



**Makoto Kumazawa.** *Portraits Of The Japanese Workplace: Labor Movements, Workers, And Managers.* Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996. xv + 267 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8133-1709-0; \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8133-1708-3.



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## Portraits of the Japanese Workplace

Kumazawa Makoto is until now probably best-known abroad through a short article written a few years ago with Yamada Jun (Kumazawa & Yamada, 1989). With the considerable number of Japanese-language Kumazawa-works in publication, Andrew Gordon and Mikiso Hane have taken an extremely valuable initiative by translating this volume. After introductory chapters by Gordon and the author the remainder of the volume is structured as follows:

- \* Chapter One: The 'Take-Off' of Japanese Workers
- \* Chapter Two: Features of Organized Workers in Postwar Japan
- \* Chapter Four: Limits and Costs of the Postwar Labor Movement
- \* Chapter Five: Light and Shadow in Quality Control Circles
- \* Chapter Six: A Postwar History of the Workplace: Management and Unions in the Steel Industry

\* Chapter Seven: A Postwar History of Women Workers

\* Chapter Eight: Twenty Years of a Bank Worker's Life

\* Chapter Nine: Working Like Mad to Stay in Place. Reflections on the Japanese Salary-Men Today

These chapters are (except for the last one) actually excerpts from two different editions of a Kumazawa collection of essays (Kumazawa, 1981, 1986; see also Kumazawa, 1993). The volume's original title, *Nihon no Rodosha-zo*, can be translated into English as "Image of the Average Japanese Worker." Other Japanese economists and sociologists have sometimes pursued the concept of a so called "average worker" and tried to chart his or her values. Thus, the title of the original work refers to this scholarly tradition. Although there is no such person as an average worker, and this concept may seem to be a bit peculiar, the concept derives from basic sociological ideas about the mechanism of the socialization of individual into society. The individual may under

certain conditions influence society, but the individual is also simultaneously formed by it.

In the case of Kumazawa's research the focus of analysis is on the corporate society. He finds that the Japanese corporate society places tremendous pressures on the individual, and his or her capacity for independent organizing. And, as I will return to below, rather than the narrow "average worker" concept, the broader concept of corporate society and especially the discussion of labor's role within it has been Kumazawa's preoccupation both before (Kumazawa, 1972) and after (Kumazawa, 1989, 1992, 1993) the publication of the original versions of *Portraits*—in addition to his interest in the conditions for women workers (Chapter Seven in *Portraits*, 1995).

As is evident from the chapter titles, the themes range from historical issues at a societal level to studies of the workplace in a contemporary context, such as in the detailed quality control circle case study. Chapter Eight was justly referenced to by David Montgomery on the book's jacket as deserving 'to be ranked among the classic critiques of modern industrial life.' It is a rich book ranging across multiple levels, and it reflects a considerable range of Kumazawa's overall research interests and background. The decision by Gordon and Hane to select, in conjunction with the author, precisely these chapters for translation, and to publish the collection with the title *Portraits of the Japanese Workplace: Labor Movements, Workers, and Managers*, was a very wise one indeed.

One minor critical comment is perhaps in order. The concept "corporate society" (*kigyo shakai*) has been gradually gaining foothold within the Japanese sociology of work and labor economics. It is currently even used by the media and among practitioners. What is being referred to by the concept may vary somewhat, but usually the context makes it clear whether the use refers to the (excessive) impact that corporations and corporate values may have on society at large, or to the way giant corporations tend to form societies of their own. In *Portraits* it is the latter, internally focused meaning which has clearly been Kumazawa's target of analysis, together with a special emphasis on the relationship between corporate society and what he refers to as the "workers' own workplace society" within firms and extending beyond individual workplaces. His distinction becomes confusing, however, by the use of additional terms such as "company society" (e.g., pp. 9, 38, 47 & 148) and "enterprise-focused workers' society" (p. 38). It could have been more beneficial with a consistent use of concepts.

The argument Kumazawa wants to present in his

book are clear, even with these inconsistencies. My point is only that a consistent development and use of concepts might make it easier to nurture a synthesis of the theory of a corporate society, as developed predominantly by Japanese researchers and as based on Japanese case material. This could then be incorporated within the framework of more general theories preoccupied with the nature of the corporate society, such as Whyte's concept of the organization man (Whyte, 1956), studies of the workplace societies and their informal regulative mechanisms (Roy, 1960; Burawoy, 1979), labor process theory discussions on the relationship between "us" (the workers) and "them" (management) (Edwards, 1979; Burawoy and Wright, 1990), and Scandinavian theories on the existence of worker collectivities (Lysgaard, 1985).

Nevertheless, a fine collection of Kumazawa's research findings has with this volume become available in English translation, and theoretical considerations such as the ones hinted at here, as well as empirical comparisons, have thus been made possible for researchers without direct access to Kumazawa's work in Japanese.

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