

THE CONCEPT AND THESIS OF JAPANIZATION RE-VISITED

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ÖZET

Bu makale, Japonlaşma kavramı ve tezini, İngiliz endüstri ilişkileri ve sanayi sosyolojisi literatürüne dayalı ve eleştirel olarak değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Japon Modelinin yeni üretim ve örgüt model ve verimliliğin ve rekabet gücünün artırılması, işin insanileştirilmesi, çalışanların sadakatinin artırılması ve yüksek güvene dayalı çalışma ilişkileri için küresel bir formül oluşu iddiası Japonlaşma tezinin temel varsayımını oluşturmaktadır.

Bu makale, Japon modelinin ve bazı unsurlarının İngiltere'de üretim yapan Japon firmaları ve yerel firmalar tarafından benimsenmesi ve uygulanmasının radikal bir kırılma oluşturmadığını ve Japonlaşma tezinin, varsayımlarının aksine bu sürecin, işin yoğunlaştırılması ve gayr-ı insanileştirilmesi kadar işçi direnişine de neden olduğunu ileri sürerek bu iyimser varsayımlara karşı çıkmaktadır.

ABSTRACTS

This paper seeks to critically evaluate the concept and the thesis of Japanization by focusing mainly on the British literature in industrial relations and industrial sociology. The central assumptions of the Japanization thesis are that the Japanese model represents a new production and organizational paradigm and constitutes a worldwide

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formula for increased productivity, competitiveness, the humanisation of work, enhancing workers' commitment and high trust labour relations.

This paper challenges to these optimistic assumptions by arguing that the adaptation and emulation of the Japanese model and its selective elements do not correspond to a radical break. In contrast to the assumptions of the Japanisation thesis they have resulted in the intensification and de-humanization of work as well as resistance among the workforce.

Key Words: Fordizm, Taylorizm, Japanization, Japanese Model, humanization of work, workers resistance, transformation of work,

I. INTRODUCTION

The astonishing success of Japanese economic performance has attracted substantial attention so much so that it would not be wrong to label the final quarter of the 20th century as the Japanese decades. The most popular theme about the control and future of the global markets and manufacturing industry has been the Japanese challenge indisputably. The dynamic expansion of Japanese export flows and massive assault by Japanese companies in global markets have been the source of major anxiety and pressures in the Western Europe and North America.

In the Western world, enormous campaigns and scientific projects were launched to discover the secrets of Japanese superior performances. The policies to attract Japanese investment were also designed by the governments with the objective that it would have demonstration effects on their uncompetitive manufacturing industry alongside creating jobs (Thompson and McHugh, 1990). As a result, many firms, particularly the major western manufacturers, embarked on a major process of emulation and adaptation of the Japanese management methods and production techniques (the Japanese model) to enhance their competitiveness and improving their performances in the early 1980s.

The Japanese model and its swift diffusion to all over the world have been expensively studied both on empirical and theoretical basis. These studies have resulted in the generation of a myriad of concepts,

theories and approaches in various academic fields¹. In Britain, studies and debates about the process of adaptation and emulation of the Japanese model by the Japanese transplants and local firms have been often carried out under the concept of Japanization. The concept was widely used in the late 1980s and lost its fame in the 1990s. Nevertheless the allocation of an issue of an international industrial relations journal² to the debates about the concept and thesis of Japanization in 1998 and the accumulation of numerous case studies on the Japanese transplants and local emulators have led to a renewed interest in evaluating the merit of the concept of Japanization in Britain.

This paper has been prompted by such interest and intends to scrutinize the concept and thesis of Japanization critically by focusing mainly on the British literature in industrial relations and industrial sociology. Three different approaches to Japanization are critically examined. They are the Japanization Approach, the Human Resources Management Approach and the Control Approach. The central argument of the first two approaches is that the Japanese model represents a new production and organizational paradigm and is about to replace the existing Fordist-Taylorist production paradigm. It constitutes a worldwide formula for increased productivity, competitiveness, the humanisation of work, enhancing workers' commitment and high trust labour relations. However, the third approach is a critical one, which neither regards the Japanese model as superior to Fordism nor concedes a total conversion of the British manufacturing and industrial relations towards the Japanese model. Yet, it sees the personnel policies and production strategies of Japanese transplants and emulators as representing a new regime of control, subordination, and exploitation.

This paper challenges to these assumptions and seeks to demonstrate that the adaptation and emulation of the Japanese model and its selective elements do not represent a radical break, its diffusion tends to be of uneven, incremental and gradual nature and has resulted in the intensification and de-humanization of work as well as resistance among the workforce on the basis of evidence from the case study and

¹ See, for example, Dohse et al., 1985; Hoffman and Kaplinsky, 1988; Womack et al., 1990; Florida and Kenney, 1992; Wood, 1992.

²Employee Relations (1998) Special Issue: Post-Japanization in UK Manufacturing

survey carried out at the Japanese transplants and local emulators in the UK.

II. THE CONCEPT AND THESIS OF JAPANIZATION

The belief that the Japanese model represents a new and alternative production paradigm, which should be emulated by the Western industry as a global formula for increased productivity, competitiveness, the humanisation of work, enhancing workers' commitment and high trust labour relations led to a very rapid diffusion of the Japanese model in Britain. Both national and international firms operating in Britain launched an extensive process of emulation and adaptation of the Japanese model in the early 1980s. This process became the dominant topic in the academic debates and studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

A great deal of debate about the diffusion of the Japanese model has been conducted in relation to the concept and thesis of the Japanization in Britain. The concept of Japanization reflects mainly British academic discourse in assessing the extent, implications and related problems of the diffusions of the Japanese model in British manufacturing industry (Hasegawa, 2001: 165; Morgan et al. 2002: p. 1023).

The concept of Japanization was first used by Peter Turnbull in his article discussing the restructuring of production and industrial relation at Lucas Electric in the UK, in 1986 with the aim of comprehending the essence of radical transformation in manufacturing, human resources and industrial relations practices in the 1980s. Turnbull used this concept as image-cum-metaphor. But the use of concept has been subject to debates ever since (Akcroyd et al. 1988).

