

**Taiwanese Laborers' Body Images –
The Correlations between Embodied Behaviours
and the Social Structures**

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❧ Abstract ❧

Today, Taiwan's society looks joyful and boisterous. However, many researches have revealed that since the 1990s are more and more Taiwanese people unhappy, unhealthy and unsatisfied with their life. If the people are unsatisfied with the current social values, why it could continue to exist and dominate the society constantly? In order to answer this question and to clarify the correlations between peoples' embodied behaviours, personal thoughts and the social structure in Taiwan, this paper has delved into the contradiction between blue and white-collar laborers' body images, embodied behaviors at work and their individual thoughts about the current working and living condition.

According to the literature reviews and the analysis of the narrative interviews, this paper has come to the following points:

1. The bodies and the daily behaviours of the dependent employees are shaped by the working condition. The bodies have been formed as a disciplined, diligent and overtired working tool. At work they are merely an object without consciousness.
2. The value and the function of laborers' bodies are determined by class belonging dogmatically. Confronting with this unfair but unchangeable circumstance, the underclass of employees feel powerless, lost and displeased. However, due to the feeling of powerlessness and in order to maintain the life, they are still accustomed to behaving obediently.
3. Who has reached social mobility and become middle or upper class, have reproduced the existing values and behaviour paradigm at the workplace. Who does or can not reach social mobility, also reproduce the same values and paradigms in his/her own life and even across generations. Hence, the individual and societal reproduction-cycles are built. For that matter, the dependent laborers' overtired bodies are a consequence of the social structure; meanwhile, they are also an indelible factor that leads the existing values to become inflexible social standards.

Keywords: Sociology of body; laborers' body images; working and living condition in Taiwan

1. Background and purpose of this study

Joyful, boisterous and prosperous. These cityscapes could be easily found in every metropolis in Taiwan today. However, many surveys have also revealed that many Taiwanese people are unhappy, unhealthy and even unsatisfied with their life style and the current living conditions.

According to the Philips Index by The Philips Center for Health and Well-being, more than 50% Taiwanese think themselves as mentally and physically unhealthy ^[1]. In this survey, 44% of those who are questioned suggest that their mental and physical health is getting worse, and 33% mentioned that it is impossible for them to rejuvenate. Moreover, the New Economics Foundation also found that Taiwan's Happy Planet Index, which is calculated based on experienced well-being, life expectancy and ecological footprint, falls behind 60 countries around the world, although the Taiwanese live longer than 78% of the questioned people averagely ^[2].

The statistics of the number of outpatients in Taiwan indicates the same conclusion. In accordance with the statistics by the Department of Health, R.O.C. (nowadays: Ministry of Health and Welfare), nearly 60% Taiwanese are exposed to enormous pressure in daily life ^[3~4] and about one-fifth population aged from 20 to 65 suffers in mental illness, psychosis or chronic pain syndrome ^[5].

Nevertheless, during the narrative interviews of my doctoral dissertation I have also found that the most people are unable or unwilling to change the current living condition by themselves, even though they are unsatisfied and unhappy. The autonomous reformation of society through one's own behaviours has been considered as an unrealizable idealism. What they do everyday is just to be obedient to the present social values and the existing behaviour paradigms. Why the Taiwanese people accept the present lifestyle and build a society, in which they live in that they are unsatisfied with? Why are the Taiwanese people convinced to retain the current social values, which are not accepted by them, and not change unsatisfactory standards?

2. Questions and methods

2.1 Questions

Different from the present surveys on happiness and living condition, the viewpoint of this study is not only based on economical and social aspects. Instead, this paper will clarify the above contradictions through laborers' "body

images”, which reflect the construction of the social structure, the behaviours and the mind(s) of an actor at the same time. The following questions will be discussed in this study:

1. What kinds of body images have the blue and white-collar laborers in Taiwan?
2. What kinds of stories occur behind these images? What kinds of lessons we could learn from these stories?
3. Could we reexamine the correlations between embodied behaviours and the social structure in the capitalistic society through laborers’ body images?

2.2 Methods (compendium)

2.2.1 Interviewees

		Intellectual workers	Manual workers	Sum
Gender	Female	6	9	15
	Male	7	9	16
Age	≤ 30	2	5	5
	31 – 40	8	2	11
	41 – 50	3	1	5
	51 – 60	0	7	7
	> 61	0	3	3
Years of working experience	≤ 5	2	2	4
	6 – 10	5	4	9
	11 – 15	4	1	5
	16 – 20	2	0	2
	21 – 30	0	3	3
	31 – 40	0	8	8
Education	Junior High School	0	9	9
	High School	0	8	8
	Bachelor	6	1	7
	Master	7	0	7
Working as administrative	Yes	3	3	6
	No	10	15	25
Daily working hours	9 – 10 hours	5	12	17
	11 – 12 hours	1	3	4
	Longer than 12 hours	8	3	11

Additional to the literature review, the main research method of this study is based on narrative interviews with blue and white-collar workers in Taiwan. In the summer 2013 I have carried out 13 interviews with white-collar workers, and with 18 blue-collar laborers in the spring 2014. The intellectual workers work in the fields of health care (one male incumbent medical specialist, one female former nurse and two male former clinical personnel), public service (one female civil servant, one primary school teacher and one male high school teacher), economy (one male department head, one female and one male private entrepreneurs and one male employee), scientific and cultural organizations (three female employees) and two male charity staffs. The manual workers are from the areas of service industry (one female department head, five female and two male staffs), manufacturing industry (one male manager, three female and four male employees) and security (one male department head and one male employee).

