

Becoming *Dagongmei*: Body, Identity and Transgression in Reform China

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Abstract

My study focuses on the working lives of Chinese women in the light of China's attempt to incorporate its socialist system into the world economy in the Reform era. My cardinal concern is the formation of a new social body - *dagongmei* - in contemporary China.

The great transformation experienced during the reform era creates significant social changes, and the lives of *dagongmei* are the living embodiments of such paradoxical processes and experiences. The first part of my thesis looks at how the desire of the peasant girls - the desire of moving out of rural China to the urban industrial zones - is produced to meet the demands of industrial capitalism.

The second part, based on an ethnographic study of an electronic factory in Shenzhen, studies the processes of constitution of the subject - *dagongmei* - in the workplace. First, I look at the disciplines and techniques of the production machine deployed over the female bodies, and see how these young and rural bodies are turned into docile and productive workers. Secondly, the politics of identity and differences is analyzed, to see how the existing social relations and local cultural practices are manipulated to craft abject subjects. Thirdly, the processes of sexualizing the abject subjects in relation to cultural discourses and language politics is unfolded.

The final part examines the relation of domination and resistance inside the workplace. Dream, scream and bodily pain are seen as the actual form of struggle against the enormous power of capitalist relations in Chinese society.

In short, my study explores the process, the desire, the struggle of young rural girls to become *dagongmei*; and in the rite of their passages, unravels how these female bodies experience the politics and tension produced by a hybrid mixture of the state socialist and capitalist relations.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: the Poetics of Becoming *Dagongmei*

A big and prosperous China in the 21st century is first dreamed in the West, then re-dreamed by the Chinese elite. It is a misfortune of our epoch. What is more tragic is the calling of the young generation of our daughters not only to live, but work out for the project of the dream¹.

Gaze/Gate: On the Day of Recruiting Labour 4th March 1996

It was Monday, a week after the Chinese New Year holiday and a day that rural migrant girls looked in hope for chances to enter a factory in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ). At one o'clock after lunch, the factory gate was surrounded by a crowd of people crushing to the door hoping to get in for an interview. There were more than two hundred people, most of them were female and only a few male. Judging by their appearance, it was easy to see that they were the *mang liu*, blind nomads among the first migration wave that came yearly, immediately after the Chinese New Year, to hunt for jobs in the city. The Economic Reform launched by the Chinese state in the early 1980s decided not only to open the door of the country to foreign capital, but also the urban door to the rural people. The whole society then began to ride on top of a great movement: a movement of the economic system, a movement of political ideology, a movement of everyday living culture, and a movement of real people. These movements create the new hopes, new dreams, new desires and new politics that are my cardinal concerns.

It was a day important not merely for the migrant rural girls finding chances to become *dagongmei*, working girls, but also for providing ways for a novice and native anthropologist learning to make sense of her own society out of its impossibility.

The factory where I worked in Shenzhen during 1995 and 1996 was an electronic company owned by Hong Kong capital. For anonymous and aesthetic reasons, I named it Meteor Electronic Company Limited. Meteor, a kind of shooting star, evoked the figuration of rapid change and the epic shifting of contemporary Chinese society.

¹ My own words.

Three uniformed factory guards, male, tall and strong, each holding an electric stick and standing beside the gate, tried to maintain an order in the crowd that seemed impossible. Two ladies, Ying and Jun, the staff of Personnel Department, stood at the entrance examining the certificates the job-seekers held. I stood behind Ying and Jun, who worked busily and tried to explain the situation to me at the same time.

Ying We didn't do ads in the newspaper or on street notice boards. We just spread out the news on the shopfloor that we were going to recruit labour this afternoon. Now here come so many people we can't handle them. Every year is like this.

Pun Where do they come from?

Ying Oh, provinces all over the country. But anyway, I am sure they are people who have relationships with our factory. Maybe relatives, or co-villagers or peers of our factory workers.

Ying and Jun checked four kinds of certificates:

1. Shenzhen SEZ Permit
2. Identity Card
3. Certificate for Secondary School Graduation
4. Certificate for the Unmarried

Ying Our priority goes to the Guangdong local workers, aged over 16, but better 18 to 23, single and with a high middle school education.

Jun Nowadays, people can easily buy a school certificate at a low price. So it is difficult for us to tell the real from the fraud. We need to judge not only from the certificates, but also from their appearances.

It was not the first time that I heard the story that people could easily buy school certificates from some schools. Following Jun's eyes, I looked at the crowd as well, focusing on their faces and bodies. They were so different, some tall, some short, some thin, some fat, and some had a more urban-look than the others. Whatever appearance they gave, the whole crowd concentrated their gaze in my direction. The only direction, the *gaze* of the factory, where *gaze* and *gate* met, absorbing all kinds of expectations into one flow of desire: the desire for factory life.

Today twenty people were chosen. The gate was pulled down, leaving the crowd in the outside world of disappointment. It became extraordinarily silent, more silent than the usual day in the factory. The Meteor Electronic Company, now possessed 526 workers and planned to hire fifty workers this year. Last year they lost about 40 workers who returned to their hometowns during the Chinese New Year holidays and never came back. The twenty people were directed to a huge dining room in the second floor. Ying and Jun had them sit at the table and distributed application forms for them to fill in. No guidance was given. After ten minutes, Ying and Jun collected all the filled forms and started the first round interviewing.

“Liu Siu Hua” was the first one to be called. A young girl with a round face stood up among the group and came to the table. She looked firm, and a little bit nervous. Jun looked over her certificates again, this time more deliberately in order to make sure that the information on age, place of residence, marital status and education level corresponded in each certificate. If she had any suspicion, she would not ask for any explanation and simply sent her off. The basic information was correct, so Ying started asking questions.

Ying (in Cantonese) Can you speak Cantonese? You are a Hakka?
Siu Hua (reply in Cantonese) Yes, at least I can understand almost all.
Ying Our Department heads all come from Hong Kong. You need to understand them without any mistake.

Ying continued to ask about her past work history, wages, working hours, accommodation and other fringe benefits that the factory she worked for previously provided.

Siu Hua I did QC² jobs. I worked in Tim Lee Electronic Plant for two more than two years. They paid me a basic wage of RMB 375³ and overtime of RMB 200 to 300.

Ying What were the working hours?

Siu Hua 7:30 AM to 11:30 AM, 12:30 PM to 5:00 PM and 6:30 PM to 10:00 PM.

² QC refers to Quality Control.

³ The exchange rate of sterling against *renminbi* is 1: 13.18, and US dollar against *renminbi* is 1: 8.31 on 15th August 1997. The unit of RMB is *yuan*.

Ying Did they provide meals and accommodation?

Siu Hua Yes.

Ying Then why did you leave?

Siu Hua The factory moved to Guangzhou and we all lost our jobs.

Ying Did you find a job elsewhere?

Siu Hua No.

Ying No? Really? You are so lazy then?

Siu Hua I did try, ... but ... but I got no interviews.

Ying Hm, go back to your seat and wait.

Siu Hua left the table, with her face worn by a sense of uneasiness. Ying put remarks on the application form, suggesting that she see the QC department staff. Jun soon arranged for Ah Biao, the QC foreman, to come down. Biao, at his early thirties, holding an internal mobile phone in his hand, looked confident and talented. He walked straight to another table, going through the application form and the remarks. I moved my seat to his table; he gave me a nod and a look of surprise that I was there. I was supposed to be working on the line in the Production Department. I had been granted permission to observe the recruitment on the first day of annual labour recruiting.

“Liu Siu Hua,” Biao shouted. Siu Hua looked more nervous this time and walked fast to the table.

Biao You are aged 20, with two year working experience. What did you do in the factory?

Siu Hua I did..... I did QC.

Biao I know, but what stuff did you do?

Siu Hua I did checking the functions, the defects, and

Biao Okay, okay, if I give you this mobile phone to check, what will you do?

Siu Hua (more hesitantly, with her hand shaking from holding the phone)

I will, I will look over the appearance, and check the function. I will follow the steps carefully.

Biao (showing a little bit of impatience but laughing when he saw the shaking hand)

What's the problem with your hand? You haven't eaten full enough to hold the phone? Let me look at your hand.

Siu Hua stretched out her palm, small and soft. Biao held her fingers and Siu Hua wanted to draw back but controlled herself. She flushed.

Biao Oh, not too bad. I guess you didn't do farming work at home. I hope you didn't.

Siu Hua No, I did not do farming at home.

Biao So you are the lucky one. What is your schooling?

Siu Hua Middle high school.

Biao Completed?

Siu Hua Yes.

Biao Really, then you should have the talent to recognize the English word "open".

(Biao wrote down the English word on a paper, passed it to her and smiled at me.)

Siu Hua *bi*, pen, isn't it *bi*?

Biao (laughing) You said you have completed secondary school, and you can't distinguish the word between "pen" and "open".

Biao (passing the paper to Siu Hua)

Well, if you really have secondary schooling, write me ten English letters of the alphabet, starting from the 13th to the 23rd.

Siu Hua hesitated for a while, and immediately wrote down all 26 letters and simply crossed out the first twelve and the last three. We all smiled, and I thought she was clever, but Biao said that was always the way the silly workers did it. Siu Hua was told to sit back and wait.

Ying and Jun finished the first round of interviewing and asked two people to leave immediately after looking at their certificates. Among eighteen people, sixteen female and two male, twelve were assigned to the Production Department, while six were sent to QC Department for further interviewing. After the second round of interviewing, seven were asked to leave and the remainder were going to see the

Department heads or assistants. This was a terrible time of selecting workers into the disciplinary machine; criteria were set, though flexible and situational according to the demands of different departments and work positions. Commanding Cantonese, education level, work experience, nimble fingers, and good attitudes were all basic requirements.

Ms Tang, the QC Department Manager, a Hong Kong citizen, showed up at 4:00 PM. With casual wear, she looked stout, energetic and quite handsome in a short-cut and curled hair style. "Any perfect stuff? I want the perfect!" she asked. Biao did not give her a direct answer but said, "It's like finding needles in the sea." Five people were going to see her, and the interviewing was arranged in a meal room for the Hong Kong staff who worked in the factory, situated at the far end of the large common dining room. Biao and I sat beside Ms Tang. Biao tried to provide as much as information he could.

Liu Siu Hua's name was called for a third time. Siu Hua already looked tired, still fraught and nerve-wracked. She walked to the table and sat down.

Tang Sit Straight. Don't bend your back. You're not farming now, are you?

Siu Hua showed fear when Ms Tang spoke. She instantly stretched her back right straight and looked at Ms Tang. Ms Tang turned her voice soft when she was satisfied at Siu Hua adjusting her body.

Tang You've got experience of working in an electronic plant. How many models have you touched?

Siu Hua (hesitated) Perhaps ten models, or more.

Tang Were the checking processes similar or different?

Siu Hua Similar.

Tang Did you do the bookkeeping yourself? Could you recognize those English model names?

Siu Hua Yes, I did. And I seldom made mistakes.

Tang Hm, I will give you three months of probation period. During the probation period, the basic wage is RMB 320 per month, and the over time work is RMB 2.5 per hour. Do the rates sound reasonable to you?

Siu Hua Yes, Madam.

the *dagongmei*, the migrant female workers working in foreign-invested factories are the first pioneers to experience the deep and rapid social transformation of the Chinese society - the change of an agricultural and state socialist mode of production to an industrial and capitalist mode of production. As women, as peasants and as migrant workers, *dagongmei* are liminal subjects living in a shifting Chinese society. Their ambiguous and overlapping identities entailed rich stories of how the state-party, the capitalist market and the patriarchal culture work hand in hand to produce new relations of power and domination. And as historical agents they actively meet those changes, powers, and spaces of transgression.

The dramatic changes in the lives of contemporary Chinese women workers have elicited much less academic study than the issue deserves, despite their substantial part in the socio-economic transformation and the modernity project of the Chinese society in the period of economic reform. My study hopes to explore the process, the desires and the struggles of young rural girls to become *dagongmei*. In the rites of passage, hard, bitter, varicoloured and intriguing, I want to unravel how these young female bodies experience the politics and tensions produced by the hybrid mixture of the state socialist and capitalist relations. A *dagongmei* is a sexed social body, inscribed with specific, yet contingent and arbitrary historical forces that are urgently ready to unfold. The body, the regulating and fracturing of the female body in the workplace in response to the demands of industrial capitalism, will be my particular interest. Based on an ethnographic study in the factory, I will look at the processes of political technologizing of the body, intertwined with the dynamics of registering a feminine identity in relation to the production of sexedly disciplined subjects. Workers' subjectivity, their ways of accommodating and fissures of transgression, gone deep into the personal psyche, will all be my concerns. The body, particularly the female body in the study, is the contested site, the threshold that the transformative forces of the Chinese society work upon to build up the project of modernity. The regulation, the technology of the body and self in the course of capitalist transformation opens up horizons for our understanding of the way that the quest for Chinese modernity is not only a socio-economic project, but a bio-cultural one as well.

The episode of recruiting labour that opens up the thesis contains nearly all the crucial intriguing plots that need to be resolved in the following chapters. First of all, the meeting of *gaze* and *gate* insinuates in our minds the politics of desire in contemporary China- the desire of industrial capitalism to produce wants, lacks and wishes of the individual to serve the force and demand of the society at large. As Deleuze and Guattari put it clearly, desire is the social unconscious; “lack is created, planned and organized in and through social production.” (1983:28) The creation of desire and lack is the art of market economy that “involves deliberately organizing wants and needs (*manque*) amid an abundance of production; making all of desire teeter and fall victim to the great fear of not having one’s needs satisfied” (ibid.) The socius, the body of the society records all production of desire and creates its own delirium by constructing a collective passion that acts through every individual as though they are members of its body (Deleuze 1988:109). The desire to be *dagongmei*, shown by the great flux of migration to the urban industrial areas, traces the politics of the capitalist machine in producing social lack and generating the desire of individuals to fill the void. The urge and eagerness of the young girls to leave their hometown depicts a story far more complicated than the simple explanation that current migration flows in the reform China are dictated by the logic of poverty. Poverty as the crystalized form of social lack is produced and organized by the power of state and capital. Poverty, especially the huge gap between the urban and rural societies, is not unreal, but artificial and historically made, and, most important of all, is needed to be consumed.

The depreciation of farming work and the contrast of farming and industrial work in the management interview hint that the politics of *différance*, hierarchy and othering are involved in the process of producing new industrial subjects- *dagongmei*. Siu Hua, coming from a rural area, was often questioned about doing agricultural work, since farming, imagined as rough and rustic toiling, would spoil the sharpness and dextrousness of the body, and particularly the fingers. The constitution of new selves and new identities is an act of power (Laclau 1990), an enforcement of reactive forces and homogenization (Deleuze and Guattari 1984), and a process of self-subjectivization, exclusion and displacement (Foucault 1988) that involve the deployment of institutional controls, disciplinary techniques, the art of naming and the power of language. To construct new capitalist industrial subjects in the workplace, the old socialist and rural beings are

constantly devalued, downgraded and forsaken. Rural subjects, especially non-Cantonese speakers, are imaged as abject subjects, and thus the dark flip side of the new, modern and desirable identity. *Dagongmei*, as a new identity, as a cultural artefact, is produced at the particular moment when industrial capitalist machine comes to fruition in post-Mao China, and the beginning of the process of proletarianization regulated by both market and state forces. Existing social differences such as the divisions between the rural and the urban, the north and the south, the male and female, the married and the single are all manipulated to maintain, extend or modify the new power of domination and hierarchies.

The regulation of the body starts at the very moment when one comes to confront the production machine at the entrance of the factory gate. Power simply cannot wait to invest on the body when both parties meet. The chosen twenty interviewees among two hundred people were picked up arbitrarily by judging at first glance their appearances and then their certificates. Siu Hua was asked by the foreman, Biao, to show her hand, and then by the Hong Kong manager, Ms Tang, to stretch her back right straight at the beginning of the interview. The body is the primary site that attracts the investment of the disciplinary power, which always aims at imagining, and then crafting an idealized type of docile and productive labour. As Foucault poignantly says, the political technology of the body is bound up with its economic use; “it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination”, and “its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection” (1977:25-26). Turning rural and “lazy” “socialist bodies” into industrialized, efficient and productive bodies is the fundamental work of the production machine. And if, as Frantz Fanon says, the black man’s soul is the white man’s artefact (1967), we say that the *dagongmei*’s body is the production of the production machine.

If Karl Marx has already taught us that the division between town and country is the basis of the accumulation of capital, I am going to argue that sexual difference is another *must*, especially in the age of the new international division of labour. Mao’s China highlighted the category of class whilst negating sexual differentiation. Deng’s China, on the other hand, is marked by the proliferation of sexual discourses and female bodily images (Croll 1995; Evans 1997). Capitalist production and consumption need sex, want sex and rely on sex as the basic constitution of the system of difference and hierarchy. *Dagongmei* is an embodied identity of class and sex; what the production machine wants is

not a naturalized body, but a sexed female body. Siu Hua was recruited not only because she was an immigrant worker, but also a girl, a female who was cheaper and easier to regulate and control. Foreign-owned electronic compounds in China are depicted as orchards of peaches, in metaphor the world of female adolescents wait for men to pursue them. The bio-power of the production machine has no interest in modelling a general body, but in a particular sexed body, a feminine body, which is imagined as more obedient, tolerant and conforming to the factory machine. A docile but productive female body is the “perfect stuff” that Ms Tang wants.

“Where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault 1984); even though the relation of power and domination over the female body is tremendous, *dagongmei*, as a specific embodied Chinese subaltern group, are never totally subjugated and muted. The process of subordination and domination is seldom complete, and it is marked by various forms of collaboration, transgression and resistance which together come to make up its complex, dissident and heterogeneous subjects (de Certeau 1984; Guha and Spivak 1988; Scott 1990; Willis 1977). *Dagongmei* are complex, dissenting and tactical subjects who live up against a system of domination which is inherently incomplete, and who know how to find out the fissures for transgression in the grid of discipline and power. In the struggle of everyday life, these women workers are practical and strategic agents who strive to survive in an alienated milieu by manipulating the situational opportunities, or even making use of hegemonic discourses and mechanisms in protecting themselves. Siu Hua, in the situational struggle, created the subaltern’s wisdom by writing down all twenty-six letters of the alphabet and then crossing out the unnecessary ones. Before the male disciplinary machine, no matter how powerless they are, *dagongmei* are never “docile bodies”, but “tactical and resistant bodies” who sometimes covertly or overtly confront the domination, and sometimes successfully subvert or break down the disciplinary power. I am not going to romanticize these “everyday life practices” (de Certeau 1984), or “cultural struggles” (Ong 1991), but the stories and the experiences, the pains and the suffering, the screams and dreams of the women workers on the shop floor unfold the intriguing portrait of “the politics and poetics of transgression” that I am so eager to open up.

How can I speak?: a crisis of representation

The quest for modernity in China, the broad subject matter I would like to study, meets the post-modern challenges to the epistemological legitimacy of the human sciences in general and anthropology in particular in 1980s. Those challenges make me hesitate to begin the portrait, for I never knew the act of creation was so problematic. Never have the questions of “truth” and representation raised such an agenda and never have the doubts of representation been so pervasive as in our age. As George Marcus and Michael Fischer put it, “The present is a time of reassessment of dominant ideas across the human sciences, extending to law, art, architecture, philosophy, literature, and even the natural sciences. ... It is not just the ideas themselves that are coming under attack but the paradigmatic style in which they have been presented. Particularly in the social sciences, the goal of organizing disciplines by abstract, generalizing frameworks that encompass and guide all efforts at empirical research is being fundamentally challenged.” (1986:7) The crisis of representation at stake is about the trustworthy means and possible methods of understanding and describing social reality. Positivism, empiricism, structuralism, and symbolism all are put into doubt, and the legitimacy of their producing accurate knowledge is seriously questioned. Jean-François Lyotard’s representative work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) attacks these “grand theories” or “metanarratives” that have legitimated the rules of social science since the age of the Enlightenment. Totalizing visions or generalizing paradigms are condemned as building up authority other than “truth” in disciplining practices. Lyotard argues for “micronarratives” or multiple “language games” instead and says that postmodern knowledge is “not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable.” (1984:xxv)

In the discipline of anthropology, the challenges from postmodern knowledge push positivist anthropology to give way to the interpretive anthropology for which Clifford Geertz is a spokesman and there is a deep reflection on ethnographic writing by both British and American anthropologists. Recent practices come to a consensus, though not without polemics, that “ethnographic truths are inherently *partial* - committed and incomplete” (Clifford and Marcus 1986:7). The making of ethnography is thus artisanal, and the poetic and political are inseparable and inevitable. An

accusation from Edward Said (1979) that anthropology as a discipline is a participant in, if not a creator of, *orientalism* further perplexes the current generation. The fundamental shattering of the conventional authority of the discipline contributes to at least two reflections: first, the advocacy of ethnography as experimental writing; and second, anthropology as a cultural critique of one's own society. These two trends are inter-related and mutually conditioned. For the former, Marcus and Fisher put it,

A period of experimentation is characterized by eclecticism, the play of ideas free of authoritative paradigms, critical and reflexive views of subject matter, openness to diverse influences embracing whatever seems to work in practice, and tolerance of uncertainty about a field's direction and of incompleteness in some of its projects.

(1986: x)

For the latter, Marcus and Fisher insist that anthropology is no longer the simple collection of the exotic, but the use of cultural richness for self-reflection and self-growth. They explain that "one distinguishing feature of the experimentation is the sophisticated reflection by the anthropologist about herself and her own society that describing an alien culture engenders. This reflection can be harnessed from the field of experimental writing and redirected for full-scale projects of cultural critique at home." (1986:4) Thus the study of other cultures is no longer to seek empirical evidences to prove any universal rules of western progress or stages of human evolution. Rather, it opens up horizons to reflect that the western ways, especially the capitalist modes of organizing human societies and activities, are not the only possibilities, let alone the best.

Politics of Location

While the American interpretive anthropology is preoccupied with the new criticism of representation, British anthropologists in recent years have been more concerned with the political engagement and localizing strategies in ethnographic writing. Richard Fardon and Mark Hobart share the view that self-critique of American

interpretive anthropology still can not escape ethnocentric views of other cultures. Given the inequality of political relations, and the unidirectional flow of academic authority, Mark Hobart argues, "So, despite claiming to embrace the Other and liberate its polyphonic discourse, such approaches perpetuate the vision of the anthropologist as the superior 'knowing subject' who beneficently grants the Other its right to appear on its own behalf in the circus of contemporary academe. ... The cruelest cut of all, however, is that the Other is only authorized to participate according to Western notions of self and action, and so is liable to be deemed not to playing fair when it does not co-operate." (1990:306) In brief, the problems of registering the Western self as the knowing subject in anthropological practice are still not solved. The post-modern turn thus on the one hand shatters the legitimacy of Western knowledge, but on the other hand equally admits that the authority of Western self is inevitable since what matters is the self-critique of one's own society and the other cultures are only taken as reference images. The West still has the power to speak, and still speaks to a Western audience.

Attempting to go beyond post-modern critiques, the British anthropologists ask us to take the action and agency of both the fieldworker and the field agents into account. The field, the real space of encountering other culture, is less like a text than a *con-text* that is historical, temporal and locally situated. Bruce Kapferer, in a critique of postmodern anthropology, also raised the problem of relating a philosophy of deconstruction to a political radicalism committed to understanding processes of power, resistance and suffering (1988:81). Jonathan Spencer argued that ethnographic knowledge was produced through complex processes of interaction between informants and the anthropologist. Field encounters create "a kind of intermediate ground between cultures", and "the beginnings of a hybrid cross-cultural object or product" (1989:155), that is the only possible result of the dialogue in ethnography. Nancy Lindisfarne puts it simply and powerfully, "The anthropologist is both changed and an agent of change." (1996:13). Recently devoting herself to writing in Arabic, she struggled to fight ethnocentrism and the seemingly never defeated Western subject, by addressing herself to a merely native audience. By putting the local audience on stage for the first time, Lindisfarne has no way to go but a reorientation of her academic interests. She must rethink the whole anthropological practice - what kinds of questions are to be asked? What will make sense to the local audience? Once no longer serving a western academe,

she says, political engagement in the field is inevitable (1996:1). What she means by “political” is an active commitment to dissent and an understanding of local power and resistance. As she puts it,

An active commitment to dissent is also necessary if the anthropologist - of whatever political colouring - hopes to offer insights which go beyond the banal and the prejudgments of dominant political formations. Such an attitude of dissent depends on affirming the place of human agency and moral or ethical choice in all interactions and exploring the forms of local resistance which emerge from the nuanced differences, incompatibility and contestation of those choices.

(1996:1)

Practising Native Anthropology

I do not agree with the recent argument that the aim of native anthropology should be set in articulating *alternative* modernities of non-western societies in contrast to western modernity (Ong 1996). In the paper, “Anthropology, China and modernities: the geopolitics of cultural knowledge”, Ong argues for redefining the meanings and uses of alternative modernity in the local geopolitical context as the practice and contribution of native anthropological knowledge (1996:60-65). Although she strives to articulate a non-western oriented anthropological practice, the audience she addresses is still and only the western audience. The paradox is clear: is it good for the Chinese to hear again an official version of the “Chinese road to modernization” (an imagined state version)? What are the insights she could provide for the Chinese who live under an “alternative modernity” she argues for? The mirror for what is distinctive, what is alternative, is always the stereotype, the normative of western modernity. Thus the mirror of reflecting Chinese modernity is still the western societies, which are often essentialized as well. The dichotomy of the western ego/oriental other dyad is still not solved. For me, what is more interesting for native anthropology is not to argue for an otherness or distinctiveness, but to go deep to understand the relation of domination and resistance in one’s own society. Native anthropology, I believe, will not have a more authentic voice

or more authority in producing local knowledge. Rather, a practice of self-critique, self-deconstruction and a preference for nuanced differences, may help to find out the possibilities of self-healing.

Preoccupation with my “own” society grants me a position as a “native” anthropologist whether I like it or not. But for me, what is “own” and what is “native” is always ambiguous, contradictory and self-defeating. Born in a small city in South China, I followed my family migration to Hong Kong in 1979, when I had not completed my primary schooling, and at the time when China started to launch the reform policies. I completed my undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Hong Kong. There a Chinese society, but at the same time a British colony and a “successful” capitalist city, provided me with a western education and different values and styles of life. Hong Kong, before the hand over of 1997, was a distinctly colonial society, where over 95% of the population was Chinese. The daily language was mostly Cantonese, one of the dominant dialects in Guangdong Province, while the official and formal language was English. Family values were often articulated to maintain a stable social order, accompanied by a “money-oriented” capitalist culture and bureaucratic and technocratic politics. It was a place culturally identified with Chinese tradition, albeit imagined and reinvented, while economically oriented to Western consumption values.

Torn apart by two systems, it was particularly hard to assimilate into the host culture, the new mode of life, as childhood memory of the state socialist system continued to affect my experiences growing up in Hong Kong. Thanks to the experiences of displacement, I am acutely aware of the differences between the political systems and the ways social and individual life are shaped. I am also sensitive to social inequalities generated in the capitalist Hong Kong society, as the Chinese official version of Marxist idioms still haunted in my mind. For a long time, I have found myself an exile rather than an immigrant. I could never absorb a new subjectivity in the host community, nor could I find an identification with the culture of the motherland. Cultural exile creates a deep sense of identity crisis, resistant to any identification of “home”. Intellectually, I can never escape from being “homeless”. I cannot identify with the mainland elite whose project, though it sometimes seems radical enough in a state socialist country, is to look for western modernity, or speaking plainly, western capitalism to replace Chinese culture and the socialist system. Nor can I agree with

mainstream Western "China studies," which can hardly escape the trap of orientalism. Nor can I applaud some famous American scholars who act as experts and guardians who can supposedly diagnose the problems of China better than the insiders.

The sense of "homelessness" excludes me from the possibility of standing in the mainstream or sympathizing with either side. Instead, like a nomad (in the Deleuzian sense) I am always forced to look for borderlands or peripheral positions to breathe, to think and to write. Mayfair Yang, an overseas Chinese anthropologist, is right to say, "The question of a decentered anthropological subject-position from which to diagnose China's modern afflictions challenges not only Eurocentrism, but also the "center" of contemporary Chinese culture. At a time when the center of Chinese culture in the world is unable to articulate the concerns of a significant portion of people who call themselves Chinese, it is on the "peripheries" of Chinese culture where dynamic cultural innovations and self-questioning will have to take place." (1994:29) These "peripheries", Yang says, are the product of waves of Chinese "diaspora" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people fleeing warfare, impoverishment, and political persecution on the troubled mainland. They include the Chinese societies of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, as well as Chinese communities scattered in the West (1994:29). It is insightful to say that exiles or immigrants in a peripheral position can provide a new understanding of the Chinese culture and a cultural critique of the center. But for me it is not true that people in the center cannot articulate themselves as Chinese on their own without help from the outside. Rather, people in the center, especially the center elites, always overreact with the sense of superiority of their national and cultural identity as Chinese. Sinocentrism is the common disease not only prevalent in the 19th century but also at the end of 20th century when the center is being incorporated into the international order. "Native" anthropology can contribute not only to challenging Eurocentrism, but Sinocentrism as well, by always taking a peripheral position in the borderland.

This thesis was written as the handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China approached. That did not help much to lessen my sense of "homelessness", nor shorten the cultural distance to the center. The whole Hong Kong community was very alert to the political and cultural shock of the motherland political system. Economically speaking, the two places have been integrated with each other since the early 80s when

the setting up of the Special Economic Zones in South China absorbed much of Hong Kong capital. South China became an important base providing abundant land and cheap labour for the Hong Kong industrial capital, and a demand for Hong Kong popular and consumer culture. But economic cooperation in the past decades can hardly shorten the cultural distance. Instead it creates more misunderstandings, discriminations and mistrust as economic interactions and power are structurally skewed. The long segregation and the dissimilarity of the two cultures has pushed the identity crisis of the Hong Kong people to an extreme limit. As a city of diaspora, Hong Kong is a place where individuals can hold several passports or nationalities, and at the same time still have the right of abode there. Blurred identities, if not resistant identities, are a feature of post-colonial society, since no single political power or value system can provide legitimate cultural identification. My practice as a "native" anthropologist thus is embedded in these historical conjunctures that help to construe a fluid, nomadic, peripheral, yet distinctive position.

Studies on Chinese Women

The study of Chinese women was made visible by Western academics in the 1970s, often female writers influenced by western feminism and wanting to look for and compare women's inequality and oppression in other cultures (Croll 1978; Wolf 1972; Young 1973). With the presupposition that Chinese society was oriented on a family-based structure, the studies of the 70s and 80s were often confined to the area of reproduction and family in order to unravel gender asymmetries. They stressed that the low status of Chinese women was rooted in the Chinese family system, which was organized along male kinship lines and was patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal in nature (Johnson 1983; Kung 1983; Andors 1983; Stacey 1983; Wolf 1972; 1985). Women in traditional China, it was often argued, were deprived of the means of production and the right of property. Their personal autonomy was totally submerged under male authority, either of their father or husband. As Kay A. Johnson puts it, "the patriarchal-patrilineal-patrilocal configuration, in China, as elsewhere, made women marginal members of the entire family system. They were temporary members or future deserters of their natal families and stranger-intruders in their new husbands'

families." (Johnson 1983:9). Women, then, were born into a system which structurally placed them in a very vulnerable position and were basically powerless (Johnson 1983; Kung 1983). Girls were "goods on which one lost money", and they would marry out once they grew up. They were doomed to be "useless things" because they could not contribute to the natal family's survival or provide care for their parents in their old age. Women's labour would be given to another family, and they were considered as "water spilled on the ground." No family would invest time and money in educating their daughters who one day would become the daughter-in-law of someone else (Croll 1983, 1994; Kung 1983; Wolf 1985). A sense of inferiority and degradation was nurtured when the girls were very young, and their inferior position in the family and in the community was structurally located.

Forty years' experience of "socialism" in China did not fulfil its promise of "women's liberation", which was one of the revolutionary goals expected from socialist development. Studies on modern Chinese women convinced us that "the Chinese Road to Socialism" was built on the path of patriarchy (Johnson 1983; Andors, 1983; Stacey 1983; Wolf 1985). Many scholars support the argument that both the revolutionary strategies in the pre-Liberation period and the development policies in the socialist construction era perpetuated and reinforced, rather than destroyed, the traditional family system and ideology. They argue that the reluctance of the government to vigorously pursue family reform goals, and the failure of the government to perceive and act on the patrilocal, and patriarchal marriage patterns which maintain traditional male-centered family structures, are partly due to the leadership's recognition of the utility of strong families for their economic and political goals (Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983). The priorities of economic and political goals nevertheless overshadowed the goals of social change, even at the cost of sacrificing the promise of women's emancipation. Judith Stacey firmly believes that patriarchy lived throughout the history of the Chinese Communist Party, and the CCP made use of the patriarchal system to win a revolution. Margery Wolf, on the other hand, does not believe the CCP intentionally modelled their new society on the patriarchy of the old. She argues that "the leadership did hope to relieve women of the patriarchal burden but were defeated because they did not recognise their own cultural blinders. Despite their good

intentions, their patriarchal lenses ruled out alternatives that might have changed China's history and the future of international feminism." (Wolf 1985:261)

All the above studies cast light in illustrating that "socialism" in China did not provide a model for achieving gender equality; rather "socialism" could cohabit with patriarchy. Studies during the last decade have made the argument more sophisticated by reformulating the concepts of "patriarchy" and "family", taking them not as fixed universal systems, but as changing processes in specific temporal situations. Recent researches on Chinese women and families have argued that the family system has been further consolidated in the reform period. After the rural land reforms in the 1980s, rural families have reverted to their importance in the pre-Liberation period (Croll 1985, 1994; Davin 1991; Davis and Harrell 1993; Fei 1991; Johnson 1993). As Croll has put it, "the reversal of the process of collectivisation was primarily a consequence of the contracting out of land and production quota to the peasant household, which brought about the simultaneous decline of the collective and the emergence of the peasant household as the dominant economic, political and social unit in the Chinese countryside." (Croll 1994:20) With the restoration of production functions, the family as a collective unit in rural society is the centre of resource allocation, division of labour and final income redistribution. Thus family strategies become particularly important in allocating labourers, deciding what types of crops should be planted and choosing to develop non-agricultural production sidelines or send labourers to wage work in the industrial cities (Croll 1994; Johnson 1993). At the cultural level, the family is where cultural norms are enmeshed, power relations anticipated, and decisions made.

The existing research on Chinese women and the family contributes a valuable understanding of women's situations and gender relationships in Chinese society. It is, nevertheless, prone to rely on grand theories such as "patriarchy" and "patrilineality" to discern the conditions of Chinese women's lives. Structural approaches tend to universalize the experiences of women, whose inequality and oppression are believed to be rooted in the family system. The subject of the study, "women", has seldom undergone serious epistemological reflection and is often taken for granted as an unproblematic concept. Differences among and within women themselves are often

neglected. Even worse, women in China were viewed as the passive victims of structural configuration, especially the seemingly never fading Chinese family system.

Studies in the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s call for attention to women's experiences, differences and agency. The category of "Chinese women" is problematized in order to attune to the multiplicity of identities, voices and locations of different generations of women in specific historical time (Croll 1995; Gilmartin, Hershatter, Rofel and White 1994; Barlow 1994; Evans 1997). Croll in her recent book *Changing Identities of Chinese Women* (1995) points out the importance of understanding the experiences of women, and the gap between the female experiences of familial and social life and the hegemonic rhetoric of the socialist state. As she puts it, "One of the most marked characteristics of the Reform period is the open recognition of the discrepancy between the rhetoric of equality and the female experience of inequality." (1995:8) The diversity of female experiences, the changing identities and the plural rites of passage in acquiring womanhood thus are the agenda for future women's studies. The search for women's lived experiences and agency is opposed to the view of Chinese women as passive acceptors, a view of historical agents with a great variety of experiences. Chinese women are no longer the passive victims of structural oppression, rather they are, temporally and situationally, strategic agents in making their own lives. While there are active calls to look for women's agency and daily experiences, recent study so far has not put enough effort into exploring the heterogeneous identities and actions of Chinese women as social agents, nor has it provided in-depth ethnographic studies recording them as active, lively strategic agents participating to create and defend their lives.

Chinese Women and Work

Literature on Chinese women and work, on the other hand, has a long tradition of depicting Chinese daughters as active labourers, participating vigorously in the production sphere. As Kay Ann Johnson states, "the commonly held notion that women in traditional Chinese society were restricted to the home and were never allowed to participate in 'productive' labour is an exaggeration." (Johnson 1983:15) Among poor peasant families, keeping girls at home was only an ideal that could rarely be achieved.

Many historical studies show that women frequently participated in productive work and contributed a considerable share to their family economy (Buck 1937; Feng and Chang 1945). In addition to farming work, women also participated in a variety of productive jobs. In late 1920s Hakka women in Elizabeth Johnson's study were involved in various form of transport work such as carrying coal, charcoal, steel, and cement for construction, even when they were over forty years old (Johnson 1984:81). Some women were good at selling, since women peddlers were allowed to enter the house of the affluent families, according to the Pruitt's story of a Han daughter (Pruitt 1967:175). Some women were also active in home industries. Rawski's study (1972) shows that women in weaving and spinning jobs contributed income to their families at least equal to or more than men made from farming. Rawski reported that a skilled woman weaver could weave in four or five days a bolt of cotton cloth, whose value was equal to one sixth of the annual production from one mou of fertile land (Rawski 1972:47). In Suzhou, a wife could earn as much through weaving as her husband who was a model farmer. The women could earn twenty silver *liang* a year, while a hired labourer only cost 13 *liang* a year (Rawski 1972:55).

Girls in the Canton Delta were famous for participating in the silk production in the early twentieth century, and earned considerable wages from mulberry leaf harvesting, silkworm raising and silk reeling (Topley 1975; Stockard 1989). This income provided the economic base for girls to develop many strategies to resist marriage. It contributed to the rise of a "resisting marriage culture" in the Canton delta, especially in the Sundak region in the early twentieth century. While daughters in Canton were active in silk industries, girls in Shanghai in the pre-1949 period were predominant in the early textile industry. Emily Honig, in her study of Shanghai women workers, states, "In Shanghai, China's largest industrial centre prior to 1949, cotton was king and the majority of mill workers were women. Including those employed in the silk and tobacco factories, women accounted for almost two-thirds of the total industrial work force in Shanghai." (Honig 1986:1) The above studies show that Chinese women's experiences were diverse and nuanced according to their local economic roles and cultural practices. They were never totally passive, nor absolutely economically dependent as the common assumption held, though their economic power might not necessarily increase their status. Janet Salaff's studies on Hong Kong

working daughters in the 1960s and 1970s reported that girls were able to expand personal consumption levels and gained certain freedoms in social life through their wage-earning power, though most of their earnings contributed to the family income (1981:170). Lydia Kung's work on Taiwanese women echoes this: "I do not wish to deny the very real transformations that have occurred: working daughters enjoy greater mobility, peer contacts, and their participation in production has enhanced their economic value to their families. These conditions have not, however, substantially elevated the standing of women at home or in society" (Kung 1983: xiii-xiv).

Phillis Andors was the first scholar to do research on the situation of contemporary Chinese women workers at the Shenzhen SEZ in the mid 1980s. She points out the increased feminization of labour as China started to adopt export industrialization: women workers, mainly single and under 35, composed 70% of the work force in most of the light industries like textiles and electronics (1988). Maria Tam is a native anthropologist who records a lot of interesting stories of women workers in a joint corporation in Shekou Industrial Zone. Employing Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, she argues that modernization as "an overwhelming and impersonal process, would be related to those individuals who made it a reality through day-to-day 'getting by'", and "in fact by definition 'modern-ization' requires human action" (1992:xi). Women workers, thus, were taken as "social agents that helped to bring out modernization by grasping new opportunities and exploiting resources under a new set of rules" (ibid). Ching Kwan Lee, a local sociologist, on the other hand, deploys Michael Burawoy's theory of production politics to make a comparative study on two factory regimes: one in Hong Kong and one in Shenzhen (1995). Based on ethnographic study, she argues that the factory regime in Shenzhen was one of localistic despotism, while in Hong Kong it was one of familial hegemony. The two plants where she conducted research were owned by the same Hong Kong enterprise, managed by the same team of managers, and produced the same electronic products, yet had two different modes of disciplinary control which aroused her academic interest (ibid). Though her study aims at reformulating Burawoy's theory on the politics of production by putting in gender and the factors of social organization of labour market such as familial, kin and localistic ties, she nevertheless provides rich and intriguing stories of women workers on the shopfloor. These existing studies, by and large,

contribute to the understanding of women's agency and actions and provide us with valuable empirical researches and personal accounts showing how individuals actively participate in creating their own life worlds. My project is inspired by these studies.

Sex, gender and body in Studies of China

Harriet Evans has said that the exploration of the specific meanings inscribed in the Chinese use of the terms *xing* (sex) and *xingbie* (gender) is a vital political project in contemporary China (1997:30). But the study of sex and gender in modern or reform China still lags behind other fields of interest, though there have been increasingly demanding voices in recent years. The volume *Engendering China* (1994), a collection of essays, is the first attempt to highlight the importance of the subject in China. The problem for western academics, or even local scholars trained in western feminist canons, is the difficulty of employing the Chinese terms *xing* and *xingbie* translating them into western concepts (Evans 1997). There are no Chinese terms corresponding to the western concepts of sex, sexuality and gender. Most scholars, including Chinese writers, use the term *xingbie* to denote gender (a social and cultural construct) in contrast to *xing*, sex (a natural and biological attribute). But the term *xingbie* literally only means "sex difference" and is most often used to differentiate male and female in many Chinese documents or records (Evans 1997:28). Yet the lack of distinct concepts for sex and gender, with the ambiguity thereby entailed, does not necessarily prevent communication. Rather, it can provide a good way to reflect on the artificial or arbitrary division of sex and gender in western concepts.

Harriet Evans's recent book, *Women and Sexuality in China* (1997), provides a detailed analysis of the dominant discourses on sexuality in the socialist period and the reform era. As she puts it, "Sexuality is a key site of the construction of gender differences and of the hierarchies inscribed in them. My aim in analysing modern and contemporary Chinese sexual discourses on the basis of theoretical insights located in a cultural context far removed from them is to attempt to unravel the specific modalities of meanings - particularly those that target and appropriate women - inscribed in their conflation of sex, sexuality and gender." (1997:29). Most of the studies on sex or sexuality, however, are historical works such as Frank Dikötter's outstanding *Sex*,

Culture and Modernity (1995), and Gail Hershatter's paper (1994), "Modernizing Sex, Sexing Modernity: Prostitution in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai". Both studies focus on the discourses of sex, the construction of knowledge and its relation to China's quest for modernity in the early twentieth century. Dikötter explores the emergence of modern medical science in changing and regulating sexuality at a time when China was undergoing rapid change towards modern state-building and nationalist zeal. Hershatter, on the other hand, confines herself to prostitution in Shanghai, tracing changes in the discourse on sex and prostitution, and the way the categories were embedded in political power, social transformation, and ideas about nationhood and cultural identity (1994:147). These studies focus on the period of Republican China and contribute to the understanding of the nexus between sex, discourse and power in a specific time and cultural place.

The study of the Chinese body, like the study of sex and gender, attracts less attention than the issue deserves, except in the confines of medicine, painting and literature. The neglect of the study of the body was not an idiosyncrasy of China studies, but a general symptom of the social sciences (Turner 1991). Stimulated by the poststructuralist and postmodernist critique of the concepts of subject, self, and body, some scholars have started to re-frame the paradigms of China studies and turn their attention to the body. All the essays directly or indirectly addressing the Chinese body are collected in *Body, Subject and Power in China* (1994), which is the first monograph on the investigation of the body in China. Another monograph on the Chinese body is *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* (1995) by Susan Brownell.

The study of the Chinese body, in a reflection of the Western knowledge paradigm, is posited as a counter-construct to the Western Cartesian body. As the editors of *Body, Subject and Power*, Angela Zito and Tani Barlow, say, "We quickly realized that if we wished to talk about the body - our own or other people's - and failed to address our own assumptions, we could easily ensnare ourselves. We may imagine that other people's bodies are just like ours, or that they have no bodies at all, or that their bodies are so different that we cannot possibly understand them, trapped as we are in a particularly Western post-Cartesian body-mind." (1994:1-2) They understand that the Western concept of one biological, unitary body, generalizable to all human beings

in all social contexts, is problematic. They argue that "China possesses a multiplicity of "bodies" subject to historical and cultural variation that is as deep and complex as any charted for Europe." (1994:4)

In contrast to a Western unitary, anatomical body, Kuriyama believes that Chinese bodies are constructed within two confines: *li*, rituals, and *qi*, energy (or *feng*, wind). In the philosophy of Chinese classical medicine, Chinese bodies are believed never to be one, but multiple, dispersing and fragmented (Kuriyama 1994). Against the traditional emphasis on cosmic harmony and unity, Kuriyama highlights the decisive role of disharmony and individuation in the development of Chinese medicine. He stresses that individuation in classical China had no ontological basis, "the nature of the self that slipped out of phase was ultimately the same as that of the environment it emerged from: the self was itself windlike." (Kuriyama 1994:33) Individuals, in this Chinese medical view, are not distinct essences. Rather individuation simply mirrors the plurality and unpredictability of winds. Different localities have different airs, individuals have personal breaths, and individualized orifices on the body's surface mediate the confluence of cosmic, local, and personal winds (ibid. 1994:34).

While Kuriyama employs the Chinese concepts of wind to deconstruct a stable and unitary body, Judith Farquhar works on a reinterpretation of the discursive practice of contemporary Chinese medicine. In "Multiplicity, Point of View, and Responsibility in Traditional Chinese Healing," she argues explicitly that there is nothing which can properly be called "*the body*" in Chinese medicine. Body is not discrete but a multiplicity. Many subject positions are acknowledged in medical practices which give emphasis to specific points of view (1994:78). She points out, "What I find instead in the discursive practice of contemporary Chinese medicine are numerous subject positions, constant reminders that perceptions are contingent upon the point of view of the perceiver, and an organisation of knowledge (of disease, of medical tradition) as a specific and momentary *relation* unifying knower and known." (Ibid. 1994:78-79) Farquhar argues that anatomy is entirely missing in Chinese medical discourse, and the Chinese body is historical and constructed, ever vulnerable to disorganisation and in need of continued reinvention in the form of a proper hygiene of eating, washing, sleeping, sexual practice, and feeling (ibid. 1994:93). In contrast to a Western objective

and unified body, the Chinese body is in fact a processual body, which offers a site of struggle against the claims of medical "Western" epistemologies.

In his discussion of Chinese art, John Hay asks: where is the body in Chinese painting? He points out that sculpture of the nude body has been extraordinarily prominent in Western society for millennia. In China, not only has the nude been entirely absent, but so has sculpture (1994:68). He argues that Chinese art was produced and seen within a very different set of frames. And though there was no nude, the human body was far from invisible. It was dispersed through metaphors locating it in the natural world by transformational resonance and brushwork that embodied the cosmic-human reality of *qi*, or energy (1994:44). He continues, "When trying to understand the human figure in Chinese art in contrast to the nude in Western art, we must also bear in mind the naked body's complex and inextricable dialectic with clothing. Although there was no nude in China, there was certainly nakedness." (1994:44). In his view, the body of *qi* is hardly invisible but it is dispersed. Thus the question ultimately becomes how to represent *qi* in brushwork. Since this is accomplished with lines, clothing turns out to be more useful than flesh.

Kuriyama's, Farquhar's, and Hay's papers are very interesting for their attempts to interpret the Chinese body as a dispersing, processual and social body. But there is a risk of romanticizing the Chinese body in order to attack the Western body. That the Chinese body is not constructed in an anatomical structure, nor is it conceptualized as an objective reality, does not mean that the Chinese body can live out of the knowledge/power/body nexus, and be less subjected to domination. The "fluid reality" and social embeddedness of the material Chinese body contains more complicated and sophisticated power relations which need to be exposed, rather than hidden and then beautified.

Ann Anagnost is the only author who argues clearly that the Chinese body is a political body as well. Many insights can be gained from her paper, "The Politicized Body", in which she explores how the docile political subjects were produced and undergirded by a projection of the party/state as a subject writ large. Employing a news item from the *Peasant Daily* (1987) about a peasant striving for a "law-abiding household" plaque, she analyzes how the power of the state, through the bestowal of status honours, defines positions in political culture through its classificatory strategies-

its power to name and to sort persons into the hierarchically arranged categories of a moral order (Anagnost 1994:133-134). Anagnost argues that "rituals objectify subjects"; they "produce docile bodies and transform these bodies into signifiers that figure in a master narrative of progress toward a socialist modernity. These rituals objectify subjects in a way that does not individuate them but causes them to be subsumed within a mass identity" (ibid. 1994:139). In other words, she traces a process of how a subject recognizes itself in a hegemonic discourse by which the state-party claims to correctly "represent" subjects. The consequent "politicized body" is the subject of endless state narratives.

Anagnost goes on to argue that the processes of subject making and the technologies of power over the body in China are different from the West. In contrast to the individuation of the political subject of the Western disciplinary technologies, she argues, the Chinese context operates according to a different principle. The disciplinary technology deployed by the Chinese state at first glance seems similar to what Foucault called "semiotechnique". She says,

in order to work, it must make its subjects visible rather than invisible and anonymous as are the individuals produced in the West. Signs play on the surface of subjects, reordering their outward practice rather than their inner psyches. It is not that these techniques fail to affect one's sense of self, but they affect it more in terms of a submersion of the self into a moral category, The goal is not so much the orthopaedic refashioning of the individual, so that deviance is made to conform to a norm presumed to be present in the social body, *as it is the radical re-formation of that very social body, in which old practices are displaced by new in the teleological movement toward a modernity that calls itself socialist.*

(1994:150)

In short, Anagnost's essay contributes to the understanding of the constitution of subject through performing, regulating and politicizing the body in the Chinese context. She stresses that the meaning inscribed on bodies, their modality of power, and the processes of subject construction are all different from the West.

My own project builds upon the insights of the above studies on the Chinese body. But I myself, as an embodied Chinese subject, have quickly come to realize that the counter-discourse that the contributors to the collection, *Body, Subject and Power in China* formulate to attack Western epistemologies (the Cartesian body/mind dichotomy, the universal subject and the individualized self) can easily result in romanticizing the Chinese body. The fascinating paradigm they build is the claim that the Chinese bodies, by their very presence, are multiple, shifting, processual and social. Except for Anagnost, who pays attention to the specific socialist political culture, all the other authors to certain degree essentialize the Chinese body in order to argue that there is intrinsic difference between the West's body/subject and the East's body/subject. For me, there is no essentializing difference as such. "Chineseness" should not be granted an ontological status, rather, it should be deconstructed and returned to its historical and temporal presence. The critique of postmodernism and poststructuralism on the Western body, self and subject should not let itself turn to the Chinese body, constructed as romantic Other, to dissolve its epistemological cul-de-sac.

Women's Movement and Women's Studies in Mainland China

Women's studies in mainland China are rarely pure agendas of academics. They are often offshoots of women's movements in the early 20th century and in contemporary period. The first tide of women's movement in China emerged in May Fourth movement of 1919, and it was at that period that women's issues were seriously raised out and openly discussed for the first time in Chinese history. Women's studies groups were formed, and many were led by female intellectuals who were allowed to study in public schools since the end of the 20th century. Many issues such as women's education, women's right to vote, women's freedom to choose marriage partners, and women's work and foot-binding were hotly debated in colleges, or in newspapers and magazines (Pun, 1995:246). Women's movements sprouted in May Fourth period, however, were soon subsumed under the nationalist movement and the communist movement, and became parts of political movements (Pun 1995:245-263).

All-China Women's Federation led and shaped women movements in China after the Chinese Communist Party took over mainland China in 1949. Women's issues were then restricted to be discussed under the cannon of Chinese Marxism and dictated by the Chinese government. Women issues were almost silenced when All-China Women's Federation was forced to shut down during the decade of Chinese Cultural Revolution. It was not until the early 80s, after launching of economic reform, that the Federation was allowed to re-establish itself. But its legitimacy as the only agent to represent and handle women issues in China was questioned, especially from women intellectuals in the academy, despite the Federation founded the first Institute of Women's Studies in 1983 (Li and Zhang 1994:141). With relative eased control on academic activities, many women intellectuals in various university started to speak out their views on women's issues and show their differences from the Federation. In 1987, the first non-governmental Women's Studies Center was formed in Zhengzhou University in Henan. Hereafter, there was a boom of women's studies in colleges over the country since the mid 1980s and reached the climax in mid 1990s, as China hosted the 1995 World Women Conference in Beijing.

Many influential works on women's studies in this period cover several disciplines such history, literature, sociology, demography and methodology. Representatives are Li Xiaojiang's *Eve's Search* (1988) and *Gender Gap* (1989) in women's studies theory; Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua's *Emerging from the Horizon of History* (1989) in the study of women's literature; Lü Meiyi and Zhen Yongfu's *Chinese Women's Movement, 1984-1921* (1990) in the field of women's history; Zhu Chuzhu's *The Population of Chinese Women* (1991), and Women's Studies Institute's *A Review of the Social Status of Women in China* (1995) in the field of social studies (Li and Zhang, 1994:143-145). There are also a large number of large scale surveys on family, marriage, work and sex either in city, provincial or national level. Recently, Women Workers's Committee of All-China Trade Union compiles a book on *Chinese Women Workers's Situation* (1997), covering reports and surveys from thirteen provinces. These studies contribute to raising concern on Chinese women's issues in national level as well as in international community. Despite many efforts are made and valuable information is provided, micro studies or ethnographic investigations are, nevertheless, lacking and there is still little space left for the women we studied, who

can speak out themselves and address their own problems. Often the women studied, especially in those large scale surveys are reified and even worse, treated as data, but not living agents.

Fieldsite and Fieldworker

The field is a labyrinth for most ethnographers, and the attraction of the labyrinth comes from temptation, often cultural or ideological. The desire followed is the pain, the difficulty of getting access to the right site, like a lover wandering if the one he or she pursues is the one true love. My urge to work in a factory and act as a *dagongmei* is definitely subjective, loaded with ideological burden. My childhood memory of living in a worker's country and my youthful training in feminism merge into a search for an identity of female worker. It all helps to shore up my intellectual and "radical" fantasy. Before going to the field, I was often excited when I dreamed of myself toiling on the line in an electronic factory, or when I told my friends and my family about my project which they thought was insane. The workplace, I believe, is the "right" space in which the female bodies of *dagongmei*, myself, and my project will be properly situated. The blooming of foreign invested factories in Shenzhen SEZ demonstrates the rapid transformation of Chinese society in the last decade. These factories provide the best locales to see how the microphysics of the power of capitalist forces and the existing state socialist relations produce the new subjects - *dagongmei*. I then decided to intrude into one of them and start my nomadic ethnographic journey. The failure of Mayfair Yang's attempt to get into a factory in China by using introductions from state bureaucratic agents warned me to avoid contact any state organs, if at all possible. My identity as a Hong Kong person, rather, helped me to make connections with these foreign invested factories, since more than 80% of these factories in Shenzhen are owned by Hong Kong capital. Meteor Electronic Company, the one I chose, is owned by a good friend of my elder brother, Mr Chou. As the major shareholder and the company director, Mr Chou approved my research project.

My enthusiasm for work in a factory was somewhat cooled down, not by the difficulty of getting access to the field, but by the postmodern critique of the fieldwork experience, and by the actual negotiation in the field site later. The critique says directly

that there is no "field" as such, and thus there should be no "reality" of Chinese society "out there" waiting for me to know and understand. The knowing subject is not value-free but complicitous in creating known objects. Foucauldian insights tell us that the making of "truth" and knowledge is about power, resistance and social practice (Rabinow 1986). Yet for me, it is clear that the "field" in China is neither "out there", nor can it be freely and arbitrarily constructed by one's own will; rather, it is always historical, political and locally constrained. The field as a living text, an orchestration of moving signs is surely not an individual construct; I would not dare to claim it as my own. I will rather argue that the field in China is delimited by: a) the political situation of China; b) the agency of the field informants; and c) my experience and interpretations as a novice and native anthropologist.

My access to the field was made possible, however, by the Open-door policy adopted since 1979. Anthropologists from the outside are now for the first time allowed to stay in China doing intensive fieldwork, though most of the time under official supervision. My research proposal, written for the management in the summer of 1995, emphasized the understanding of labour relations and workers' psychology and thus the need to work on the shopfloor and sleep in the workers' dormitory. I received a response in August 1995, confirming that I could start my fieldwork in two months' time. I had visited the company twice before I formally became a full-time worker in November 1995. My proposal was modified by the company director, Mr Chou, who acted for health and safety reasons rather than because of political or sensitive issues. He suggested that I work in the general office as a clerk rather than as a worker on the line. For working hours, he suggested I go off work at 5:00 p.m. and do no overtime work at night. For accommodation and food arrangement, he suggested I eat and stay with the Hong Kong staff in a shared apartment rather than with the local workers in the dormitory. It took me a long time to convince him that his good intentions would spoil the depth of my research if I could not work and live directly with the shopfloor workers. My insistence surprised him, as if he could never believe that doing research should be so hard and demanding. He simply took me as an idealist student who had no experience of working and thus did not understand the hardship of factory life. He allowed me to try out the first month and readjust my demands afterward.

My ambition to go directly to the heart of workers' lives did me little good. Though I tried to present myself as a "student trainee" who came to learn the operation of the factory system and the lives of women workers, most of the line workers did not trust me at first. Instead, I was encircled by the supervisory ranks, such as department managers, forepersons and line leaders, who showed the most curiosity and interest in me. These people were much more educated and could imagine what a Ph.D. meant. They often directed and delineated my research interest by their own imagination. Surprisingly, I was heartily helped by these people, as they enthusiastically showed me their work and explained to me in detail what they were doing. At first I found myself too exhausted to cope with the long working hours, as I had not yet got used to them. I was forced to develop too many "friendships" that I did not know how to handle. The intimate relationship developed with the supervisory staff hindered my communication with the shopfloor workers. I was always treated as a "special guest" in the workplace, which spoiled my dream of becoming a "real" *dagongmei*.

