

The Concepts of Hegemony in the Analysis of Working-Class Literature

Ryosuke Yamazaki

For an analytic approach regarding American working class in literature, it would be crucial to hypothesize what they represent, and to grasp their social positions within the text. Those novels describing workers' harshness expose how the capitalism of its day consistently debased the characters and deprived them of prosperity, stability, and humanity. With an eye for disclosure of industrial exploitation in conspiracy with inhuman mechanical development deriving social, class, and ethical hierarchy from the worker's plight, those enunciations of hierarchy simultaneously enable the reader's awareness of Otherness of the working class. Their oppressed figures are undoubtedly the outcome brought by exploitative nature of capitalism which is fond of workforce as mute commodity; however, the irresistible structure of capitalism does not consist simply in its inhumanity. The upward desire of the oppressed in poverty is also indispensable for capitalism because working class people, who cannot escape from their internalized normative value of the oppressor's materialism, are unconsciously involved in retaining its hegemonic nature. Hence, it is important to scrutinize the construction of how hegemony emerges and maintains its power in order to marginalize the working class from the mainstream. In order to analyze those concerns, this paper mainly adopts Antonio Gramsci's (1891-1937) notion of hegemony as a framework. Gramsci's influence on other intellectuals is notable and his notions of hegemony seem to have sparked a wider mode of thoughts on the subject. Therefore, in addition to Gramsci, this methodological writing will

also employ other intellectuals' works, which especially present a point of view about the Otherness of the persecuted masses and the oppressed.

Gramsci's Concept of Hegemony

First of all, it is important to examine the meaning of hegemony and the determination of how Gramsci refers to it. His concept of hegemony discursively appears throughout the *Prison Notebook*. It is significant that integration with his large pieces of knowledge into a sole embodiment seems to require great effort, and the phenomenal work indicates that he often enunciates the concept of how hegemony works (Lears 568). The following statements are two of the pivotal aspects of Gramsci's hegemony thought:

1. The "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.

2. The apparatus of state coercive power which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed. (12)

In the first explanation, Gramsci implies that the complexity of hegemony does not just consist of a simple structure of oppression which explicitly displays the visible power such as dictatorship or autocracy. In other words, not only that the ruling class sustains hegemony, as Lears highlights the danger of collusion in unconsciousness, but also that the bottom-up "consent" from the oppressed people is necessary to maintain the dominant condition of hegemony (569-70). Moreover, the second one points out the legitimacy of

hegemony in that it functions as protection for the preservation of its oppressive structure when the oppressed notice the truth. Summing up both features, even if hegemony varies its forms with several oppressive structures, all kinds of hegemony need to conceal its plain dominant aspects in society. In this case, a question of what kind of form hegemony embodies should be answered. According to Williams, when people regard it as “commonsense” or “normal reality” in daily life, hegemony completes its oppressive construction (145). This precisely highlights the legitimated aspect of hegemony because legitimated institution, such as “the Church, trade union, or school” (Lears 570), enables its glimpsed figure of domination to be a part of an undoubted “normal reality”. That is, hegemony always inhabits the inside of our social life, and it is not an unusual event happening on the other side of the world. Therefore, habitual agents of hegemony, in a broad sense, who consciously or unconsciously reproduces hegemonic effect, is not only the ruling class, in spite of “the function of ‘hegemony’ which the dominant group exercises throughout society” (306). Hegemony always has to invest its obscurity in front of the oppressed group. Otherwise, for instance, the oppressed working class “may openly revolt through strikes, factory takeovers, mass movements, and perhaps the creation of a counterhegemony” (Lears 569). As Laclau and Mouffe point out, one of the necessary conditions of hegemony is a “collective will” (67–69). Hegemony is thus an ambivalent notion. Whilst it works as a commonsense in normal life, its concealed oppressive aspect always lurks beneath our unconsciousness. Therefore, in order to perceive hegemony, we not only have to examine its transgressive notion over the boundary of social classes, but also the subversive viewpoint that deems it necessary, for instance, class conflict does not merely happen on the sole spot between the ruling class and the oppressed class. In other words, such a supposition is important where there are varied struggles even inside of the ruling class sphere as well as the

oppressed.