On the other hand, central to the Japanization thesis is that the Japanese model as a whole package of techniques and practices was developed in Japan and can now be adapted to other milieus. This view seems to be better than those conceptualizing the Japanese model from the Japanese experience to some extent. But, this view also depends on the use of an ideal type as a benchmark to evaluate the extent of adaptation and emulation of Japanese model. It considers the Japanese model as a coherent package and its adaptation mainly in quantitative and unidirectional manner (Elger and Smith, 1994: p. 37).

Many writers have elaborated the process of the Japanization of British industry and contributed to the thesis Japanization. There are a large number of different approaches seeks to explicate this process. Of these, the most comprehensive three approaches: Japanization, Human Resource and Control approaches will critically be analysed.

III. THE APPROACHES TO JAPANIZATION

A. JAPANIZATION APPROACH

This approach was developed by Oliver and Wilkinson, who are the best known proponents of the concept of Japanization, in their book "Japanization of British Industry" (1988, 1992). They examine the Japanese influence on British management and industrial relations practices and their consequences for workforce in their book. Oliver and Wilkinson claim that a very important transformation and restructuring process is taking place in British industry as many UK firms profess to be emulating the Japanese model (1992: p. 14).

They argue that the Japanese model is organized around three basic principles: the avoidance of excess, the elimination of waste and removal of unevenness. When implemented, these principles bring an advantage to Japanese firms over the western firms, albeit resulted in a drastically enhanced interdependencies between participants in the whole system and particularly make firms more vulnerable to disruptions by worker resistance and suppliers (1992: p. 279). This gives workers and suppliers more power and capacity to interrupt production whether by accident or by intention. To balance the workers' enhanced capacity for interruption or to eliminate the risks for interruption and defuse their dependency on workforce, management is forced to develop labour policies making workers reluctant to act against the interest of companies. A successful management of these enhanced dependencies demands a full range of supporting conditions as well as high level workers commitment. In relation to the diffusion of the Japanese model in the UK, Oliver and Wilkinson point out that a successful adoption process would necessitate very specific social circumstances, similar to the Japanese social structure. They use the concept of "functional equivalents" (a set of supporting condition) to mean the implementation of Japanese production methods by means of

local practices, which do not have to be exactly the same as in Japan (1992: pp. 14, 175).

Elaborating the pros and cons of the Japanese model, Oliver and Wilkinson acclaim that the high dependency relations imply a tougher control over the mechanical and human resources used in the production system. This means that an individual employee may occasionally become subject to some negative consequences of the high dependency relations. Japanese model results in work intensification and heightened control by company over their constituents agents such as their workers. Yet these methods provide benefits for both labour and capital (Oliver and Wilkinson, 1992: pp. 76-88). In other words, though accepting some of the appalling characters of the Japanese model, such as work intensification and increased managerial control, they believe that the benefits of the Japanese model compensate more than for the intensified workloads (Oliver and Wilkinson, 1992: pp. 307, 325-328, 340-341). The reward is the increased job security. In short, despite agreeing with the opponents on some negative consequences, they tend to promote the view that Japanese production methods are in essence much better and more progressive than the outdated Fordist practices (Oliver and Wilkinson, 1992: 342).

B. HUMAN RESOURCES APPROACH

This approach was developed by Wickens in his books "The Road to Nissan" (1987) and the Ascendant Organizations (1995). Wickens' approach is primarily based on his experience as the personnel manager in Nissan's factory in Sunderland, the UK. Although he argues that some of Japanese production practices are the products of Japanese history and culture, most of them are by no means unique and can be transferable with modification to a Western environment. For him, they are the "new universal best practices" that all firms have to emulate if they want to remain competitive. He claims that many companies, which are not foreign-owned nor in electronics or on green-field sites, have already successfully emulated them in the UK. Their experiences suggest that Japanese production methods can be successfully introduced in a various industries (Wickens, 1986: ss. 182-189).

The core assumption of this approach is the association of the Japanese model with human resources management (HRM) movement,

which attempts to alter the central principles of personnel management from the direct control of workforce to a quest for a high committed workforce. Wickens claims that many practises have been designed to facilitate the development of a highly committed workforce in the Japanese transplants (1987: s. 160). They have moved from a company culture based on by low trust relations and conflict to harmonized and high trust labour relations. This transformation has been centred on the obliteration of the rigid job classification, the introduction of the harmonised terms and conditions of employment, the development of a two-way communication channels and team working. Wickens formulates Nissan's production practices as a tripod, based on flexibility, quality consciousness and team working (1987: pp. 39-95). These elements are mutually interdependent for the smooth operation of the entire system. It may fail in the absence of any of these elements. Nissan's tripod is the critical source of success and competitiveness.

The Japanese transplants employ HRM strategies in managing their reliance on their workers by creating communality of interest. These high commitment strategies are intended to reconfigure the relations between workers and management and to replace the conflict by communal interest and cooperation. The control of individual workers is no longer based on close supervision and surveillance, but on commitment. The role and task of a supervisor as a team leader, the most important element in Nissan's tripod, has been also re-configured by returning many responsibilities back to them. For the successful implementation of the Japanese model, the principles of conventional western approach to personnel policies has to be substantially modified and personnel policies must be considered as one of the crucial components of business strategy. They should also support and be consistent with production policies. These are the most important changes that the British management and corporate values have to undergo. Unless this occurs, the process of adaptation and emulation will not be successful even in greenfield sites (Wickens, 1987: p182).

He suggests that the industry should take lessons from Nissan to solve its problem of quality and competitiveness (Wickens, 1987). He believes that the industry itself is responsible for its poor human relations. Thus, it must enrich the deskilled jobs and ameliorate workplace relations so as to make the manufacturing jobs more

attractive. Meaningful jobs at all levels involving high authority, responsibility and salaries must be created to attract high quality people at all levels.