The interviewees include 15 females and 16 males. The average age of the group "intellectual workers (IW)" is 34.46 years old and younger than the group "manual workers (MW)" (44.89 years old). The youngest intellectual worker is 29 years old and the oldest is 42 years old. In the group MW is the youngest interviewee 19 years old, and the oldest 62 years old. Because many manual workers in Taiwan begin their professional life since the age at 18 and the interviewed manual worker are older than the intellectual workers, the average years of working experience of the group MW are 23.56 years, longer than that of the group IW, which are 9.85 years. The shortest and longest working experience of the both groups are 2 and 40 years (MW) as well as 5 and 19 years (IW).

2.2.2 Narrative interviews

All of the interviews have referred to the following topics:

1. Personal perception of body;
2. Working and living conditions;
3. Real behaviours in daily life.

Each topic included 3 to 5 themes and every theme involves 1 to 4 questions. The interviews lasted individually between 60 and 90 minutes with 15 to 20 questions. In order to avoid the mutual influence of the questions and the answers, the interviews have been accomplished based on three principles.

First of all, the questions were not asked in accordance with the sequence of the categories. The related categories and topics have not been addressed by each other. In this way, all interviewees could reply and express their thoughts and experiences faithfully, but not in compliance with the logic of the questions.

Secondly, the interviews were semi-structured and some questions have been added or ruled out based on the response contents. That means that the interviewees could express their feeling and thoughts pursuant to the causal structure of events and their expressions would not be interpreted out of context during the analysis.

Thirdly, not all of the questions referred directly to the main theme "body". Through these "indirect" questions the interviewees could express their opinions and assessment of their living and working conditions, the traditional ideologies and the current social circumstances. After the interviews I have compared, analyzed and interpreted all contents in a case or in different cases according to subjects and phenomena. By this means, the contradictions between body, mind and the social structure, if any, could be presented and interpreted realistically.

Table 2. The categories and the themes of the interview outline

[Resource: personal table]

Category	Theme	Sequence
Personal perception and concept of body	What does Body mean and how do you define it?	1
	How do you estimate the traditional values concerning body?	4
	What is your ideal work motivation and what does work mean?	7
	What is your ideal living condition?	9
Working conditions and status	Working conditions, working hours and annual leave etc.	2
	Real work motivation and work's meaning	6
	Job satisfaction	11
Real actions in daily life	Body conditions: health, well-being and stress etc.	8
	Living conditions: lifestyle, time distribution and rhythms etc.	3
	Life satisfaction	12
	Sense of belonging and thoughts of fairness	10
	How and to what extent influence the traditional values your real life?	5

3. Definition of “body”

From the biological viewpoint, a human body is merely an organismic flesh. But from the standpoint of the body sociology, a body plays many different social roles.

In the structuralism, Karl Marx (1818-1883) considered that working for satisfaction of basic needs is the fundamental of a human being. Thus, both bodily behaviour and body's condition are affected by economical system and working condition passively ^[6]. Likewise, the French sociologist Michel Foucault (1926-1984) also considered that the social system and the instructions from surroundings discipline, mold and constrain human's body incessantly ^[7~8]. Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) was also of the opinion that every person has his/her own social, cultural, economical and symbolic capitals and human's behaviours are always determined by the sort and the amount of capitals ^[9].

Far from it, in the act theory the body has active impact on the social structure. In Goffman's dramaturgical body theory, he compared the social structure to a “drama”. In this drama every person plays different roles with his/her body and all the joined people influence and affect each other through their bodily behaviours profoundly ^[10]. Similarly, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann claimed that people externalize their habits and knowledge everyday. What people externalize and behave will construct the objective reality and the social structure together. Also, what people produce in the society will lead themselves to internalize and socialize the existing reality again ^[11].

In the theory of structuration, the body is a passive material, but meanwhile, it also has its active influence on the society. In Giddens' thesis, the body is shaped by history and social structure. In addition, it also has its own practical consciousness and could build our society on initiative ^[12]. In the same way, the British sociologist Shilling regards body as the origin and the field of a society. Besides, it is also a media with which people can be actually internalized to the surrounding environment ^[12].

Briefly, the social structures and every person's body construct a collective cycle together. Both of them influence and mold each other jointly. The human body exists not only passively under the social structure. Moreover, it is also an active impact factor for the society. Through it every human being is capable to construct the social structure. In a word, a body's behaviours and perceptions are affected by the society. On the other side, the human also build the society through his/her body actively. The correlations between body and social structure are bilateral.

4. Taiwanese laborers' body images

Do Taiwanese laborers' bodies tally with the western theoretical assumptions? As the narrative interviews demonstrate, the body images, which the Taiwanese laborers present in their daily life and at the workplace, could be categorized into three different orientations:

1. The body is always there, but it has been neglected;
2. The body tend to be under surveillance and disciplined;
3. The body and the thoughts contradict each other.

4.1 The value and the significance of body are neglected

Undoubtedly, every person has her/his own body to be a human being. However, what does Body mean? What kind value it has? Which social role it plays under the social structure? Facing these questions, almost all of the interviewees (27 of 31) have the same reply: "Body is..., just a body!"

