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Hidden Forms of Bargaining on China's Shop Floor

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Abstract

This article examines shop-floor bargaining in China in both the socialist and reform eras. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in three manufacturing factories, document analysis, and secondary sources, the author discusses how government policies and organizational structure shape the interaction between workshop managers and workers and how the practice on the shop floor alters managerial attempts in return. The author argues that, despite different economic structures in the two historical periods, Chinese workers are not the docile labor force often portrayed in literature and media. Instead, they utilize any leverage given within organizational structures and bargain for not only economic gains, but also for respect and autonomy. Their bargaining, though different from institutionalized union bargaining, influences managerial decisionmaking in a subtle way with ideological implications.

Lean Production and Labor Controls in the Chinese Automobile Industry in An Age of Globalization¹

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Abstract

This article explores the changing workplace and labor-management relations in the Chinese automobile industry under the influence of globalization and China's market reform. It depicts the everyday working lives of Chinese autoworkers and the shop-floor dynamics of labor relations based on the author's intensive fieldwork at the seven major automobile assembly enterprises in China during 2004–2007.

The main findings of this paper are that, in spite of the generalized lean production and homogenization of workplace experiences of Chinese autoworkers, two different models of labor controls have emerged in the Chinese auto industry: "lean-and-dual" and "lean-and-mean." On the one hand, under the lean-and-dual regime, management adopts labor force dualism by using both formal contract workers and agency workers on production lines side by side, which leads to a "hybrid" factory regime that combines both "hegemonic" and "despotic" elements. Hegemonic relations have been established between management and formal workers based on high wages, generous benefits, better working conditions, and relatively secure employment for formal workers, while "despotic" labor control characterizes the conditions for temporary agency workers with lower wages and insecure employment.

On the other hand, the lean-and-mean type of auto firms adopt a high-wage, high-turnover strategy of lean production without the promise of job security to their entire workforce. The interventionist roles of the Chinese central and local states in regulating labor relations and the roles of managerial staff, factory unions, and factory party committees in building hegemonic consent among workers in the auto industry are also explored. The paper concludes by discussing the potentials and limits of Chinese autoworkers and the likely roles they are to play in the evolution of labor relations under China's current market transition and globalization.

The Changes of Chinese Labor Policy and Labor Legislation in the Context of Market Transition

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Abstract

This article examines the changes to and relations between labor policy and labor legislation in the context of China's market transition with a focus on the 1994 Labor Law and the 2007 Labor Contract Law. The initial impetus to labor policy change came from the unemployment crisis at the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s. Since then, the state has relaxed its control over labor mobility and job allocation. The last two decades of the last century witnessed the most important changes in China's labor policy, that is, the replacement of lifelong employment with contract-based employment and the replacement of government job assignment with the labor market. Such changes indicate the paradigmatic shifts of China's labor policy in the reform era. Under the new labor policy paradigm, the role of law has been strengthened in governing labor relations and other labor-related affairs. Within the policy context of promoting economic growth while maintaining social stability, both policy and law are coordinated and complementary in stabilizing labor relations and protecting labor rights. Given the socioeconomic circumstances and the underdevelopment of the rule of law in China, policy is still important during the period of market transition.

Ziyou (Freedom)¹, Occupational Choice, and Labor: *Bangbang* in Chongqing, People's Republic of China²

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the complicated processes and dynamics of rural migrant workers' occupation choice in post-Mao China among a specific migrant population, the *bangbang* (porters or carriers) in the city of Chongqing in southwest China. By employing ethnographic data from my year-long anthropological field research among *bangbang* and following the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, this paper explores the question of whether neoliberalism alone deliberately and vehemently transforms these laborers into self-reliant subjects. It argues that for rural migrants, the discourse on *ziyou* (freedom), as promoted by the state, plays a significant role in facilitating the migrants' subject formation, transforming them into self-reliant and enterprising laborers even as it makes them vulnerable to fierce exploitation. At the same time, *bangbang* turn this neoliberal rationality around and use it in their struggle for the security and aid refused to them by the state because it externalizes the "technologies of the self." *Bangbang* internalize neoliberal techniques of governance that are framed as *ziyou* (freedom), not from social responsibility or patriotism but from disappointment with and distrust of the state.

Local Strategies of Labor Control: A Case Study of Three Electronics Factories in China

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Abstract

This article explores production politics and labor conditions in electronics manufacturing in China. With case study analysis of three electronics factories in a production chain at an export processing zone, it examines external factors of labor regulation from local government or international challenges and labor market situations that help shape a sociopolitical environment for local strategies in global production. It also considers some key internal factors of firms—enterprise scale, market capabilities, and requirements of the labor process—that influence work organization on the shop floor. The central argument of this article is that manufacturing factories in the global production apply local conditions to work organization and take different strategies in recruitment and labor control within and beyond the workplace.