Wickens seems to be convinced that right philosophy and methods can overcome cultural and social limits as long as management support and upheld a set of values. He regards the management and production methods implemented at Nissan as ideals, which are successfully used in a number of UK based companies such as IBM, Pilkington, Eaton, Nabisco, Whitbread, Continental, Formica, Eldridge Pope, Kimberly Clark, Hardy Spicer (Wickens, 1987: pp. 182-3). He believes that values and methods, suitable to the new industrial epoch are "widespread" across countries, industries, cultures and social relations. Yet, Japan has been the forerunner in setting some common trends in the world industry. Thus, Wickens' approach based on human resources theory and his right-wing ideology clearly gives a clue about his position as the director of personnel and information system at Nissan (Hasegawa, 2001:s.165). Wickens further develops his approach in his subsequent books: *The Ascendant Organizations* (1995) and *Energise Your Enterprise* (1999). In these books, he seeks to demonstrate how to integrate workers commitment and control of production process to strengthen the commercial organization in areas such as leadership, team working and innovation.

C. LABOUR CONTROL PERSPECTIVE

This approach was developed from a field work carried out at Nissan's plant in Sunderland, UK, by Garrahan and Stewart in their book *Nissan Enigma* (1992) in an attempt to criticize work and working conditions in Japanese transplants in the UK. A number of writers also contributed to these perspectives (Delbrige, Turnball and Wilkinson, 1992; Swell and Wilkinson, 1992). This is a critical approach and seeks to demonstrate that the social and technical aspects of production in Japanese transplants are designed to have a greater degree of control over the workforce rather than creating high levels of commitment. Many practices such as team working, job rotation and flexibility used in Japanese transplants and emulators are not the instruments of releasing the unused potentials of human resources by enhancing employee commitment, participation and involvement as suggested the HRM approach. On the contrary, they are used for the intensification of work

and enhanced management control (Delbridge, and Turnbull, 1992, p.28). As the Japanese production system is extremely vulnerable to workers resistance, worker consent must be secured not by eager collaboration of a "committed workforce" but rather by control and surveillance elements of production regime. Therefore, all aspects of Japanese production methods heighten the power and control of management over workforce.

Using this perspective, Stewart and Garrahan regard the imposition of Japanese working practices at Nissan as a reconstitution of social control of production (1992: p. 150). The Japanese production system used in Nissan manifests social and technological subordination at work in a manner, only supposedly and rhetorically transcends the social and political context of Fordism. Thus, the human resource management and production practices used by Japanese transplants represent a new regime of subordination and exploitation. Contrary to Wickens' explanation of Nissan tripod as quality, flexibility and teamwork, they interpret this tripod as "control, exploitation and surveillance" (1992: p. 153).

Thus the argument considering the Japanese productions methods as Post-Fordist and more progressive is rejected. Garrahan argues that the implementation of Japanese production methods at Nissan does not herald the demise of Fordism. But rather it represents a blend of these Fordist modes of subordination with alternative forms of technical and social organization (1992: p.153). This alternative type of work organization seeks to shift managerial power and control from the technical design of production. Ironically their presence in the technical structure of production is felt to a greater scale than Fordism. However what is important is that the way in which this subordination is secured by technology, yet workers' self-subordination or consent rather than Fordist technology and direct control and deskilling strategies.

The writers stress that the relations of domination and subordination are simply reconstituted in Nissan by a number of social and technical organizational process, in a way that they are more pernicious and disempowering than those related to Fordist production organization (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992: p.85). They argue that Nissan's new working practices individualizes the relationship between worker and production regime. They understand worker commitment,

quality, flexibility in social organization of work and avoidance of class culture as actually means to true Fordist ends rather than evidence of Post-Fordism. Thus, their assessment of Japanization is negative, not only at corporate but also at local and regional levels (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992: 23). Nevertheless, they also assume a conflict and resistance free workplace under the Japanese model (Palmer, 1996) and the diffusion of the Japanese model is even and universal.

IV. THE SPECTRUM OF JAPANIZATION

The concept Japanization is used to denote the adaptation and emulation of various elements of the Japanese model. Some writers argue that the concept of Japanization should be treated with caution because it has been used as a general term, under which mixture and variety of developments have been covered. Procter and Ackroyd maintain that the concept of Japanization is based on an idealized Japanese model, which may not only offer a distorted view of reality but conceal what is really happening in the British manufacturing industry (1998: pp. 237-247). Regarding the Japanese model, Thurley also believe that there are significant mismatches between the rhetoric and the realities of institutional practice and human behaviour, where these decisions are taken for largely pragmatic reasons (1994: p. 2). What is more is that the concept of Japanization acquires different meanings and used to account for a different process in the hands of different writers. These make the concept of Japanization problematic and chaotic.

Ackroyd et al. proposed a typology of Japanization and scrutinize the evidence on how the Japanese model fits the current British economic structure and to what extent this model and its elements and features have been emulated by British industry in the late 1980s (1988: p. 15). In line with the different forms of adaptations and emulations of the Japanese model, they discern three different types of Japanization, namely, direct, mediated and permeated Japanization. As management has introduced the elements of the Japanese model on a selective basis with different purposes, each type has completely different consequences for industry and economy as well as industrial relations and its actors. Procter and Ackroyd argue that this distinction, its original purpose and general conclusion still valid today (1998: pp. 237-247).

A. DIRECT JAPANIZATION

This refers to the penetration of the British economy and industry by Japanese MNCs. The establishment of production facilities of Japanese transplants via Japanese direct investment or joint ventures with domestic firms may have a demonstration effect and profoundly influence the local employment and industrial relations practices and organizational structure in Britain (Ackroyd et al. 1988: p. 15). The domestic firms may also be influenced indirectly when they enter relations with Japanese transplants.

