

# **Gendered Labour Market Segregation in Post-Mao China: Social and Political Ramifications**

Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in Partial  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of

**Master of Philosophy**

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January 2006



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## Declaration

I hereby declare that the dissertation titled "Gendered Labour Market Segregation in Post-Mao China: Social and Political Ramifications", being submitted to the Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other university.



Abhilash G. Nath

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## Preface

The post-Mao reforms have brought about conflicting social and economic changes in China. One aspect of these changes is the development of a dynamic labour market, segregated along race, gender, sex and age. Along with this the period also saw the proliferation of female labour market in the selected sections of the economy. In flourishing industries like textiles, electronics, foot wears, toys, tourism, domestic services and sex work, etc., where major chunk of the work force are women, predominantly, rural women, workers are increasingly being exploited for attaining greater economic efficiency. Moreover, the Taylorist production procedures, which are popular in most of these newly developed industries, have introduced diverse forms of repressive labour regulations that have led to the fragmentation of workers' class consciousness in these industries. This has led to the proliferation of multiple forms of workers' resistance in China. These worker's resistances that are shaped by state agencies, the local workings of global capital and the already configured local power/culture realms both inside and outside the workplace are organised predominantly against these forces. Instead of direct labour-capital confrontations, these resistances are channelled through oppositional tactics in workplace, embodied desires, and alternative interpretations and images of factory life. And therefore they are mostly situational and uneven.

It is evident that the growth of gendered labour market, which has significantly enhanced the personal and economic autonomy of at least a section of Chinese women, has enabled these women to stand against the repressive state policies, global capital and the patriarchal order. For instance, the female labour migration, by liberating sections of rural women from direct patriarchal control, has opened up new possibilities for them. When compared to pre-1980s, it has also improved the economic position of at least a section of rural Chinese women, with the

development of female headed rural families and small-scale industries, Chinese women have started to take up new types of jobs in rural areas that can lead to the restructuring of the culturally imposed sexual division of labour there. These new urban “roles” have both oppressed and liberated women, as roles develop women’s quality of life as well as her identity. That the proliferation of industrial jobs and the concomitant evolution of a “new women” have further led to the restructuring of the Chinese patriarchal order.

From a political perspective, the proliferation of “new women,” associated with the development of female labour market in post-Mao China, has brought conflicting relations between Chinese women’s real interests and the state policies for uplifting Chinese women. State policies aimed primarily at the enhancement of economic gains often have marginalised genuine labourers’ interests in general and women’s interests in particular. Moreover, state corporatist institutions – Women’s Federation (WF) and All China Federation of Trade Union (ACFTU) – in the present situation, to a large extent, have failed to incorporate the diverse interests of different sections of Chinese population. The labour politics in post-Mao China, therefore, is organised predominantly in a terrain that is more or less beyond the control of Women’s Federation and All China Federation of Trade Union. Even, scholarly studies, during the period, have aimed at developing a ‘new subject position’ for Chinese women as an antidote for the state sponsored “national women.” This new subject position, for them, will enable women to act according to her own ‘free will’ in a terrain beyond the Women’s Federation. *Nuxing* theories, developed primarily in the context of the growing popular disenchantment against some of the discriminatory policies of the state, are examples.

Through tracing the multiple ramifications of these grassroots struggles on state and state policies, the study tries to evolve a view of Chinese polity from below. Most of the literature on the Chinese polity looks at political

and military elites primarily because they are critical in maintaining a system or to change its direction. The present study will offer a view from below. The erosion of Maoist ideological state apparatuses, primarily because of the lack of legal back up in the post-1980s, has exposed the Party-state to a legitimacy crisis. Many economists have even started arguing that, if the state fails to sustain the current tempo of economic growth, it may have to face serious popular resistance in the recent period. The social reforms, moreover, have widened the geographical and social core-periphery relations in post-Mao China. It is in this context that the grassroots struggles as a vital political force gain importance in the Chinese polity.

As popular disenchantment with the political processes cannot be ignored by any state for a long period, they form an important force, though inadequate in bringing a qualitative change in the Chinese polity. For instance, the state, under pressure from the society, has implemented many policies to help labourers in the market economy. The trade union law and marriage law are two among the many. By looking at the local-national linkages in the Chinese political processes, the study subsequently argues that grassroots gendered labour struggles, proliferated since the 1980s, can have multiple ramifications on state and its policies.

