

# A Comparison between Japanese and Korean Labor Politics: Japan in the mid-1960s and Korea around 1990

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## Introduction

During my visits to Korea in the early 1990s, I was overcome by a strange feeling of *deja vu*. Let alone the surroundings. I also encountered the equivalent of the Peace Preservation Law that had existed in pre-war Japan, despite the democratization that was announced in Korea on 29th of June in 1987. During February of 1988 and May of 1989, more than three thousand people were reportedly arrested as "conscience prisoners" or political prisoners. This means that an average of 3.7 persons were arrested per day which reached almost twice as many as that in the era of the Fifth Republic. The Korean *Chaebol* are very similar to the *Zaibatsu* of prewar Japan. The radical labor movements and antagonistic state labor relations that boil in Korea are reminiscent of the situation in Japan during the 1950s. As for the economic fundamentals, which I will explain later, the present indexes of Korea are almost identical to those of Japan during the mid-1960 and early 1970s. Needless to say, Korean high-tech industries are rapidly evolving in the forms of those of Japan and their development patterns are almost the same as those of Japan in the 1970s and the 1980s (Hattori ed., 1987 : 36).

However, there are two conflicting opinions in the comparison between Japan and Korea. On the one hand, Korea is included in the same category as Japan, especially in terms of its political economy. The conceptualization of the capitalist developmental state by Chalmers Johnson is a typical example of this case (Johnson 1982 : 317, Johnson 1990, Johnson 1994). On the other hand, most of Korean social scientists are reluctant to agree with western scholars. They

would rather compare Korean politics with authoritarian regimes, particularly those of Latin American countries. Thus, how should we consider the conspicuous similarities and impressive differences between Japan and Korea and how should we theoretically conceptualize them?

My argument here is as follows :

Korean governing elites have adopted the post-war "Japanese systems" as a effective late-comer model. This introduction was carried out by the principles of elitism and formalism in the same way that the Japanese had introduced the western model into Japan. It inevitably emphasizes an initiative by state bureaucrats and centers around "institutions and organizations". As a result, however, the essence of Japanese systems, which is based on "mutual reciprocity and informalism", becomes lost in the process of adoption. At the same time, since the governing elites have considered labor issues as a national security matter, they have taken a very different stance to industrial relations from that of post-war Japan. This also damaged the introduction of Japanese systems into Korea, because the Japanese system is constructed along overlapping networks among government, business and labor. Since the Japanese networks developed from the micro-enterprise level to the national decision making level through the meso-industrial sector level, they provide intermediaries for information sharing that inspire cooperation and integration among the social actors (Tsujioka 1993, 1994a).

Consequently, although the institutional devices and economic performance of the nation appear to be on the same path that of the Olympic years of 1964 in Japan and 1988 in Korea, respectably, the

government-business-labor relationships in both countries are indeed distinctively different.

## 1. The essence of the Japanese system

For Chalmers Johnson, the problem of the developmental state of Japan lay in public-private relations. After the attempt of self-control and state-control, Japan sought out public-private cooperation as a synthesis. It has several mechanisms like government-guaranteed financing, targeted tax breaks, government-supervised investment coordination, equitable allocation by the state of burdens during times of adversity and so on (Johnson, 1982 : 311). It is supported by numerous unusual institutions that include the official deliberation councils, MITI's vertical bureaus and the corresponding, officially sanctioned trade association of each industry ; the temporary exchange of officials between state and private enterprises ; formal discussion groups and the practice of administrative guidance (Johnson, 1982 : 312).

Ronald Dore conceptualizes the Japanese system as welfare (enterprise) corporatism. It is a successful adaptation of late industrialization coupled with several characteristics of the late comer effect. Dore put accent on industrial relations, which contain enterprise level bargaining and negotiation, an enterprise welfare system, stability of employment, indistinctness between white and blue collar workers, business bureaucratization and cooperative and corporative ideology (1973 : 370).

