manufacturing Consent Under Market Despotism: The Piece-Rate System and the Formation of the Subjectivity of Taiwanese Workers, «Taiwan: a Radical Quarterly of Social Studies», 17, July 1994, pp. 106-110 (in Chinese).

<sup>1994,</sup> pp. 106-110 (in Chinese).

18 Yearbook of Labor Statistics, Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, ROC, 1986, p. 49; Report of Wages and Salaries by Occupation in Yearbook of Labor Statistics, Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, ROC, 1988.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Unionization was compulsory for industries employing more than thirty workers; only one labour union per industry was allowed and strikes were practically forbidden. See the Labour Union Law at http://db.lawbank.com.tw/ENG/FLAWDATo1.asp?Isid=FLO14918.

such as oil, plastics, aluminium, chemicals, synthetic fibres, petroleum, steel, tobacco and telecommunications. Labour unions were commonly referred to as 'tofu-unions' as they were entirely managed by the ruling party that formally occupied all leadership positions. On the brink of the movement's rise in the late Eighties, unionised workers numbered more than one and a half million (out of a workforce of almost 8 million) and there were more than two thousand registered labour unions of which 68% were in the industrial-sector. 1

In such a political context, the primary objective of workers was the liberation of their social and political representative organisations from KMT repressive and corporative control. Through increasing numbers of candidatures of independent anti-KMT activists in union elections, workers started to gain the control of their plant-unions and to form independent national labour associations such as the National Independent Labour Alliance, the Tao-Chu-Miao Brotherhood Associations and the Brotherhood Associations.<sup>22</sup> As a result, the monopoly of the KMT-controlled Chinese Confederation of Trade Unions (Quanguo Zonggonghui) was seriously threatened. Furthermore, labour activism in the 80s also produced other forms of social and political worker representation. In 1987, the most left-wing side of the DPP split in order to set up a Workers' Party<sup>23</sup> with the intention of giving workers a political voice: "The party's manifesto proclaimed its hope of becoming the main political vehicle for the 7.7 million strong industrial workforce in Taiwan [italics mine]".24 In addition, labour support organisations such as the Taiwan Labour Front (Taiwan Laogong Zhenxian) and the Labour Rights Association (Laodong Renquan Xiehui), were also established. This assertion of autonomy was accompanied by a considerable rise in labour-capital disputes, in particular wildcat strikes. In 1980, the number of registered disputes was 700 and involved almost 6 thousand workers; in 1989 registered disputes totalled almost 2000, involving almost 63 thousand workers.25

This notable increase in labour disputes contrasts, however, with a sudden dramatic decrease in the total number of unionised workers. Between 1984

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> S. Frenkel, J. C. Hong & B. L. Lee, The Resurgence and Fragility of Trade Unions in Taiwan, in S. Frenkel, ed., Organised Labour in the Asia-Pacific Region. A Comparative Study of Trade Unionism in Nine Countries, New York, ILR Press Ithaca, 1993, pp. 162-186.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Number of Unions and Union Members in Taiwan, by Union Type and Density in Yearbook of Labour Statistics, Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, ROC, 1990, pp. 11-29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> See for example the struggle for autonomy of the Far Eastern Chemical Fiber Company Union (Far Eastern Chemical Fiber Company Union Archives and Newsletters 1988-1989, Hsinpu) and the Taiwan Petrochemical Workers' Union, (Taiwan Petrochemical Workers' Union Archives and Newsletters 1988-1989, Kaohsiung).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> In 1989 this party would split up into a smaller labour party and the labour support organization called the 'Labour Rights Association' (*Laodong Renquan Xiehui*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Clarion Call to Workers, «Far Eastern Economic Review», 21 January 1988, p. 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1988, pp. 370-371; Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1995, pp. 62-63; 147-149.

and 1989, the	number almo	st halved f	from over	one	million	to	less	than
700,000 and it	continued to	ecline thro	ughout the	Nin	eties.			

Year	Industrial unions	Industrial unions' members (millions)
1979	1.637	1.028
1984	1.924	1.370
1989	1.345	698
1998	1.176	575

Table 1. Number of industrial unions and their members by year. Source: *Labour-Management Relationships* in *Yearbook of Labor Statistics* (1990; 2010), Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, ROC, 1990 and 2010, pp. 11, 29; pp. 34-35.