It took at least a month or two for the managerial staff to lessen their curiosity about me and my presence on the line. As days went by, I became "normal". Workers on the line started to talk to me. They shared their hardships and feelings, hoping that I could understand them, since I was working on the line and was more willing to listen to them. My merging into the workplace community was much helped by staying in the workers' dormitory, where all private spaces were shared and one could not hide anything. Mistrust was clear, as every day we chatted, ate, read, and listened to popular songs together. While most of my co-workers or room mates could never make sense of what a doctoral thesis meant, they nevertheless had their own understanding and imagination. Writing fiction about "real" workers' lives and poor people was the role they imagined and inscribed on me as an ethnographer. "Bitter" stories and female grievances, somewhat exaggerated or invented, started to bombard me, the never failing good listener. On many occasions some Hakka women talked to me with great passion in local dialects for a long time, murmuring their hard experiences of life while I understood nothing. What I could speak fluently were Mandarin, Cantonese and Chaozhou *hua*. So, except for those who could speak Cantonese, most of the workers talked to me in Mandarin, though with strong local accents. Cantonese was the official

company language, while in daily life Mandarin was the most common language that workers of different origins used to communicate with each other.

My fieldwork in the company ended in April 1996, at a time when I already had a lot of good friends, and when I started to understand various dialects and could communicate with my co-workers without language difficulties. Knowing that time was never enough, I had no choice but to stop the fieldwork, especially in a situation where I had little time to write down field notes while I was working in the company. Eleven to twelve hours working each day sapped me all my energy. And if there was still something left, I preferred chatting with my co-workers before we went to sleep. If there was a rest day on Sunday, everybody slept like “pigs” until noon time and then in the afternoon went out shopping. Most of the time I struggled to get up early in the morning to write down what I thought was particularly important and what should not be forgotten. Failure to do so was the normal case. So I wrote field notes based on memory and afterthought, which gave me an acute sense that ethnography, after all, is a subjective construct. Ethnographic reconstruction is an attempt, a never fulfilled attempt, to make sense, to order and reorder rich yet chaotic lived experiences which are inherently resistant to patterning and conceptualizing.

Overview of the thesis

Becoming *dagongmei* is the central theme of the thesis. *Dagongmei* is a specific cultural-symbolic artifact, produced at the particular moment when international capital came to China in the Post-Mao period. *Dagongmei*, literally “working girls”, is a new term coined in Reform China, denoting a new kind of labour relations fundamentally different from those of Mao’s period. A Cantonese term imported from Hong Kong, *dagong* means “working for the boss”, or “selling labour.” The term has a fierce connotation of commodification and a capitalist exchange of labour for wage. *Mei* means the sister, the girl, which further illustrates that the selling of labour is gender specific. In contrast to the term *gongren*, the proletariat class, the master of the state socialist country, the use of the new word *dagong* signifies the end of the old Chinese working class solely regulated by state mechanisms and the rise of market factors in shaping labour relations. *Dagongmei* thus is a newly embodied social identity emergent in

contemporary China, produced to meet the changing socio-economic relations of the country and the needs of the capital. As a condensed identity, it unfolds the full story of how a state socialist system gives way to the capitalist world economy and how capitalist practices depend on the regulation of class and sexual relations.

Chapter II, besides providing a brief introduction to local changes in an industrial village in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, will illustrate the making of the new Chinese working class emerging in the contemporary period. The argument of the chapter is that *making* and *unmaking* are aspects of the same process, as the new Chinese working class struggles to emerge in a rapidly changing market socialist economy in the Reform period. I will try to elucidate how the newly formed working class, born under the light of the Chinese socialist economy integrating into the world economy, are subjected to both the workings of the market and state forces, and are *specific* to the form and process of its historical making. The specificity of the new working class lies in the paradoxical processes by which it is often deformed, or even killed, at the moment of its birth. The emergence is transient and rootless. The analysis of class in this chapter is taken as active processes, in which the subjective experiences of the workers will be stressed.

Chapter III deals with the production of desire: the desire of the young rural girls leaving home, driving themselves into industrial work. The puzzle in this chapter is that there is no violence, no coercive force, no misrecognition involved in the process of moving labour into the industrial world. Young Chinese village girls know well about sweatshops and the hardship of the factory life. Yet they are still eager to leave the village by selling their labour in the urban area. Marx's concept of "alienation of labour" will be re-evaluated and further elaborated from the workers' subjective experiences and the processes through which the rural girls actualize themselves as labourers. The huge migrant waves, the flow of population from the rural areas to the cities, give a living picture of the great hope and desire of a whole society steering into a market economy. How individual desires are articulated and produced, and why individual desires are so in harmony with the demand of the industrial capitalism- all these questions are the central concerns of this chapter. The contention is that "desire" or "lack" itself is an ideology, a social need, a creation of the market economy and a function of power. Desire is generated to act as a common "passion" of society that

individual social agents are induced to live up. A changing society contains psychic politics which are social and historical: living on desire, living on power.

Situating myself in the electronics factory, Chapter IV discusses the imperatives and techniques of the production machine in producing a social body: docile, disciplined yet productive *dagongmei*. Drawing insights from Foucault's *surveiller et punir* (1979), I will show the political technologizing of the body, and the techniques of disciplinary power deployed in the Meteor workplace. The study of the body, especially the female body, will be particularly crucial in this chapter, because we can see vividly how the production machine can work arbitrarily and violently on it, and how the lived body reacts and resists. All the disciplinary power and techniques, either institutional or discursive, are embedded in specific local practices. My interest is in the modalities of power specific to the Chinese society in the contemporary period. Besides unveiling the relations of domination, the microphysics of power over the Chinese female body, I will also look at the relations of resistance and practices of transgression in the workplace. The female body I study is never the "docile body", but the "tactical body" of its agents who strive to survive, who know how to find out transgressive ways in order to live in a newly oppressive industrial world. The notion of "work culture" helps to reveal the creative attempts of women at developing everyday life tactics to confront disciplinary power, such as forming kin and ethnic forces in efforts to assert control over work processes, manipulating hegemonic language to challenge factory regulations or formulating innumerable informal codes of workplace defiance.

Chapter V asks the questions of "who need identity?", "who need (to be) workers?" and "who need (to be) *dagongmei*?", and their relation to power and capital. *Dagongmei*, as a new social identity, is crafted and then inscribed on the rural female body when the young girls enter into a particular set of production relations, experiencing the process of proletarianization and alienation. I will probe the process and analyze the regulatory and identificatory practices inside and outside the workplace. I will see how the production of identity deploys the art of metaphor, the power of language and the politics of othering and differentiating. I will also study how the regional, kin and ethnic differences are imaged to craft identities in the workplace. The central argument in this chapter is that the identification of person according to the principle of locality or ethnicity is political, embodying rural-urban disparity and spatial

inequality. Rural-urban disparity, as the major social difference in China, is manipulated, invented and reinvented to create abject subjects in the workplace. Local and kin-ethnic identities will be seen as performative cultural artifacts and practical relationships which are produced at instantaneous moments in specific situations. The politics of dialects, as a system of social differences, hierarchies and distinctions, will also be looked at to disclose the struggle over power, resources and identities in the workplace.

Chapter VI discusses the power, the discourses and the perversity of sexualizing female bodies in the workplace. Sexed subjects will be seen as the effects of power and themselves are constructed through a process of signification and resignification, differentiation and exclusion, situated in specific times and places. For Foucault, the body is “sexed” within a discourse of sex which is itself an effect of a specific organization of power, discourses and pleasures (1978). While he deals with body and sexuality, he has long been criticized for neglecting the gendered nature of disciplinary techniques on the body, or a sexually differentiated body which is particularly necessary for certain types of mechanisms or apparatuses (McNay, 1992). Thus, in this chapter I will try to link up the process of politically technologizing the body, with the process of registering a feminine identity (gendering), at its nodal point: daily language, local practices, social discourse and institutionalized regulations. Particular attention will be drawn to the conflict embedded in the process of gendering, and the perversity, not the homogeneity, of workings on bodies. The point in this chapter is that sexualizing labouring bodies is another necessary project of capital in contemporary China. *Dagongmei* as a class and sexual subject, is in great contrast to the asexual subject *gongren* in Mao’s era. *Dagongmei* highlights the sexual re-orientation to industrial work that is crucial to industrial capitalism, which is a system of hierarchy and distinction. I will see how the regulation of a sexed body is fundamental to the disciplinary techniques in the workplace and how individuals cope, negotiate and transgress against hegemonic control.

Chapter VII finally arrives at the scene of bodily pain, the scream and dream of workplace life. I will trace how individuals are torn by the tensions between capitalist force, state socialist power and the local patriarchal culture; I will show how they meet social violence and how bodily pains develop in the workplace. The painful body, I argue, is not the defeated body, but the resistant body. Chronic pains, such as headaches,

back aches and menstrual pain, are pervasive in the factory, and provide an index of social alienation and domination of the female body. But as Arthur Kleinman said, chronic pain as the embodiment of human suffering, could be viewed as “the same process of embodiment of resistance to the lived flow of daily experience” (1994:174). Menstrual pain, the specific feminine experience, lets us unravel the inevitable conflict between women’s bodily time and industrial time. With Julia Kristeva’s insight, women’s time is periodical and cyclical in nature (1986), inherently contradictory to the linear and progressive industrial time. Thus, no matter how overwhelming the disciplinary power is, the female body cannot but resist it through various chronic pains, dymenorrhea or fainting in the workplace. Scream and dream, in Bataille’s sense, are the extreme limit of human experience (1995), crying out the impossibility of human suffering and the possibility of human freedom and transgression. I am going to argue, followed Foucault’s reading of dreams (1985), that struggling in the borderland between the consciousness and the unconsciousness, the *dagongmei*’s scream and dream is an odyssey of human freedom.

Chapter VIII ends with a reflection on the thesis as a political project and the practice of native anthropology. A brief concluding effort marks the (in)conclusiveness of the project and asks for an open and participatory reading.

The Making of the New Chinese Working Class

Making, because it is a study in an active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning. The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making. ... More than this, the notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship. Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomize its structure. ... The relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context.

E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*

The subtitle of this chapter, “Making the new Chinese working class”, is a trope, or an irony more than a statement. I want to avoid turning real lives into dead data, pattern, or structures by the enunciation of the word “class”. And I do not want to stifle an analysis of “class”, as some trends in post-modern studies try to do by announcing the death of class analysis. So I will regard “class”, not only as fluid historical relationships, but also as relationships that contain many tensions, contradictions and even self-defeating elements. In this chapter, my argument is that *making* and *unmaking* are aspects of the same process as the new Chinese working class struggles to emerge in a rapidly changing market socialist economy in Reform China.¹ As Andrew Walder argues, the process of proletarianization in socialist China was unique in the way that it was political force rather market force which dictated the whole process. The *second* Chinese working class, differed from its embryonic form in the 1920s. It was formed within a short period - a few years under a command state economy, in contrast to the English or other European working classes that took at least half a century and were dictated to by a market economy (Walder 1984). The *third* Chinese working class, born under the light of the Chinese socialist economy integrating into the world economy, is subjected to both the

workings of the “invisible” hand of market and the “authoritarian” state, again is *specific* in the form and process of its historical making. The word “class” in this chapter is used as a singular noun, though I do not intent to neglect the complexities and variations of the new working classes emergent in different regions of China. migrant workers in South China, as they share many of the same characteristics. My study was focused on the migrant workers in South China. It can only shed light on one particular form of working class emerging in the changing society of Shenzhen, shaped both by the forces of capital and the state. However, this form of working class will become more and more important in the future China as a whole.

My contention is simple: this newly formed *third* Chinese working class in the region of Pearl River delta, and maybe in other economic developing zones as well, is checked at the particular moment of its birth as a class force. This hybrid phenomenon is one of the interests of my study. Based on five-months stay in a foreign-owned factory in an industrial village in Shenzhen, I attempt not only to offer the subjective experiences of the workers to see how far they experience themselves as class agents, but also try to nail down to details of the state mechanisms and factory measures in (un)making the newly born working class. Situated in a most micro environment, I attempt to find and analyze the documents issued at the lowest level of government and observe the implementation of the policies.

Mapping the Factory in a Changing Community

“Shooting Star” was a nickname the workers gave to the factory where I worked between November 1995 and April 1996, so I simply fixed on that name as the Meteor factory throughout the whole thesis. On a usual day, everybody rushed for breakfast in the canteen at 7:00 p.m., and work would start at eight o’clock. It was a ten minutes walk from our dormitory to the factory. The air was fresh and chilly in the mid autumn morning. Girls, like morning birds, flocked together, talking and

¹ See Andrew Walder (1984) “The Remaking of the Chinese Working Class, 1949-1981” for the argument of (un)making of the Chinese working class in the socialist China.

laughing on the way to the factory. We would pass the workers' dormitory zone, market streets, shops, clinics and a large playground in order to reach our factory premises. There was a great contrast among those old and new buildings and our modern factory premises, which had been built less than five years ago. Like other big companies in Shenzhen, the five storey building was furnished with large window glass and air-conditioners and was fenced by a wall and guarded by a huge iron-barred gate. The premises looked modern, elegant and outstanding. The gate simply separated those who were inside and outside, giving them distinct identities and status. Over five hundred workers, ranging from 520 to 580 during my stay, were employed by the Company. Most of them were from rural areas all over the country and nearly 75% were female.

The Meteor is located in one of the industrial villages in Nanshan District, Shenzhen, within the confines of the Special Economic Zone. To preserve its anonymity, I call the village "Blue River". It is in the eastern part of Nanshan District, connecting Shekou Industrial Zone and the main highway of Shenzhen to Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong. Nanshan is a former official administrative name given to the place in 1985 when the Shenzhen SEZ rearranged itself into three administrative districts, namely Luo Wu, Fu Tian and Nan Shan districts. Local people call it Nantou in daily language. As an old town, Nantou is famous, with a timeworn castle. After fifteen years of rapid development, the sense of historical antiquity of the space has already been lost and everywhere there is a mixture of new and old buildings. In the centre of the town is a market place, where numerous fashion shops, department stores, hairdressers, book shops and restaurants are clustered. At night the place is crowded by people, especially young factory workers who come here for shopping once work is done. Shopping, and most of the time not buying, is the most favourite pastime among my co-workers. Wandering around and spotting cheap and good stuff helps to kill the boredom of working whole days on the shopfloor. Since central Shenzhen is far away from the Company and it takes at least forty-five minutes to get there, workers in the Meteor often go shopping in the market place of Nantou instead. The appearance of the town is still different

from central Shenzhen, where skyscrapers, modern commercial centres, five-starred hotels and international banks all swarm. Nantou, rather, is more spacious and features groupings of industrial villages.

Historically, Nantou was an important township site in Bao'an county in the southernmost tip of Ancient China. It suffered very seriously in the time of the early Qing Dynasty, when the Qing government ordered all the population in the Coastal areas to move northward away from the shore and banned all fishing and sea trading activities, in order to prevent anti-Qing revolts and pirate raids. Harsh government measures were launched: all the houses and boats were burnt and those who refused to move were killed. Nantou castle was nearly destroyed and turned into a barren area. It was not until 1670 that the government relaxed the sea ban and a new county, Xinan, was established. During the mid 19th century, Nantou became an important military base for defending against colonial aggression, especially after the British government took Hong Kong island. In October 1900 Sun Yatsen, "the father of the Chinese revolution", formed a revolutionary base in Bao'an and started the anti-Qing movement there. When the new Republic was set up, the old name Xinan county was changed to Bao'an county, still with Nantou as the county town. During the Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War (1937-1949), Bao'an was occupied by the Japanese army and then reigned over by Chiang Kai Shek's government. It was not until October 16, 1949 that the Communist army succeeded in entering the old castle of Nantou, and the Bao'an County People's government was formed. Afterwards the county town was moved to central Shenzhen and Nantou became one of the communes. In 1980, when the SEZ was set up, Nantou became an administrative district, the official name changed to Nanshan, and it was enlarged to include both the old towns of Nantou and Shekou.

The Changing Community of Blue River Village

The history of Meteor Electronic Company Ltd. in Shenzhen has exemplified the development of the Blue River village in Nantou, and the changing social

relations of the local community for more than one decade. The Meteor was set up in 1985, a year after the village, formerly a rural commune, had undergone a dramatic change. Shenzhen was chosen to set up a special economic zone by the Central State and the Guangdong Provincial Government in 1981, as a stepping stone to introduce international capital and as an experimental model to encourage other mainland cities. Encouraged by the Open-door policies and the economic reforms, the local government of the village, supported by the Nanshan District government decided to form a company in 1984. In the reform period it was not at all unusual for all levels of local governments to set up companies. But what interests us is that the local state of Blue River not only merely formed a company, but completely turned itself into a company. A rural commune formed in 60s in Mao's era then became an industrial commune in Deng's period. The former name Blue River People's Commune was changed to Blue River Manufacturers' Chief Company, under which it owned or joint-ventured over thirteen companies.

The old government offices building remained, but it was expanded to include a new wing of four storeys connected to the old one. The "bureaucratic" structure of the Chief Company was changed and expanded as well. Now there was a General Office, an External Trade Department, a Finance Department, an Administrative Department, a Population and Birth Control Department, a Labour Regulation Department, and a Mass Organization Division which included a Youth Committee, a Women's Federation and Trade Union. The Company itself was a mixture of pre-existing socialist "politics" and a reform market "economy", a hybrid if not absurd reflection of the ongoing development of the socialist market economy. By turning itself into a company, the Blue River government gained complete independence in regulating foreign investment and local trade without any intervention from the upper governmental levels like District Government or City Government. The local people believed that more freedom, more efficiency, and then more development would avoid possible "administrative intervention" from higher political forces. Blue River was not an exceptional case; it was rather a common practice throughout Shenzhen, as many a rural town transformed itself rapidly into a

modern industrial city in the course of 1980s. The process of industrialization and urbanization in China was always distinctive in the way that it was the state, or political forces rather than capital, which served as the locomotive of economic development. Where could we find a place like Blue River, as a local government, as a company, which can more fully disclose the *essence* of political economy?

Blue River is not only an exemplar of political economy; it is itself a complex cultural-political economy. As a Hakka ethnic village, it is dominated by the surname *chou* and has a local population of less than two thousand, who hold a Shenzhen *hukou*, the household residence registration. Previously the local residents held rural agricultural *hukou* and were officially categorized as peasants. Shenzhen urban *hukou* were granted when the Shenzhen government set on the course of rapid change to this “backward” area. Land was distributed for less than two years in Blue River and requisitioned again in 1984 for the use of industrial development. It was not confiscated at once as happened in the 50s and 60s, but rather step by step, though in a speedy way.

Mr Chou, the Director of the Meteor, chatted to me in a small restaurant, “It was really a backward place when I came here in 1985. Where we sit now was a paddy field; everywhere there were paddy field and lychee trees. The people were farmers and very poor. But now none of them do farming; they own shops, restaurants, do business or work in the factory.”

Land was requisitioned for compensation; every household, according to the number of household members, was to be allocated a share each year in the yearly profit made by the Chief Company, formerly their village government. Villagers time and time again told me about the corruption of the Chief Company and how it was owned by father and son. But their grievances never ended up as direct confrontations, which were frequent in other villages in the Pearl River Delta zone in the past ten years.

One local shop owner talked to me when I was having tea in his shop: “I know there is serious corruption; the leaders of our village drive expensive, famous branded cars and live in luxurious houses. But what can we do? It is they who make

us rich.” Every year, households obtained share dividends ranging from RMB 15,000 to 20,000; the variations were seen as following the ups and downs of the Company earning capabilities.

A local cadre proudly told me, “It was almost ten times what the family could earn before. Nowadays people don’t need to do anything but just wait for their share dividend at the end of the year. What’s more, the family can free hands from farming and they can choose to do business.”

The local residents here suddenly became rich, with their official identity changed from rural people to urban citizens and, more strikingly, with their economic status or class position totally altered. They were no longer part of the agricultural population lying at the bottom of the status society in Socialist China, but the privileged class of urban people who held a valuable Shenzhen *hukou* living in the Special Economic Zone. In terms of occupation, almost 80% of the local working population were self-employed persons. About 10% were managerial or supervisory staff in the companies newly set up in the village. Roughly another 10% worked outside the village, some holding a position in the District government or employed in big companies in Central Shenzhen or Guangzhou. The working population in the Blue River were predominately male, in contrast to the collective period when both female and male villagers were required to participate in commune production. Most of the women now stayed at home, doing housework rather than going out to work. Their income was no longer seen as important to the family economy, and there was a strong patriarchal belief in the village that the man should be the bread-earner of the family. Giving birth, preferably to sons, and doing household chores were women’s main responsibilities. The living standard of the village nevertheless was rising and comparatively higher than any other cities in China. Every family was well furnished with electric appliances, a colour TV set, hi-fi disc and air-conditioners. But it was not without worry. There has been an economic recession in Shenzhen from 1993 till, as more and more foreign capital moved out of the special economic zone to the much cheaper area in the internal mainland. Foods, goods and daily necessities here were relatively very expensive. The prices were one-third higher in

Guangzhou and probably double those in other northern cities like Beijing and Shanghai. Yet as long as a family could afford it, they still preferred to buy imported foreign-labeled goods even if they knew these products in fact were made in China. The local residents here considered themselves as Shenzhen *ren*, the people of Shenzhen, a broad cultural identity signifying a modern cosmopolitanism attached to the space and the people who lived there. Few would identify themselves in class terms, despite the fact that class consciousness was so well nurtured in Mao's period and indoctrinated into people's minds, and the local people here enjoyed a middle class or upper middle class living style. However, economic differentiation existed in the village, as was easily recognized from the housing². The richest not only owned a big house, but also a modern, stylish villa, with an appearance different to traditional buildings. Some of the families owned more than one or two houses and rented empty house or rooms out to outsiders, most of them migrant workers. Wealth in the community was less determined by the ratio of working labour in the household than by the possession of political and cultural capital which could generate economic resources.

The majority of economic producers, or the working class in the village, on the other hand, were not local residents. The total population, including permanent and temporary residents, amounted to 8,126 at the end of 1995. Of these over 75% were temporary residents, migrant workers who had moved in from outside the village. Besides the thirteen big factories affiliated to the Chief Company, all the other small-sized companies owned by locals employed workers from other areas, especially from rural areas, both inside and outside Guangdong Province. As in the Meteor, apart from three staff who held Shenzhen *hukou*, all the mainland Chinese staff and workers were hired as temporary labour and held a temporary *hukou*. Except for most of the engineers, technicians, managers, supervisors and some office clerks who came from urban areas, more than 80% of the work force formerly held a rural *hukou*, and thus were "agricultural producers" in the official categorization. The

² For references to economic differentiation in the rural areas in China, see Howard, 1988; Martin, 1990; Selden 1993; and Yang 1994.

work force in the Meteor, and in manufacturing industry as a whole both in the village and in Shenzhen, was mainly made up of the rural population, who were only allowed a temporary *hukou* when they were employed by the factories in Shenzhen. A *hukou* is attached to employment, and once a migrant worker was dismissed, or left the job, he or she was not granted the right to stay in Shenzhen. The socio-economic structure of Blue River village was thus conditioned mainly by a two-tiered system. One tier was local urban residents who not only possessed the means of production but also the space, the right of abode. The other tier consisted of rural migrants who had to sell their labour to the factories in which they worked, while having no right to stay permanently where they worked. These migrant temporary labour were three times the number of the local residents, and were the lowest status workers in the community.

Shenzhen as an immigrant city

It has often been said that Shenzhen is an immigrant city, built quickly with a borrowed population. In 1979, after the 11th Plenum of the Third Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Central government and the Guangdong Government decided to upgrade a small town, Bao'an county, to the status of a city named Shenzhen. In May 1980 the Special Economic Zone was set up. Shenzhen then became the first immigrant city in Reform China, erected as a test case as an economic development zone open to the international capital. I chose Shenzhen for my study because it was the specific place where international capital and the socialist state encountered each other and worked hand in hand, though not always in harmony, in shaping a new Chinese working class.

Situated in the far south of mainland China, Shenzhen is close to Hong Kong, and every day thousands and thousands of people go hurriedly back and forth across the Lo Wu bridge separating the two places. After the transfer of Hong Kong sovereignty on 30 June 1997, it is unlikely that the Customer Gate will be closed. It takes about forty-five minutes by train from the Kowloon Railway Station to Lo Wu

bridge, and then queues to go through the Customer Gate. During weekends, or at the Chinese New Year and other big traditional festivals like Ching Ming or Mid-Autumn, queuing up for an hour or more is normal.

Shenzhen is on the east of the Pearl River Delta. In the north it is connected to Dongguan, Weiyuan, in the south to Hong Kong, and in the east it faces Daya Bay. The total area is about 2,020 square miles. The Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is only part of Shenzhen city. It occupies one sixth of the whole city, with an area of 327.5 square miles. The SEZ is shaped like a triangle; one can travel by bus across the whole zone in less than two hours. The SEZ is special not only in its economic but also in its political and social aspects. There is a long iron curtain from east to west separating the SEZ from the non-special zone of the whole country; the Customer Gate is set up at the western end of Nantou district. Those who wanted to enter the SEZ require special permission from the Public Security Branch in their local regions.

Before the setting up of the SEZ, Shenzhen was only a small town with 310,000 residents and less than 30,000 workers. The total population at the end of 1994 was 3.35 million and the total labour force 2.23 million. In its population composition, less than 30% are categorized as permanent residents who have come from major cities and become state officials, entrepreneurs, technicians and skilled workers. Over 70% are temporary residents, which means they do not have the official household registration entitling them to recognized citizenship in Shenzhen. So, when they lose their jobs in Shenzhen, they are not officially permitted to stay in Shenzhen. At the end of 1994, out of 3.35 million total population, 2.41 million were temporary residents (Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook, 1995).

Table 1 **Ratio of Temporary Residents to Permanent Residents**
 (permanent residents as 100)

Year	Permanent residents	SEZ	Temporary residents	SEZ	ratio
	Shenzhen	SEZ	Shenzhen	SEZ	Shenzhen
1979	312.6	71	1.5	0.5	0.5
1980	320	84.1	12	10	3.8
1985	478.6	231.9	402.9	237.9	84.2
1986	514.5	257.4	421.1	231.3	81.8
1987	556	286.9	598.4	312.7	107.6
1988	601.4	321.9	930	462.2	154.7
1989	648.2	362	1267.8	664.9	195.6
1990	686.5	395.3	1332.9	614.5	194.2
1991	732.2	432.1	1653.1	765.9	225.8
1993	876.9	521.4	2073.0	668.0	236.4
1994	939.7	565.2	2415.4	910.1	257.0

Unit: in thousands

Sources: Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 1991, 1992, 1994, 1995.

It is clear that the expansion of Shenzhen and its Special Economic Zone is based on the mobility of migrants as temporary residents. Most manual labour in the SEZ is undertaken by these temporary residents from rural areas. In Shenzhen, as soon as one becomes a legal temporary worker, one is then entitled to be a temporary



resident. Of course not every temporary resident is necessarily a temporary worker, but a rural laborer can get a temporary *hukou* in Shenzhen only if he/she is hired as a temporary worker. In Shenzhen all workers and staff members are categorized into three kinds: *guding zhigong*, regular workers and staff members, *hetong zhigong*, contract workers and staff members, and *linshi zhigong*, temporary workers and staff members. *Guding zhigong* refers to those employed by state-owned enterprises or government organs and they enjoy all the state welfare such as housing and food provision. *Hetong zhigong* refers to those employed on a contract basis by all kinds of enterprises; the contracts may last for three or five years. Most contract workers in Shenzhen are university graduates who are employed as technicians, skilled workers or management staff. *Linshi zhigong*, temporary workers are the most disadvantaged in Shenzhen; not until 1988 were they officially given temporary contracts on a yearly basis.

In the second half of the 1980s, the number of temporary workers increased rapidly and in 1988 the number of temporary workers began to surpass the total number of regular workers and contract workers. Most of them are employed in either collectively owned or privately owned enterprises, especially in foreign-owned enterprises. In 1990 the total number of workers and staff was over 550,000, of whom over 290,000 were temporary workers. In 1991 the total number of workers and staff members increased by nearly 100,000, totaling 648,800. Of these, 362,300 were temporary workers, equal to 55.8% of the total work force, 180% of the regular workers and over four times the number of contract workers (Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook, 1992).

Table 2 Regular, Contract and Temporary workers and staff members in Shenzhen

Year	Total No. of workers and staff members	No. of Regular workers & staff members	No. of Contract workers & staff members	No. of Temporary workers & staff members
1985	226.6	128.6	28.6	69.4
1986	258.8	137.9	34.4	86.5
1987	322.9	145.5	46.7	130.7
1988	417.4	159.3	64.7	193.4
1989	482.4	176.2	67.5	238.7
1990	554.1	186.5	73.6	293.9
1991	648.9	201.1	85.4	362.4
1992	710.9	205.8	102.6	402.5

Unit: in thousands

Sources: Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 1991, 1992, 1993.

Labour appropriation in Shenzhen is unique in its use of temporary labour from the rural areas. The use of temporary labour is not new in Mao's socialist period (Walder 1986:48-54), but it is surely a specific phenomenon in the SEZs and a significant developmental strategy of the state in the reform period. The mobilization of migrant labour or casual labour, which in China is termed temporary labour, is one of the most distinctive elements of capitalist development in both developed countries in the last century and the newly developing countries in the 1960s (Cheng 1984; Burawoy 1976; Sassen 1988). Reform China, like other developing countries, depends

on the mobilization of rural labour as the cheapest labour supply, as part of the process of primitive accumulation in industrial development.

In the three decades of socialist development, the strategy of the command economy was to extract raw material and resources from the peasantry to support industrialization (Selden 1988, 1993; Riskin 1991). The exploitation of the peasantry was then in a way more camouflaged. Now in the market socialist economy, the process of accumulation is to appropriate labour directly from the rural areas, through both state and market mechanisms. It is justified by an estimate of a rural labour surplus of 100 million people at the end of 1970s, that continued to grow in the 1980s³. Solving the problem of employment was thus the most urgent task of Deng's state, especially when the rural floating population became a thorny issue in the mid 1980s. The failure of the planned economy to provide employment for the entire population is a well known fact. But the questions are whether the pro-market economy with its new labour mechanisms will alleviate or aggravate the old problem of mass unemployment and urban-rural dichotomy, and whether the way the state deals with rural labour provides a solution for surplus labour or further exploits rural labour for the sake of urban economic development. These questions are controversial, and require further theoretical formulation as well as empirical investigation.

The industrial development of Shenzhen is not only dependent on the extraction of labour from the rural areas, but more specifically female labour. As Lucie Cheng and Ping-Chun Hsiung show in their study of Taiwan women workers, the emergence of Taiwan's economic "miracle" and the advancement of Taiwan's position in the world system is dependent on the specific use of women's labour, both cheaply paid and unpaid (Cheng and Hsiung 1992:233-234). So does China depend on female labour, which is the cheapest and most compliant labour, in the development of export-processing industries (Andors 1988:22-23). However both the Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook and the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone Yearbook choose not to give estimates of the sex ratio of the temporary labourers as a whole as well as in different

³ National Studies Team of the Chinese Academy of Science, *Shengcun Yu Fazhan* (Survival and Development), Hong Kong: Ke Hua Press, 1991.

economic sectors. Therefore the number of female temporary laborers in the manufacturing sectors is unknown. However, by a careful reading of the statistics we can find some clues. According to a Shenzhen statistical publication of 1991, out of 255,371 workers and staff members in the manufacturing sector in 1989, 156,184 were female, which was about 61.2%.⁴ In the light industry sector, the percentage of female labour was higher; of 223,732 workers, 64.7% (144,752) were female.⁵ Especially in foreign-owned enterprises, female labour comprises the most dominant part. 65.5% (8283) of the 12,642 staff and workers were female.⁶ In 1991 female labour in the light industry sectors made up 62.8% of the total work force, while in 1994, female labour in the whole manufacturing sector accounted for 60.2%.⁷

⁴ Shenzhen Statistical Bureau, *Shenzhen Shi "Qiwu" Shiqi Guomin Jingji He Shehui Tongji Ziliao (1986-1990) (Materials on the National Economy and Social Statistics of the 7th FYP of Shenzhen 1986-1990)* (Shenzhen: Shenzhen Statistical Publication, 1991), p.370.

⁵ Ibid., p.370.

⁶ Ibid., p.373.

⁷ Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook, 1992, 1995.

Table 3 Number of Female Labourers in Shenzhen

Year	Total No. of female workers	No. of female workers in manufacturing sectors	No. of female workers in light industries
1979	2,567	715	-----
1980	19,502	6,169	-----
1981	23,014	8,052	-----
1982	31,982	9,161	-----
1983	45,683	17,764	-----
1984	60,346	21,460	-----
1985	74,836	35,769	-----
1986	106,512	49,757	42,238
1987	145,285	84,269	71,667
1988	201,956	120,281	106,627
1989	238,636	156,184	144,752
1990	278,608	186,145	169,223
1991	323,336	203,350	180,444
1992	339,215	213,073	164,769
1993	373,343	202182	
1994	394,979	232,347	
1995	417,213	250,614	

Sources:

1. Shenzhen Shi Guomin Jingji He Shehui Tongji Ziliao(1979-1985) (Materials on the National Economy and Social Statistics of Shenzhen 1979-1985);
2. Shenzhen Shi "Qiwu" Shiqi Guomin Jingji He Shehui Tongji Ziliao (1986-1990) (Materials on the National Economy and Social Statistics of the 7th FYP of Shenzhen 1986-1990);
3. Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996.

Since the statistics include regular, contract and temporary labour, and do not distinguish among them, we cannot know the exact percentage of temporary female laborers working in the manufacturing sectors; but still we can infer the percentage to be higher than the percentage of total female labour. Phyllis Andors estimated in 1988 that over 70% of the temporary labour force in Shenzhen was female (Andors, 1988:31-32). Josephine Smart even believes that about 90% (in 1989) of the total labour force in the light manufacturing industries run by Hong Kong capital was young female labour under 25 years of age.⁸ In my study in Meteor Electronic Company, I found that all women workers except one were classified as temporary workers. No matter how long they had worked in Shenzhen, they could never become *gongren*, (worker), in the official categorization of status.

⁸ Josephine Smart, "Coercion, Consent, Reciprocity and Exploitation: Labour Management in Hong Kong Enterprises in China," a paper presented at the Centre of Asian Studies, the University of Hong Kong in February 1993, p.10.

The Emergent Working Class as Dagongzai(me) and as Mingong

We are a mass of *dagongzai*,
coming from the north, coming from the west.
At first we didn't know what *dagongzai* meant;
Now we know, toiling from sunrise to sunset,
Toiling with drops of blood and sweat.
Selling our labour to the boss, selling our bodies to the factory,
Do what they demand of you, no discussion, no reflection just
obey.
Money is the magic, and what the capitalists bestow on you.
A commodity, a commodity.

I found the above verse, written with a ball-point pen, on the wall of a male dormitory room in the Meteor Company. No one staying in the room admitted that they had written it, saying that the writer might already be gone. *Dagongzai*, the working boys, and *dagongmei*, the working girls were the new terms widely used in Reform China, denoting a new kind of labour relations fundamentally different from those of Mao's period. Imported from the Cantonese in Hong Kong where labour relations are mainly regulated by the market and explicitly laissez-faire capitalist, *dagong* means "working for the boss", a term which aggressively connotes commodification of labour, or the exchange of labour for a wage. The term *dagongzai(me)*, used extensively in the past two decades, contrasts with the term *gongren*, a far more popular usage in Mao's period, and one that denoted a highly privileged class status in the Chinese society out of the reach of the Chinese peasantry. State propaganda said *Gongren*, the proletariat class, were the masters of the country in the course of socialist construction; *gongren* was not the alienated labour Marx argued existed in capitalist society. *Gongren* as an ideal type was a new kind of subject produced by the Chinese socialist state to liberate labour from alienation and fully actualize itself in the process of production. In actuality in the past three decades of state socialist experiences, the

Chinese *gongren* virtually worked for the state, with the state as a *socialist boss* providing not only wages, but permanent employment, housing, medical care and education for the younger generation. It was nevertheless a special type of state socialist labour relation that struggled to change the capitalist labour relations.

The use of the term *dagong* does not merely signify the change of the “socialist boss”, but also the coming of a new boss from the capitalist society. No longer under the protection of the state, *dagong* are casual labour, that can be dismissed at will, that can be replaced by anyone who is willing to sell his or her labour. This value is determined mainly by market forces and surplus value is extracted as the component of the capitalist profit. In a word, *dagong* is a term signifying the change to capitalist labour relationships and *dagongzai(me)* is a term designating an identity that is imbued with connotative awareness of labour exploitation and class consciousness. One question I often put to the workers in the Meteor was: “Do you consider yourself as a peasant or a worker?” While some young workers were puzzled by my question and did not understand what I was asking, some treated it simply: “I am a *dagongzai* or a *dagongmei*.”

Given that there are a large number of temporary labourers in Shenzhen and that they share common characteristics and identity as *dagongzai(me)*, both the objective conditions and subjective experiences for articulating a new working class are present. Class identity was constructed by the hierarchical division of labour in the workplace and the sharp income differentiation between the local urban people and the rural migrant workers. While the urban citizens occupied the managerial and supervisory positions in the factory, the rural migrants formed the bottom of the pyramid as cheap manual labour. The average income of a shopfloor worker in the Meteor was about 520 *yuan*. A supervisor made nearly one thousand *renminbi*, and an assistant manager between one thousand and fifty and two thousand *renminbi*, three to four times a manual worker’s income. There were four Hong Kong staff working in Meteor as Department Heads, and though their income was highly confidential, workers guessed that it was twenty to thirty times theirs. The boss’s income, they thought, was out of their estimation. But what they knew was that what he spent on a

meal in the restaurant was equal to one month of their salary. Class consciousness was acute when workers were harshly treated or dismissed at will. Enduring working hours for twelve hours each day, with no regular holidays on Sunday, and simple meals with little meat and poor rice, most of the workers in the Meteor often joked about themselves as undergoing “a dog’s life”, saying even “a foreign dog is better than a *dagongzai* or *dagongmei*”.

Class identity became more conspicuous when the migrant workers came into contact with local citizens in daily life. The following was an experience four women workers and I had in a cultural park. On a holiday Sunday, I invited four girls from Sichuan, who stayed next to my dorm room, to go for fun to a famous cultural park in Shenzhen. Since the entrance fee was quite high, migrant workers could not easily afford to go; the cultural park was mainly constructed for local people and tourists. Due to the small wage they earned, not only was the entrance fee too high for them, everything sold in the park shops was too expensive as well. At noon, we all were hungry and I suggested we go to a restaurant and I would treat them. Yet everywhere we tried was very crowded and we decided to eat in one of the small restaurants. When we went into the restaurant, and before I could ask the waitress for seats, the waitress directly refused us entrance and said in a very annoying and rough way,

“No seats, no seats. *Dagongmei*, how much money could you possibly afford to spend in a restaurant?”

Judging us by our appearance, the rustic look of the four Sichuan girls, and the way we were dressed, the waitress, a local, could easily recognize us as *dagongmei*. I was furious as well as sorry that my co-workers had to experience such discrimination. But one girl consoled me,

“We are rural people, and having no money, we shouldn’t go to a restaurant.

It’s a place not for us. But then we can save a lot of money, can’t we?”

My *dagongmei* companions were often discriminated by urban people and they had gotten used to it. Shenzhen was a place “of them”, but not “for them”. *Dagongzai(me)* was an abject class subject to different life chances and life styles.

Mingong, directly translated as peasant-worker, was an official term given to rural migrant workers. It was widely used in such mass media as TV news reporting and newspapers. The term *mingong* entailed all the complexities and ambiguities of the identity that a migrant worker inscribed. More important in the term is that we can see how the state and urban society labeled these workers, shaped their relationship to capital, and thus their socio-economic position in the changing market socialist economy. By examining these two terms, *dagongzai(me)* and *mingong*, I argue that I can get near to disclosing the process of making and unmaking of the new Chinese working class. The term *mingong* foretells the impossibility of the rural peasantry becoming an urban proletariat. First of all they were not allowed to change their previous status as peasant; their labour was needed, but not their labour identity, and thus the possibility of changing social status from peasant to worker. So even though our workers in the Meteor had worked in Shenzhen for more than five years, they were still officially classified as peasant-worker despite their actual relation to production had long been changed as industrial laborers. A “proper” identity as “worker” was not granted. It was restricted not by the market, but the state. Economic development in China, the incorporation of the national economy into the international division of labour, nevertheless, greatly differed from other developing countries in the Third World, not only in path and in speed, but also in how the state and the past socialist social relations intervened and affected its course.

Mechanisms of Labour Appropriation: Labour Service Market

China as a state socialist regime is not unique in its taking the initiative to bring in capitalist elements in the course of national development. Like the reform programmes in Eastern Europe, China, after the failure of totalitarian state planning, tried to usher in market mechanisms to solve social crises such as low-level development, massive unemployment and underemployment, and the lowering of living standards, especially at the end of the Cultural Revolution (Dirlik and Meisner 1989; Nee and Stark 1989; White 1993). Shenzhen then became the bridgehead of

intersection between a socialist state and international capitals. But it should be borne in mind that the retreat of state planned economy in the Shenzhen SEZ does not mean that the socialist state gave over all its power to the so-called market mechanism or international capital. As Vivienne Shue reminds us, "it is essential to recognize that more power to the market has not so far in human history, and does not now in China, necessarily mean less power for the state over the society..... And indeed, when a relatively strong state power is already in existence- as in China now- the further development of capitalism has historically tended to lead not to lesser but to greater bureaucratic expansion and control." (Shue 1988:119) In Shenzhen power is given to the local government, which tries to impose strict social control for the purpose of purely economic development, even at the expense of socialist goals. And it is in the gap between the dream of a "big" modern state and the failure to impose greater bureaucratization upon the people that the particularly complicated and exploitative mechanisms of labour appropriation and labour control in Shenzhen are engendered.⁹

In setting up *laowu shichang*, the labour service market in Shenzhen, the local state intervenes politically in the extraction of labour for the sake of foreign investments. The intervention of the state is not only in its administrative regulation of labour, but also in its changing control of population migration and of labour recruitment. The labour service market represents the reorganization of labour by the state, to help it cope with the new international division of labour in its transition to market socialism. The labour service market can be divided into two parts: one organized and one unorganized. The organized labour service market shows the strategy of the state to regulate labour appropriation under its reach of administration; the unorganized sector reveals the failure of labour control in the process of rapid development.

9 The analysis of the state in China should be careful enough to discern the concrete situation, avoiding over-generalization. For example by "state of China", it can be the Central government, Provincial Government and local governments. The interests among them are diverse and often in conflict. The relation becomes tense when the Central State tries to limit the pace of economic development to control financial disorders.

When the SEZ was formally set up in 1980, the Shenzhen Labour Service Company (LSC) was founded. This is an official organ for labour supply under the control of the Shenzhen Labour Bureau. The purpose of the company is to regulate the transfer of labour from inland China, especially from rural areas to the newly established enterprises in Shenzhen. Migrants are not officially allowed to find themselves jobs without the mediation of the Labour Service Company and the regulation of the Labour Bureau in Shenzhen. With strict social control in China, accompanied by the well-known *hukou* system, people were not permitted to move freely from one place to another in the pre-Reform era. At the start of the 1980s the Labour Service Company had the power to transfer labour legally from all provinces as it was required by foreign enterprises. In Shenzhen, each administrative district (Lo Wu, Fu Tian, Nanshan) and the county (Bao'an) has its own labour service company and Labour Bureau. These form a network to regulate the transfer of labour as well as the control of labour recruitment in Shenzhen. In the first half of the 1980s, about 250,000 labourers were transferred by the labour service companies every year.¹⁰ In the second half of the 1980s, the number of labourers increased by 350,000 yearly. The network of the labour service market was further developed with over 60 labour service stations formed in Shenzhen by cities and counties of Guangdong Province. These stations helped to send laborers from their local regions and also helped to manage and control labour migration. Every two years starting from 1987, these labour service companies convened labour service exchange conferences, in which both the employers and the job seekers would come and be introduced to the companies which conducted interviews and offered contracts. In the Labour Exchange Conference of 1987, the labour service stations from Shantou, Mei County, Shaoguan, Weiyuan, Jiangmen and others made agreements with 161 enterprises to transfer about 3,017 laborers from the rural areas into Shenzhen.¹¹ In the 1990 Conference, about 10,467 job seekers came to the meeting, and 5,778 of them signed agreements with 174 enterprises

¹⁰ Shenzhen Labour Bureau, *Shenzhen Tequ Laodong Zhidu Shinian Gaige Licheng (Ten Years of Reform of the Labour System in the Shenzhen SEZ)* (Shenzhen: Haitian Press, 1991), p.57.

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp63-64.

which participated in the Conference.¹² Though the local state is active in allocating labourers, it is still a danger to overestimate the capability of the state in shaping the labour force. The actual number of labourers supplied by the organized labour service market is still unknown.

The unorganized labour service market is far closer to the real practice of labour appropriation in the Shenzhen SEZ. It is impossible for the local government to control the rapid increase of temporary workers every year through its administrative network (Andors 1988:29). What the government can do is to let the migrants find a job themselves, while at the same time blaming enterprises, especially the foreign-invested enterprises, for recruiting labour privately. But it is generally known that the actual labour recruitment is done privately without the regulation of the labour service companies. Job seekers from the rural areas just wander from one factory to another to find opportunities by themselves, and the employers just select suitable ones among them. The labour recruitment history of Meteor showed that at the early set-up stage, the Company depended mainly on the local labour bureau to help them recruit laborers in large numbers. But after 1990, the labour used kept constantly growing and they started to hire workers privately. The practice is convenient and cheaper since the Company does not need to pay the service fees. The Shenzhen government does not and cannot prohibit such practices, but sets up new mechanisms to control labour appropriation.

Spontaneous Labour Migration and Kin-ethnic Ties

Spontaneous labour migration is the common reality of labour appropriation in Shenzhen, though migration is strictly controlled under the *hukou* system. Personal migration without official permission is regarded as illegal and the person can be sent away at any time. Strict population control in turn forces the migrants to rely on existing social networks to provide information and assistance in job-seeking, temporary lodging and escape from civic regulations. Kin and ethnic networks, in this

¹² Ibid., p.68.

context, are particularly important in providing buffers to facilitate the mobility of labour from rural areas. For most of the rural girls, migration without the help of kin ties is impossible. Great rural-urban differences and rigid *hukou* controls created obstacles to moving to the cities in the pre-reform era. Few women have the chance to visit cities before they come to work in Shenzhen. Besides rigorous state controls, rural customs inhibiting female movement, and the severe cultural shock of a big city - contribute to the difficulties of female migration from rural areas to urban cities. The village community recognizes kinship ties, the familiar and close bond as the best guarantee the rural girls had of mutual rights and obligations (Haraven 1982).

Chain migration, through kin and ethnic ties, took form within a short period in the Shenzhen workplaces. The pattern was often that one or two persons would come out first to Shenzhen to find a job, sometimes by the introduction of the village leaders or relatives. Once they found a job, they would tell their family members, relatives and *tongxiang*, co-villagers, and soon these kin and *tongxiang* would follow the migration trip. The rural labourers flowed into the city in groups. The story of a group of women workers coming from Jiangxi to the Meteor Company was typical in illustrating the chain migration and the formation of kin and ethnic enclaves in the Shenzhen workplace.

Shui Ming, at the age of 23 was considered the "big sister" in her group. The identification of the core person in a group was not only based on age, but who came to the factory earliest and who had built up the network to help kin and *tongxiang* in the workplace. Shui Ming and her *tongxiang*, Li Ling were the first ones among the group to find a job in Shenzhen in May 1992. The experience of hunting for jobs, they said, was extremely difficult for them because none of their village folks worked in Shenzhen at the time of their migration. There was only a distant relative, living in a different village, who worked in a shoe factory. And when Shui Ming and Li Ling came to find her, she had already left and no address was available. Wandering for five days in the streets of the industrial zones in Shenzhen, visiting more than ten companies, with empty stomachs and exhausted bodies, they finally found the Meteor in Blue River Village. Shui Ming said they were lucky to be hired at the Meteor. But

her sisters considered her a capable person, since she was not shocked by the totally strange situation and was daring enough to knock on every personnel office door in order to find a job. Having worked in the Meteor for half a year, she got used to the factory regime and started to arrange for her kin and *tongxiang* to come to Shenzhen. At the end of 1992, another cousin, who stayed at home after graduating from the secondary school in the summer that year, came to the Meteor to join Shui Ming. In the Chinese New Year, Shui Ming and Li Ling went back to their home village and were welcomed by their family and all the village folks. Besides bringing back RMB 1500 for eight months' work, they also conveyed many exciting experiences and stories about Shenzhen. Their stories quickly spread in the village and to other nearby villages and after the Chinese New Year, two relatives from a nearby village came to find them and asked them to bring them to Shenzhen. Shui Ming agreed and accompanied by her own younger sister, the five of them together formed a chain movement to Shenzhen again. In this kin and ethnic group, it was clear that Shui Ming and Li Ling formed the core, and surrounding the core her cousins, relatives and sister shaped the periphery. Mutual obligation and the principle of reciprocity were presumed in the chain migration and in the kin group with Shui Ming as the head figure, obliged to take care of all her kin and *tongxiang*.

In a word, rural women workers in Shenzhen have reasons specific to themselves for building up kin and ethnic networks, for rural-urban migration creates special problems which must be overcome if the migrant is to adapt to a new life in the strange industrial environment. Girls are not culturally prohibited from working outside the village, but they are discouraged unless the family economy is in dire straits. Compared with men, women are perceived as more vulnerable and less able to adapt to new and alien environments. They seem to require more care and assistance, especially when personal safety is concerned. Having and enlarging social networks are thus particularly important to female workers, for these networks provide reliable support they can obtain in no other way. Labour movement in Reform China relies heavily on the co-optation of existing social networks among the rural communities, and the

efficient appropriation of labour to the labour market was largely indebted to non-market modes of social relationships (Taussig 1980).

Labour Control in Shenzhen

With the rapid increase in labour migration beyond the control of the organized labour service market, the Shenzhen Labour Bureau in late 1988 set up new regulations whereby private labour recruitment by enterprises is recognized if not formally accepted. The regulations state that all temporary laborers in Shenzhen shall sign a one-year temporary contract, and at the beginning of the year all enterprises in Shenzhen are required to submit their estimate of new recruitment, which has to be approved by the District Labour Bureau. Thus enterprises are allowed to employ laborers throughout the year by themselves if the number is kept within the quota. In the case of Meteor, the employer is required to inform the Labour Bureau whenever they hire labourers and a sum is paid to the Bureau to buy a temporary labour contract. When the contract is signed by both parties, the employer and the employee, the Labour Bureau will check the quota, then provide a Temporary Labour Handbook for the worker employed, charging 50 *yuan* each. The Handbook is a register of the background information on the worker, including the name, sex, date of birth, education level, marriage status and original place, as well as the duration of the employment. This Handbook is kept by the employer and when the temporary worker leaves the enterprise, the Handbook shall be sent back to the Labour Bureau. The government hopes that regulation through the system of the Temporary Labour Handbooks will enable it to control the migration of rural labour including numbers and mobility and thereby retain its macro-planning.¹³

The enterprises are supposed to renew the application procedures for every worker each year, which means that the enterprises pay the Labour Bureau every year.

¹³ However some enterprises in Shenzhen, especially small and local capital owned enterprises, simply neglect the labour control measures. Few send the Handbooks back to the Labour Bureau and I found a lot of original copies in the Meteor, even though the workers had already left the factory.

According to the Documentation of the Labour Bureau of Nanshan District, Shenzhen City [1996] No.3, the enterprises shall decide how many temporary workers they intend to use in the next year and then go to the District Labour Service Company to renew the certification. If the original place of residence of the temporary workers is within the Guangdong Province, the enterprises shall go to the labour service stations, set up by different cities and counties of Guangdong Province in Shenzhen, to renew the extension of use of labour at the beginning of the year.¹⁴ Another lump-sum of 20 *yuan* to 60 *yuan* per labourer shall be paid, for issuing a card named Registration of Employment for Out-going Person Card. The justification for collecting money is that in sending out labour (though most of the rural laborers come out by themselves) to help Shenzhen's economic development, their original counties will lose the productivity of labour. So they should receive some compensation. If the temporary workers come from other provinces, the enterprises need not pay the money since labour service stations from other provinces are not allowed in Shenzhen. The Shenzhen government does not welcome labour from other provinces and tries to give priority of employment to labour in Guangdong Province. However, no matter whether the labourer comes from within the province or from outside the province, after the application for a temporary labour certification, the enterprises have to pay another 300 to 400 *yuan* for each worker they hire each year. Labourers coming from outside Guangdong Province have to pay a higher fee. This payment, known as *chengshi zengrong fei*, City Increased Capacity Fee, is justified by the argument that the migration of labour increases the workload of management and the burden of urbanization. In order to prevent escape from payment, the Shenzhen Labour Bureau every year will set up an Inspection Team to check the enterprises on their use of labour. If the enterprises do not follow the procedures to apply for the number of labourers used, and do not pay the City Increased Capacity Fee, they will be punished with a fine. Nevertheless, there are still loopholes. The practice of Meteor is that they

¹⁴ Shenzhen Labour Bureau, "Announcement About Applying the Continued Employment of 1995 Temporary Labour, Service Labour Procedure", Shenzhen Labour Bureau 1995, No.229.

will apply for a quota of four hundred labourers each year, and ignore registration for man one hundred unregistered workers.

It is clear that the regulation of labour by the state is not only for the sake of pooling labour for foreign investments, but, by appropriating labour for the enterprises, to make profit from it. As Phyllis Andors points out,

since contract negotiation is the major source of revenue for the labour service companies, the greater the management fee paid to the LSC (Labour Service Company), and the less welfare monies to be paid out to workers, the more money retained by the LSC. This gives the LSC an incentive to increase the temporary portion of the labour force, which is overwhelmingly female.

(1988:31)

Making money from labour control is an open secret and is detested by employers in Shenzhen. Mr. Chou, Director of Meteor, talked to me,

These are only formal procedures. Actually we can hire as many laborers as we like and whenever we consider necessary. In the past five years, we have hired all our labourers by ourselves. To inform the Labour Bureau, to apply for the temporary *hukou* and temporary labour permit is only a waste of time. Sure the bureaucrats of the local government depend on these to make money. We loathe these procedures because they do not do anything for us and our workers.

Thus, for every worker the Meteor hires, they need to pay a total of four hundred *renminbi* to the district government each year. Mr Chou said this was an invisible production cost that people seldom noticed, but the company pay for four hundred workers, and so the amount was considerable: an extra labour cost of RMB 160,000 annually. In addition to the payment to the district government, the money paid to the

local government of Blue River village is even more notable. The local government draws 30% from the total wage bill of the enterprises, leaving only 70% to go to the workers. In the case of Meteor Company, every month they pay seven hundred and fifty Hong Kong dollars¹⁵ per worker employed to Blue River Chief Company, to which the Meteor is affiliated as a *sanlai yibu* enterprise, that is a production-processing enterprise. The Chief Company then exchanges the Hong Kong dollars into *renminbi* at the official rate and returns 70% of the amount to Meteor as workers' wages. Thus, at the 1996 rate, for every worker the Meteor employed, the local government can earn about RMB 240. This kind of labour payment to an affiliated company, often set up by the local government, is the common practice in Shenzhen. The rationale is that since the local governments allow foreign capital to invest in their administrative patch, they need management fees to regulate labour, and provide land for factory premises and workers' dormitories. Additionally, of course the enterprises still have to pay rent for whatever land they use. Nevertheless the labour payment is negotiable. Some companies have to pay more, some less, depending on the numbers of workers the companies employ and the *guanxi*, the good relationship with the local government. Since all the workers except one in the Meteor are not Blue River residents, it is quite clear that the local government makes a profit on the migrant workers from outside the community, especially those from rural areas.

Ambiguous Identity: Mixing Population Control with Labour Control

Besides labour control, population control is another specific strategy of the Chinese socialist state in appropriating labour into industrial capitalism. It is the most important mechanism in perpetuating the exploitative nature of labour appropriation in Shenzhen. Population control in China is effected by a system called *hukou*, household registration, which was formally set up in 1958 when the Central State promulgated the Regulations of Household Registration (Zhang 1988:35); we will discuss it in detail in the next chapter. As Dorothy Solinger points out, the *hukou* system in China

¹⁵ The exchange rate of sterling against Hong Kong dollar is 1:12.6 on 15th August 1997.

determined not just where a person could live but along with that the person's entire life chances -- his or her social rank, wage, welfare, food rations, and housing (Solinger 1991:8). In the pre-Reform era, there was only one strict system of *hukou*: the registered urban permanent residence and rural permanent residence. No one could change their identity except under state planning. In some cases university graduates were allowed to change their *hukou* to work in big cities because they were considered professionals. Peasants, with their fate sealed by the rural *hukou*, were banned from leaving the land for over three decades. Loopholes did exist, but in terms of numbers, the illegal migration was still not able to challenge the bifurcated social order between the rural peasantry and the urban working class.

Shenzhen is the first city which changed its *hukou* system dramatically. It introduced provisional measures of control on the moving population. Beside the former permanent household registration, temporary household registration is now issued to hired temporary labourers. Over two-thirds of the population in Shenzhen are registered as temporary residents, holding temporary *hukou*. In Shenzhen the *hukou* system is well connected with labour control. The mechanism of regulation is that when rural migrants are hired by enterprises and approved by the Labour Bureau as temporary laborers, after the payment of Increased City Capacity Fee, the enterprises should apply with the Public Security Bureau for a certification of temporary residence registration and with the local police station for registering a temporary *hukou*, and, finally, with the District Public Security Bureau for a Temporary Residence Certificate so that their workers can become legal temporary workers in Shenzhen.¹⁶ The temporary residence is only for one year and needs to be renewed and fees paid annually. The *hukou* system in Shenzhen works to keep the urban status sacred and restricted, and no matter how long a worker has been in the city, he/she would remain only a temporary resident.¹⁷ The strategy of the local government is regularly to change the use of rural labour. The principle is that if there is work, rural labour can

¹⁶ Documentation of *hukou* Management Division, Shenzhen Public Security Bureau, 1990.

¹⁷ Ibid.

come and be given a temporary residence; if there is no work, they will have to leave so the local government will not take up the burden of proletarianization and urbanization.