Although Johnson focused on public-private relations and Dore on

business-labor relations, both scholars shared the significance of informal human relationships and human networks. In this line, Masahiko Aoki analyzed Japanese enterprises and characterized them as "corporative" (1988). Ken'ichi Imai introduced the concept of network systematically into industrial organizations in Japan (1988). Daniel Okimoto (1989) and Jaeho Yeom (1989) elaborated the networks focusing on the high-tech industrial policy in Japan. Richard Samuels presented the concept of "reciprocal consent" in which firms give the state jurisdiction over markets in return for their continuing control over those markets (1987). He emphasized the aspect of mutual negotiation and persuasion.

All these interpretations of the Japanese system agree on the significance of a relational or contextual aspect which was brought up through "a tortuous learning and adaptation process" (Johnson 1982 : 306). This process can be characterized as a series of trials and errors that are, in a sense, democratic interactions. This process and relational aspect assure system integration and cooperation through mutual information sharing.

## 2. Reception of the Japanese model in Korea

Korea's introduction of the Japanese system as a model of industrialization is very obvious, at least in the appearance and functions of governmental and social institutions. For instance, the arrangement of the Department of Commerce and Industry in Korea is the same as that of MITI in Japan. Moreover, a lot of affiliated semi-governmental organizations in Korea have corresponding models in

Japan (Hattori, 1988 : 36). A part of the list is as follows : Japan External Trade Organization vs. Korean External Trade Public Corporation, Japan Productivity Center vs. Korean Productivity Center, Japan Export and Import Bank vs. Korean Export and Import Bank, Japan Development Bank vs. Korean Industry Development Bank, Japan Institute of Labor vs. Korean Institute of Labor.

In addition, governmental institutions such as the industrial standards, the tax system for export promotion and the industrial policy system also strengthen the adaptation of Japanese models. Finally, various social institutions, which had gradually evolved as customs in Japan, are implanted as government policies ; *Shosha* or trading company, enterprise unions, the business labor consultation system, quality control, and *Keiretsu* (Hattori 1988 : 35-36). Hattori claimed that Korea is one of the frontiers in the application of the Japanese model.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the initiative of applying the Japanese model seems to be limited to the strata of the governing elite and the business elite under the authoritarian regimes. That would partly explain the continual adversity against Japan that was evident in the majority of the mass-level. However these institutional arrangements successfully brought about the high economic performance in Korea that will be described in the next section.

### 3. Korea in 1988 and Japan in 1964

While the situations of business and labor and the relationship between the two actors are very different from those of Japan in the

mid-1960s, it is noteworthy that outputs of the economic systems of Korea in the mid-1980s and of Japan in the mid-1960s are close. Table 1 shows the similarity.

The ratios of the agricultural and manufacturing work forces and the availability of telephone might explain similarity in the social and economic life in both countries. The ratios of agricultural work forces were 25.2% in Korea in 1984 and 24.7% in Japan in 1965. Those of manufacturing work forces were 24.7% in Korea and 31.5% in Japan, respectively. In the mid-1960s in Japan and the mid-1980s of Korea, more than one telephone for 10 persons was installed. Regarding the macro indexes, GNP per capita in Japan in 1970 and that of Korea in 1984, are very close. In addition, wages per month relative to American wages can be indicative. The Japanese wage in 1960 was \$63.17, 16% of that of the US and the Korean wage in 1980 was \$222.23, 18% of that of the US. The Japanese wage in 1970 was \$199.77, and the Korean wage in 1989 was \$723.41, which were 35% and 39%, respectively, of that of the U. S.. (Im, 1992 : 39).