What does body mean? Your question is so strange! I've never thought about it. Well, body is....., body... [IW1 – private entrepreneur, male]

What is body? You scientists always think too complicated. Body is just a body. Can you live without a body? Definitely no! You have to eat, so you have to work. Can you do that without a body? Definitely no! [MW07 – dependent employee, male]

Because the body is always there, its values and its importance are regarded in normal time as a matter of course. The most laborers have simplified the meaning of their bodies as "a tool to satisfy the basic needs". Unless one can meet the basic needs, anything else besides of working is merely a fanciful illusion. For this reason, the significance of body is simplified as "labor only" at the workplace^[13].

"Labor only" does not only mean that the laborers' bodies are regarded as a "material". Meanwhile, it also means that it needs to work under strenuous working conditions obediently. The body is forced to work laboriously and spiritless. This is one of the main reasons why so many workers consider that their bodies are meaningless besides of working:

Burnout, excessive stress and abnormal working conditions let me feel that my work has only one purpose: making money. It seems that I've done a

lot everyday. But that doesn't bring me any self-esteem. [...] My body is very tired. But I have to keep on, because that's my job. [IW11 – dependent employee, female]

Load-bearing capacity is necessary. On the one hand, the body has to be loadable. On the other hand, the spirit needs to make the best of a bad job. It [the body] is a tool, a prop. [IW06 – medical specialist, male]

Every day I work so long and under huge stress... I knew it's unhealthy, so I've put a question mark on my life. But a good job is the prerequisite for a comfortable life. One should earn and save money at first. In order to achieve it, the body and the life quality should be laid aside. Something must be sacrificed, so that you can have a comfortable life one day. [IW10 – dependent employee, male]

Confronting with the unsatisfied working and living conditions, the body is utilized as a “working machine”. This machine is not allowed to cease working, or it would be defined as a worthless waste at work. With other words, the laborers’ bodies are regarded as a capital, with that the public economic growth can be sustained. Besides, the bodies are also regarded as a capital by their owners, with that the proletariats have opportunity to change their original class belonging. With the bodies, which can make it through the dreary working conditions for long time, the proletariats may reach social mobility one day. In this condition, the value of their bodies would be finally esteemed.

However, it does not mean that the people, who have become superior and have so-called “valued bodies” nowadays, will put themselves in others’ shoes and try to improve the prevalent dreary working conditions. All of the interviewed administrative class, self-employed and private entrepreneurs rationalize the abnormal working conditions, from which they have ever suffered, after success. They consider that one must endure all of the dreary conditions, if he/she wants to approve his/her value. What they rationalize and practice now, just tallies with the “food chain in the capitalist society”:

Before, I was also burnout. But I have made it through and taken great pains to come to this position. [...] One has to make effort, if he/she doesn't want to be exploited. [...] Who has no competence or doesn't work hard enough, has to endure stress and exploitation without a doubt. [...]

Yes, at that time I've complained about it. But injustice is very general. We have a capitalist society. The injustice is quite normal, except when we carry out communism. [...] The working class can earn as much money as a doctor or an engineer, if he/she is willing to have several different jobs at the same time. Who doesn't work hard, earns of course less than the others. [IW08 – private entrepreneur, female]

The exploitation is inevitable. Sure, the working conditions are unfair. But it's not employers' blame. The employees and employers cause this result jointly. The wealthy people can exploit the others. That is just a food chain! [MW01 – manager, male]

Who become categorized as the superior class can validate the value of his/her own body and reproduce the disliked instructions at work. Under the rationalized compulsions, the underclass of employees, who suffers under financial burdens and have only limited capitals, feel that they have only limited opportunity to change their living condition on initiative. From this standpoint, what they can do is just to accept the way they are expected to act. This is the main reason, why the laborers' bodies are in general neglected. Until their bodies are suffering from serious diseases, the underclass of employees would finally take notice of this condition:

Every day I have many works to do. The body is forced to adapt to the tedious work and the so-called "System of Job Responsibility (責任制)". [...] In the current society we have no choice. Facing the stress from others I can not care about my body condition or its needs. Whether I can take a break, that's depending on whether I have completed my tasks. [IW13 – dependent employee, male]

Even if I feel uncomfortable or sick, I have to force myself to keep on working. In Taiwan this is general. The work forces our bodies. I cannot change it until I am seriously ill. [MW14 – dependent employee, male]

Before, it [the body] was just a tool. Until I got sick, I finally noticed how important it is. Of course I knew it [One should take care of his/her body condition]. But in comparison with the work it [body condition] was not so important. Whether I could accomplish my tasks was much more important. That's why I ignored it [the body]. [MW04 – dependent employee, female]

The bodies of the dependent employees are not only focused on obedience. To be more precisely, because the underclass of employees always suffer under enormous pressure from the interpersonal relationships, their bodies are also disciplined and always live under others' judgments.

