

Continuity and Paradigm Shifts in Industrial Relations Research since 1967: Comparing a National Forum with the International Forum

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Industrial relations are a moving terrain where actors pursue their objectives in an evolving political and economic context. J. T. Dunlop, probably the most influential industrial relations scholar in the latter half of the 20th century, rightly stressed this evolving nature of industrial relations in his landmark study *Industrial Relations Systems* published in 1958. In his view, trade unions, employers' organizations and the government interact and negotiate common rules regulating employment contracts and conditions of work in a given context or constraints. Basically, he enumerates three main contexts, that is, technological context, market or budgetary constraints and power structure between three actors. These contexts naturally change according to the country concerned and the time horizon under consideration. From the hindsight of today, we may say that the flexibility of this broad framework and possibilities of adaptation of contexts have been one of the main reasons of longevity of the Dunlop model.

Research of industrial relations is mainly based on the observation of actors and evolving contexts. As actors and contexts are very broad in scope, a number of different approaches is naturally possible. Hence, industrial relations scholars come from different backgrounds, such as labour economics, sociology, human resource management, labour law or political sciences.

Industrial relations scholars select a subject of their interest and carry out their research activities. This choice is greatly influenced by the social concerns or policy orientation of the time in which scholars work. If we construe the main themes of research activities as a paradigm, we may expect that predominant paradigms change with the passage of time, as the power balance of actors such as labour unions or economic and technological contexts alter. By the same token, we could expect that paradigms and social concerns are naturally different from one country to another.

In this short article, we attempt to see how paradigms of industrial relations research have evolved in recent years by looking into two fora of industrial relations research activities, that is, IIRA World Congress and the monthly journal of the Japan Institute of Labour (today JILPT), *Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi* (Japanese Journal of Labor Studies). The first forum is rather self-evident.

The IIRA (International Industrial Relations Association) was established in 1966 on the initiative of some leading scholars of industrial relations and ILO in order to stimulate research activities in industrial relations. The IIRA is the umbrella organization assembling national associations of industrial relations. The founding members included B. Roberts of London School of Economics, J-D. Reynaud of CNAM, France, I. Nakayama of Hitotsubashi University and Robert Cox of the ILO. Since 1967, a world conference called the "World Congress of the IIRA" has been held every three years with an increasing number of participants (mainly academics). The agenda of the world conference is fixed by an ad hoc organizing committee which chooses themes of discussion, sometimes called tracks. Once the themes of the conference are fixed, a call for paper submission is launched among affiliated national associations. The selection of the themes of the conference reveals the major concerns of industrial relations scholars of the time at the international level. We will chronologically review these themes as an indication of paradigms at the international level.

Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi (prior to 1990, *Nihon Rodo Kyokai Zasshi*) is a

professional journal published by the Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training (JILPT). It was created in 1959 by the (then) Japan Institute of Labour. This institute was established by the Ministry of Labour as a specialized research and information-clearing body in labour matters. It was a time when two rival labour confederations (Sohyo and Domei) had ideological oppositions, and political tensions and industrial conflicts were frequent, particularly in the public sector (conflicts on the right to strike for public corporations and public servants) and coal mining. At the beginning, the left-wing confederation Sohyo opposed the creation of this institute seeing it as a tool of the government. The ministry pledged to make it an objective research center for labour matters, seeking collaboration of top level, respected academics. Its first president was T. Maeda, former minister of education and a respected scholar. Then, later, the presidency was occupied by I. Nakayama, a most authoritative economist in the labour field. It gradually succeeded to gain a high reputation as an objective research organization. With the passage of time, the opposition of left-wing unions and scholars diminished. In its long history, this Institute could boast to get as special researchers such big names as T. Shirai, T. Hanami, H. Shimada, Y. Kuwahara, K. Koshiro and M. Osawa. By the mid-1990's, this institute established itself as an independent high-quality research center. Therefore, its main journal *Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi* was considered a good quality journal of labour studies. It was multi-disciplinary from its inception and published papers of specialists of different disciplines (labour economists, industrial relations scholars and labour lawyers), professionals as well as policy-makers. By the time IIRA was created, we could say that this journal had become a national forum for labour studies and policy discussions.