On the other hand, the intersection of labour control with population control is revealed in the system of inspecting temporary residents. The inspection in 1995 was carried out in mid-June with a search of all the enterprises including the foreign invested and local owned enterprises in the Nanshan District. The purpose of the inspection was to see whether or not the enterprises had applied for the quota of use of labour, completed the procedure of use of temporary labour, paid the Increased City Capacity Fee, and applied for the certificate of temporary residence for all their workers. If any enterprise was found not to have followed all the labour regulations and had not applied for the certificate of temporary residence for its workers, it could be punished by a fine of RMB 300 per month for a worker from other provinces and RMB 100 per month for a worker from Guangdong Province.¹⁸

No doubt the *hukou* system in China helps to create the exploitative mechanisms of labour appropriation in Shenzhen. *Hukou* defines one's identity and status, according to which urban residents are put under the state planning of food, employment, housing, education, health and other social welfare. The maintenance of the distinction between permanent and temporary residents is to shirk the obligation of the state to provide housing, job security or welfare for the newly forming working class in Shenzhen. As we said before, the labour of the rural population is wanted, but not their survival in the city if their labour is not given. The newly forming working class has and is allowed no roots in the city.

Still worse, the *hukou* system mixed with the labour control in Shenzhen is the specific mechanism which makes up the ambiguous identity of the rural migrant labour that deepens but at the same time obscures their exploitation. Are the temporary residents treated as urban residents or not? Are the temporary laborers regarded as workers or peasants? The answers are ambiguous (Andors, 1988). The ambiguous identity of the migrant labour is the special phenomenon created by the specific

¹⁸ Documentation of Urban Population Control Leading Group, Nanshan District of Shenzhen (1995) No. 1, Population Management, Nanshan District of Shenzhen, 1995.

mechanisms of population and labour control in Shenzhen, or elsewhere in other economic developing zones in China. The ambiguity of the status helps to appropriate labour from the rural areas without giving them full recognition as laborers by the Chinese state in the process of development in the Reform era. The term *mingong*, “peasant-workers” or temporary workers, blurs the line of identity between peasant and worker. The contention here is that this process of proletarianization is launched by the Chinese socialist state when it allows the rural migration to meet the needs of international capital and regional development, while at the same time obscuring or diluting the phenomenon of proletarianization. The non recognition is not due to the embarrassment that China is a socialist state facing large-scale unemployment or underemployment and dismissal of workers, evils considered to be part of capitalist society. On the contrary, the socialist state acts as a developmentalist state, contriving to interpose some capitalist mechanisms into the state socialist system while at the same time refusing, or being unable, to undertake the cost of proletarianization and its generational reproduction. The blurring of the peasant/worker identity, or the non-articulation of the newly born working class, is the weird outgrowth of the Chinese socialist state in its extraction of labour from rural areas. Actually, the strategy of appropriating rural labour to support economic development but being reluctant to undertake the responsibility of rural proletarianization is clearly stated by the Shenzhen Labour Bureau itself:

The major component of the labour service market is the temporary workers. Their characteristic is that they are active and flexible in the market. They are assiduous, hardworking, easily manageable and economically productive. What's more they do not transfer their hukou, (actually they are not permitted to do so). If there is work, they come; if not, they go. This lessens the burden of enterprises, solves the problem

of labour use and at the same time does not result in urban overpopulation.¹⁹

Furthermore, housing, education and other environmental infrastructure is not provided by the Shenzhen Government to the temporary residents. As over 70% of workers in Shenzhen are considered temporary labour and temporary residents, they are not entitled to use the urban facilities. When the migrant workers themselves are not rightful citizens, their family members are not allowed to live in Shenzhen as well unless they can find a job and acquire the status of temporary worker. Marriage and childbirth cannot be registered in Shenzhen. Officially these workers are still regarded as peasants and are supposed to have backup from their family in the rural areas. Thus the local government and the foreign enterprises can shirk its responsibilities while at the same time making use of the rural labour for its own development. The cost of labour reproduction is left to be borne by the rural society. Migrant labour is specific in its transient nature. Normally a worker, especially a female worker, will spend three to five years working as a wage labourer in the industrial city before getting married. The long-term planning of life activities such as marriage, procreation and family were all expected in the rural community. As in other developing countries in the Third World, the process of proletarianization in contemporary China relies heavily on the subsistence mode of agricultural production. China is an extreme case in that the process of proletarianization was highly dictated by the politico-administrative rather than market forces, and it was the politico-administrative forces that helped to co-opt the existing social relationship and economic structure into the capitalist development. Given that there is a great labour surplus in rural China, it is almost not necessary for the urban government to consider the reproduction of labour in the long run.

Since the newly formed proletariat are not allowed to build their slums in the urban areas, the burden of daily reproduction of labour is left to the factory. Most workers live inside the factory buildings with about 50 workers in one flat or house

¹⁹ Shenzhen Labour Bureau, 1992, *Shenzhen Tequ Laodong Zhidu Shinian Gaige Licheng (Ten Years of Reform of the Labour System in the Shenzhen SEZ)*, pp80.

built of wood and iron sheet provided by their employers. Again Mr Chou, the Director of the Meteor, complained,

The Shenzhen government does not provide any housing and basic infrastructure for the workers but demands money for every worker we hire. The money is claimed for the so-called Increased City Capacity Fee. However the city does not provide any facilities for them. Our factory still needs to provide food and housing on our own.

Yet, Mr. Chou also admitted that the Company benefits from the status of the workers too. Since the temporary laborers are not officially recognized as *gongren*, neither does their factory recognize them as such. Mr. Chou said that the workers they previously employed in Hong Kong are still under the protection of the labour law in Hong Kong, and they cannot dismiss the workers arbitrarily without compensation. Here they can dismiss the workers in Shenzhen at any time they want: "The labour regulations simply are not working here, nobody cares to enforce them, not even the trade union and labour bureau." The insecure nature of the job often makes the temporary workers very compliant, passive and willing to work longer hours, usually twelve to fourteen hours a day. The reluctance of the socialist state to undertake the costs of the reproduction of the proletariat creates a particular space for international capital to extract labour surplus in China at an extremely cheap cost.

In a word, the role of the Chinese state in regulating labour appropriation and labour control in the process of development in the reform era does not benefit the working class newly formed from the peasantry. On the contrary, labour control, population control, and the non-articulation of the identity of the proletarian class deepens the exploitation of the laborers who come from rural areas. The extraction of rural labour, especially female labour, does prove that the economic development of the Shenzhen SEZ is dependent on the specific use of cheap and flexible female labour. The blurring of the identity is the weird outgrowth of the blending of the exploitative mechanisms of population control and labour control, which helps to maintain the

availability of a massive cheap and flexible labour force for the sake of the development. As Michael Burawoy holds, the ideology which justifies the central appropriation and redistribution of surplus of state socialism is Marxism, or Marxism-Leninism;²⁰ however, the ideology which justifies the new mechanisms of exploitation in the reform era is developmentalism or modernization. What is significant for the *third* Chinese working class is that the basis for its formation is uprooted, as the right of abode of the migrant workers in urban industrial centers is usurped by the state. Urban slums, places for migrant workers to aggregate themselves as class force, are severely wiped out, despite there are rapid growth of slums in some big cities like Guangzhou. Rural proletarianization in the contemporary China is unique in its nature that for every rural migrant, life as an industrial worker is transient and few have the hope of changing their social status from peasant to worker. The growing roots of a constant and substantial working class force are dispersed when the migrant workers at the end are sent back to their rural hometown. Administro-political forces, albeit in a chaotic way, shape and mis-shape the nature of the newly formed working class.

²⁰ Micheal Burawoy, 1992 "A View From Production: The Hungarian Transition from Socialism to Capitalism," in Chris Smith and Paul Thompson (ed.) *Labour in Transition: the Labour Process in Eastern Europe and China*, p.184.

Chapter III The Production of Desire: Leaving the Village

What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour?

First, the fact that labour is *external* to the worker, i.e. it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour*.

Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

Jin: "I knew I had to go."

Jin was one of my best friends in the factory. The friendship started by chance when I came across her one day in the dormitory. I had left the factory premises directly after the afternoon work because I was too tired to take the evening meal and wanted to take a rest at once. It was at dinner time and nobody was supposed in the dormitory, I found Jin sitting on the trunk in her room, wearing a gloomy look. I headed into the room and then started talking with her. She was unhappy because she lost her meal card, which would be stamped each time when she took a meal. For the renewal of the card she would be fined ten *yuan*, and she needed to pay for all meals in the last month even if she didn't take them all. "I am not hungry. I have no appetite... You know, it is my own fault. I am always careless," Jin murmured. I insisted on inviting her to eat outside, though neither of us had any appetite at all.

Jin, aged eighteen, was an assembly operator on Line A. This was her first job since she had left her hometown in Sichuan five months previously. Jin was the only daughter in her family in the village, but she had two elder brothers. One was staying on the farm and one was working in Zhuhai, another industrial town in Guangdong.

"The land is so little, it doesn't need many hands to till it. My father and my eldest brother will do." Jin told me one night when she visited me in my room. Land was redistributed in 1981 on a family basis when the state launched the land reform

policies and overturned the collective system. Jin's family got two acres of arable land and three acres of mountainous land. For merely "feeding mouths" that would be no problem, Jin said, since besides farming, her family invested in poultry rearing as well. Pigs and chickens were the main sources of cash and would be enough to buy basic necessities and even some of household electrical appliances. "After my schooling, I stayed at home and helped my mother to feed the pigs. Other than that, I got nothing to do and was so bored. ... But my father didn't allow me to go out with other girls. They all went to *dagong* in Guangdong."

Her father refused to let his daughter work outside the village because the family did not need extra money, even though they were poor compared to other families in the village. The father did not want the only daughter to be spoiled in the city or to take any risks in unfamiliar situations.

"I stayed home for a whole year, seeing all my friends in the village going out to find jobs elsewhere. They could all earn their own money and bought back rice cookers, electric fans and radio recorders. ... I was so envious and angry with my father for keeping me at home. There was no reason, I thought," Jin kept on saying.

Cash was very important to the peasants for buying industrial products to improve living standards. For the youth in the village, cash signified one's own labour capability and independence from the family. Jin was also attracted by the idea of changing her appearance from farming girl to factory worker in fashionable T-shirt and jeans. Jeans were definitely a cultural product of industrial life, and not fit for farming in paddy field. Changing youth culture in the village and the possibility of new life style in the city all helped to produce Jin's desires to leave the village.

Jin planned to run away from home when she knew there was no way to persuade her father.

"When my best friend, Ping, came back home in midsummer, I asked her to take me away. I was very afraid actually. I had never left my hometown before. And I didn't know where Guangdong was. Ping told me we had to take a coach to Chengdu first, then change onto a train to Guangzhou and then another train to Shenzhen."

The whole trip was three days and nights and would cost her about two hundred *yuan*, her whole life savings at the age of eighteen.

“I don’t know where I got the guts. At that time I so terribly desired to leave the village, just for the sake of leaving the village...”

Jin was fed up staying in the village, finding most of her young co-villagers working in big cities. Stories and anecdotes about industrial life were not new to her; everybody coming back from the factories would bring back tales of city life as well. Be these tales interesting, dreadful or sweating, Jin decided to find them out herself. “At midnight, when all my family fell asleep, I packed my luggage. To keep it simple, I just brought two sets of clothes and some basic necessities, thinking that Ping would help me in need. I went to bed, but I was too excited and for the whole night, I couldn’t sleep...” At four, before the dawn broke, Jin moved out of the house and left a letter for her family. Jin had to walk about half an hour to leave the village and met Ping at the coach station in the town.

“What did you write in your letter?” I couldn’t help interrupting her.

“I told my father I was not an unfilial daughter. I wanted to earn money myself and I would send it back home. I would take care of myself and find a job in Shenzhen...” Her response still showed a sense of pride.

“I met Ping at the coach station...” Jin was eager to continue her story. “She told me the coach would leave at five and we decided to have breakfast near the station. ... When I sat down, I saw a woman running from the field towards the station. She was approaching, it was my mother. I was terribly frightened and stunned. ... My mother saw me and shouted my name. ... At that moment, I thought my dream was dashed.”

But her mother did not dash her dream; instead she gave her one hundred *yuan*, her *si fang qian*, the private savings of a married woman, and an umbrella. “My mother promised to keep my secret. She repeatedly asked me to write letters once I arrived in Shenzhen, and I definitely should be back home for the Spring Festival...”

“The coach was leaving, my mother handed me the umbrella. It was raining slightly but I didn’t realize it until I saw my mother standing by the station from the coach. She was weeping, but I knew I had to go...” Jin left her mother, left the village, left the earth.

Marx is quoted at the beginning of the chapter, not for the sake of joking at a great thinker, but from the pain of teasing out the contemporary scenery in China: the

desire to leave home for the industrial work. Marx said that when the worker is at home, he or she is not working, and when the worker is working, he or she is not at home. Of course for Marx "at home" means more than a geographical location, but also an existential mode of being by which a man or woman actualize his or her being in the world.

The puzzle dominating this chapter is that Chinese workers did not feel "at home" when they were really at home, in the village where self-subsistence could provide a better degree of harmony between wo/man and nature. Rather, they desired to leave "home" by choosing to sell their labour to capitalists. This, according to Marx, leads to the fatal process of self-estrangement and self-objectification of their true selves through their participation in the activity of wage labour. Immediately following the above quotation, Marx wrote:

It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another.

(1964:110-111)

But there was no violence, no coercive force involved when a young Chinese village girl like Jin who was so determined to escape her home, made herself "alienated" through industrial labour. Also, there was no misrecognition of the "I" as suggested by Althusser, who argued that the domain of ideology was paramount in interpellating individuals, and fooling them into following the interests of the dominant class. Most of the factory girls knew quite well before they left their village that they were going to be imprisoned in a sweatshop for twelve hours each day, earning about five hundred *renminbi* per month. They knew the factory boss would not be lenient and treat them as an equal human being. They knew there was huge

gap between the industrial life and rustic life. They knew they were going to sell their bodies. They knew almost everything...

Then why, why were these young Chinese girls so eager to leave their parents, and the land, in order to enter the capitalist consumerist world? Or why were their individual desires in harmony with the social demands? More specifically, why did Jin's desire coincide so happily with the demands of industrial capitalism? Here, there are at least three questions, or three aspects of the same question we need to explore:

1. How state socialist China becomes capitalist and forces mobility;
2. The colonization of social desire by the metaphysical signifier: Capital;
3. The desire for one's own oppression and alienation.

What is desire?

G. Deleuze and F. Guattari are absolutely right to say that Wilhelm Reich "is at his profoundest as a thinker when he refuses to accept ignorance or illusion on the part of the masses as an explanation of fascism, and demands an explanation that will take their desires into account, an explanation formulated in terms of desire: no, the masses were never innocent dupes; at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they *wanted* fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for." (1984:29) The central question of Reich in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* is why the mass desired their own repression: "Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?" Yet Reich, as Deleuze and Guattari say, himself never manages to provide a satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon, because at a certain point he reintroduces precisely the line of argument he was in the process of demolishing. He does this by creating a distinction between rationality as it is or ought to be in the process of social production, and the irrational element in desire, and by regarding only this latter as suitable subject for psychoanalytic investigation. Hence the sole task he assigns psychoanalysis is the explanation of the "negative," the "subjective," the "inhibited" within the social field, and yet the social field is undifferentiated. The oppressors and the oppressed are surely different kind of people. He therefore necessarily returns to a

dualism between the real object rationally produced on the one hand, and irrational, fantasizing production on the other. He gives up trying to discover the *common denominator or the coextension of the social field and desire* (1984:29-30).

Then, what is desire? How can we follow Reich's question but by going beyond his explanation. First of all, Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* help us:

It (desiring-machine) is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts. It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks.

(1984:1)

Desiring-machines are binary machines, obeying a binary law or set of rules governing associations: one machine is always coupled with another. The productive synthesis, the production of production, is inherently connective in nature: "and..." "and then..." This is because there is always a flow-producing machine, and another machine connected to it that interrupts or draws off part of this flow. And because the first machine is in turn connected to another whose flow it interrupts or partially drains off, the binary series is linear in every direction. Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows.

(1984:5)

Going beyond both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari try to tell us a fundamentally different story of desire: desire runs here and there, like a river flowing day in and day out, knowing no final destination. Deleuze and Guattari do not want to attribute the machine that it only has a physical image of a machine to desire. But they do see a mechanistic process of non-human energy that produces and continuously deterritorializes its routes. For Deleuze, there is a joy immanent in desire; but desire only exists in the relations of production that it creates. Desire produces itself, spreading by contagion; but this contagion is the real

production of mutually affective and transformative social relations. To produce and know desire, therefore, is to express a politics of desire: the production of desire is inseparable from the creation of new modes of social existence (Goodchild 1996:41).

Desire is neither a biological impulse, nor a metaphysical energy, nor a symbolic structure, as Freud or Lacan believed. There are no pre-social instincts or drives, whether towards aggression or sexual activity that can transcend society, nor a universal psychical essence like the Oedipus complex that guides the formation of subject and society (Goodchild 1996:74). Instead, desire, previously taken as a sexual energy, is extended into all social, political and psychological processes. As Deleuze and Guattari argue,

The great discovery of psychoanalysis was that of the production of desire, of the productions of the unconscious. But once Oedipus entered the picture, this discovery was soon buried beneath a new brand of idealism: a classical theater was substituted for the unconscious as a factory; representation was substituted for the units of production of the unconscious; and an unconscious that was capable of nothing but expressing itself- in myth, tragedy, dreams- was substituted for the productive unconscious.

(1984:24)

For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is not a concept that derives its entire meaning from sexual relations; desire is a 'sexuality' which extends beyond gender relations, because it can relate entirely heterogeneous terms and territories, a multiplicity of sexes (Goodchild 1996:41). Nor is desire the idea of phantasy, nor a rhapsody of image that comes to be repressed when it encounters with the "reality". Neither is desire derived from lack. By contrast, desire is all source of reality and truth, is the production of the real, the subject and the social:

If desire produces, its product is real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and can produce only reality. Desire is the set of *passive syntheses* that engineer partial objects, flows, and bodies, and

that function as units of production. The real is the end product, the result of the passive syntheses of desire as autoproduction of the unconscious. Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the *subject* that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression.

(1984:26)

Unlike Lacan and Žižek, Deleuze and Guattari stated that desire is never born from lack. As a machine, desire is the spring of production, the production of production. It never lacks anything. There is no transcendental lack that organized the psychic activity and pre-determined the unconscious. For them,

The real is not impossible; on the contrary, within the real everything is possible, everything becomes possible. Desire does not express a molar lack within the subject; rather, the molar organization deprives desire of its objective being.

(1984:27)

One of the greatest contributions of Deleuze and Guattari in their theory and politics of desire is the breakthrough of all dualisms that posit the false opposition between the psychic and the social, between the individual and the social, between the personal desire and the social unconscious. For them, both the individual and the social are the production of the desiring-machines. The division is not an essentialized fracture, but a coin of two sides when looked at from a different perspective. There is no such thing as the social production of reality on the one hand, and a desiring-production that is mere fantasy on the other:

The truth of the matter is that *social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions*. We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to

invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production.

There is only desire and the social, and nothing else.

(1984:29)

Desiring-production is one and the same thing as social production. It is not possible to attribute a special form of existence to desire, a mental or psychic reality that is presumably different from the material reality of social production. Desiring-machines are not fantasy-machines or dream-machines, which supposedly can be distinguished from social machines (1984:30). Thus, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize, there is never any difference in nature between the desiring-machines and the social machines. There is a certain distinction between them, but it is merely a distinction of *régime*. And,

despite the fact that they are governed by two different regimes- and despite the fact that it is admittedly a strange adventure for desire to desire repression, there is only one kind of production, the production of the real. And doubtless we can express this identity in two different ways, even though these two ways together constitute the autoproduction of unconsciousness as a cycle. We can say that social production, under determinate conditions, derives primarily from desiring-production: which is to say that *Homo natura* comes first. But we must also say more accurately, that desiring-production is first and foremost social in nature, and tends to free itself only at the end: which is to say that *Homo historia* comes first.

(1984:32-33)

Homo natura and *Homo historia* are two different faces of the same identity. Desiring production is first and foremost social in nature. The social provides the repressive potential, the signifying structure, the organ-machine that waits for the psychic, the desiring-machine, the body without organs to breathe, to eat, to shit and to fuck. With these insights into how desiring-machines work, of course in the

abstract, then it is high time to come back to Jin's story in particular and to Chinese history in general.

When Jin said: "I knew I had to go", how many voices did she echo in Chinese society? When she escaped and moved out the village, how many people did she join and accompany? The post-Mao era was characterized by these desiring voices and actions that created and captured the ethos of the society. Nothing is more useful for understanding the force and pattern of mobility, especially rural to urban mobility in the past decade, or for grasping the changing nature of the Chinese society. It discloses at least two processes: capitalization of the state socialist society and the reworking of worker and peasant relations.

The Change of Production Mode and the Force of Mobility

The mobility of the agricultural population marked the beginning of the history of primitive accumulation in the process of capitalization, as Marx discloses:

In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are epoch-making that act as levers for the capitalist class in course of formation; but, above all, those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled as free and "unattached" proletarians on the labour market. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation, in different countries, assumes different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different periods.

(Capital Vol. 1, 1954:669-670)

The process of expropriation of the agricultural producers in contemporary China did run its own way, assume its own specific aspects. The nature of exploitation was different from what Marx and Thompson described in the history of English capitalism. The striking difference we observe in China was that the process of expropriation of agricultural producers from the soil did not lead to the formation of

working class. Rather, based on the legacy of Mao's policies, the process of expropriation makes use of the existing social relations and state bureaucracy to assist the economic force. The result is that the emergence of the Chinese agricultural proletariat is checked at the moment of birth as a class force. The state machine crushes the class formation of an agricultural proletariat in the cradle. I have described this process in the last chapter. Here, let us come back to the change of the mode of production in China.

As Marx said, a change in the economic structure was the pre-condition for freeing agricultural producers from the land and the creation of a relatively surplus population. The mode of production should be changed, Marx argued. So in contemporary China, the state socialist mode of production should be changed too. Mao Zedong died in 1976, and two years later Deng Xiaoping launched the economic reforms and started the new era of capitalization in China. It ended the collectivization of three decades. Land first of all would be divided and given back to individual households, and the state control of the market would be eased. The historical transitional moment is often said to be at the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1978, when the party claimed to undertake new historical responsibility and turned the job of the government back to *shehui zhuyi xiandaihua*, the so called "socialist modernization". The Session Report advocated launching a deep social revolution to actualize the "four modernizations", of agriculture, industry, military and scientific technology:

To actualize the four modernizations, that are demanded to enhance highly productivity, what is needed is to change production relations and an upper infrastructure that is not suitable to the development of productivity in various aspects. The inadequate management mode, activity mode and thought mode should all be changed; therefore it should be a broad and deep revolution.¹

¹ quoted from the Report of the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the China Communist Party. Hong Kong: Joint Publishers. 1978, p5. My own translation.

The Third Plenum initiated Deng's reform policy though at that time nobody knew how far the state socialist mode of production would be changed. Yet land reforms were extensively carried out until the Sixth Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of CCP in 1981, which promulgated the "Resolution of Certain Historical Problems of the Party since the Construction of the Nation" that helped to confirm the ideological base. The Resolution blamed that the backwardness, the poverty, and the stagnation of the country on "personal mistakes", that is, the mistakes of Mao Zedong.

It stated,

In 1958, the Second Plenum of the 8th Central Committee of the Party passed the general line and basic direction of socialist construction. It accurately reflects the universal will and demand of the mass of the people to change the backward economic and cultural situation of our country. Its drawback, however, was that it neglected objective economic rules. Before and after the session, all party comrades and all peoples had developed socialist activity and creative spirit in the productive construction. But, due to lack of experience in socialist construction, and lack of recognition of an economic development rule and the basic situation of China's economy, and due to the pride and self-complacency of Comrade Mao Zedong, and many central and local comrades nurtured in the victory, the subjective will and subjective effects were exaggerated because of the urgent need to make achievements. Without serious investigation, research and testing, the "Great Leap Forward" movement and the rural collectivization movement were carelessly set in motion soon after the launch of General Line. Thus, the "leftist" orientation, characterized by high goals, blind direction, exaggeration and the "communist wind" was extensively prevalent.²

² see *Sanzhong quanhui yilai: Zhongyao wenxian xuanbian xia* (Selected Important documents: from the Third Plenum). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe. 1982:805. My own translation.

Deng's new regime tried to create a picture: the backwardness and poverty of the country was produced by the "leftist" policy dictated by Mao Zedong. Mao's further mistake was mobilizing the Cultural Revolution which seriously damaged the country's economy and political situation. Deng's willingness to question the authority of the Communist Party, to portray Mao as a maniac, irrational revolutionary was simply for the sake of coating himself in a new cloth of rationalism and finding legitimacy for his new reform policy. Deng surely conceived his reform policy as a deep social revolution, and its consequences for Chinese "socialist" history would be far greater than the Cultural Revolution launched by Mao.

However, history is not merely made by a single man; Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, no matter how "great" they were, were simply the leaders and then the symbols of two different forces in history. At the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the legitimacy of the ruling state party was seriously questioned and the society at the bottom had already changed, despite the existence of the repressive state machine at the top.

The mode of production, especially in the rural areas experienced spontaneous changes at the end of 1970s. Various studies found out that some rural communes in villages had already divided land by themselves long before Deng launched the land reform, and the "black" market selling staple foods was never totally under control. The repressive state never proved successful; a totalitarian model able to fetter the society was merely imaginary. There are many examples to illustrate the failure of the state to control the social and of the spontaneous modifications of the mode of production in various rural communes before agricultural reforms were formerly carried out in 1982. Ezra F. Vogel, in his study of Guangdong Province, provides us with interesting and detailed stories on how the villages in poor mountainous areas divided land, without the permission of the provincial government:

In early 1979 Guangdong provincial officials received reports that in every poor area like Haikang County (*Zhanjiang* Prefecture) and in remote mountainous areas like *Zijin* County (*Huiyang* Prefecture), local teams had taken the initiative on a wide scale in assigning land to households even

during rice-growing season. Official policy did not yet permit this, and local officials tried to clamp down. In *Zijin*, higher-level cadres went down to villages to stop it in March, June, and September 1979, and yet over the year, as they later discovered, the number of teams practising it increased from 1300 to 3700. An investigation of the situation there and in nearby Heyuan and Heiping counties began on June 10, 1980, led by the head of the Provincial Agriculture Commission, Du Ruizhi. At meetings from June 19 to 25, the team members discussed their findings with officials. Du reported back to the province that the assignment of land to individual families was even more widespread than previously reported, that the peasants were pleased, and that despite bad weather, production had improved substantially. Nevertheless, Du could not persuade the province to approve the practice openly. Some feared that Beijing might disapprove, some feared loss of cadre authority in the countryside, some feared difficulty in collecting grain, and some feared that after success in the first year, production of basic crops would later fall off and that once land was distributed it could not easily be taken back.

(1989:95)

Another sociologist, Graham Johnson (1982), who also did his field work in Pearl River delta, found out that more than 20% of the work teams there had already privately adopted the family contract system, especially on land growing sugar cane and fruit. The work teams divided the land and worked for themselves. The peasants created all kinds of flexible production methods adjusted to their different ecologies.

As for the local rural “black” market, it never died out throughout the 1970s, though it was completely banned in 1957. Terry Sicular found out that though massive private exchange of grain could not formally exist in the Cultural Revolution period, rural marketing and exchange on a small scale was actually prevalent. After 1977, the state did relax its control on the private exchange, so in addition to cotton and cotton products, all sorts of agricultural products were extensively exchanged. Over five million tons of grain were sold through rural markets in 1979; that is, about 10% of the state planned quota. The amount of

agricultural products exchanged through the local rural markets was about 170 billion *renminbi* (1989:104). Vivienne Shue even discovered that private exchange not only existed among individual households, but also among brigades and communes. One cadre from a brigade in Dong-guan told Shue:

In our brigade supply and marketing coop we tended to try to handle problems that arose for ourselves and did not expect help from higher levels or ask them for help. We even did things that were illegal to solve our own problems. One of these involved violation of the state's unified purchase and supply policy. Adjacent to our commune was another commune called XX commune and there they grew a lot of peanuts. But our commune grew a lot of sugar cane. The land in our commune was not suitable for peanuts and the amount of oil supplied to us by the state did not meet our needs. Now our brigade was very close to this other commune; our people saw each other all the time and we were linked by marital ties. So what happened? Our brigade party secretary and brigade leader and several others in the brigade got their heads together to decide whether or not it would be possible to trade some of our sugar for some of their peanut oil. This was without a doubt illegal and not permissible. Both of these commodities came under unified purchase and supply and both should have been turned over to the state for distribution. At first the party branch secretary didn't know what to do. He was a little afraid. Then the brigade went to consult the people in XX commune to see if they would agree. They replied that they'd be happy to do so. They never had enough sugar you see. So a brigade boat was secretly sent over there loaded with sugar and came back with peanut oil. We didn't just do this once either; we did it many times.

(1988:110)

Besides private trading among communes, individual peasants also made exchanges among themselves without the notice of the commune leaders. The cadre continued his story:

Sometimes we did things without ever informing the commune supply and marketing coop too. For example, during the busy season the peasants didn't have time to take off to buy vegetables and other things to eat. So the brigade leader suggested that we could catch shrimp in the reservoir at night and have them ready for sale to brigade members in the morning. He discussed it with us and others first and then checked with the brigade party branch secretary, who also agreed that it was a good idea. On the one hand it meant we at the supply and marketing coop would earn a little more money. And on the other, it would be providing the brigade members with something better to eat. Of course, most of the shrimp and fish that we caught in the reservoir were supposed to be taken on the commune. So when we decided to do this during the busy season, we most certainly didn't tell the commune about it. ... Yes, almost everybody in the brigade knew about it and they knew it was illegal, but it was beneficial for them and so no one ever said anything to the commune cadres about it.

(ibid.: 110)

Thus we can see that no matter how dedicated and strict the state organizations were in rural areas, the state never succeeded in completely controlling the daily life of the peasants. Throughout the 70s, there was everywhere a "silent" revolution at the bottom of Chinese society. The economic reforms initiated in the early 1980s by Deng's regime were simply an acceptance of the *de facto* structural changes of the rural economy. They no doubt accelerated the rate and the extent of the change. The legitimation of rural decollectivization, and the adoption of the production responsibility system after 1981 resulted in the dismantlement of more than 50,000 communes within two years (World Bank, 1992:66). And as Elisabeth Croll put it,

the reversal of the process of collectivization was primarily a consequence of the contracting out of land and production quotas to the peasant household, which brought about the simultaneous decline of the collective and the emergence of the peasant household as the dominant economic,

political and social unit in the countryside.

(1994:20)

The agricultural marketing and price reforms that accompanied land reform allowed the loosening of the state monopoly, and a large and growing share of agricultural marketing moved from the state commercial system to free markets (ibid. 1992:66-76).

The primitive accumulation of “socialist capital” was through the politics of collectivization, the confiscation of all lands from the hands of individual peasants to be managed under the state machine through a planned economy and its organs, the communes and brigades. In four decades of state socialist development, the strategy of the state was to extract raw material and resources from the peasantry to support urban industrialization (Seldon 1988, 1993; Riskin 1991). The exploitation of the peasantry was then in a way more camouflaged. Now the poetics of primitive accumulation was decollectivization, the returning of land back to the households and the autonomy of peasant life. Besides raw material and resources, labour should be not only freely, but cheaply, appropriated from the rural areas to bolster the market mechanisms of the changing command economy and to attract international investment. One of the great consequences of Deng’s reforms was to release the surplus population from farming. China is well known for having 20% of the world’s population fed by 6.7% of world arable land. Of 1.1 billion of the total population, more than eight hundred million were peasants, living on limited land.

The rapid break up of the communes and the return of arable land to families suddenly produced massive underemployment among the rural working age population. Labour requirements in agriculture dropped greatly without there being adequate access to any off-farm employment opportunities. There are no official statistics on this subject. The World Bank report of 1992 estimates labour requirements in crop cultivation declined by 27 million during 1982-1984, though labour employment in animal husbandry and agricultural sideline production increased (1992:69). The sharp reduction of agricultural labour actually was both a reflection of increased transparency of the massive underemployment previously hidden by the commune work point system, as well as a change of the mode of rural

production. Rural underdevelopment actually was a persistent problem throughout Mao's China and intensified in Deng's period. It was previously disguised by the commune collective structure and the work-point system; the problem became apparent when agricultural production was privatized on an individual household base. Farming activities were then organized on a family-base, leaving the household to absorb or take care of its surplus labour.

There are again no accurate numbers for the surplus labour. An estimate from a national study team of the Chinese Academy of Science was over 100 million rural surplus workers at the beginning of the 1990s³. A considerable amount of rural labour surplus therefore, became free in the family farm, thus constituting the source of surplus labour waiting to be subsumed by the industrial capital. Jin and many others were those among the large "surplus army", which formed the huge mobile flow in contemporary China. Thus, when Jin said, "After schooling, I stayed at home and helped my mother to feed the pigs. Other than that, I got nothing to do and was so bored", she aired out the problem of 100 million rural surplus workers. The boredom of staying at home and the desire of city life created the force of mobility. A national newspaper, *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), on 26 January 1994 provided a very vivid description of this rural to urban exodus:

A great mass of *mingong* (migrant workers) was pouring from the entrance of the railway station, non-stop. *Mingong* flux released from all coaches and buses ran to the square of the station. ... Everywhere there was luggage lying on the ground, and *mingong* were eating bread and cakes.

³ The Chinese Academy of Science (1991) *Shengcun yu fazhan* (Survival and Development). Hong Kong: Ke Hua Press. pp19-22.

The Creation of Historical Void

The antagonism of town and country can only exist as a result of private property. It is the most crass expression of the individual under the division of labour, under a definite activity forced upon him-- a subjection which makes one man into a restricted town-animal, the other into a restricted country-animal, and daily creates anew the conflict between their interests.

Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*

Here a question arises. Is it really your desire to develop heavy industry? ... But if you have a strong desire to develop heavy industry, then you will pay attention to the development of light industry and agriculture. This will result in more daily necessities, which in turn will mean more accumulation, and after a few years still more funds will be invested in heavy industry. So this is a question of whether your desire to develop heavy industry is genuine or only a pretense.

Of course this question of whether one's desire to develop heavy industry is genuine or not does not apply to us. Who does not genuinely desire to? With us, it's merely a question of whether our desire is strong or weak.

Mao Zedong, *On the Ten Great Relationships*

The force of mobility, the desire to move to the city was to a certain extent invoked by a specific historical void, created in the particular contexts of the modern history of China. Rural surplus labour was only a visible factor accounting for the migrant flow. The invisible, the hidden reason, I argue, was a historical gap produced by Chinese state socialist history, notably a deep social cleavage between the city and countryside. The social cleavage provided the signifying structure and the material context for individuals to live out their own desires and expectations. I let the following two stories illustrated the rural-urban disparity and individual desires.

Ying: "I had to go before it was too late."

Ying was a married woman in the factory, working in the packing department as a packer. There were only a few who got married and still worked in Meteor; most of them were cooks, cleaners or packers and earned a little bit less than the single shopfloor girls. Ying at the beginning attracted me because of her personality and because of her marital status. I wanted to know how she coped with family demands and industrial life. Again, I found another runaway woman, this time an overt one. Ying, in her early thirties, was a very interesting woman; talkative, energetic and easy-going. Every time I met her during our leisure time, she was always making fun and jokes about other women workers. "This woman gave up her husband and sons, and is always making fools of people," was the common remark about Ying in the factory.

Ying was from a village in Jiangxi, another province adjacent to Guangdong; the geographical nearness could easily help to expose the wealth gap between the two areas. Ying was a mother of two sons, one nine and one seven. They were both in primary school. Her husband was a village school teacher. He stayed at home and did all the farming work and domestic work.

"How can you leave your husband like this? Who takes care of your children? Do they live with their grandfather and grandmother?" I had a series of questions to ask her:

"No, we live on our own, but we are quite near to our grandma's house, a few minutes walk. My sons can eat there," Ying said.

"But who tills the land? Your husband has a job in the school, doesn't he?" I continued to ask.

"We don't have much land, we have four *hukou*, but only got three persons' share. There was no more land to distribute when I gave birth to my last son. My husband didn't need to go to school all the time. Actually he is a *min-ban* teacher (a village-organized job, not supported by the township government finance). His earnings are so meagre, so little, only twenty *yuan* each month. He is one of the few educated persons in the village, but I often tease him. I asked him, 'what is the use of

your knowledge? What can twenty *yuan* be for? A *dagongmei* can earn twenty times more than you!” She spoke in a high pitched voice.

“Was your husband angry with you? How could you bully him like this?” I was sympathetic to her husband.

“Oh, he seems to have no temper and always keeps quiet. He is really a boring person, I tell you.” She kept on complaining and laughing.

“Because he is a nice person, then you are so liberated?” I found myself still on the side of her husband.

“Ha, ha, who said so? I told my husband I have given my ten years time to *Li jia* (the husband’s family), helping them farming, doing all the household chores and giving birth to two sons. What did they give me? A poor family.”

Ying married into her husband’s village in 1985 when she was twenty-one. During her marriage, the trend peaked for young girls moving out of the village and exploring a new life in the city. Ying instead was bound by the marriage; she gave birth to her first son one year after marrying. Then the second son came two years later and for the following years she was completely tied by family burdens. She had no chance to leave the village, but saw most of the young women moving in and out. She never enjoyed freedom, and she never earned money.

“I was fed up with village life. I told myself to wait until my sons went to school. I waited for ten years, and on that day, the first day of my child’s schooling, when my last son went to the school with his father, I was so happy and found myself free. It’s my turn, I told myself. I had to go before it was too late and I was too old.”

Ying planned to leave. “When my husband came back home, I told him I was going to the city to find a job. He was too shocked to believe my decision. I told him I would keep writing letters back home and probably would be back home in a few months. ... I told him if he was too busy to till the land, just give up the vegetable field, I would earn back the money from the factory,” she said in a low voice.

At the time of our talk, Ying actually was struggling to go back home. She had been working in Meteor for more than five months. She missed her sons, if not her husband, too much to continue her work in the factory. “I’ve earned one thousand and five hundred *yuan* within five months, and now I can save about one thousand

yuan. I would like to buy two sets of new clothes for my sons, one rice cooker and probably one washing machine..." Ying smiled with self-esteem.

Dong: "It's not the first time I go out working."

wai chu yi ge ren, dai dong yi tiao cun (A person moving out will make the whole village flow).

A local slogan in Dong's hometown

If we found Jin and Ying's life experiences too idiosyncratic, Dong's story may be more typical and more similar to the women workers of her generation. At the age of 23, she was an experienced *dagongmei* and had been working in Guangdong for more than four years when I met her at the Meteor. Every year she changed her workplace at least once. She had worked in garment and plastic plants before she went to the Meteor. She worked in the QC Department and stayed in the room next to me. She often invited me for supper and asked me to buy entertainment magazines from Hong Kong, so we became good friends in the factory. In return, she provided me with the most detailed of life stories, including an account of her childhood, her family and her natal village. Compared with other women workers, she knew more about the functioning of her family economy. What surprised me in the factory was that most of the factory girls could not say how much land their families owned or the average income of their household. The sibling order might be one of the possible explanation, as Dong was the eldest daughter in her family, and the order required her to take up the family burden when she was still young. The least information we have is from girls who had elder brothers in their families.

Dong was born in a poor village in Hunan. She grew up along with the course of rapid economic development in China of the past fifteen years. In 1981, when she was eight, the age of entering primary school, land reform was launched in her village. The family had about 3.5 acres of arable land, and 2 acres of mountainous and forest land for five members. Besides her parents, Dong had one younger brother and one younger sister. Without other alternatives, the family depended on these lands for everyday survival. The common household strategy was intensive farming.

Limited by natural resources and labour power, the family could never develop sideline production, which at the start of the 1980s helped some families become “ten-thousand-yuan” households.

Life was not so hard for Dong, especially during her childhood in the mid 1980s when the price of seeds, fertilizers and insecticides, and the state taxes still remained reasonable. However, the family hit hard times when all three kids went to school. Besides being affected by the roaring inflation in China in late 80s, the family had to cope with stagnant land resources and increasing educational fees for their children; education had been free in the collective period. Rapid economic reform in the coastal and urban areas and the boom in private trading accelerated the price inflation, which had direct effects on the peasants’ lives. What’s worse, in the late 1980s the land reform began to show disadvantages, rather than the advantages they were said to have for peasant lives in the previous period. Agricultural production on a local level stopped increasing, with land limited by ecology and, after its division, fragmentary and resistant to technological innovations.

Dong was the eldest daughter, the first one to take the responsibility to alleviate the family burden. Her father asked her to quit her junior secondary school at the age of sixteen, when her younger brother got into secondary school and the family did not have no enough money for both. Gender inequality is particularly experienced when the family lacked enough resources. Dong then remained at home helping with farming work and domestic chores. The division of labour was simple in the family; the father and the mother shared all farming work such as irrigating, planting, fertilizing and harvesting. Her mother spent more time on poultry rearing and housekeeping, while her father did more planning on the household economy and undertook all the transactions in outside markets. Besides grain, the family produced peanuts, cotton, beans and several kinds of vegetables, which together with pigs, chickens and eggs helped the family to earn about RMB 2500 each year.

Many hopes of the family focused on Dong’s younger brother- the only son of the family. They dreamed the son would get in higher education, find a job in the town and that finally the family could build a new house for the son to bring his wife to when he married. Saving money was the present concern. Dong shared all those

family expectations, so when her cousin went out to work in Shenzhen, she hoped to join the migration.

“I thought I could earn more money in the Special Economic Zone. I felt bored at home and a waste of time because my parents could take up all the farming work. My cousins and other friends who worked in Shenzhen often told me a lot of interesting stories. I knew quite well what the working conditions might be, and how much I could earn before I went out for work. I knew it was not easy to work in a big city which was a totally strange place to me. But I thought it was still worth it to try and it was a chance for me to look at the outside world. We often thought we were *jing di zhi wa* (frogs living in a well know nothing about the outside world), and we knew little about the life outside the village.” As Dong understood it, Shenzhen was a world full of struggles, yet exciting and a place one could make money within a short time. For her, to work in Shenzhen was not only a way to face economic necessity and the expectations of her family, but also a chance for self-exploration and self-development.

She went back home only almost every year. Every time she brought back about 2000 *yuan* to her father, which was more than the total of her family income. The family was happy with her contribution and she was satisfied too. “The first time I saw my father and mother smile so heartedly, then I knew that there is big gap between urban life and rural life. My parents at first could not believe that I earned 2000 *yuan* within five months.”

But for Dong, the life of the outside world became less and less interesting as she worked in Shenzhen for four years. “I know there is a big difference. People in the city earn a lot and enjoy a different kind of life. But I do feel tired. The working hours are too long. It’s too hard. What’s more, I could never have hoped to stay in the city for a long time. My *hukou* (the official residence registry) is in the village, I don’t have the right or money to live in the city. Last New Year, I went back home and thought that I would not come out again. I stayed home for two months and I slept, slept all the day...” With her energy and health resumed, she felt bored at home and went out working again. She had a boyfriend living in the nearby village; they agreed to get married the next year. She knew that after marriage, she would have no chance to work in the city again. So even though industrial work was too

arduous and exploitative for her, she still wanted to enjoy her personal “freedom” outside the village for a limited time more. Saving some of the money for her future married life is another consideration. “Life will be happy if my husband and my parents-in-law treat me nice. But no one knows. It’s better for me to have some money of my own.” Dong did not see marriage as a big change in her life, but simply a natural course for her life. So the individual life cycle, the women’s transitional life period between puberty and marriage was conjured by the social time, the transitional period of the market economy.

Jin, Ying and Dong and many other women in the workplace all had stories, struggles and expectations of their own when leaving their villages. But their individual desires were somewhat produced by a social void, conditioning by the same historical factors and existing social relations.

Jin said: “I stayed home for a whole year, seeing all my friends in the village going out to find jobs elsewhere. They all could earn their own money and brought back rice cooker, electric fan and radio recorder. ...”

Ying asked her husband: “What is the use of your knowledge? What can twenty *yuan* be for? A *dagongmei* can earn twenty times more than you!”

Dong told me: “The first time I saw my father and mother smile so heartedly, then I know that there is a big gap between urban life and rural life. My parents at first could not believe that I earned two thousands *yuan* within five months.”

All their words brought forth a clear message: a social lack, a deep rural and urban divide that seduced the rural generation to live out their own desires in the economic urban developing areas in the reform period. There were at least two seductions, actually one coin with sides, that we could chart out: one was the great disparity between the city and countryside, between the working class and the peasantry; the other was the consumerism of urban life featured by luxury goods and modern technology. In the following section we are going to see how the rural-urban chasm was historically formed in China.

The Rural-Urban Chasm

The Chinese state-party machine crushed all forms of inequality embedded in the private ownership of property and eradicated the class divisions between landlord and tenant and between capitalist and worker in the course of “socialist” transition from the early 1950s onwards. But at the process of collectivization of private property, the Chinese state-party machine replaced the role of the market in capitalist society by producing new forms of inequality, albeit through political and administrative means rather the mechanisms of the “invisible hand”. As Mark Selden illustrates,

we observe not only the continued existence of residual sectoral and spatial hierarchies of wealth and power, but the emergence of *new* patterns of inequality, hierarchy, status, and domination that are the direct consequence of specific institutional and developmental priorities of socialist states.

(1993:162)

Among all forms of inequality, the hierarchy between the urban working class and the peasantry was the most prominent one. The priorities of the state, as seen in the First Five-Year Plan (1953-57), affected by the Soviet model, was the development of capital-intensive heavy industry focusing on urban areas. Rural regions, on the other hand, were left alone to provide rapid accumulation and all kinds of resources urgently needed for industrial development in the cities. Rapid collectivization of agriculture in 1956 was planned to support the nationalization of industry. It was believed that massive collectivization and rapid communization would accelerate agricultural production within a short time, and so more resources and capital could be drawn to support the urban development. Chinese development from the very beginning built its imagination on a utopia of highly industrialized western nation. To achieve it, there was the belief that it should depend heavily on the growth of heavy industry. Light industry should be suppressed in the transition period in order to curb the rate of consumption and save resources and energy to build a basic

infrastructure for heavy industry. Agriculture, on the other hand, was to be highly developed to provide the original accumulation for the industrial growth. Collectives and communes were highly politically organized units that not only confiscated land from individual households, but also planned and dictated production schemes, division of labour and distribution of products, hoping that administrative means could maximize all agricultural production. The rural society was organized by an unitary hierarchy- commune, brigade, and production teams, ranging from several thousand people to several hundred. These units were expected not only to feed their own population, but also to provide high production output for industrialization and urbanization. Sacrificing rural benefits to support urban industrial development constituted the main element of the socioeconomic structure of state socialist China, and created a bifurcated social order between urban-rural and state-collective divisions for the next three decades.

Mao Zedong, by birth a peasant, did try from time and time to lessen the gap between the rural and the urban areas. His words revealed the contradictions among the people themselves. In his speech "On the Ten Great Relationships" in April 1956, he stressed:⁴

The peasants' collective economic organizations are just like factories. They are also units of production. Within these collective economic units the relationship between the collective and the individual must be properly regulated and properly managed. If we do not manage this relationship properly and do not pay attention to the peasants' welfare, then the collective economy cannot be properly run. ... The collective needs accumulation, but we must be careful not to make too great demands on the peasants. We should not give them too hard a time. Except where we meet with unavoidable natural disasters, we should enable the peasants' income to increase year by year on the basis of increased agricultural production.

⁴ Stuart Schram (ed.) 1974, *Chairman Mao Talks to the People: Talks and Letters 1956-1971*. New York: Pantheon Books. P.70.

Yet all his concern about the peasants' livelihood merely resulted in verbal promises. The desire of the state-party to develop heavy industry was simply too powerful, and it had no other method than to extract raw materials and resources from the rural collectives faster and faster through the Great Leap Forward and the early 1960s. Mao's developmental vision could only result in half-hearted sympathy with the peasantry. His prioritizing the position of the working class and the cities as the future of socialist China was well revealed in his talk in 1957:⁵

The number (12 million urban workers out of 6 billion population) is so small, but only they have a future. All other classes are transitional classes. The peasants in the future will become mechanized and will be transformed into agricultural workers. ... Right now there is the system of ownership by peasant co-operatives. In the future, in a few decades, they will be changed to be like factories; they will become agricultural factories. In this factory, you plant maize, millet, rice, sweet potatoes, peanuts and soybeans. ... The several hundred million peasant and handicraft workers have now already become collective farmers; in the future they will become state farmers, agricultural workers using machinery.

Mao's promise never came true. The collective farmers never became state workers, and for over three decades they were segregated into different life world, entitled to different rights, interests and living standards. As Judith Banister put it: "urban areas are essentially owned and administered by the state, and their residents are the state's direct responsibility. The state budget must supply urban areas with employment, housing, food, water, sewage disposal, transportation, medical facilities, police protection, schools, and other essentials and amenities of life "(1987:328). The opposite of the story was that the state provided none of these services for the rural areas. Nor would it provide rural people with any of the other social services and welfare that were routinely provided to urban residents, particularly to state sector employees (Selden 1993; Cheng and Selden 1994:644; Solinger 1993).

⁵ Michael Kau and John Leung (eds) 1986, *The Writings of Mao Zedong*,

It was actually a caste system, sanctioned not by cultural or religious factors, but by political force. The two-caste system, between rural collective agricultural producers and urban state workers, was planned and made rigid to achieve one goal: the systematic siphoning of resources from the rural collective sector to finance the urban heavy industry and to support a growing administrative apparatus and urban population. In the years 1953-56 the transformation from private and capitalist ownership to state and collective ownership of agriculture, industry, handicrafts and commerce was basically completed. By the end of 1956, 97% of rural households had joined co-operatives, including 88% in large collectives (Seldon 1993). Peasant life was no longer regulated by small household economy based on plots of their own land or supplemented with various forms tenancy. Parallel with the collectivization of agricultural land and the destruction of the peasant household economy, private marketing activities and sideline production were further curbed. In December 1953, The Regulation of "Unified purchase and marketing of grain" was issued to prohibit individual exchanges of grain. It established compulsory sales to the state of specified amounts of grain at low state prices. The dual purpose was to assure ample cheap food for urban residents and to channel the agricultural surplus from the countryside towards industry and the cities. "Unified purchase and marketing" was quickly extended from grain to cotton and oil crops, and within two to three years to all major foodstuffs and agricultural raw materials (Cheng and Selden, 1994:657). The compulsory marketing of crops at low prices, high crop-sale quotas, low state investment in agriculture, and the curbing of private markets all contributed to a low level of consumption, or even none, in the rural areas. The state established further administrative mechanisms to control labour mobility, which had been one possible means for peasants to alleviate their burden by finding temporary jobs during the slack seasons. Thus the rural population was strictly bound to the rural collectives.

Peasant values and cultures were also frequently attacked as residues of feudalism, or sometimes capitalism. In the process of transition to co-operatives and collectives, though there was no large organized opposition among peasants, small-scale resistance and reluctance to join the co-ops were widespread, especially in

south China among well-to-do peasants. These phenomena were often accounted for by the selfishness and insularity of petty-peasant consciousness that affected peasants' enthusiasm for participating in the collectivization movement. "Sweeping snow off one's house door" was interpreted as "class struggle" since Mao believed that most of the resistance to the collective movement was from the upper and middle peasants. As Mao said,

Political work is the lifeblood of all economic work. This is particularly true at a time when the social and economic system is undergoing fundamental change. From the start, the agricultural cooperative movement has been a severe ideological and political struggle. Before a new social system can be built on the site of the old, the site must be swept clean. Remnant old ideas reflecting the old system invariably persist in people's minds for a long time, and they do not easily give way.⁶

In 1960s and 1970s the party continued to press rural "class struggle" to curb household marketing, private and sideline production. As a result of collectivization and the restriction of private markets and freedom of mobility, the Chinese agricultural producers as a whole experienced extensive deprivation of their ownership of their own product, their land and their labour, that is, their own means of production. But of course, total and encompassing control of peasant life was impossible, given the fact that peasants were granted the right to cultivate small household plots limited to about five percent of village land. As we have noted, private though "illegal" marketing activities never stopped during the socialist transition period. Scholars were surprised by the small amount of conflict between state and society in rural areas during the Mao period. But though we lack detailed documentary evidence, we can believe that the Chinese peasants took the forms of quiet and informal resistance with no manifestos or organization, and thus the violent

⁶ Mao Zedong, "Notes from Socialist Upsurge in China's Countryside", in *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*, Vol. V, Peking: Foreign Language Press. 1977. p.260.

confrontations seen in Soviet collectivization were rare (Selden, 1993:163).

The consequences of the skewed development of heavy industry and the lack of rewards for rural to urban resource transfer, combined with strict administrative controls on population movement, constituted the heart of China's socialist accumulation policy and the crystallization of rural-urban hierarchy. So a social chasm formed between the working class and peasantry. From the mid-1950s forward the gap in income and benefits grew significantly in favour of the state over the collective sector, and the city over the countryside. The World Bank (1983) estimated the 1979 urban-rural income gap at 2.2 to 1. Thomas Rawski calculated the gap at 3.4 to 1, excluding subsidies, and as high as 5.9 to 1 with subsidies included (1982:12-26). Dwight Perkins and Shahid Yusuf reported that the income gap increased from 3.9:1 in 1957 to 4.9 to 1 in 1979 (1984:125-127). Selden estimated subsidies to the state sector, were in the range of 4 to 5:1 throughout the two decades (1993:170). Many rural households also experienced a significant loss of income from handicrafts, sidelines, and commercial crops as a result of the state policies prohibiting these supplementary economic activities.

Besides the income gap, state workers enjoyed a considerable amount of social welfare and fringe benefits that were beyond the dreams of rural peasants. State workers won lifetime employment, retirement pensions, free health care, and heavily subsidized housing and food. These extraordinary subsidies for state-sector workers were made possible by the appropriation of rural resources and state priorities favoring investment on the state sector over the collective countryside. Collectivized rural producers, on the other hand, enjoyed none of these benefits and were dependent on self-financed village welfare programs, and left subject to the constraints of ecology and natural disasters. The character and size of the subsidies provided only to state-sector workers and their families illustrated well the rural-urban differentiation. By 1978 these subsidies averaged 526 yuan per state worker, 82% of the average nominal wage, and accounted for 13% of national income. The most important subsidy, which kept urban food prices low while state purchasing prices increased, was for grain and edible oil. In 1978 this subsidy alone averaged 180 yuan per worker. There were also substantial state subsidies for housing, pension, health care, education and transportation (Selden 1993:168). For the

collective peasantry, Nicholas Lardy (1983) estimated that the total package of price subsidies and fringe benefits was less than 10 yuan per person.

The income gap was further illustrated by the fixed assets that urban workers and rural peasants owned. Between 1952 and the late 1970s, fixed assets per industrial worker rose from 3,000 yuan for five million workers to nearly 9,000 yuan for fifty million workers. By contrast, in the late 1970s, there were just 30 yuan of fixed assets per rural worker, one thirtieth of those for industrial workers (Yang and Li 1980:207; Perkins and Yusuf 1984:16). Thus, with low marginal productivity and high disguised unemployment, rigorous controls on grain distribution and consumption, high rates of accumulation and state extraction of the rural surplus, rural per capita income and consumption stagnated over the entire collective era. In some poorer rural units from the Great Leap Forward and continuing for two decades thereafter, *cash* virtually disappeared, forcing people to live almost entirely on income in kind derived from collective production (Selden 1993:169).

In addition to the income gap and consumption disparity, the rural areas experienced a long-term decline of food consumption from the mid 1950s to the late 1970s. From 1954 onward the compulsory sale system required each brigade or production team to sell a substantial amount of output to the state at a low fixed price, leaving only a small part for individual consumption. This small part averaged 154 to 200 kg of grain per capita, less than the quota provided to the urban residents (184-212 kg of flour, rice or other grain (Selden, 1993:19-20). The World Bank (1984:164) reported that rural per capita caloric consumption, which averaged 2,049 calories in the years 1956-58, did not recover to that level until the late 1970s. Wang Haibo estimated that per capita grain consumption in the rural areas decreased from 197.1 kilograms in the years 1953-57 to 188.7 kilograms in the years 1976-78. Edible oil consumption also fell from 2.3 to 1.6 kilograms in the same period (1985:416). The rural communities suffered the most in the time of famine in 1960 and at the height of Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s when grain output again stagnated and oil and pork consumption further declined from already low levels (Selden 1993:21-22). In the eyes of the rural people, the guaranteed, subsidized rations of food supplied to the urban residents were a distant dream and a reminder of the gulf that separated the urban and the rural areas. As Cheng and Selden put it, "Rural

people called it 'guaranteed harvest regardless of drought or flood' (*hanlao baoshou*), something of which they could only dream." (1994:660)

Thus, the collectivization rapidly launched in the mid 1950s, with state compulsory sale, grain procurement, prohibition of private marketing, sideline production and restraining of consumption, contributed to the sense of extreme loss and alienation experienced by the Chinese peasantry. Anomie deepened when the differentials between the urban life and rural life were walled up by administrative and political means, notably the *hukou* system which in fact was backed up by military and public security forces. There was no choice for anybody, leaving the origin of one's birth to determine one's fate as rural peasant or urban worker. A particularly striking example of control on the rural society was the fact that in times of famine, such as the early 1960s, peasants were barred from fleeing famine areas and even required to obtain a document from local cadres in order to leave their villages to go begging (Selden, 1993:23). The sense of loss and lack thus was inevitably rooted in the course of socialist transformation. Chinese peasants were forced to endure and to live up to the unbearable gap that saw no hope of closure after three decades of state socialist struggling.

Hukou system: a Hybrid Creation of Statism and Socialism

For over the three decades of socialist construction, the Chinese peasantry was then tied to the land and fettered by the political-economic collective structures. A *prohibited space* between the rural and the urban was created. The most conspicuously was the socio-demographic *hukou* system. If we said collective structuring was the production-machine which codified and reified the desire of the socialist utopia, then the *hukou* system was a desiring machine more typical of statism than socialism. It not only codified, but managed to perpetuate a social chasm, and thus a prohibited space by administrative means including control of population mobility and food and daily necessities. Before the generation of Jin, Ying nor Dong, few of the Chinese peasants had the chance to move to the city, leaving the rural-urban divide to increasingly widen. A historical void, a social lack was inevitably produced; the Chinese peasants for a long time were enticed to fill up

the lack by moving to the urban space, and given the chance by Deng's regime conjuring a desire for industrial capitalism.