The Oppressed's Consent to Maintenance of Hegemony

In order to precisely employ the theory of Gramsci's hegemony to working-class literature, let us call a collective will a normative form by iterated performativity in class community. Here, the working class would exemplify the process of how one social bloc unconsciously sustains hegemony. For instance, Dawley presents a historical reality of the working class, in the United States, in poverty with reference to their competence:

Competence meant the ability to get along well in economic terms—to possess real estate or saving sufficient to house a family, or tide it over during hard times, or support husband and wife in old age. As a bare minimum, a competence would provide a base for stable membership in a community, reduce the terrors of failing into debt, and keep a family from the throes of dependency and destitution. For working-class families, it was a ticket out of poverty to the regions of minimal security. For middle-class families, the competence was a more liberal endowment of property or saving that generated income through rent or interest to sustain the family through adversity at its accustomed level of prosperity. (151)

For two of the social classes, it is obvious that their competent figures are a means of escape from poor living standards, and internalize the same sense of welfare as that of the ruling class in terms of economy. That is, whether possession or absence of money is synonymous with superiority, at least in an industrial capitalistic society. Their competence represents their beliefs that the possession of material and money and a rich life will be derived from the result of hard-work and effort. In this case, such a viewpoint which focuses on class consciousness might work to seek for a subconscious position of hegemony. As one of the common features regarding class

consciousness, Gramsci states that “In acquiring one’s conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting. We are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man” (324). Here, even if it is evident that capitalism exploits worker’s labor, it is not a controversial issue because working in competence proves their belonging to the society. Although both classes are eager to change their life from poverty, they cannot escape from their working cycle because working competence has already become a normative ethic as well as “stable membership” (Dawley 151). Gramsci implies that class consciousness is a production of normative working ethic by workers’ daily performativity (324-25). If someone stops working within the sphere, the deviant performativity changes one’s social position to the Other in the society. Thus, hegemony is maintained by the oppressed worker’s consent, which is reinforced by their iterated performativity as an authentic and normative working ethic. Moreover, even if the practical meanings of competence are slightly different between the working class and the middle class, Dawley’s statement connotatively presents that heterosexual family is a fundamental form and a cultural institution that they have in common. In this case, the heterosexual family as normative form would work as a commonsense in the whole of the society. Such normative family form would assume hegemonic nature because it is in danger of oppressing, for instance, the homosexual group labelled the deviant outsiders in the heterosexual sphere. Moreover, there is another danger that the heterosexual family as normative form determines the authentic gender role in patriarchal hierarchy. Despite of the risk, the normative gender role would assign legitimacy to the hierarchy. It enables hegemony to render the gender division of labor, which means to draw the boundary between the male’s public space and the female’s domestic sphere as private space, a normal reality.

Gramsci's Influence on Stuart Hall

In terms of literary analysis, it is also crucial to examine what American working-class novels represent and reproduce outside of the text. Some works written in 1930s, for instance, which describe the harsh unstable life of the white working class, produce an ideology of heterosexuality as a normative familiar form. Regarding the similarity between hegemony and cultural ideology, Lear explains Gramsci's Marxist thought and points out that "For Gramsci, ideology is not merely a system of beliefs that reflects specific class interests; its development is more complex" (570). This indicates a common feature that hegemony inhabits throughout the social community beyond the class boundaries, and ideology also seems to emerge from a multiple spot in society. Although Gramsci complexly insists on his thought about ideology "that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or 'willed'" (377), a more developed notion of its representativeness emerges from one of the intellectuals, who is affected by Gramsci, Stuart Hall (1932–2014). Generally speaking, Hall and his works are mainly discussed in the spheres of popular culture and identity politics in terms of cultural studies. However, Procter estimates that Hall's contribution for cultural studies is very effective in analysing oppressive structure (2). He insists upon that "For Hall, the study of culture involves exposing the relations of power that exist within society at any given moment in order to consider how marginal, or subordinate groups might secure or win, however temporarily, cultural space from the dominant group" (2). Obviously Hall inherits the concept of hegemony from Gramsci, who insists upon that it makes people blind about the concealed dominant truth. In this section, Hall's works which are concerned with the process of how legitimated agency reproduces dominant meaning are focused on, rather than the specific aftermath of the reproduction. It enables this methodological approach to avoid fixing an identity of the working class. This is very important because it seems to be

naive to regard the whole of the relegated working class as every cultural Others at the same level.