This type of Japanization started in manufacturing sector with the installation of the Nissan Plant in Sunderland, Newcastle in the mid 1980s. It was expected to increase and expand itself into the financial markets. The first demonstration effect of the Japanese model occurred at greenfield sites, or sites without previous industrial production histories, where Japanese managers of these new firms pioneered the first 'no-strike' agreements in Britain³ (Ackroyd et al. 1988: pp. 11-23). These developments have been very significant in British industrial history because they represented a break from some of the entrenched industrial traditions and 'right-to-strike'. The demonstration effect of Japanese transplants and their emulation by domestic firms in the UK has encouraged industry-wide changes in the functions and images of many unions. As a result, union legitimacy and power were undermined while those of management were reinforced in the workplace.

Despite profound impacts and significance, the direct involvement of Japanese firms in British economy has been very limited and confined largely to manufacturing (vehicle and consumer electronics) sector in retrospect (Morris, 1988: p.34). By 1989, 57 Japanese transplants were established which accounted for only 2 percent of manufacturing investment in the UK and 18,000 jobs were created (Hauge, 1989). In the 1990s the amount of direct investment by Japanese was still low. The Japanese companies employed only 55,000 people which constitute 1.3 per cent the total employment in manufacturing. This workforce created about 1.6 per cent of total value added from manufacturing (Halsam and

³ Toshiba was the first Japanese company to secure a no-strike deal. Following this a large number of American and British companies operating in Britain concluded similar agreements.

Williams, 1996). In terms of employment and value added, German, French and Dutch firms each has produced similar results. According to more recent studies, these figures have not changed much (Morgen et al. 2002).

B. MEDIATED JAPANIZATION I

It refers to the initiatives by British firms to emulate the Japanese model. Although, this type of Japanization is the most widespread, it has less direct impact (Ackroyd et al., 1988; p. 17). This is because such attempts and their outcomes are likely to be mediated by the direction and constraints of British management. It is argued that the British management has generally adopted the Japanese practices either as a matter of best practices or as a matter of legitimising device for managerially imposed changes in entrenched working practices. Ackroyd et al. report that in the UK, some companies, which realized the necessity to modify production and industrial relations practices to improve their competitiveness, endeavoured to emulate some of the Japanese production methods without making major alteration in their existing production systems with the aim of reducing conflict and interruption to a minimum level (1988: p. 18). However, some others preferred inaugurating selective elements such as quality circles or flexible working practices. Others have opted for more comprehensive changes encompassing both employment and working practices. The changes, took place at Jaguar, are usually cited for this form of Japanization. The major restructuring taking place at British Leyland is also used to point out the same process (Marsden et al. 1985). Nevertheless, to what extent the changes and their success can be attributed to the Japanization is open to question.

C. MEDIATED JAPANIZATION II

The second type of mediated Japanization is based on the ideological use of the concept of Japanization to legitimize the imposed changes in working practices by management. These changes have been often seen as necessary or desirable to maintain the long term objectives of a company. However, these attempts can be better understood in relation to the trade union and labour policies of the Thatcher government. The Thatcher government sought to curb the so-called abuse of union power and inculcate a "new realism" into the workplace

so as to re-assert managerial prerogatives, i.e. the right to manage. Management sought to introduce the elements of the Japanese model either on a selective basis or a collection of individual techniques. Analysis of the restructuring attempts demonstrates the widespread adaptation and use of the JIT system and Quality Circles, Team Working for re-organization of production and employment relations (Taliby and Turnball, 1988; Graham, 1988). There are also attempts seeking to achieve the fundamental changes in the attitude of the workforce and creating a positive commitment and involvement (Ackroyd, et al. 1988: p. 19). It must be pointed out that the real aims behind such attempts were not to create a new form of work commitment but to reduce inventories and achieve "right first time production". The exploit of such changes as a means of legitimising managerial authority is clear.

D. PERMEATED (FULL) JAPANIZATION

The term of Permeated (Full) Japanization is used for accounting for the process of emulation of Japanese economic structure and practices by British industry. This form of Japanization indicates the importance of cultural and structural elements in the process of adoption. In one of the early studies on the Japanese model, "The British Factory and Japanese Factory", Dore points out the possibility of "reverse convergence" and plainly expresses this view as the reproduction of Japanese economic structure in Britain. Although this view was severely criticised on the ground that it places Britain below the zenith of evolutionary system, it has recently been taken up and reformulated by Ackroyd et al, with reference to cultural factors shaping the Japanese management model (1988: p.20). They believe that the post-war Japanese economic success can only be partially explained via cultural factors. Japanese management approach is an answer to a series of unfavourable circumstances facing industry (demographic, dependence on raw material and energy resources imports) and is based on the comp^once to modernize via selective absorption and adaptation of technology rather than conscious development of a universally applicable management model.

According to Ackroyd et al, no trend exist towards the convergence of "the economic system, corporate strategies and employment practices into anything like the Japanization thesis would imply and towards the reorganization of financial and industrial capitals

into a new structure of alliance in Britain (1998: p. 20). Therefore, the evidence, suggesting that permeated Japanization is occurring to any extent is very limited. A major increase in the other forms of Japanization would pressurise the economic system and structure of Britain and trigger off the drive for permeated Japanization to thrive. Nevertheless, the first two types of Japanization are very low, the level of permeated Japanization will likely to remain low in the UK. In a word, a "reverse convergence is a remote possibility but certainly not a probability"(Procter and Ackroyd, 1998;p.239).

V. CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE JAPONIZATION THESIS

The concept and thesis of Japanization has been severely criticised both on theoretical and empirical basis on the grounds that not only it mis-comprehends, but also inadequately reflects the nature of the transformation in industrial relations and manufacturing industry in Britain.

A. THEORETICAL CRITICISMS

To begin with the theoretical criticisms, Dickens and Savage consider the concept of Japanization as a bad abstraction, a chaotic conception and misnomer (1988: p. 61). The concept implies specific kinds of industrial practices and relations in Japan. However, these are associated with particular industrial sectors and with particular kinds of MNC capital. Therefore the concept of Japanization is a rather unhelpful and bad abstraction.