The following were some anecdotes recorded by a mainland Chinese scholar, illustrating how ordinary people struggled to cope with the social lack:

He, a doctor of some repute, spent much energy and all of his savings on the "rural-to-urban transfer" of registration for his wife, who was teaching in the countryside, and their three children. In 1987, after he had paid up the 8,400 *yuan* urban registration increase fee and obtained urban registrations for the four of them, he solemnly said to his entire family: "I cannot leave you another inheritance in this life, I can only give you this urban registration."

In Zhengzhou, an old police officer who had been engaged in registration work for many years said to this reporter with a hoarse throat: "There is not a single registration officer whose throat is not hoarse." There are really too many people demanding a solution to their registration problem, and you have to talk and explain to every one of them, but who believes these explanations? Some people kneel and kowtow to the registration officer as soon as they enter the door, begging and pleading in tears, and others even bring a rope and say that if they don't get the registration they will hang themselves.

(Ren, 1996:15-16)

The *hukou* system was a hybrid creation of developmental statism and collectivism. It put the whole civil society under the state control in order to steer towards socialist construction. Its result was a spatial hierarchy between the rural and the urban, and a status hierarchy between the Chinese working class and the peasantry. In 1950s, for the first time in the Chinese history a social cleft was politically and administratively created, not by feudal states in dynastic periods, but by a state which claimed to emancipate its people from feudalism and imperialism. In this sense, state socialism was nothing other than an authoritarian project; it had no other method but to plan, calculate and determine all aspects of its subjects' lives and

to subsume them under gigantic economic plans. As Foucault (1981) might have said, people were turned to population, lives becoming codes, data and numbers; it was where power functioned and the process of subjectivization started. The *hukou* system entailed the whole secret of the statist project in Chinese socialist history. The origins of the Chinese statism derived not only from the Russian models that China followed in the process of the early socialist construction, but also the nationalism and paternalism that engulfed the party-state machine over the whole course of socialist development.

Tiejun Cheng and Mark Selden (1994) provided the most comprehensive study of the origins and the social consequences of China's *hukou* system. They rightly say the *hukou* system which emerged in 1950s, "was integral to the collective transformation of the countryside, to a demographic strategy that restricted urbanization, and to the redefinition of city-countryside and state-society relations." (1994:644) The *hukou* registration not only provided the principal basis for establishing identity, citizenship and proof of official status, it was essential for every aspect of daily life. Without a *hukou*, one could not officially be eligible for food, clothing or shelter, one could not obtain employment, go to school, marry or enlist in the army (ibid. 1994:644). The consequences of the implementation of the *hukou* system was a bifurcated social order, a rural-urban prohibited space that was going to affect the peasant life in the post-Mao reforms.

Thus, as Cheng and Seldon said,

The *hukou* system decisively shaped China's collectivist socialism by creating a spatial hierarchy of urban places and prioritizing the city over the countryside; by controlling population movement up and down the spatially defined status hierarchy, preventing population flow to the largest cities, enforcing the permanent exile of urban residents to the countryside, and binding people to the village or city of their birth; and by transferring the locus of decision-making with respect to population mobility and work from the transformed household to the work unit or *danwei*, specifically, in the countryside, to the lowest unit of the collective. Over more than three decades, the *hukou* system structured the differential opportunities offered

urban and rural people in general, and state employees and the tillers of the soil in particular.

(1994: 645)

The Hukou System and its Loopholes

Measures to control population mobility started immediately after the setting up of the People's Republic in 1949. But it was not until 1958 that the *hukou* system was formally launched. On 9th January 1958, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress promulgated "Regulations on Household Registration in the People's Republic of China". The 1958 Regulations, often regarded as the birth of the full-fledged *hukou* system, provided the most detailed regulations of residence registration. It also gave clear instructions concerning registration of temporary residence among the floating population. Article 15 of the Registration Regulations stipulated:

Citizens who temporarily live for more than three days outside the county or city of permanent residence need to be reported to the household registration organs for registration of temporary residence by the head of the household at the place of temporary residence or by themselves, within three days, and report for cancellation before departure.⁷

Article 16 of the Registration Regulations also stipulated the time of residence in cities of the floating population:

When citizens leave their place of permanent residence for private matters and the period of temporary residence exceeds three months, they must apply to the household registration organs for extension of the period or go through the procedures for migration; if they neither have reason for

⁷ Shi Songjiu, "Strengthen Management of the Floating Population", in *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, Fall 1996, Vol 29, P29-30.

extending the period nor the conditions for migration, they should return to their place of permanent residence.⁸

From 1958 the *hukou* system was completely established, providing an institutional guardian of the deep urban-rural divide that had structured Chinese society since the mid-1950s. A historical scar was reified, inscribing the sense of loss, alienation and inferiority on the Chinese peasantry as detailed as the record of individual information on the *hukou* card. As Cheng and Selden rightly say, throughout the collective era, the *hukou* made it possible to bind China's rural population in a subaltern position on land it did not own and could not leave (1994:668). An urban and rural gap thereafter existed, leaving its historical legacy which continues to construe people's lives in the reform period.

The *hukou* system, in a Foucauldian sense, was a product of governmentality for technologizing the people. With its minute calculation, deliberate planning and encompassing extent, the *hukou* system was nothing but a "wonderful" creation of the Chinese state by which to control its citizenry. Rural people were taken as objects of "unified procurement", while urban people as objects of "unified distribution". But since thorough control of the country was only an ideal and imagined project of the state machine, it could never succeed in totalizing the society. For no matter how strict the restrictions and regulations were, the *hukou* system was never impermeable. Population movement from countryside to city continued throughout the 1950s, though on a rather small scale. Sudden and rapid movements in the urban areas, especially the Great Leap Forward provided opportunities for the rural to urban migrants, since urban enterprises were facing great pressure to raise production rapidly, and thus required abundant temporary labour from rural areas. An article in People's Daily (27 November 1957) reported that from 1950 to the end of 1956, about 150,000 rural people came to Beijing to look for employment, and the original workers and residents brought about another 200,000 dependents to the city (Cheng and Seldon 1994:661).

⁸ Ibid. 1996:30.

Rural to urban mobility reached a peak at the height of the Great Leap Forward. The tough new restrictions just set up in 1958 were simply swept aside as urban enterprises recruited cheap workers from the rural areas. As Cheng and Selden say,

at the very moment when new *Hukou* regulation expanded the reach of the state, the decentralization and chaos of the Leap produced a general breakdown of administrative control. The influx of millions of people into the cities in the years 1958-60, in response to the sudden explosion of urban industrial and construction jobs, constituted the most rapid burst of urbanization in the first three decades of the People's Republic.

(1994:665)

With the collapse of fiscal and administrative controls, and with all enterprises facing intense pressure to boost output, the industrial labour force increased at unprecedented rates. Accelerated capital construction everywhere produced acute shortages of labour in urban industry. Rural people who had recently experienced a loss of access to urban jobs responded to new job opportunities and mobilization campaigns that promised boundless prosperity. In autumn 1958, 38 million people were reportedly mobilized to leave their villages, taking with them tools and draught animals to join the campaign for indigenous iron and steel production. The number of workers and staff on the state payroll also dramatically increased at this time. In 1958 alone the state sector employed 21 million more people including many middle school graduates and educated youth from rural areas, with large numbers of women among them. This represented an increase in state sector employees of 67.5% over 1957 (Liu and Wu 1986:231; Cheng and Selden 1994:665). It is ironical that from 1958, as the state tried to enforce rigorous measures to bind rural people to the land and block movement to the cities, the number of migrants greatly increased. It was not until 1962 that the state launched rigorous measures to clear the rural migrants in the cities. About a million workers were laid off and sent back to the countryside. During the period 1967-77, the state rusticated about 18 million urban young people in order to reduce the pressures upon urban employment and the consumption of commodity grain (Wu 1994:680). All these measures made it more and more

difficult before the late 1970s for the people with rural *hukou* status to live permanently in urban places, and even applying for temporary *hukou* status in cities was narrowly restricted.

According to the 1982 Population Census, out of the total 1.002 billion population, 11.1 million, or 1.1%, had been permanently living in places that were not where they had registered their *hukou*. Of the 11 million people, 6.3 million had not lived in their official place of residence for a year or more, and 4.8 million had no *hukou* at all (Wu 1994).

Tight state control started to relax in the late 70s when millions of “rusticated” young people who had been sent to the rural and border areas during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) were allowed to return to cities. In 1983 the state allowed temporary migration from villages to townships for people to find jobs while still retaining their rural household registration. In 1984, limited permanent migration from villages to towns or cities was approved, though the urban government would not provide a food ration. In 1986, grain sales at market prices to migrant labourers in urban areas were legalized, though private markets had been prosperous since early 80s (World Bank 1992:58). The regulations of *hukou* registration, on the other hand, were little modified throughout the 70s. The state was not forced to issue new rules until 1985.

In July 1985, the Ministry of Public Security issued the “Temporary Regulations on Management of the Temporary Population in Cities and Towns”, which restated the methods for registration of the urban temporary population. With regard to people aged 16 and over entering cities and staying temporarily for over three months, it stipulated that they should apply for a temporary residence permit. People coming from elsewhere to run shops or factories, engaged in construction or working in the transport or services sector, with a rather long period of temporary residence, were to be registered as an “attached” population by the police substation at the place of actual residence (Shi 1996:31). Throughout the 1980s, the state lost control of rural-urban migration due to rapid economic development. This started in the coastal areas from early 1980s and in the big cities all over the country after the mid 1980s. The 1985 regulations were a remedy to deal with problems that were out of central administrative control. Local cities, on the other hand, developed regional measures,

or even used public security forces to drive out the influx of rural migrants. From time to time urban governments called for “extermination” of the *mingong* wave, especially during the Chinese New Year period.

The following story was told by a male worker in the Meteor who experienced an extermination action against the migrant influx in Guangzhou train station in December 1994:

At about ten o'clock at night, my *tongxiang* (co-villagers) and I just wanted to settle down in a place under the bridge near the train station. We had been looking for an empty place for ages before we could settle down. There were clusters of people wandering around the square in front of the train station, searching for places to pass the night time and waiting for the next morning to hunt for jobs. Suddenly, a lot of government cars came and public security guards jumped down from the cars. They used sticks and water pipes to clear the people on the square. Masses were driven to one of the corners of the square; some wanted to run away and were beaten. It was such a horrible scene, it seemed that we were all criminals and would be arrested. We were asked for, and separated by, our place of origin- people from Sichuan were grouped in one place, while people from Hunan and Hubei in others. Then we were sent on a large bus, people from different places were sent on different buses. The bus took us outside the city of Guangzhou and we were charged five *yuan* each person. Those who did not have money were scolded and beaten. ...

Lack (*manque*) is created, planned, and organized in and through social production. It is counterproduced as a result of the pressure of antiproduction; the latter falls back on (*se rabat sur*) the forces of production and appropriates them. It is never primary; production is never organized on the basis of a pre-existing need or lack (*manque*). It is that it infiltrates itself, creates empty spaces or vacuoles, and propagates itself in accordance with the organization of an already existing organization of production. The deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy is the art of a dominant class. This involves deliberately organizing wants and needs (*manque*) amid an abundance of production; making all of desire teeter and fall victim to the great fear of not having one's needs satisfied; and making the object dependent upon a real production that is supposedly exterior to desire, while at the same time the production of desire is categorized as fantasy and nothing but fantasy.

Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

Marx, quoted in the last section, was wrong to say that the antagonism of town and country could only exist in a society of private property. The history of the Chinese state socialism witnessed the process of confiscation of private property in 1950s, but at the same time, the creation of a huge urban and rural chasm in Chinese society. It was not "feudalism", nor the "petty-capitalism" of past Chinese history, that turned human beings into prohibited town or country animals, but socialist development dictated under the Chinese Communist Party that claimed to liberate all countrymen from oppression. It was not fair to say that the Chinese state particularly aimed at creating hierarchies among the people, especially a deep divide between the working class and the peasantry. But it is correct to say that it was the by-product of developmentalism and statism inherent in the nature of the Chinese socialism. Class and status divisions among people were not produced by the capitalist machine, based on the market logic- "inequality but justice" of the distribution of private property among individuals through the exchange mechanism. Rather, divisions and hierarchies were created by a state-party machine which confiscated and turned

private property into “state property” and then arranged, distributed and sanctioned different sectors of people according to its logic of planned economy.

It was not my original aim in this chapter to describe a genealogy of social lack and then blame the past history of Chinese state socialist experience. Rather, my concern was to account for the present desire of a mobile society, steered, though teetering, toward industrial capitalism by a “socialist” state and a mainly agrarian population. The void, the lack created by the Chinese statist socialism in Mao’s period, I argue, was filled up by a hybrid “socialist market economy”, that is, a hybrid mixture of “state socialism and global capitalism”. The opening-up of the command economy did not shrink the lack. Rather as Deng Xiaoping had advocated, “let some quarters of people get rich first”, so it further enlarged the gap, especially between the city and the countryside and between the eastern coastal areas and the western interior⁹.

The flow of population from the rural areas to the cities, as a “social phenomenon” reflects the fusing and struggling of individual and collective desires to fill the social lack. People become agents of the common “passion” of society, as though society had its own passions and forces. This complete social conditioning is

⁹ (Rural per capita income grew at an average annual rate of 15% in real terms during 1978-1984, but then the economic growth in terms of agricultural productivity and rural income became stagnant in the second half of 1980s and early 1990s. The gap between urban and rural income were further widening when the rural income per capita increased less than three percentage during 1985-1990 (World Bank, 1992; Selden 1993). A World Bank report (1992) provided the following account for the stagnation of poverty after mid 1980s in the rural areas. It came from 1) sharply increased prices for grain and other subsistence goods adversely affected the real incomes of the majority of the rural poor; 2) the rapid growth of the working age population which exceeded the expansion of employment opportunities, contributing to a worsening of rural underemployment; and 3) economic growth which was greater in higher income coastal provinces than in the lower income inland northwestern and southwestern provinces. Fiscal decentralization passed an increasing share of the costs of rural social and relief services to the local governments, which were unable to support either adequate social services or economic growth (1992: xi). Unequal development, far more serious in Deng’s reform China further deepened the social lack, though the opportunities given to the rural population to get rich seemed higher.

unconscious; for while individuals act on the basis of their own desires and passions, these desires have been formed by the experiences and nature of the socius throughout the course of history (Goodchild, 1996:27). In this way, desires are not “repressed”, but produced, and power emerges at the time when the desiring machines encounter each other. Power then acts on desires, produces desires, and constructs them in such a way as to preserve a part of itself, so that it prevents new encounters, new relations that will transform its “essence”. And if we say socialism in Mao’s era was a *collective desire* of the state, imposed abruptly on the Chinese people, then capitalist developmentalism in Deng’s China was a *collective passion* of the whole society, that even the most conscientious political dissidents or intellectuals would not disagree with. Turning China, the whole country, into a market, on the other hand, was another *collective dream*, this time of international capital. Thus, our contemporary Chinese subjects needed not only to be turned into efficient industrial producers, but themselves desired to be agents of capitalist consumption. A young Baudrillard was still lovable when he said the mirror of production was consumption. And if as Marx said, the production process is an alienating process, in which women and men turned themselves into objects and confront themselves as something hostile and alien, then in the process of consumption, women and men seem to redeem their alienation and achieve a sense of satisfaction by recovering themselves from the sacrifice as alienated labour. The harder one works, the more one wants to spend. And the more one desires to spend, the harder one needs to work, mirroring the tricky relationship between production and consumption. The desire to get rid of poverty met the desire to consume commodities. Young female workers in the factory were seduced by the common passion to consume electric rice cookers, radio recorders, colour TV sets, as well as modern fashions and cosmetics.

The desire of capital, producing the desire of consumption, penetrates into the void of Chinese contemporary history, brings ecstasy and gives birth to hybrid creation of new Chinese subjects. And Chinese state socialism was happy to lose its virginity.

Chapter IV Social Body, the Art of Discipline and Resistance

This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated, and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.

M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.

M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. I.*

Hidden transcript -

Here, offstage, where subordinates may gather outside the intimidating gaze of power, a sharply dissonant political culture is possible.

J. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*

In this chapter I will discuss the imperatives and techniques of the production machine for producing a social body: a docile and disciplined *dagongmei* in China. Turning a young, nomadic and rural body into an industrialized, efficient and productive body is the fundamental work of the production machine under the dictate of capital's logic. Foucault called these kinds of disciplinary techniques over the body the *political technology of the body* or *microphysics of power* (1977:26). I will look at the processes of the political technologizing of the body, and those techniques of disciplinary power deployed in the Meteor workplace. The body, especially, the female body, is important to international capital in China because it is where the production machine extracts labour power. What capital wants is surely not a docile

and submissive body as most labour process theories presuppose, but a productive and functional social body. The study of body is crucial here not only because we can see vividly how forces of production machine work arbitrarily and violently on the body, but exactly because the body is the spring, the centre that not only produces desires, emits signs and marks identity, but most importantly contributes labour power.

Extracting labour power from a female body through a microphysics of power in the workplace is the cardinal concern in this chapter. With insights from Michel Foucault, I will focus on particular practices in a Chinese workplace, rather than study universal disciplines in prison, military camp or school. Disciplinary techniques in the Meteor involved both institutional and discursive practices. Besides a series of consistent maneuvers and disciplines deployed on the body, the production machine manipulates a politics of discourses on body as well. Its specificity, its modality of power and language can only be found in China, and only in the contemporary reform period. Only by looking into the local politics of discourse and practice, can we understand the specific factory regime produced in China and those particular strategies and disciplines used.

Inasmuch as the relation of power and domination over the female workers is great, *dagongmei*, as a specific embodied Chinese subaltern group, is never totally dominated and muted. Insights from Paul Willis's "work culture", and "subaltern studies", tell us that neither submission nor defiance exhausts the behaviour of subalterns. Subordination or domination as a process, is seldom complete, and marked by various forms of collaboration and resistance which together merge to make up complex and heterogeneous subjects (Willis 1977; Guha and Spivak 1988). James Scott's concept of "hidden transcript" and Michel de Certeau's notion of "everyday life practices" also help us to stand on the side of the oppressed and see how the subjugated subjects react, resist and participate in the process of domination. The common view here is that where there is power, there is resistance. Human subjects, as historical agents are seen as practical, active and tactical in living up to a system of domination. In supplementing to Foucault's theory of *surveillance*, de Certeau says,

If it is true that the grid of “discipline” is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also “minuscule” and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what “ways of operating” form the counterpart, on the consumer’s (or “dominee’s”?) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order.

(1984:xiv)

James Scott, on the other hand, understands these popular procedures or “ways of operating” by the dominated as *hidden transcripts*. He contrasts these to public transcripts, which are hegemonic discourses and practices representing the systems of domination from the official point of view, from above. He says,

By definition, the hidden transcript represents discourse- gesture, speech, practices- that is ordinarily excluded from the public transcript of subordinates by the exercise of power. The practice of domination, then, *creates* the hidden transcript. If the domination is particularly severe, it is likely to produce a hidden transcript of corresponding richness.

(1990:27)

In short, besides paying attention to the relations of domination and the microphysics of power over female body, I will look at the relations of resistance and the practices of hidden transcripts in the workplace as well. The female body I study, then, will not be the “docile body”, but the “tactical body”. To survive these female bodies manipulate the situational opportunities and even the hegemonic discourse to protect themselves. They prevent the large power from reifying a unitary image of their bodies, and they formulate their struggles in everyday life. The image of “Chinese women” is often inscribed by capital with a homogenous and orientalist construction: a slim body, sharp eyes, nimbler fingers, beautiful, shy, passive and hard working. Far from a unitary imagination, I find that the women’s experiences, practices and forms of struggle, both overt and covert, were extremely diverse in

both individual and collective ways. Previous feminist studies have already shown that working class women are not passive acceptors of their situation, but active agents in improving their working conditions and protecting their own rights (Lamphere 1987; Pollert 1981; Westood 1984; Rosen 1987). A new interpretation of women's struggle in the workplace is slowly being developed in the past decade, which stresses the emergence of a "women's work culture". This culture is creative; women try to develop everyday life tactics, and assert informal controls over the work process. They challenge strict disciplines with an informal code of resistance to boredom, to humiliation, and to the process which would make them into machines (Pollert, 1981:130).

Chinese workers, "Socialist" beings

To homogenize a disciplined and productive social body the production machine in the workplace used the politics of language and value¹. Young girls and boys from the countryside were portrayed by the hegemonic discourses as uneducated, "uncivilized" and thus undisciplined. They were ready to spit on the floor, to leave their work position at will and to destroy the production machine. Floods of rural people into the city were called *mangliu*, blind migrants who were ready to destroy the order and stability of the city, potential criminals and potential prostitutes. Public discourses, as revealed in the various articles of newspapers, emphasized the blind nature of the migrant workers. They did not know where to go; they had no plans, no aims at all. If this flood of blind migrants could not be properly regulated, they would tear down the "achievement" of the economic reforms. Capital in China knew too well that it was from these blind migrants, cheap but hard to control, that they were going to extract the labour power. Since they were so cheap, so abundant, it was worth wasting time and energy to design a panoptic *surveiller* on these nomadic bodies. But to transform individual undesirable migrants into useful workers involved strict disciplines that work on body and mind, behaviours and beliefs, gestures and habits, attitudes and aptitudes. We will now look at the details.

¹ I return to this discussion in the next chapter.

If there is a universal rule that peasant life, the human nature of *peasantness*, was commonly distrusted by industrial capital (Marx 1867; Foucault 1977:135), we are not sure if such a belief, such a discursive politics, was deployed for the sake of cheapening the labour cost or for something else. Capital in contemporary China found itself caught up in another mode of unbelief. It could not trust those who were born in rural areas, but also raised in the “socialist” system in China. What could capital expect? Uncivilized peasantness plus impractical collectivism could only nurture lazy and unruly labour. Mr. Chou, the Director of the Meteor said,

Labour in China is very lazy, their socialist history teaches them not to work in a competitive way. No matter what they do, willing or not, the wage over thirty years is RMB 36. Those practices of the *common rice bowl* absolutely could only produce lazy people. We need ten times more efforts to control and educate them.

In Mao’s era socialist workers, ideologically if not in practice, were the avant garde of the proletariat and the leadership of the revolution. Now in Deng’s period a worker is a symbol of laziness, unable to conform to the rhythms of industrial capitalism, carrying with him or her the evil of the past socialist history. What the capitalists depict is a stereotyped image of *Chinese worker*. This shouldn’t surprise us. What amazed us was that the western academic sometimes helped to invent the same image. For instance, Lisa Rofel, an American anthropologist, based on her study in a state-owned silk factory in Hanzhou in mid 1980s, gave us this picture of Chinese workers :

Throughout the factory, I found prep workers sitting off the shop floor chatting, young men leaving their looms to have long, leisurely cigarette breaks, and inspection workers who would sit outside during their shift and relax in the sun. Western tourists who visit similar factories often comment on the lack of “industriousness” of Chinese workers. There is not a little irony in this characterization, given the

orientalist notion of Asians as hardworking.

(1992:96)

The reason she provided was this: China's party-state strove to introduce capitalist features and adopt Western scientific management techniques for producing disciplined workers. But these practices of modernity, she said, were countered by the specific history of China, especially the Cultural Revolution, which produced ardent political subjects rather than productive bodies. She argues:

In the seemingly distant past of the Maoist era, workers, through various political campaigns, were periodically encouraged to leave their work positions to focus on other concerns, namely their political consciousness. In the initial years, virtually all workers left their work posts to reinvigorate that consciousness through factory-wide meetings in which they forced managers to confess crimes of following the capitalist road. The more radical workers, mainly from the younger generation, left the shop floor in pursuit of political rights; they challenged managerial authority by dragging managers out of their offices and forcing them to do manual labour on the shop floor. Workers continuously moved on and off the shop floor, one moment weaving some cloth or spinning thread, the next moment participating in a political meeting.

(1992:97)

With an oriental and hegemonic construal of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), she continued to beautify the Chinese socialist history,

Workers during the Cultural Revolution thus challenged the meaning of their place, both physically and in terms of social divisions of authority and power. Walking away from one's work position to engage in politics put one at the forefront of the radical faction. Even after 1973, when managers returned to their place in the offices, they did not punish or pressure workers to produce more silk goods. For them, too, the most important

product to come off from the shop floor was supposed to be political consciousness.

(1992:97)

Thus in Rofel's eyes, the Chinese workers, imprinted with their specific and glorious history (which she imagined as specifically Chinese), were political, "red" and resistant, not only in the Cultural Revolution but in the contemporary period as well. Thus, even modern micro-techniques of disciplinary power would not be effective to regulate them. Socialist *habitus* was as solid as iron, so though the Chinese managers' mentality could change, the workers could not. However, the younger generation, especially those from the rural areas, was seen as historically endowed subversive subjects, and thus harder to incorporate into modern production. She says,

These women, in their late teens and early twenties, were newly arrived from the countryside and had just begun to enter the factories in the previous year. Subject(ed) bodies, they nonetheless refused to remain spatially rooted in one place or move in the prescribed circuits. There was a steady stream of back-and-forth visiting. Their bodily movements did not mimic new standards of rationality. They did not work quickly enough. They made mistakes in the tension of the thread. They did not look carefully to the left or to the right; they did not check, link, or make clear markings. They did not use their hands, eyes, and ears to inspect for quality....

(1992:103)

What an astonishing picture of Chinese workplace and Chinese women workers! In order to articulate an alternative mode of modernity, a purely academic project in Rofel's mind, she depicted the Chinese workers as obsessed with transgression, subversive to the disciplinary regime of space, that symbol of western modernity. The Chinese workers, as socialist beings, were imagined and invented to contrast with the hidden but essentialized Western workers, who as capitalist subjects were

disciplined, productive and profit-minded, and possessed rational economic sense rather than political consciousness. Though outside of her intention, Rofel's study, if not making her an accomplice to capital, at least resonates with the current project of international capital in creating a denigrating image of Chinese workers. Socialist beings thus were inferior to capitalist beings who were *born* imaginatively to be individualistic, competitive, hard working and most important of all achievement-oriented and therefore self-disciplined.

I will soon examine the disciplining of the rural and socialist body on the Meteor shop floor. But before I go to my own ethnography, I would like to look at an interesting study comparing a Hong Kong workplace with one in China. Ching-kwan Lee provides us with vivid pictures of how *different kinds of beings* can be organized and controlled:

Localistic despotic factory regime in China -

Like other large factories in Shenzhen, Liton was fenced on four sides by high concrete walls and a 24 hour guarded main entrance gate. Equipped with batons on their belts, security guards check the bags that workers brought with when leaving the factory premise. Since visitors were not allowed in, security guards paged workers to come down from the dormitory to meet their visitors outside the main entrance. On each shop floor, a security guard held an electronic detector bat to be randomly applied on workers at the end of every shift. He also oversaw that workers did not punch in the time cards for other workers, and that every time workers went to the bathroom, and they had gotten the "leave seat permit" from their line leader. Mottos were painted in red large Chinese characters, saying "Ask Your Superiors When You Have Problems", "Quality Comes First", "Raise Productivity", "No Spitting", "No Littering" etc. Some of the factory regulations were written on large sheets of paper, framed and hung on the wall. Notice boards on the entrance of each shopfloor detailed the hourly production target and the actual hourly output; the scoring of each line worker's performance assessed by their line leaders; the names of the "best" and the "worst"

worker of the week; the daily scores of cleanliness of each production line evaluated by the floor supervisor. These visible inscriptions of rules into the physical factory setting showed only the tip of the regimental iceberg. New recruits were asked to read a 10-page handbook of elaborate factory regulations governing everyday demeanors at work and in the dormitory. These despotic rules were strikingly similar to those Karl Marx described for the prototypical factory of his time.

(forthcoming 1997:137-138)

Familial hegemonic factory regime in Hong Kong -

It was like a passage from hell to heaven when I left the plant in Shenzhen for that in Hong Kong. The smell of human perspiration and the dizzying shadows of overhead fans were gone. The air-conditioned and brightly lit shopfloor greeted my entry into a different world of labour in Hong Kong. The physical setting aside, life in Hong Kong plant turned out to be much more relaxed, even playful, than in Shenzhen, despite the much more advanced age of Hong Kong women workers. Hegemonic managerial domination replaced Shenzhen's despotism, in which control was visible, overtly imposed and punishment-oriented.

Factory life in Liton's Hong Kong plant was remarkable for the invisibility of codified rules. An orderly autonomy prevailed among workers whose attire and demeanor on the shopfloor reflected a more liberal regime of production. Work began daily with breakfast rituals that were workers' spontaneous creation, rather than the canteen routine imposed by management, as was the case in Shenzhen. Entering the air-conditioned shopfloor, workers punched in their time cards, while the security guard smiled and exchanged morning greetings with the workers. Workers went to their individual lockers, put down their purses, and some would take their uniforms out, in case the air-conditioning got too cold. Most women just wore their own clothes, no headscarves, no colored shoulder stripe. For those who brought their own lunch boxes - tin containers carrying steamed rice and some meat or fish on top - they

would keep them warm in a large oven beside the water boiler in the pantry.

(ibid.: 169-171)

Lee's work, of course, reifies workers' experiences and subjectivity by simply classifying factory life in China as localistic despotism, and factory life in Hong Kong as familial hegemony. Now it is time to go back to the Meteor shopfloor. We already have a glimpse of how the politics of discursive practices worked to produce a *socialist being* unfit for capitalist production, and how the socialist being was regulated in a substantially different way from the capitalist being in the workplace. Now we will go on to see the workings of the rituals and techniques of the production machine, those processes for transforming specific socialist beings - the rural women workers - into *dagongmei*. We will look at the specificity of the local Chinese culture, especially the specific Chinese gender trope and practices, and how they were insinuated into the modern disciplinary power. The capitalist machine, once plugged into the state socialist machine, kept moving further and further toward deterritorialization, with unbearable force (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). The infiltration of international capital into Chinese society met less resistance than cooperation from the dominant hegemonic power in contemporary China. Western academics, on the other hand, often ended up essentializing either Chinese subjects or Western subjects, which are often an *aporia*.

The Art of Spacing: Positioning on the Line

Once entering the factory gate, a qualified worker or not, the factory machine immediately fixed you into a specific position. You found yourself nailed down into a grid of power and disciplines. Lisa Rofel was still right to say, "Factory spatial relations are not just the setting for disciplinary actions, but are themselves part of the same mode of power and authority." (1992:103) The production section in the Meteor workplace was arranged into ten production assembly lines and four QC lines. On each line, there was a range of people: 20 to 25 on assembly lines and 15 to 20 on QC lines. Placing a body on the line was the first step by which the techniques

of disciplinary machine could work on the individual. It was also for her the first step in accommodating her own body to the whole production machine. A cog in a machine; the body was pinned down to its own specific position, functional and productive.

Mei-fang sat right opposite me on production line B. We had a specific relationship that would not develop in another place or with other people. My presence as an anthropologist in that particular work position and the demands of the production logic of our factory jointly shaped our relationship. Our relation seemed to further verify the Marxist axiom that production relations are by nature social relations.

Mei-fang was a fresh hand, hired two days after me to work on the assembly line. Rounded faced, she still looked rustic. At eighteen this was her first work outside the village in a modern company. After keeping quiet on the line for two weeks, she started to chat to me. Talking was not permitted on the shop floor, but it often spontaneously sparkled in the afternoon and at night when we thought that disciplinary control was eased.

“Why do you work here?” Mei-fang uttered in a small voice.

Guessing that she knew me as a student from Hong Kong, I replied, “I want to learn the work process, the factory system and the lives of women workers here.”

“Do you like to work here?” She asked me instead of my querying her.

“Yes, because I can make a lot of friends here.” I responded without any preparation to her question.

“Hm,” she answered and was silent again. I wondered if my reply made any sense to her.

We were both placed on the screwing positions on Line B. There were 22 workers on the line. We had one line foreman, one line leader and one line assistant. The model produced on the line was an MB201 route-finder, a famous European brand produced for a big name car company in Europe. It was a kind of electronic road map for drivers. The products came to our line at nearly the final stage of the production process. We assembled the main board, the LC Display and the plastic case around the whole product. With work divided into twelve processes, normally there were about two to three people with responsibility for one process. My process

was taken by three people: Mei-fang, me and Ching hua. To this day I believe that Mei-fang was hired to accelerate the pace on the line because of my slow speed. I guess upper management did not want me to take up too much pressure.

Each work position in the line was *a procedure of knowledge and power*. It was stated in clear and minute detail what position the body should take in each process². Workers were trained as specialists in just one process. Only the workers who had been working there for more than two or three years had the chance to learn more than one work process. The work process was seldom changed, unless a change to a new model required a new arrangement of work positions. In front of every seat, there was a layout hung on the shelf, demonstrating meticulously with pictures and graphics each step the worker should follow. Work characterization was minute, specified and systematic. What the individual could and should do was to follow it with exact accuracy. If one was attentive and disciplined enough, one needed only repeat these bodily movements without bothering the mind. The following is one example of one work position on the QC line. In front of Da-mei, a quality controller on QC Line A, the layout stated:

Work Process of Functional Test (III)

Model	Route Finder	Quality Controller:	Work Number:
Facilitators	Car Kit 12V, JIG short line, 2A 1.5V Battery, ROM Card	Speed	
Work Process	COMMS Functional Test		

Content:

1. Put on battery, insert COMMS card, and the switch the power On. LCD glass plane demonstrates the following:

² See Foucault, 1977:149.



2. At the same time press “↑” + “T” button. The picture plane will be changed to:

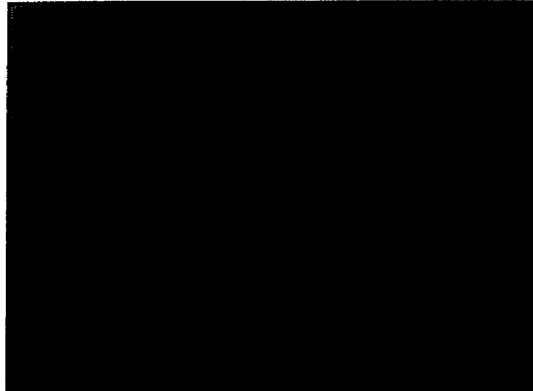


Then press “↓” button, move “→” to the position of “COMMS TEST” and then press “—” button on the right hand side. The picture plane will show the following:



3. Press “—” on the right hand side, the plane will show: “PRESS ANY KEY TO SEND LOOPBACK Q TO QUIT”, then continuously press “W” twice, LCD plane will also show the word “W”.

4. At the state of stage 3, press “P, I, M” letter keys one by one to do the test.
5. At the state of stage 3, press “Q” key, the plane will show back stage 2, then press “V”, move “➡” to the position of “QUIT COMMS TEST”, and then press “—” button on the right side, the plane will resume the following picture:



Then press “V” key and move “➡” button to the position of “QUIT”, then press “—” key on the right side, and the plane will return to stage 1.

6. Switch off and take out the ROM CARD and battery. Check whether there is any defect in the LCD glass.

We can see clearly how each step of each work process was meticulously demonstrated. The job of quality controlling Route Finder products was divided into five work processes and each process was further dissected into five to seven steps. Each individual occupied only one work position and was adept at one work process. Da-mei knew no other work processes but her own. Of her own process, she knew neither the meaning of those words shown on the LCD plane, nor what the product she worked on was for. But that did not matter. She simply followed the instructions of the layout and forced herself to recognize those English letters and words. Then those arrows, graphics and alphabets would automatically be stored in her mind. Once she saw them, she reacted instinctively without hesitation and pressed the right keys and buttons. Her memory, eyes and hands were so well coordinated that there seemed no possibility of failure. One day I had a chance to talk to Da-mei:

“Do you think the layout is useful for you?”

“It was useful at the very beginning. You know the line leader will only show you one time how to do it and you never dare to ask a second time. The first time I saw those *insects* (English letters), I was scared to death. I couldn't recognize them, so I copied them down and recited them at night. On the second morning, they were all in my mind and I didn't need to see the layout anymore.”

But what the disciplinary machine actually wanted was to produce a body without mind, a mindless body. “I don't need to use my mind anymore. I've been doing the same thing for two years. Things come and go, repeating every second and minute. I can do it with my eyes,” Da-mei told me. And since the body was mindless, it was replaceable. Every body should be trained to be a mindless body. That was the strategy of the production machine to safeguard its power and prevent any possibility of the producing body taking charge. The Chinese producers, as I have said, were always seen as distrustful workers who would leave the factory any time they liked. The situation is often exaggerated, but the turnover rate was particularly high during the Chinese New Year period. Every year, the company estimates, one-sixth of the work force leave for good and never come back. Thus for the producing body to be changeable, it should be further individualized. One only took responsibility for one's own duty, became an expert in one's own position. Everybody was useful, but not crucial. No one individual could know and affect the operation of the whole work. Individualizing the body was the principle of the *economy* of the production machine to assure the running of the whole machine, the totality. To gain collective labour, to ensure the function of the totality, the working body had to be dissected and individualized, and thus could be replaced. The dialectic of individuality and totality was well mastered by the art of spacing, the art of positioning the social body in the workplace. The principle of positioning was the principle of individualized partitioning, as Foucault puts it,

It was a question of distributing individuals in a space in which one might isolate them and map them; but also of articulating this distribution on a production machinery that had its own requirements. The distribution of

bodies, the spatial arrangement of production machinery and the different forms of activity in the distribution of “posts” had to be linked together.

(1977:144-145)

A Technique of Power: the Assembly Line

If we say the disciplinary spacing of the body results in individualizing and fragmenting labour power, the assembly line devised in modern industry is a technique of power to reunite the individualized bodies into a concerted action. All the six assembly lines in the Meteor were equipped by moving conveyor belts; the moving of the belt was simply the moving of power. Like a chain, it buckled an individualized body into a specific position, but at the same time they linked up to form a collective social body devoted to the sole aim of maximizing production.

The operation of the moving belt was not only co-operative and productive but also symbolic. The flashing light set at the head of the belt signaled its function, dictated all actions of each body, composed individual energy into a collective labour force, and thus showed its power to magnify. Like a conductor directing the orchestra, every individual act, every piece of music formed a symphony. The light flashed once every two to two and a half minutes, telling us of the running of a new set, controlling the speed, the time and the bodily movement. The working body was individualized, but not one of them could be idiosyncratic. Ultimately it was the concerted action, the collective labour and the co-operation of the team, of the line, that mattered. It was ritual, rhythmic and totalizing; the beauty of directing, the art of disciplining. Foucault puts it clearly,

disciplinary tactics is situated on the axis that links the singular and the multiple. It allows both the characterization of the individual as individual and the ordering of a given multiplicity. It is the first condition for the control and use of an ensemble of distinct elements: the base for the control

and use of an ensemble of distinct elements: the base for a micro-physics of what might be called a “cellular” power.

(1977:149)

Unlike musicians in an orchestra, there was no need for rural girls to be trained for a long time before they were put on the assembly line. Taylorist methods of production were still deployed on the Meteor shopfloor, so though skill was involved, it was retained at the minimum level. The principle of dividing was still the first principle in determining the organization of work. Work was dissected into tasks as minute as possible, and every piece of work was precisely studied and carefully devised. The art of timing was shown as the following:

Work process: bonding		
Model: MWD-440		
No. of bonding line per piece: 363		
502 Machine: 2 lines/sec		time/pcs: 3'05"
509 Machine: 1.5 lines/sec		time/pcs: 4'04"
Work process: bonding		
Model: SA-95		
No. of bonding line per piece: 130		
502 Machine: 2 lines/sec		time/pcs: 1'05"
509 Machine: 1.5 lines/sec		time/pcs: 1'44"
Work process: brushing soldering liquid		
Model: MWD-440		
Time: one minute		
Quantity: 7	8	10
Sec/pcs: 8"57	7"5	6"
Average sec/pcs:	8"	

Work process: brushing soldering liquid

Model: ROF-CPU

Time: one minute

Quantity: 10 7 12 12

Sec/pcs: 6" 8"57 5" 5"

Average sec/pcs: 6.12"

Work process: fixing IC die

Model: ROF-CPU

Quantity: 2 dies

Sec/pcs: 14" 9" 7" 11"

Average sec/pcs: 11"

Work process: soldering contact pin

Model: ROF-CPU

Quantity: 6 points

Sec/pcs: 23" 43" 23" 39"

Average sec/pcs: 32"

Besides the personnel staff, the staff the workers disliked most in the Company were the time analysts. Time and time again they came out from the Engineering Department, holding a timing calculator, stood behind the back of the workers, and started measuring the time. Suggestions were made, orders would then be sent and the bodies were going to catch up the pace again. These time analysts actually studied not only the amount of time the work required, but also the bodily acts, the gestures and the gaps between the bodily movements. No time was wasted. Every bodily act had to be accurate and correct. The distance between each body, the distance between the body and the conveyor belt, the height of the chair, the table and the shelf were all carefully measured and planned. Time and space must all be saved; no waste of *surplus* bodily acts and no waste of *surplus* labour force. This was at least the dream of the production machine.

On our Line B, the work of assembling ROF, the final processing product, was divided into 12 processes. Once there were new lots on the line, the time analysts would count our work pace again. Putting all the data from everyone's results into the computer, they would figure out the target for daily production, the speed of the whole moving belt and the work pace of each individual body. Work speed was reviewed on a weekly base. They put pressure not only on the individuals, but on the line as a whole. Comparisons were made between the lines and if the gap was too large, Mr. Yeung, the chief of the timing analysts section from the Engineering Department would come out to give a warning time and time. The foreperson and the line leader who were responsible for keeping the operation of the line would also share the same pressure. They were assigned to train the workers, keep discipline and arrange work positions and raw materials. But they also had to keep the line working smoothly by eliminating or controlling such human factors as slow down, sickness, temporary leave to washroom, and whatever unpredictable human elements might escape the dictates of the moving line.

JOB S ON LINE B

THE LINE →			○ FLASHING LIGHT
Pui-xi	CHECKING MATERIALS	1	2
20pcs/min			CHECKING MATERIALS
			Ling-yue
			20pcs/min
Lan-di	MOULDING RUBBER BUTTON	3	4
35pcs/min			MOULDING RUBBER BUTTON
			Gan-zhu
			35pcs/min
Choi-ping	FIXING CHARACTERS, CUSHION AND PLASTIC LEGS	5	6
1pcs/min			FIXING CHARACTERS, CUSHION AND PLASTIC LEGS
			Lu-fang
			1pcs/min
Nan-nan	MOULDING SWITCH BUTTON	7	8
3pcs/min			ASSEMBLING LCD WITH TOP CASE
			Dai-wu
			1.5pcs/min
Fu-xing	ASSEMBLING LCD WITH TOP CASE	9	10
1.5pcs/min			ASSEMBLING LCD WITH TOP CASE
			Jia-fai
			1.5pcs/min
Xi-ling	SCREWING LCD PLATE	11	12
2pcs/min			SCREWING LCD PLATE
			Bai-mei
			2pcs/min
Dong-jin	CHECKING LCD SEMI-PRODUCT	13	14
1pcs/sec			FUNCTIONAL TEST LCD SEMI-PRODUCT
			Lan-ting
			1.2pcs/sev
Fu-hui	ASSEMBLING BOTTOM CASE	15	16
0.2pcs/sec			SCREWING ROF PRODUCT
			Shu-tong
			1pcs/min
Pun	SCREWING ROF PRODUCT	17	18
1.5pcs/min			SCREWING ROF PRODUCT
			Mei-fang
			1pcs/min
Ping-ping	FUNCTIONAL TESTING PRODUCT	19	20
1pcs/min			FUNCTIONAL TESTING PRODUCT
			Sin-huo
			1pcs/min
Mei-lan	REPAIRING	21	22
0.3pcs/min			FUNCTIONAL TESTING PRODUCT
			Yun-ling
			1pcs/min

Every day we complained about the work speed and the unequal arrangement of job and time. Though every work process was “scientifically” studied and carefully measured, the ordering of a multitude of individualized bodies at the same time was still not an easy task. Despite the fact that each job was dissected as minutely as possible, it was still impossible to keep each work process to a similar amount of time. Somebody was forced to work faster than others, while some people were required to hold down a harder work position than others. The assembly line simply flew on its own way, neglecting all the work and human differences. Individual bodies were required to accommodate to the line, rather than the line to the body. Time and time again it was impossible to avoid “piling up jobs” in front of our table. Shu-tong, nick-named “Fat Guy” sat above Mei-fang and shared the same work process with us.

One day she complained: “People can’t work at this sort of killing speed. The line should not run so fast. You ought to know screwing needs more time. I am already selling my body.”

Bai-lan, our line leader quickly came and hushed her. “Don’t shout. The line is not under our control.”

It was true; the running of the line had nothing to do with the producers, not even the line leader or the foreman. As a technique of power, the assembly line was completely autocratic; the moving rate followed its own will once the line was set up by the Engineering Department.

Maximum bodily force could be extracted if the moving machine was organized on the principle of autonomy. Work was repetitive and monotonous, and once you got addicted to it, your hands, eyes and your bodily force would autonomously react and perfectly fit the rhythm of work. It seemed that the more time you devoted to your work, the more free you were. No matter how many grievances the body might have, at the end the body could and did find its way out. Because the more one worked, the more efficient one became, and the “up to the wall” job would be finished and one would be feel free again. Work was repeated in a cyclical interval of seconds and minutes. It ran and ran without requiring anybody’s mind and intention. But without mind and intention, it seemed you were free to move your body, totally free since there was no obstacle, no possible obstacle in the mind since it was

mindless. The moving line wanted to produce not only an autonomous body but also a free body - a body free to live up to the force. It was a paradox, but a perfect one, another dialect of discipline and freedom. The principle of autonomy was not only the principle of the autocracy of the *power*, but also the *praxis* of the freedom of the body. It was a wonderful creation of the production machine. My experience in a Chinese workplace reminded me of the Hungarian writer and dissident, Miklos Haraszti, who worked in the Red Star Tractor Factory in 1971 and wrote the famous book, *A Worker in a Worker's State*. He said,

In the end, the only way out is to become a machine myself. The best workers are very good at this. It is as if an immovable mask was glued to their faces, whatever the type of work they are doing. Their eyes seem veiled, yet they never miss a thing. Their movements don't seem to require any effort. They follow predetermined trajectories, like inert objects under magnetic control. Throughout the whole day, they keep a fast even pace. Just like the machines, they don't rush into things when they are feeling fresh, nor do they slow up when they're tired. They give way to 'nerves' only when the proportion of 'good' work to 'bad' is really grim. Otherwise, their behaviour reflects reality: 'good' and 'bad' jobs, 'paid' and 'unpaid' work, run together in the course of a day. The benefits they squeeze out of them and the wages which come from them are equally indifferent to such distinctions.

(1978:54)

Speed, Control and Resistance

But where there was power, where there was resistance. Fat guy was a hot person and usually the first one to react to power. The moving line was set to produce a homogeneity of work pace. But the work itself was heterogeneous and variable. It was nearly impossible to unify the speed of each process. The process relied on human elements to create the homogenization, and the process was thus subjected to uncontrollable human differences. No matter how despotic and powerful the

Taylorist methods in the workplace, the production machine nevertheless was not omnipotent in the control of the working bodies. Rush orders and frequent changes in production models were the characteristic of the subcontracting factory. So the management had to rely on the women's cooperation and willingness not only to work overtime, but to finish the work on time. Women thus held a certain power, albeit interstitial rather than formal (Grieco and Whipp 1986). Formal power generated formal organization and control, while interstitial power created the hidden subversions and informal ties that are my concern.

Tactics of resistance often targeted the work speed. The production machine tried in every way to turn the human body into a working machine. But the girls on the line learned very quickly that the moving line was an electric despot, binding their bodies to work as fast as possible for the least amount of money. Fu-hui, a girl sitting in front of me, talked to me in a drowsy afternoon, "I really dream about the line suddenly stopping for a while. I simply can't take a breath. It drags us to work faster and faster. But the more we work, the more the boss earns. They give the workers a little more, yet they make big money." Class consciousness was articulated in the workplace from time to time, though often in an individual and momentary way. The pressures of the assembly line and the work tensions it produced led the women to confront their own exploitation each day in a very immediate way.

Though the work speed was determined by the upper management, the women nevertheless could exert a certain influence on the work pace at certain moments. Sometimes, especially at night, when the work speed was unbearable to over-stressed bodies, or when a new speed was set for new products, and the girls on the line had not yet gotten used to it, the women on the whole line would suddenly slow down at the same time, demonstrating a silent collective resistance to the line leader and the foreman. Nobody would utter a word. They simply let the jobs pile up like hills and somebody was left with empty hands. They let the line alone to run itself and made it like a "paper tiger". The foreman then would speak a lot of "good words" to persuade the women to be tolerant and catch up on the work. He would say, "girls, the more you work, the more bonus you get. So why don't you catch up yourselves". Or, "Have some patience, you are all girls. The more you work, the more you'll feel easy." But if these "good words" were not "heard", and the slow-down persisted,

then what he could do was to report to the supervisor and have the time analysts readjust the pace. The women would view these moments as victories. They knew the rush seasons were the most appropriate moments to exert their bodily power by simply letting their bodies relax and earn time to breathe. Rush periods were the time that the new pace of work and amount of bonus were often bargained over and fought for. Sometimes other working and living conditions were challenged as well. However, once the busy period was over, the women's bargaining power was dramatically weakened. The workers knew too well that their bargaining power was temporary, ephemeral but recurrent. They had to catch the right moments or it would be gone.

Controlling pace was an effective strategy to prevent the overwhelming domination of disciplinary power in the workplace. In the place at the Meteor where the workers were not working on the automatic moving line, such as in Bonding Room or Functional Testing Room, they had more power to "hustle and idle" the work speed according to their own interests.

Hua, the foreman of the Bonding Room, told me one day, "If there is a moody hour, the girls will assemble the component slowly and then pass the work to the next slowly. They worked as slow as tortoises. If you force them to do it quicker, they can sometimes make it all wrong and you need to redo it. Or they can all pretend to be ill."

Collective illness was common if the speed was set too fast and the bonus rate was too harsh.³ The bonus rate was an incentive mechanism that supplemented the fixed hourly rate paid to all the shopfloor workers. Every worker in the workplace knew that the bonus system was to induce them to work as fast as possible. So when the rate of pay was good, they worked faster; if not, they simply slowed down. Thus, in certain ways, the workers were able to find out interstitial power to exert some control on the work pace and maximize their own interests. Hidden transgressions were everywhere. But these transgressions, I believe, were somehow perceived and anticipated by the management. When there was a slack season and the Meteor did

³ Further discussion of pain and illness into the female body will be found in Chapter seven.

not have enough work, the bonus would be set lower, so that the workers would automatically slow down their work pace and the factory did not need to stop production. Resistance and incorporation seemed to be two opposite strategies continuously enacted in the workplace in every corner and every moment.

Programming the Work Habit: One Day's Time-table

The basic technique of the disciplining power was regulation of the body by placing it in a disciplinary space, measuring it and analyzing it. But it was not enough to produce a disciplinary space. The management of time was far more important. An autonomous body, a body-machine, was not the sole aim. What the production machine needed was not a docile body, but a productive and efficient body, a body of praxis. That was far more complicated. Rural country girls, the disciplinary power imagined, were free to breathe the fresh air, wandering in the mountainous land, with *nothing to do*, and thus *no sense of time* in their hometown. They were fresh, young and wild. How to install a *program of disciplinary time* into their mind, their psyche and their unconsciousness in order to comport them into the rhythms of strict industrial life? Despotic and primitive methods were used.⁴ A time-table, a basic technique, was simply deployed to manage and then change everyday life practices. Programming a new factory life, building-up a work habit, self-technologizing the body, the mind, and the *habitus* were all the effects of practicing a time-table.

⁴ Foucault said that the time-table as a strict model was inherited from the old practices of the monastery in the Middle Age. (1977:149)

The Time-Table

6:30 AM- 7:00 AM	Wake-up
7:00 AM- 7:30 AM	Go to the factory
7:30 AM- 7:50 AM	Breakfast time
7:50 AM- 8:00 AM	Punch time card
8:00 AM- 12:00 AM	At work
12:00 AM-12:50 PM	Lunch time and rest hour
12:50 PM- 1:00 PM	Punch time card
1:00 PM- 5:00 PM	At work
5:00 PM- 5:50 PM	Dinner time
5:50 PM- 6:00 PM	Punch time card
6:00 PM - 9:00 PM or 10:00 PM	Overtime work

This was a normal time-table for the day shift workers in Meteor. The usual working day was eleven or twelve hours a day. If there was a rush order we were required to work until eleven or twelve o'clock midnight. The night shift workers started work at 8:00 PM and finished at 8 o'clock in the morning, with one rest hour between 3:00 AM and 4:00 AM. Overtime work was considered part of normal working hours, directly violating the Labour Law (1985), and the Regulation of Labour Contract of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (1995). In these documents there are the following statements:

- 1) The working hours of the worker should not be over eight hours per day; the weekly average working hour should not over forty-four hours.
- 2) The worker should have one rest day per week.
- 3) The normal overtime work should not be extended over one hour; for some special reason and with consideration of the worker health condition, the prolonging of working hours should not be over three hours each day.
- 4) The total overtime work per month should not be over thirty-six hours.

No factory in Shenzhen took these regulations seriously. Nor our company. Every night we had three hours overtime work. While it was called overtime work, the company planned it as normal working hours.

Daily life was rigorously regulated by the time-table and everybody struggled to live up to the strict schedule. The following is from my field notes. It is one of my many attempts to describe a working day in the workplace:

The sense of time 19th January, 1995

It was a cold and windy winter day. The sun was still sleeping, and the sky was dark, but we had to wake up. The alarms of clocks in my room sounded at 6:30 AM, some a few seconds faster or slower. Six people, six clocks, and I was definitely sure that with only my own alarm I could never have gotten up. Yun-ling, Fang, Yue, Hua-hong and Mei were my room-mates. Yun-ling slept above me on the upper bunk. She was usually the last one to get up. She murmured in a sleepy voice: "Gosh! What kind of life is this! Wake up at half past six. In winter I thought I'd never "eat" this kind of bitterness. Only my mum in the village would do it. She's great, getting up to feed us and the pigs." We all laughed and told her it was better to act than talk.

Waking up around past half six, we rushed for the toilet, brushed our teeth, washed our faces and changed our clothes. We compromised among ourselves, since there was only one toilet and one washroom. "Hurry up, hurry up"; there was shouting everywhere in the room, but no arguments such as occurred often in other rooms, especially when someone lost their temper. In our room, the situation was still bearable and we all learned to keep our patience with one another. Time was pressing and we could not afford to waste a minute. So if somebody was in the toilet, some would wash themselves in the washroom, while some would change their overalls on the bed or comb their hair. Turns were arranged silently and we lived on consent rather than written orders. To make life easier, self-disciplining was nurtured from the moment we woke up.

About 6:45 PM to 7:00 PM we began to leave the dormitory. We could reserve fifteen minutes for breakfast if we could spend less than twenty minutes walking to

the Company. I often walked with Yun-ling and Mei, two Cantonese from rural Guangdong.

Yun-ling complained of the harsh life in the village: "At home, I got up when the sun rose and it was time to be hungry for breakfast."

"Don't you need to help your mum cook or feed pigs in the morning?" I asked.

"Sometimes, but I was not the one supposed to do so." Yun-ling had two elder sisters and one sister-in-law who helped the family do domestic chores and farming work. She was the free hand at home, which was why she searched for factory work in Shenzhen. No clock alarm was needed in the village life, which was centered more on natural time rather than disciplinary time. The Chinese axiom told the *habitus* of the rural life: "When the sun comes out, it's time to work; when the sun is gone, it's time to rest." The social clock did exist - I do not want to beautify village life - but it was at least more in harmony with the biological clock, though the two were interdependent and regulated with each other. There were specific times for sowing, fertilizing, and harvesting, and they were recorded in detail in the Chinese lunar calendar. But there was no strict disciplinary machine to guide everyday life. The working time of individuals varied, according to the family economy, the sibling order and gender which allotted different household duties, and the local practices. Pressures were felt, especially by the mother or eldest daughter. She was required to manage the daily food for the whole family and often had to get up at a very early hour. But we rarely heard somebody complain of not enough sleep in the village. In the workplace, too little sleep was a serious problem; every day we slept about six hours or less. Not enough sleep, plus a long harsh working day, made the disciplinary time external and alien to us. The body was dragged to meet the time-table imposed from the outside. There seemed no way to escape once one was placed in the industrial world.

Ten minutes before 8 AM we had to queue up, enter the factory gate and punch our time cards. Security guards stood at the big gate, carefully checking workers with company permits which had to be pinned to the chest pocket of the overall. If you forgot to bring the permit you would not be allowed in, even if the security guards recognized you as a company worker. You had to go back to the dormitory and find the permit, and would definitely be late to work. A fine and condemnation followed.

Five minutes late would be counted as one hour late and wage would be deducted for two hours; about five *yuan*. Such serious punishment seemed to say that every minute of labour was crucial to the functioning of the whole production machine. The disciplinary machine believed that "time is money". It was a basic ideology of industrialism, and the machine was eager to inculcate it to the rural workers. Losing time was losing you money and losing the company profit. Time therefore should be deliberately planned and strictly controlled, not by the producers, but by the production machine. With our overall, cap and gloves we were more or less dressed, and with our work tools and materials well prepared, the factory clock rang at exactly 8 o'clock. The light flashed and the line started running. Our morning work began. Music, popular Cantonese song, was on for fifteen minutes, to freshen our minds to work more efficiently. It was said that the workers could work faster in the morning with energy refreshed by a few hours sleep. So in the morning discipline was often strictly kept, and it was more difficult to find a chance to talk or joke. There was a common understanding on the line that the higher management were in a mood to keep things straight in the morning hours. Talk and laughter often could not be tolerated when caught by the foreman or supervisor on the spot. Silence, fast moving lines and the running of time out of control; this was the feel of morning work.

Five minutes before the lunch time at twelve, the line would stop and we started to finish up our jobs. Talking immediately mounted and all kind of noises filled the silence. We had kept quiet for all the whole morning, and it seemed that nobody could wait to talk. We were not permitted to leave the shopfloor all at once. Each line took turns to leave first, because there was only one stair for the shopfloor workers. Rushing to lunch for fifteen minutes, we would come back to our seat and sleep. All lights were switched off. The bright workshop turned to a dark world. Since we were too exhausted every day, all of us would fall into sleep. An afternoon nap is a habit in China, in both rural and urban areas. In Mao's period industrial enterprises would close in the afternoon and re-open at 3:00 PM, so that workers at least could have two hours sleep after lunch. The habit was altered in urban China in the past decade, when the mode of economic life was dictated by private capitalist practices rather than state management. In the eyes of Western capitalists, it was unbelievable that workers in China could have such a leisure life that they themselves could not enjoy

or even dream of. "Time is money" was not a false consciousness tailored to cheat the workers, but they themselves, as the bearers of the axiom, had to live up to too.