Ideological Representation of Literary Works

Hall's argument indicates his skepticism about legitimated social institutions as well as Gramsci. As the Italian intellectual points out, hegemony assumes obscurity in conspiracy with legitimacy. Hall inherits this perspective and develops the idea in terms of language and ideology. As Procter elucidates Hall's complex thought, ideology also forms its presentation into normal reality as well as hegemony (45). However, it does not necessarily refer to only dominant notions. It also highlights normalized meanings of enunciated messages rather than connotation. Hall derives a problematic aspect of ideology from its establishment of normalized meaning and people who participate in construction. In his central work called encoding and decoding, Hall analyzes the process of how the meaning of information requires consensus like a collective will, but the message which has never equally delivered to the whole of the society always lacks its universality in fact (134–35). As Procter precisely points out, in Hall's concepts of "preferred" and "dominant meaning", there is always limited boundary on whether people who can receive the message or cannot even perceive it (46). That is, if working-class literature has an ideology in common in spite of the conjuncture inside of a class which consists of several differences of race, ethnicity, and gender, there needs to be caution in saying that people who produce the normalized ideology are always the same. It is probable that the dominant message is defined and chosen for favourableness of the mainstream culture, but marginalizes cultural minorities from its effect (Hall 134–35). Therefore, to seek for the dominant meaning of what American working-class literature produces in common is to grasp the ideology of literary representation of the genre. It would provide

a connection between victimized characters in the fictional world and the working class in the real. Moreover, Hall seems to have an enthusiasm to deliberate the relation between cultural ideology and its “subjectivity”.

. . . the unconscious process through which ‘subject’ is constituted is also – it is proposed – the process which constitutes ‘the subject’ *in language*. It is also the same as that which constitutes ‘the subject’ for ideology. . . . Texts do not express a meaning (which resides elsewhere) or ‘reflect reality’: they produce a representation of ‘the real’ which the viewer is positioned to take as a mirror reflection of the real world: this is the ‘productivity of the text’, . . . (159)

These statements after all reconfirm Hall’s viewpoint about ideology which is constructed from outside, not from the inner text. Hall repeatedly highlights the relationship between encoding and decoding that the former, which is a creator of message, cannot control the latter which significantly effects on construction of an ideology (130–31). However, if the encoded message accords with decoded ideology, author’s opinion should be more or less reconsidered. If novelist’s literary message is favourably accepted by readers, on the one hand, the ideological accordance with the writer would highlight the plausible interpretation of what the novel simply presents. However, on the other hand, the smooth consent between encoding and decoding within the mainstream culture might be problematic because it is capable of marginalizing Others from the sphere. That is, if such works are popular in the mainstream culture, ideological messages from novels might enforce the Otherness of cultural minorities. In this social condition that the dominant meaning is undoubtedly accepted by the mass, there would be a room to examine the spot where ideology as the dominant meaning becomes hegemony. Subsequently, therefore, this paper intends to gaze at the connection between hegemony and ideology in order to mention the

reproductive process of the Otherness of the working class in the literary text.

Reproduction of Otherness

In order to reveal the Otherness of the working class, this section not only re-examines Gramsci's thought, but attempts to bring two of the critical intellectuals. In the *Prison Notebook*, Gramsci suggests calling the oppressed people the "subaltern" (54). Regarding this term, Gayatri C. Spivak (1942-) shows her enthusiasm about the subaltern group and accomplishes its further interpretation in terms of the Third World. Spivak especially believes in the definition of subaltern that people are not only debased and relegated to the ruling class but are thoroughly marginalized from its cultural sphere (259). Although her perspective would appear to be notably influential in the analysis of marginalized Others, this section is based on the assumption that Spivak's definition of the term is slightly and consequently different to Gramsci's concept. Let us call Gramsci's notion a more comprehensive definition:

The subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State": their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States. . . . In order to become a State, they had to subordinate or eliminate the former [specific auxiliaries] and win the active or passive assent of the latter [specific allies]. (52-53)