4.2 The body is disciplined and under “surveillance”

The concept “positive intersubjective relationships and correlations” – or in the simplest terms: “one for all, all for one” – is a crucial point to the classical Confucianism and the Taoism. However, the interviews of this study have revealed that this ideal concept is contorted today and it was defined as “a game with potency and ingratiation” in the network of relationships. Due to this contortion the behaviours must suit others' wishes in daily life and follow the instructions from the superior classes at work:

In our culture, success means earning a lot of money. That's what our family teaches us. You have to satisfy their expectation, so that you can get affirmation from them and other people. What I think and what I want is no matter! [...] It's our culture, our value. [MW18 – department head, male]

Under great pressure from the networks of relationships one cannot decide the rhythm or the direction of his/her life. The aim in life is not to develop one's own interests or talents, but to comply with the social values and the expectations of the higher classes. Who can obtain sense of achievement from works cannot perceive ontological security absolutely. Particularly for female laborers, who suffer from dual pressures from social and familial networks, are easily confronted with this dilemma. Because their bodies do not really belong to them:

The opinions of others are a kind of brainwashing! Now we don't listen to our thoughts anymore. The consciousness has long disappeared from our minds. It has been buried! That's why so many people are unhappy. [MW08 – dependent employee, female]

As a woman, my body doesn't really belong to me. Many relatives tell me: "It's too late for you to get married," or "You're too old to be pregnant". But why? This is my body! This is my life! It's none of their business. Isn't it? These kinds of comments always irritate me! But I have no idea how can I

react to these comments... [IW11 – dependent employee, female]

My work can give me a sense of achievement. But my family and relatives make me feel stress. They comment on my work, my income and my marital status very often. Because of these comments, I'm wondering whether my job is pointless. It's difficult to say whether I am satisfied or not. Because of these comments I am unhappy and dissatisfied. The sense of achievement is no more meaningful for me.
[IW12 – dependent employee, female]

The habitus, to satisfy others' expectations, also influences the behaviours at work negatively. More exactly said, this habitus is one of the major reasons why the present working conditions become abnormal. In order to accommodate themselves to others' judgments and to ingratiate themselves with others in the network of relationships, all of the interviewed laborers (were forced to) consider that long working hours is a kind of symbol, which means diligence. To them this symbol is essential and necessary for every body, which wants to prove that it is able to cope with enormous pressure at work:

Today, the most managers and the bosses evaluate their employees according to their working hours, but not according to their competence. If other colleagues are still in the office, no one dares to call it a day, although the tasks have been completed. The boss and colleagues think that you are diligent, if you work until 21 o'clock. [...] We are afraid of others' comments. That's why we often compromise with other people absurdly. We can not make decision by ourselves! [IW05 – dependent employee, female]

We Taiwanese always work very long and are often burnout. For us work is a kind of security, a guarantee for life. [...] We always think: "I can not stop working". For us, long working hours mean "diligent", "hard work" and "sense of responsibility"! [IW13 – dependent employee, male]

In order to obtain ontological security under the judgements of the relationships network, the laborers' bodies must behave identical with others. The abnormal working condition are therefore rationalized. Gradually, laborers' thoughts are also forced to be assimilated. To them this unreasonable but rationalized working condition needs to be accepted and to be embodied.

Besides of long working hours, the earnest but not attainable hope to short-term leave also shows how disciplined the laborers' bodies are. In this study, all of interviewees are looking forward to longer day-off. However, only 4 interviewees¹ can fulfill this wish. The other workers are forced to give their statutory vacation up. Facing this condition, all of them have a similar reaction: to accept it dumbly.

According to the Labor Standards Act, I had 7 days vacation every year. But the boss didn't allow such a long vacation. Because of the workload, the stress and the sense of responsibility, I didn't dare to take a vacation. I could only "borrow" a few days from my boss. But during my leave, my boss called me and asked me the status of my work very often. So it [a few days leave] was meaningless, because I couldn't really relax. But I couldn't complain, because he was my boss. And at that time I needed this job. [IW08 – private entrepreneur, female]²

Although the body is overloaded, it has to continue working. Otherwise it would mean that the body is incompetent or abnormal. In combination with the spirit of the capitalism, such as "efficiency", "pursuit of profit" and "System of Job Responsibility", laborers' bodies have neither passion nor motivation to change the existing abnormal conditions. Under the surveillance they just behave obediently and disciplined. With Foucault's words, the body is disciplined and constrained by social norms and values^[7]. It always exists in a modern "panopticon", which is constructed from the power of the dominant class and the knowledge of the capitalism^[8]. Because the body is rated as a product of the social structures and is always determined by the external factors, its behaviour rests no more on its thoughts. The contradictions between body and mind are therefore induced.

4.3 The embodied behaviours contradict and distort the thoughts

As mentioned, the most Taiwanese laborers have to work very hard, long time and fatigued every day. Does it mean that this way of working can bring out better quality, efficiency and capacity? Unfortunately, the answers to the

¹ Two school teachers, one civil servant and one private entrepreneur. All of them are (relatively) independent at work.

² This interviewee was a dependent employee before a decade. In this part she reviewed her working condition and vacation status.

questions concerning personal work motivation and meaning as well as personal feeling about bodies' passive status have indicated a negative result.