The study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter; an introduction to the study, will survey the available literature for contextualising the research problem within a broader literary tradition, and will outline a methodology. The second chapter titled "Gendered Labour Market Segregation and Resistance in Post-Mao China: Institutional, Structural and Cultural Forces" will examine the institutional and cultural forces that shape the nature of gendered labour market and resistance. The third chapter, "Labour Migration and Changing Gender Relations: Social Ramifications" will explain the social ramifications of female labour

migration in post-Mao China. The forth chapter, "Gendered Labour Market and Migration: the Political Ramifications" is intended to look at the political ramifications of the gendered labour market. Since the chapterisation aims to look at the social and political ramifications of the gendered labour market, it will also offer a view of Chinese polity from below.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and indebtedness to those who have helped me in different ways to prepare this dissertation. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the valuable guidance that I have accepted at different stages of my thesis work from two of my respected and distinguished Professors in the Centre for East-Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Professor Madhu Balla guided me in finalizing this topic and it was under her valuable guidance that I completed my synopsis work. And when she left Jawaharlal Nehru University for a professorship in Delhi University, she has handed over the duty to an efficient hand. I have received the opportunity that I consider as a fortune of getting the guidance of Dr. D. Varaprasad Sekhar, Assistant Professor at the Centre for East-Asian Studies. It is under his valuable guidance that I completed my dissertation. I would like to express my indebtedness for their co-operation and valuable guidance, without which this work would not have been possible to accomplish. I also remember the courtesies and help of librarians of Jawaharlal Nehru University, French Information Centre Library, Centre for Studies on Developing Societies, New Delhi, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, School of International Relations, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam.

I am greatly thankful to my parents for forgiving my absence in the family when it has gone through crisis and for encouraging me whenever I felt myself as meaningless. Far from home, in New Delhi, when I lacked emotional support, my friends created a homely atmosphere. I hereby sincerely acknowledge my indebtedness to them.



## **1** Introduction

The study seeks to analyse the new institutional, structural and the cultural forces that have shaped a gendered labour market, forms of labour resistance and, its political and social ramifications in the post-Mao China. Pivotal to the perceptible economic and social changes since the starting of reforms in the late 70s was the development of a dynamic labour market, segregated along the lines of nationality, race, gender, sex and age.<sup>1</sup> Large-scale internal labour migration from the countryside to the industrial cities, and between urban centres, that followed the reforms has augmented this process. One aspect of this has been the migration of women to the new manufacturing centres in coastal China leading to the proliferation of both female labour in selected sectors of economy and different forms of gendered labour resistances that have ramifications on state and society.

These working women, known in Chinese Cantonese as *dagongmei* constitute 30 to 40 percent of the floating population in China.<sup>2</sup> Most of them are mainly from inner and underdeveloped provinces like Sichuan, Henan, Hunan and Yunnan.<sup>3</sup> Female labour migration has had significant repercussions for Chinese women. It has restructured Chinese women from direct traditional, patriarchal family bonds by guiding them to urban public spaces, exposed them to modern ideas of gender and the role of

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<sup>1</sup> Aihwa Ong, "The Gender and Labour Politics of Postmodernity", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 20, (1991), p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> Dalia Davin, "Migration, Women and Gender Issues in Contemporary China", In T. Scharping (ed.) *Floating Population and Migration in China* (Hamburg: Institute of Asian Studies, 1997)..

<sup>3</sup> Cen Huang, "The Qiaoxiang Irony: "Migration Labour in Overseas Chinese Enterprises", In Leo Douw et al, (eds.) *Qiaoxiang Ties: Inter Disciplinary Approaches to 'Cultural Capitalism' in South China* (London: International Institute for Asian Studies, 1999), p. 219.

family, and ensured greater economic and personal autonomy in family life.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, the structural compulsions of the post-Mao labour market through new forms of social, political and cultural techniques of control over female body have pulled female labour to the bottom of the labour hierarchy. The introduction of gender norms by state and transnational capital for creating a flock of docile female labour force to increase economic gains has further reinforced the secondary status of female labour in the modern workplace. Female labour resistances that have proliferated since the reforms are mainly organised against global capital, state and its policies and the patriarchal nature of Chinese society. These grass root level struggles for a greater emancipatory social and political order have ramifications for the production policies of enterprises, internal and external policies of the state, and also for the public image of Chinese women.