Moreover, the newly born Labour Party<sup>26</sup> – ready as it was to give voice to a workforce of 7.7 million – had no success in political contests at either national or local level from 1992 onwards. From 1987 to 2000, the KMT continued to be the most voted party of the new and democratic political spectrum, followed by the DPP opposition party. In 2005, the year of my fieldwork research, the Labour Party had almost three thousand registered members and it dealt principally with labour support activities. Basically the *Laodongdang* (Labour Party) and the *Laodong Renquan Xiehui* (Labour Rights Association) were a single organization with the same President, who at the time was Zhang Jeng-rong.<sup>27</sup>

	1989	1991	1992
Appointed candidates	8	3	1
Voted candidates	0	0	0

Table 2. Labour Party performance in national elections from 1989 to 1992. Source: On-line Categories and Results of Elections in Taiwan, Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, Taipei http://vote.nccu.edu.tw/engcec/vote3.asp; D. Fell, Success and Failure of New Parties in Taiwanese Elections, «China: An International Journal», III, 2, September 2005, pp. 212-239; C. Schafferer, The Power of the Ballot Box: Political Development and Electoral Campaigning, Lexington, Lanham, 2003; 1989: Legislative Yuan supplementary elections; 1991: National Assembly elections; 1992: Legislative Yuan elections.

As is clear from Table 2, the Labour Party was unable to win a single seat in the first three national elections it contested, and from the 1995 Legislative

January 2005.

Note that in 1989 the Workers Party split and the new party was labeled as the 'Labour Party'.
 Interviews with Tang Shu (Secretary of the Labor Party's International Department) and Zhang Jeng-rong (General Secretary of the Labor Party and President of the Labor Rights Association), 19th

Yuan elections onwards, it withdrew from all electoral competitions at national level

As we have argued, the chief purpose of the labour movement's struggle against control and repression on the political stage was to establish these newly-formed autonomous social and political organisations to provide the impetus and to become the focal point for new labour-capital struggles. However, such figures indicate that there was a wholesale lack of interest in these new actors.

It was evident that the social and political autonomous representation of workers was to remain a problem, substantiated by a long lull in any progress or advance in labour legislation. Following the first phase of settlement, the labour movement then addressed the so-called and much-debated 'Three Labour Laws Question'. The Labor Union Law (*Gonghui Fa*), the Labor-Management Dispute Settlement Law (*Laozizheng yi chulifa*), and the Collective Agreement law (*Tuanti xieyuefa*) were passed in mainland China between the 1920s and 1930s when Taiwan was under Japanese rule, and even if they were amended, the amendments date back to twenty or thirty years ago. <sup>28</sup> The reform of these laws was to become one of the major goals of the emancipated labour organizations, but despite the fundamental changes that were occurring in Taiwanese politics and society, these laws continued to reflect and uphold past authoritarianism until 2009-2010. Indeed, they kept alive serious restrictions on unionization and on the right to strike, and proper reforms were not brought in for another twenty years. <sup>29</sup>

## OBSTACLES TO THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MOVEMENT: SOME EXPLANATIONS

Throughout the struggles of the late 80s, the Taiwanese labour movement was able to achieve some measure of organizational autonomy from the KMT's coercive, repressive and corporative state apparatus. However, it was thwarted and ultimately defeated by capital in the 'war of position' and remained subaltern to the super-structural elements of the 'historical bloc' which, at the time the movement was spawning, consisted of an 'organic unit' comprising the mainlanders' dominant political and economic powers and the entrenched economic power of Taiwanese capitalists. A plurality of factors lie at the origins of this historical outcome, specifically the political and economic dynamics that had taken root in a society characterized by eth-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Labor Union Law, http://db.lawbank.com.tw/ENG/FLAWDATo1.asp?Isid=FLO14918. Labor Management Dispute Settlement Law, http://db.lawbank.com.tw/.Eng/FLAW/FLAWDATo1.asp?Isid=FLO14924; Collective Agreement Law, http://db.lawbank.com.tw/.Eng/FLAW/FLAWDATo1.asp?Isid=FLO14923.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Protection and Impetus of Labor and Human Rights in Taiwan. Professor Hou-Sheng Chan Discusses the approval of the Three Labor Laws, «Taiwan Labor e-Quarterly», 3, 10 October 2010, Council of Labor Affairs, Executive Yuan, ROC, pp. 1-4.

nic divisions that were deeply ingrained in the political origins of the Republic of China – and which eventually contributed to depoliticising capitallabour relations.