Dohse, et al. stress that the Japanese model is not a universal model but an invention of Toyota (1985: p. 34-35). They address directly to the implications of the Japanese model by using the label Toyotism and refuse the idea of sweeping changes and radical breaks in work organization and labour relations by re-evaluating the novelty of these innovations in Toyota. Thus they simply argue that Toyota's production methods, in fact, reinforce rather than supplanting the principles of Fordism and mass production by offering new methods of rationalizing labour process and intensifying work. They also dispute the central argument of Japanization thesis by indicating the links between the Japanese production methods and economic, political and social circumstances as well as institutional framework of employment

relations in Japan, where they are rooted, with specific reference to the development of Toyota. Although advanced in the mid 1980s, their central argument is still strong and have some valid implication for the diffusion of and resistance to the Japanese model in West where different forms of trade unionism and traditions of workplace bargaining prevail.

Wood also uses the label of Toyotism for indicating the company specific character of the Japanese model (1992: pp. 567-600). He criticises the core argument of the Japanization thesis, which sees the Japanese model as a whole package and a universally applicable practice. He distinguishes between the transfer of specific elements of the Japanese model and the diffusion of wider institutional arrangements. He defines the essence of Toyotism as JIT (Just-in-Time) and claims that the adaptation of such methods not only has been quite selective and limited outside Japan, but also very uneven in Japan. The concept of Toyotism better elucidates the company specificity and unevenness of development of the Japanese model among Japanese corporations both within and beyond manufacturing industry. It also allows the aversion of any assumption of a universal and homogenous Japanese model or "a generalized contrast between Japanese and non-Japanese firms" (1992. pp.582-585). He believes that management goals and priorities may also differ particularly when being aware of the fact that there is no perfect production system and all versions still have their own contradictions and conflicts. Woods' analysis focuses on the various aspects of the Japanese model and distinguishes the contemporary transformation in employment practices and inter-firm relationship from the innovation in labour process.

The concept of Japanization views the Japanese management techniques in their British forms as an answer to the relentless problems facing the British industry. However, there has been a growing doubt about the Japanization thesis and the effectiveness of the Japanese model. It is argued that not only the concept of Japanization is misplaced but also the criteria by which the development of Japanization is assessed are themselves defective (Stewart, 1996). Thus this has created significant suspicion regarding the rational use of this approach in an effort to comprehend Japanese foreign direct investment in Britain (Stewart, 1998: p. 215). This view is also supported by Procter and

Ackroyd, who indicate that the Japanization thesis misunderstood the arguments about the typology of Japanization, put forward by Ackroyd et al (1988) who intended not to put down the basis for the measurement of the different forms of Japanization, but rather draw a critical comment about the likelihood of any kind of Japanization occurring.

Procter and Ackroyd are of the opinion that the concept of Japanization and the preoccupation with the small number of Japanese transplants have distorted our understanding of the reality in British manufacturing (1998: pp.213-223). They point out that over-emphasis on the Japanese production methods has had two important and connected results for the British manufacturing industry. Firstly, the organization and management of Japanese transplants have been the focus of attention for some time due to the Japanization debate. Because of this, the Japanese transplants have not only become a very important manufacturing model to study for researchers, but also the most established model for the organization of manufacturing industry.

Secondly, putting the Japanese model at the centre of the analysis of industrial restructuring has also resulted in a misinterpretation of the general pattern of transformation of work organization and industrial relations in the UK (Procter and Ackroyd; 1998: p.215). Hence, the identification and assessment of what is actually happening in British manufacturing industry and organizations have been completely neglected. The present pattern of manufacturing industry is supposed to be some inappropriate estimation to "the high-surveillance regime", rather than being something distinctive on its own right. The debate of Japanization has promoted the view that the Japanese model will be the dominant pattern of manufacturing system and work organization replacing the Fordist-Taylorist system in the West. This view inevitable has overlooked the fact that the British industry has not only been preserved, but also "developed its own unique qualities". In areas where the British firms are uncompetitive they have withdrawn rather than emulating the Japanese model as a package and in areas where they are competitive a new form of flexible firm has flourished.

Graham points out the ideological use of the Japanese model in the process of industrial restructuring (1988: pp. 68-74). He argues that when firms emulate the Japanese model they in effect altered it by either modifying or discarding some of its aspects. Hence under such

conditions the extent to which the Japanese model can actually be considered as Japanese is open to question. If the model is not the same as the one used in Japan it is meaningless constantly describing it as Japanese. He comes to conclusion that the implementation of Japanese techniques in most cases in the West is too superficial to argue to stand for a new production paradigm (1988: p. 73). Thus he claims that the Japanese model is a myth. This myth allowed the process of restructuring in work organization and industrial relations to be carried out as imperative to meet the Japanese competition. Trade unions' approval of the need for alterations in work organization and industrial relations practices illustrates the power of this myth (1988: p. 74).

B. EMPIRICAL CRITICISMS

1. Japanization as a Whole Package

The proponents of Japanization thesis assume that the transplants and emulators implement the Japanese model as a whole package in the UK. Therefore, a full transformation of the British industry is well underway. For them, an even and a single pattern of transformation have taken place in both transplants and emulators across national and sectoral boundaries. However, the research carried out on the Japanese transplants and emulators demonstrates that there is no single pattern of adoption, but each sector and each firm has its own distinctive pattern of adoptions or emulations. In most of the case studies, it is reported that a selective and partial implementation of technical aspects of the Japanese model have taken place in the UK with transplants obviously doing better than the emulator regarding the extent and success of implementation (Delbridge, 1998: 203).

Taylor et al.'s comparative research on a Japanese transplant producing consumer electronics located in the UK and an emulator, a subsidiary of the British Electricals, illustrate that even the Japanese transplants opt for a selective adaptation of the elements of the Japanese model (1994: pp.196-225). They report that some of the central elements of the Japanese model such as JIT but also new forms of flexibility are not implemented in the Japanese electronics transplant. Simultaneously various methods, from which just a few were associated with the Japanese model were used for workforce cooperation. That is, many traditional forms of work practices were extensively used. In contrast,

the British Electricals, considered as the prime example of Japanization by the proponent of the Japanization thesis seems, to be very different than the Japanese electronics transplants. Many aspects of Japanese production methods have been carefully introduced at this plant. However, according to writers, management objective was not to create a basis for comprehensive introduction of the other practices such as JIT and TQC but rather to exploit this as an ideological justification for changes at the plant.