At 12:50 PM, the lights were turned on and we were wakened to punch our time cards. At one, the clock rang, music was on and the line ran again. Work was repeating, repeating and never ending. A closed environment with all windows sealed and covered by a plastic curtain, curbed the eye contact of the workers with the outside world. We could not judge the time by seeing the rising and setting of the sun, nor could we breathe natural air. The workplace air was regulated 24 hours by the central air conditioning. The temperature was kept at 20°C throughout the whole year, low enough not only to cool the electronic parts, but also to wake up drowsy eyes. Talking, gossiping, joking and secret snacks were sometimes allowed in the afternoon work, on the condition that they would not affect the speed and running of the line. And it seemed that noise and laughter were an effective way to keep the workers awake. What the girls complained about most was not the minimal wage or harsh work load, but inadequate sleep through months and years.

Choi-ping, a girl of eighteen said, "Everyday I can only sleep for five or six hours. It doesn't drive me mad, but makes me like a sleeping pig. Whenever there's chance. I fall asleep. I can't help but be drowsy."

What the girls could do was wake up and cheer themselves up. Every chance of making fun and sharing snacks was found, each little moment important to keep the spirits up. Another way of killing drowsiness was taking a short break to the washroom. But you could not leave the work seat unless granted the *out-of-position* permit by the assistant line leader. There was always a long queue waiting for the permit. For each line there was only one permit, and in each work section you had to leave the line one at a time. You hung up a yellow card at the desk as a signal to the assistant line leader. She then gave you a permit and replaced you with another worker in your seat, so the jobs would flow without interruption. She kept a notebook and a time recorder, and wrote down how many minutes and seconds each worker left the seat. Five minutes was the maximum allowed. Workers often complained of the time limit, especially when they were menstruating.

Drowsiness was the contagious virus the disciplinary machine found it most thorny to deal with. Work pace would slow down and jobs pile on the line. Some

workers would get hurt by the soldering gun or the molding machine due to drowsiness. The line leaders would “keep one eye open and one eye closed” on spotting workers’ talking. Accidents such as cutting a finger or fainting often occurred in late afternoon or at night, when workers did not have enough energy and concentration to work. When somebody suffered such bodily pain and was sent to the hospital, the others on the shopfloor would suddenly raise their spirits on the job. Dragging to five, we could all hear the sound of our stomachs and were eager for dinner.

Work started again at 6:00 PM; the time card was punched again. We were told at the beginning what time we could end our work that night. If it was at nine, we thought we had a lucky day. Normally we stopped work at ten, and sometimes the shift extended to eleven or twelve if the production order was a rush. Night work was comparatively more relaxing, with a radio turned on for the whole section. Here the workers listened to the Hong Kong channels which they found more interesting than the Shenzhen or Guangzhou channels. Chatting about popular film stars and favorite singers helped to pass time quickly. “Nightdreaming” of romance provoked by the love songs or stories from the radio, helped to kill time in the extreme exhaustion and boredom of night work.

Inspections by the Personnel Department or higher management in the Production Department seldom occurred in the night time. “The white-collared staff, with good fate, need more time to take care of their bodies; they don’t have time to inspect us,” Fat Guy explained to me on the line. Off work at nine or ten o’clock, we dashed back to our dormitory, queuing up for hot water to bathe. After bathing, we still needed to wash our clothes, and somebody with a free hand would cook some snack since we all felt hungry after working another three to four hours. Eating and talking took another hour. After twelve we all went to bed. A hectic day, with every minute and second fully utilized and organized, definitely differed from the rhythms of rustic life in the village. There was six hours sleep, and nobody got enough, but day after day we all got used to it. At the very beginning of my working in the factory, I thought it was impossible for me to stand it for more than a week. But then after one week, a cycle of repetition, a constant regularity, a well written rhythm of life and work, all these forces penetrated not only into my body, but my soul, my

psyche, and I found myself fairly adapt at it. Life was manageable only by a strict time-table.

The time-card was extraordinarily important to our life. It recorded not only our timing behaviours, but also our wage that was calculated according to it. Every worker was given a time card on the first day at the factory. We clocked in three times a day; we had to be on time before 8:00 AM, 1:00 PM and 6:00 PM. The electronic clock was automatically set. If one was on time, the card would be marked with the date, hour and minute in blue; if not, the colour was in red. Time was related to reward and punishment; the card signified the politics of writing, recording all the details of what everybody did every day with exact precision. There was no excuse for one second late; the marker of the clock would automatically change its colour to red and your time card would be “stigmatized”. It was not the deduction of wage that mattered, but the stigma of the record. It counted badly for your year-end bonus and the chance of promotion.

“It is *mianzi* (face) that hurts,” Shui-bin told me one day when we rushed together to the factory in the morning. “I don’t want to have a red mark in my card, it is such a shame.”

Mianzi, face, is a local moral concept, commonly used in the language of everyday life. In the Chinese cultural context *mianzi* means a personal dignity and reputation that everybody has to hold if to maintain a basic standard of decent life. Losing *mianzi* is the result if one cannot live up to the social ethics in any moment or situation, particularly when one’s life is related to others in the family, workplace or community. *Mianzi wenti*, the problem of face, helps to generate a sense of self-discipline and self-technologized subjects. As a *doxa* of Chinese society, the belief of *mianzi* works to control everyday life in minute ways. Disciplinary techniques in the workplace incorporated these symbolic and cultural territories to heighten their controlling power. There were only three minutes left when we dashed down the street to factory. Time, reward and self-subjectivizing were all worked into our lives.

In the Meteor it was clear that a capitalist mode of construction of temporality overrode the peasant’s time in regulating daily life. The relation between human life and time thus became one of aggression and conquest. A system of homogeneous uniform time in measurable units it nevertheless created cracks, fissures and tensions

in the human life. Life, or the essence of *Dasein*, as Heidegger puts it, was a mode of temporality itself. But in capitalist practice, life and time became an alienating relationship, in which life was forced to catch up to time as if it were an external object to possess, and to conquer. The time-table, with its ethos and practices, was undoubtedly the essence of the capitalist mode of temporality. It provided a new frame of timing for the individuals to program a new pattern of life, which had to take "time is money" into its very heart. Life itself thus became a total alien flow of fragmentary time; the working day was disguised minute by minute by the renewed effort of will the workers incessantly squeezed from themselves (Haraszti 1978:57). But with the uncompromising, severe and demanding nature of time, workers found it easy to notice its despotic power imposing on their bodies, their movements and their everyday life.

The time-table was a contested terrain, the acute point of labour subconsciousness before the work habit. The new sense of disciplinary time transgressed into the unconsciousness. The time-table was so strict, so rigorous that everybody could feel it, could know and experience it. The timing and rhythms of everyday life in the factory were completely different from the peasant's way of life in the village. Here life was dissected into a series of timed behaviors, rigidly patterned and stored into the body and mind of each worker. But it was precisely in the body that the *transaction* between the disciplining power and the workers was made; submission was approved, recognized and justified. The crux, of course, was not only the wage, but a different style of life: the capitalist mode of life. To acquire a distinct life style from the village, one needed to follow at least the basic rule, to help oneself to establish the new rhythms, to cultivate the work habit, and to repeat them everyday in order to ensure its *form of life*.

The Factory Regulations

If the time-table was the heart of the disciplinary power regulating a factory life, then the factory regulations were the heart of time-table propelling its functioning. A strict time-table needed a severe prosecutor to carry out the execution. The modality of power itself no doubt was extremely despotic, but it was justified by the nature

and the massive number of the workers they had to govern. Over five hundred workers, from diverse places of origin, speaking different dialects, having different habits of life, and different behavior codes and standards. To order these *blind migrants* into one standardized set of behaviours and mold the confused mind into a well disciplined psyche, the disciplinary machine needed ingrained techniques of power. It also needed an impartial and equitable legislator-machine which could set unbiased codes and state clearly how to punish and reward. A punishing and rewarding universe was established, in which everybody knew what to do and how to do it.

New workers were asked to read the Factory Regulation Handbook before they could start work on the shopfloor. But in our weekly precept time on Wednesday afternoon at 4:30⁵, factory regulations were frequently repeated, and warnings were given from time to time. On the turns of the staircases and in the canteen, important factory regulations were framed under glass on the wall. Nobody could escape seeing them, six times a day. Of course, one could see without looking and hear without listening. But day in and day out, they would simply instill into one's unconsciousness; no matter how much one found them disgusting, or thought they had no effect on one's mind at all.

At the landing turn of the second floor staircase, everyday we could see:

⁵ More discussion of precept time will be found in the next chapter.

Production Regulations

1. Workers should do all preparations such as wearing work cap, electronic-prevention belt, gloves and others five minutes before the on-work time. To prevent any dirt on the products, nobody is allowed to comb hair or do anything that may cause dust or dirt. Violation is fined two *yuan* each time.
2. All workers should obey the production arrangements of the higher authorities. If one has any different opinions, complete the job first before going to a higher level to reflect.
3. No allowance to leave work position and change work position during work time unless approval by the supervisors. Leaving the work position for personal reasons such as going to toilet you must apply for a *out-of-position permit*. Violation is fined two *yuan* each time.
3. No one will be allowed to leave the factory unless there is *company exit permit* signed by the affiliated Department manager and the Personnel Department, and examined by the Security Guard before leaving the factory. Leaving the factory without permission will be seriously punished and fined fifty *yuan* per time.
4. Punching a time card for others or asking another person to punch a time card for you is prohibited. The first time of violation will be given serious warning and fined twenty *yuan*; the second time will be fined one hundred *yuan* and dismissed at once.
5. There should be no lateness to work. Late for over five minutes will be counted as late for one hour, while wage will be deducted at two hours rate.

At the third floor and in the canteen, the following framed rules were on the wall:

Daily Behaviours Regulations

1. No talking, eating, playing, chasing, and fighting is allowed on the shopfloor.
2. No permission to throw waste. No spitting. Violation is fined five *yuan* each time.
3. Receiving or making personal phone calls is not allowed. If discovered, no matter how long one uses the phone, the worker will be immediately dismissed and all wage deducted.
4. For stealing of factory property one will be dismissed at once and fined fifty to five hundreds dollar. If the case is serious, the offender will be sent to the Public Security Bureau.
5. The normal period of wear for an overall is one year. If one requires a new overall, there should be a reasonable explanation; otherwise, fifty *yuan* will be deducted from the wage.
6. The normal period of wear for a pair of work shoes is eight months. If there is unreasonable damage, twelve *yuan* will be deducted from the wage.

Job Leave and Resignation Regulations

1. No job leave unless there is permission from line leader, foreman, and Department manager. Leave permit should be signed by all of them, and sent to the Personnel Department for approval. Then the leave permit should be signed by the applicant to make it efficient. Otherwise, all leave will be considered as absence.
2. For those sick or on personal leave who can not attend the overtime work, prior permission should be gained and proper procedures completed. Otherwise, all will be considered as absence. Absence for one night of overtime work will be deducted half a day's wage, absence for one day deducted three days wage.
3. Absence for two days will be deducted six days wage. Continuous absence for three days will be considered as voluntary leave and all salary voluntarily given up.
4. Resignation of basic workers should be noticed fifteen days before actual leaving, staff should give one month's notice. Otherwise, wages will be deducted for fifteen days.
5. For those new workers and staff who have not completed two months work and resign, seven days wage will be deducted for training costs.

These frames, these codes, of course, did not have the dramatic effect of altering the actual factory life. We felt their existence only when we were on the verge of violating them, or really violating them. Like any law from above, there were a lot of ways to find loopholes. No talking, eating and playing in the workplace was among the first regulations. But as I have described above, talking, eating snacks, making jokes and teasing were overtly found in the late afternoon and on night work. Workers simply could not help but violate the regulation if they wanted to kill the boredom and drowsiness. Individual defiance like screwing up the job, speaking loudly, making fun, or leaving the work seat without waiting for the permit happened from time to time as well. Passing jokes on the line, sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly, could be seen as resistance to the inhuman work conditions and a chance to refresh the empty mind. Sexual innuendoes to the male technicians or supervisors were the funniest time on the line. Small pieces of paper on which were written dirty jokes were passed from seat to seat, stirring up laughter all down the line. When and who forgot to close the zipper of his trousers, or who had a new hair-cut, or wore new clothes - all were the "raw materials" for assembling jokes. Defiance and transgressions were tolerated only if they did not seriously affect production.

Forepersons and line leaders kept “half their eyes open” because they knew that the actual daily operation of the line could never be guided by factory regulations which were too adamant and relentless. The willingness to give labour power and the cooperation of the workers had to be taken into consideration. Bai-lan, the leader of my line, told me, “It’s no use being too harsh. We need to understand the workers’ situation and individual problems. I would prefer to ask the worker to leave her seat to wash her face with cold water than see her yawning all the time.... Sometimes I don’t prevent them talking or daydreaming, you know, it is the only way to keep the work moving.” Even to the line manager, stringent disciplinary techniques seemed despotic, external and impractical in regulating a human world of real action, agency and limitation.

There were also other clever and lovely tactics, often invisible and unrecorded, that girls in the workplace developed to cope with the work pressure and “humanize” the harsh conditions. While some preferred daydreaming, some passed around sweets and snacks, and some liked to enjoy tapes and radio broadcasting. Some girls also brought photos or pictures of favourites, sticking them on their work desks. They were interested in asking me about Hong Kong singers and film stars. The frequent question was: “Have you ever seen the stars on the streets in Hong Kong?” Every time I said “No”, they all felt disappointed. Some told me they liked Leon Lai, while some liked Andy Lau. Juan, the leader of QC line, aged 23, was a fan of Andy Lau; under the glass of her work desk, there were over ten different pictures of Andy Lau. She told me she liked him so much that she would save all her money to buy his current albums. The reason for liking one particular male star was that often that the idol was special, handsome, with dazzling eyes and an irresistible manhood. Juan said, “Singing is my favorite pastime. I dreamed of becoming a singer when I was very young. But I know I can never be a singer. I am only a peasant girl, my family is poor. I will never have that chance.” The line girls and the line leaders showed a longing for favourite singers and for daydreams. This access to psychological escape helped to alleviate the pressure, tension and boredom of repetitive work day after day.

Though there was no strict regulation which stated that the workers could not listen to the radio during work time, the practice was that they only could have music

for fifteen minutes as they started work in the morning and afternoon. For the overtime work at night, the radio was often on for the whole session; but it was a *habitus*, a common consensus and expectation rather than a rule. The workers had to struggle to keep it as a rule and a right. Since the radio was a crucial entertainment to curb the harsh working life, and despite the fact that indulging in music was an individual strategy to cope with everyday work pressure and tension, any opposition to these individual acts could develop into a collective resistance. Resistance in this vein is a good example to show that workplace resistance is not always oriented towards economic interests, as some mistaken interpretations hold. It is not always about “bread and dignity”, but “pleasure and work” as well.

One interesting struggle I observed in the Meteor was the struggle over the radio. Since different lines were loyal to different channels, sometimes the flows of sound were fought with each other, as the volume of the radios were often turned to the maximum. The forepersons or line leaders often needed to shout when they talked to the workers, which to some extent caused interrupted. Sometimes the volume would be turned to a lower level by the line leader, but very quickly the workers would turn it up again, since nobody could hear if the sound was not louder than the adjacent line and higher than the machines. The situation was noticed by Tin, the assistant manager of Production Department; one night he suddenly ordered the line leaders to switch off all the radios without informing the workers. It was at 8:15 PM. The workplace resumed its silence, but a queer atmosphere of silence at night, which was too great a contrast from the other nights. An extraordinary mood prevailed on the shop floor; grumbling and discontent were intense and widespread. All the workers spontaneously slowed down their pace at the same time. Moving lines were forced to stop; people started chatting and laughing as they did in the leisure time. At first some new workers did not dare to stop working, but when they looked at other workers who were all idling and chatting, so they dared not to work too. Following others quietly, all the workers on the lines joined in the slowdown. Forepersons and line leaders knew that there would be no use in uttering a word. None of them tried to persuade the workers to work. I was shocked by the situation and excited to see how the struggle would go on. Nothing happened; the workers continued talking and joking, with some singing in low voices. The forepersons were

called in to the office of Production Department to discuss with Tin how to deal with the situation. Tin was definitely not willing to give up and allow the radio on again. It was too great a challenge to his authority and his *mianzi*. But Tin could not order production stopped, since only Mr. Wu, the manager of the Production Department, had the power to do so, and he was not in the factory at the moment. The impasse persisted, and it seemed that all the laughing and joking were mocking at Tin's authority. At nine, we were asked to leave the workplace. On the way back to the dormitory, the workers were excited, talking loudly and freely on the street. Nobody mentioned the event directly; though everybody knew it was an open confrontation with the despotic production machine. Conversations mainly focused on their favourite stars, and once the talk centered on their idols, you could not stop the girls talking for another hour. Working life seemed too pale without handsome male singers to console these young hearts. Next night the radios were on and production relapsed into normality.

The case showed that the workers would act militantly not for economic reasons, but for cultural activities which they saw as an important part of their daily life. Love songs and stories, full of romance and fascination, were the most fertile soil for daydreaming, alleviating work pressure and lessening nostalgia. Alienation of labour seemed lessened by popular songs and singers. The radio provided not only entertainment for enduring long working hours and harsh working conditions, but also opportunities to contact a wide outside world, the only way to unfetter their bodily imprisonment in the workplace. Strictly bound by the factory regulation, the workers nevertheless were free in their daydreams and imagination. The self-assertiveness and pride of the women workers were not merely built from the work skills they gained in the workplace, but also from the life experiences they were exposed to and dreamed of. Stopping radio meant intervening into their private lives, and thus into their rights, on which they would not compromise. In this event, even the forepersons and the line leaders were on the side of workers. Bai-lan said, "The radio program provided the *spiritual food* to stimulate the girls to work fast. I am sure without the radio, I can't get them work."

Victory was one-sided; the factory regulations were still too detailed, too stringent and penetrating into our daily life. We could ignore their existence and

control only by obeying and coping ourselves with the codes. The more naturally you could cope, the less control you could feel, and the more freedom you had. As Miklos Haraszti sarcastically said,

The norm dreams of me as a perfect being made up of a few regulations, who works on immaterial matter, and is interchangeable with any other perfect being without loss of efficiency. The norm recognizes no problem, no chance event, no complication in men or materials. The norm knows men who are ill and healthy, but it ignores the cough which forces me to put my hand in front of my mouth and which thereby prevents me from raising the piece at the required moment; it ignores sore feet which make me walk slowly; it knows no slackening of concentration, no broken fingernails, no unpleasant sweating, no satisfaction at having eaten well. ... In fact, the norm knows absolutely nothing; despite this I must do what it says, because if I don't it threatens me with punitive sanctions.

(1978:101)

The residence and living regulations, another ten codes, were written on the wall on every floor of the dormitory. Again: no spitting, no fighting, no gambling, no drinking, no faction gangs, no change of beds, no talking and laughing after midnight, no visiting after twelve, no visitor staying overnight, no use of cooker, heater, personal fan..... There were another one hundred *nos* regulating our life. Fines were five *yuan*, ten *yuan*, fifty *yuan*, one hundred *yuan* - up to five hundred *yuan*. Nevertheless, there were more violations of regulations in the dormitory than in the workplace. Workers simply changed beds among themselves to form kin and ethnic clusters. Workers coming from the same hometown found it easier to cope with each other. It was impossible to stop cooking in the room, since we all felt hungry at night after overtime work. Visitors from the same villages often stayed overnight until they could find jobs elsewhere. Sometimes a man was found in a woman's bed. If reported, the workers would be dismissed at once. Gambling and drinking, albeit less found in the women's rooms, were common in men's dorm. Arguing and fighting occurred frequently everywhere. Daily life transgressions were

innumerable, although the workers did not seriously threaten the order of dormitory life.

The Electronic eye: the Principle of Panopticism

Now we come to the end of this chapter. Homogenizing the social body involved all kinds of techniques of power including the most scientific and sophisticated, and the most despotic and primitive. At first, we saw how the technique of strict spatial positioning fixed the distrusted nomadic bodies in clearly delimited seats on the shopfloor. Detailed study and analysis of each work process, of each individual body, aimed to maximize the labour time resulted in the fragmentation of labour power. Then the assembly line, with its moving and consistent exercise power, linked up a multitude of individualized bodies into one collective automatic function. The time-table and the factory codes simultaneously worked hard to install a new software of factory daily life into workers' psyche, and to help us to acquire a new habitus of everyday life. It was some sort of new *humanity* the disciplinary machine wanted to create. The art of spacing, the art of timing, the art of dissecting individual bodies and the art of composing collective energies, all functioned to produce a new social body- *dagongmei or mingong*. Extracting and maximizing labour force was the sole aim, the sole *economy* of the production disciplinary machine.

Yet in the end, the production machine still could not find itself safe and certain in the techniques of power. Nomadic beings were not easy to deal with. A *supreme power* with more encompassing and penetrating force was needed. That should not be a human being, nor be present. What could it be? An electronic eye. The moving line, the time-table and the factory codes were the most visible and conspicuous forms of power at work on the body. But finally we come to the invisible and untouchable. The factory codes were always visible and we always knew where the power was and where we could escape. But the power of the electronic eye was always obscured, hidden in the General Office. We could not see it, we could not touch it, but we all knew it existed, always gazing at us. It was somewhere, everywhere and very powerful.

None of the shopfloor workers had the chance to see it actually work. But there were stories, rumors among the workers of how it was working. One day, Fat Guy told me, thinking that I did not know of its existence, "There's an electronic eye hanging on the wall, always checking our behaviour. The Director doesn't need to keep a watch on the line. He just sits there but he can watch every one of us. The pictures are flowing before his eyes and he can control the computer and have the picture focused on anybody." She kept her voice as small as possible and it seemed that the eye was already gazing at her. The presence of the *unpresence*, the fictitious image of the panoptical eye seemed more effective at controlling our behaviours. With the eye poking through the wall, we were forced to think and to know that we were all continuously under supervision. There were rumors that once the Director discovered who was talking or laughing on the shopfloor, s/he would be dismissed immediately without warning.

The highest authority needed to find a chance to demonstrate its super power. And this power ought to be impersonal, invisible, untouchable and even far away from the imagination of the workers. It was above, it was everywhere, it was very threatening, but it did not exist until we told ourselves that it was there. Sometimes we totally forgot its existence, but sometimes we kept on telling each other that it was there. The object of the gaze was the subject of power; at the heart of the disciplinary machine, it manifested the subjection of those who were perceived as objects and the objectification of those who were subjected (Foucault, 1977:184-185). In this chapter we find ourselves completely caught up in the Foucauldian universe of *surveiller et punir*. In the next chapter I will try to and step onto another terrain and further analyze the making of the social body - *dagongmei*.

Chapter V **Becoming *dagongmei*: Manufacturing Identities and the Politics of Differences**

Stuart Hall asks: Who needs 'identity'?

Ernesto Laclau answers: The constitution of a social identity is an act of power.

We ask: Who needs (to be) a worker?

 Who needs (to be) *dagongmei*?

“Who needs identity?” The answer is simply *power*. “Who needs (to be) a worker?” The answer is more direct: *capital*. “Who needs (to be) *dagongmei*?” The answer then is more specific, capital in Deng’s China. *Dagongmei* is a new embodied social identity emerging in contemporary China, produced to meet the changing socio-economic relations of the country and the needs of the capital. A new identity is produced, crafted and then inscribed on young rural female bodies when they enter into a particular set of production relations, experiencing the process of proletarianization and alienation. In this chapter, I describe the process as it builds a social identity; I look from both the side of power and the side of the subject, and at regulatory and identificatory practices inside and outside the workplace.

Dagongmei is a specific cultural-symbolic artifact, produced at the particular moment when private and international capital emerged in Post-Mao China. As a condensed identity, it reveals the full story of how a state socialist system is giving way to the capitalist world economy and how capitalist practices depend entirely on the regulation of class and sexual relations. The connotations of the term are multi-layered; *da-gong*, literally means “working for a boss”. It is a new concept, supposedly in contradiction to Chinese socialist history. Labour, alienated labour, supposedly *emancipated* for more than thirty years, is again sold to the capitalists, and this time under the auspices of the state machine. *Mei* is the female, the sister and the girl. *Da-gong-mei* means that those selling their labour to the boss are female, young girls. But paradoxically, the term *dagongmei* did not carry a negative meaning for those young girls from the rural areas; rather, it provided new identities, new senses of the self that they were going to acquire, once they worked inside a foreign or private factory, selling their labour. Self-subjectivization was very important to the

power, to the capital machine which needed willing labour. Manufacture consent? How? By manufacturing *identity*.

The manufacture of identity involves the politics of discourse and the politics of difference. Inside the workplace, we can see how the production of the identity-*dagongmei* deployed the art of metaphor, the power of language and the politics of othering and differentiating. At the core of the regulatory and identificatory practices, there was a play of *différance*, establishing a violent hierarchy between the rural and the urban, the northerner and the southerner and the male and the female. Here we are going to see how the regional, kin and ethnic differences were imaged to craft the identity in the workplace. Sexual differences will be discussed in the next chapter.

A Fumbled Identity: My First Day on the Shopfloor

Early in the morning in late autumn, I woke at six when my room mates were still sleeping. I was a bit excited; after reading all sorts of company archives and recent information in the general office for two weeks, I was going to work on the assembly line as a worker. In order to look like a factory girl, I bought T-shirts, jeans and shoes in a local market near our Company. I had my hair curled too, at the suggestion of Tall Ling, the Director's secretary. Arriving a bit early at the Company, I saw Jun from the Personnel Department swallowing her breakfast at a small food shop just opposite our factory building. "You don't need to hurry. I know you are going to work on the shopfloor today." Jun smiled at me and said that today I was really dressed like a factory worker. "Without your glasses, you are just our double."

She led me to the Department of General Affairs. I was asked to sign a form and then a set of factory overalls were provided: two blue suits, one blue cap, a pair of white gloves, and one pair of slippers. Blue was the colour for the production department. Before I went upstairs to the shop floor, I changed my clothes in the washroom. Jun was still with me and laughed at my appearance. I somehow felt that though I had changed overalls, my image was awkward and my newly assumed identity still not crystallized. Jun brought me to assembly line B on the fourth floor. It was about 8 o'clock in the morning. Except for some echoes of machine sounds, silence reigned on the whole shopfloor. I was shocked again, not by the silence, but

by the stares of the workers. Everybody looked at me queerly at the very moment I appeared on the shop floor. Did my appearance in an operator's overalls look bizarre? Didn't I look like a *dagongmei*? Or was I not expected to work on the shopfloor? I was wondering, with my heart throbbing. He-chuan, the foreman of line B, looked at me as if he expected me, and was the only one to welcome me. He led me to my seat on the middle of the line, a position on the screwing station, and asked me to sit down. I sat down, knowing that all gazes still fell on my body. A body unfit to an identity.

My existing identity as an anthropologist, albeit ambiguous and unstable, was certainly too reified for me to adapt to a new one. Time after time I wondered and asked myself: Was I like a factory girl? An anthropologist working on the shopfloor that was fairly accepted by the western academics. But how about my family, the local community in China, and all the staff and workers in the Company? I knew they could never understand, even if in the end they accepted it. It was true that my past identities did become diluted and ambiguous as time went on and on, and when I found myself totally lost in the industrial world, toiling twelve hours per day, without knowing what happened in the outside "civilized" world. But the question, "Was I a *dagongmei*?" still did not dare to daunt my mind. People treated me differently on the shopfloor and at the same time reminded me of my past identities. Neither I, nor the capital nor the workers were able to inscribe on me a proper identity: *dagongmei*. The production machine from the beginning had no interest in incorporating me. I was left alone.

Different fate, different identity: Mei-fang's coming

The fate of Mei-fang showed a great contrast to me. The production machine bore a strong anxiety to turn Mei-fang to be a *dagongmei*, a modern female worker. So did Mei-fang herself. We were not born to be workers, especially those like Mei-fang who were "born to be peasants". Granting oneself an identity that could find no residue, no cause-and-effect, no justification in biological factors or any born-to-be attributes, involved particularly sophisticated techniques and strategies of power.

Internalization, on the other hand, required further meandering, painful and even perverted ways of technologizing the self.

Mei-fang came on Wednesday, the day we had a precept for fifteen minutes every week. Bai-lan, our line leader brought her to a seat opposite me. Unlike me, she was given serious warnings and strict training before she could start working. Bai-lan first checked her overalls, her cap and her gloves, and then told her to have her hair neatly tied and completely covered inside the work cap.

“Make sure not a string of hair drops down on the desk, on the chair or on the floor. Short hair will be easily dropped in the product and can’t be easily noticed. Your fingernails should be cut plain; otherwise the gloves will tear and you will cause flecks on the stuff you do,” Bai-lan said.

Then Mei-fang was instructed to wear a static electricity belt on her hand to prevent body electricity attacking the electronic products. She was given a metal recorder and told to tap it before she put the product onto the conveyor belt.

“You should never forget to tap it. The recorder not only counts how much work you do, but also the number our whole line produces. All the numbers from each recorder should be the same at the end. You should not make any mistake,” Bai-lan said and then started to teach Mei-fang how to do screwing.

I noticed immediately a basic difference between Mei-fang and me in the way the management treated us. He-chuan told me to take care of my fingers and not to be hurt by the screwing driver, whereas Bai-lan told Mei-fang to take care of the driver and not let it get worn. Yet it took me a week to understand that Mei-fang was hired to supplement my work since the upper management thought I could not keep up with the work pace, and I might take casual leave for other reasons.

Mei-fang was given on the job training for a three month probation period, the practice for all newcomers. Screwing, in fact, was not as difficult as I thought at first. In our work process, four mini screws and two even smaller ones were used to fix the main board to two outer cases. Picking up screws from the box and putting them in the appropriate positions required nimble fingers and a quick hand; otherwise, the screws would be easily lost or one might pick up more than one screw at the same time since screws easily stuck to the fingers. But these were not the hard bits. The most skillful element was handling the electric screw driver. How much force you put

to it mattered most. Different sizes of screws or the same sizes in different positions involved different amounts of force. Too much force and you would produce small breaks on the case; too little force and the screw might be tilted and you had to fix it again. It took me three days to become adept at the work process, and so Mei-fang almost the same amount of time.

Actually, for Mei-fang learning the work process, grasping the skill, was not a problem. After three or four days she could work much faster than me. But she was silent all the time. Working two weeks in the Company, she sometimes just nodded and smiled to me and then kept on screwing.

“She seems not happy. She doesn’t utter a word for a whole day. How odd!” Fat Guy from our line gossiped to me at lunch one day.

What kept Mei-fang quiet? What worried her, when other workers fell into chuckles from time to time? A fairly fit body to job was not good enough? Yes, it was unsatisfactory to both the production machine and the workers themselves. A fairly fit body was not complete. For survival in a modern factory one needed something more, something fundamental to one’s sense of self. Mei-fang was unhappy and I was uncomfortable. There was something we felt lacking and this *lack* was inarticulate. We both were pretty fit to the work, no problem with our skill; but the fact was that we were still not well equipped to be a worker, a *dagongmei*, who had to live in a modern industrial space.

If Deleuze and Guattari are right to say that the creation of lack is a function of the market economy, the art of the dominant class; that it is deliberately created, organized and produced in and through social production (1984:28), then we need to know how this *primary* fear of lack among Mei-fang and other rural girls is produced and how they are induced to live with it. *Dagongmei*, as a hegemonic identity, as a cultural-symbolic artifact contains a set of reactive forces. These forces will try to homogenize human activities and senses of self that are inherently plural, fluid and uncontrollable. The process of homogenization is the process of exclusion and displacement, which produce of anxiety, inflicts pain on individuals, and drives them to integrate into the collective will and goals of the hegemonic construct.

The politics of labour identity in China was linked not only to the project of industrialization but also to a project of spacing. As shown in Chapter three, the rural space could only nurture *peasants* and the urban space *workers*. Three decades of Chinese socialist history did not imagine a modernization project in the air, but in an curtain between rural and urban, and thus between peasants and workers. *Chinese socialist beings* were born to have an identity not from biology but from locality, but by their locality, the urban or the rural. Mao's industrialization required an extraction of rural resources to support the urban establishment, a strict planning of rural and urban development, and thus a strict control on individuals' status and identity. The art of naming and classification was central to Mao's politics. Deng's industrial development and ways of realizing the market economy, on the other hand, demanded not only raw material but *human power* from the rural areas as well. That is why Mei-fang and the millions of rural girls were needed as *dagongmei*.

These rural girls were born in villages, they were not workers, they had already been named as peasants. Yet they were needed. This time the state socialist machine, burdened by its past history, was powerless to gear its naming motor; it gave way to the capitalist machine. The identity of *dagongmei* echoed a relationship to the urban, to capital, but not to the state. There was, and there had to be, new models of workers in new era. The machine of capital now felt free to reterritorize the urban-rural boundaries and to mimic the politics of naming and exclusion.

At first newcomers like Mei-fang were not considered as qualified workers, but "workers-to-be" in the Meteor. Even after they had worked a few months in the factory, young girls, especially fresh graduates from rural origins, were often taken to be country girls rather than factory girls. Judged not by her work pace or skill, but on her appearance, and her *appropriate* behaviors in the industrial space, Mei-fang looked fresh, quiet and permissive. She was too rustic. She wore T-shirt and jeans but no face powder and lipstick. And her jeans were a little bit old-fashioned, and thus still rural. Her pastime - knitting - coated her more in a country image.

For Mei-fang this was the first time she experienced the rural-urban disparity so poignantly. The sense of difference was no longer abstractly realized in her mind in

the village, but was daily lived on the shopfloor. The workplace here was not to be conceived as a microcosm of the society at large, but as a process of production and reproduction of the larger society. It is through the image of such a *socius-workplace* that we can understand the practices of identification by which the production machine was to technologize the self. The production machine, in making use of the existing social relations, simply reproduced itself as one part of the system and at the same time built the system. The factory regime itself was not a pyramid of power hierarchies, but a kaleidoscope of power and hierarchies, created by weaving identities of gender, kinship, ethnicity and rural-urban disparity.

The Urban-Rural Metaphor and the Abject Subject

I always kept my work pace as slow as possible to ensure that every piece I produced was of good quality. I was afraid that any defect for which I was responsible would cause my co-workers, especially Mei-fang, to be reproached. But it still could not avoid. It was on the fifth day after Mei-fang come, still within her training period. In late afternoon I was very drowsy and waited for somebody to start talking. He-chuan, our line foreman, holding a route-finder, suddenly showed up in front of Mei-fang and yelled, "What are you doing? You are going to spoil this case. Such a big scar here (He pointed to the case of the route-finder). Did you learn something by heart? You know you are not using an ax ploughing a furrow, don't you? These products are very expensive, you can't pay for it by farming for a year. *cushou cujiao* (Rough hand, rough foot)!"

He stopped talking. Then he turned his eyes to me, and showing a sense of embarrassment, added,

"These village girls are always like that, difficult to teach."

He-chuan left. I saw Mei-fang's face blush and eyes fill with tears. I was really angry at such a sudden and irresponsible reproach. He never looked for who caused the scar! But I understood instantly that he actually could never know. He just came to the most likely target, shouting. Then all of us on the same work process could hear and take responsibility for each other.

The discourse of the reproach itself seemed unimportant; it just gave a simple message: somebody in our work process made a low quality product, but the disciplinary machine could never know who. In shouting, in expressing his authority, He-chuan was also defeating himself, showing he could not control the labour process. But the discourse had another function. It produced a *surplus value* of language that the disciplinary machine did not expect: helping to craft the identity of *dagongmei*. If Mei-fang or anybody else had difficulty changing themselves, the machine would come to help. If putting you on the line and getting you adept at the work was not enough, then the discursive magic showed its power.

The ploy of metaphors was seen everywhere on the shopfloor; leaving a scar on the case was like leaving a furrow on the land. You were a peasant. You were not a worker. But you should be a worker, and though you were still a peasant at least you should behave like a worker. In the metaphor that He-chuan created in his reproach, he never expected to say that working in the factory was like farming on the land, but he could not escape the mimic paradox. Working was not farming, but in some sense it might be still like farming. Otherwise how could the metaphor be effective? Invoking the metaphor did show the contradictory nature of the discourse, but it never wasted energy. Only by juxtaposing farming and working, only by differentiating farming from working, could working show its priority and privileges. To declare a gap was to depreciate the value of farming. Then a hierarchy of values was created, in which working occupied a higher rank. A gap was produced, a void which allowed power to produce abject subjects. Mei-fang was not the only girl subject to these kinds of reproach and the power of language. Everyday on the shopfloor I heard discriminatory language to line girls, whether in covert or overt ways. A Cantonese term *xiangxiamei*, village girl, was often used to depreciate the status of the women workers from rural areas. Phrases like “*xiangxiamei*, you know nothing except farming”, “*xiangxiamei*, what else can you understand? Learn the rules and behave civilized”, “*xiangxiamei* is always like a *xiangxiamei*, *cushou cujiao* (rough hand, rough leg)”, or “*xiangxiamei* can never be taught! Foolish and stupid” were frequently heard in the workplace, especially when the male foreman or lineleader came to criticize or scold the workers. The metaphorical meanings hidden in these daily usages were the great contrasts between the body and the space: unfit

xiangxiamei living in the *modern* industrial world. On the one hand, there were stupid, uneducated and uncivilized *rustic* girls, whose labour was cheap and despised. On the other hand, there was a *modern* high technology of factory, whose products were valuable and exported. Intense anxiety was aroused, making individuals feel “lacking”, “unfit” or most often “not properly suited” to the place they lived and worked. Girls like Mei-fang felt frustrated for not living up to the demands of a modern world and for not themselves being modern beings.

It was awkward for me, I was often portrayed as a modern, highly educated person with a wide knowledge of the outside world and technology, and thus a model for all the female workers. Though I was unfit for the identity of *dagongmei* and for working on the shopfloor, I was imagined as a modern professional who was very suitable for living in a modern space. In spite of my efforts to avoid eulogies, I often heard snippets of conversations like “learning this or that from Miss Pun”. Sometimes I was asked for the meaning of English words, sometimes to translate some documents, sometimes to demonstrate the format for taking minutes at meetings or the word processing program on the computer in the Production Department. In the Department office, where I usually went to chat at lunch time after the meal, the supervisors, the forepersons and the clerks would circle around me and start to ask me about things in Hong Kong or UK. Admiration would sometimes surface inversely: “We are from the rural areas, like frogs in the well, and know nothing about the outside world.”

Actually some of supervisors and the forepersons were from a city or big town, but in front of me, they still liked to contrast themselves as village people. So despite my effort to turn myself into a line girl, the production machine instead took an interest in marking me out as someone coming from big city, knowledgeable, urbane and superior to the female workers from rural areas.

Daily language, shopfloor conversations, arguments and reproaches in the workplace always tried to remind Mei-fang and other fresh workers of their past identity as peasants. “*Cushou cujiao*” was the physical stigma of the person as a peasant, whereas *xiangxiamei* was the abject identity that must be polished and upgraded. I took quite a long time to understand why Mei-fang was not happy. If one

did not want to be discriminated against or depreciated, one had to try hard to change oneself.

A basic differentiation among the workers was between the old workers and the new workers. The old workers, by virtue of their their appearance, their speech, the dialect they spoke (often Cantonese) and the work pace and skill they possessed, were nearer the ideal model of a *modern* worker. The new workers on the other hand, were waiting to be installed and inscribed with a new body, a new identity and a new soul. The production machine wanted complete *new beings*. To declare a gap, to make war with one's past identity was for the sake of founding a new identity. The magic of the metaphor and language would not end at depreciating one's past identity. Reminding and invoking one's past identity was to cut the umbilical cord of one's past life, to clear a base for building up a new self. Industrial work was desired, not only because of the higher wage that it provided, but the new identity, the new sense of life that it created. Peasantness imaged as "*cushou cunjiao*" was the constitutive outside of the new identity. Without mirroring and then negating one's past identity, one found no way to shore up one's new life.

Frantz Fanon said, the black man's soul was the white man's artifact.

We have said, the *dagongmei*'s soul was the production of the production machine.

But there was defiance, if not resistance, to the production of machine.

I recorded one occasion:

March 28, 1996 At evening

We still have to work at night. The radio is on. There is no mood for work, we expect and dream. Tomorrow is payday. The girls on our line are talking about where to go and what to buy. While Fat Guy suggests buying new jeans, Fu-hui, a girl sitting in front of me, thinks of buying lipstick. She asks me to suggest some brand names of high quality and reasonable price. I am at sea and wondering. Suddenly I hear a shouting from the adjacent line, Line A. A line girl bursts into anger and shouts at her lineleader, "Don't take me as a *xiangxiamei*, and think I know nothing, so you can bully me. You never ask the others to move to work on the other line. But always me. It's me every time. What's the difference between me and the others?"

Why me every time? Why always give me the bad job and move me?" The girl is refusing to be lent to the Line C. When a rush job lacks hands, girls are frequently borrowed from another line. But most of the time the workers are unwilling to be lent; they feel the job on the other line is not their own.

At Precept Time

Our line had "precept" time on every Wednesday at half past four. A few minutes before it started, Bai-lan, the line leader would stop the line and prepare for the staff coming from the Personnel Department and the Production Department. Tin, our Department assistant managers, always came. If there were serious production problems, our Department manager, Mr Wu, would show up. If Mr. Wu came, Tin stood beside him and behaved like an inferior. In his early thirties, Tin was an university graduate and had worked at the Meteor for over four years. In the eyes of line girls, he was a sharp and capable figure. We sometimes thought he was quite attractive if he was not out of temper. He was urbane and educated; in a world of few men, he was often a target of fantasy.

It was the first day that Mei-fang came to work in Meteor. She and I were asking what would happen at precept time. At 4:30 PM Ying, Tin, He-chuan and Bai-lan appeared and all the line girls, except me, were asked to queue up in front of the line. I was told to stay in my seat. Again I felt myself an outsider - time and time again the production machine had no intention to discipline me. I moved my seat to the front in order to hear what they were saying. Today Ying wore a three-piece skirt set and looked like an urban career woman. Though sometimes she would say she was a *dagongmei* as well, in our Company she was classified as clerical staff. Her status, wage, fringe benefits and living conditions were all different from the line operators. In a managerial tone, as her position required, she said,

This week a worker was caught helping another punch the time card. It was a serious violation and we reserved the right to dismiss her at once. There is no excuse for anybody to clock on for best friends or co-villagers. The helper will be punished more seriously than the one who asked for

help. In the factory one should be responsible for oneself only. If you are so used to helping each other in the village, remember, remember that now you are in the factory. ...

The company inspected the workers' dormitory on Monday. Production tools, such as scissors and adhesive tape, were found in two workers' bunks. Though they were not expensive things, the acts were considered acts of theft. According to the Factory Regulations, these two workers were each fined fifty *yuan*. Again, we considered these serious offenses. Next time, if they violate the rule again, these two workers will be dismissed immediately.

During the inspection, I found it was quite common that cartons were brought out by the workers to make benches in their rooms. I emphasize that workers are not permitted to bring any production materials out the factory gate, even if they are waste. Waste materials are not your property, they belong to the Company. You have no right to use them. To put it seriously, I can treat that as stealing too. Your habit of taking useless stuff back home should be changed. Let me repeat it again, you are working now in the factory, the bad habits you bring from the country should be given up. No spitting on the floor and keep your bunk and room clean. ...

Ying's speech did not surprise anybody. It was the usual stuff. My co-workers simply stood still and kept quiet, some showing no interest in hearing her. Information circulated among workers through chat, gossip, and rumours, not through this kind of formal address. We all knew who was caught clocking on for another and who was fined for keeping company materials. The common feeling towards the workers who were caught was that they were "unlucky". Mei-fang kept her head low and did not look at Ying. But Ying's words were not without function. If in the end she could not safeguard the factory regulations and impose them on the workers. She could put into words the *nature of peasantness*, a nature that of course was imagined and created. *Huxiang bangzhu*, mutual help and close relationships, were seen as attributes of village life and that had to be given up to live in an industrial world. Everyone should be responsible for themselves alone. The capitalist

machine wanted only individualistic persons. Industrial wo/man should learn to compete with each other but not to help each other. Helping others to clock on was quite a frequent practice in the workplace; sometimes people wanted to gain time to go to toilet or to send money back home. The post office was only open during the day and most of the workers had to sacrifice their lunch time to go there. Long queues were expected at lunch time so they got back to the factory late. Other workers would help if they saw their kin and co-villagers were not back in time.

Stealing, again, was often taken as a bad habit of country people. Ying and other staff of urban origin often warned me not to leave valuable things in the dormitory. Workers were not allowed to bring bags into the workplace. They were inspected going in or out the gate. Every worker was thought of as a potential thief. Again this kind of bad human nature was nurtured in the rural area. Making use of waste in daily life was a natural village way. Resources belonged to nature, didn't they? The notion of private property was a serious problem to these peasant-workers. They were told to give up their practical reasons for sharing natural resources and even taught to despise it. Sharing then connected to the notion of stealing. The logic of capitalist practice needed to win over any non-capitalist reasoning in order to assert its hegemony. To gain the power, to win the battle, the opponent, the other life styles had to be evoked and then destroyed.

Tin's speech focused more on the production target and work discipline on the line. He said that our line had more rejects than the other lines which affected production speed. He reminded us not to talk while working and said everybody should be more attentive. Next Monday western customers from Europe would visit our company and he told us to behave ourselves. "Everybody should wash their overalls at the weekend. We don't want the customers to see a speck of dirt on your body or in the workplace. No one is allowed to leave their work seat until the end of the tour. Materials and cartons should be well allocated and labeled. Company policy is to show we have a completely modern and well-trained work force and an advanced technological factory." Workers were asked for cooperation. It seemed that a sense of belonging to the Company and a sense of self-esteem as a modern worker would be articulated in front of the foreign customers.

At dinner time the girls on our line discussed the speeches. They accepted much of what Tin said, but they laughed at Ying. She had at least ten nicknames, such as "Miss Canton", "tall *mei*", "bossy cat" and "chicken". Posing as a "modern lady", she was less an admired figure than a target of jeers and innuendoes. She was often mocked behind her back. Her tone and attitudes were often mimicked and made fun of. Immediately after her sudden inspection of the shopfloor, laughter would erupt. Rough language would spread down the line. "The bossy cat dresses up so nice. Woo, what is she going to do tonight? Flirt with men?" Or "Miss Canton really thinks she is Miss Canton. I can't stand the way she walks." A figure who stood for modernity and urbanity, Ying was seen to be on the side of management and capital. It was a negative image, not one the women workers wanted to imitate.

Becoming a Dagongmei

One night about a fortnight after she started working at the Meteor, I had a chance to talk to Mei-fang. At first she was still timid and kept her head low all the time. I tried hard to start conversation by asking where she was from, how old she was and how many siblings she had. She told me she was from a village in the north of Hunan Province, and something of her family situation, and then she started crying. I was upset by seeing tears flowing down her face. She said,

"Jie¹, I want to go back home."

"Why? You worked so well in the factory."

"I don't know, I miss my home. I feel that I don't fit in the workplace."

"But why? You are not working slower than the other people."

"I don't know why. I just feel I don't fit here. I feel I'm too different from the others. Next month after I get my wage, I'll leave."

One month passed and Mei-fang did not leave.

"Life is hard here, but if others can stand it, why not me?" she said to me.

¹ I was called by the women workers in the factory as "jie", a Chinese term meaning elder sister, because most of the them were younger than me. "jie" showed a kind of familial familiarity.

Mei-fang started to go out with other workers on holidays. At night she listened to Cantonese popular music with them. She bought more current fashions and wore lipstick. She asked me to help her buy hair shampoo, facial cleaner and a lipstick pen from Hong Kong as other women workers often did. All these helped them to shake off their rustic image and turn them into a modern *dagongmei*. Buying cosmetics was one of the ways I did favours for my co-workers, though not without a sense of guilt in introducing more and more commodified goods to “pollute” them.

Discriminations continued.....

If self-internalization was one way to solve the identity crisis temporarily, discriminations against rural people did not stop there. Rural factory girls experienced the sense of an abject self not merely on the factory premises, but more severely in daily life outside the factory. Shopping in downtown Shenzhen was one of our favourite pastimes on holidays. Each month we had a rest day on the Sunday following pay day. Quite often I would go with my co-workers to Dang Fang Market, where we could find Hong Kong products at a relatively cheap price. Fashion shops, department stores, supermarkets, fast-food stores and cafes, all owned by local people, clustered around the two sides of the street. They were always full of people at night or on Sundays. Boutiques, supermarkets, fast-food stores and cafes were all symbols of the “western wind”, allowing people to “taste” the new way of life, and more importantly to affirm *dagongmei* with a modern self. One Sunday five Sichuan girls, Yue, Ling, Hong, Qin and Ping, invited me to go out with them. We decided to go to Dang Fang Market and I suggested that I treat them to a coffee in a cafe there.

From getting on the mini bus, to every fashion shop we went into, I could feel a strong sense of discrimination against us. Because we were speaking Mandarin and my co-workers had a strong village accent, we were told to hurry up onto the bus in a very impolite way. Because we were not dressed up in modern urban styles, salesgirls in the boutiques showed indifference to our interest in their fashions. They did not bother with us even if we asked the price. Their attitudes seemed to say that we were too poor to buy their products. Ping asked me to speak to the salesgirls in Cantonese when we headed for the next shop. I said, “If you want to buy something,

then I'll help you ask them in Cantonese. If not, I don't want to speak to them. We should despise them far more than they despise us." All the girls laughed, it seemed I was more annoyed than them. Ping comforted me, "Jie, you don't need to be too serious. We are getting used to the local people's discrimination. They think they are richer, don't they?"²

We hung around the open market and then went into a supermarket. The supermarket has only become popular in recent years. To show its difference from local family-owned groceries, the supermarket provided a variety of foreign goods, stressed its concern for high quality foods, and the peculiar way it was managed. It puzzled us that security was as strict as on the factory premises. More than four security guards stood in front of the gate. We had to leave our handbags at the counter before we entered the gate. And because we looked like poor rural girls from Guangdong, a security guard followed us everywhere we went. But there was real reason to take us as potential thieves; the prices in the supermarket were unreasonably high. One cup of Japanese instant noodles cost eleven *yuan*, our salary for one day. We discussed, muttered, and chuckled, but never bought. Ping asked me how much the local people earned that they could afford to buy such expensive stuff. I told them I had no idea and probably those stuff could never be sold. Hoping that my friends would not be subjected to a feeling of inferiority by simply introducing them to those expensive foreign commodities, I suggested we'd better go to a cafe.

I had not expected it, or I was careless, but it was the first time my Sichuan sisters had gone to a cafe. I felt guilty again for bringing them to experience a style of life that was not their own. They all had no idea what to order and the prices of the drinks were unacceptable to them, so they persuaded me to leave. But it was too late. A waitress was already standing at our table, looking us with a strange smile.

Yue said, "A coke for eight *yuan*!"

Hong echoed, "A tea for ten *yuan*! For ten *yuan* I can make one hundred cups."

Ping whispered, "What is a drink for? Just water. It can't make the stomach full. Should we go, should we go?"

² Lee, Ching Kwan (forthcoming) in her ethnography of a Shenzhen workplace had similar experiences to me.

Feeling embarrassed, I tried to calm them down and ordered drinks for them. Two coffees, two lemon teas and two soft drinks. The waitress finally left our table and I noticed that the people at the other tables all looked at us. I felt I had been unforgivably foolish to put my friends in such an awkward situation. Insults then followed. A few minutes later, a waiter brought us one cup of drink. It didn't look like anything we ordered. I called back the waiter and he took it to the table in front of us. A man was sitting there. He shouted,

"Their hands have touched the drink. Bring me another one. You don't know how dirty their hands are, those *waixing mei!* (girls from foreign provinces)" *Waixing mei* was an abject term for girls from foreign provinces, that is, outside Guangdong Province. I felt so angry and burst out in Cantonese, "What's wrong with *waixing mei*. A dog's eyes always despise a human being!" He didn't expect my sudden reproach, stood up and left the cafe, still with a disdainful gaze. In Chinese proverbs, a *good* man never fights with a woman. Maybe that was the reason he left without a word. We all laughed, and during the drink we continued to make jokes about this particular local man.

Back at the dormitory, I could not fall asleep that night. That disgusting man's image was always in my mind. I knew too well that the term *waixing mei* coated a double discrimination of gender and rural-urban disparity. But probably it was the first time I had shared the same discrimination with my co-workers as lived experiences. The silence of the man might hide another layer of discrimination towards female subjects, though we enjoyed an instant win at that moment. Women were not worth arguing with; that was what the Chinese proverb meant. I headed over to Yue's bunk and found she was still awake and writing a letter to her boyfriend, a recruit in the Beijing army. She wrote,

It was exciting today. We went out to Dang Fang market and had a drink in a modern and expensive cafe. An ugly local guy bullied us but we fought back. ... Shen, why are we so poor? Why do the local people always treat us as if we weren't human beings? Do you remember when we were young in school, the textbook told us that people in a socialist country are all equals? But when I go out to the outside world, I find

myself one hundred times more worthless than in the village. How do people treat you in Beijing? It's our country's capital. People there must be nicer. ...

Inventing Local, Kin-ethnic Identity and Inequality

Ethnic categories are broad classifications of people; they are frequently mapped according to a series of binary discriminations which oppose an 'us' to a 'them'.

R. Cohen, 1978, "Ethnicity: problem and focus in anthropology".

The politics of difference and othering in producing subjects is further complicated by an intertwining of local, kin and ethnic relations in the workplace. Women workers in the workplace are not merely identified and classified as urban or rural people, but also more specifically by region and ethnic group. Girls from the north are dubbed with local names: *Sichuan mei*, *Hunan mei*, *Hubei mei* or simply *Bei mei*. Whereas *Chaozhou mei*, *Canton mei*, and *Hakka mei* are ethnic identities that tell of a woman's local culture and dialect they speak. These are all common terms used in the workplace to identify individuals, especially in daily language when workers address each other. Identification of persons according to the principle of locality or ethnicity is political as well, since it embodies a sense of spatial inequality far more delicate than rural-urban disparity. Where you are from and which dialect you speak foretells your status and wealth, and thus your bargaining power and your position in the workplace hierarchy. Rural-urban disparity, as a bedrock for nurturing differences, is divided into minute hierarchies by intersecting with the elements of locality, and kin-ethnic identities.

There is an epistemological problem with the concepts of locality and ethnicity. I take them not as fixed, inclusive categories in a structural-functional sense, but as performative cultural artifacts and practical relationships. These relationships are produced at instantaneous moments in specific situations. Thus they are all fluid, changeable, invented and re-invented. As Richard Fardon puts it,

Precisely because ethnic terms serve and inform practical significance, which are liable to change, they share with Nietzsche's pocket the characteristic of sometimes containing this, sometimes that, and sometimes several things at once. Contents tend to reflect the habits of the user, subject only to the broad constraint of the design of the pocket. Like pockets, ethnic terms have complex histories of use.

(1987:170)

The boundaries of local and kin-ethnic groups in the workplace are resilient and changing, definitely not hung up on geo-political definitions. Individuals negotiated or identified themselves to a group of fellows according to situational needs in determinate settings. The construction of local or ethnic identities was situational, performative, and variant. A local term like *Sichuan mei* or an ethnic term like *Chaozhou mei* could be expanded to include people from very different backgrounds, or narrowed to exclude quite similar individuals. Ethnic boundaries were between whoever people thought they were between (Fardon 1987:176). Moreover, local groups often overlapped with kin-ethnic groups. Geographical, genealogical and cultural elements all worked together to weave group identity and classify individuals.

"*Ni shi shen me di-fang ren?*", literally "a person of what *di-fang* are you?", was the most common question in the workplace. It was used to start a conversation or make friends with strangers. Difficult to paraphrase, it embeds much more meaning than the English phrase "where are you from?" *Di* means the place, the locality, while *fang* embodies a cultural meaning of *di*, connoting specific kin and ethnic relationships. Thus "*ni shi shen me di-fang ren?*" not only asks where you are from, but also what your kin-ethnic identity is and which local dialect you use. It was nearly equal to the question of "who you are?" in a more specific spatio-cultural sense. In daily conversations, to know "*ni shi shen me di-fang ren?*" was far more important than to know "what is your name", or "how old you are". Workers in the Meteor seldom directly asked each other their names, but rather they asked their affiliation to localistic and kin-ethnic groups.

Workers in the workplace were grouped into different local or kin-ethnic enclaves, and enmeshed into different networks of consolidation, obligation and authority. Local and kin-ethnic networks were not only developed by the workers themselves to facilitate migration and finding jobs, but also manipulated by the production machine to create a division of labour and job hierarchies. In the Meteor, all the important and supervisory positions were to some extent affected by localistic and kin-ethnic power. A line leader was chosen not only on her work capabilities, but also for her network and prestige among the workers.

Siu Wah, the line leader of Line C, chatted to me one day. She said the control of everyday operation on the shopfloor was not as easy as others reckoned. It involved the cooperation and consent of every worker in each seat. For a rush order, you had to be able to speed up the work pace, which required the girls' cooperation. So, the most reliable persons were from your own kin and area, and what you could do was to enlarge your own group. Enlargement of one's own local or kin-ethnic group in the workplace became the most important political way for dominant groups to maintain their status, or for weaker groups to struggle for enhancement. The weakest groups were the outsiders to the province, especially those from the North China, who were often called *waixing mei* or *bei mei*. They were forced to take jobs packing or soldering, the drudge work. Competition for "good jobs" was frequent and occurred everyday on the shopfloor. Workers thus relied on local or kin-ethnic power for daily negotiations.

The management skillfully made use of local and kin-ethnic relations to facilitate production efficiency and profit maximization and to facilitate everyday control of workers in the workplace. Locals and kin were considered responsible for each other's performance. Where unskilled new workers were hired on a relative's recommendation, they were often taught by their relatives. This saved the management time and money. Sometimes kin were made to take responsibility for those new comers who did not conform to factory disciplines or violated some of the basic rule of workers' behaviours (Hareven 1982). The workers were afraid that if their recommendation proved bad or unsuitable, they would not have another chance to introduce a friend, and their reputation would be affected as well. This self-

disciplining within local and kin-ethnic circles heightened the efficiency of labour control, and to a certain extent enforced the submissiveness of the female workers.