We will look into papers published (articles) after 1965 (no.101 and subsequent numbers) so as to see how the interests of labour scholars, as well as policy-makers, have shifted in recent years. Also of interest is to recognize that there is a certain difference between major topics at the international forum and those of the Japanese forum. This paper is organized in the follow-

Chronological Table of IIRA World Congresses

	First World Congress 1967, London (President: B. Roberts)	2nd World Congress 1970, Geneva (B. Roberts)	3rd World Congress 1973, London (B. Roberts)	4th World Congress 1976, Geneva (J. Dunlop)	5th World Congress 1979, Paris (J. D. Reynaud)
I	Bargaining and Conflict	Political Systems and Industrial Relations	Theoretical Framework for Prospective Study	A Review of Labour Problems in Selected Countries, 1920-1974	Workers' Participation
II	Organisational Response to Technological Changes	Industrial Relations and Industrial Change	Industrial Relations and Inflation	Manpower: Employment, Foreign Workers	Forms of Protest and of Settlement in Industrial disputes
III	Problem of Incomes Policy and Structure	Evaluation of Manpower Policies	The Structure of Power in Trade Union Movements	Industrial Relations and Social Policy in Industrialised Countries	The Changing Growth and their Effects on Industrial Relations
IV		Workers Participation in Management	The Multinational Corporation and Industrial Relations	Industrial Relations and Labour Markets in Developing Countries	The Crisis of the Seventies in Industrialised Countries: Evaluation Studies
V		The Role and Functions of Industrial Relations Centres	Labour Relations in the Public Sector	Methods of Work Organisation	
VI				Labour Studies	

	6th World Congress 1983, Tokyo (Mikio Sumiya)	7th World Congress 1986, Humberg (F. Furstenberg)	8th World Congress 1989, Brussels (R. Blanpain)	9th World Congress 1992 Sydney (J. Niland)	10th World Congress 1995, Washington, D.C. (T. Kochan)
I	Industrial Relations in Post Industrial Societies	Technological Change and Industrial Relations	Labour Flexibility and New Employment Patterns	The Role of the State in Industrial Relations	The Global Human Resource Challenge: Managing Diversity in International Settings
II	Collective Bargaining and Incomes Policies in a Stagflation Economy	Institutional Forms of Workers' Participation with Special Reference to FDR	Structural Change and Industrial Relations Strategies	Trade Unionism in the Future	Emerging Models of Worker Participation and Representation
III	Industrial and Political Structure	Work Trends in Working Time Arrangements	Aspirations and Expectations of a New Labour Force and Implications for Industrial Relations	Human Resource Management-Implications For Teaching, Theory, Research and Practice in Industrial Relations	The Challenge to Government Policy Promoting Competitive Advantage with Full Employment and High labour Standards
IV	Industrial Relations in the Unorganised Sector	Co-operation and Conflict in Public Service Labour Relations	Equity and Equal Treatment in Employment	Industrial Relations and Political Transformation	New Model of Negotiations, Dispute Settlement and Prior Problem Solving
V	Visibility of the Japanese Model of Industrial Relations	Labour Relations as a Strategic Factor in Development	Recent Trends in Industrial Relations Studies and Theory	The Macro/Micro Interface in Labour Market Policy and Practice	Industrial Relations, Economic Development and Democracy in the 21st Century
VI		Recent Trends in Industrial Relations			