After reflecting on the factors outlined above, the next section presents a hypothesis concerning the possible resilience of traditional forms of belonging to social organizations, as a further explanation as to what might have hindered the organization of a labour movement in Taiwan.

Developmental theorists and their critics alike have argued that the KMT mainlanders' rule was financially, socially and politically independent from Taiwanese local forces. It had no direct relations with the landlord class and was thus able to radically change Taiwan's social structure through the agrarian reform (1948-1953).<sup>30</sup> Although this would seem to be an irrefutable fact, it is worth considering some important internal and external events which played some part in gradually cracking the KMT's state autonomy vis-à-vis civil society and which can help explain the emergence of the dominant historical block in Taiwanese society.

The first two events, in chronological order, were the violent military repression of the 1947 anti-KMT rebellion and the defeat of the KMT in mainland China's civil war in 1949, followed by the end of US direct aid (1965), the ROC's loss of its UN Security Council seat (1971) and the normalisation of US - Chinese diplomatic relations in 1979.

The 1947 event marked the start of the creation of a Chinese/Taiwanese ethnic divide which was based less on cultural differences than on a political reaction against the mainlanders' colonialist attitudes.<sup>31</sup> After the Communist victory in the mainland, the island became the KMT's last and sole refuge, though 85% of its inhabitants were native people versus 15% mainlanders. At this point the need for building consent and, at the same time, US pressures for a free market, pushed the KMT party-state to embark on a twin path of economic and political liberalization, which ultimately opened the doors of the KMT state not only to Taiwanese but also indirectly to global capital.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> See for example R. WADE, Governing The Market, cit., pp. 231-236 and p. 253.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> A. M. WATCHMAN, Taiwan: National Identity and Democratization, Armonk New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1994; M. J. Brown, Is Taiwan Chinese? The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004; R. Marsh, National Identity and Ethnicity in Taiwan. Some Trends in the 1990s in S. Corcuff, ed., Memories of the Future. National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 2002; S. Corcuff, La transition post Lee Teng-hui à Taiwan: la consolidation démocratique à l'épreuve du débat identitaire, paper presented at the European Association on Taiwan Studies Conference, London in April 2004 (http://www.soas.ac.uk/taiwanstudies/eats/eats2004/).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> As regards the distribution of industrial production, by 1986 the private sector had grown from 44.10% in 1953 to 83.54%; while the public sector had decreased from 55.90% to 16.46%. CHU WAN-WEN, *Industrial Growth and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: The case of Taiwan* paper presented at the Conference on Transitional Societies in Comparison: East Central Europe versus Taiwan, Prague in May 1999 (http://idv.sinica.edu.tw/wwchu/SME%20TW.pdf).

In this scenario, the privatization of the confiscated Japanese industries started soon after the agrarian reform, with the selling of the Taiwan Cement Corporation and the Taiwan Fertilizer Corporation to former landlords in order to compensate them for their land losses. Several Japanese industrial entrepreneurs had on the other hand pre-empted KMT confiscation by selling their industries in advance to the richest Taiwanese landlord families.<sup>33</sup>

At the start of the Sixties, the decision was made in political economy policy planning to move from an Import-Substituting Industrial Strategy (1945-1960) to an Export-Oriented one (1960-onwards); at the same time, the privatization of the industrial sector and the liberalization of the market proceeded with the foundation of the first Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in East Asia, created to attract foreign direct investment through tax breaks and labour market deregulation. This decision coincided with Western industries' delocalization of production giving rise to what has been called the 'global factory' or the 'new international division of global labour'.34 The subcontracting system made up of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the SEZ operated principally in labour-intensive industrial production (textiles and electronics) and was ethnically distinctive in that it was a Taiwanese native specialist economic field. SMEs became the effective engine of Taiwanese economic growth: they represented 97.5% of all manufacturing industry, their total contribution to industrial production reached 55% and their percentage of exports amounted to 60%.35 After the blocking of US direct financial aid, they became the fundamental source of foreign currency necessary to invest in military defence against the threats coming from the People's Republic of China.