Local and kin-ethnic differences among workers were further exaggerated, invented and manipulated to divide and rank the work force. A work hierarchy was developed along the lines of the imagined cultural traits of each individual. Mr Chou, the Director, said that in ten years work experience in Shenzhen, he had developed a particular idea about each kin-ethnic and local group. He believed that different groups had different kind of personalities and possessed different natural work capacities, suiting them different kind of jobs. His imagination, or invention, of their peculiarities shaped the hierarchy of the labour force inside the factory. He saw the Chaozhou *mei* as submissive, attentive but clever, and thus suitable for accounting and personnel. The Hakka *mei* were shy, reticent but industrious girls, so after training they were fit for mid-level management such as foreperson or line leader. They were good listeners and good followers, so once given a chance you could rely on them. Chou said the Hakka girls were often viewed as the second best to the Cantonese, and other employers in Shenzhen liked to appoint Cantonese rather than Hakkas as supervisors. But he regarded Hakkas as better than Cantonese, because the Cantonese had more choices of upward mobility and were not as loyal as Hakkas. Those *waixingmei*, girls from foreign provinces outside Guangdong, were eager to show off their capabilities. Chou said they were oppressed by the Guangdong people. Local government and local people discriminated against them in job seeking, job mobility and the right of residence. Thus in the opinion of management, some of them were good and some bad. Chou thought the Hubei *mei* were better than the Hunan *mei*, and the Hunan *mei* better than Sichuan *mei*, since the poorer the region, the harder working the workers. Hubei *mei* were considered as good operatives, more dexterous and more willing to toil hard. They had less bargaining power, especially when they were only a small group in the workplace.

Table 4 Imagined localistic and kin-ethnic peculiarities and Job hierarchization in the Meteor

Localistic and kin-ethnic origin	Imagined Character	Job Position
Cantonese	capable, astute, sociable	secretary, supervisor
Chaozhou <i>ren</i>	submissive, attentive, clever	accountant, clerk
Hakka	shy, reticent, industrious, reliable	foreperson, line leader
Hubei <i>ren</i> , Guangxi <i>ren</i> Guizhou <i>ren</i>	timid, alert, dexterous, submissive	quality controller, operator
Hunnan <i>ren</i> Sichuan <i>ren</i>	talkative, confident, hardworking	operator, handyperson, maid

Thus, in the Meteor, different local and kin-ethnic circles were allocated to different positions by such stereotypical perception. The personnel department was occupied by Cantonese and Chaozhou secretaries, accountants and clerks. The forepersons and lineleaders were often chosen from the Chaozhou or Hakkas, while the operators were full of provincial outsiders. The job allocation was full of ethnic bias and discrimination, especially towards those provincial outsiders. No doubt there were heterogeneous views towards local and kin-ethnic peculiarities among different employers in Shenzhen, and it is always dangerous to draw any generalization. But the study in the Meteor told a valuable story; how the local and kin-ethnic cultural traits were imagined, articulated and then lived out in a specific workplace had a great impact on the job positions and job mobility of workers.

The manipulation of kin-ethnic groups was further tangled by the production machine's use of them against each other to prevent labour resistance. Mr Wu, the Production Manager, said though local groups seemed to dominate in certain positions, he would not let them totally control any part of the work processes. On the lines, local groups placed on the same line were easier to control and train, but he would insert somebody from another group as a counter weight. Wu said he did not trust these groups. They had so many tricks and they could resist at any time by

collective illness and slowdown. In Line B, where I worked, there were twenty-two workers; among them, eight Chaozhou *ren*, five Hakka, three Sichuan *ren*, three Hunan *ren* and one Guizhou *ren*. Our lineleader, Bai-lan was a Chaozhou *ren*. Coincidentally, I was a Chaozhou *ren* too. Bai-lan tried to keep a balance among each group and rarely showed preferences to any particular group, but in times of difficulty or rush orders, she still needed to rely on her own locals, the Chaozhou *mei*, to help her. On usual occasions and daily conversations, Cantonese and Mandarin were the two dialects most often used among our line and in the whole workplace as *official* languages. But it was easily noticed that when Bai-lan asked help from her locals, she would turn to the Chaozhou dialect. Distrust among groups was serious. Communication was not only blocked by different dialects, but also the constructed bias and discrimination from the production machine. A divided work force was created as local and kin-ethnic relations were mapped out to shape the job hierarchization and facilitate the labour control.

Daily Prejudice and Accommodation

As we have shown, individuals entering the factory were pre-inscribed with a localistic or ethnic identity, then a set of invented cultural traits and a pre-determined work capability. Cultural traits were manipulated and mixed up with economic interests, and so individual workers were snared into a hierarchy and then a conflict among themselves. Privileged groups such as Cantonese and Chaozhou *ren* self-internalized themselves by mirroring a model image and living up to that invention. The abject groups, especially the *waixing ren*, resisted the derogatory images in either positive or negative ways. I had no moral judgment here. Positive ways mean that the workers tried hard to change their abject image by sticking to the capitalist work ethics, working hard to show their industriousness and looking for chances to show their capabilities. Negative ways mean that the workers simply followed the abject construction and acted according to it. Everyday life tactics again were fluid and strategic, and in different occasions individuals would react differently. The following is a part of my field notes recording a complaint by a *Sichuan* worker:

It's about 11 PM. I've finished taking a bath and looked around to join in some women's chat before going to bed. I passed Li Ting's room, noticing she was angry with her room mate Yue, a Cantonese girl. On fire, Li Ting shouted,

"Don't think yourself extraordinary as a Cantonese! Always you bully people. Always you bully people."

Yue didn't argue back but ran away to the other room. I calmed down Li Ting and asked her what happened. She said, still angry,

"This woman always runs wild and does whatever she wants to do. Never considers others and looks down on people. I can no longer stand up her. She is a Cantonese, she thinks she is big. She broke my bowl, and never intended to buy me to replace it. Instead she said my stuff blocked her way.... She never cleans the room but always criticizes others for making the room dirty and always thinks that *waixing ren* are much dirtier than any other species. ..."

Different local or ethnic groups in the workplace seldom talked to each other, let alone made friends across their boundaries. Distrust was worsened by lack of spare time to communicate with each other. Daily conflicts escalated due to tight space and rush time and space. What's worse, mutual creation of negative images toward each other further damaged the possibility of friendship or sisterhood. In the eyes of Cantonese or Chaozhou groups, *waixing mei* were often portrayed as uncivilized persons, much lazier and dirtier. *Waixing mei*, who though poorer were often better educated than the Guangdong people, viewed the Cantonese as rude, proud, astute, and never to be trusted. "These are the people who tread on my feet and remind me daily that I am a lesser human," was the common feeling of *waixing mei* towards Cantonese. At work, *waixing mei* were discriminated against and allocated work at the bottom of the job hierarchy. In daily life they were excluded and bullied. Mutual exclusion, based on a construal of localistic and ethnic elements into a "personhood", was arbitrary and no doubt violent.

Nevertheless, the more mutual exclusion in the workplace, the more factory daughters needed to develop informal ties and forms of strategies to cope with the everyday life pressures. These ties of assistance and resistance in the workplace were tied into local and kin-ethnic relations. Locality and ethnicity can be manipulated for recruiting laborers and controlling the work force. But on the other hand, it also provides an arena for bloc formation in the workplace. By placing their own kin members in the same work division or same assembling line, the women could exert some control on the work process, though with strict limitations. The line leaders in the Meteor would place their own kin members on their line so as to extend the influence over the labour process, while the forepersons would train their relatives as the line leaders to facilitate control and accumulate power to fight over the speed and the rates of pay. For the line girls, having their kin or locals on the supervisory positions was the only possible way to guarantee their job security. More kin or locals in the workplace also helped one get a "good job". In times of sickness and absence, the kin or locals would help to finish the remaining work so the woman would not be criticized. Factory rules stated clearly that nobody could help others to punch the time card, but helping kin to punch the time card was common. Women continued to protect their family members or co-villagers even by confronting the rules.

Language and Identity: Cantonization of the Workplace

The social uses of language owe their specifically social value to the fact that they tend to be organized in systems of differences which reproduce, in the symbolic order of differential deviations, the system of social differences.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*

The struggle over regional (rural or urban), local or ethnic identities leads us finally to the investigation of struggle over languages, specifically the politics of

dialects in the workplace. Language is a system of differences³, produced and reproduced in a spider web of social differences, hierarchies and distinctions which construe the social reality. Struggle over legitimate language is highly political, as Bourdieu said, as it brings together the struggle over identity, status and power (1991:52-54). The politics of identity is enmeshed in a politics of language. It matters what dialect one speaks and what accent one holds. A hierarchy of dialects in the workplace was violently deployed in a war linked to the struggle over work position, resources and power.

The war of language in the workplace was launched in different directions, aimed at different goals. First, it was the rivalry between Mandarin and Cantonese. Mandarin was the official language in China, and politically superior. But it has lost its legitimacy to Cantonese, which has emerged as the victorious language not only in one Shenzhen workplace but in the whole of South China. The subordination of the national official language, Mandarin, to a local dialect, Cantonese, discloses that the importance of state power in regulating social life has given way to market forces in contemporary China. The war between the two languages does not merely reflect the intense combat between the state and the market machines in regulating social life, but makes it and shapes it. In the workplace Mandarin is still commonly used, but no longer endowed with power, superiority or a hegemonic position. Cantonese, on the other hand, has emerged as a commercial language versus the political language, and has got the upper hand in shaping the workplace hierarchy. The upper management were Hong Kong people, while the middle management were mostly urban Cantonese. The managerial language, therefore, was Cantonese. Managerial meetings, orders passed from a higher level to a lower level, and daily encounters among managers, supervisors, forepersons and line leaders were conducted mainly in Cantonese. Command of Cantonese then became a must for climbing the hierarchical ladder. One got a better chance of promotion not only because one could have a better understanding with the superiors, but also possessed the same habitus, the

³ I will not discuss Saussurian perspective to view language as an internal linguistic structure based on a system of difference here. But rather follow Bourdieu's line to take the difference solely as social.

same expressive style and was assimilated into the same managerial culture. Mr. Chou, the director and the four Hong Kong managers never uttered a word in Mandarin. Even when they knew the other person had poor Cantonese, they still insisted on talking in Cantonese. For them Cantonese was a cultural capital. It was a symbol of superior status and identity, helping them to exercise their authority more effectively. Language power was not invisible nor silently exerted on individuals, but rather explicitly demonstrated. Subordinates who were not native speakers, but could speak Cantonese fluently were appreciated and got more chance of promotion. Those who did not know Cantonese had to bear their own cost in misunderstanding or miscommunicating with the superiors or others. Anxiety was created among the non-Cantonese speakers. If one did not want to remain at the bottom of the work hierarchy, one was self-induced to learn Cantonese, or at least to understand enough to survive in the workplace.

Though there was a landslide to the commercial language, Cantonese, defiance and transgression happened from time and time. Tensions were particularly acute when a Mandarin speaker in a high position in the workplace came into contact with a Cantonese. Notable cases could be found in communications between the Engineering Department and the Production Department. The staff in the Production Department, both native speakers and outsiders, were totally assimilated to Cantonese. The engineers and technicians in the Engineering Department were mainly university graduates from Northern cities and showed a rather unyielding attitude to Cantonese. Accurate Mandarin, with Beijing toning, was still an emblem of their credentials, status and self-dignity. These young male professionals persisted in using Mandarin, even though they knew Cantonese and in fact all of them could understand Cantonese. Interesting encounters were found when the engineers spoke to the staff in Production Department. On the one side, one spoke in Mandarin, consciously maintaining the superiority of the national language drawn from its political capital. On the other side, one kept talking in Cantonese in the whole conversation, showing the victory of Cantonese as the only *official* language in the workplace and the industrial world. Both sides understood each other well and neither was willing to give in.

Communication on the lines was more complicated, though the tensions were less acute. When the line leaders reported to the forepersons or supervisors, they usually spoke in Cantonese. But when they talked to the line girls, they were bilingual and preferred Mandarin when they spoke to *waixing* workers. Most of the lineleaders were not native speakers of Cantonese; some were Chaozhou, some Hakka. For them both Mandarin and Cantonese were foreign languages and they simply used them in appropriate situations. The leader of Line D, San was a Hunan *ren*: She seldom spoke in Cantonese on the line or to other line leaders. As a tough and capable figure in the workplace, she was promoted to the position not because she could assimilate herself to the managerial culture nor because of any particular relationship with the upper management, but solely because of her work capability and her rigid discipline. She was the one of the most disliked people in the workplace. She was never soft to the line girls and often accused them loudly in Mandarin. The line girls, particularly the Cantonese workers, often made fun of her. The Cantonese mimicked her Mandarin speech and tones to depreciate her status and authority by showing unmanagerial language.

Intrigued by her persistence in talking Mandarin, one day I asked her, “San, why do you always speak in Mandarin? You know Cantonese, don’t you?”

She replied, “I can’t help but speak Mandarin. I don’t know why. I knew Cantonese after I worked a year in Shenzhen. But I don’t want to speak in Cantonese unless I am forced to. Probably I don’t like the Cantonese. They are always too proud; they think they are rich, so everyone should use their dialect.”

But San was idiosyncratic; it was an exceptional case of resistance to the dominant language. The majority in the workplace were busy at, and induced to, the play of language politics.

The second dimension of the war was the internal conflicts in the dialect Cantonese itself. The language machine was not satisfied at creating a hierarchy simply based on the differentiation between Mandarin and Cantonese, but a more delicate *différance* built up on internal divisions within Cantonese itself. Cantonese in the workplace was further divided into different styles and accents, such as Hong Kong Cantonese, Guangzhou Cantonese, Hakka Cantonese (rural Cantonese) and Guangxi Cantonese. Accents were the embodied stigmata of cultural capital,

inscribed with a hierarchical access not only to covert power, but also to institutionalized overt power. The more one could mimic Hong Kong Cantonese and Guangzhou Cantonese, the more one was granted with status and authority in the workplace. It was clearly noticed that the higher the managerial hierarchy, the more one was inclined to speak Hong Kong or Guangzhou Cantonese. The assistant managers and the supervisors could command fluent Hong Kong Cantonese because they were the ones who often contacted the four Hong Kong managers, and most of them were native Guangzhou Cantonese themselves. The forepersons and line leaders learnt Guangzhou Cantonese as well since they often communicated with their Cantonese superiors. If one stuck to one's rural Cantonese and didn't make an effort to change the accent, then one might be superior to the Mandarin or other dialect speakers, but one was still at the bottom of the internal hierarchy.

Yi-ping, a Guangdong Hakka, was the receptionist and phone operator when I started to work at the Meteor. As a friendly, young and pretty girl, she was promoted from the line to the counter. But within her one-month probation period she was moved back to the line again. "She can never pronounce Lin and Ling accurately, nor can she make a distinction. She always connects the phone line to the wrong person," Ling, the secretary in the general office grumbled to me angrily as I read Company documents there. "She is a Hakka from the rural area. She can't speak Cantonese properly. You know, that is Hakka Cantonese. ... What's more, her sensibility to spontaneous events is low and she doesn't know how to handle unwelcome phone and calls and people...." Ling continued talking to me, showing her proper and beautiful Hong Kong Cantonese, despite the fact that she was a Chaozhou *ren*.

The sense of superiority was nurtured implicitly by juxtaposing two accents of Cantonese. One was Hong Kong Cantonese, distinct, elegant and authoritarian. One was Hakka Cantonese, rustic, low-ranked and devalued. Different accents of Cantonese prescribed persons with different cultural capital, and thus affected their bargaining power to fight for a higher work position and negotiate a new identity.

One night I found Yi-ping in the dormitory, listening to Hong Kong Cantonese popular songs. She was still hurt, and planned to leave for home: "I don't want to work here, they made me feel inferior. If they don't give me a chance, I will go elsewhere."

Knowing that her Hakka Cantonese accent counted against her, Yi-ping tried hard to change herself. She found every chance to talk to me, hoping that I could inculcate into her a more urbane and highly valued Cantonese. Listening to Cantonese songs was another favourite way to learn Cantonese, and she often sang loudly and openly.

Self-technologizing was complete when one dreamed, desired and determined to live up to the hegemonic mode of life; to acquire a modern identity as a *dagongmei*, and to command a superior dialect of Cantonese. To become a *dagongmei*, one had to change not only the “bad” *habitus* of one’s life style, but also one’s daily dialect. The cost of symbolic power was great; you had no choice but to scramble for it. Language was, as Nietzsche said, a hidden philosophical mythology. But it was also, as Bourdieu said, a hidden political mythology prophesying, coding and legitimating a system of social differences (Bourdieu 1991). The play of *différance* was political. The rural life was imagined as an alterity in order to be depreciated. For a rural being to become an urban industrial subject, he or she had to be divided from the totality of her or his past life, *habitus*, disposition, speech act, accent and identity. The rural world had to be imagined as a deficient reality that could not give birth to complete human beings or modern subjects. First the capitalist machine invented the rural beings as incomplete, as “lacking”. Then the rural beings thought and saw themselves as such. Huck Gutman, in “Rousseau’s Confessions: A Technology of the Self” points out a double displacement: “deficient reality is transformed into the imaginary and the imaginary is superimposed upon the real in such fashion that the imaginary transforms, takes over, becomes, the real.”(1988:112) Deleuze and Guattari further illustrate this point and help us to conclude this chapter,

Capitalism institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities, thereby attempting, as best it can, to recode, to rechannel persons who have been defined in terms of abstract quantities. ...

The real is not impossible; it is simply more and more artificial.

(1984:34)

Feminine Bodies and Multiple Identities

Being 'male' or being 'female' emerges as a holistic unitary state under particular circumstances. In the one-is-many mode, each male or female form may be regarded as containing within it a suppressed composite identity; it is activated as androgyny transformed. In the dual mode, a male or female can only encounter its opposite if it has already discarded the reasons for its own internal differentiation: thus a dividual androgyne is rendered an individual in relation to a counterpart individual. An internal duality is externalized or elicited in the presence of a partner: what was 'half' a person becomes 'one' of a pair.

Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*

The "naming" of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, and an institutionalized performative that both creates and legislates reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies in accord with principles of sexual difference.

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*

Was Fat Guy a boy or a girl?

I was often teased by other women workers when Fat Guy held my hand as we walked together. "Like a real couple, or a pair of mandarin ducks" was the common response to our intimacy. The teasing would never happen when I went out with other women workers or even went to dine with a male worker. Fat Guy was a nickname given to Shu-tong, a girl of twenty-one, highlighting the male side of her appearance and her personality. With short hair, Fat Guy's round face had big eyes, a straight nose and a thick-lipped mouth. Stout, energetic, and talkative, Fat Guy was famous for her quick disposition and her courage in confronting the upper management on the shopfloor. In contrast to other girls' decorations on their beds, Fat Guy stuck on pictures of cars and planes instead of flowers, film stars and singers. She liked sporty wear. I was close to Fat Guy because we worked on the

same line on the shopfloor and because she was much more active than the others in making friends with me. We often walked together to the factory or back to the dormitory, and had meals together as well. Friendly gossiping about our relationship didn't irritate Fat Guy or me, and sometimes Fat Guy seemed to enjoy the joking that she could have me as a "wife".

In the end I was disturbed by the relationship not because I was no longer willing to be Fat Guy's "wife", but because Fat Guy's "perverted" sexual identity destroyed my ideal construct of *dagongmei*, an embodied identity of both class and gender. I have discussed *dagongmei* as a class identity in Chapter two. In this chapter I will begin teasing out the intricate processes of gendering on real lived bodies.

Nothing in writing this thesis has perplexed me as much as beginning this chapter on the sexual bodies of women workers. It should be an easy topic for me, with my training in feminist studies. But I hesitated a long time over how to begin. The topic, in fact, is very familiar for me, and *xingbie*, the sex/gender of one's identity was so "natural", sometimes fatally inborn and natural, for my shopfloor co-workers, that it seemed not only difficult but also bizarre to stir up questioning, to keep myself distant from familiarity and to try to theorize. One belief keeps me insisting on challenging the familiarity, the naturalness of sex: "nothing is natural except nature". The social order and the sexual order of the human world are never natural. The naturalness of these orders are the effects of power and the constructs of ideology. The deeper the power pervades, the truer the ideology creates, the more natural the order is and the harder it is to confront it.

From the Death of "Subject" to Subject Positions

The difficulty in discussing sex, body and identity is set forth in the challenges from postmodern studies in the last decade. Where is the start of my analysis? How to understand *dagongmei*, a sexual subject in general and Fat Guy, an individual with conflicting identities? Searching for an appropriate unit or departure for analysis is a distressing, if not a disruptive, problem. Concepts such as "identity", "subject", "gender", "sex" and "body" have become like phantoms floating in and out of my body/mind, and I cannot easily make up my mind which one is the best stepping

stone for my ethnographic analysis. Commitment to feminist studies in the past few years has broadened my academic interest, but causes trouble when I try to formulate an analysis now. The challenge from postmodernism has put feminist theory into serious trouble. Without great courage, no one dares to speak out, since any type of representation will be problematic and we can no longer easily find a proper place from which to speak. No voice can dream of escaping the attack of postmodernist questioning, certainly not my own work which is framed under the discipline of feminism. In this chapter, I strive to look for a proper unit of analysis, some appropriate conceptual tools and a less problematic speaking position, which hopefully may provide the epistemological grounding for my ethnographic study.

Feminism, specifically western feminism, posited as a politics of identity, has had its epistemological grounding destabilized by the claim of "the death of the subject" of postmodernism. Western feminism, as a political project rooted in the Enlightenment ideal of justice and equity, has built up its intelligibility on a universal subject. It upholds an essential difference in femininity, which becomes a contentious locus of critique. The dialogue between postmodernism and feminism will not be detailed here and the diversity of various postmodernism(s) are not my interest.¹ The questions here are: if the death of "subject" is real, can we speak of the category of woman, the presumed and pre-given subject of feminism? And even worse, will the category of gender, which was once a very powerful political and analytical tool, be useful anymore?

Here I am looking for a "postfeminist" position² and hold the view that the critique of an essential subject does not necessarily lead to a total abandonment of

¹ For details can refer to Linda Nicholson (1990) ed. *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York and London:Routledge; Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips (1992)eds. *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*. UK: Polity Press; Judith Butler and Joan Scott (1992) eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York and London: Routledge.

² A "postfeminist" perspective should be understood as aiming at "a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity appears to be necessary in order to formulate a representational

historical subjects. This construction must be put under the scrutiny of a Foucauldian critique. For Foucault, the subjects are themselves the effects of disciplinary actions, fully embedded in and produced by matrixes of power and discourse. And the task of a *feminist genealogy* is to question “woman” as the proper subject of feminism and to trace and reveal the political operations which produce and conceal what qualifies as the juridical subject of feminism (Butler 1990:5). Feminist schools which tend to see women as a coherent and unified identity and formulate universal experience of women’s oppression are undoubtedly problematic. Differences between women and differences within women render all attempts to articulate universal experiences from the standpoint of women self-defeating. Feminist anthropology helps to formulate a notion of “dividual” self and argued that non-western subjects are often divided, fragmented, fluid and multiple (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Moore 1994; Strathern 1988).

Can feminist politics theorize without resorting to an universalizing subject, or does it have to discard any commonalities between women? Can we still use the category “women” which is inherently fragmented and divided, and identities which are embodied as unstable and fluid? Judith Butler provides the following interpretation from a “postfeminist” view:

Identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary. This is not to say that the term ‘women’ ought not be used, or that we ought to announce the death of the category. On the contrary, if feminism presupposes that ‘women’ designates an undesignatable field of differences, one that cannot be totalized or summarized by a descriptive identity category, the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignifiability.

(1992:15-16)

Chantal Mouffe, from a similar stance, provides a clearer position within her framework of radical democratic politics. As she noted,

politics that might revive feminism on other grounds.” (Butler,

I will argue that, for those feminists who are committed to a radical democratic politics, the deconstruction of essential identities should be seen as the necessary condition for an adequate understanding of the variety of social relations where the principles of liberty and equality should apply. It is only when we discard the view of subject as an agent both rational and transparent to itself, and discard as well the supposed unity and homogeneity of the ensemble of its positions, that we are in the position to theorize the multiplicity of relations of subordination.... This does not mean, however, that we cannot retain notions like “working-class”, “men”, “women”, “blacks”, or other signifiers referring to collective subjects. However, once the existence of a common essence has been discarded, their status must be conceived in terms of what Wittgenstein designates as “family resemblances” and their unity must be seen as the result of the partial fixation of identities through the creation of nodal points.

(1992:371-3)

Subjects can be seen as the effects of power, and they are discursive constructs with their own possibilities, through a process of signification/resignification, differentiation and exclusion, and their own limitations in time and history. I would prefer to understand the subject of “subjects” as “subject positions”, whose emergence requires active political agency and articulation. Henrietta Moore helps to elucidate this point,

The basic premise of post-structuralist thinking on the subject is that discourses and discursive practices provide subject positions, and that individuals take up a variety of subject positions within different discourses.

(1994:55)

Thus post/feminism as radical politics is possible not through constructing an essential gender identity of "women", but by being grounded in various articulated subject positions and identities. The deconstruction of women as a coherent and unified identity will not put an end to feminist politics, but rather open up new spaces for more possibilities and alliances in specific historical situations and conjunctures.

Nevertheless, if gender identities are themselves fictive, articulated and constructed, what are their discursive limits, their materiality? This question moves me from the concern of "subject" and "identity" to "gender", "sex" and "body".

From Gender to Sex

If we are right in saying that gender identities are constructed through a process of signification, identification and exclusion of a human attribute, called "sex", then the question at issue is: what is sex? Or how can we understand the relationship between gender and sex?

The practice of feminist anthropology has no difficulty in exploring the difference between women in different cultures. For many anthropologists, gender is a very obvious social and cultural construct. But the problem is that the discipline too often plunges itself into a gender/sex distinction, viewing gender as belonging to culture and sex to nature. Sex is often seen as a natural, biological attribute from which gender builds upon its symbolic signification. The relationship between sex and gender is very much under-theorized in most work on the anthropology of gender (Moore 1994:12).

Binary categories such as culture/nature, public/private, mind/body and gender/sex have been seriously criticized in the more recent works of feminist anthropology (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Moore 1988, 1994; Strathern 1988). Various ethnographic studies on different societies show that differences of gender are not necessarily identified by the binary sexed bodies, but can be located in all bodies, and the bodies are not viewed as unified wholes, but as androgynous composites. The greatest contribution of these studies is the finding that there is no

one-to-one correspondence between sex, gender and sexual difference as is often understood in western discourse (Moore, 1994).

Ethnographic findings have contributed to challenging the gender/sex dichotomy of the western paradigm that tends to essentialize sex as a pre-given biological entity. We are then pushed to conceive of sex as culturally constructed, like gender. Sex, itself a gendered category, is produced as “pre-given” and “prediscursive” through the cultural construction designated by gender (Butler 1990:7). Sex is then the effect, but not the origin of the “true” claim of gender. Michel Foucault makes this clear in *The History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1):

the notion of “sex” made it possible to group together, in an artificial acts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, and omnipresent meaning: sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and a universal signified.

(1978:154)

In other words, sex is as fictive, articulatory and imaginary as gender. The category of “sex” is a discursive construct and its collusion with gender is coercive and compulsory. Judith Butler concludes,

The “naming” of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, and an institutionalized performative that both creates and legislates reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies in accord with principles of sexual difference.

(1990:115)

Some questions still remain: if sex is a cultural and discursive construct, itself a gendered category, should we retain the distinction between sex and gender? Can we distinguish sex from gender? Or does the concept of gender become redundant? For me, a feminist genealogy must not omit concepts such as gender or sex, but tear down their “true” claim as juridical operation, their coercive regulations in a matrix of power and discourse. If “gender” and “sex” are all historical constructs, what we

do is not to throw away either or both; to deconstruct their claims to truth is to open up possibilities for our struggles.

The last but not the least question is: what is the materiality of sex? Here we come to the subject of “body”.

From Sex to Body

The return to the body, to the embodiment of the subject, is seen as the most revolutionary project of recent feminist theorizing. It announces the death of an universal, transcendental subject, and rejects a pre-given sex as the most natural way for a human subject to acquire a gender identity. Adrienne Rich was almost the first one to articulate the term “female corporeality” and to posit the “importance of the body to the constitution of the subject” (Rich 1976). Rosi Braidotti was more eager to claim the project of repossessing the body. The recognition of the embodied nature of the subject, and sexual identities, in particular, was a timely project. She argued that the body cannot be reduced to the biological, nor can it be confined to social conditioning (Braidotti 1991:219). The body is not the essence, but the interface, the threshold, between the material and the symbolic, and one’s primary location in the world. She said,

In a new form of “corporeal materialism”, the body is seen as an inter-face, a threshold, a field of intersection of material and symbolic forces; ... The body is not an essence, and therefore not an anatomical destiny: it is one’s primary location in the world, one’s primary situation in reality. As a consequence, in the radical feminist philosophies of sexual difference, the strategy of repossessing the body aims at elaborating alternative forms of knowledge and representation of the subject. The embodied nature of subjectivity is posited so as to allow for the radical subversion of culture.

(1991:219)

The death of the “subject”, the rejection of a pre-given “sex”, leads us finally to the “body”. But is the “body” the final ground of any theory of a human subject?

Nobody knows. The body is surely not a pre-social entity, but should we stop here? Maybe the way is to find out how the discourse of sex is created and regulated through the body in specific histories. Our effort to know finally draws us to Foucault's knowledge of the body and power. Foucault's approach (1978, 1979) on the materiality of "sex" and its link to "body" within a matrix of bio-politics, is for me, the most concrete one. The claim that the body is not only the inscription of our history, which should no longer be neglected, but also the place of departure of a genealogy is appealing. Judith Butler warns us that the Foucauldian body may risk being trapped into a "pre-social" body because it is often taken as the origin on which our culture and history are built (Butler 1990, 1993). However, we need to land somewhere to start our discourse. What's more, the distancing of gender from sex and sex from body is an act of political engagement and political theorizing. If we want to distance the body from "somewhere", it should be a political action, rather than an abstract epistemological inquiry that leads us nowhere. The body is neither pre-social, nor social, neither pre-given, nor determined. It is the interface where power can be pervasive and productive, where various hegemonic discourses can be most "naturally" legitimated.

For Foucault, the body is "sexed" within a discourse of sex to produce a monotonous modality of sexuality, which is itself an effect of a historically specific organization of power, discourses and pleasures (Foucault 1978). It is not because we have a body, that we have a sex, but rather we have a particular notion of sex, so we have a certain type of body. The modality of body is of course the effect, but not the origin of the sex, which is constructed in a specific set of social regulations and power relations. Foucault said,

the notion of sex brought about a fundamental reversal; it makes it possible to invert the representation of the relationships of power of sexuality, causing the latter to appear, *not in its essential and positive relation to power*, but as being rooted in a specific and irreducible urgency which power tries as best it can to dominate.

(1978:154)

Hence, as Judith Butler has interpreted it, “sex” not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce the bodies it controls (1993:1). Thus, we not only need a history of sex, but a history of the body as well. The project of studying the body is first brought out in the essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, where Foucault places the body as the starting point of the “effective history”, genealogy. The importance of a genealogy is to expose how the body is inscribed by history and how the process of history twists, shapes and destroys the body. The whole process is doubtless arbitrary, violent and imbued with a net of warring forces. This kind of knowledge of the body, called the *political technology of the body* by Foucault, is what he tried to work out in *Discipline and Punish* and the *History of Sexuality*.

In short, it is this political technology of the body, sometimes called political anatomy, that I find provides the most insight for my own ethnography in the workplace. But it is not be the undifferentiated human body that interests me but a sexed female body. The bio-power of the factory machine is not only interested in modeling a general body, but a particular sexed body, a feminine body to fit the factory discipline. While Foucault dealt with the body and sexuality, he has been criticized for not paying enough attention to the gendered nature of disciplinary techniques on the body (McNay, 1992), or to a sexually differentiated body which is necessary for certain types of mechanisms or apparatuses. Thus, in this chapter, I will try to link up the process of politically technologizing the body, with the process of registering a feminine identity (gendering). I will look into language, local everyday practices, social discourse and institutionalized regulations. Particular attention will be drawn to the conflict embedded in the process of gendering, and the perversity, but not the homogeneity, of workings on bodies, which are conceived not as passive or docile, but living and resistant.

The whole nation is in a fever of making money.

The second theme of the epoch is: Women. (Women permanently cannot catch the first theme; this is the pity of sex!)

.....

The interest in women by the society may be due to the fact that half of the great job of "the primitive accumulation of capital" is shared by women: prostitution. The consumption of the female produces a greater stimulus to production and circulation than male consumption .

In a Chinese popular novel (1995), *Tragedy of Sexes*

It is high time to turn to the issues of sex and sexualizing the subjects in contemporary China. Any visitor to China in recent years will not be surprised by the proliferation of sex talk, discourses and consumerized images in Chinese popular cultures (Evans 1997). Signs of sex are everywhere, and we seem invited to a Baudrillardian world where female bodies are commodified and fetishized to such an extent that only a mass grave of signs are glorified (Baudrillard 1993). Nudes, erotica and all kinds of sexy, seduced female bodies, both western and Chinese, are found in magazines, posters, newspapers, the covers of novels, calendars and even serious academic books and periodicals. On every street corner advertisements on the lamp posts, tell the passer-by that some families have secret, local knowledge of an operation to heal some sexual diseases. Stories of sex and violence, uncontrollable sex drives and sex outside marriage are extraordinarily articulated in novels, video shows, TV programs and films. Painting, visual arts, and avante guard dance performances all focus on the theme of "feminine body". Elisabeth Croll, after her numerous field trips to China in the past ten years, concludes:

The Reform period is thus marked by a new interest in the image and presentation of the feminine, focusing first on physical appearance and adornment. This is not surprising given that one of the most important characteristics distinguishing reform from revolution is the new interest in

consumption, in consumer goods and in their style, colour, material and brand name, all of which have generated a new phenomenon - consumer desire. the new interest in commodities and lifestyles has brought about a new relation between people and things, so that persons have become classified not so much by their class background or “work” or occupation as previously, as by the possession of objects or their evaluation, so that identity has become associated with lifestyle rather than class label.

(1995:151)

The all-pervasive interest in female bodies in Reform China is guided by consumer desires, whose gazes are not only sexy, but sexualized. The consumption culture dominant in contemporary China is extraordinarily marked by its sexual appetites, especially for female bodies. Shenzhen night life – night clubs, karaoke, wine bars and hair salons – flourishes more than Hong Kong, since most of the manufacturing industries moved there in the mid 1980s. Night life around these places is closely related to various sorts of sexual or pornographic activities. My co-workers in the Meteor warned me not to go to a hair salon without careful selection. The girls who worked in hair salons dressed in trendy fashions and were easily tempted to sell their bodies. Sometimes they earned double or triple the money factory girls made. But what puzzled me was: where should I go? There were more than ten hair salons near the factory. Most of them served local citizens or male customers, who were supposedly richer. If the density of hair salons per person was understood solely in term of hair services, it was unreasonably high in Shenzhen.

Hotels, especially small ones, were places for exchanging “illicit” sex. Young and beautiful girls from the North (the place they were from was highly emphasized), were told to wait in hotels and search for men alone. The phone would ring in the late night and ask you for “lonely heart” services. *Bei-mei*, the girl of the North, was a term with multifaceted and ambivalent meanings. *Bei-mei* was younger, fresher, more lush and virginal, so that they were more sexually aroused and desired. But these “good qualities” did not grant them higher pay than the *ben-di-mei*, local girls. They were cheaper even when they provided better services. In the process of sex

trading, in the particular act of prostitution, the regional disparity between the North and the South was again produced and reproduced. Sex was not only inscribed with inequality between male and female, but marked with economic discrimination between the North and the South as well. Prostitutes were themselves hierarchically differentiated. Those who came from richer areas were worth much more those from poorer areas. Time after time the central government dictated anti-porn movements. But the local state was far more tolerance, since they saw the sex industry was closely linked to local economic development. One local cadre in the town told me, "No sex, no video shows, no clubs, no hair salons, no restaurants, no hotels, no money!" Sex linked up the whole chain of economic activities, just as corruption conjured up political life in China. No sex, no money.

Does capital have a sex?

These "sexy" scenes in open-door China make me ask: Does capital have a sex? Or simply, does capital need sex? It seems clear that where capital goes there is a proliferation of sex trade and sex discourses. Much research on women and work shows that the coming of multinational capital and the industrialization of developing countries leads to the disintegration of traditional morality and the growth of a porno culture (Ong 1987; Truong 1990).

How are we going to understand this "sex boom" in Deng's China? Is sex, as Jean Baudrillard says, simply dictated by the *phallus* exchange logic and design(at)ed nothing, and all female bodies are nothing but phallus simulacra? (Baudrillard 1993) On looking at sexual issues in China, I find myself totally at sea. I am more and more convinced that we are not living in one world, but many worlds at the same time. State socialism? Market socialism? Market capitalism? Or State capitalism? Perverted or hybrid forms of both or more? What are their relations to sex? How does sex as a political category, as Monique Wittig and Michel Foucault insisted, function in these meta-systems? Or should sex be taken as an economic-symbolic category rather than anything else? In contemporary China intangible discourses on sex, be they official, civil or foreign, be they at odds with one another, fight hard to grasp and produce the reality.

First, civil and popular discourses put forward a repression thesis. Civil discourses from all ranks of society in literary works, popular stories and magazines, point to the fact that the state socialist regime was a machine that repressed sex and sexualizing identities. Nothing is better than a novel for exploring this theme. Zhang Xianliang, a male novelist, wrote a novel called *Half of Man Is Woman*. It was published in 1985³, and triggered off a hot debate on politics and sex in China. The story was stirring in the way that it told us how a male political prisoner lived through his sexual drives and fantasies during his imprisonment during the anti-right campaign in the late 1950s and the Cultural Revolution in the mid 1960s. The writer directly condemned the political machine for its inhuman suppression and destruction of sexual life and sexual potency. The story reached its peak when the male protagonist, after much political suffering and sexual repression found himself impotent on the night of his marriage. The novel also accused the political machine of neutralizing sexed subjects and turning all gender identities into only one political subject: *tongzhi*, the comrade⁴. The outcry against the state regulation of sex was posited as a direct act of resistance to the dehumanization of “human nature” by the political machine. The state machine, with its emerging crisis of legitimacy after Mao’s death and the end of Cultural Revolution, was no longer justified in regulating sexual life and gender subjectivities – or the entire life of society, for that matter. But sex and gender identities were by no means central to social life. The emergence of the novel in 1986 was thus a prologue to the “hot wind” of sexual liberation and the *hidden agenda* of social change in China. Repression invited liberation. Nothing special. What surprised us was that a transsexual subject, which Jean Baudrillard said would be found in late capitalist societies, emerged instead in state socialist societies

³ The English version of *Half of Man Is Woman*, translated by Martha Avery, was published by W. W. Norton in New York in 1986.

⁴ The problematics of the story on gender and gender subjectivities were discussed Zhong Xueping, 1994, “Male Suffering and Male Desire: The Politics of Reading *Half of Man Is Woman*” in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*. Eds. Gilmartin, Christina, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel and Tyrene White. Harvard University Press.

at a much earlier time, not through the political economy of signs, but through the political economy of politics.

Second, official discourses still put forward at a bourgeois disease thesis. As Harriet Evans says, the official discourses on sexual issues in the contemporary period are largely a response to the changing popular beliefs and practices. Though no longer effective, the state has never lost its interest in regulating individual sexual conduct and marital behaviour (Evans 1992, 1997). She puts it,

However, the apparent autonomy of popular practices, and the emergence of new spaces facilitating the elaboration of discourses on sexuality removed from the controlling arm of state power have not eclipsed state interests in defining appropriate marital and sexual behaviour. For alongside the abundance of advice and information about sex-related matters, and despite the changes of modality of the official discourse of sexuality, it is clear that much of it is, as in the 1950s, oriented towards channeling individual, and particularly female, behaviour in the service of social and moral order.

(1997:156)

The “sex boom” of the last decade was still seen as an attack on Chinese society by the corruption and disease of bourgeois values, after China opened its door to western capital. The worn-out ideological machine from time to time repeated the rote formula of the revolutionary period: sex was dangerous to the rising proletariat; indulgence in sexual life was bourgeois. It was a phenomenon of moral decay. The Chinese revolution should keep its purity by distancing itself from corroded western values. But this time the ideological machine was a little bit depressing. Its failure to safeguard its virginity was all too plain. After three decades of closure, the elderly revolutionary leaders are leading the country to copulate with the western world and pollute themselves. What can they say?

The productivist logic of Marxism may perhaps help us to understand the attitudes of the state socialist machine towards sex and sexualizing subjects. Engels in “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State” (1884) stated clearly

that sexual exploitation was subordinate to class exploitation. Therefore the emancipation of women into the production field in a classless society would dissolve the inequality between two sexes. Production would clear the ties of economic dependence of female on male and raise female status. So what was important for human emancipation in a socialist utopia was actually production and technology. Who was going to lead the socialist revolution and the production revolution? In the orthodox Marxist terminology, it was the proletariat. But in the eyes of Mao, in the particular Chinese circumstances, the revolutionary agents of independence and liberation were most unlikely to be proletarian, but mainly peasants. It was first and foremost a nationalist struggle, and then a class struggle. After the Liberation in 1949, the owner of the country was the proletariat, or more accurately the *producer*. To build a new China, to catch up with the western "paper tigers", the state machine emphasized production more than anything else. All countrymen were mobilized and planned to participate in the socialist construction. Rapid collectivization of the urban and the rural societies aimed at rapid accumulation and production. What the machine needed then was not sexual subjects as men and women, nor the sexual division of labour that mattered so much in capitalist societies, but *tongzhi*, a unified subject embodied with the "same will" as the state socialist production. No class, no gender. They were all redundant. What's more, the myth of creating a transsexual subject - *tongzhi* lay not only at a productivist logic of the state machine, but in an absolutely pure logic of production without consumption. There was actually nothing called consumption, but only allocation in Mao's China; food and all daily necessities were strictly rationed, calculated and distributed to each person and each household. The motivation of production was not consumption or "market will" as in capitalist societies, but solely political will. An absolute transcendent political will was a complete narcissistic machine; it needed no other but only its own. There was no mirror for sex. If sex emerged, it could only be as diseases that would erode the virginity of the completely narcissistic machine. Can we then say that the "sex boom" foretells the breakdown of the narcissistic machine?

Third, foreign oriental discourses put forward a petty capitalism thesis. For example, we find an American expert, Hill Gates, trying to give us an explanation of

the commoditization of women in contemporary China. She imagines a specific Chinese culture and a kinship and gender system that was *hyper-stable* for more than one thousand years. Then all economic activities, including the transnational capital pouring into Deng's China, are forced to revolve around the kinship and gender system. Hill Gates tells us,

The commoditization of people must be seen as a persistent and continuously reproduced element of Chinese culture..... I see as motivated much more by a well-established indigenous petty capitalism than by the effects of an exogenous capitalism.

(1996b:8)

Women trafficking in China, widely reported in the Chinese press since the late 1980s, attracted domestic as well as international attention. Women were found sold to be brides, prostitutes and labourers in various provinces in the last decade. What is to blame? What causes the commoditization of the female bodies? Here our American expert treated us as fated by the "dangerous persistence of the extraordinary strength of patriarchy". Of course, in Chinese style even "Taiping rebels, May Fourth schoolgirls, half a century of Marxism - Leninism - Mao Zedong - thought, and the formidable counter examples of their own mothers have had little influence on the profound sexism of most Chinese." (1996a:9) She said it was due to the patriarchal Chinese kinship and gender system that motivated patrilineal households to buy women as wives and labourers. Economic life centered on the patriarchal family turned women into commodities that could be bought and sold. So it was not capital, nor poverty or surplus population, but the Chinese family on their own who trampled on their daughters. Gates' portrait of Chinese society seems to mirror Lévi-Strauss's Savage societies, in which woman, as an item of exchange, was traded to consolidate the bonds and ties of the kinship groups controlled by men (Strauss 1969). Chinese history, always exotically imagined, was thus never changing; the Chinese males could not help but extremely sexist and the Chinese females powerless marionettes, their fate dictated by the long-lived Chinese kinship and gender system. The subjects, the historical agents with lived experiences, never existed in Gates world views,

which is completely at odds with my understanding of the women workers in China's workplace.

Imagining Dagongmei

Dagongmei is a hegemonic identity embodied with changing class and sexual relations in contemporary China. As I have mentioned in Chapter V, it is a specific cultural artifact, produced at the particular moment when international capital came to China in the post-Mao period. *Dagongmei* is a condensed identity; it unfolds the full story of how a collective state economy was opened to a privileged world economy and how capitalist practices in China depended entirely on the regulation of class and gender relations. I have discussed class in chapter two. Here I will focus on the sexual orientation it embeds, holds and grants. My argument here is that capitalist practices, as practices of hierarchy and difference, require many divisions of the society; so sexual difference was a major regulatory project. *Dagongmei*, as a term contrasted to *gongren* (a non-sexualized subject in Mao's era), entails sexualization within industrial work. *Mei*, as I said before, means the female, the girl and the sister. Feminization of the labour use in Shenzhen and other economic developing zones illustrates clearly that the basic industrial labourers, especially cheap and unskilled workers, capital needs are female workers. Men, *dagongzai*, are not excluded, of course. But once they are needed, they are given different positions, as we will see later in the sexual division of labour in the workplace. Labour, thus, no longer taken as an unsexed subject, is a sexed subject exhibiting itself more as a sexual being than a class being in contemporary China. Sexualizing the labouring bodies is the project of capital, rather than the project of state. We can see this if we compare the two social subjects: *gongren* in Mao's period and *dagongmei/zai* in the contemporary period. For *gongren*, sexual difference was disguised and made redundant in socialist labour relations. Women were introduced into the "world of men", be it light industries, heavy or military industries. The system said that women upheld half the sky in socialist China, and could do whatever men do. In the official regulatory practices sexual difference was diluted and made meaningless through propaganda and institutionalized arrangements. With the general disillusion with socialist

practices, the subject *gongren* was gone, or became an out-dated mode of everyday discourse. *Dagongmei/zai* is a newly coined term, especially popular in South China and economic developing zones in the North. It exhibits its sexual orientation to the body of labour at first glance. The natural, disembodied world of industrial labour was set on the process of sexualizing; its sex was not to be veiled, but to be regulated and named.

In the workplace, it is not difficult to find that the regulation of a sexed body is now fundamental to the control of labour. Given that Meteor was a world of young girls who dominated in almost all the seats of the assembly operation, it was always a headache for the upper management, the foremen, and the line leaders, often male, to manage over their labour. None of the foremen, or line leaders, male or female, would take the *dagongmei* as pre-given submissive female bodies waiting for them to regulate at their own will. (Any foreman I talked to would complain about the girls' discipline. Management needed to articulate, perform and repeat everyday the submissiveness of women, often with an imaginary feminine figure pinned on the real working bodies. Here are records of daily language from the management used to invoke sexualized bodies in order to facilitate labour control:

Shun (foreman of Line C): Mei, you're a girl, how can you speak to me like this? Didn't your parents teach you how to be a woman? Do you speak to your father like this?

Hong (assistant manager): Rough voice, rough *qi* (energy), don't you want to get married and get out? Behave yourself when you're still a young girl.

Li (foreman of Line A): Girl, have you got ears? You never do exactly what I tell you to do. Where is your heart? Gone with your lover in the village?

He-chuan (foreman of Line B): Mei, don't you know you're a girl? You should treat the work more tenderly. How many times do I have to remind you?

He-chuan (foreman of Line B): Look at yourself, like a *nanren po* (a butch girl). Can't you learn to be like a woman?

Such remarks were often heard in the workplace, particularly when the workers' discipline had to be tightened. What interests us is that the workers were far more often taken as sexual subjects than as labouring subjects. The identity as a labourer was less important than as a female in the eyes of management. The regulation of gender was invoked when labour control was at stake. The workers were often reminded of their femaleness- "you are a girl". It was inscribed and coded onto the working bodies. One was not merely a worker, but more important to one's life, a girl, and a woman in the future. As a girl in the process of becoming a woman, one should behave as the culture required: submissive, obedient, industrious, tender and so on. The underlying implications were: "You are a girl, you should be obedient enough to do what the management tell you to do. You are a girl, you should not be defiant to your superior by speaking in loud voice. You are a girl, you are going to marry someone, serve someone, so you better train yourself to behave properly. You are a girl, you should take care of the job you do as you one day will take care of your family. As a girl you are going to be a woman, a wife and a mother of men. ..."

The inscription of the feminine attributes to a girl, the regulation of a girl's behavior, of course did not concern her future life in general. Rather, her future life as a wife and as a mother was deployed for the present technologizing of bodies as docile labour.

But what is interesting is that maleness was posited at the same time as the degrading opposite, a warning to the girls' behaviour: "You should not be like a boy, a boy is lazy and troublesome. You should not be like a boy, a boy is careless and without tenderness. You should not be like a boy, you can't get married." Maleness was articulated as an oppositional and abject sexual attribute that a girl should not have, if she wanted to become a good female and thus a good worker. Judith Butler was right to say that "the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abject outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation."(1993:3)

Despite the constant implication that maleness was supposedly contradictory to their self-esteem and self-identity, it always seemed that those who possessed the power to speak were free of gender constraint. So often when He-chuan, our foreman,

condemned girls for manly behaviour, he seemed to forget he himself was a man too. It was so naturally practiced that nobody could cast any doubt on the legitimate correspondence between a female gender and a supposedly good worker. Discursive power was not only pervasive, but also elusive. The “unnatural” could become “natural”, or common sense in daily life. Further, regulatory power tried hard to create anxieties among the subjects themselves- there would be shame if they, as girls, behaved like boys. “Dividual”, as Marilyn Strathern said, were often taken as individual whole, and one could only choose or be forced to choose, either as a female or as a male. No internal ambivalence or variation inside the individual was allowed, at least in the hegemonic sexual discourse. Femaleness and maleness were created as a fundamental binary opposition in human beings. Girls in the workplace actually cared less about being unable to get married than about not living up to the imaginary feminine. Girls could seldom fight back if their foremen or line leader attacked their sexual orientation as male. Girls were induced to fear their sexual ambiguity or perversity, as they were taught to behave like a female and cultivate their femaleness. Sex here was definitely a politics, a policing of bodies. The feminine was not only imagined, inscribed but also developed, installed and self-desired. Objectifying and self-subjectivizing were the same process. *Dagongmei* was never only a subject of power, but an object of one’s own desire as well.

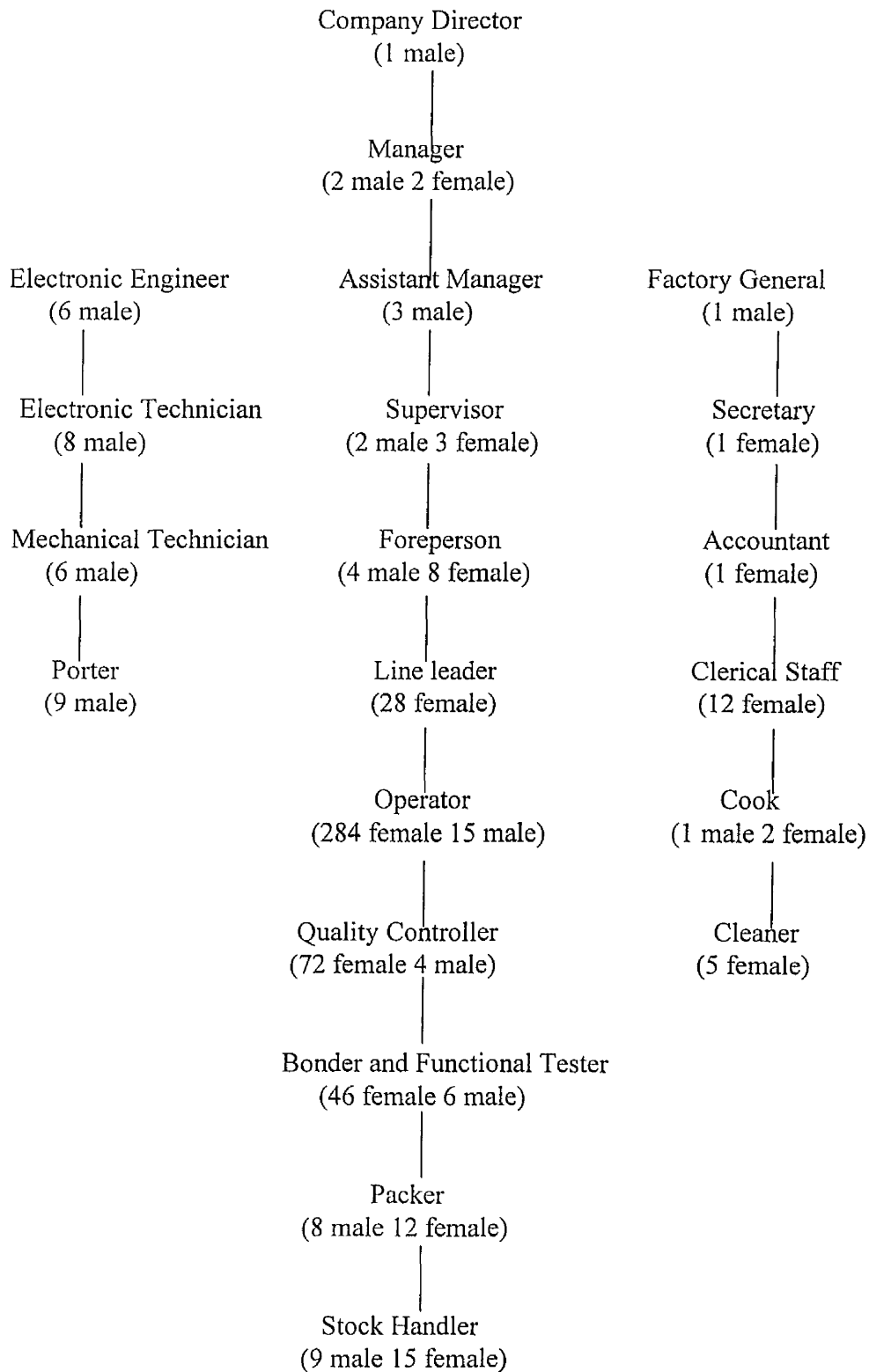
Sexual Division of Labour

Femininity was always imagined and linked up to the performance as a decent worker. But the women workers in Meteor knew quite well that in the pyramid of hierarchy inside the workplace, the female, not the male, was actually the inferior sex. While they might not fully understand how their femaleness was regulated and articulated time and again in the everyday disciplinary practices, they knew well that the division of labour was rigidly sex-segregated. Meteor was a world of women, but not for women and by women. On top of them, there were men as their foreman, as their manager and as their director. No matter how often they were reminded not to be mannish- “don’t behave like a boy”, it was the male who got the power and status, with a higher wage and benefits. Women workers in the workplace had to live up to

the ambivalent realities construed by disciplinary discourses, daily language and institutionalized power, which were often inherently splitting and self-contradictory.

Workplaces where girls were predominant, such as garment, electronic, shoe and toy factories, were often called “peach orchards” in popular magazines and stories. They were depicted as female places of love, joy and happiness. It was nevertheless a male-orientated if not a sexist metaphor, creating dreams of men to pursue lovely sexual objects in the peach orchards. While a workplace full of girls might be an orchard of peaches for the male, it was definitely not a world of joy and happiness for the female, at least not for the women workers in Meteor. The sexual division of labour was as rigid in Meteor as in other Shenzhen workplaces. Of over six hundred workers in the workplace, about 78% were female. They were predominant on the assembly lines, and were placed in all kinds of work processes: subassembling components, screwing, air seasoning, soldering, molding, functional testing, quality controlling and packaging. Jobs were allocated on a hierarchical basis, with a sex-segregated pattern apparent.

Sexual division of labour in Meteor Electronic Company



(Data in March of 1996)

The worlds of management and assembly workers were sternly stratified. The management were not entirely men, but male and masculinized female. In the eyes of the line girls the top level of management was a world of the masculine, cool, deep and untouchable. Though two managers and three supervisors were female, they were all taken as men or "as capable as men". The director, Mr. Chou, and the four managers, Mr. Li of the Engineering Department, Mr. Wu of the Production Department, Miss Tang of the Quality Control Department and Miss Jen of the Material Stock Department, were all from Hong Kong. As in all the large foreign-owned corporations in China, the most important posts were not left to the Mainland Chinese. Mr. Chou was the founder of the Meteor and had worked in Shenzhen for ten years. He had a firm and disciplined paternalistic image. He was an untouchable authoritarian figure in the workplace, especially for the line girls on the shopfloor. He seldom appeared on shopfloor except when accompanied by "red beard, green eyes" white men touring the Company. If he did show up on his own, it meant a serious problem had occurred.

Mr. Li, over fifty, was a Hong Kong born professional; he could not speak Mandarin well. He was the most easy going of the Hong Kong staff. Mr. Wu, in his early forties, was a new immigrant to Hong Kong in 1987. He was one of the first generation of university graduates when China resumed university education after the Cultural Revolution. He was hired for such an important position because of his specific background. The Production Department was the largest department in the Company, Mr. Wu said. They had more than three hundred and fifty workers, and Meteor needed somebody who was not a Mainland Chinese but knew Mainland Chinese workers well. "The bosses thought I was a expert in Chinese economics and knew how to control the workers' psychology." Mr. Wu said to me one day. After graduating from the Economics Department in Nanjing University, he first worked as an accountant in a state-owned enterprise in Nanjing. In 1985 he was promoted to secretary, the highest position in the enterprise. He chose to leave China because status and power could no longer satisfy him. He looked for a higher living standard in Hong Kong.

Miss Tang was employed as the QC Manager, probably because she looked like a man and was strong and authoritarian enough. Her sexual identity as a lesbian was

top secret, but nobody could control the rumors and gossip all over the workplace. People called her Mr. Tang to her face and *nanren tou*, "Man head", behind her back. Miss Jen was a stout mother. She left her husband and son in Hong Kong and worked in Shenzhen. As with other Hong Kong staff, she could only leave the Company and go home on Saturday afternoon and had to return to Shenzhen very early Monday morning. Mr. Chou told me he preferred to find men from Hong Kong to take up managerial posts in Shenzhen, because men carried less family burden. Women, even when they were strong enough like Miss Jen, would still take the family as their first concern. "But the Company doesn't have enough budget to hire men. You know they will demand higher salary," Mr. Chou explained.