Elger and Smith's research on the evolution of employment practices and labour problems in four Japanese transplants in Telford, challenges further to the assumptions of Japanization thesis (1998: pp. 185-207). The writers report that none-of the four case-study firms implemented a full and consistent package of the Japanese model and its elements identified by the Japanization thesis. However each firm implemented selective element of Japanese production techniques such as quality management, quality circles and some elements of internal application of JIT, which demanded a high level of worker commitment for effective operations (1998: p. 193).

Delbridge also points out the existence of extensive mismatches between the case plants and the ideal Japanese model in terms of the social aspect and the central elements of the Japanese model (1998: 202). Some of the essential elements of the employment relationship reported in Japan are totally missing in both transplants and emulators. The life time employment, seniority-based pay and promotion are not implemented at all. Workers are threatened by management with dismissals if they fail to live up to company expectations at some transplants. In many cases, no enterprise union exists to perform the role of "supporting conditions".

Dedoussis and Littler indicate the extensive differences between the actual practices of the Japanese transplants and the practises that Japanese firms implement at home (1994: pp. 175-195). Indicating the mismatches between the Japanese model and its partial implementation by the Japanese transplants, They label the latter as peripheral Japanese model (1994: P.176). The differences are attributed to the cost minimization efforts on the part of the Japanese parent firms. According to Dedoussis and Littler, the Japanese transplants tend to be highly sophisticated capital intensive plant in car industry while they tend to be

subsidiary or subcontractor plants of large Japanese MNCs and manufacture simple products and perform somewhat simple assembly operations in other sectors including the automotive supplier industry (1994: p. 179). The supplier and subcontractor transplants in the automotive supplier industry and transplants in other industries including the electronics industry tend to practice the peripheral Japanese model in which some core elements of the Japanese model such as life-long employment and seniority based payment system are missing and the participation of the local workers in decision making is negligible. The central characteristic of these plants is the use of low-cost practices. In such circumstances, training and the other high costs of practices of the Japanese model are absolutely abandoned and Fordist-Taylorist style work organization and management practices prevail instead (Dedoussis and Littler, 1994. pp. 177-178).

Those authors, noticing the dissimilarities between the ideal Japanese model and its implementation to non-Japanese milieu, consider the transplants and emulators as hybrid organizations which have not been envisaged by the Japanization thesis. For example, Thomson and Rehder (1995) describe the Japanese transplants as "new hybrid manufacturing organizations". These hybrid organizations blend the elements of Fordism and the Japanese model with different national and European innovations. In various ways, the Japanese model mixes the conventional Fordist model, which does not lead to the dominant Japanese model but many creative and continuously evolving various hybrid spin-offs. Consequently, they regard the NMUK as a hybrid-mix of manufacturing and management practices which constitutes an exclusive English blend of Fordist and Japanese system (Thomson and Rehder, 1995: p. 61). They also point out that the new Japanese-Euro hybrids while setting standards, the quality of working life shows no sign of improvements.

From the case study reports presented above, it can easily be inferred that a wide range of transfer patterns of the Japanese model exist both national and industry levels, since each industry and each firm within an industry tend to opt for a totally different forms and patterns of adoption and emulation of the selective elements of the Japanese model. Firms select ideological and practical elements depending on such factors as nature of labour, production technology,

the patterns of competition and labour markets (Elger and Smith, 1994: p.98). Consequently, it can be argued that the wholesale attempts by British companies to replicate Japanese production practices are not well considered.

2. A New Pattern of Labour Relations and Work Organization

Another argument of the Japanization thesis is that the diffusion of the Japanese model throughout British industry has given rise to the development of new labour relations, since the relations between management and labour have been extensively reshaped by the delegation of managerial authority to shopfloor, which increased worker control. However, the evidence from the empiric researches is at odd with the assumptions Japanization approaches (Edwards, 1992). The experience of British firms illustrates that Japanese transplant and emulators have not succeeded in generating an ambience of co-operation between labour and management. Some writers claim that workers have been rarely authorized to make even the most trivial decision on their own in Japanese transplants. It is even argued that kaizen enables management to tighten its grip on the process of decision making (Graham, 1994: p. 148). Moreover, some companies sought to employ a consensus decision making to secure managerial control over the results. Yet, under asymmetrical relationship between worker and management, it was almost impossible to reach a consensus involving more token input from workers.

Broad's (1994) research on the functioning of company council at a Japanese electronics transplant also demonstrates the failure of the creation of a "consensus culture". Broad argues that management exploited the council as a channel for passing information down to the shopfloor rather than as a forum for jointly discussing any controversial issue. Thus, workers ask for the recognition of a union to represent their interests.

Grant's research on two Japanese electronics transplants reached a similar conclusion (1994: 1-3). The companies adopted the new industrial relations practices (single union deal and no strike agreement, company advisory body, single status and labour flexibility) were unsuccessful in generating a high-trust labour relation settings. Due to management's failure to come to terms with the essence and aspire of

co-operation and partnership, the new patterns of industrial and employment relations have remained antagonistic. These case studies demonstrate that Japanese model has not led to a high commitment workforce and it is not unproblematic.

3. Changing Nature of Work

The proponents of the Japanization thesis argue that the implementation of Japanese practices has transformed the labour process by changing the nature of Fordist-Taylorist work. However, many writers drawn on the case studies' results report that the nature of the moving assembly line work has not changed to any significant extent in most of the Japanese transplants and the local emulators. It is apparent that the workers still have to execute the endlessly repetitive and limited cycle of standardized task on the assembly line, similar to the one described by Beynon (1973) in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact the situation at workplace is worse than before because the workers are now more closely supervised and are held individually responsible for their performance in a more repressive way than before the introduction of new technology and new practices. In some cases, they are not even allowed participate in QC and other innovative practices. This evidence seems to validate once again "the super exploitation" thesis, advanced by Dohse et al. (1985).