### Studies on Gendered Labour Market in China

Many approaches in the past have revealed the dynamic processes of gender segregation in different parts of the world. In the broader sense, literature on China's gendered labour market segregation, on the most part, has been dominated by arguments based on economic determinism and the centrality of the of world capitalist forces; these perspectives have their own problems, as they undervalue the social, political and cultural determinants of gendered labour segregations. For capturing these multiple determinants, the present study seeks to look at gender segregation in post-Mao labour market from a subaltern standpoint and would try to explain gendered labour segregation from Chinese women's standpoint.

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<sup>4</sup> Huang Xiyi, "From Housewife to Career Woman: Rural China's Second Long March," *Ceres: The FAO Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, (January-February), pp. 44-47.

*Studies on Chinese Women*: The long Chinese history marked by the interaction of powerful state, political hierarchy and a culturally rooted patriarchal order, is essentially a history of the Chinese men.<sup>5</sup> By means of being treated like a commodity – whether in the exchanges of marriage and adoption, or else by being simply forced into slavery, hostile labour market or prostitution – the Chinese woman has essentially been reduced to invisibility in different degrees, at different points of time, for reinforcing the social and economic relations of those specific historical periods. The post-Mao gendered labour market segregation, which is the latest stage in the same trajectory, involves the interaction of state agencies, patriarchal order and the local activities of global capital.<sup>6</sup>

While examining the gender transformation in contemporary China many scholars have compared the post-Mao period changes in the political and popular perceptions of female autonomy with that of Maoist period. Christopher J Smith, in *China and the Post – Utopian Age*, argues that Maoist state socialism, though, to a large extent, has improved the living standards of women, had been structurally constrained by its ideology from taking up gender issues.<sup>7</sup> Though the Party-state, through its political and ideological training had managed to increase female labour participation in the economic spheres, especially since the withdrawal of soviet scientists and technicians in the second half of 1950s, the communist ideology that demanded the primacy of politics and class struggle had marginalized all other issues including gender.<sup>8</sup>

The collectivization and the top-down implementation of the economic policies, at the same time, had tightened the control over women's economic and social lives. And the denouncement of sideline

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<sup>5</sup> Gates, Hill (1989), "The Commodification of Chinese Women", *Signs, Common Grounds and Crossroads: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Women's Lives*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 801 – 802.

<sup>6</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit. no.1, p. 294.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher J. Smith, *China and the Post-utopian Age* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), p. 289-292.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 296-297.

production—for example animal husbandry, local handicrafts and other off-farm economic activities like small-scale trade and services – as ‘capitalist tendencies’ restricted women’s access to alternative employment opportunities. Along with that the introduction of the household registration system controlled the geographical and social mobility of Chinese women. Therefore, deprived of their personal autonomy, women in the Maoist period had to depend on state social security programs like paid maternity leave, life-long employment, low-cost childcare, children’s education and medical care etc.<sup>9</sup> Hence for many China scholars the female empowerment during the Maoist period was a state project.<sup>10</sup>

The post-Mao reforms that opened up new opportunities and problems have significantly influenced the life of Chinese women, by leading to the creation of alternative employment opportunities for them both in urban and rural areas.<sup>11</sup> It could be well to argue that the development of a dynamic sideline economy in China, over time, has improved the female economic and personal autonomy vis-à-vis an essentially patriarchal social and political order. On the other hand, the reforms of the *hukou* system in the early 1980s further have enhanced female geographical and social mobility. These social changes and its ramifications on women’s life have significantly influenced the post-Mao studies on women. In a Foucaultian sense, Women’s studies have eventually become an ‘academic field of action’ in post-Mao China. Since late 1980s it has begun to attract scholars, teachers, bureaucrats, Fulian workers, urban readers, literary figures,

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<sup>9</sup> Zhang Heather Xiaoquan, “Understanding Changes in Women’s Status in the Context of the Recent Rural Reform”, In West, Jackie et al, (eds.), *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), pp. 52-54.

<sup>10</sup> Zhao Minghua and Jackie West, “State and Economy in the Making of Women’s Lives: An Introduction”, In West, Jackie et al, (eds.) In West, Jackie et al, (eds.) *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), pp. 4-6.