#### 4. Utilization of the Japanese model in Korean labor policy

The principle of utilizing Japanese labor laws and policies in Korea was seemingly not so different from that of other policy areas. The Korean governing elite sometimes directly translated the articles of laws in Japan, strengthened the regulation of, and formalized Japanese social customs. I will discuss the correspondence between the laws of these two countries in this section. However, their attitude and stance behind these laws were considerably different

Table 1 The Economic Index of Korea in the mid-1980s and  
of Japan in the mid-1960s

	Korea (80s)	Japan (60s)	Japan (80s)
Population (thousand)	40578 (84)	98275 (65)	121047 (85)
GNP (\$1000 million)	811 (84)	935 (65)	12763 (84)
GNP per capita (\$)	1998 (84)	952 (65)	9089 (84)
		2009 (70)	
The % of investments in GNP	30.0 (84)	—	28.3 (84)
The % of exports in GNP	38.5 (84)	9.0 (65)	17.0 (84)
The amount of exports (\$ mill.)	5743 (84)	8452 (65)	29245 (84)
The % of manufacturing in GNP	29.2 (84)	36.4 (60)	29.8 (84)
Heavy chemical industry in manufacturing	60.1 (84)	—	64.5 (84)
The % of the manufacturing work force	24.7 (85)	31.5 (65)	25.0 (84)
The % of the agricultural work force	25.2 (85)	24.7 (65)	8.8 (84)
The output of pig iron products products (thousand ton)	21866 (84)	73188 (66)	185989 (84)
The output of pig iron exports (thousand ton)	5743 (83)	9664 (65)	30862 (83)
The number of vehicle products (thousand)	262 (85)	696 (65)	7647 (85)
Shipbuilding tonnage	1473 (84)	5363 (65)	9711 (85)
The number of color TV set products (thousand)	3605 (85)	510 (66)	16880 (85)
The number of refrigerator products (thousand)	1864 (85)	—	5352 (85)
The capacity of beer products (thousand kl)	792 (85)	2640 (67)	4598 (84)
The output of synthetic fiber products (thousand ton)	759 (84)	—	1747 (84)
The amount of cement products (thousand ton)	20231 (85)	32500 (65)	78852 (84)
Atomic power plant capacities (thousands kw)	2865 (84)	138 (66)	24686 (84)
The % of scientific research funds in GNP	1.06 (83)	1.51 (65)	2.29 (83)
The # of railway traffics (billion km passenger)	23.2 (82)	258.8 (65)	325.0 (84)
The ton km of railway traffics (billion ton km freight)	118 (82)	—	217 (82)
The diffusion of vehicles (person/vehicle)	87.2 (84)	31.4 (67)	4.4 (84)
The diffusion of telephones (phone/thousand persons)	138 (84)	131 (65)	496 (82)



from those of the Japanese, which will also be explained in following sections.

The Japanese influence over Korean labor laws has broken into four categories (Hayashi 1990 : ii-vii). First, there is direct translation and implantation. The system of labor laws is divided into three parts: laws on collective industrial relations, laws on individual industrial relations, and laws on employment security. The composition of each part is almost identical to that of Japan except for the unique existence of the Labor-Management Consultation Law in Korea, but it lacks the equivalent of an employment insurance law that exists in Japan. There are a lot of phrases in these laws that are similar to those in Japanese laws. The Korean system of labor laws was first established by Singman Rhee in 1953 and supplemented in 1963 by Park Chung-hee.

The second category is the settlement of interpretative ambiguities and problems in Japanese laws. In this category, Korean labor laws are more articulate and sometimes more pro-labor such as the denial of the compensation for the damage by strikes.

In the third category, there are laws containing more advanced standards than those of Japanese laws based on the Japanese prototype such as legal work hours, extra pay for overtime work, holiday work, legal compensation for industrial disaster, and enforcement of the Equal Employment Law.