	11th World Congress 1998, Bologna (T. Treu)	12th World Congress 2000, Tokyo (T. Hanami)	13th World congress 2003, Berlin (M. Weiss)	14th World Congress 2006, Lima (Aparicio Valdes)	15th World Congress 2009, Sydney (R. Lansbury)
I	Turning Growth into Jobs: Efficiency and Equity in Training Policies	Exploring Trends in Employment Relations and New Approaches to Work in the 21st Century	Enterprise Reorganiza- tion: Negotiated, Consultative or Unilat- eral?	Social Dialogue, Economic Freedom and Industrial Relations	Management, Work and Organisation
II	Reconciling Multilateral Interests: The Restructur- ing of Employment Relations	The Impact of Globalisa- tion on National and Regional Systems of Industrial Relations and Employment Relations	Changing Contours of the Employment Relations and New Model of Labour Relations	HRM and Labour Relations(?)	Voice and Representation
III	Medium-sized Business Unit	Changing Patterns of Employee and Union Participation: Toward New Systems of Indus- trial Relations?	Industrial Relations and Global Labour Standards	Productive Employment and Education	Work, Family and Community
IV	Squaring The Circle: Quality of Work and Family Life, Industrial relations in a Wider Social Context	Search for Flexibility, Fairness and Prosperity: Alternative Employment Policies in the 21st Century	Collective Actors in Industrial relations: What Future?	Policies of Social Protec- tion	Institutions, Processes and Outcomes
V		Asia in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportu- nities in Work and Labour	European Integration: Convergence or Diversity	Integration and Free Trade in the Americas: How much trade of quality of life?	New Forms of Work
VI					

ing way: in the first section, we review, by period, the themes of the IIRA world conferences and titles of short articles published by the *Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi*. Then, we briefly discuss continuity and paradigm shifts in the second section.

1- Themes of IIRA World Congresses and the *Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi*

1967-1975: First world conferences of the IIRA

We take up the period from 1967 to 1975 as one block. The newly born IIRA held 3 world conferences in Europe (London, 1967, Geneva, 1970 and London, 1973). As a whole, in this period, labour unions were very much active with a traditional emphasis on collective bargaining and job controls in most developed countries. After mid-1960, many developed countries were confronted with labour issues. Considered as the motherland of industrial relations studies, the USA was caught up in the Vietnam war and frequent economic recessions, but industrial relations scholars were actively researching traditional subjects of industrial relations, such as collective bargaining, industrial disputes, and conflict resolutions. Some new themes such as manpower analysis attracted the interests of young scholars. Manpower analysis was more or less an outcome of the development of human capital theory. The works of T. Schultz and G. Becker had a persistent influence on generations of labour economists and industrial relations scholars. Thus, educational attainments and skills combined with wage differentials (return to human capital investment) became a popular subject of research. Another new theme included the study of discrimination. The adoption of the Civil Right Act in 1964, which prohibited all forms of discrimination in employment, gave a strong impetus to this theme, particularly racial and sexual discrimination. Scholars trained in labour law were attracted by legal issues (equal opportunity issues) while the new generation of labour economists took advantage of the progress made in econometrics (wage or income differentials).

In Europe, this period saw a wave of social unrests, particularly in

France (1968) and Italy (1969). Similarly, the UK was caught by recessions and inflation, which successive governments of Labour and Conservative could not resolve. Some new subjects of research seemed to catch the attention of European scholars at this period. One of such themes were multinational companies which operated beyond national boundaries, the enlargement of EC was largely related to this issue.

The themes (tracks) of the three world conferences (1967-1973) covered major concerns of industrial relations scholars who were mainly drawn from Europe and North America. The themes selected concerned problems of industrial relations at different levels (macro/ micro, public sector), as well as the changing contexts (technological changes, inflation). We also remark on certain new themes: manpower policies, multinationals and work organization. However, most of the themes fell in the ambit of traditional industrial relations studies.