Every day I have to get up very early and work 13 to 14 hours. I feel very tired. My body is exhausted. Almost all colleagues in my department are facing the same problem. So we just fulfill what we have to do. We know the quality is very important for our tasks and we care about it. But because of the loading we cannot take it to heart. [IW09– dependent employee, male]

The passive status makes me feel lost. I have to complete so many tasks in a day. So what I do is just finish my works sloppy, or I cannot satisfy my boss' requests. The self-expectation and self-request are therefore overlooked. I complete everything, but not very seriously. [MW02 – dependent employee, female]

The reason why the employers force their employees to work harder and longer is to improve the capacity. Nevertheless, what the strict requirements and the irrational working condition result in is only negative emotional state and overtired body. Bad emotional state and overtired body always damage people's enthusiasm. Although the most workers consider working capacity, quality, conscientiousness and self-efficacy very seriously, under the unaffordable pressure they are incapable to put more enthusiasm into their works. Their bodies exert their utmost to obey the working conditions and the social standards, but their embodied behaviours are no longer based on what their owners think or believe. This situation affects not only private life or one's own working motivation. Actually it is spreading in the whole society and influences the atmosphere at the workplace negatively throughout:

The atmosphere at work is nowadays flavorless and lacks for sense of achievement. In such life many people feel powerless. [...] This feeling is similar to an infectious disease. By the time I also feel my working life is monotonous and very boring. But I cannot change anything. [IW05 – dependent employee, female]

The "System of Job Responsibility" means there is no specific working hours. You have to work even on the weekend and on public holidays. And in general these works are not counted in overtime work. Because of this regulation, I do not know what and how much I have to spend. [...]

Confronting with this circumstance, many workers lost their enthusiasm and live directionless. That's why so many workers work with huge stress, but our society doesn't make any progress. [IW11 – dependent employee, female]

In addition to the microscopic levels, private living condition and the atmosphere of individual workplace for example, negative emotional state and overtired body are also the causes of the selfish society and the rationalization of the distorted values. In above cases, the body is no more a media, with that its owner can construct or reform the social values actively. In some extreme cases, the noisome experiences of the last generation may even lead younger generation astray. The body is in these cases regarded as an “article of commerce”, which is sellable and buyable:

The most people beside me are working under great stress. But actually they don't know what does work mean. What does work mean, whether the company and the society can make progress or not, these are no longer important. Many people work and live pessimistically. What people care about are merely their own interests. They only care about whether they can ensure their survival. The concepts such as trust, empathy, mutual assistance and the development of society don't make any sense. [IW12 – dependent employee, female]

The people of the lower socioeconomic status lack for resource and assistance. Their opportunities are limited. The value judgements of many kids from this kind family are therefore awry. They believe since their childhood that money talks, because their parents instilled this concept into their minds. In school, a 12-year-old girl said to me: "Why should we learn and work so hard? It's much easier to make money in bed [means prostitution]!" She is so young, but this misvalue is already instilled in her mind! It's really hurts! [IW07 – teacher, female]

Comparing the answers to two different questions – the question concerning work motivation and meaning and the question about the influence of the traditional values, we will find that the contradiction between thoughts and embodied behaviours really exist:

These [traditional] concepts are good indeed, but they are unrealizable. I believe these concepts are

bearing in our minds. I've tried to practice these ideas in my life. But with today's working conditions it's very difficult. Almost impossible.
[MW09 – dependent employee, female]

I have tried my best to take care of my body according to the traditional concepts. But in real life, our body doesn't always belong to us. The working hours, the burden of work and work overtime..., because of these I cannot make decision for my life by myself. If I can do it casually, I'm definitely lucky! [IW10 – dependent employee, male]

The traditional ideologies are still deeply engraved on many interviewees' minds. Even so, the experiences of the interviewees demonstrate that there is always a huge gap between people's thoughts and the real world. As it ought to be, the most people are not dared to "waste time" to break the usual practices or to "take a risk" to suffer from the stigmas such as "freak" and "good-for-nothing" with their disciplined, industrious and obedient bodies. Facing the "reality", what people really think and believe is regarded as an unrealizable idealism. The embodied behaviours, which are disciplined by surroundings, contradict its mind. As time passes, the disciplined and obedient body also changes or even distorts its original thoughts. As a result, the already established social values are consolidated, even though the most people are dissatisfied with them.

5. Lessons behind laborers' body images

The interviews have revealed that nowadays the most laborers ignore the significance and the value of their bodies. The reason for this situation is obvious: under the judgments and the "surveillance" of the interpersonal relationships, the embodied behaviours have to suit others' expectations. Because the body does not behave according to its mind, the embodied behaviours and the thoughts of the laborers are opposed. With Robert Gugutzer's, a German sociologist, thesis, the Taiwanese laborers have their own bodies, but they "are" no longer their bodies^[14].

What we could learn from these body images? Why so many Taiwanese laborers behave obediently and cannot reform the current unsatisfactory circumstances, even though they are unhappy and dissatisfied with their life and work? Could we clarify the correlations between people's behaviours and the social structure by means of these lessons? Through the profound rethinking with the laborers' body images, I

would ascribe the causes of the above phenomenon to the following aspects:

1. The value of laborers' bodies is determined alone by their class belonging;
2. Every body reproduces the existing values unawares.