The Department of Engineering and the Department of Production were considered the two most important departments in the Company. In the Department of Engineering, all positions as engineers, technicians, work study analysts and machinists were occupied by men. The electronic engineers were the people who designed the operation of assembly lines and decided how each work process on the line should run. The work study analysts studied and determined the time, speed and pay rate of the line. The technicians and machinists helped to make smooth the operation of each work process, and maintain and repair the conveyor belts and all the machines and tools. Orders and ideal designs of production were then sent to the Production Department, which undertook the actual daily operation of production.

Under Mr. Wu, Tin and Shen were the assistant managers in charge of the production lines and the bonding department respectively. These two men were university graduates from big cities, with qualifications that women could not dare to envy. On the shopfloor, it was actually Tin and Shen who held direct control of production and the highest authority over the line operators. It was clear that the whole production process was under the control of men, who gave orders and decided the work speed and wages for women. No one complained about male authority in the workplace, since gender issues were covered by the rural-urban disparity and educational level as well. In the eyes of line girls, Tin and Shen were not only male, but urban born and highly educated; it went beyond the point of articulating any fundamental challenge to male power.

The assembly operators, though predominantly female, were not a homogeneous group. They were categorized into three grades. The basic operators concentrated on one job. The second grade operators were competent in at least three jobs, and the first grade operators knew almost all the jobs and could be moved up and down the line as required. Some of the first grade operators were called “flyers”; they were trained for all the work processes and could be called up for every position, if somebody was absent, sick, unable to speed up or had gone to the toilet. Most of the time, assistant line leaders were chosen from these “flyers” who were considered capable and experienced and dared to speak out. “It is difficult to find the right people for leaders among the line girls. Girls are so talkative when they crowd together. But at work, they are so timid and afraid to criticize the others,” Tin tried to explain when I asked why the managerial strata was dominated by males.

Men were not totally excluded from the assembly lines, but over 90% of the positions were occupied by women. Assembling tiny electronic components is often considered women’s work since patience, care, sharp eyes and nimble fingers are required. In the Meteor the management emphasized, a totally submissive work force under strict control which in reality they did not have. Mr. Chou, the Company Director said, “Men, especially manual workers, are potential troublemakers. They can’t sit still all day and work like a machine. So if there’s a choice, we would of course choose girls.” At the highest level of management, girls were often imagined to be more submissive, attentive, dexterous and thus more reliable than boys. But middle level management, nearer to the actual shop floor, often hold different views. Yet for Mr. Chou the gender-selective labour practices were so natural and taken for granted that any questioning became meaningless. Most of the management practices in Meteor were inherited from the common practices in Hong Kong, where once light industrialization took off in 1960s the feminization of labour use and sex-based job segregation were the dominant patterns. When Hong Kong capital moved to Mainland China in 1980s, these practices moved as well. Managers from Hong Kong were well imbued with these sex-stereotyping ideologies. In China, these reinforced sex-based job segregation. The reason for the feminization of labour use and sex segregation in the workplace might be a little bit different in specific locations and

particular industries, but the pattern of gender-based job segregation was pervasive, at least in Shenzhen.

Due to the sexual segregation of jobs, the wage system was organized on a hierarchical basis, favorable to male workers, which conspicuously reinforced the inferiority of the female sex in the workplace. The wage system at Meteor was complicated. It deployed various payment methods, like monthly pay, daily pay, hourly pay, overtime work pay and production bonus, at the same time. All the office staff and staff above line leader grades were paid at a monthly rate. The line operators and manual workers were mostly paid at an hourly rate. Normal working hours, in the daytime were paid in *renminbi*, with RMB 2.4 per hour. Overtime work at night was paid in Hong Kong dollars, at \$3.6 per hour. The worker preferred Hong Kong dollars because they could buy imported foreign commodities.

Male staff had a more stable form of payment, and the average wage of male workers in the Meteor was 42% higher than that of female workers. There were five supervisors, two male and three female. The male supervisors earned 900 *yuan* per month, but the female supervisors were paid 200 less. All the female operators were paid at an hourly rate, with the average pay around 400 to 600 *yuan* a month. One third of the pay depended on overtime work; otherwise the basic wage would be just enough to pay the food and rent. "We all hate night work, but it is the only way to earn Hong Kong dollars and the money," line girls on the shop floor often complained to me (I was the only one in the workplace not paid).

Finally, the uniforms and overalls of our factory helped to symbolize and draw the labouring bodies into the world of sex hierarchies. Men and women were put in different kinds and different colors of uniforms and overalls. These signified position, status and power. Except for the director, everybody – the managers, the office staff, the shopfloor staff and the workers – were asked to be properly uniformed. But there were great differences between who wore uniform and who wore overalls. The male engineers and technicians had to wear white shirts, whereas the male supervisors had blue shirts, and the female supervisors blue dress sets. Shirts and dress sets were formally recognized as uniforms, clearly articulating the symbols and representation of power that belonged to the management strata. Uniforms and overalls were the basic cutting line differentiating between the

managerial staff and the basic workers, the male and the female, and the controller and the controlled.

Despite the fact that the forepersons and line leaders might sometimes be considered as the representatives of the management strata, they nevertheless were dressed in overalls rather than uniforms, but in a different colour from that of the operators. They were dressed in yellow, with all the operators in white and blue. Operators on the QC lines wore white overalls, symbolizing a slightly higher status than the production lines operators in blue. The gender hierarchies covertly revealed and reproduced in uniforms and overalls were often unrecognized. I poignantly came to the realization of myself as an inferior sex with a degraded body, when I put on a blue overall as a line girl working on the shopfloor and looked at Tin and Shen, our assistant managers, as they walked through our benches in proper shirts and pants. They were superior, even by appearance.

Perverted bodies

Nevertheless, *dagongmei* as an obedient and submissive social body was merely a hegemonic construction: though powerful enough, it was often contradicted in real life struggles. For example, the hegemonic power failed to co-opt Fat Guy's sexual identity. Fat Guy worked with me on the same line and was always a headache for management. She refused to feminize herself and openly acted butch. She was quick to air grievances and express her opinions when she saw unreasonable arrangements or unfairness. But she was loved as well as loathed by our line leader and foreman. She often worked faster than anyone else on the line and was able to help the others when their work was piling up. She rarely asked for sick leave; rather, she often helped take girls suffering from menstrual pains or other bodily discomfort to the rest room or the hospital. It was considered inappropriate for unrelated male workers to touch the female body, especially when the girl was menstruating. Everybody knew Fat Guy's important role on our line. Thus, the regulation of sex did not work on her. That is not to say that the factory disciplinary machine completely failed to regulate her behaviour, but it needed to resort to other strategies.

Despite a lot of gossip and innuendo about her, Fat Guy insisted on having her own way. "I don't mind that people say that I'm mannish. I don't like girls timid, screaming and fussing all the time."

Fat Guy liked to make friends with boys rather than girls in the factory. She often went out with male workers to see films or videos with violent and heroic plots. Women's talk at night, the most usual entertainment after working, did not attract her much. She thought girls gossiped and murmured too much. Girls in the workplace, on the other hand accepted her as butch and treated her as a boy. They came to her when they needed help. Here, body, sex, identity, had no one-to-one correspondence; and neither body nor sex could provide legitimacy for sexual identity. The sexual identity was not split, but ambivalent and different.

The ideal construct of *dagongmei* as a docile feminine body was further disrupted in my mind when one day I saw an unbelievably terrible scene:

Girls' Fight

It was a winter night, windy and cold. At ten, after overtime, I dragged my extremely tired body back to the dormitory with Fat Guy. Fat Guy told me she would queue up for hot water for me to bathe, and she asked me to have a few minutes rest in bed. Every night we would struggle over whether to bathe or not, especially on cold nights; if yes, we needed to queue up for hot water, sometimes for more than half a hour. At the end of our dorm rooms, a big stove warmed hot water between ten and twelve at night in the stove room. Since hot water was provided within limited hours, women frequently helped relatives, co-villagers, and good friends to wait for hot water. Sometimes one person would bring four or five buckets from the long queue. Queue jumping happened frequently and squabbles and arguments followed. It was a site of contestation.

I told Fat Guy I would check the queue first. If it was too long, I would not take a bath that night. When we entered the dormitory gate, approaching the stove room, I heard loud noises and I thought it was another argument. Fat Guy screamed, "They are fighting, they are fighting with each other." We ran to the spot; two groups of girls were wrestling. With roaring rage, one girl hit the other girl's face with great

strength. On the other side, another girl fought back by scratching the hair of her opposite. As Fat Guy tried hard to stop the fighting, she was pushed away by a thin young girl with grave force. I stood still, terribly frightened by the violence. ...

I couldn't sleep at that night, forced to contemplate conventionally and sadly on how these girls could be so violent?. Violence is often believed to be a male attribute; it belongs only to man. Fighting should only happen to men, not to women. But at that night, my convention was disrupted again. It hurt to ask why these young girls were so brutal, so aggressive as boys sometimes were. And I knew it was senseless to ask about "human nature". We were all forced to live in an inhuman, harsh and intolerable environment. No one knew how long they could stand it. Leaving the factory, and going back to the village was one choice. But suspicion, quarreling, and even fighting were also ways to release grievances, especially those suppressed for a long time. It was the outside environment that mattered. What was the point if I retreated back to the "inside" of a subject, the "nature" of a human being? Violence is a social relationship and must therefore be located in its historical and social context. Violence is never sexually prescribed, it is socially and culturally assigned.

The fighting girls were all dismissed on the second morning. No investigation into who was right or wrong was needed. These girls all confronted factory discipline, and the reason that everyone in the workplace knew in their hearts was: they did not behave like girls! They were like unruly boys or animals.

Women's talk, Herstory and Negotiating Female Subjects

After bathing, about half past ten at night, it was the time of women's talk. Talking was so important in factory life when everybody was kept mute for working a whole day. Women grouped to each other based on the ethno-kin lines that provided the most crucial supporting networks for their daily accommodation in a new industrial world. Girls from the same villages, counties, or simply same provinces, sharing the same dialect and similar living habits would make close links among each other. When the time of their own came, that was so minimal, talking

everywhere would start. We often heard men complain that when several women came together, you could never stop their talking. “*Qi zui ba she*” (seven mouths and eight tongues), was a Chinese idiom used to designate talkative women who were so eager to speak out, at least should operate seven mouths to fully express themselves. “*Qi zui ba she*”, of course, was term of contempt; its semantic meaning overtly showed the desire and power of men to keep the women silent. Women’s talk had long been seen as a threat to patriarchal order (Cassell 1977, Spender 1980). In the workplace women’s talk was a double threat to the male order as well as the managerial order. At night women gossiped about the managerial figures, exchanged information on personnel policies and found out who was punished for confronting the factory rules, who succeeded in finding a boyfriend, who was so disgusting and always flirting with the girls. They chatted about sex, childbirth, family and complained about food. Since I could speak fluent Chaozhou dialect, sometimes I jumped in the talk among the Chaozhou women.

Two Chaozhou cooking maids, aged over forty, circling by several girls, was the target of complaint. “Aunt, do you think the food in our canteen is too poor?” Lan, a young girl from Chaoyang asked.

An younger cook instantly replied, “Daughters, I never want you to eat poor rice. But what can I do? I do my best to serve you.”

“But aunt, the food is really rotten, not even my family’s pigs will eat it.” Another girl called Jin interrupted.

“Oh girls, don’t talk, something bad that will spoil your fortune. You are all young, you all had never eaten bitterness and gone through hard times. At the time of famine in 60s, we all ate wild vegetables and tree bark.” The older maid spoke in a rather sentimental way, calling back her memory of hard times to convince the young girls.

“Wow, aunt, you are talking about something terrible. But the age has changed.” Tong-tong stopped the words of the maid.

“You are too lucky, and too happy in this generation. You’ve got no sense of women’s bitterness in the past. You now have pretty clothes, earn your own money and go where you want to go. Who could be like you when we were young? We never dreamed of leaving the family and the village. Women, always kept at the

home, did all the cooking and chores, waiting to get married and give birth to sons.” The maid insisted on talking. All the girls chuckled. The maid felt a little bit easier and continued to talk about “women’s bitter *herstory*”.

“You don’t understand women’s lives, do you? You won’t know what bitterness is before you taste it. Girls, there is still long road ahead of you. In future, when you think you can marry a husband and enjoy happiness, you will find yourself alone in a foreign family that is not your own, never. Your father-in-law and mother-in-law will keep a strict eye on you, and even your husband can’t help you. And within two years, if you still can’t lay eggs, then you will know what kind of life will follow you. All the gossips in the village will target you. You feel shame for yourself and your husband’s family. Old Master in the village will start to prescribe herbal medicines to help you. Then comes the big stomach, the ten months pain and the extraordinary pain at the moment of delivery. You are all young, you can’t even imagine the pain. It kills you, it kills you, but every woman will go through it. It is woman’s destiny.” The older maid muttered to great interest.

“Oh, aunt, please don’t terrify us. I don’t want to be like that. There is no point in us living like that,” Jin stressed her view.

“But there is no choice; when I was young, I thought Chairman Mao could help us, I heard of women’s emancipation. I guessed I could stay in my own family and didn’t need to marry out. But still my father asked me to marry out at the age of nineteen,” The younger maid supplemented the older.

“Oh, oh, aunts, your age is past. Nowadays, we can run away from our families and find a job in the factory. We can send money back to our fathers and they will be happy too.” Tong-tong showed optimism.

“You are telling child’s tales. How about when you get older and older? Will the factory still want you? Women’s place is in the family. You don’t believe me, do you?” the older maid said.

One of the main theme of the women’s talk in various cultures was to articulate the *herstory* of women’s lives and tell it to the younger generation through spoken words. Excluded by the formal and official written records in our patriarchal world, women’s experiences of their own lives were either kept marginal, trivialized, or simply seen as non-existent in our *history* (Ardener 1975, Rich 1979). But stripping

away women's right to write or to be written could not keep their mouths shut. It was not true that women trapped in a patriarchal order could never express themselves, could only have "a problem without a name", or had to translate their experiences into the male code in order to express themselves (Ardener 1975; Irigaray 1977; Olsen 1978). My study in the workplace shows that in whatever oppressed place, women have never been a muted group. That belief could only be a dream of male dominance. The women *herstories* in China have long been an oral tradition, memorized, imagined, and passed through generation and generation (Croll 1995:11-12). It was this kind of women's oral *herstories* that helped to construct women's life world and make sense of women's experiences to themselves. The oral tradition, a rich cultural capital, provided not only stories, examples and models, but also a lively genealogy, from which women could learn and negotiate themselves as female subjects.

It was usually the case that the older women, who had more experience in life, obtained more power in articulating what women's life should be and what was women's fate. But the above episode showed that women's oral *herstories* were never reified, and far from authoritarian and totalizing. There were always spaces for different women in different generations to share their own experiences, to shape their various world views and to negotiate their own identities. Although "women's bitterness" was the embracing theme across all Chinese women's *herstories*, there was still room for women of different ages to participate in negotiating how much "women's bitterness" a "normal" women should undertake. Lan, Jin, and Tong-tong belonged to a younger generation who run away from the patriarchal family, and found jobs in big city. Even if the jobs were temporary, they were not willing to eat the same poor food their aunts did. Life stories of the past might provide a reference and mirror for the younger generation to make sense of women's lives. But they could not over-determine any matrix. They were not rules like written down documents which taught you how to behave yourself. Marriage and giving birth to sons might be the inevitable fate of women in the previous generations. But for our young factory girls, short-term escape to the city had already let them know there were other possibilities and alternatives of life. "The age had changed," they said,

and believed it strongly. But nobody had yet said how they could work out the changes in their own lives.

Gossips, power and multiple identities

Another night I was invited to eat “sweet soup” in a Cantonese group. The girls were all from Qingyuan, the poorest rural area in Guangdong Province, and they all worked in the QC Department. Food and gossip, the most enjoyable moments in our factory life! Gossip flowed naturally, wildly, and again came to focus on Miss Tang, the manager of their Department, who was from Hong Kong. Miss Tang’s sexual orientation was always a topic of gossip, and that Miss Tang was a lesbian was both top secret in the factory and known to everybody. Many women told me about her and each asked me to keep her *secret*. Mr. Tang was the nickname given by her subordinates in front of her. Behind her back, everybody dubbed her “*nanren tou*”, Man’s Head, to emphasize her maculinized appearance and personality.

Qing turned the gossip on Miss Tang: “I saw *nanren tou* eating with her girlfriend in the McDonald’s.”

“When? Did you see her girlfriend? Is she pretty?” All the other girls asked.

“Last Sunday. I could only see her the side of her face, you know, I dared not enter. I looked from the glass wall. I guess she doesn’t look bad. Very well dressed and strong make-up. Dong told me that one day she saw them walking in the street. Her girlfriend was taller than her,” Qing answered.

“But our *nanren tou* looks quite handsome, doesn’t she?” Bin said.

“Wow, somebody is secretly in love with our *nanren tou*!” Qing teased, and all the girls laughed.

Getting teased, Bin responded instantly, “What rubbish you are talking? Will I love a person who is so harsh to us? I think because she treats people so hard and so emotionless, that’s why she become abnormal. Can I love a pseudo-man, who is in fact a woman? Can I?”

We continued to laugh despite Bin’s explanation. “Why not? She is rich, powerful and handsome. I bet if she chooses you, we can all get promoted. Please do sacrifice yourself!” Another girl called Hua cackled.

“But how can a woman love a woman? Hm, I am asking seriously. How can two women have sex? Can they give birth to baby?” Bin turned her head to me, expecting an answer from me and trying to divert our attention from her. Unwilling to intervene in their talk, I simply said, “They can have sex, but they can’t have a baby through their sexual intercourse.”

Qing added, “I saw a magazine one day, It said that in the western countries they have a lot of gays and lesbians, who don’t care about social and family pressure and insist on getting married to each other.”

“How strange! They can marry. But it’s good for them, isn’t it? At least they can have family,” another girl named San said.

“But it’s still a pity they can’t give birth to a baby. I think a woman’s life can’t be complete without getting through marriage and the delivery of babies,” Bin muttered.

“Oh, Bin, your thoughts are a little bit out-dated. Today, who will care about the stuff of delivering sons? Happiness is more important!” Qing responded.

“Yet finding a good husband is still important, isn’t it? When we go back home, we can’t stay our whole life in our father’s house, can we?” Hua asked.

“Oh, Hua, you are talking⁵ with somebody, aren’t you? When are you going to marry him?” Bin asked back. All of us chuckled again and Hua blushed.

“I still have no idea. I don’t want to go back home too early. But last New Year when I was back home, the man’s family already asked my father. Last month, my boyfriend came to visit me. He tried to convince me to come back home too.” Hua spoke in an embarrassed tone.

“What a lucky woman! You must have done a lot of good things in your previous life. By the way, will you accept sex before your married life? Qing teased again, and we all fell into chuckles.

Hua instantly flushed and shouted, “I won’t, I won’t!”

“Wow, virginity is so important to her.” Qing continued to make jokes.

“I do believe that virginity is important for women. We shouldn’t easily lose it to someone if we can’t be sure if he’ll marry you or not. You know, there is no hope

⁵ talking means dating somebody.

for us to get married if there is a rumor that we have sex with somebody before.” Bin talked in a rather thoughtful mood.

“My father will beat me to death if he knows I have that relation with a man in the city,” the quiet San murmured.

“Oh, I don’t think it is wrong. If I really love a man, I don’t mind,” Qing raised her tone, a naughty expression on her face.

“Alas, what a liberated woman!” All the girls turned to joke at Qing and laughter continued.

Food, gossip, jokes and laughter were all too crucial for us in dealing with hard and boring factory life. Gossips and laughter demonstrated the power of the female workers, however minimal, to tease the patriarchal and capitalist orders. Paul Willis pointed out a long time ago, that “having a laff”, was a way to defeat boredom and fear, to ease the hardship and brutality of life, and thus was a way out of almost anything (1977). “Having a laff” was clearly a weapon of the weak to fight against the alienation of work and the subsumption of labour to capital. Of course I had a problem with laughing at Miss Tang’s lesbianism as an abnormality, and that kept me silent throughout the whole conversation. But at that moment, still bound by their cultural practices, laughing at Miss Tang’s sexuality was one way for the girls to air their grievances against the brutal life in the factory. Moreover, “mucking in” the manager’s sexual affairs, if one was willing, was a possible way to get promotion and advantages. The factory girls learned that sexuality was political, and something they could decide to manipulate it or not. Like labour, sexuality was also something that belonged to the workers, but which could be alienated and subsumed to the logic of capital. Sexual relationships between male supervisors and female line girls were not absent in our workplace, but were frowned on heavily by all those not involved. Maybe out of envy and competition, since there were many fewer male than female workers. Dating and sexual relations were usually often seen as advantageous and functional, but in the end were futile, if not evil.

Another focus for gossip was the love affair between Gen, one of the supervisors in the Production Department, and Jing, now the secretary of the Department. People kept on telling me that Jing was only a line girl before she knew Gen, and how she was a nice and humble girl before. But now she was completely

proud and seldom talked even to her ethnic-kin group. "You see the strong make-up, nobody is stronger than her. I am sure I won't want to learn from her, selling sex in exchange for a higher position." I had already forgotten who passed on this gossip to me.

Despite some bias, there were real social and cultural reasons for them to worry about any love and sexual relations they might have. First, if the man was an urban citizen, his family probably would not accept a girl of rural origin. Second, if both sides came from different provinces, the girl's family might not approve the affair either, since the marriage system in China was still patrilineal. No family wanted their daughter to marry far away, unless they were really poor. Third, there were many rumors in the workplace that once a woman got pregnant, the man would run away and there would be no hope of finding him. It was an anonymous industrial world, not a communal village where everybody knew each other. Most girls thought that it was not worth it to exchange sex for a short term interest and, in the end, ruin one's whole life.

"Having a laff" thus was more than a weapon that was deployed to poke at the management. Jokes, laughter and rumors were exactly where the women workers played out their gender subjectivities. Having a laugh was having their views and ideas on sex, love and marriage exchanged, conjured, and thus helped to suture their female identities. Jokes and laughter had more importance than is usually assumed. During joking and laughing, women were more capable of articulating their feelings and emotions, albeit conflicting and ambivalent, such as love and hatred, desire and fear; dream and anxiety. There was Bin who thought "a woman could not be complete without getting married and giving birth to babies." There was Hua who took marriage as an important life path for women. But there was also Qing who said sex for happiness should be acceptable. Feelings and emotions expressed in the talking and joking were all part of a process of sexualization (Hearn, Jeff & Parkin 1987). They were how girls colluded to play out themselves as sexualized subjects.

Cultural Representation of dagongmei

In Shenzhen and other economic developing zones, numerous popular magazines and stories centering on *dagongmei* emerged in the past ten years. The most famous were *Shenzhen Ren* (Shenzhen People), *Nü Bao* (Women's Magazine), *Dagongmei* (Working Girls) and *Wailaigong* (Migrant Workers). The themes always stressed the struggle of life and death in the modern industrial world, the changing attitudes towards sex, love and marriage and the desire of turning into a modern man or woman. These magazines helped to create a variety of lively images of *dagongmei*. Not without imagination, and not without exception, the working girls were often portrayed as sexualized subjects. Sometimes they were even actively sexual agents, who dared not only to leave the village looking for a job, but also looked for love and men. Often coated in a sad mood, predicting the difficulties of pursuing "true" love, the stories nevertheless provided a new construction of female subjectivities, in contrast to the old traditional image of submissive Chinese women. In a column, "Special Economic Zone cannot take care of *dagongmei*'s love" in *Shenzhen Ren* (1994:11), several short stories told how active and bold the *dagongmei* were in seeking love:

One male line leader and ten line girls

On the first day working on the packaging line, Ping said: the male line leader was so handsome! Working for two years, she had been in six factories, but it was the first time she'd met a handsome line leader. Ping's words threatened the other nine girls on the same line, for the line leader had become the scrambling little prince of ten hearts.

The line leader was a Guangdong boy. He didn't complete his university study and went out to work. 1.72 metre tall, he was not too fat and not too thin. With a white skin and wearing a pair of glasses, he looked mature and a little bit shy. His actions were sharp and his words generous; he played no favourites among the ten girls, nor said anything unnecessary to anyone. For what needed reproach, he reproached all. For what needed concern, he showed concern to all.

The ten love seeds sprouted at the same time. Those who were bold wrote love letters and sent gifts to him. Those who was timid loved him secretly in their hearts. Among the line girls, a war of love was launched openly, seriously affecting production. The male line leader could not deal with the situation and was forced to leave the factory. Without a word to the line girls, he was gone.

One foreman and six working girls

The foreman, with the surname of Lai, could not compete with the other boys in the company, as he was short and quiet. From day to night he toiled hard on production and nothing was special about him. He was only aged 22, but the workers all called him “old boy” or “work mania”.

However, six pretty girls in the workplace all loved him. They had all written love letters to him and waited for his reply. But he never uttered a word, as if nothing had happened. Cing was the prettiest girl in the workplace. Unlike the other girls, she was not disappointed and never stopped writing letters to him. Everyday, she was the first one on the shopfloor and worked very hard to increase the work pieces, in order to attracted the foreman’s attention. Yet he still made no move.

Finally Cing was in despair, and could not face the foreman. She quit her job and became a salesgirl in a hardware store. However, the foreman often came to the store to buy materials. She quit the job again and wrote to him: she would go somewhere he could not see her. She went to work in a big hotel as a waitress. Unfortunately, there was nowhere she could hide; every Sunday, the foreman went with the boss to have breakfast in the hotel. They met again...

Cing wrote another letter: “You don’t love me. I can’t see you again. I have to go.” She left town.

One handy boy and a woman supervisor

Coming from Guangxi as a boy, it was not easy for little Tao to find a job in a craft factory. He worked as a handy boy. He cleaned the shopfloor and the toilets, and loaded materials and products. He got a lower wage than anybody else and often

felt inferior. However, as the slang goes: a fool has more happiness. He received a love letter from Miss Chan, the famous production supervisor in the factory.

Little Tao was throbbing and could not believe it. Yet after a couple of letters from Miss Chan to “invade” him, he finally “surrendered”.

They rented a flat and lived together. Miss Chan took the role of breadwinner. She paid for all little Tao spent and helped him to send money back home regularly....

Little Tao could never believe in the “love” he had found. Not knowing how to take advantages from people, he left quietly, his hot and sincere lover in tears.

Not without problems, all these stories construe hot and desiring female subjects; *dagongmei* who are far more active than men in expressing and pursuing love. The traditional hegemonic discourses framed women as passive sexual objects, waiting for men the hunter. But popular culture instead favours an impressive image, a modern working girl who challenges traditional sexual relations and takes active roles. The Chinese peasant girls no longer stay at home, following their parents’ arrangements or waiting for the matchmaker to decide their fate. Instead they were encouraged to get out, to leave their village and look for their own love and life. “Your body is your own”, “Holding tight to love” and “Control your own fate” – all these hidden messages were conveyed through popular culture and became contemporary mottoes for modern female life.

This was life in a transitional period. Old cultural practices, new urban cosmopolitan models, pressures and guidance from the communal rural society, desires and pursuits in a modern yet anonymous industrial world, all mixed up and worked together to form significance for new femininities. There were no fixed boundaries and stable reference frames, no harbours in which new subjects could take refuge. As Elisabeth Croll said,

Confusion is the prevalent theme in present-day representations of women and in the written and spoken words of women themselves. Tension and confusions is openly expressed again and again in the numerous short stories in the past ten years in China.

In the workplace, alternative models of sexuality like Miss Tang's, new ideas from the western countries through mass media and popular culture, new experiences in urban life, all kind of contradictory ideas, behaviours and experiences were nurtured and contributed to making fluid and split female subjects. Women workers in contemporary China were forced to live with conflictive feelings, not of their own making.

To end this chapter, I introduce one of the most popular songs in the workplace. During my stay in the Meteor, I could find no way to escape hearing it everyday:

Tomorrow I am going to marry you⁶

Second hand, minute hand ticks and ticks in my heart
My eyes glisten and glisten with emptiness
My heart goes pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, throbbing continuously

I ask myself how much I love you
How eager to live with you and fly far way
My heart's throbbing up and down, up and down continuously Wow.....

Tomorrow I am going to marry you
Tomorrow I am going to marry you
If not the everyday traffic disturbs my dream
(If not that night the electricity stopped, I discovered my loneliness and emptiness)
Tomorrow I am going to marry you
Tomorrow I *finally* marry you
If not ask me

⁶ A song sang by a Taiwanese male singer in Mandarin. My own translation.

If not persuade me

If not at the suitable time, you let my heart throb

(But at this particular moment, I feel frightened and afraid)

Chapter VII Scream, Dream and Transgression in the Workplace

A scream pitched into the darkness of the night. It was four in the morning as usual. Yan always had the same nightmare and shrieked again. I was woken by the ghost-like voice, to find it passing, and the deep silence of the night reigned again.

I moved to Bin's room and shared a bunk with her because there were complaints about a woman worker called Yan who screamed late every night in her room. Eight people crowded into one small room, less than 100 square feet, sharing four double-decked iron beds; lucky to be thin enough to jam into the room. This was, however, a normal dormitory in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in China. Relations among the girls in this room were tense, not only due to a lack of space and privacy, but also because of Yan's screams, which first frightened all her room mates and then disturbed everybody's sleep. I suffered too, not from disturbances in my sleep, but from a difficulty in grasping, understanding and then speaking for the voice. Yan herself seemed to suffer least; she consciously woke up at a particular moment of her screams and then fell asleep again immediately. A high pitched voice followed by a dreadful silence - after a week's stay in the room, I was disturbed by an anxiety to understand the voice. Can the subaltern speak? Can one experience the other's experiences? For the former, Gayatri C. Spivak says No; for the latter, R. D. Laing says No. Silence is the only response.

The silence brings me to the experiences of human suffering, pain, transgression and resistance. Some of those experiences are non-communicable, while some are universal human experiences. The experiences I had in the workplace were nevertheless rooted in the local world, bounded by specific historical epoch and socio-cultural transformation. The last, but not the least, questions I would like to ask in this chapter include :

1. Can there be an anthropology of the voice? I had no difficulty in experiencing the dreadful silence after the voice. But the voice itself spoke nothing. It emptied its fullness with a high-pitched sound and an overwhelming power in destroying

language. How can I record the voice, understand the voice, bring it into the symbolic world and pin it down into my signifying chains? What are the grounds and ethics of interpretation? Where is the limit, the possibility of speaking for the impossibility?

2. Can there be an anthropology of human pain? At the end of the ethnographic study, I am pushing myself to the limit of bodily pain, which as a universal human experience again defies the very possibilities of cultural categories and symbolization. Can anthropology provide a way to capture the core of human suffering? If pain is forced to be spoken out, are there any cultural differences of inscription, significance and then different experiences of human pain? If bodily pain is experienced as bridging the somatic and social space, as Arthur Kleinman argued, can the discipline of anthropology transcend the oppositional productions of "truth" of pain between biomedicine and psycho-analyses?
3. Can dream and scream be considered as acts of transgression? If Freudian psychoanalysis was attacked for driving all meanings of dreams and screams into the realm of unconsciousness, then can we argue that between the borderland of consciousness and unconsciousness lies the very possibility of resistance? What can we learn from Foucault's reading of dreams as an odyssey of human freedom?

The Voice Breaking Out

Yan's midnight screams have been going on for a month. She said she didn't know why she cried out. Nor could she control it. "I feel depressed when I hear people gossiping about my screaming. I have no idea what it is. When I am awake, it disappears and I sleep again. But I have a dream that is the same every night. I dreamed I am going to a pier, and am about to take a boat to cross a river. The river separates the two villages and there is no other way than going by boat if I want to go to the other village. I need to take the boat. I see the boat is leaving and I hurry. But I find my body can't move, it's too painful, too tired to move. I'm terribly scared because the boat is leaving. I'll be left behind and the sky is turning dark. It's the evening. I have no way to go."

Yan was too terrified in her dreams to control herself and stop screaming. Yet at the moment she screamed she woke up and fell asleep again. While Yan and the other girls were so tired they slept again, I woke up for a while. I heard the silence, a deep sigh from Ping who slept in the upper deck, and the noise of grinding teeth from Bin who was laying beside me. I found myself in extreme anxiety and agony because my past training in sociology or anthropology provided me with no knowledge by which to apprehend the situation. I was lost in the field. I was lost at the particular moment that I woke up to hear the voice. And if I could not experience Yan's experiences, I shared the fear and the pain, though in other ways.

World, self and voice were all lost, or nearly lost, as Elaine Scarry says, when the body is going through intense pain (1985). As a novice anthropologist, I felt unbearable pain to meet and to hear a voice I could not make sense of. I did not know how to bring it to a wider audience. It was due to no foreign culture, or an alien place that I had the complete sense of otherness in the field. It was the voice. The voice was resistant to language, without its significance or referentiality. It could not be seen, be touched, had no "reality" when it manifested itself in the air that I came to encounter. If as Michel de Certeau said, our era is a sort of epic of the eyes, "our society is characterized by a cancerous growth of vision, measuring everything by its ability to show and be shown" (1984:xxi), then can our "showbiz academics" still accept something that is invisible, or even pre-language? But there was no choice. The voice was so powerful, and with its boundless referential power, it shrieked into the symbolic world and nullified any claims of the world. It was directly from the heart and the body of the subaltern, from a person who was often excluded in the written, from a specific human being who struggled to live out her life. It was from a *dagongmei*, a displaced subject.

It was in the encounter with the voice in the field, and in an attempt to understand, to interpret and to codify the possible meanings of its impossibility, that I was forced to realize the practices of knowing, as an anthropologist. Anthropology has long been taken as the study of the other. (The other was not only limited in the sense of other people, other culture, but the complete otherness of experiences.) It has no space of its own, and only by nomadic migration to the other's place can it dwell

itself. Anthropology cannot know itself, has no identity of its own unless it knows the other, finds out what is the other. The nature of adventure has nothing to do with romantic imagination, but with its inescapable fate of practicing itself. It lives on the space of other, and is marked by its nomadic itinerary wandering itself to the area of the unknown. Its condition is its non-condition with itself (de Certeau 1984:161). As Michel de Certeau described the nature of heterological literature, anthropology is a scriptural operation of the other, like going through a “sexual” process if it wants to find out its own borderland, its final limit:

They advance according to a “sexual” process that posits the arrival of the other, the different, as a detour necessary for their progress..... this “sexual” functioning of heterological writing, a functioning that never succeeds entirely, transforms it into an erotic: it is the inaccessibility of its “objects” that makes it produce.

(1984:161-162)

If the encounter with the voice in the field was like a sexual encounter, then the experience was undoubtedly more painful than pleasurable. Yan’s screams tempted me to a foreign, risky terrain, somewhere between sound and word, between language and non-language, between consciousness and unconsciousness where I had never been before. But thanks to the temptation, I arrived at an ecstasy-- the limited experience of knowing not the other but myself (Bataille 1991). I learned that pain, the possibility of writing, arises from the impossibility of experience. Reality was not “out there”, and neither was history of individuals or the collective a straight reflection of reality. The intrusion into the gap, the fissure between the presence and *unpresence*, between the symbolic and *unsymbolic*, gave the possibility of finding meanings.

I don't know why I have that dream, and everyday it is the same. The pier, the river is so familiar to me. It seems that I have been there in my life before. ... Oh, when did I start to have this dream? A month ago, we were kept to do overtime work until 11:30 PM for three consecutive days. And we needed to move to a new dormitory on Sunday morning. I felt so tired that every part of my body was aching, as if it is not my own body. I could not control it and stop the pain. When all my room-mates went shopping and the room was empty, I urged myself to cry out, so loudly that I myself couldn't believe it. I was shocked by the sound, and afterward, I have that dream and scream at night. It's repeating and repeating.

...

Yan's dreams and screams resonated to some extent with what Freudian described as traumatic neurosis. Cathy Caruth has provided the most general description of a trauma,

In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event-- which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight-- thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing.

(1996:91-92)

The persistent repetitiveness of Yan's dreams and screams seemed to tell us that she was going through some sort of traumatic experiences. But other than the extraordinary pain, there was no unexpected or sudden event happened in her life that could be singled out as the personal trauma to which psychoanalysis might suggest. On the surface and in her daily life, she was as ordinary as other factory workers, though they all had their own personal stories. Yan had worked in Meteor for thirteen months when I met her, and moved into her dormitory at the end of March 1996. No industrial accident has happened to her, nor any great change in her family except the death of her grandmother in the Chinese New Year of 1996. She went home to her village in Hunan when she got the news that her grandmother was seriously ill. Her grandmother died on the fifth day of the New Year and she returned to the factory the next day without attending the burial ceremony. Yan took her grandmother's passing away as natural death because she died at eighty-three. The death did cause pain, but it was not an unexpected shock in Yan's life.

In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud defined,

In the case of the ordinary traumatic neuroses two characteristics emerge prominently: first, that the chief weight in their causation seems to rest upon the factor of surprise, of fright; and secondly that a wound or injury inflicted simultaneously works as a rule *against* the development of a neurosis.

(1950:9-10)

Freud believed that anxiety and fear were not enough to produce a traumatic neurosis; what was needed was a state of surprise and fright that a person was not prepared for (1950:10). Since the consciousness was not well prepared to confront the sudden event or tragedy, it went to the realm of unconsciousness and was reenacted there, out of the wish and control of the person. But there was no single shocking event in Yan's life. In Freud's study of the Jewish massacre, he conceived the trauma as the belated experience of a "childhood" tragedy- the killing of Moses in early Jewish history. I have no interest, nor do I see the point in tracing Yan's traumatic experiences into her childhood. Nor I am interested in the origin of the human psyche

in any essentialized form. I try to make sense of, however, Yan's dreams and screams in the very presence of her experience in the social life. The trauma, I perceived, was both psychological and social.

One thing I could assure from Yan's traumatic experiences was that the bodily pain she suffered from overtime work in the factory was at first exposed in the realm of consciousness. She shrieked in the afternoon when nobody was in the dormitory. Then a displacement took place into the unconsciousness realm: the experience went to her dreams and unwittingly, repetitively was reenacted there. The screaming that followed happened somewhere in between consciousness and unconsciousness. She woke up at a particular moment of the screaming and fell asleep again. The detour from the realm of consciousness to unconsciousness and back to consciousness again entailed a double telling of the story that we are going to explore.

Yan saw the dream and scream as an uncontrollable "evil" force that was born from her body. There was nothing said of spirits or ghosts such as are often said to haunt women workers in Southeast Asian countries (Ong 1986). Yan, however, thought she suffered from *xin-bing*, the illness of the heart. Though she always emphasized that she could not understand the reason, she often said, "There must be something wrong inside me", "I am sick, you know, that is why I have the dream and scream". For her the dream and scream was a signal of her sickness. The illness of the heart, though inward and psychological, was not separated from the body which came to live out the pain and the scream. Thus dream and scream were an index of bodily imbalance as well. She felt the evil was not an external force that came to dominate her, but grew inside from her body and mind. Though I try hard to avoid essentializing "Chineseness" in order to avoid creating Oriental subjects, Yan's way of seeing was quite typically "Chinese". She saw the body and the mind, the natural and the social, the inner and the outside world as a harmonious whole, forced to split only by a pathological or irregular state. And she felt that if the outside world was sick, the inner self could not escape the evil either. So although I tried to see the trauma as social, as something external that came to afflict the self, the sufferer, Yan, took it as something from inside, from herself. She felt that only she could be blamed. "I want to heal myself. It is my fault" was her thinking. She turned the outside inward and saw the sickness eroding from inside,

from her heart and body. Yan's "false consciousness" thus was cultural bias rather than class bias or anything else.

Yan's "false consciousness" was deepened by the other women workers in the workplace, especially those who treated her as an abnormal person. There were not only complaints about her, but also rumors and gossip everywhere. While some joked that she was pursued by spirits, some guessed she was bullied by a man in the workplace. Some were more understanding and thought that she had a personal *secret* or suffering that could not be told. Yan never openly talked about her dream and scream with any co-workers, so people often discussed it behind her back. Gossip often resulted in rumors that tended to exaggerate her situation, especially for those who never heard the screams. "Screaming like a *nu gui* (female ghost)", "Crying out with daunting voice, like being struck by a storm", "It's so scary, she screamed with a trembling body that could never calm", and "She never stopped screaming at night; the high-pitched voice was very ghostly" were the common words of workers' talk and gossip. Yan knew that people often gossiped about her. But the more people talked about her, the more she isolated herself and the more anxiously she wanted to cure herself. She was aware that other workers didn't want to make friends with her because she had the strange habit of screaming at night. "I simply don't know how to say it and how to explain to people. I know people are making stories of me. ... But what can I do? I do feel guilty toward my room mates. You know we are already short of sleeping hours, I really don't want to disturb people's sleep. It's my fault, I want to heal myself as soon as possible," Yan told me with a depressed voice. But Yan was too ashamed to see a doctor, especially when she did not know how to articulate her "illness". During my stay in the field, she never went to see a doctor. Yan took on herself the sole responsibility for the trauma and developed a sense of guilt which I thought further worsened her situation.

The room mates, though directly affected by her screams, were actually more sympathetic to her. Ping, a big sister in the room, was Yan's local mate from the same place of origin, Hunan. She was the one who tried to talk to Yan and asked her to control the scream. Ping worried what would happen if Yan could not control her scream. If the upper management thought that her screaming affected others' sleep and worse, others' working mood, then she might not be able to stay long in the

factory. Ping told me her worry one night when Yan was not in the room: "You know, if Yan is not a capable person, I don't think the company will keep her. There is too much gossip about her and people take her as an abnormal person. ... Nobody would like an abnormal person working in the factory." Bin, the girl I shared the bunk with, was less concerned about her job, but more about her health, since Bin had her own problem of back ache. She thought that Yan's screaming was daunting and disturbing, but she also felt close to her and said, "Sometimes I want to scream as well, but I just can't. Her scream seems to fill the air with my own pain. I really think that sometimes." Common bodily pain was the source of empathy on the basic of which Bin tried to tolerate Yan's disturbances. "She must have deep suffering that cannot be voiced. I feel pity for her, you know, she is such a nice and capable girl. One night I saw her crying" Bin started to tell me Yan's story in a very small voice when I slept beside her at night.

Chronic Pain: Body and Work Process

"I get a nagging pain in my back. It often hurts me. After I had worked here for several months, I started to have that pain. You know, I am already better than the assembly girls who sit all day and night on the line. I'm just doing typing, recording and bookkeeping in the Production Department. Sometimes I get the chance to walk around and take a rest, drink some water. But still I suffer from the pain, I don't know why. Sometimes it runs to the back, sometimes it runs to the neck. "

Yan was a clerk in the Production Department. This was her second job after graduating from secondary school in her hometown and spending one year studying accountancy in Guangzhou. Yan's understanding of her pain was ambivalent. Sometimes she thought it was overtly due to the overloaded work and stress, yet sometimes she murmured that at the age of 24 she was too old to work in the factory. She no longer had the energy to toil for twelve hours each day. The average age of all female workers in the factory was 20.2, and most of the line girls were only sixteen to eighteen. Old age meant a body too deteriorated to endure the industrial work. The

factory girls expected their health to deteriorate after working for more than two years in the city.

The electronic industry is notorious for using toxic chemicals and creating health damage to workers. Since I am not well equipped with medical knowledge, nor knowledge of chemical effects or industrial health hazards, I cannot go deep to explore those hazards that might damage the bodily organs, such as heart and lung problems, blood and cell damage, procreation problems and even cancers. Rather, based on the daily experiences shared with my co-workers, I focus on chronic pains that were extensively shared in the workplace- headache, sore throat, flu and cough, stomach problems, back ache, nausea, eye strains, dizziness and weakness and menstrual pain.

Nearly every process and job along the electronic production line involves the use or manipulation of a complex series of chemical processes. Since it is beyond my knowledge to provide a step-by-step overview of the production processes, I can only highlight some of the major work processes that cause obvious hazards and where my co-workers told me of their suffering. Cleaning, the first job of semiconductor assembly, used most of the chemical cleaning agents such as solvents, acids and alkalis for degreasing, rinsing, etching, oxidizing and buffing the electronic chips or dies. Acids and organic solvents can be highly toxic and cause long-term effects on human health. Workers on the shop floor were easily exposed to toxic cleaning agents, especially those involved in the assembly of PCBs (printed circuit boards) and semiconductor assembly. Some forms of cleaning took place in nearly each major work process and it was an essential step in soldering, bonding, plating, encapsulating and other assembly processes (Gassert 1985). Dip cleaning was the method used in the Meteor; electronic chips and PCBs were cleaned in a large bath of heated solution before they came to be assembled. Organic solvents such as alcohol, aliphatic, aromatic or chlorinated hydrocarbons were the most common and probably the most poisonous chemicals used in the workplace. While some were in pure solution, others were mixed with or used to dilute other substances such as inks, paints, plastics and glues. The cleaning room was a disgusting place; workers were unwilling to work there. Chemical fumes and smells were nauseating and often

caused narcotic effects such as headache, drowsy, dizzy or drunk feeling and might cause long-term illness of the skin, nervous system or problems with internal organs.

I noticed Hui-ping, a girl of twenty, because she had a particularly pale face. She had worked in the cleaning room for nearly a year, she told me she had a serious headache and felt dizzy all the time:

“You know, none of the workers are willing to work in the cleaning room. So they bully the fresh worker. When I came to work here, they placed me in the room and never let me move out. The smells in the room are stuffy, and worse than those smells in the hospital. Those acids make me feel dizzy all the time and I can’t concentrate my mind well. Recently I find my head too painful to describe. I think of going back home if my headache cannot improve.”

The turn-over rate of workers in the cleaning room probably was the highest in the workplace, since few workers could stand the working conditions for more than a year. According to a handbook on health hazards in the electronic industry, cleaning jobs are often hazardous; acute injuries, illnesses and, occasionally, sudden death can result from exposure to strong irritant chemicals such as acids and alkalis. Burns of the skin, eyes and lungs are common with corrosive chemicals. Other less dangerous chemicals can cause chronic skin or lung problems such as dermatitis, allergic sensitization, sore throat, cough, asthma and conjunctivitis. Most solvents and acids are absorbed quickly through the skin and enter the bloodstream where they can travel throughout the body causing cell and organ damages. Fumes, vapours, mists and gases are also inhaled and pass through the lungs into the bloodstream, causing immediate effects on the nervous system such as headache, dizziness, or drowsiness (Gassert 1985:120).

Bonding was another essential work process that obviously caused chronic pains. Bonding is the heart of semiconductor assembly in electronics production, since it connects the electronic die to the IC (integrated circuit microchip) on a frame to create an electrical circuit. Produced by a machine with a computer monitor and a microscope, it was a semi-automatic job, since the machine required a bonding worker for its operation and maintenance. There were two types of bonding in the workplace: die bonding and wire bonding. Die bonding was a hand-made process; the minuscule semiconductor chips (dies) were mounted on the frame with a

transistor, diode or IC. Die bonding, or die-attachment, involved the application of epoxy resin in the frames along with a curing agent, so that the dies could be fixed on the frames. Workers used a pair of tweezers to separate the chips and then put them onto the frames with extreme care since the chips could easily drop off. Chips were the most expensive electronic component in the whole production; workers were often reminded of this and were put under pressure to work with minute care. Wire bonding, the next step after die-attachment used aluminum wires to create an electric circuit. An electric chip would not work unless it was connected by wire to the electrical terminals of the frame. Ultrasound was applied in the wire bonding; the sound wave caused the molecules in the wire and the contact points to vibrate and shake together, forming bonds. Since both the die and the wire were extremely minute and thin, the workers could only perform the job by using the microscope and the computer monitor to fix the wire and the contact points. Later drops of black epoxy glue would be coated on the bonded die in order to protect them from damage. Workers held a gun, shooting drops of glue on the frames and then put them into an oven to be baked to fully cure the epoxy. Epoxy resin is known for its poisonous nature and hazards to workers health, especially in skin and lung-related illnesses (Gassert 1985:122-123).

Bonding was a work process notable for the extreme smallness of the objects it worked with. Long-time use of microscope and over-concentration on detail caused eyestrain, dizziness, headache and stress. Permanent eyesight damage resulted if the worker continuously used the microscope for more than two years. Bonding machines in the Meteor operated 24-hours. Besides the electronic components it produced, the machines were the most costly fixed property in the workplace, so that the company could not afford to stop production. Workers were arranged on two shifts. Since I could not observe production in the daytime, I learned the work process in the night. There were forty-six workers in the Bonding Department inclusive of technicians, foremen and line leaders. All the bonding workers were female, and said to be experienced workers who had worked more than two years in the factory before being moved in the Bonding Room. Sharp eyes, thin fingers and good work attitudes were particularly important in the bonding job, said Lun, the foreman. He explained,

“Damaged chips are incurable, so we have high pressure to do everything in the right way. ... In the night hours, workers usually don’t have enough spirit to concentrate on work, so that the work pace is lower and there is more breakage.”

“The wage and bonus here is a little bit higher than for the workers in other assembly lines. The bonding job is harder and energy-consuming.” Surrounded by the rhythmic sound of the bonding machines, Lun needed to raise his voice when he talked to me. The temperature in the room was much lower than in the other rooms and lines on the shopfloor. Maintenance of the chips and machine required cool conditions. The big contrast between the cool temperature in the working room and hot temperature outside the workplace, especially in the summer time, often caused workers to get flu, colds and coughs, as they were in and out for lunch and dinner. Workers’ faints most often occurred in the Bonding Room, especially in the time of women’s menstrual pain.

Siu-mei, an old worker in the Bonding Room told me one night,

“We are often told that we are at the heart of the production and the most important workers in the company. But what can we have? Fifty *yen* more than other workers in the workplace. Yet we all know that our eyesight is becoming weaker and weaker. Sometimes when I leave the factory, I do not dare to touch the sunlight. I find my vision blurred and I can’t walk a straight line.”

Another girl, Hon-ling, sat beside Siu-mei. She jumped into our conversation:

“I just worry about my eyestrain, I’ve got headache and stomach ache (what she meant was menstrual pain) too. It’s too stressful to work here. Night and day are turned upside down. I demand to move out but there is still no reply. You know I don’t want to faint myself one day. ...”

There was a common belief in the Bonding Room that once the women developed eyestrain, headache and menstrual pain, they could never be cured. Both western medicines and Chinese herbal medicines were tried, but all were said to be useless, no help at all. Hon-ling said she had the headache after working half a year in the Bonding Room and she tried several ways to heal herself, but nothing helped. “Sometime it seems that the pain is incurable. Even when I go back home, it follows me,” Hon-ling tried to convince me. Bad sleep in the daytime and a stressful working situation at night contributed to the general weakness of workers’ health and the

specific illnesses of each worker. Sometimes just by looking at the face, one could tell a fresh from an old worker. Rosy face, an insignia of the young village girl, faded after just a year or two in the factory.

The intensity of bodily pain of course varied among workers. There was no "pain thermometer" that could measure the pain and the experience of pain was inseparable from personal perception and social influence (Good, Brodwin and Kleinman et al 1994:6). The experience of pain of one worker could easily affect other workers, especially in the same line or same working room. Headache, back ache and menstrual pain were pervasive in the workplace. These problems however were invisible, especially when most of the women kept their individual issues secret and remained silent. Yet once the problems were evoked, nearly every worker in the workplace could tell her own story. The processes of bodily pain thus were both psychosomatic and socio-cultural. Chronic pain, because of its persistence and incurability, provided an index of social alienation and domination in the workplace. Arthur Kleinman, on the other hand argues that chronic pain is the embodiment of human suffering, and can be viewed as a process of embodiment of resistance to the lived flow of daily experience (1994:174). Chronic pain, he believes, was a source of power, with its uncompromising refusal to be cured that can provide a powerful challenge to the micropolitics of social relations (1994:187). Pain would not only lower the work pace, but could sometimes cause direct interruption or stoppage to the production. Dizziness and eyestrain would affect the accuracy and efficiency of the bonding workers in managing the machine. Thus a painful body was not a defeated body. It was a resistant shield to the micropower that afflicted directly on the self. The collective manipulation of chronic pain in the workplace therefore could be seen as the fundamental bodily resistance to the work, to the industrial labour that was too alienating and too stressful to the workers. This argument can be illuminated by analyzing the menstrual pain of women workers.

Menstrual Politics: Women's Time vs Industrial Time

I don't know why, it's so painful that I can't control it. Inside my body, something turned upside down, like a knife cutting me into pieces. And the blood, the blood never seemed to stop flowing.

(Lan, age 19)

Women's fainted time and again in the workplace. On a hot May afternoon, a girl called Lan on line A fainted again. Her face turned pale, her lips became bloodless, and the body was as cold as ice and trembling. No one could stop the cold and the pain. Production was interrupted. "It's the *woman's issue*, woman's period and woman's fate." Women on the line all knew what happened, and every time they sigh, worrying that the suffering would come to them sooner and later. Every month there would be one or two women sent to the clinic suffering from dysmenorrhea. It was a threat, a pain, an inescapable *issue* shared by all women in the workplace irrespective of age (between the age of menarche and menopause), locality and ethnicity. This common experience of women inevitably exposed to the conflict between the uncompromising nature of industrial time and a woman's life.

The women's period is "the moment of truth that will not sustain lies", Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove argued in their brilliant book, *The Wise Wound: Eve's Curse and Everywoman* (1978). The *truth*, here, I want to articulate in the particular context at China's workplace, was the alienation, the arbitrariness of disciplinary time that intruded, dissected, and reorganized women's life. That time was inherently contradictory to their sense of time, produced closer to their common bodily experiences. Women's life, women's sense of time, I will argue, is more loyal to their bodies. Or one can say women's life is more fatalistic, bound by their bodily experience. With insight from Julie Kristeva, we know that women's time is particular. It can never be fully incorporated into the social time, as it is organized by a *periodical* or *cyclical* sense of time as women live out their bodily change and repetition in everyday practices. According to Toril Moi's exegesis, Kristeva in the paper "Women's Time" provides a feminine mode of time in contrast to the historical and social time: "Female subjectivity would seem to be linked both to *cyclical* time

(repetition) and to *monumental* time (eternity), at least in so far as both ways of conceptualizing time from the perspective of motherhood and reproduction. The time of history, however, can be characterized as *linear* time: time as project, teleology, departure, progression and arrival”, which nevertheless is contradictory to women’s time (1986:187). Women’s time is *maternal* time; the menstrual cycle, the cycle of marriage and procreation, the cycle of puberty and motherhood, are all crucial bodily experiences in making up a woman’s life. Women’s body, as the container of the female sexual subjects is much more important than men’s body in shaping women’s life form and chance. The menstrual cycle, the cycle of ease and pain, the cycle of nature and harmony in Chinese physiology, is the most important factor in organizing women’s sense of time as it runs repetitively in monthly cycles. The cyclical sense of time, inevitably is going to conflict with the linear, progressive and aggressive male industrial time. As Emily Martin rightly said,

Women, grounded whether they like it or not in cyclical bodily experiences, live both the time of industrial society and another kind of time that is often incompatible with the first.

(1987:198)

At night after the overtime work, I went to visit Lan. She lay on her bed, still looking pale and weak. At the age of 19, she often suffered from menstrual pain.

“I don’t know why, it’s so painful that I can’t control it. Inside my body, something turned upside down, like a knife cutting me into pieces. And the blood, the blood never seemed to stop flowing.” Lan told me.

“What did the nurse do to you?” I asked.

“The nurse gave me an injection, and after a few hours, the pain was gone, but I was too weak and dizzy, so I fell asleep again. When I woke up, it was already evening and the nurse asked me to leave. ... But I was so afraid, I could feel the blood was still flowing. It was very embarrassing that my pants were getting stained and red,” Lan told me in a low tone.

“Did you have the pain when you were in your hometown?” Lan came from a village in Jiangxi. Before she moved out to work in the factory, she helped her family by doing farm work at home.

“No, I didn’t feel any discomfort when it came. I didn’t even know it would cause pain. Sometimes my mother asked me not to go to the rice field when the period came. She said the water in the field would make me have pain, but I didn’t feel the hurt. I would take rest when I felt tired,” Lan said.

Over half of the women in the workplace were subjected to dysmenorrhea, though the degree of pain varied from one to another and from time to time. Menstrual pains occurred less often when the women were in the village. Most of the women said they started to have the pain after working one or two years in the workplace. But some told me once they moved out the village, they suffered immediately from the pain. This common rhythm of suffering, while it caused pain to the women, couldn’t help but at the same time cause a “headache” to the production machine. The disciplinary time was scientifically studied and deliberately organized, but the woman’s body, had its own clock, and could never be totally regulated and subsumed. A woman’s faint often stopped the assembly line until her position was filled by somebody else. The loss of production was expected but it could strike at any time. Especially at the time of a rush order, the women’s faints were often taken as bad omens foretelling the possibility of not being able to meet the order date. A sudden change of environment, long working hours, extreme work pressure all contributed to disturb the menstrual cycles. So some would prolong their period from five to seven days, some had periods lasting over a month and some simply would stop and never have periods. Menstrual disorder disturbed women’s time and made it harder for the disciplinary machine to control the women’s lives.

On the shop floor line leaders kept at hand unknown pills, to provide when the workers claimed menstrual discomfort. Nobody could ask for sick-leave because of menstrual pain. Bai-lan, the line leader told me,

“Too many women had this kind of problem. If we allowed one to take rest, then all the others would ask for it as well. What can we do? Production cannot be stopped. We give the pills to the girls to stop the pain. Or, if they faint, we send them to the hospital.”

These unknown pills, which I guessed were panedols and contraceptive pills, were distributed by the Personnel Department to the line.

“So we keep them. Whenever the girls suffer from the pain, we give them water and the pills. Sometimes these pills really work, it can stop the pain within a short time.” Bai-lan explained to me.

Girls on the line had no choice but to depend on these pills. Some thought they were panaceas, and could not live without them:

“I don’t know what the pills are, but every time when I feel pain, I eat them and I feel released. ... Sometimes I am afraid that the line leader will refuse to give them to me, so I keep some of the pills myself.” (Fu-xing, a girl on line B).

Only a few refused to take them because of rumors that they could damage health, especially fertility. While the company encouraged the girls to take the pills when they suffered from menstrual pains, there were also worries that the contraceptive pills would be misused and sexual encounters encouraged. So they warned the girls that these pills could not be used except for menstrual disorders. The line leader often reminded the girls:

“These pills are not for fun. If you use them wrong, you’ll make a big mistake.”

The lack of an explicit explanation for these pills stimulated myths and rumors that was a strategy of the production machine to control the female body and the sexual behaviours. Providing the unknown pills thus was the attempt to regulate the female body, to rechannel the women’s time into the mainstream of the disciplinary time.