Finally, in the face of Taiwan's growing international isolation, the KMT state was obliged to fall back on in its own local economic forces, which had begun to enjoy growing bargaining power in politics as well. The KMT state had begun to build the basis for a political liberalization at the local level since the end of the 40s. Despite the implementation of co-optation strategies, the participation of non-KMT candidates in local direct elections and their electoral successes therein did indeed produce alternative political choices that would later converge into the 'outside of the party' (dangwai) democratic and anti-KMT movement. The dangwai at once, represented Taiwanese entrepreneurs' interest in their struggle for achieving the control of key political

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> D. Y. Hwang, *The Rise of a New World Economic Power: Postwar Taiwan*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1991, p. 127. Wang Hong-Zen, *Ethnicized Social Mobility in Taiwan and in the Initial Post-war Period* in «The China Journal», xxvII, 3, July 2001, p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> D. O. CHANG, *Informalising Labour in Asia's Global Factory*, «Journal of Contemporary Asia», xxxix, 2, May 2009, pp. 161-179.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> White Paper on SMEs (2001-2005) in Small and Medium Enterprises Administration, Ministry of Economic Affairs (www.moeasmea.gov.tw); Ngo Tak-wing, Civil Society and Political Liberalisation in Taiwan in «Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars», xxv, 1, January-March 1993, pp. 3-15.

positions monopolized by mainlanders and, at the same time, it organized workers' discontent with KMT oppression.<sup>36</sup>

However, with the mass protests of Chungli and Kaohsiung it became clear that this Taiwanese ethnically united front would show its capital-labour conflicting nature. These events acted, indeed, as a watershed in paving the way to the progressive loosening of the ethnic divide that had until then existed between mainland and Taiwanese capitalists and consequently prompted the formation and development of their social and political historical bloc.

Notwithstanding martial law, the Seventies were a turbulent period. Several clandestine publications and organizations were founded, such as 'Taiwan Politics' (Taiwan Zhenglun) and 'China Tide' (Xiachao lianhehui) of socialist inspiration or 'Beautiful Island' (Meilidao) inspired by the ideals espoused by the Taiwanese independence movement.<sup>37</sup> The first two attempts at forming independent unions were at the Far Eastern Textile Company and at the Taiwan Railways Company in 1977, by which time the number of labour disputes had burgeoned, inducing the KMT state to pass the first labour law, the so-called 'Labour Standard Law' (1984). In November 1977 (the Chungli Incident) and in December 1979 (the Kaohsiung Incident) workers took part to the first two mass political protests on the streets since the 1940s; they were suppressed by KMT military troops and its leading activists were arrested.<sup>38</sup> As Christian Schafferer has pointed out, between 1978 and 1980 – the peak period of mass political turmoil when radical activists were being placed under arrest – the most moderate wing of the dangwai held its first political negotiations (goutong) with the KMT party-state. As Schafferer has stated, 39 this was a compromise which helped the *dangwai* earn the important official status of a political party in 1986 (DPP) and also signalled the beginning of the legal strengthening of Taiwanese middle-class hegemony in the Gramscian sense.

Despite this early rapprochement between the *dangwai* and the ruling party, the Eighties saw the resurgence of further social turmoil, in which the *dangwai*/DPP played a role as the main driving force behind the workers' movement as a whole. The antagonism against KMT-controlled trade unions and their leaders took the form of organizing new and autonomous unions and selecting candidates in new trade unions' elections, all of which

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> L. Chao & R. H. Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy. Political Life in the Republic of China on Taiwan*, Baltimore and London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 104; S. RIGGER, *Politics in Taiwan*, cit., p. 38; Kan Tsung-yuan, *Ethnic Competition, Democratization and the Cross-strait Politics of Taiwan*, PhD Thesis, University of Southern California, UMI, 1998, pp. 41-63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> D. W. D. DAVISON, *Politics of the Left in Taiwan*, «Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars», XII, 2, April-June 1980, pp. 20-21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> J. Minns, R. Tierney, *The Labour Movement in Taiwan*, «Labour History», Lxxxv, November 2003, pp. 103-128; Interview with Tang Shu (Secretary of the Labor Party's International Department), 19<sup>th</sup> January 2005.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> C. Schafferer, The Power of the Ballot Box: Political Development and Electoral Campaigning, Lexington, Lanham, 2003, p. 105.