<sup>11</sup> Zhang Heather Xiaoquan, op. cit. no. 9, pp. 54-56.

college students, and for-profit publishers.<sup>12</sup> In the face of the emergence of new women's issues many of them argue for "women's theory that is outside the state sponsored writing on Chinese women." For instance, Li Xiaojiang writes, "new women's issues... are sprouting like herbs in the spring rain of reforms. Problems such as women returning to the home, female workers losing benefits or having their benefits reduced, young girls being forced to discontinue their education, and the reappearance of prostitution and concubinage are not just becoming visible today. They have at least a ten-year history... [These are not only] the problems of women workers and of all women at work, but also in the lives of women of every class, and in every facet of women's lives. Especially in contemporary China, women's problems come from every direction..."<sup>13</sup> At the bottom of much of the writings on Chinese women is the uneasiness for the culturally imposed sexual division of labour that effectively quarantined women inside the family.

One of the important trends in post-Mao discourses on women, especially after the restoration of the national woman as the hegemonic pan-national subjectivity in state rhetoric, is a consistent effort to relocate Chinese women's self outside the state sponsored subject position, *funu*. For many theorists, *nuxing*, literally means "female sex," is always a self in relation to a masculinist state sponsored representation of women - much of the discourses on women, for instance, "the iron girl" of the Mao's China were aimed to destroy the feminine characters of Chinese women. Therefore *nuxing* writers often take biological women (essential women) as the subject of theorisation.<sup>14</sup> A close observation of their writings suggests that

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<sup>12</sup> Gail Hershatter, "State of the Field: Women in China's Long Twentieth Century", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.63, no. 4, (Nov 2004), pp. 991-92.

<sup>13</sup> Li Xiaojiang, "Economic Reform and the Awakening of Chinese Women's Collective Consciousness", In Jackie West et al., (eds.) *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation* (New York: St Martin's press, INC, 1999), pp. 360-61.

<sup>14</sup> Tani E. Barlow, "Politics and Protocols of Funu: (Un)Making National Women", In Christina K. Gilmartin et al., (eds.) *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State* (London: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 349.

whether their targets are party weakness vis-à-vis women's liberation or the insufficiencies of party-inspired women's history or the backwardness of party cadres they always have turned out the antidote of *nuxing* operating under her own 'free will' in a terrain beyond the Women's Federation. So the rhetoric of *nuxing* basically associates with alternatives while *funu* with apparatchik-style political categories.

The structural changes in the traditional division of labour especially after the proliferation of female labour market in post-Mao China have brought about new round of debates that linked three topics - "personality" (*renge*), "roles" (*jiaose*), and "female" (*nuxing*). The growth of the labour market, for some of the participants, has fabricated new personalities; often conflicting to women's self that is related to her traditional "family role" these identities provide her new possibilities in social life. Li Xiaojiang identifies women's conflicting roles in family and society as the "typical eastern women's fate" as the post-Mao changes in the sexual division of labour have brought her into selfless domestic sacrifice on top of the burden of her new salaried work. Li recognizes that "the double roles brought dual standards, like a double-edged sword...making it impossible... to find a relaxed, real sense of self [*ziwo*] whether ...in the home or outside in society."<sup>15</sup>

Theorists of *nuxing*, time and again, argue for the retaining of some of the roles defined on the basis of gender in Chinese society. According to theorists like Wei Bingjie, Ruo Shui and Feng Yuan, "roles" have both oppressed and liberated women, since that is the double nature of roles. In this construction roles can develop women's quality of life as well as her personality and therefore they can enjoy life splendidly. And the argument goes further that the flourishing of female personality could rightly determine the nature of society; for example, an Edenic matriarchy once had existed where female personality flourished. In China "virtuous

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 353.

wife and good mother” have historically been the two given roles that repressed the emergence of personality. Criticising society as unfair for this sexual division of roles is not avail, as ‘balance of justice’ has never been the moving force in the progress of history. It is obvious that much of the women’s problems have materialized actually as a means for the society to resolve many other social problems of post-Mao China – such as excess labour, labour productivity, and so on. Therefore, they have been the cornerstone in the development of Chinese society’s production capacity.<sup>16</sup> But soon with the proliferation of female labour market, Chinese women started developing a sufficiently stable self to begin winning crucially social positions and more importantly, at least some sections, even have started asserting themselves as ‘independent actors.’ The resultant explosion of conflict for power between sexes is reflected in the proliferation of discourses and practices aimed to force *nuxing* back into the demeaning, emotionally labourious, and traditional female role categories such as wife, housekeeper, and child care nurse etc.