It was thus not an accidental occurrence, nor an unintended play of patriarchy, that the industrial world was kept largely for male for such a long time, especially in the western societies. For Karl Marx, labour is the most distinctive human practice. It distinguishes human beings from other species, and in work humans experience freedom, self-praxis and a creative transformation of nature in accord with human needs. But under capitalism, labour is subsumed for the interest of capital, no longer for self-praxis and self-fulfillment. Thus labour becomes the alienation of human practice under capitalist relation of production. The workers experience alienation at least in two ways: loss of control of their product and loss control of their productive activity; they do not possess the means of production, the method, the time or the

result of production. In short, the alienation of labour is the loss of control over life and the experience of life as an object. This objectification of human life is the utmost evil of capitalism. Marx puts it clearly,

The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside* him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.

(1964:108)

Marx's labour, nevertheless, is an asexual labour and the alienation he indicted is a general experience for both male and female workers. Here I want to elaborate how the alienation of labour experienced by male and female workers is sexually different and gendered in nature. Female workers, I argue, can be subject to more acute and deeper alienating forces than male workers, as a woman's physiology, body and sense of time are fundamentally contradictory to the capitalist mode of production and the industrialized mode of time. Women's time was less able to be surrendered, and women's bodies were most difficult to regulate. Pre-menstrual syndrome, menstrual pain, maternal leave and sickness all are women's issues that are out of the control of the capitalist machine. Women's labour is devalued and discriminated against precisely because of the difficulty for the machine of instituting and rechanneling women's time and life into industrial time. In the world dominated by the capitalist mode of production, women are then second class not only as sexual subjects, but also as labourers. Women workers are cheaper because they are the less able to live up to the production machine, the disciplinary time. Socialist feminism is right to say that women are oppressed by double alienation, as women and as workers. But we need to further pinpoint how the double alienation is not independent, but closely interconnected and mutually deepening (Bartky, 1990). It is not enough to say that women as workers are alienated in material production, while as females are estranged in cultural production. While it is possible to separate the

double alienation, I would rather say, women, already estranged by bio-cultural production, are further deeply alienated in economic production.

Despite the fact that dysmenorrhea was a serious problem in the workplace affecting women's health and production, menstruation was still taboo, not to be talked directly or in public. The fear of talking came from the male staff who took the issue as a purely female issue, dirty and disgusting. They refused to talk, to mention and to help when they saw girls suffer from menstrual pain or faint. The menstruating body, for the male supervisors or managers, was a taboo body that not only disrupted production, but also polluted the workplace and offended their masculinity. Here Chinese local culture and the imperatives of the production machine were in conflict. Female labour had to be drawn out from the domestic sphere, to the workplace. But female bodies were still restricted in Chinese patriarchal culture, especially in the rural context. Women were conceived as polluting objects when they were menstruating or pregnant. It was better to keep them at home and not let them show up in the public. Local practices vary, but in many places in China today, menstruating women are not allowed to perform ancestor worship, participate in public rituals such as wedding or funeral ceremonies, or eat with male family members at the same table. The women's liberation movement in Mao's socialist era, although it challenged feudal practices on gender issues, only focused on the marriage and work systems. It did not touch a lot of hidden beliefs, such as the menstruation taboo. Reform China and international capital needed female labour, especially rural female labour. They had no other way but to deal with these hidden beliefs. Though Deleuze and Guattari believed that the capitalist machine was able to conquer, co-opt, and reterritorialize all sorts of residual, artificial, imaginary or symbolic territorialities wherever it moved (1984), the machine in the workplace seemed to leave menstruation as a gray area it could not tackle. The worn-out Chinese patriarchal machine continued to manipulate practice.

Since the labour of the polluted female bodies was wanted, the presence of the taboo bodies could no longer be hidden. The patriarchal machine took a schizophrenic stance and wanted to keep menstruation as a disguised phenomenon in the public space. Dirty, ugly, undesirable and unmentionable - these were the male's attitudes towards female menstrual flow. The blood was a threat to the cool space of

the workplace as well as to the purity of male sexuality. There was still a firm belief that men should avoid sexual encounters with menstrual women lest male potency be threatened, and the man's body polluted. Menstruating women thus should not show up in the public space. But since they were now everywhere in the workplace, the women should at least behave themselves well and try their best to hide the flow, the rag, the sanitary towels or whatever related to the issue. It was forbidden to use the word menstruation in daily language, even among girls themselves; "that issue", "big aunt", and "the dirt" were the euphemisms. When the girls talked of menstrual pain, they called it "stomach ache" to each other, which I misunderstood for quite a long time. So when they sometimes wanted to speak of stomach ache, they had to emphasize it as a "real stomach ache" and not the fake one. While the girls could not hide their body in the workplace, they were taught to hide their blood with extreme care. A stain on their pants would be seen as a great shame. Careless girls would not only be reproached by the line leaders, but also depreciated by other women as well. Sanitary towels had to be kept secret and it was a great sin to expose them to public view. I was given a serious lesson by my room mates, though out of good will, when I didn't notice the strictness of the taboo and put sanitary towels everywhere on my bed. My misunderstanding of the bed as a private space led me to relax control in a way which was unacceptable to my room mates. Since six people shared the room and the beds were next to each other, in the eyes of the girls there nothing was private. I became an anxious woman during my period. Self-technologizing was most complete on the issue of menstruation. The negative male attitude produced derogatory subjects who learned to be shameful of their own body. Shame or embarrassment about mentioning the women's issue made it almost impossible for the women to ask for a work recess, even when they suffered from serious pain. That is why faints were so common on the shop floor.

Pain, Fragmentation and Anger

I tried very hard to control my body. I clenched my teeth and gnawed my finger, but my body was still trembling. It was out of my control; it was cold sweating and my inside continued to tremble. I hated it so much, I hated *that issue* (menstruation). Why should women suffer from that?

(Ling-yue, aged 18)

I want to go back home, I can't stand the pain here. Nobody will care for you, but everybody looks at you. I feel ashamed to have that issue and the pain on the line. My body is simply uncontrollable and so disgusting. I want to dig a hole and bury myself at the moment I ask help from the line leader.

(Shui-hua, aged 20)

Women learned shame for their bodies from outside social violence, whereas they had gone through inner splitting and fragmentation from their inside bodily experiences and mutations. Emily Martin argues that women suffer from alienation with respect to part of the self much more acutely than men:

For one thing, becoming sexually female entails inner fragmentation of the self. A woman must become only a physical body in order to be sexual.

(1989:21)

Splitting the self from the body, treating the body as an object for the self, was the common experience of the women, particularly when they went through menstrual pain. "It was out of my control. ... I hated it so much", "It cut my body into pieces"-the body was not only taken as an object, but sometimes as an opponent to oneself. In facing agony, women not merely split their mind and body, but also turned themselves into a number of *personae* (Martin, 1989:21). If the women wanted to retain the "will to power" over their life and body, dividing the self was one of the way out to resist extreme bodily pain and to prevent total self collapsing. The intense,

extreme bodily pain will destroy the integrity of the self and create some sort of schizophrenic experience. Since it was often out of the control, the sufferers would try to exteriorize the pain as something that was opposite to their bodies, and the bodies opposite to their selves. The pain attacked the body. The body, failing to sustain the pain, in return took revenge on the self. It was the pain that caused the splitting of the body and self. Or we could say the splitting of the self from the body was a life ruse to confront the unbearable pain. Such externalization formed a buffer that could prevent the complete disintegration of the body/self complex.

Inner fragmentation thus was the common experience of women in defending against the loss of self caused by bodily pain. What I want to elucidate is how this inner fragmentation of women's body is related to social violence and alienation.

R. D. Laing, Deleuze and Guattari all believed that schizophrenia- the splitting of self is not a syndrome for a few. Rather it is a common phenomenon, an everyday life tactic of survival for normal people to live in modern capitalist societies (1984).

R. D. Laing was once irritated and said,

Torn, body, mind and spirit, by inner contradictions, pulled in different directions, Man cut off from his own mind, cut off equally from his own body- a half crazed creature in a mad world.

(1967:46-47)

To survive in a mad industrial world, to go through social alienation, what the human being can do is to tear themselves apart, both mind and body. The destruction of the social, in Laing's eyes, comes through the destruction of the self. The divided self, estranged from oneself and society, he argued, cannot experience either oneself or others as "real" or "whole". The self invents a false self and with it one confronts both the outside world and one's own despair. The disintegration of the real self keeps pace with the growing unreality of the false self until, in the extremes of schizophrenic breakdown, the whole self disintegrates (Laing, 1969).

The divided self, the schizoid boy, as R. D. Laing, Deleuze and Guattari's said, is not sexually differentiated. Here I want to argue again that the process of disintegration of the self, or the experience of schizophrenia, is specifically gendered

in nature. Women as sexual subjects first experience an inner fragmentation from their bodily existence. Second, as a social body, as alienated labour, as half crazed creatures in a mad world, they live out a further disintegration of the self. Labour alienation worsened the female body conditions, which in turn deepened the self destruction when women experienced both inner bodily fragmentation and social alienation at the same time. A woman in the workplace not merely tore her mind and body apart, but further dissected her body into numerable pieces. Tearing the body into parts was a possible way of confronting the impossibility of lessening extreme individual and social pain. Social alienation and bodily alienation were well integrated in the bodies of the female workers. Suffering from the menstrual pain, Ling-yue bit her teeth and gnawed her finger, hoping by tearing the bodily parts to alleviate the intolerable pain. Treating the body as an object, that is hostile and disgusting object, was the common experience of bodily alienation of the women workers. But Shui-huang would not further torture herself if her pain was not gazed at in public, and subjected to social alienation at the same time. "Why should women suffer from that *issue*?" was an indictment of women's own body. But the indictment was more grievous and the suffering more acute in the workplace, a male-manipulated public space. In social alienation the disciplinary machine first ruined the female body and then made bodily alienation unacceptable when exposed to the social. "I want to dig a hole and bury myself" illustrated the shame of women's bodily alienation before the socially alienated male space. Shui-huang strongly desired to conceal her bodily pain from the workplace, and it was plain too that by exposing bodily pain in public, Shui-huang suffered shame and social pain. A woman thus not only suffered her own bodily pain, but the outside social pain that deepened the inner one. Bodily alienation and social alienation were mutually reinforcing.

But where was the fragmentation, where did the fissure of transgression lie. The menstrual body itself was the body of resistance. The failure of the disciplinary machine to control the menstrual body was very plain. No matter how deliberately the movement of bodily acts was measured, and no matter how the pace of work was scientifically calculated in minutes and seconds, the female body had its own rhythm of time and suffering. A woman was not a robot. A woman's body was a body of flesh and blood that could be regulated, but never changed and totally subsumed.

While most of the women's time was successfully regulated, the exact moment of a woman's menstrual period, the outrageous pain, the depression and the anger could not be precisely anticipated. Fainting, the extreme experience of bodily pain, could be seen as the fundamental challenge to the disciplinary machine. Fainting was not an illness, but surely a dysfunction of the female body that could live in its own rhythm. This obviously exposed both the violence of industrial time and its failure to turn the female body into a working robot. Time and time again, fainting in the workplace disrupted the production machine, causing chaos and uncertainty for the production plan.

Menstruation, a sign of femininity, united women of different ages and backgrounds in the workplace. Menstruation provides a mark of womanhood, a rite of passage turning girlhood into womanhood. It demonstrates the very possibility of procreation, asserting women's power of creation and self-identity. Despite the shame and disgust attached to menstruation by the society, Emily Martin said,

the positive feelings women themselves have about menstruation also allow them to act in their own behalf, not just as members of private families inside the home. The primary positive feeling many women have about menstruation is that it defines them as woman.

(1989:101)

Whilst a women's body and time is unique, women's pain can be shared. In times of trouble, every woman would come to help, even if it meant violating the factory regulations. Women often left their work seats without asking for a permit to help other women when there was serious pain or fainting. Ignoring serious warnings, they kept right on bringing water, finding a thick cover to warm their sisters' bodies, or accompanying them to the washroom. Production on the line would be interrupted, but none of the workers cared. Severe reproaches would come from the higher management but women simply "listened without hearing". The washroom was often conceived of as a place of transgression, where women could avoid disciplinary control and find room for themselves (Shapiro-Perl 1984; Martin 1989). The washroom was not only a place where women could keep their menstrual blood from

showing. It was also the place that they could preserve a bit of autonomy for themselves in a context where their bodily state and movements were rigidly controlled (Martin 1989:94). Women found in the concrete experiences of their bodies a different notion of time, the opposite of the industrial time in the workplace.

The premenstrual syndrome of low mood, bad temper and a surly reluctance to work was another act of resistance to the disciplinary machine. Sudden crying often broke out. It was claimed this was just before the menstruation period. Some of the women could hide their tears from the shop floor until they got back to the dorm room. But some of them burst into tears on the line. It was often said that women were easily irritated when they were “waiting for that *issue*” and if they were criticized by their line leaders at that moment, they would often lose their temper. It was a moment of hassle and of the untouchable. And if the line leaders wanted to avoid the girls’ anger or bad temper for “no reason”, it was better to leave them alone. Bai-lan, my line leader told me, “When you see some girls suddenly lose their temper for no reason, then you know they are disturbed by that *matter*.”

The unnamed anger often drove the girls into confrontation of the factory disciplines or sometimes even disobedience of the upper management. There was gossip among girls about Choi-ping, a girl on my line, that at the moment of her *issue* she refused to change her work position, and burst into anger and tears when the line leader told her to do so. Choi-ping was a quiet and obedient girl all the time. So when her anger suddenly grew and directly opposed the disciplinary order, Bai-lan and all the women on the line were surprised and thought that she was suffered from that *issue*. The anger demonstrated a power that the girls usually hid. At the moment of menstruation, anger was released and power came. As Susan Griffin said, the anger was the roaring from inside, it was a timely blessing that women showed their anger and power. In description of a woman suffering from anger, she wrote,

And so her anger grew. It swept through her like a fire. She was more than shaken. She thought she was consumed. But she was illuminated with her rage; she was bright with fury. And though she still trembled, one day she saw she had survived this blaze. And after a time she came to see this anger-

that-was-so-long-denied as a blessing.

(1978:185)

It was a moment of legitimate rage, a moment when women knew their bodily limit and the limit of subordination to the social and institutional violence. Every woman on the line had a well-stocked arsenal of anger and it was only a matter of time before it flared. A reproach from the line leader, a change of work position, an argument among workers, could all accelerate an outburst of anger against the complex of bodily and social violence. The moment of menstruation ended tolerance. "Sometimes they become very moody and slow down their work. ... But it is difficult to know whether they are really suffering from that *issue* or simply pretend," Bai-lan murmured to me, showing her inability to control the menstrual troubles on the line. Menstruation, an issue of women's oppression, might act as a weapon to confront the disciplinary control. The refusal of the workers to cope with the work pace, the unwillingness to follow an unreasonable management order, or sudden burst into tears and anger all turned the disciplinary machine into a "paper tiger". A stigma of the shameful female body, the menstrual flow could sometimes be a sharp weapon to disrupt production and protect the women's body from complete immersion into the production machine. It was a moment of a red splash of freedom.

Yan's Pain: between the Body and the Social

I think I love him.

I am poor, but I am not greedy.

I was wondering about going back home or finding a job elsewhere. I really had no idea at the beginning. ...

Back to Yan's story of pain. We already know that industrial labour caused her bodily pain, and her psychosomatic pain was embedded in a wider social and cultural context. When Yan mentioned that at the age of 24 she was too old to work in the factory, it designated not only her physical state, but something more subtle and cultural that affected her life. The issue of age was laden with gendered and cultural

significance. Yan was brought up in a town in the western part of Hunan Province, the province where Mao Zedong was born. The area where she lived was one of the poorest counties in the province. But her family was not poor, since both her father and mother were the official cadres and worked in the township government. She had an elder sister and a younger brother, and all three of them had secondary or higher education. Since her parents were the educated people and government officials, the children were expected to have as much higher education as possible. After secondary school, Yan tried her best to get into university but failed twice in the examinations. At the age of 19, she was sent by her parent to a one-year course in accountancy in Guangzhou. After the course, she went back home to be an accountant in the forestry branch of the township government.

She was not satisfied with the job and the life in a small, poor town. After a year in Guangzhou she already knew the great disparity between the urban and the rural. "I was a cadre in my hometown, but my wage was just two hundred dollars. An ordinary worker in Guangzhou earned more than me," she said. Aside from the wage, there was too great a gap in material life style. None of the youngsters were willing to stay in the town: "Educated or not, they all went to Guangdong looking for chances." Yan convinced me that she was not particularly ambitious. She went with her elder sister to work in Dongguan, another economic development zone in Guangdong. When her elder sister married a local citizen there, their *hukou* were transferred from their hometown to Dongguan by paying five thousands dollars per head to the local government. As I have discussed in Chapter III, in the period of socialist construction, the *hukou* system was one of the most effective mechanisms by which to control and distribute population. One's fate was tied to the area of one's birth. In the village, one's whole life would be as a peasant. If luckily, in the city one would be a worker, part of a privileged class that enjoyed all the products of the peasants, but not vice versa. Population mobility was not permitted unless part of the state plan. With the open-door policy and economic reform, the labour surplus from the rural areas was drawn to cities to meet the needs of private or international capital. After being bound to the land for three decades, it was the first time that the whole of the Chinese peasantry gained freedom to move, and freedom to experience the inequality between the urban and the rural.

Yan spent more than two years in Dongguan, working as a secretary in an electronic company and earning six hundred *yuan* per month. She felt happy in the first year as she was supported by her sister's family; she ate and slept there, enjoying the sort of family life that was beyond the dreams of any *dagongmei* who worked far away from her hometown. As a secretary, directly serving the general manager of the company. She held as a high status job. She said she could learn a lot, especially about how to deal with complicated human relationships. She became quite mature in that year. Then her affair with the general manager, a Hong Kong man in his mid-forties, made her leave the company, and even Dongguan.

Yan told me the story one night when we went to a book shop. "He treated me so nicely, like an uncle, teaching me a lot of things. I didn't hate him, frankly. We worked as a pair of good partners and he never scolded or criticized me. ... But he had a family, wife, sons and daughters in Hong Kong. Sometimes they came to visit him and had fun there. ... Hm, he wanted to take me as a lover and promised to house me and take care of me if I was willing to follow him. You know, a lot of girls now are looking for that kind of relationship and waiting for men to feed them. They don't mind the status. But I was so hesitant, so fearful that something out of my control would happen. It might affect my whole life."

She refused the relationship and left the company. Asked if she regretted it, she responded with a smile, and said, "Sometimes I do miss him." It seemed clear that they were actually sexually attracted to each other, and the reason for her refusal was more than an ethical issue. She was ambivalent enough that even she herself could not quite tell what she felt. In Shenzhen, there were residential areas called *er-nai cun*, concubine's villages or second-wife villages, where all the women fed by Hong Kong businessmen lived. When I went through there with other women workers, they often made fun of the women they saw, picking on way they dressed and their make-up. "*Bu yao mian zi*", shameless, or "*mai shen*", selling body, were the common phrases used to make fun of the women. "*Mian zi*" meant not only one's own dignity, but also one's relationship with others, especially the family and the community. "*Bu yao mian zi*" not only insulted oneself, but also one's family and hometown. To be an *er-nai* was to be an illegal wife and an immoral woman, whose immorality lay in her reluctance to work for herself and in her greed in enjoying a

luxurious life and breaking up another woman's family. *Mai shen* was a kind of exchange of one's body for a better life, with overtone of material pursuit.

Yan often kept silent when other girls gossiped about the women they saw in the street. Sometimes she would comment, "It's their business, don't stick your nose in it." From her experience, it was not money that attracted her to the man for her decision to leave him was not without consideration of *mian zi*. Her elder sister, her parents being government cadres and her high educational background all contributed to her anxiety and thus the repression of her desires. "I am poor, but I am not greedy." In our interaction for months, Yan never forgot to convey this clear message to me. It was poverty that led her to leave her hometown, looking for a better life elsewhere. But it was not poverty that drove her to love a Hong Kong man. She had mixed feelings. She didn't consider her love illegal or immoral, but certainly *mian zi* and the uncertainty of the future led her to give up the relationship. The repression of Yan's desires was both sexual and cultural. The culture was laden with monogamous value and full of discrimination against the poor and women involved. Discrimination was severe when the men were from the far upper classes and there was huge gap of material life between the male and the female.

Leaving Dongguan, Yan was caught in an impasse. "I was wondering whether to go home or find a job somewhere else. I really had no idea at the beginning. I missed my hometown so much and definitely wanted to return. But I found I had no choice. My *hukou* was moved out and I could no longer find a job in the government. I found nowhere to settle. I could not go back to my hometown."

It was at that particular moment that Yan realized that once her life was put in transition, she could never go back. She felt her life was out of control forever. She often told me she felt she was floating. The paradox was that although she suppressed her desire to love a man, in order to prevent her future becoming uncontrollable, she found her life was already in an uncontrollable state. The sudden realization, I believed, was the possible cause of her trauma. Yan realized something she could not accept, and the process of realization was a process of refusal.

Bruno Bettelheim, in his study of Nazi concentration camps, stated that radical social change could lead to the destruction of the human psyche and the integrity of self (1960). Bettelheim's emphasis on a concrete external social environment, rather

than any inner psychic essence, in regulating the personal life, was a valuable study in social psychology. But his social “reality” was too reified, too “out there”; he did not see how different people perceived and imagined the social reality.

In Yan’s story, we can find a far more dynamic relationship between the individual and the social. The social might be “out there”, but it could not affect an individual’s life unless the individual turned it inside out. The rapid social change might be beyond Yan’s control, and it could only destroy her sense of self at the particular moment she realized it and refused it. But there was never a dichotomy between the individual and the social; the individual was always in the process, to a varying extent, of realizing the social. In this sense, we can understand what “the individual is impersonal” means. But it is more important for us to decode the process of im-personalization and to show that the social never ceases to impose violence on the self; and that the self, with its existence as being-in-the world, could not but realize the *reality*.

Yan’s story continued...

I know I had no more choice. When I’m wandering about the street of this big city, I know it is not my place, it does not belong to me. But I have to stay. I see people selling stuff at the side of the road, I wonder whether my life will finish soon.....

Leaving Dongguan, she was helped by a relative and found a job in Shenzhen, where we worked together. Yan was not happy with the job. As an ordinary clerk in one of the departments in the Company, she enjoyed none of the status and privileges she had in Dongguan. Above her was a huge hierarchy. After working at the Meteor for a year, she knew she had little chance of promotion, without particular *guanxi*, nepotistic relationships or kin in the higher hierarchy. She worked twelve hours a day, not including overtime work. In Dongguan, She usually worked ten hours and had some leisure time of her own at night. In Shenzhen, without the support from her sister’s family, she had to eat in the factory and sleep in the dormitory. She had to depend on herself for everything.

“Previously I didn’t think factory life was so exploitative. I knew the bosses always made a lot of money and the workers wages were mean. In that company in Dongguan, I knew almost everyone’s wage.... .. Well, the workers earn very little and I know that a meal the general manager takes in the restaurant costs more than a worker’s monthly salary. There is also unfairness among the workers. Some earn double or triple the others. But at that time, I didn’t question anything. I accepted it, it’s human’s fate,” Yan told me one day when several workers were complaining about the wages.

Yan only earned five hundred and fifty *yuan* per month, fifty *yuan* less than before. Yan thought she was worth more because what she did in the Company was more than a clerk’s work. Since she knew computer typing and the excel program and had experience of taking minutes, she actually undertook most of the department’s office work. The sense of oneself as a commodity was quite strong among the workers in the Company in general. But it was particularly acute for Yan. In Marx’s terminology, it was the experience of alienation. The acute sense of alienation might be due to the sudden changes in social life in China in the past decade. Before entering industrial life, life in the countryside was tied to the land and to nature; in some way it was a subsistence economy, and the labour they contributed was realized in products they could possess. Leaving the land and going to the city they had to experience another life, in which they could only sell their labour for cash. *Mai shen* was not only a term for women selling their bodies to men sexually, but was also often used for selling your body to the capitalists. They were forced to sense themselves as *proletariat*, having nothing but only their bodies when leaving the villages. The great contrast of the industrial and agricultural life helped them to develop a sense of alienation and class exploitation.

The realization of class consciousness, again, was varied and always fluid. In Dongguan Yan was more willing to cope with the industrial life and felt justified in selling her body. In Shenzhen she started to complain about her wages and grew more aware of inequality and exploitation. Her views towards the boss she worked for changed as the situation changed. Now she put herself in a completely oppositional class position, while in Dongguan she had been in a more ambiguous state. The most extreme way she put it was: “Before I controlled people, now I am

controlled..... In the eyes of the managers, workers are only stuff that could be thrown away at will.”

Given the long working hours and harsh working conditions, the common feeling in the workplace was that the workers “worked like dogs”. They told jokes about work like: “Is your only regret that you were not born a foreign dog?”, “Next incarnation? Remember to be born elsewhere, even as a dog”, or “Fate takes turns, fate will turn one day.” While some of the workers dreamed of becoming petty capitalists one day, others were more realistic. They knew that after several years of toiling in the factory, they had to go back to the village. For the women, it meant that they were going to get married before they became too old. Few of them could hope to stay in city unless they could find local husbands. As I have discussed in Chapter II, there was little chance for the peasantry to turn themselves into a real proletariat and form a new working class in the city. The socialist state in China ruled out the possibility of the birth of a new urban proletariat.

For marriage, Yan was again caught in between. At the age of 24, she really needed to think of marriage. In China, especially for rural women, the age of 24 was nearly the limit for a woman to enjoy the freedom of single life. Celibacy could not be accepted in the village life. Marriage was still “the big event of the entire life”, especially for women to settle for their future life, not in the family of origin, but the family of husband. Girls in the factory often returned home at the age of 23 or 24; sometimes they decided this themselves, and sometimes their parents requested it. In China, even in remote villages, people have the freedom to choose their own partners, but introduction by others is still a common practice and parents can still exert a tremendous effect on the final decision. Resistance to marriage was not impossible, but then women would have to depend totally on themselves, given that their families would object and it was an insult to the families of the grooms. Women in the workplace were always torn between family expectations and industrial demands, between marriage pressures and the temptations of city life. Sometimes it seems that the capitalist regime made use of the cultural expectations in exploiting the women’s lives. It was normal practice that most of the women would leave the factory automatically at 23 or 24, so they could contribute their labour between sixteen and twenty-four, the most energetic period of their lives. The capitalist

machine therefore could extract the maximum of labour capacity during the women's golden age. After working four to five years for twelve hours per day in the factory, they were totally worn out. It was high time for them to get married and continue their labour by giving birth to sons, serving the patriarchal machine. The socialist machine did not smash the patriarchal machine, nor did the capitalist motor; in fact, they worked happily with each other, hand in hand, gear meshing with gear.

Yan did not have a clue about her future married life, since her original *hukou* had been cancelled, and the last thing she wanted was to look for a husband in her rural hometown. She was lost whenever she thought of her married life.

"But why don't you find a man in Dongguan or Shenzhen?" I asked her one day.

"It's not as easy as buying vegetables. The men with local *hukou* in Shenzhen will not look for women of rural origin. There are plenty of pretty urban girls from the North, from the big cities for them to choose. In Dongguan, my sister did help me introducing partners, but sometimes I don't like people, sometimes people don't like me. Well, it's not easy....." She sighed.

"But can you think of not getting married?" I persisted.

"I do. Sometimes I don't want to think too much and let the time pass. What can I do? Yet the problem is I need to find a job to survive. I really don't know how many years I can keep working with a worn-out body. Even if my health could support it, I don't think the Company wants an old woman."

Yan kept silent afterward. The great anxiety of her life was not difficult to understand. The wear and tear of her life, as we said before, was as much psychosomatic as biocultural. The socialist machine produced the *hukou* system that bounded her mobility. The capitalist machine sapped her youth and energy. And finally the patriarchal machine made her lost in the world. Triple oppressions; we come nearer to Yan's dream and scream.

In and by its transcendence the dream discloses the original movement by which existence, in its irreducible solitude, projects itself toward a world which constitutes itself as the setting of its history.

By breaking with the objectivity which fascinates waking consciousness and by reinstating the human subject in its radical freedom, the dream discloses paradoxically the movement of freedom toward the world, the point of origin from which freedom makes itself world.

the trajectory of the dream, the whole Odyssey of human freedom.

M. Foucault (1985), *Dream and Existence*

We are now back on the trajectory of Yan's dream and scream. Domination foretells a story of resistance. If the narrative of Yan's personal story disclosed the social and cultural violence on an individual, then the final question we are eager to ask is how the individual reacted, lived out and resisted the violent reality. Were dream and scream acts of transgression? If we don't want to fall into the trap of saying that resistance could only happen in the unconscious, then we have to go beyond Freud's psychoanalysis in interpreting dreams. Secondly, if we want to argue that Yan's trauma was more than an inner personal psychological crisis, then again we must submerge it in a larger social and cultural context, without subjecting it to a cultural determinism.

Luckily we can find a final resort in Foucault's interpretation of dreams. Dreams, as Foucault believed, are not a fulfillment of a repressed desire, nor a rhapsody of images that help dreamers to escape the reality. Rather dreams are a specific form of human experience, entailing the very possibility of the theory of *Existenz*. As he put it,

But a dream is without doubt quite other than a rhapsody of images, for the simple reason what a dream is an imaginary experience; and if it cannot be

exhausted-- as we saw earlier-- by a psychological analysis, this is because it relates also to a theory of knowledge.

(1985:43)

Foucault's paper on *Dream, Imagination and Existence* provides another possible reading of dreams. Foucault attacks Freud's dream theory by saying "Freud psychologized the dream" rather than anything else. There was a double reductionism in Freud's theory. Firstly, he turned the meanings of dream into the unconsciousness in the process of saving its "meaninglessness" conceived by the 19th century academics, and second, by a over-psychologized translation of symbolic meanings into the images of dream. "The dream experience, by contrast, has a content all the richer to the degree that it is irreducible to the psychological determinations to which one tries to adapt it." (1985:44)

The first step Foucault did was to rescue the meanings of dream from the unconscious space and the psychological overtuning. Dream, as the imaginary experience, was the practice of human existence and the very possibility of transcendence. Only by admitting that dream was a sign of imaginary experience, a possible experience that could break through and transcend the dichotomy between the objectivity and subjectivity, between the consciousness and unconsciousness, then beings were provided the experience of freeing oneself and making oneself in the world:

the dream: like every imaginary experience, is an anthropological index of transcendence; and in this transcendence it announces the world into man by making itself into a world, and by giving itself the species of light, fire, water and darkness. In its anthropological significance, the history of the dream teaches us that it both reveals the world in its transcendence and modulates the world in its substance, playing on its material character.

(1985: 49)

Rather than taking dream experience as a displacement or a wishful fulfillment of the repressed desire, correspondent to a "lack" in waking reality, Foucault wanted to

restore the very possibility of human imaginary experience, which entailed a journey of *radical* freedom into the world with its transcendence. As he said, "Man has known, since antiquity, that in dreams he encounters what he is and what he will be, what he has done and what he is going to do, discovering there the knot that ties his freedom to the necessity of the world." (1985:47)

Yan's dream could be read as the trajectory of realization of her being-in-the-world and the very possibility of freedom and resistance. Yan was caught in triple oppressions. The pursuit of an industrial life rewarded her with a torn body. Sexual desire and moral pressure captured her in stress. The cultural demand of a marital life and the state control of her mobility snared her in the middle, with no possible progress or retreat. She realized all these suddenly, unexpectedly, in a new situation. The bodily pain she suffered was more than physical and mental; it was social and cultural as well. The individual pain was inscribed with a social and cultural trauma; it was reenacted repeatedly through the individual life. Yan's dream was specific, but its specificity entailed the very truth of the universal. It was the struggle of a female worker at the crossroads of a Chinese society transforming itself into industrial capitalism.

Yan resumed the unity of body and self by driving the struggle with the pain into the dream. In the dream, she didn't give up but continued with a hopeless struggle. She was running across the river, trying to reach a foreign land. "Sometimes I find the scene in the dream is very familiar to me, I must have been there before. It's like a calling of going back home. I am running and running..." Yan said. The dream, for her, was like a space of *home*; in Heidegger's sense, it was the dwelling of *Existenz*, the hope, the very possibility of actualization of the being-in-the world. The dream itself was home to Yan's life, very familiar, very intimate, very authentic, while in the dream she was running toward somewhere strange and foreign. "I don't know why I am so desperate to cross the river. I simply make up my mind to do so, to chase the boat. I am so determined. Seeing the boat is leaving, I find myself full of extraordinary force... it seems like I am going to break, break through something that blocks my way." In my view, there are at least three possible readings of the crossing. In the Chinese village scene, a river always divided the land of one's own and the other's place. A woman crossing the river left her hometown and moved to

an alien land. A possible traditional way of reading the dream was that on getting married, as the marriage practice in China was still patrilineal and patriarchal, the woman had to leave her own village in order to start a new life in her husband's family in a strange community. In a contemporary context, a woman crossing the river and leaving her own land might also mean going out to look for a job in the city. The economic reform, the pouring of international capital into the Chinese society opened up new possibilities, created desires and hopes for the village girls to pursue a new life path, as I have discussed in Chapter III. In a more transcendental sense, it might mean the breaking between the old and the new way of life; Yan's determination was a break with her past life, with all the pains and unbearable beings of existence. Projecting to cross the river was to expect a future life in the foreign land that might open up new rays of light. A life of twenty-four years was too young to be destroyed. It was an experience of being alien, of nomadism. The urge, the calling, was the strong desire to look for something new, though she was actually caught half-way, torn by a painful body. "Despite the great force that I seem to possess, my body simply stands still and refuses to move." Both the stillness and the running were inevitable in Yan's life.

There was a gap between the realms of consciousness and unconsciousness. But by going through the unconscious, Yan saved a lost self. And by extending her imaginary experiences, she fused both realms and freely experienced herself in the world. The sleeping soul was never asleep, but more sensitive and active than the waking soul in actualizing herself in the distant world. The repetitiveness of the dream, the traumatic experiences, could be read as an insistence on continuing one's struggle and on one's freedom to do so. It was seemingly fatalistic and inescapable. In this sense, Freud was wrong to say that dream was the guardian of sleep. As Foucault argued,

If Consciousness sleeps during sleep, existence awakens in the dream. Sleep, itself, goes toward the life that it is preparing, that it is spelling out, that it favors. If it is a seeming death, this is by a ruse of life, which does not want to die; it "plays dead," but "from fear of death." It remains of the

order of life.

(1985:54)

In wakening, not sleeping, the dream shed light on the freedom of existence. Lacan, in re-reading the dream of a burning child in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, also emphasized the awakening implication rather than sleeping function of the dream. The father of the burning child woke up in the dream too late to see his child's death. The father-son relationship in the dream was the ethical relation of one's being to the other, to the world. The trauma was the inevitable fate responding to the call of the dead child (Caruth 1996:97-100). Yan didn't prolong her sleep in the dream, rather she continued her struggle in the oneiric experiences. Her failure in her dream to get into a boat was her predicament: she had no way forward or backward. And this quagmire did not end in sleep or escape. She struggled and struggled to realize a worn-out body that could not move. The projection of the future was blocked again in the dream. But she didn't give up. She broke out in a scream, an authentic resistance, and woke herself up at the very end of the dream. If the unconscious realm did not provide nirvana, she returned to the conscious. The voice, in between the conscious and unconscious, declared the very existence of her struggle. It crossed all the realms between language and non-language, between the imaginary and the real, between the self and the world. The voice was a final source of self-extension; the self extended out beyond the boundaries of any personal and cultural limits, occupied a space much larger than the body (Scarry 1985:33). Yan was an the odyssey of human freedom and resistance.

The explosion will not happen today. It is too soon ...
or too late.

I do not come with timeless truths.

My consciousness is not illuminated with ultimate radiance.

Nevertheless, in complete composure, I think it would be good
if certain things were said.

These things I am going to say, not shout. For it is a long time
since shouting has gone out of my life.

So very long ...

Why write this book? No one has asked me for it.

Especially those to whom it is directed.

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Two years before I went to study in Britain, on 19th November 1993, a blaze engulfed a Hong Kong capital-owned toy company in Kuiyong, Shenzhen, it killed over eighty workers and twenty were seriously burned and sixty injured¹. The blaze caused the collapse of the factory building, but, did not dash the dreams of the young Chinese *dagongmei* who continued to flood into the industrial zones for a better life and chances. I am still not sure whether it is those survivors who lived with dream and desire, or the fire and those deaths that directed me to the present project. Fanon is right to say, "No one has asked me for it, especially those to whom it is directed." (1967:7) But why write it? To be honest, I cannot provide the readers with high-sounding intellectual or academic reasons. Those I love and am concerned for probably don't have the time or the chance to read what I write. Why still keep on murmuring? Again, as for Fanon, it is the urge, the pain, the impossibility of *not* writing that drives me to the stories.

As a participant in a concern group organized in Hong Kong, I went to meet one of the survivors from the Shenzhen fire in the local hospital, Xiao-ming, a young girl of twenty-one who was a fresh migrant worker from a Hubei village. When I met her in the hospital, her body was completely burned with all the skin seared and charred. She was left with a pretty face and flashing innocent eyes. She was calm

¹ Mingbao, 20th November 1993.

even if she could not control her emotions. She let her tears flow down slowly and she never let her weeping disturb our talking. Worried that recalling memories of the fire would be too hard for her, I did not take the initiative and mention the fire. We chatted about her childhood, her family and her work experiences in Shenzhen. For one rainy and stuffy afternoon in the hospital, I was moved by her story and lost in her world.

“I was lucky that I could go to school. Not all the girls in our hometown went to school. When I was young, our village was still very poor. ...”

“I liked dancing... I won a number of prizes in school competitions. Once I was chosen by the teacher to participate the cross-school competition in the town. ... Yes, I was excited and happy that I could go to the town.”

“Kids liked to fight, to jump, to sing, but I liked to dance, so I thought I could be a dancer someday... you know, when people were green, they were silly and had dreams. I was often praised in the school, so I really wondered if I could be a dancer...”

“I am the eldest daughter in the family... I have one younger sister and two younger brothers. I quit my study when my younger siblings needed to go to school and we didn't have enough money.”

“It's not easy to go to my village. It's in a mountainous area that no train or bus can reach. You need to walk about an hour to reach home. ... I don't know how to go back home now... Do you think I can go home? Hm, but you can go for fun, there are rivers and lake, a lot of fruit trees. I know you *chengshi ren* (people living in town or city) will like it.”

“People there are poor, but very simple... there is almost no trust in the city. I am attracted by the city life, but I don't like the city person.”

“For a couple of years, I helped my parents doing farm work and housework. Young people nowadays no longer like tilling the fields. I didn't either. Everybody said working in the outside was more fun and could earn a lot of money.”

“In 1990 I got out with my co-villagers and found a job in a garment factory in Shenzhen. Getting out the first time was so exciting; the big city, the skyscrapers, a lot of shops and a lot of people. ... It was like watching a film, and I was there.

Everything was interesting to me, and I found myself very rustic and innocent. ... I made up my mind to work in Shenzhen.”

“But I was not happy with my first job. The factory often delayed paying our wages. We were supposed to be paid on the first day of each month, but the factory was often late, sometimes a month, sometimes two months. ... Well, the wage was not particularly lower than other factories. I could make about three hundred *yuan* each month.”

“I left the factory in May 1991, and was introduced by my cousin to Zhili Toy Company. It was a big big plant, with over six hundred workers. I met a lot of co-villagers in the new factory. ... Work was very hard there, we worked from sunrise to midnight. Everyday I was worn out, all my energy gone. ... But I felt happy working there. I had a lot of relatives and friends, we chatted a lot and helped each other.”

“After that I seldom thought of working in another factory. ... Every three months I could send about six hundred *yuan* back to my hometown to my father. I thought I could at least work there for another two or three years.”

“But then the fire happened, the fire... ”

Xiao-ming was satisfied with her job in the Zhili Toy Company. Her contribution improved her family’s economic situation and one of her younger brothers was entered into senior secondary school. She planned to work for another three years so her brothers could have enough money for higher education. Her parents hoped she would marry out by 23 or 24, before she was too old. In the village, marriage was still considered “the major matter of one’s whole life”. So the older generation worried that girls working in the city might delay marriage for too long and spoil their whole lives. Xiao-ming and her friends, nevertheless, had other thoughts. They knew that after marriage they would move to another village and would be forced to stay at home for the rest of their life. They would probably have no chance to work in the city any more. In the Chinese New Year of 1992, a wish became a plan: save money for a tour of Beijing, the capital, before they were married out.

In 1993 Xiao-ming began to save money for herself. By late autumn, after sending money to her family, she had five hundred *yuan* for herself. On the night of 19 November 1993, the fire burned the money and burned the dream. ...

The factory doors were locked, the window bar sealed and the fire-exit passages were congested. Six hundred workers were trapped in the fire with no way to escape. The workers' dorms were inside the factory premises. The ground floor was the store room and the workers' canteen, the first to the fourth floor were the shopfloors and the fifth and the sixth floors were the workers' dormitories. To prevent stealing and control workers' movement, all the doors, including the stair doors were locked at night.

"Though I don't know how I can survive, I still think that I am lucky to escape the gate of hell."

When Xiao-ming was wakened by noises, the dorm was already very smoky and she could hardly believe there was a real fire. She ran out of the room and saw some male workers hysterically hit the window bars. She tried to move to the stairs but was soon trampled by workers behind her.

"There was shouting and screaming and I was like everybody went mad." She fell down and choked. Flames roared up through the stairs and burnt her body. At that moment she thought she would die. A co-villager came to help and move her to the window and she had no choice but to jump down.

What the story told

I ran into the tragedy before I made up my mind to study for a doctorate. I still believe it was the involvement in the support group, the experience of that pain, that led me to study the life and struggle of *dagongmei*. As a student who liked pure literature, my sensitivity to the changes in Chinese society, was first of all brought out by meeting Xiao-ming in 1993 and the pain that persistently followed. It was through Xiao-ming's trauma, and probably my own trauma as well, that I first realized there was no individual story which was not political and social. Xiao-ming's fate might be personal, but her trauma was social, historical and collective in nature. With my love of personal fiction and concern for individual lives, the

coincidental encounter with Xiao-ming finally brought me to a concern for the social, or more specifically, the relationships between social violence and individual lives. It was not just a matter of changing from pure literature to sociology and anthropology. It was also a change in my understanding of myself in the world, a movement across boundaries into new horizons. The trauma opened me up: I realized rapid changes in Chinese society, the arbitrary force of society on individuals, and the reaction and transgressions of the self.

The rapid changes of China in the past two decades - the opening of the country to international capital and the introduction of market mechanisms to rescue the declining legitimacy of the party-state, and thus the contractual engineering of the society by both *market* and *state* inflicted double wounds on Chinese society. The hybrid marriage of state socialist power and the capitalist system technologized the society and the individual. At this time, in contemporary China, land and labour, nature and human life are produced as commodities for sale, not merely by the “capitalist” market, but by the “socialist” state-party. The decentering of the central power, and the weakening of the ideological apparatus, are far from a “retreat of state” in regulating social life (Shue, 1995). Rather, the worn-out yet still existing *hukou* system, the parochial nature of city governments with expanding administrative power, the strict control of population and urban development, and the hard crushing of independent labour organizations all dictate the specific process of proletarianization in China. The persistent influx of peasant migrants into the urban areas in the last decade did not give birth to the new Chinese working class. The making of the class force is, after all, retarded, shattered and destroyed not by the market apparatus, but by the state machine. *Dagongmei*, as half-peasants, half proletariat are the *displaced subjects* produced by the hybrid conjugation of state and market machines.

Xiao-ming’s escape from the gate of hell began the pain of writing and the urge to disclose the double wounds. My later fieldwork confronted me with the delicate microphysics of power in the workplace. The production machine, plugged into the state and market machines, is the immediate means for crafting the displaced subjects. The human body, the producing body, is the interface or the threshold where the violent forces, be they political or economic or be they complicit or

conflicting, do their work. But the state and market are not the only springs of power. Local cultural practice, in China the patriarchal culture, comes onto the scene as well. The process of gendering, the regulation of sex and sexuality and the dominance of marriage and family life showed the great strength of culture in *sexualizing* the displaced subjects. Triple oppressions - the capitalist market, the state-party and the patriarchal culture are my conclusion, despite the risk of over-generalization and simplification.

Yan's scream was the scream of our epoch, decrying the violence and absurdity of the triple oppressions.

When Xiao-ming told me about her story, it seemed that she was speaking about the pain of another body. Her calmness and lack of emotion struck me. It seemed that pain could only be spoken out in the process of othering the self. Xiao-ming's narrative, and the way she told it as if telling another's story, pushed me to understand how individuals deal with pain. The process of othering the pain, the strategy of dividing the self, so that the spoken self or the performed self emerged as distant, cool and alienated seemed the only possible way to defend the vulnerable inner self (Laing 1966; Sennett and Cobb 1972; Scarry 1985). Talking to Xiao-ming, I struggled to control my tears, so I could imitate a rational self and not spoil our dialogue. It was the first time I gained an acute sense of how I reacted to myself and at the same time to the other and the social. There are at least two layers of awareness. First, individual fiction is always social and political in nature. Second, the individual is "dividual" and splitting when confronting with an alienated socius. Thus, there is not only a realization of extending the self to the social, but also a crisis of knowing and experiencing the self.

Inner fragmentation, as I have argued, was the common defense of the women workers against the loss of self caused by bodily pain. In this thesis I have tried to show how the splitting of the self is an effect of social violence and historical alienation. Schizophrenia, the splitting of self, is a stigma of our age. To look at it is to uncover the violence and destruction of the advent of capitalism in the state socialist society. Deleuze and Guattari put it,

Schizophrenia as a process is desiring-production, but it is this production as it functions at the end, as the limit of social production determined by the conditions of capitalism. It is our very own “malady”, modern man’s sickness.

(1987:130)

Body in pain can destroy not only the integrity of a person’s self, but also one’s language. Pain can be spoken out through the process of othering of the self; but if it turns into oneself, it is resistant to language. Elaine Scarry says,

It is the intense pain that destroys a person’s self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe. Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject.

(1985:35)

The body in pain is bereft of the sources of speech. Yan’s scream is an attempt to express herself, to resist the pain and to reunite the split body and self. Xiao-ming spoke out through the process of othering, and Yan destroyed language by screaming. Both resisted a possible disintegration of the self. *The painful bodies thus are not the defeated bodies, but the transgressive bodies.*

Throughout the thesis I have to see my co-workers and friends and the people I loved as pioneers who teased out the tensions in all the structural and historical forces they faced. I have also struggled to see them as practical agents who consciously and unconsciously manipulate the body politic and co-opt, negotiate with or confront those tensions and forces. Everyday life struggles took diverse forms, negotiating not only with economic and political factors, but also cultural and psychic experiences. While daily grumbles and grievances could be found everywhere, a proportion of workers still gained some satisfaction and achievement. The high wages they could earn, the

money they could send back to their families, the skill they learned and the sense of pride and new identity they achieved all contributed to a sense of self-fulfillment. Time and time again “heroic stories” told how one or two women succeeded in climbing up the career ladder and ended up with a marriage in the urban area via personal effort, commitment to the work and building up networks in the city. These “heroic stories” construed the dreams and hopes of the whole generation of *dagongmei* and, continuously helped to produce desires of factory life. Pain and hurt persisted. Occasionally there were fires and deaths.

And if Yan’s scream helped her to release the pain and hurt, it also foretold the tales of transgression, the politics and poetics of resistance in the workplace. My pain, through the process of othering, through the impossibility of writing her dream and scream and many other women’s stories, was aired as well. Yan’s scream was my scream, helping me to live out the limited experience.

Minor Literature as Practising Anthropology

As I come to the end I would like to argue that native anthropological practices, if they are contribute to anything other than mainstream anthropology, should be undertaken to create a minor literature. I derive this concept from the insights of Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Deleuze and Guattari saw three points as characteristic of minor literature. Firstly, the language of minor literature is affected by “a high coefficient of deterritorialization”. A minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is constructed by a minority within a major language (1986:16). Secondly, everything in the minor literature is political. In major literature, when the individual concern joins with other individual concerns, the social milieu serves as a background. Minor literature is completely different in the way that “its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics, to the social it formed” (1986:17). Thirdly, everything in minor literature takes on a collective value. There are “no possibilities for an individuated enunciation that would belong to this or that ‘master’ and that could be separated from a collective enunciation” (1986:17). Minor literature, after all, is the *literature of people’s concern*:

There is never an individuated subject; there are only collective assemblages of enunciation, and minor literature expresses these acts insofar they are not imposed from without and insofar as they exist only as diabolical powers to come or revolutionary forces to be constructed.

(1986:18).

Bringing these insights to the practice of my native anthropology in China, I have tried to make my ethnography a minor literature, adventuring into the borderlands, hoping to discover new terrain, new encounters and new experiences, but not without paying attention to the risks and dangers. I have struggled to avoid locating this project in any major languages, in the mainstream anthropological canon or in China studies. As an “intellectual nomad” wandering in the field, I intrude and am bound to intrude into a new cross-disciplinary terrain. My training in sociology, anthropology, China studies and feminist studies became pale and weak when I encountered the richness and complexity of those lived experiences. Therefore, I sometimes go here, sometimes go there, enjoying the search. I look for a theoretical lens in Pandora’s box, a magic house which never belongs to any single discipline. I am not going to argue that “theory” and “experience” can never be separated, but like a mother-child dyad, they cannot exist without each other. Experiencing is the same process as theorizing; they are all evocative in nature.

As a practice of minor literature, native anthropology should be brave enough to ask and explore new questions that cross over many disciplines. But also, as Mayfair Yang says, by adopting a different strategic and peripheral position, it can contribute to the critique of Eurocentrism as well (1994). Native anthropology, if it has any vision, should not provide an alternative version of local modernity, but disclose the power and ideology enmeshed in the discourse of Chinese modernity, a hegemonic construct of both state and capital. The direct immediacy of the field in one’s own society can prompt a more acutely political consciousness. The native anthropologist is not interested in exploring another culture, another society that is new to him or her. Gazing at one’s own society and culture becomes more problematic if one is not engaged in political practices. There will be no reason to study one’s own society as an “another culture” if the process of othering does not spring from pain, from the urge to diagnose one’s society.

A “revised politics of location” of anthropology is advocated to ask questions about anthropologists themselves, starting the work from “home”, from the place one began (Mackey 1991; Lindisfarne 1996). It is plain for native anthropologists that they have no other choice but to start work from “home” and go back “home”. But it is not a single return route from home to home (“home - home”). Stepping out of one’s home onto the road, wandering or in exile, is an attempt of nomading into new lands and a reterritORIZATION of every wonderful land. It is not an alternative “home” but an extended home with more spacious land and hopefully more fresh and healthy air (i.e. “home - home - to - becoming”).

The project, the search for the life and struggle of *dagongmei* in contemporary China, is thus a desire of the “homeless” intellectual, through the practice of native anthropology, to build herself a nest, if not return to the old home. Whether I have succeeded or not is open for further discussion.

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AS'D

工號(NO.): AS-D 485 262

深圳南頭 XX 電子廠

員工履歷表



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政治面目: (黨/團/群眾) 團員	年齡: 20 岁	性別: 女		
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	1993-1995 来深圳	成丰电子厂	修理 收音机 音响	
家庭社會主 人員	姓名	與本人關係	年齡	單位
	XX玉	父. 女	46	
	XX超	叔	37	深圳法院
面試結果	对无线电元件熟. 对电子线路熟练. 英文一般. 70% 取高家电维修毕业. 反应快. 有修理经验. 70%			
	介绍人: (收音机类) 对微电子无认识.			

- 注意: 1. 此表要認真填寫, 不得涂改, 屬個人在廠檔案.
 2. 新入廠人員工作未滿一個月要求離職者, 不發任何工資.
 3. 以上項目要按實際填寫, 否則發現將從嚴處理.

30日下午 11 點
 95. 年 7 月 3 日 上午

填表日期: 95 年 6 月 29 日

用工单位编号: _____

深 圳 经 济 特 区

劳
动
合
同
书

(劳务工适用)

深 圳 市 劳 动 局 编 制

甲方 (用人单位)

乙方 (员工)

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经济类型: 来料加工

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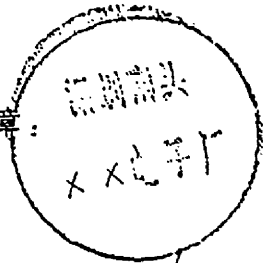
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法定代表人签名：

Handwritten signature of the legal representative.

双方签订合同

时

间：95年 6 月 16 日

鉴证机关盖章



时

间：____年 ____月 ____日

深圳市南山区 劳动局文件

深南劳服[1996]3号

转发市劳动局关于办理一九九六年度 劳动用工手续的通知

各用人单位：

现将市劳动局《关于办理一九九六年度劳动用工手续的通知》(深劳服[1995]229号)转发给你们，请遵照执行。

深圳市南山区劳动局
一九九六年一月三日

主题词：劳动 管理 通知

抄报：市劳动局、区委办(政府办)、何初本区长、魏振雄区长助理

抄送：区建设局，南山、蛇口公安分局，南山、蛇口工商分局

一九九六年一月三日印发



(共印1500份)

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姓名: 陈X和 性别: 女
 出生日期: 1975-10-22
 身份证号: 441424751022482
 工作单位: 南山XX电子厂
 住址: 南山区XX宿舍
 电话: E6132857
 有效期: 1997-03-31

姓名: 廖X珍 性别: 女
 出生日期: 1977-02-16
 身份证号: 441422770216374
 工作单位: 深圳南头XX电子厂
 住址: 南山区警校宿舍
 电话: E6137692
 有效期: 1997-03-31




姓名: 陈X琴 性别: 女
 出生日期: 1974-01-06
 身份证号: 440526740106272
 工作单位: 南山XX电子厂
 住址: 南山区XX宿舍
 电话: E6132855
 有效期: 1997-03-31




姓名: 李X娟 性别: 女
 出生日期: 1976-04-20
 身份证号: 440229760420392
 工作单位: 南山XX电子厂
 住址: 南山区XX宿舍
 电话: E6133123
 有效期: 1997-03-31




姓名: 黎X丽 性别: 女
 出生日期: 1975-09-13
 身份证号: 440921740913042
 工作单位: 深圳南头XX电子厂
 住址: 南山区XX宿舍
 电话: E6137675
 有效期: 1997-03-31




深圳南头 X X 电子厂 ✓

员工动态表

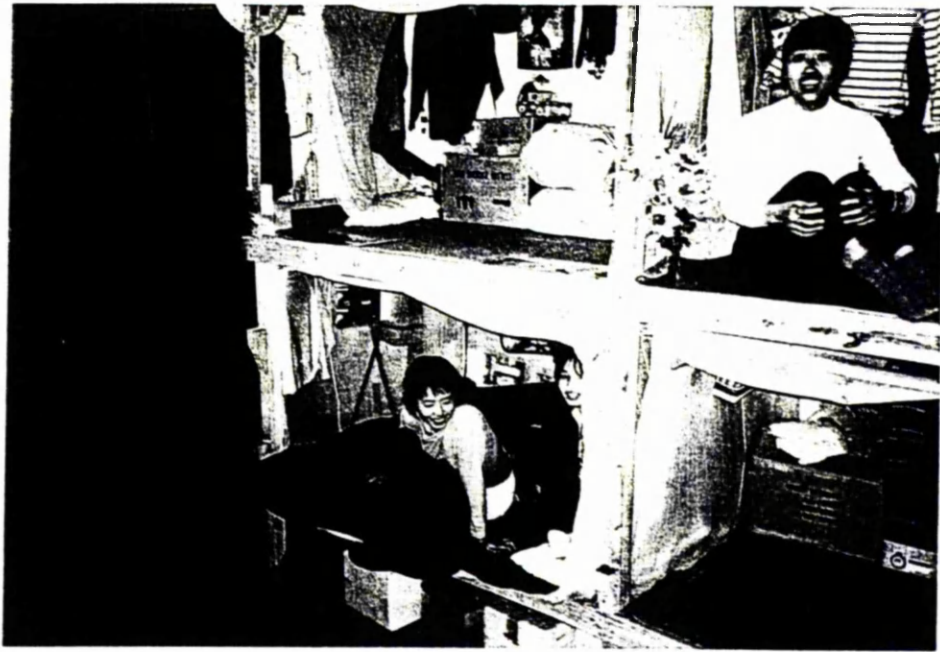
姓名: <u>XX同</u>	工号: <u>15</u>	
部门: <u>品质部</u>	职位: <u>/</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/> 升职	<input type="checkbox"/> 自离职	<input type="checkbox"/> 加薪
<input type="checkbox"/> 请假	<input type="checkbox"/> 解雇	<input type="checkbox"/> 加津贴
<input type="checkbox"/> 病假	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 申请离职	<input type="checkbox"/> 警告
<p>原因: 由于员病一直未能好转, 故申请高 职, 即辞即走, 呈请批准. 按规办理.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">09/08-95</p>		

雇员签名: Fime 部门主管: [Signature]
 日期: 9/8 人事科: [Signature]
[Signature] 9/8 [Signature] 9/8

Workers on the Shopfloor



Workers in the Dormitory



Glossary

bei mei	北妹
ben di mei	本地妹
bu yao mian zi	不要面子
chengshi ren	城市人
chengshi zengrong fei	城市增容費
cushou cujiao	粗手粗腳
dagongmei	打工妹
dagongzai	打工仔
er nai	二奶
gongren	工人
guanxi	關係
guding zhigong	固定職工
hetong zhigong	合同職工
hukou	戶口
huxiang bangzhu	互相幫助
jing di zhi wa	境底之蛙
li	禮
liang	兩
linshi zhigong	臨時職工
laowu shichang	勞務市場
mai shen	賣身
mangliu	盲流
mianzi wenti	面子問題
minban	民辦
mingong	民工
nanren po	男人婆
nanren tou	男人頭
ni shi shen me difang ren	你是什么地方人
qi	氣
qi zui ba she	七嘴八舌
sanlai yibu	三來一補
shehui zhuyi xiandaihua	社會主義現代化
si fang qian	私房錢
tongxiang	同鄉
tongzhi	同志

xiangxiamei

xing

xingbie

wai chu yi ge ren, dai dong yi tiao cun

waixing mei

鄉下妹

性

性別

外出一個人 帶動一條村

外省妹