5.1 Unsatisfied, but still obediently. Why? – The value of laborers' bodies is determined alone by class belonging

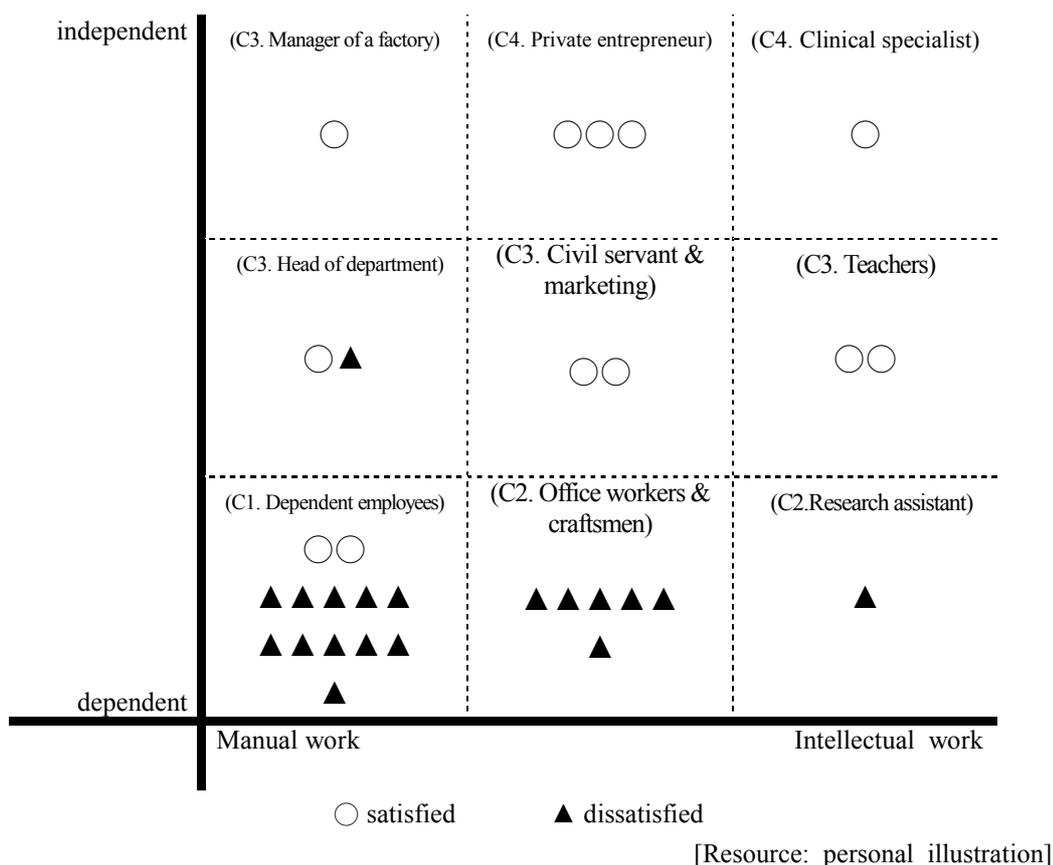


Fig. 1. Comparison between self-satisfaction, type of work and class belonging at work

The comparison between self-satisfaction, type of work and class belonging at workplace indicates that neither professional proficiency nor type of work affects laborers' self-satisfaction. The significant impact factor is class belonging at work. No matter manual or intellectual worker, who is independent at work – that means he/she can decide working hours, working condition and the rhythm of life by him/herself – can obtain feeling of satisfaction. On the contrary, no matter how energetic and persistent the dependent laborers work, their class belonging always restricts the value, the function and the achievement of their bodies. For this reason, they always feel lost and displeas³.

³ There are only three exceptional cases in this study. Two of them are underclass of employees in

From Maslow's hierarchy of needs [15~17] and body's value it could be thoroughly interpreted, why is the independence at work so important. According to the cited interviews contents the underclasses of employees (C-1 and C-2 in Table 3) lack for independence at work. In order to hold the job in hand, even many fundamental rights such as time off in lieu, appropriate working hours and workload as well as physical and psychical well-being etc., must be ignored⁴. To them the work means nothing more than a response to the physiological needs. Their bodies are utilized as a tool without self-consciousness in capitalistic labor market. With Hannah Arendt's words, they are merely animals, who have to work to maintain their life [18]. Either the sense of achievement or the sense of belonging is merely a mystery to them. Consequently, they feel impotent at work and perplexed in life.

As opposed to the underclass, all interviewees of the middle and the upper classes (C-3 and C-4) can not only fulfill physiological needs and safety. Based on the independence they can also take the value and the condition of their bodies as well as their psychological needs into account.

Because the workers of these both classes are generally recognized as the "winners of the social competition", their bodies are "valuable" and. Instead of "a working machine without consciousness", their bodies are regarded as a medium with which one can realize him/herself. That is to say that they "have" their own bodies, meanwhile, they "are" also their bodies. Their bodies are neither disciplined nor constrained at work and they can behave in line with their personality and will. What they think and what they perceive are respectable and can be actualized in real world. Based on this reason, they can feel the sense of achievement, self-esteem, actualization as well as positive interpersonal relationship⁵. This is exactly why the middle and the upper classes are significantly satisfied with their working and living conditions.

traditional industry. One interviewed section head in the service industry works as administrative and meanwhile she is also responsible for manual works.

⁴ Refer to the varied citations in Ch. 4.

⁵ About the experiences of the laborers, who are independent at work, please refer to the following citations:

A. "At work I can achieve what I want and realize my value. That's important to me. Due to these I have enthusiasm at work and I enjoy myself" [IW01 – private entrepreneur, male].

B. "[At work] I have self esteem. I can obtain positive response from my work and from other people, so I don't feel tired at all. Besides, I can meet many different people, I can accumulate experiences and knowledge. It's a kind of self-affirmation. I have the sense of achievement" [IW02 – school teacher, male].