The fourth category embraces laws that formalized Japanese customs and social institutions. For instance, the 1980 revision of the Labor Union Law established the enterprise union system in place of the industrial union system. Although the 1987 revision of the law

permitted other types of union systems, the single union system or prohibition of plural unions in the enterprise substantially forbade new types of union systems in Korea. The second example is the enactment of the Labor-Management Consultation Law in 1980. The labor-management consultation system was first established due to the article in the 1963 revision of the Labor Union Law. The 1980 law made the establishment of this consultation system obligatory for about 5,000 big companies. In Japan, this system has been promoted by the Japan Productive Center and its collaborate counterpart among the labor unions in the late 1950s and 1960s. As a voluntary base in Japan, about 80 percent of all companies with more than 100 employees adopted this system in the 1980s (Nakamura 1988 : 54). Besides the enterprise union system and the labor-management consultation system, the Korean government has legislated the retirement money system and the employee education system for the youth.

In general, the labor legislation mentioned above contains many advanced articles in terms of legal completeness and in many cases a tendency for labor protection. As will be described in the next section, however, the labor policy in Korea has been considered as a security matter by the governing elite. Thus, starting from this point on, the Korean labor policy began to diverge clearly from the Japanese model.

## 5. Deviation from the Japanese Model : Korean Labor Policy as an Internal Security Policy

I will show in the following how the governing elite in Korea has considered the labor policy as a key stone for Korean internal security.

The first impressive fact is that all major revisions of labor relations laws were made simultaneously with the revisions of Constitutions. In addition, four out of five major revisions of labor relations laws were performed in certain "emergent legislative bodies," during the recess of Parliament (Yang ed., 1988 : 278-279).

The system of Korean labor laws was established under the First Republic in 1953 after the first revision of the Constitution. The system includes the Labor Union Law (LUL), the Labor Dispute Conciliation Law (LDCL), the Labor Committee Law (LCL) and the Labor Standard Law (LSL). The content of this system maintains a stance that is highly pro-labor stance such as the principle of free establishment of labor unions, the autonomy and democracy of labor unions, the prohibition of disturbing activities by employers, and the recognition of the collective bargaining right by labor unions.

The first revision of this system occurred under the military "revolutionary" regime of Park Chung-hee in 1963. The political activity of labor unions has not been permitted ever since Park forbade in the revision. In addition, this revision strengthened the regulation of labor union establishments, limited the right to organize public servants, made a system that check the legality of labor disputes and established the labor-business consultation system.

The second major revision accompanied the October Yusin in 1972 in which, the Park administration strengthened government intervention and depoliticized labor movements. The third revision was performed within the January 14th Emergent Measures in 1974 in which the administration added some measures of workers' welfare. Before the Yusin regime, the administration established the Temporary Law for Labor Unions and Labor Dispute Conciliation Concerning Foreign Companies in 1970 which drastically limited the activities of labor unions in foreign companies.

The fourth revision, which occurred in the beginning of the Chun Doo-huan administration, was famous for compulsorily introducing compulsory enterprise unions in place of local branches of the industrial union system. The revision intended to isolate unions within enterprises from industrial unions and the national center (Hattori, 1988 : 201-202). It only forbade union cooperation as third party intervention on the side of labor unions. On the business side, cooperation between employers and employers' organizations was not forbidden. In addition, procedures of labor disputes became rigid so as to substantially deny the right of dispute, which, for instance, can be seen in the long cooling period of labor disputes (Hattori, 1988 : 203).

Only the last revision was discussed and passed in the Parliament along with the 9th revision of the Korean Constitution in 1987. Even these revised labor laws contain many constraints and limitations of labor movements.

The second point concerning the security-oriented nature of Korean labor policy revolves around the problems of existing labor

laws. Under the upheaval of labor movements in 1987, the Roh Tae-woo administration was obliged to revise the arrangement of its labor policy. It abolished the Special Measure Law for Security.

According to Yang Kwan-soo (1988: 278-299), there are many serious constraints in Korean labor laws, even regarding the three fundamental labor rights. As for the right to organize, the first barrier is the procedure for labor union establishment. The Constitution prescribes the right to organize voluntarily and the Labor Union law only requires submissions of declaration of establishment. However, the Enforcement Ordinance of the Labor Union Law created the system screening new entry. This system functions as if every labor union had to be licensed by authority.

