

Revisiting the industrial relations in Taiwan's high technology industries

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Abstract

Taiwan's scholars have for a long time shown great interest in labor capacity when discussing industrial relations in Taiwan during the burgeoning labor movements of the 1980s and 1990s. Surprisingly however, this storm of labor movements skipped the Hsinchu Science Industrial Park (HSIP), which concentrated its business in the non-unionized high technology sector. In fact, industrial relations at HSIP were largely peaceful. Through their emphasis on labor capacity, existing labor studies insufficiently explain how HSIP escaped the explosion of labor movements after lifting martial law in 1987, and why workers who had spent long careers at HSIP offered little collective resistance. Rather than focusing on labor capacity, this paper employs an alternative perspective, the capacity of employers and employer interest, to examine how employers brought together segments of capital and labor through a diversity of strategies. This diversity of firm strategies involves two aspects. First, high tech industrial managers took advantage of Taiwan-style profit sharing and stock ownership institution to secure plant-based cooperation between managers and labor with the support of national institutions. Second, this paper finds that human resource management (HRM) strategies often differ from country to country, while Taiwan's HRM strategies draw from the experiences of Silicon Valley. Rather than fragmenting workers into teams and ethnic networks, Taiwanese managers examined practices at Silicon Valley firms and established individual labor and management relations for avoiding collective labor representation and labor activities.