C. "At the beginning of my working life, I worked to meet basic needs. But today, besides of material I can also satisfy my spiritual requirements. The interpersonal relations, self-achievement and so on can be fulfilled. Today it's different. I can feel confidence and respects" [IW03 – private entrepreneur, male].

Table 3. Huge gap between the classes

[Resource: personal table]

Classes	Independent at work	Body's meaning & function	Meeting the needs	Satisfaction
C-4. Private entrepreneurs	Yes	Unity of body and mind	Physiological needs Safety Love/belonging Esteem Self-actualization	Yes
C-3. Administrative workers	Yes	Unity of body and mind	Physiological needs Safety Love/belonging Esteem	Yes (1 exception)
Huge gap				
C-2. Underclass of the intellectual workers	No	Sellable capital; working tool (labor only)	Physiological needs	No
C-1. Dependent manual workers	No	Sellable capital; working tool (labor only)	Physiological needs	No (2 exceptions)

Different living conditions and the differentiation of the working conditions disclose that nowadays not only economic gap has been widened in Taiwan. Obviously, there is also a huge gap concerning the meaning, the value and the function of body between different classes. The meaning and the function of body are not determined by initiative, efforts, competence or ambition. But rather the congenital class belonging, which is not selectively, is the only one determining factor. No matter how the underclass struggles with the existing environment, it is still in vain and unchangeable. Confronting with this unfair circumstance the most Taiwanese dependent laborers are unhappy and dissatisfied with their life, but due to the powerlessness they are accustomed to behaving obediently. Still worse, in the passive status the helpless people will reproduce the disliked social values with their embodied behaviours unawares. The vicious circle between social structure and individual is therefore caused.

5.2 Embodied behaviours affect the society also actively – The vicious cycle built by reproduction

It seems that laborers' bodies and their behaviours are simply affected by the society. Indeed, people's behaviour paradigms, ethic values and value judgements are affected by social environmental factors profoundly. However, the narrative interviews demonstrate that the correlation between individual embodied behaviours and the social structure is bilateral. Every person's embodied behaviours, no matter to which class he/she belongs, are an indelible factor of the social construction.

As mentioned, the laborers – particularly for the underclass – suffer under enormous stress and they cannot obtain sense of achievement by working. In order to achieve a balance between frustrated feeling and obedient behaviours, the overtired and constrained body needs some “assured little joy (小確幸)” such as temporary joy produced by consumption, a cheap coffee after work and an affordable delicacy at night or on weekend, so as to relax.

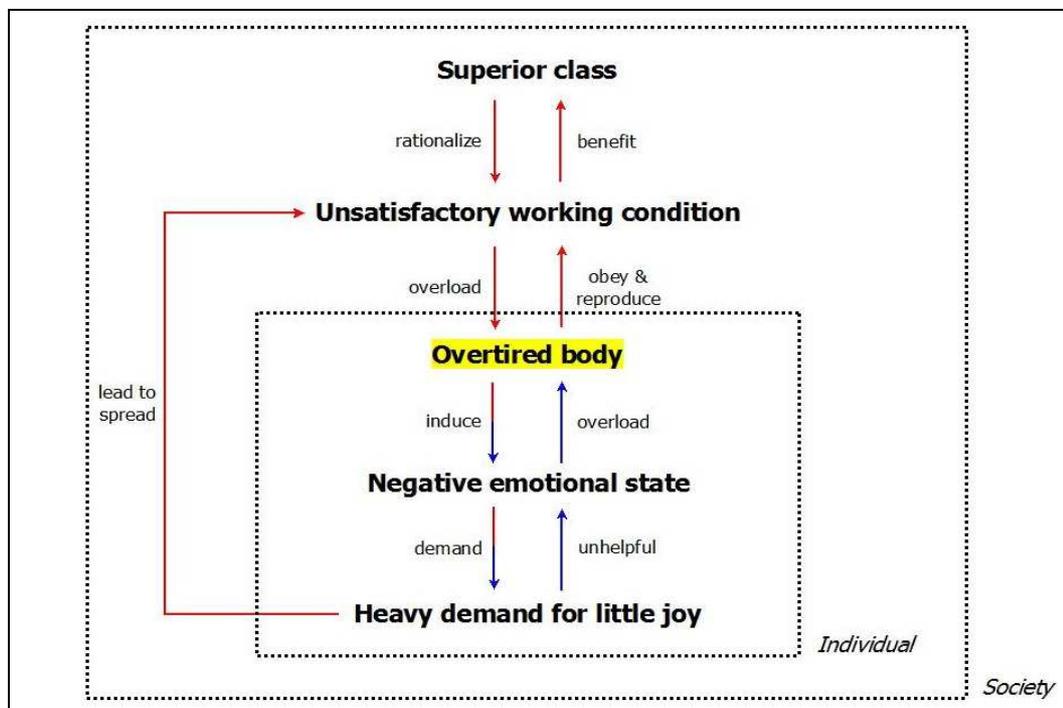
Since the 2000s, the term “assured little joy” is very popular in Taiwan. Through little and momentary joy one can truly relax him/herself for short time. However, the negative emotional state that accumulates day by day cannot be solved in this way. After all the main factors for well being⁶ of a person cannot be really created or achieved through the temporary pleasure:

⁶ For example successful social relationships, physical and mental health, engagement and satisfaction at work, personal freedom, positive internal attitude as well as appropriate life philosophy ^[19].