Moreover, theorists of *nuxing* argue that the emotional expectations associated with traditional female roles, for decades, have successfully sapped women of her self-consciousness and destroyed her personality. Consequently, Chinese women need to recover their ability, lost since the fall of matriarchy, to “recognize the personality of the self.”<sup>17</sup> Women’s politics in post-Mao China, for the most part, has out grown the established party-state concerns and is practised in a terrain that is relatively beyond the influence of state sponsored mass organisations.

*Economic Perspectives:* Diverse forms of economic arguments are popular among scholars of China’s labour market segregation in the post-Mao period. The labour market segmentation theory, which involves the concepts of the dual labour market and internal labour market, has

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<sup>16</sup> Li Xiaojiang, op. cit. no. 13, p. 363.

<sup>17</sup> Tani E. Barlow, op. cit. no. 14, pp. 350-51.

conceived a gender-based segmentation of the labour market.<sup>18</sup> It assumes that female labour in this hierarchy is placed in “secondary external labour market” in networks and hierarchies of jobs.<sup>19</sup> For instance, according to Huang Xiyi, central to the radical reorganization of the Maoist structures in the late 1970s was the development of a gendered labour market with men occupying almost all the top jobs like, foremen, technicians, supervisors and labour contractors, while shop floor operators and domestic workers are almost all young women.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the Marxist approach asserts that labour process from the beginning of industrialisation has been ‘capitalist and gendered.’<sup>21</sup> The profit maximisation drive of entrepreneurs has restricted female labour to unskilled, low paid jobs to aid capital accumulation. The central concern of this approach is a double segregation of the female labour. Horizontal segregation demotes to the extent to which men and women are concentrated in different jobs and vertical segregation defines the gendered differentiation in pay, skills, status and promotional prospects.<sup>22</sup> This approach on gender segregation focuses its analysis on the demand side.

Drawing on Wallerstein’s world system approach<sup>23</sup> and Burawoy’s concept of “factory regimes,” Ching Kwan Lee has distinguished two differentiated factory regimes in Hong Kong and Shenzhen in south

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<sup>18</sup> B. Allen, et al, *Political and Economic Forms of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Huang Xiyi, “Divided Gender, Divided Women: State Policy and the Labour Market”, In Jackie West et al, (eds.), *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), pp. 97-99.

<sup>21</sup> H. Bradley, *Men’s Work, Women’s Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 13-14.

<sup>22</sup> Flemming Christiansen, ““Market Transition” in China: the Case of the Jiangsu Labour Market, 1978-1990” *Modern China*, vol. 18, no.1, (January), pp. 72-93.

<sup>23</sup> Wallerstein’s concept of the “modern world system” that contextualised local labour politics within a global political economy has also been popular, with scholars relying heavily on it to explain labour market dynamics. European capitalism historically produced a transnational division of labour between the core, semi periphery and the periphery. This transnational division of labour, for him, reflects the degree of capitalist development achieved by each country drawn into global exchange relations, is manifested by differentiated “labour regimes.” Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World--System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).



China.<sup>24</sup> These differentiated factory regimes, determined by the core or periphery location of Hong Kong and Shenzhen, are seen to be responsible for the differences in the behaviour of workers. According to Huang Xiyi, state policies implicated in the functioning of national and township and village enterprises (TNCs) also act as a structural variable to bring out and reinforce a gendered and hierarchical labour market;<sup>25</sup> and as for Christiansen, *hukou* system in mainland China plays an important role in pulling the rural migrant women into the low paid manual labour sectors.<sup>26</sup> The enhancement of managerial autonomy that has considerably reduced the external bureaucratic and party domination in the production politics within state-owned enterprises further has great implications on post-1980s labour politics.<sup>27</sup>

In tandem with the enterprise reforms, the implementation of labour contract reform further curtailed the bargaining power of workers in state enterprises.<sup>28</sup> The growing powerlessness of Party and trade unions, at the same time, has weakened the class consciousness among workers. This intensified the lateral conflicts amongst local and migrant labourers, thereby, segregating the worker along localistic lines. This fragmentation of the Chinese working class unity has, to a large extent, restrained collective class/gender movement in the post-Mao period.