Delbridge's research results on the Japanese Electronics transplant and the British manufacturing firms do not indicate any shift away from the Fordist-Taylorist production regime but rather represent an extension of the principles of this regime via more systematic standardization of production jobs in a milieu featured by enhanced managerial hegemony and control (1998: p. 204). He claims that no evidence exists in the Nippon CTV case to buttress the recent view that the Japanese transplants constitute the best example of the adoption of the Japanese model which upholds mutual responsibilities, thrust and mutuality between workers and managers. At the Nippon CTV case, work organization is based on the high surveillance and low trust labour relations where workers had no autonomy and no discretion.

Taylor et al. (1994) also argue that the implementation of some elements of job restructuring both in the Japanese transplant and the British emulator companies are not novel and do not represent a move

towards the Japanese model. Their conclusion is that there are almost no radical changes taking place in both types of companies regarding the nature of work and employment relation. These suggest that Japanization of industry do not crop up to a significant degree.

4. Workers Participation

Another important deviation from the ideal Japanese model is that workers involvement and participation in innovation, modernization and amelioration activities, which are essential to the argument of the Japanization debate, is entirely absent in some of the transplants and emulators (Delbrige, 1998; Taylor, Elger and Fairbrother, 1994). According to Delbrige, systematic and regular job rotation, multi-skilling, problem solving, decentralized decision making and employee participation or team working are not in practice in the sense portrayed by the proponent of the Japanese model in the companies he studied. In some cases, workers tend to be considered as a pair of hands. They are expected not to contribute significantly to the activities requiring intelligence beyond Taylorist concept of task execution and obedience to managerial prerogatives. In their research, Tremblay, Rolland and Rolland acclaim that despite the prominent importance given employee involvement and continuous job training in the Japanese model, the Japanese transplants used less team work and less formalised training programs *visa-a-vis* local firms (2000: p. 11). They find that the workers were less consulted and participated even less in production decisions. Employees were not involved in a continuous process of quality and productivity in majority of the transplants surveyed.

5. Conflict and Resistance at Workplace

Another severely criticised assumption of the Japanization thesis is associated with conflict and resistance at workplace. The Japanization thesis (including the control approach) assumes that conflict and resistance is entirely absent in the Japanese model and thus the Japonized workplaces are populated by committed and contented workers. This view is evident in much of the literature on the Japanese transplants in Britain. It is asserted that the Japanese transplants prefer locating their productions on greenfield sites in areas which have lost their traditional manufacturing base and is characterized by a high unemployment (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992; Elger and Smith, 1998. p.

185). Due to these advantages, they have been able to recruit a new workforce amongst a large number of applicants from scratch (Palmer, 1996: p.129). This confers them a power not to recognize a union. If recognized, they tend to opt for a single union with no-strike deal (Beale, 1994). Moreover, management in transplants expected serious resistance at the outset due to the antagonistic nature of British industrial relations. Yet British workers turned out to be quite receptive towards the Japanese model (Dunning, 1986, Oliver and Wilkinson, 1992; Garrahan and Stewart, 1992).

However, the reports, based on a large number of case studies carried out on the Japanese transplants and the British emulators, indicate the mismatch between the assumptions of the Japanization thesis and the reality. This further undermines the credibility of the approach. The empiric researches report that both individual and collective resistance occurred widespread in most of the transplant and emulators in the UK. Palmer's study on three non-unionized Japanese manufacturing transplants located in the West Midland, exemplifies that transplants have encountered serious problems of worker resistance (1996: p.133). According to Palmer, owing to the unexpected and undesired workers resistance, management had to revise either officially or informally or in some cases reverse their strategies and objectives so as to discipline or pacify the workers in all three companies. According to Palmer (1996), in these companies, the widespread workers resistance and misbehaviour have taken many different forms including high labour turnover, reluctance to participate in "voluntary activities", talking about personal instead of work related issues in U-shaped lines as well as anti-company graffiti in the toilets

McKinlay and Taylor's research on an American MNC's greenfield microelectronics plant in the UK illustrates far-reaching existence of various forms of worker resistance against the Japanese model in the emulators (1996. pp. 279-298). In the plant, some of Japanese production techniques such as JIT, TQC, team working and problem solving workgroups were introduced. Nevertheless, workers quickly discovered a number of methods to subvert the disciplinary intend of these practices. Rather than self-controlling and monitoring their activities, the team members began to safeguard the unity and integrity of the team concept from managerial interventions. According to the writers, the

workers seemed to have accepted the key elements of the new methods as an ideology and practice, albeit decisively rejected their disciplinary objectives. This result shows that the power of Japanese manufacturing techniques to defuse worker resistance and direct their individual collective aims via the corporate plans have been exaggerated to a great extent (McKinlay and Taylor, 1996: p.298).

Graham's research on a Japanese car transplant is particularly informative in determining the forms worker resistance to the Japanese model in the US (1994: 123-149). She reports an extensive existence of individual and collective workers resistance in various forms. Collective resistance took generally the forms of sabotage, protesting and refusing to participate in company rituals, direct confrontation with management and constantly agitating team and department meetings (1994: p.141). However outstanding protest took place when workers on an individual basis refused to participate in Company rituals and complaints via anonymous letters written to Company as part of company's rumour control programme.

Stephenson's comparative research on two Japanese transplants in terms of unionization and workers resistance is another instructive example in this context (1996.210-239). She compares work, working conditions and workers' attitude in Nissan and its site supplier company, Ikeda located in Nissan JIT complex in the UK. She argues that workers seemed to have committed to the new working practices in Nissan, nevertheless an extensive workers resistance and union opposition developed against the introduction of new technologies and new practices at Ikeda. Nissan's workers' commitment and consent was depended on the promise of employment security while the Ikeda's difficulty in recruiting and retaining skilled workers enabled skilled workers to develop a union-based-opposition and resistance to the Japanese model and profoundly restricted the implementation of JIT production (Stephenson, 1994: p. 233).