The pace of living in Taiwan is quite fast. At work you must hurry up. Even the entertainment emphasizes efficiency, too. That's why we need "little pleasure", because it doesn't "waste your time". You can not take a real break. And after the short pleasure you still feel lost. But at least little pleasure can make you feel relaxed temporarily.
 [IW13 – dependent employee, male]

After exhausting work I can only go home, eat dinner, watch TV for one or two hours and then go sleeping. Sometimes I go shopping. But anyway, it doesn't make me happy, because I've to repeat the same life on the next day. I feel..., I can not get away from my life. My working life is really monotonous. [MW11 – dependent employee, female]

Through little joy and pleasure, the overtired body cannot take a real break. The real happiness does not actually emerge. Moreover, after short-term pleasure the overtired body must keep on shouldering the negative emotional states and continue to be obedient to the unsatisfactory working conditions. Thus, the overtired body is overloaded with the stress repeatedly. The individual reproduction-cycle between overtired body and negative emotional state is built unawares (Blue arrows in Fig. 2).



[Resource: personal illustration]

Fig. 2. Vicious circle (reproductions) between individual body and the whole society

On the other side, the reproduction-cycle also lies between individual and external environment as well as between classes (Red arrows in fig. 2). It is namely a kind of societal reproduction, which leads the existing values being rationalized and ultimately becoming the social standards.

From the standpoint of neoclassical economics the increase in consumption and material needs can contribute to economic growth. Nonetheless, because the unfair and inappropriate working conditions have not been reformed, the heavy demand for little joy and pleasure is adverse for the labor market as well and will further give loose rein to the unsatisfactory working conditions.

Due to the fast pace of living, the supply of little joy and pleasure must be provided anytime, anywhere, fast and without interruption. In order to meet the needs, many service providers, countless convenient stores, super markets, night markets, snack-bars, coffee shops and pubs for example, are open for business until early morning or even round the clock. The daily working hours of the dependent laborers at service industry are therefore extended. Besides, on the purpose of cost reduction the management echelon (superior class at workplace) rationalizes many unfair working conditions. Many dependent employees are hired on low wage and without basic rights or welfare. More and more overtired body are under this circumstance reproduced. While this reproduction-cycle spreads in the whole society likes an infectious disease, the rationalization of the unsatisfactory working conditions is normalized. Still worse, under the judgements in the network of relationships it will be also reproduced across the generations⁷.

Briefly, the unsatisfactory working conditions, overtired bodies as well as negative emotional states build an inter-reproduction between society and individual jointly. In this reproduction-cycle dependent laborers' overtired bodies are a consequence of the capitalistic labor market. Meanwhile, they are also the foundation of the capitalistic society. Exactly based on overtired, disciplined and obedient body, the capitalistic values will be able to last continuously and dominate the whole society for a long time, despite the general dissatisfaction amongst people. As the claims of the act theory and the theory of structuration, a body's behaviours and perceptions are passive. On the other side, the embodied behaviours also represent the existing values. Through embodied

⁷ Refer to the cited interviews in Ch. 4.2 and 4.3.

behaviours the humans internalize themselves into the social structures and lead the existing values to become inflexible standards in society. In other words, nobody can get rid of the social structure. Every person assumes his/her own social responsibility for social phenomena and problems.

6. Conclusion

In addition to psychological, economic, industrial and health care aspects, the body images, which reflect how people perceive and behave, are also a practical viewpoint to dissect the life and work satisfaction of the laborers. If we delve into how do people think and what kind contradiction exist between their thoughts and behaviours, it can also present the correlations between social values, social structures, personal thoughts and embodied behaviours of the studied objects.

Based on the interview contents, the Taiwanese laborers' body images could be summarized as following aspects: disciplined, obedient, overtired and contradictory. Because body is always there, its value, significance and social role are neglected. To the underclass the body is merely a tool, which is affected and disciplined by the environmental factors. Due to its passive status it behaves not according to its mind, but in accordance with the existing standards or values as well as the judgments of other people, particular the instructions of the superior classes. Under other people's "surveillance", enormous stress and rationalized unfair working conditions, dependent laborers' bodies are overtired. Their emotional states are also affected and become negative.

The gap concerning the meaning, the value and the function of body between different classes are widened. And for the underclass of employees the only one determining factor is the congenital class belonging. Because it is unalterable, many people could only keep on being obedient and suffering from it. With the lapse of time they feel powerless, lost and displeased. However, it does not mean that their bodies always play a passive role. Actually they also play a crucial role in the individual and the societal reproduction-cycles. Through the obedient embodied behaviors they represent and reproduce the existing values in their daily life and across generations.

Accordingly, the correlation between people's embodied behaviours and the social structure is bilateral. Because all human beings are living under the social structure, everyone is affected by others; but meanwhile, everyone also constructs

the society by him/herself and is therefore responsible for the society. If the unfavorable and unsatisfactory working and living conditions need to be reformed, every person has to break the individual reproduction-cycle between overtired body, negative emotional state and obedient behaviours as well as the societal reproduction-cycle between individual, existing values and classes through his/her daily embodied behaviours firstly. Only when the reproduction-cycles change, it will finally induce different mindsets. The improved perspective, the new perception, the better working and living conditions will be in this case truly created.

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