was a by product of dangwai/DPP mobilizing activities. Thus, the DPP was making ready to replace the ruling party as the principal political intermediary of labour organizations. 40 Furthermore, in the national elections of 1986. two DPP candidates won the labour representative seats in the Legislative Yuan, defeating the President of the Chinese Federation of Trade Unions and the President of the Labour Federation of Taiwan Province. The two winners (Wang Chung-song and Hsu Mei-ling) were union activists at the Chungwa Telecom Union. 41 Other several potentially powerful unions, such as the National Postal Union, the Taipei Bus Union, the Electric Power Union and the Petrochemical Union had the backing of the dangwai/DPP. Interestingly, soon after the political upgrading to an officially recognised party, the DPP changed its political platform from workers' mobilization towards promoting Taiwanese identity and claims for independence. As was later revealed, in particular by the sociologist and left-wing activist Linda Gail Arrigo, the dangwai/DPP's main motivation behind wearing this Taiwanese identity veil, was the political representation of the economic interests of the native Taiwanese bourgeoisie, on which it was also highly financially dependent. 42 The project set in motion by Taiwanese capitalists of obtaining control of key political positions was coming to fruition both in the ruling party - which in 1996 participated and won the first presidential election with a Taiwanese candidate (Lee Teng-hui) - as well as in the political opposition.

In the face of a progressive industrial crisis resulting from the opening of the extremely competitive Chinese market from the Nineties onwards, this Taiwanization and democratization of politics proved to be 'capital-friendly'. Firstly, it did nothing to hinder the process of Taiwanese capital outflows and industrial de-localization towards mainland China, something which contributed to a fragmentation of the Taiwanese working class. <sup>43</sup> Secondly – in particular after the DPP had taken power in 2000 – it promoted privatization to such an extent that the DPP was accused of betraying the 'workers' outright'. <sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Chen Yi-Chi, Wong Monina, New Bondage and Old Resistance. Realities and Challenges of the Labour Movement in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Christian Industrial Press, 2002, p. 76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> For DPP support to new autonomous labour unions and labour non-governmental organizations see: Dzeng Yi-ren, *Labor Power and Political Change in Taiwan 1945-1990*, PhD Thesis, The John Hopkins University, UMI, 1994; Ho Ming-sho, *Democratization and Autonomous Unionism in Taiwan. The Case of Petrolchemical Workers*, «Issues and Studies», xxxix, 3, September 2003, pp. 105-135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> L. Gail Arrigo, From Democratic Movement to Bougeoise Democracy: The Internal Politics of the Taiwan Democratic Progressive Party in 1991, in M. A. Rubinstein, ed., The Other Taiwan. 1945 to the Present, London, M. E. Sharpe, 1994, pp. 145-181.

London, M. E. Sharpe, 1994, pp. 145-181.

43 In 1990 Taiwanese capitalists' foreign investments – mainly directed to China – amounted to the 94% of those in the previous two decades. Internal investments in the same year amounted to 34% of the previous two decades' investments. Tung Chuan-Chuang, The Rise and Fall of the Labor Movement in Taiwan: a historical structural approach, p. 165.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Interview with Zhang Jeng-rong (General Secretary of the Labor Party and President of the Labor Rights Association), 19th January 2005.

As the two 'opposing' political parties (KMT and DPP) compacted around capitalist interests, thus closing to a certain extent the mainlander/Taiwanese divide to form what can be described as a dominant hegemonic bloc, the labour movement and capital-labour issues in politics appeared to have been edged out by a prevailing concern with Taiwanese identity and the question of independence. The DPP's new ethnic preoccupation eventually caused a scission in the party itself leading to the birth of the Workers Party in 1987; however, two years later this new party itself split because of internal wranglings over *taidu* (independence from China) versus *taitong* (unification with China), the political issue which symbolically and practically fragmented the workers' political representation along identity lines. Thus, capital-labour issues in politics seemed to have been converted into an ethnic one, with a consequent de-politicisation effect.

#### FURTHER RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The socio-economic developments and ethnic aspects therein discussed in the previous section had an indubitably significant impact on the progression of the working-class towards political and social emancipation; however, more research is required on the cultural construction of capitalist relations if a more complete picture is to emerge.