The diverse forms of factory regime, for Ching Kwan Lee, on the one hand, have effectively restricted labour unrest to specific enterprises. "Localistic despotism," described as a form of management control over the migrant workforce in Shenzhen, has created a docile "maiden workforce" through

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<sup>24</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 8-10.

<sup>25</sup> Huang Xiyi, *op. cit.* no. 20, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> Flemming Christiansen, "Social Division and Peasant Mobility Main Land China: The Implications of the Hukou System", *Issues and Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4 (April, 1998) pp. 23 - 42.

<sup>27</sup> Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society Politics and Economy in Transition* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 26-30.

<sup>28</sup> Anita Chan, "Revolution or Corporatism? Workers and Trade Unions in Post Mao China", *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 29, (1993), pp. 31-62.

a coercive disciplinary regime that invokes worker's localistic networks.<sup>29</sup> And "familial hegemony" in the Hong Kong factories, on the other hand, has established control over labour force through shop-floor discourses of gender and familialism.<sup>30</sup> Familial hegemony is characterised by hegemonic rather than despotic control.<sup>31</sup> This approach to gender segregation in labour market is much concerned with market conditions and rarely addresses the social and cultural compulsions on Chinese women. Moreover, Lee has neglected the importance of the belief systems of people (cultural attitudes) in the formation of workers' consciousness. His binary theory (localistic despotism/familial hegemony) explicitly suggests that a singular set of power relations can flourish in industrial systems in mainland China or in Hong Kong. While constructing a working class "other" in conflict with capital, Lee privileges class/gender as a fundamental dynamic of social change.<sup>32</sup>

Diverse forms of cultural resistance that are against the despotic control over time and movement of workers are common in almost all industrial centres in China. Factory workers often employ collective counter tactics to subvert the despotic factory regulations.<sup>33</sup> In Hong Kong-based subcontracting firms workers subvert such controls through group counter surveillance on supervisors.<sup>34</sup> In mainland factories with greater number of the migrant workers, counter surveillance on the shop floor is done along localistic and nationalistic groupings.<sup>35</sup> Workers caught in

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<sup>29</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "From Organised Dependence to Disorganised Disposition: Changing Labour Regime in Chinese Factories", *The China Quarterly*, no. 157, (1999), pp. 44-47.

<sup>30</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "Familial Hegemony: Gender and Production Politics on Hong Kong's Electronic Shop Floor", *Gender and Society*, no. 7, (1995), pp. 529-531.

<sup>31</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "Engendering the Worlds of Labour: Women Workers, Labour Market and Production Politics in the South China Economic Miracle", *American Sociology Review*, no. 3, (1996), pp. 379-82.

<sup>32</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "The Labor Politics of Market Socialism: Collective Inaction and Class Experiences among State Workers in Guangzhou" *Modern China*, vol. 24, no. 1, (Jan., 1997), pp. 3-33.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, *op. cit.* no. 24, p. 386.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 383.

social insecurity especially with the reforms in the insurance sector and in the labour laws in the mid 1990s often have invoked alternative spaces like, localistic and kin relations for moral and economic support.<sup>36</sup> This has exposed urban women to greater civic engagements. Shang Xiaoyuan argues that disenchanted with party and trade union politics Chinese women are increasingly visible in the grassroots NGO politics, leading to the development of an embryonic urban civil society where all forms of resistance are registered.<sup>37</sup> Polemical resistances by female factory workers are common in urban civil society. Female workers often have questioned the corporate images of their purported freedom in public with the knowledge of subjugated experiences at the work place. And its ramification on public attitude towards factory jobs is visible as more urban women increasingly are unwilling to prefer factory jobs. Approaches in this broader category give much importance to economic forces in structuring the gendered labour market in the post-Mao China. And for that reason they have failed to capture the dynamics of gender segregation in the post-Mao Chinese labour market. Moreover, of these miscellaneous approaches categorised here as economic perspectives, none of them provides with a comprehensive explanation regarding the forces that have shaped the gendered labour market in China. Moreover, these approaches fail to identify the Chinese women as active agents who influence the course of China's history. On the other hand, the proposed study, through the genealogy of forces operating in China's gendered labour market, is intended to affirm the insurrection of subjugated Chinese Women as active agents.