For the *Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi*, this period corresponds to numbers 101-200 (August 1967-December 1975). The journal is published monthly, in general with short academic articles, panel discussions on certain labour issues, overseas information and book reviews. As already mentioned, major contributors were distinguished academics, specialists of different areas and government officials responsible for policy formulation. By 1967, thanks to the collaboration of top scholars (I. Nakayama, K. Okochi, M. Sumiya, T. Shirai, M. Tsuda, etc.), the journal was known to be a non-partisan, respected public forum for labour policy issues. From August 1967 to December 1975, 339 short articles were published: one third concerned economic issues of labour economics and working conditions (110 articles), followed by labour-management including labour movement, (96), social security (40), labour law (36), and others. When we look at the articles concerned with labour management issues, it is remarkable that most of these covered the experiences of Western countries. Many Japan specialists such as R. Dore, S. Levine, and K. E. Thurley were regularly invited to contribute. In the category of industrial relations, many articles covered foreign development in industrial relations.

An example is the contribution of K. Thurley on the Development of British Industrial relations – Donovan report and after (November 1970, No.140). Another example is that of K. Koike on American industrial relations-internal promotions and seniority rules. Of course, there were a number of articles on Japanese industrial relations but they were often macro-level discussions (e.g., T. Nakamura on changes in industrial structure and industrial relations. May 1970, No 134). Few articles touched upon contemporary issues of labour movements.

It is probable that the editors judged that the empirical studies of Japanese industrial relations were too controversial to be published in this journal. In the category of working conditions, a number of articles revolved around wage and working time issues. Here, most articles covered Japanese cases. An example was H. Okamoto's working time in the construction industry – logic of 10 hours plus overtime a day (September 1971, No.150). It may well be that the issues of wage differentials according to the size of firms or age-wage profiles were seen as less problematic. Finally, many articles concerning labour law dealt with public sector issues. This is no surprise since the ratification of ILO convention No.87 was a hot issue in the late 1960's (ILO's fact-finding Dreyer Commission took place in 1966).

1976-1984

Three world conferences were held in this period (1976 in Geneva, 1979 in Paris and 1983 in Tokyo). The themes retained in these conferences showed a broadening of the scope away from the traditional field of industrial relations. For instance, issues of developing countries (1976), work organization (1976) and industrial relations in the unorganized sector (1983). At the same time, the deterioration of economic conditions attracted concerns of researchers (changing growth, crisis of the seventies, 1979).

The *Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi* continued to publish short articles on selected issues (January 1976 - May 1984). Among 243 articles published in this period, one third were devoted to the issues of labour-management rela-

tions and labour movement, followed by economic analysis and conditions of work (69), labour law (30) and social security (30). While there were many articles covering Western experiences in labour-management relations and labour movements, some empirical researches were carried out on Japanese industrial relations; we may cite for instance “Self-managed Group Activities in the Steel Industry” of M. Nitta (September 1978, No. 234) or “Scarcity of Good Employment Opportunity and Labor-Management Relations” of K. Koshiro (January 1982, No.274). In economic analysis, a generation of labour economists using econometric methods published in this journal (H. Shimada, T. Tachibanaki, and K. Muramatsu).

1984-1993

The IIRA held three world conferences in this period (Hamburg, 1986, Brussels, 1989 and Sydney, 1992). While most themes of the Hamburg conference were in line with the traditional issues of industrial relations, several new issues came to surface in the following conferences. In Brussels, labour flexibility was selected for the first time, echoing a growing preoccupation to international economic competitiveness. It is also remarkable that human resource management came to form a major issue in this international forum along with labour-management problems. Another new look was equal treatment and diversity. This underlined the fact that the issues of equal treatment or discrimination mainly based on sex became a major concern not only in North America but also in EU countries. We may note that human resource management occupied a larger place than before.