In Antonio Gramsci's methodological framework for the studies of subaltern classes, it is cultural traditions and pre-modern ideologies that are the fundamental shapers of modern social and political formations. This framework – outlined in detail in Notebook 25 of *The Prison Notebooks* (Italian version) – maps out methodological research guidelines which provide an outline to the uneven path subalterns must follow in their struggle for autonomy.<sup>45</sup>

A comparative historical analysis of traditional and modern forms of social affiliation may well shed light on whether, and to what extent, traditional forms of belonging to social organizations have influenced the emergence of organized labour activism in Taiwan.

A necessary premise to make here is that, in comparing relations between state and society in pre-modern and capitalist Taiwan, it is essential to undertake complex critical analysis of the 'tradition versus modernity' model that defines as anti-modern any kind of society that has not been subjected to Western type revolutions. This Western model of analysis of the East, based on variants of Weberian, Marxist or Modernization theories, tends to "conceptually freeze the traditions of non-Western peoples – the Confucianism of East Asia or the caste-structures of South Asia – either as anachronistic sur-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> A. Gramsci, «Quaderno 25 (xxv) 1934», *Quaderni del Carcere*, III, Torino, Einaudi Editore, 1975, p. 2288.

vivals or as residual forms of social relations destined to disappear with the spread of capitalism".<sup>46</sup> In his critical efforts to reveal Eurocentric prejudices in social theory, Ravi Arvind Palat suggests looking at Asian traditions as "forms of social relations that are crucially shaped and moulded by the spread of capitalism [...] as a cluster of responses to the onslaught of capitalism".<sup>47</sup>

In terms of the current debate on the nature of Chinese state and society relations, one of the most significant issues under discussion concerning the last dynasty (the Qing dynasty: 1644-1911) – during which Taiwan was incorporated as a prefecture and later as a province under the Chinese Empire - is the interconnection or mutual interdependence between the central government and local social organizations - such as local village-communities, family clans, professional guilds, or mutual aid associations. These organizations had economic, social and political functions and acted on behalf of the state providing access to the whole range of 'state' services: e.g. administrative, fiscal, judicial, resource distribution, military defence, water control, famine relief and rural credit. Their political function was at best ambivalent. On the one hand, acting on behalf of and strictly depending on the central state for their own legitimacy, they were effectively a sort of release valve for the state whenever popular discontent was manifested. Their so called 'social protection services' helped curb any potentially revolutionary social dissatisfaction with the central government, thereby prolonging the state's ruling legitimacy. On the other hand, they could also serve as the organizing base for popular rebellions, in some cases becoming clandestine associations or secret societies. In reality, the capacity of local organizations to either guarantee protection services to their affiliates or to catalyse social dissent, was commensurate to how well they were connected with political authorities. Since the hegemonic political and moral ideology was rooted in Confucianism, connections were a fundamental factor behind state and society relations. The more numerous and more powerful the connections, the greater the capacity of the organization to successfully serve the needs of its affiliates.48

In pre-capitalist Taiwan, social organizations played a fundamental role given that they were often the sole means of survival for many people. Several studies have highlighted how during the Qing rule, Taiwan was a sort of neglected periphery and suffered from prolonged state voids that left society to the mercy of the chaotic disorder of conflicting feudal powers, rebellions

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> R. A. Palat, Beyond Orientalism: Decolonizing Asian Studies, «Development and Society», xxix, 2, December 2000, p. 129.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> F. Wakeman Jr, The Civil Society and Public Sphere Debate: Western Reflections on Chinese Political Culture, «Modern China», XIX, 2, April 1993, pp. 108-138; W. T. Rowe, The Problem of "Civil Society" in Late Imperial China, «Modern China», XIX, 2, April 1993, pp. 139-157; P. C. C. Huang, "Public Sphere" / "Civil Society" in China?: The Third Realm between State and Society, «Modern China», XIX, 2, April 1993, pp. 216-240; L. Pye, Asian Power and Politics. The Cultural Dimensions of Authority, London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1985.

and unrests.<sup>49</sup> Although central bureaucracy was either extremely inefficient or practically absent, it nevertheless promoted the migration of considerable numbers from the mainland to the island, thereby reducing available farmland and causing an escalation of popular discontent. Further studies have indicated how Taiwan was one of the most important core locations for the birth and development of Chinese secret societies'.<sup>50</sup> In Taiwan, local organisations acted as guardians of a cultural order over and above the issues that were the prerogative of the central power. Indeed, in several particular historical occasions, they would act as semi-autonomous social actors in opposition to the imperial power, which they would judge as incapable of ruling according to Confucian principles.<sup>51</sup>

