

DIJ Social Science Study Group

21 September, 2016, 18:30

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Going Global, but How? Diversity in Transnationalisation Processes of Japanese Labour Activism



Social activism is not a nation state-bound phenomenon, but globally embedded. The Japanese labour movement represents a particularly interesting case to study the relationship between global frameworks of activism and their transformative impact on domestic activism, as it displays a much broader diversity than institutionalist approaches can explain. While parts of the Japanese labour movement strongly resemble their international counterparts, others remain remarkably distinct. To explain this diversity, I elucidate the interaction between isomorphic influences of global frameworks of labour activism and the strategic selection and adoption by different actors in the Japanese labour movement.

On the one hand, Japanese mainstream corporatist trade union federations officially affiliate with international labour organisations but, at the same time, are wary of any changes this might bring to their domestic corporatist arrangement. Alternative, grassroots-level forms of labour activism with much less formally established transnational collaboration channels on the other hand, tend to resort to ad-hoc exchanges and through this adapt to global frameworks more flexibly.

Sociological institutionalist theory suggests that the global integration of social movements leads to worldwide isomorphic agendas, organisational patterns, action repertoires, applied symbols and collective identities. However, within this transformative process, unlike parts of the literature suggest, domestic actors cannot be described merely as passive receivers of transnationalisation. Instead, my research suggests that, they are critical agents who strategically select and control transnational diffusion with regard to local adoption and implementation.

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Presentation and discussion will be in English. All are welcome to attend, but prior registration (heinrich@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.

Event will be hosted by the German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo (DIJ)
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