In the period from June 1984 to May 1993, there were only 150 articles published in the *Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi*. 36 articles dealt with labour-management relations and labour movements but the majority fell in the scope of economic analysis and working conditions (71 articles). Labour law specialists were relatively active with 36 articles. Out of 36 articles relative to labour-management and labour movements, one third dealt with topics of other Western countries. We may safely interpret it as a dwindling concern

of researchers and policy makers towards labour-management relations. This period corresponded with prosperous years for many Japanese large firms with regular wage increases. Enterprise unionism was probably triumphant with the disappearance of industrial conflict. The birth of a united national confederation Rengo should have given a new start to Japanese labour unions but this hope of union leaders was short lived. In 1991, the Japanese economy registered the burst of the bubble and the beginning of a long financial crisis.

1993-2002

The IIRA held three world conferences (Washington D.C., 1995, Bologna, 1998 and Tokyo, 2000). The Washington and Tokyo conferences emphasized global competition and flexibility as a major factor of changes, whereas the Bologna conference selected more traditional themes (training, restructuring). Also noticeable was the use of the terminology “employment relations” instead of “labour-management relations”. Many scholars of industrial relations felt that, in view of decreasing unionization rates in many countries, collective bargaining covered only a portion of the workforce, the majority of workers being regulated by individual employment contracts. As to new themes, quality of work and family life were taken up in the Bologna conference, underscoring the increasing importance of working women and work-life balance.

For our Japanese journal, this period corresponds to numbers 401-500. Editors’ policy seemed to have changed: instead of various short articles in an issue, each cover had its own theme with commissioned articles around it. Moreover, certain numbers published proceedings of international conference papers (e.g. Asian industrial relations conference). If we classify these themes according to former grouping, we obtain the following : economic analysis 23, working conditions and related matters 21, labour-management 9, labour law 7 and others 10. We note in particular that no issue was devoted to labour movement nor worker’s participation. Economic analysis typically covered such issues as employment problems of elder workers, women or middle-

management. Labour policies related to deregulation and flexibility were discussed in a number of articles falling into economic analysis (for instance, deregulation and labour policy) and labour law categories (law concerning termination of employment). Otherwise, many issues covered problems of changing labour markets (youth, older workers, female workers, part-time workers, and temporary agency workers). One example of these themes could be that of May 1998 “Change of Employment Structure and Worker Attitudes”.

2002-2010

In the last period we are surveying, the IIRA held three world conferences (Berlin, 2003, Lima, 2006 and Sydney, 2009). While the themes selected in the Berlin conference were more in line with traditional industrial relations studies, the two latest conferences went beyond those boundaries. We observe that social protection and free trade constituted major issues in the Lima conference. In the Sydney conference, for example, a theme “work, family and community” was adopted. Was it an isolated attempt to attract a wider pool of researchers or just recognition of a decreasing interest in collective bargaining and industrial relations? This is somehow disquieting in view of the fact that human resource management has become a major theme of industrial relations. This may suggest that many former or potential scholars of industrial relations would have left labour-management relations and more and more chosen the subject of human resource (training, work organization, or labour flexibility) or of family, which had been considered as a field of sociology.

The Japanese journal (numbers 501-600 April 2002 –July 2010) has continued its editing policy of gathering articles around a selected theme. Most of the issues selected fell into either working conditions (29) or economic analysis (28). Only 6 numbers covered issues related to labour-management relations.

It may well be a result of the editorial board policy, which purposefully

searched for some new audience (labour and sports or happiness in the workplace). A considerable number of the themes addressed the issue of unemployment and employment policies. This is not surprising, given the fact that the unemployment rate in Japan reached 5.4% in 2002. Youth unemployment also attracted much social concern in this period. One example of such preoccupation was number 533 of April 2004 “NEET- Youth Without Employment”. As to industrial relations, the overall impression is a clear departure from the traditional areas of labour-management research. Also remarkable is that, except for special issues such as EU labour law today, most themes covered topical issues in Japanese firms or society. These include “Change of recruitments” (October 2007, number 567) and “Long working time” (June 2008, number 575). In fact, Japanese economy has been struggling with a series of recessions and employment problems. However, the absence of any study on labour unions is surprising as Rengo was one of the main forces which brought the Democratic Party to power in September 2009.

