

A Sociological Study on the youth labor movement in Japan

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This study aims to clarify the actual conditions and characteristics of the youth labor movement (YLM) which has been active since 2000 in Japan. Based on interviews with members of four unions, the paper examines the YLM as both a labor and a social movement. Chapter one describes the theoretical background of YLM. From the latter half of the 20th century, labor society has been transformed. The centrality of labor in society has been criticized, but the status of labor in the life security system and in social norms remains unchanged, so the YLM has kept some elements of social movement unionism (SMU). Chapter two positions the YLM in the genealogy of Japanese labor and social movements through a case study of Union-Bochibochi that illustrates how young people have drawn upon the experience of the community union movement (CUM), a kind of SMU in Japan, when they form their own unions. The CUM has been successful in solving individual labor disputes, but less successful in retaining its members. In contrast, the YLM's retention rate is higher. Chapter three clarifies how the YLM retains its members through a flexible organizational operation, as seen in a case study of Shutoken-seinen Union. Chapter four analyzes the identity strategy of YLM by a case study of Precariat Union, which has made a new collective identity through the concept of the precariat, that is, the new socially and economically precarious proletariat. Conflicts between this collective identity and individual identity are analyzed using K. McDonald's concept of an "experience movement." The YLM has been called "Labor/Existence Movement." For example, some YLM participants were previously socially withdrawn or are long-term-unemployed. A case study of FUF reveals these socially marginalized people want the union to change labor-oriented society so they can survive in society.