Second, the Labor Union Law does not permit more than one labor union at each level, which means that there must be a single union in each enterprise, a single industrial federation in each industry and a single national center in all of Korea. No new entry is permitted by the authority when a new group is considered as being redundant that existing labor unions and federations already covered. This prohibition of plurality is preventing the appearance of new voluntary labor unions. Under the long authoritarian rule, the Federation of Korean Trade Union (FKTU) and the industrial unions affiliated with FKTU have organized most of the big enterprises. Especially since the 1980 revision, compulsory enterprise unions have prevailed. Thereafter, despite the abolishment of the compulsory enterprise union system in 1989, the prohibition of plurality sustained the enterprise union system as a whole. Many new labor organizations including the new labor "national center", namely, the National

Labor Union Council (NLUC), are in danger of being accused as illegal at any time.

The 1980 revision introduced the articles of "banning third party intervention in labor activities concerning the establishment and dissolution of labor unions and the participation and withdrawal of labor union members". Although the 1986 revision of labor laws loosened the definition of the third party so as to permit an activity to organize members that is practiced by industrial unions and a national center, these written articles still exist and constrain the activities of labor unions.

The restriction of labor rights of civil servants is very rigid in Korea. If we consider the relatively high proportion of national civil servants in the work force in Korea, specifically, 11.6 civil servants per 1000 persons in 1987 compared to 7.1 in Japan (calculation by the author), this restriction has a significant meaning for labor movements. In Korea, the new Constitution prescribed that civil servants do not hold the three labor rights except for persons permitted by special law. As a fact only civil servants working for the Telecommunication Department, the national railroad and the national hospital have rights to organize and bargain.

Teachers are not entitled to the three labor rights regardless of whether they are teaching at a public school or private school. However, the denial of the three labor rights for private school teachers has no legal base.

It is evident that Korean administrations, including the Roh administration, have "tried to keep workers away from organizing unions with all their efforts" (Im 1992 : 8).

The Korean labor laws placed heavy constraints on bargaining and strike activities by labor unions. The strike right of workers who are engaged in "major defense industries" prescribed by law is denied by the Constitution. Once the administration authorizes a certain industry as a defense industry, the strike right of the workers is forbidden regardless of whether the industry is private or public.

The cooling period prior to a strike is limited within the public utilities in Japan. However, in Korea all strikes, including private labor disputes, require the cooling period: 10-days for a private dispute; 15-days for a dispute of public utility. The arbitration procedure can be extended one more round for a public utility. Once an authority identifies the dispute as an emergency, the cooling period is extended 20 more days. As a result, the maximum cooling period for private disputes is 30-days, and for public 50-days. This kind of long cooling period substantially denies the right of strikes. Almost all strikes can be accused of being illegal due to the cooling period system.

Finally, the procedure for determining strikes is rigid. The decision must be based on majority approval by a direct secret ballot, and the strike activities are not allowed to perform outside the work place. These limitations are highly rigid in comparison to other advanced countries.

As a whole, I can conclude that in spite of having several more advanced aspects based on the Japanese model, Korean labor laws contain highly security-oriented characteristics so that the function of these laws is completely different from that of Japan in the 1960s.

## 6. Labor Politics in Korea around 1990

The differences of labor policy and labor law arrangement both countries have caused distinctive differences in labor politics and the labor movement situation in spite of the similarities in economic performance and social life that were analyzed earlier. Before describing the labor situation, let us look at a statistical overview.