Even if there is thus no doubt that the subaltern is almost synonymous with the bottom of the class hierarchy, his definition seems to allow groups to belong to the periphery of society. Afterwards, the "Subaltern Studies group" seemed to adapt Gramsci's notion, and examined closely the term in terms of the European Marxism (Morton 6-7). However, Spivak criticizes their

works as insufficient because other intellectuals that can use subaltern instead of them always has a limitation about its empirical career, and she therefore seems to be cautious of her own position as an intellectual (250). For Spivak, such a comprehensive definition is capable of ignorance about genuine voiceless oppressed people (253–54). With regard to this risk, her concept is exemplified by her comparative research in English literature works. From her analysis the Otherness of the Indian female as the Third World's subaltern emerges. Although this paper does not seek to approach feminism studies, reference to her work is meaningful in that she displays her notion of Otherness in the progress of the argument. In questioning title of the work "Can the Subaltern Speak?", she originally answers no (283). Spivak criticizes the inauthenticity of the representative speeches by any representative people who "can" speak in the public (Morton 35). She cannot approve of those insubstantial roles of the representative subjects who believe that they can speak for the oppressed. This viewpoint might be valid for the white male writers of working-class novels and their narrative styles. Not only that whether they could accomplish to be the representative authors of the debased working class or not, but also there is another discussion of how the white intellectual precisely delivers the voice of immigrant workers to the surface. With criticism to Deleuze and Foucault's works, Spivak insists on her own term of the "epistemic violence":

. . . the Third World can enter the resistance program of an alliance politics directed against a "*unified* repression" only when it is confined to the third-world groups that are directly acceptable to the First World. This benevolent first-world appropriation and reinscription of the Third World as an Other is the founding characteristic of much third-worldism in the U.S. human science today. (259)

That is, when representative subjects lose sight of the hierarchical difference

between their social positions and the oppressed people in terms of race, economy, class, and gender, the epistemic violence emerges from its blindness as if they naively believe that their representative agency can work as salvation for the all oppressed groups. In addition to Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha (1949–) and his thought about Otherness might be useful.

Reproduced Otherness of the Other in the Mainstream Text

Both Spivak and Bhabha are well known as post-colonial intellectuals, and Bhabha also refers to the voiceless Others in the Western sphere as well as Spivak's effective idea of the epistemic violence. As Williams points out the substantive meaning of the word "Western", the United States is regarded as the same positioned nation in the category of the First World (334). According to Bhabha, in short, in order for the First World to identify its mainstream subjectivity, the process forces "anti-West" cultures to show its difference as Otherness (89–90). This would enable the concept of Otherness to relate to the process of how ideology is formed because, if ideology assumes the dominant meaning but works as a commonsense, it would appear to prove the violence of epistemology. And, consequently, the demonstration is synonymous with the disclosure of hegemony. Hence, both Spivak and Bhabha seek for whom ideology works for, and who is still debased as Others in the epistemic violent field, would appear to be effective as a methodology. Regarding the difficulty to bring a settlement of the imperishability of the social weak's Otherness, Bhabha finally explains the fixed identity of how oppressed people cannot escape from exclusive circulation which eternally reproduces and reinforces their Otherness:

... the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation. The Other is cited, quoted, framed, illuminated, encased in the shot/reverse-shot strategy of a serial

enlightenment. . . . The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse. (46)

As Bhabha argues that, if the fixed Otherness has already become the normal reality for not only the ruling class but the oppressed themselves, this is a moment when the ruling class identifies their subjectivity as a cultural mainstream. In order to maintain the dominant situation, hegemony successfully deprives the oppressed of the opportunity to subvert the situation. This might be capable of concealing not only hegemony but also other more complex oppressions. In this case, the distinction of whether they are subaltern or not is quite important because the integration of the whole of the oppressed class into one category might cause another oppression. To look for the place where the Otherness of the working class is reproduced as a normalized ideology would be to pursue the residence of hegemony.

From those points of view, the analysis for American working-class works suggests to rely on the aforementioned theories and concepts as methodological foundation. An ideology, which is created for specific dominant classes, acquires subjectivity as a cultural mainstream and consequently functions as such an allegory or commonsense by the sacrifice of Otherness of the oppressed groups. Whilst such self-centred ideology would reinforce the subjectivity of the dominant groups, it simultaneously reinforces the Otherness of the marginalized people, and again reproduces them as Other. In this centrism of the cultural mainstream, the Otherness of the oppressed would unconsciously penetrate into our daily life as a normal aspect of them. As a result of this dehumanization process, hegemony would inhabit our world without notice. From this perspective, the working-class novels, which are especially written by white males, would be worth rereading for the content because it is capable of obscuring the shape of

hegemony.

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