II- Continuity of paradigms or paradigm shifts

The above overview was intended to see how the interests of industrial relations scholars have evolved in recent years through two public fora. Of course, the IIRA conference is not an impartial forum, the hosting IIRA president may push certain themes depending on his specialty field (industrial relations, labour law, or labour economist). But as a whole, the main themes (tracks) should reflect the interest of scholars of different countries so as to assemble many participants and to give impetus for future research activities.

The list of themes of the IIRA world conferences over 40 years shows both continuity and changes. Continuity is obvious. For instance, the 2009 conference chose “Voice and Representation” just like “Workers Participation in Management” in the 1970 Geneva conference. “Organizational Response to Technological Change” in 1967 is quite similar to “Enterprise Reorganization: Negotiated, Consultative or Unilateral?” of the 2003 conference. In fact, the

core of industrial relations has been –and still is– constituted by the study of labour unions and collective bargaining. Indeed, the activities and structure of labour unions may be approached from different angles so that each conference selects one or another issue such as union structures, bargaining power, industrial conflict, or political influence. Another continuity is the theme of economic and technological contexts surrounding industrial relations actors. Major change of context may have been inflation, economic crisis and globalization. In fact, though contexts or constraints have changed a great deal, the core of studies of industrial relations at the international level remains workers' participation, union structures, collective bargaining and political power balance between actors.

As to changes, we could roughly find four kinds: firstly, the weight given to human resource management has continuously increased in recent years. From the Sydney conference of 1992, almost all subsequent conferences had a theme on human resource. In the old days, industrial relations were mainly a study of labour unions and collective bargaining. Few scholars studied employers' organization and human resource management. B. Kaufman who wrote a comprehensive history of the IIRA stressed a divorce between the human relations school and the industrial relations school in the 1930's. In a way, the IIRA has made one big step towards HRM. This also underlines the fact that in most industrialized countries, the swing of pendulum has gone towards the management side.

Secondly, globalization has become a major keyword since about the Washington conference of 1995. In the pre-IIRA era, industrial relations were typically studied in a given national boundary but the growth of multinational firms and the creation of free trade zones such as EC or NAFTA made global competition a major theme.

Thirdly, the sphere of industrial relations has so enlarged that it now covers social protection, work and family. This may be a consequence of changes in the composition of the labour force. In most countries, women, elderly workers or migrant workers occupy a large proportion of the labour

force. It is no wonder that industrial relations scholars are increasingly interested in equal opportunity or work-life balance.

Finally, there is a shift from collective labour-management to individual employment relations. Today, in many countries, labour unions organize only a minor proportion of workers so that most of them are not covered by any collective agreement. This is why the name of IIRA has now been renamed to ILERA (International Labor and Employment Relations Association) so as to cover individual employment relations and individual conflicts. These are the major changes of focus of studies which may well be captured as paradigm shifts.

The evolution of major themes in the *Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi* is more difficult to delineate, due to the enormous number of articles and the change in editorial policies. However, there is a clear indication that the interests in the study of labour-management relations have waned a great deal in the past two or three decades.

Whereas in the 1960's and 1970's, one third of published articles fell into the field of labour-management relations, these have become a negligible proportion. The bulk of articles in the journal covered economic analysis of the Japanese economy and social problems. This is in tune with the IIRA forum. But the rapidity with which this shift of interest took place is not as great in the IIRA conferences. Dwindling union density and loss of ideological tensions between management and enterprise unions and between labour unions at different levels explain that few scholars undertake traditional subjects of studies in industrial relations; a result of which is that less and less of the younger generation of scholars are attracted to study industrial relations. This explains that young scholars tend to choose subjects of human resource management rather than of labour studies. Finally, when we take into account the continuity and paradigm shifts at IIRA world conferences, we may notice that in Japan the swing of pendulum is too rapid and one-sided. It seems to me that we have not exhausted the field of employment relations and industrial relations.

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