As shown in Table 2, the Korean labor union density or organization rate gradually increased during the 1960s and 1970s, then showed temporary a drop and stagnancy in the 1980s, and has been resurgent since 1987. The difference in density between Korea in 1962 and prewar Japan is not notable. The rates of Korea, therefore, have been considerably lower than those of Japan since 1960 (however, it is interesting that labor union densities in both countries seem to be converging in the 1990s). Even after the resurgence in 1987, its rate is two-thirds of that of Japan in the 1960s. These can be attributed to the following reasons: First, as analyzed in the previous section, many kinds of workers are still forbidden to be organized and are constrained by the labor laws. Secondly, capitalists and owner-managers in the Korean chaebol have shown an antagonistic attitude against labor movements, unlike Japanese corporate capitalists and employee-managers in the 1960s (Yang, 1988: 244-277). Thirdly, in contrast to the Japanese situation, fewer number of white collar workers have participated in labor unions (Hattori, 1988: 200). Korean unions have not succeeded in integrating white collar and blue collar workers in the same unions.

Table 3 demonstrates the historical tendency of strikes and lock-



Table 2 Labor Union Density  
(Unionization Rate) in  
Korea and Japan

	Japan	Korea
1925	5.6	—
1930	7.5	—
1935	6.9	—
1940	0.1	—
1945	3.2	—
1950	46.2	—
1955	35.6	—
1960	32.2	—
1962	34.7	7.6
1965	34.8	11.2
1970	35.4	12.4
1975	34.4	14.8
1980	30.8	12.9
1985	28.9	15.7
1986	28.2	15.5
1987	27.6	17.3
1988	26.8	22.0
1989	25.9	23.7
1990	25.2	25.0

Sources: Ishihata 1988: 474-474, MOL  
Japan 1978: 116, MOL Japan  
1991: 378, Kim 1986: 82.

outs in Korea and Japan. Surprisingly, the situation in Korea before 1986 shows considerable similarity to that of Japan before 1945. However, the labor offensive during 1987 and 1989 was as intense as the Japanese labor offensive in 1952, during which the peak of worker involvement in and lost work days occurred.

These statistical data seem to indicate that the labor situation in

Table 3 Strikes and Lock-outs in Korea (1960-90) and Japan (1910-88)

Japan										
	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1952	1960	1965	1970	1988
D/C	22	282	906	271	584	590	1063	1542	2260	498
W/T	2.1	36.4	81.3	32.9	763.4	1623.6	918.1	1682.3	1720.1	75.9
D/J	—	—	—	—	5486.1	15075.3	4912.2	5669.4	3914.8	173.8
Korea										
	1960	1970	1980	1982	1984	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
D/C	256	4	206	88	114	276	3617	1873	1616	322
W/T	64.3	0.5	49.0	9.0	16.4	46.9	934.9	293.6	396.5	—
D/J	—	—	61.3	11.5	19.9	72.0	6946.9	5400.8	6351.4	1836.0
D/C	Number of strikes and lock-outs.									
W/T	Workers involved (thousands).									
D/J	Work-days not worked (thousands).									

Sources : Im 1992 : 40, Ishihata 1990 : 482, MOL Japan : 1988 : 128-133.

Korea after 1987 is paralleel to that of Japan in the 1950s. This impression is confirmed by the instability of union leadership and the situation of the national center. During January and August, 1990, 82.7 percent out of 2,071 unions experienced leadership change, 43.6 percent of which involved elections with tensions and conflicts caused by nonconfidence and resignation (Kim, 1991 : 57).

The Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) enjoyed its monopolistic status under the authoritarian regime, and still remains the only national center in Korea. The leadership was, however, substantially damaged in the face of emerging democratic labor unions against the policy of FKTU after 1987. The FKTU chose Park, a progressive leader, as a chairperson in November, 1988, in order to wipe out the image of company union or government supporting union. He was reelected in 1990 and proposed several new policies : "1) to make efforts to continue negotiation with democratic

unions (NTLC) to integrate the labor movement ; 2) to promote political activities within the range permitted by existing laws ; 3) to reconcile the cleavage between progressive groups and conservative groups within FKTU ; 4) to develop a legalistic movement in order to get citizen support” (Japanese Ministry of Labor 1991 : 379).