Elger and Smith's research on the evolution of employment practices and labour problems in four Japanese transplants in UK provides further evidence against the optimistic assumption of the Japanization thesis (1998: pp.185-207). The writers report that these factories have drastically different internal factory regimes regarding management style and strict management controls and the extent and

nature of internal labour markets and job security. They initially embarked on a Japanese recruitment strategy, seeking to employ mostly young and non-unionized potentially acquiescent and inexperienced employees. These "green" workers severely reacted via a very high rate of absenteeism and labour turnover to the rigorous imposition of the elements of the Japanese model. The writers also report a limited worker resistance, ranging from avoidance of QC activities to threaten to "walk-outs" (Elger and Smith 1998: p. 192). But what is striking about these workforces is that when discontented, these reluctant and uncommitted workers inclined to leave their jobs either for a little extra money or even to relive boredom. They claim that the Japanese transplants were entirely non-unionised and organized conflict seemed to be highly restricted albeit not completely absent (1998: p.195). Further, there were no or at best basic formal consultative procedures thus workers had a very limited chance to express their grievances in an efficient mode. They indicate that the spectrum of workers reactions to management strategies included an instrumental compliance and a more active commitment along with voice and exist.

Taylor et al.'s study on a Japanese electronics transplant and British electrical firm also demonstrates the existence of a kind of clandestine workers resistance to the Japanese model (1994). They report that although management managed to create relatively docile workforce and peaceful industrial relations, the latent dissatisfaction at work was expressed through in a very high level of both worker absenteeism and labour turnover in Japanese transplant (1994: p.215) .

7. Intensification of Work

In spite of the upbeat expectations of the Japanization thesis, more and more researches point out that the implementation of the Japanese model has resulted in the worsening and intensification of working conditions at workplace. The whole system of Japanese model is designed to extract maximum surplus value from the workforce. Dohse et al. (1985), attributed the extreme intensification of work to the absence of independent union control over members, day-to-day work. Enterprise unions give management uncontrolled power in the workplace to deploy workers' own knowledge for the perpetual rationalisation of production and the intensification of work.

Graham's research (1994) based on a covered participative observance in a Japanese transplant provides further supports for the argument about the extreme intensification of work under Japanese production methods. She argues that the computerized assembly line was used to increase the pace of work as well as focusing everyone's attention on any team that fell behind. The JIT mechanism had directly resulted in the intensifying and speeding up of the work in most of the Japanese plants. This is a method of inventory control in which company keeps parts stoked on the line for only a few hours of work. This puts severe time constraints on the material handler who stoked the line and on the workers assembling the cars and trucks, because the line was only stopped when absolutely necessary. The vehicles often continued moving even when parts were missing.

Stephenson also (1994) points out an extreme intensification of work under the JIT regime and argues that workers were involved in the intensification of their own labour through monitoring of their own quality standards and those of others in both Nissan and Ikeda. What is more, workers were involved in additional self-subordination activities such as Kaizen and the monitoring a variety of actions of their peers in line with the philosophy of active participation in corporate objectives in Nissan.

V. CONCLUSION

The ascendancy of Japanese manufacturing performans has attracted widespread attentions in the West. Many attempts have been made to explain the superior performance of the Japanese companies in the global markets. The success of the Japanese has been principally attributed to the Japanese production and management techniques, i.e. the Japanese model.

The western nations and major corporations have respond to their loss of competitiveness and jobs in manufacturing sector by launching major restructuring process based on the adaptation of the Japanese model. In the UK, attempts to comprehend this process under the concept of Japanization and resulted in a number of approaches, labelled as the Japanization thesis. The Japanization thesis basically considers the Japanese model as new production paradigm and examines its transfer conditions to the West. It has number of assumptions which can be sum up as follows. The Japanese model can be effectively transferred to the

UK by the Japanese transplants and local firms. As Japanese transplants are populated by committed, satisfied and compliant workers, management has resolved the entrenched problem of workers resistance, absenteeism and high labour turnover. The Japanese model establishes the possibility of more human centred forms of work and the old Fordist era has already been or is about to be terminated. Moreover, the process of Japanization is a unidirectional and homogenous process all over the western world.

This paper has argued that the assumptions of the Japanization thesis are based on the misconception of the Japanese model and exaggerated the process of the restructuring in the British manufacturing industry. Both theoretical and empirical evidence clearly demonstrate that the Japanese model and its elements have been unevenly adapted by transplants and emulators in the UK. Firms opt for totally different combinations of the selective elements of this model with different purposes in mind. In some cases the central elements of the Japanese model are entirely absent, while in others a range of some simple techniques some of which may be related with the Japanese model are implemented. Thus, it is possible to claim that there no single pattern of adaptation across nations, regions, industries and firms as the Japanization thesis envisaged. On the contrary, many different patterns and forms of adaptations and emulations exist.

This paper also asserts that the process of Japanization has not transformed the nature of the work to a greater extent. Workers still have to carry out the ceaselessly repetitive and limited cycle of standardized task on the assembly lines. What is more, systematic and regular job rotation, multiskilling, problem solving, decentralized decision making and employee participation or team working are not in practice in the sense portrayed by the proponent of the Japanization thesis in some transplants. Workers are still treated Taylorist manner

In contrast to the core assumptions of the Japanization thesis, most of the case studies report that widespread individual and collective resistance, high absenteeism and labour turnover as well as hidden resistance and sabotages have characterized the labour relations in most of the transplants and emulators. That is, the adversary labour relation is the rule not an exception. What is more is that in most transplants, workers are non-unionised and not allowed to join a union. Where they

are allowed to join a union, management tends to recognize a single union and have no-strike deal.

Consequently it can be said that both theoretical and empirical evidence demonstrate that the adoptions and emulations of the Japanese model on a selective basis cannot be regarded as a move away from the Fordist-Taylorist production regime to a one which is based on mutual trust and cooperation between worker and management. Instead, the new regime of production seems to represent an extension and reinforcement of the principles of Fordist-Taylorist production regime by means of more systematic standardization of production jobs in a surroundings characterized by enhanced managerial hegemony and control.

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