It may well be the case that corporative capitalism under Japanese colonization and, subsequently under the KMT's corporate control over labour unions and over every kind of association, perpetuated the traditional sense of belonging, albeit in a system where the rules of the hegemonic game had been completely changed. Although Taiwan was a capitalist society on the road to full industrialisation, it might be argued that during the years of KMT rule, workers' sense of belonging to KMT-led labour unions continued to be driven by traditional mechanisms of social inclusion. Viewed from this perspective, it becomes clearer why, when the process of democratisation had begun at the end of the Eighties and labour unions were finally freeing themselves from KMT control and dependence, the movement was unable to take full advantage of this new independent status. As mentioned above, union membership levels dropped rapidly and, at the same time, the autonomous unions seemed to be seeking new party-political affiliations able to reinforce the political authority and social appeal of the unions themselves. This may well explain the progressive isolation of the Labour Party, whose social and political influence was weaker in comparison with the KMT's or even the DPP's. 52

Further research along these lines would entail consulting studies from a variety of disciplines in order to focus on the possible different ways in which

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> G. H. Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1965; D. Roy, *Taiwan. A Political History*, Ithaca and London, Cornwell University Press, 2003; J. Copper, *Taiwan. Nation-State or Province*, Boulder Colorado, Westview Press, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> For a closer examination please see: F. L. DAVIS, *Primitive revolutionaries of China: a study of secret societies of the late nineteenth century*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1977; D. H MURRAY, The Origins of the Tiandihui The Chinese Triads in Legend and History, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994.

<sup>1994.

51</sup> G. H. Kerr, Formosa Betrayed, p. 4; D. Roy, Taiwan. A Political History, pp. 24-25; J. Copper, Taiwan. Nation-State or Province, p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Labouring Front (Labour Party Newsletter), Labour Party Headquarter, Taipei, 1990-2000; interviews with Zhang Jeng-rong (General Secretary of the Labor Party and President of the Labor Rights Association) and Tang Shu (Secretary of the Labor Party's International Department), 19<sup>th</sup> January 2005; interviews with Feng Yi-cheng (DPP Assistant Legislator and former General Secretary TLF), 27<sup>th</sup> January 2005; interview with Son Yu Lian (General Secretary of the Taiwan Labor Front) and Liu Fei-fang (labor activist in Taiwan Labor Front), 28<sup>th</sup> January 2005.

cultural traditions and pre-modern ideologies have contributed to shaping modern mechanisms of belonging within the Taiwanese subaltern classes.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has described the main findings of research on the formation, consolidation and limitations of an organized labour movement in Taiwan at the end of the Eighties. The research initially highlighted that the first phase of the movement was chiefly characterised by the political objective of workers' emancipation from the repressive corporate KMT state. Although the movement's priority was to form newly organized and politically independent labour organisations, its initial successes were not brought to fruition.

Using the Gramscian perspective of social and political history, the second part of the research endeavoured to assess and measure the effective social and political representative autonomy of these newly founded labour organizations.

The third part reflected on critiques of developmental state theory and the idea of the state's political nature, drawing on Antonio Gramsci's categories of state, civil society, hegemony and subalterns as theoretical and methodological instruments to analyze the major constraints met by these newly formed labour organizations.

The research results evidenced that throughout the struggles that occurred in the late 1980s, the Taiwanese labour movement was able to achieve relative organizational autonomy from the KMT but nevertheless remained politically entrenched in capitalist hegemony wielded by the 'historical bloc' that overcame the ethnic divisions existing between capitalist mainland rulers and Taiwanese capitalists. Secondly, the paper argued that at the origins of this 'organic unit' lie specific political and economic dynamics combined with ethnic issues which eventually contributed to the de-politicization of capital-labour relations.

The analysis ends with further research hypotheses on the role of culture in the construction of capitalist relations. A closer examination of Gramsci's discussions on the influence of pre-modern social systems over modern social and political forms, will enable us to better focus on whether and to what extent some modern practices of belonging to labour organizations might have been influenced by forms of belonging inherited from the past – albeit reshaped by the rise of capitalism. This line of research would shed new light on the Taiwanese labour movement's strategies and would enable us to gain further insight into the socio-cultural history of the Taiwanese working class.