The National Labor Union Council (NLUC) was founded as a national center for voluntary labor unions in June, 1989. It was organized by putting fourteen regional labor union councils and three industry labor union councils together, of which there were 602 unions with a membership totalling 193,000 persons, which is about 10% of the total number of unionized members. Since the Labor Union Law does not admit the second national center, the administration made an attempt to prevent its establishment. After its establishment, the administration did not permit its legal status and warned individual unions that affiliation with the NLUC, participation in the NLUC's activities and collecting membership fees for the NLUC can not be considered “legal”. Thus, many unions seceded from the NULC, after which the NULC was reduced by half the number of its members and participated unions by March of 1991 (Kim, 1991 : 57).

In addition to FKTU and NLUC, two “potential” national centers are emerging. The National Employees' Union Council has thirteen affiliated federations most of which are non-legal unions. It occupies 8.8 percent out of all unionized members and 7.5 percent out of all labor unions. This council has characteristics in its attempt to organize white collar labor unions. In February of 1990, the Big Enterprise Labor Union Council for Solidarity was formed by sixteen big enterprise unions such as the Hyundai Automobile Labor Union,

the Asia Automobile Union, the Seoul Subway Public Corporation Union, and the Lucky Electric Wire Union. Both of these potential national federations could not formulate a cohesive organizational policy because of their lack of consensus among their members by the summer of 1991.

## Conclusion

Thus, up until early 1990s, the Korean labor movement didn't have a national center, which is significantly equipped with concentration and legitimacy. The official center, FKTU, seems to be losing its legitimacy and popular support. Therefore, its actual influence is not so different from that of other non-legal and potential national centers. The NLUC as well as two potentials organize less than 10 percent out of all labor unions and unionized members. They lack the necessary concentration to influence business groups and the government.

In the connection between the vulnerability and weakness of labor unions and their national centers, Korean labor has not established stable relationship with the political parties (Choi, 1991c: 331). There seems to be no substantial linkage between opposition parties and labor unions. As mentioned earlier, the ban of the political activities of labor unions due to the Labor Union Law is still crucial to constrain these unions. Opposition parties also emphasize traditional linkages with their constituents rather than labor unions.

In sharp contrast to the Korean situation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Japanese labor movement moved towards a direction

of stabilization and institutionalization in the mid-1960s (Tsujinaka 1993, 1994a). The General Council of Trade Unions of Japan, namely, *Sohyo*, was established in 1950 and kept its status as the national center until 1987. *Sohyo*'s political influence was assured by the strong connections with the Japanese Socialist Party, which merged its left and right wings in 1955. In all levels of elections, labor unions of public servants and public enterprise workers performed a big role. Through the adoption of a spring wage bargaining round, *Shunto*, started in 1955, *Sohyo* gradually became involved in business-government networks and became more moderate as a result.

After the two symbolic events of 1960, the Mitsui-miike Mining Strike and the Struggle over the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty Revision, the three parties in labor politics in Japan, which are government, business, and labor voluntarily started to cooperate with each other. In the mid-1960s, the fruit of the cooperation appeared. The government decided to leave the Constitution revision in 1964 untouched and the LDP proposed the Labor Charter in 1966. Bureaucracies started to allow labor representatives to join important formal advisory councils and semi-formal round tables in the 1960s. In big businesses, enterprise unions and employed managers began to cooperate through *Shunto* and consultation bodies. In 1964, corporate private unions made the International Metal Workers' Federation-Japan Council, or IMF-JC and the Japan Confederation of Labor, or *Domei*. These two federations grew up to be the core of *Rengo*, or the Japanese Trade Union Confederation which absorbed *Sohyo* in 1989.

Needless to say, Korean labor politics is in the process of transi-

tion. Whether it is treading a path that is similar to the one taken by Japan in the 1960s depends on a possible change of relationships and institutional arrangement among three actors: government, business, and labor. Presently, they still seem to refuse the convergence (Choi, 1993). The person and actor takes the initiative to change also will characterize the nature of future labor politics in Korea.

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