*Women as subaltern subjects:* In the late 1980s, some scholars began to examine gender segregation from the supply side. They have stressed the importance of the workers' background and education. In addition to the

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<sup>36</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 31.

<sup>37</sup> Shang Xiaoyuan, "Women and the Public Sphere: Education, NGO Affiliation and Political Participation", In West Jackie et al, (eds.), *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), pp. 202-205.

division of labour, Aihwa Ong, for example, identifies new techniques of power that may define permissible and impermissible cultural forms.<sup>38</sup> For him, the gender segregation in the labour market is a reflection of the patriarchal nature of Chinese society.<sup>39</sup> Christopher J Smith, in *China and the Post – Utopian Age*, argues that the One Child Policy had an adverse impact on the development of human capabilities of the rural girl child as industrial workers and farmers with a patriarchal mind set privileged the boy child. For Smith, the underdeveloped human capabilities of rural migrant girls, a consequence of cultural compulsions, have pulled her to the bottom of labour hierarchy. For Jude Howell state policy, market forces and socialization processes have played an important role in reproducing the gendered structure of the labour market. The increasing exotic and erotic representation of women in post–Mao print and visual media, which has erased the revolutionary image of Chinese women of the Cultural Revolution, has played an important role in positioning men and women differently in the waged and unwaged economies.<sup>40</sup> Female labour resistance that has ramifications for political processes at different levels is mainly organised against global capital, state politics and the patriarchal nature of Chinese society.<sup>41</sup>

According to Anita Chan, the weakening of state corporatist institutions-- All China Federation of Trade Union (ACFTU) and Women's Federation (WF)- and the retreat of the state from some sectors of the economy since late 1970s social reforms have led to the proliferation of horizontal relations among the industrial workers. These horizontal relations are used by workers for developing organised resistance in adverse work

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<sup>38</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit. no.1, p. 295.

<sup>39</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Spirit of Resistance and Capitalists Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia* (New York: State University of New York, 1987), p. 137.

<sup>40</sup> Jude Howell, "State Enterprise Reform and Gender: One Step Backwards for Women?", In Robert Benewick et al, *Asian Politics in Development: Essays in Honour of Gordon White* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 84.

<sup>41</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit. no.1, pp. 295-96.

conditions.<sup>42</sup> Ching Kwan Lee cites that according to official union statistics, “in 1990 there were some 1,620 incidents of arbitrated labour disputes that include strikes and slowdowns, involving some 37, 450 workers” and still then there has been an increase of 87 per cent in each year up to 1993.<sup>43</sup> For capturing the social and political implications of these micro labour politics, she introduced concepts like ‘societal corporatism,’ ‘social discourses,’ ‘grassroots interests’ and ‘civil society’ in the article “Revolution or Corporatism? Workers and Trade Unions in Post-Mao China.”<sup>44</sup>

Growing pressure from society for greater emancipatory socio-economic order has ramifications for the internal and external policies of the Chinese state.<sup>45</sup> The Chinese central government in 1995 took initiative in conducting fourth UN conference on women in Beijing. Though most delegates accused of public boorishness and deliberate sabotage, some observers have suggested that conducting an international conference in Beijing itself demonstrates the courage of the Party-state to expose the country to potentially enormous criticism about the way Chinese women are treated.<sup>46</sup> In 2002 under the compulsion of China’s WTO entry, a *White Paper on Labor and Social Security* that intends to reform the legal and social security systems was issued. It argues to expand cooperation and exchange with other countries, so as to promote the role of legal and social security systems in international labour affairs.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the study contends that the collusion of multiple interests during the post-Mao

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<sup>42</sup> Anita Chan, op. cit. no. 28, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 32.

<sup>44</sup> Anita Chan, op. cit. no. 28, p. 45-48.

<sup>45</sup> Yuchao Zhu, “Workers, Unions and the State: Migrant Workers in China’s Labour-intensive Foreign Enterprises” *Development and Change*, vol. 35, (Nov, 2004), no. 5, pp. 1013-16.

<sup>46</sup> Fatima Entesham Siddiqi and Sarala Ranganathan, “Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action” In Fatima Entesham Siddiqi and Sarala Ranganathan (eds.), *Handbook on Women and Human Rights: A Guide for Social Action Part 1* (New Delhi: Ramishka Publishers, 2000), pp. 435-471.

<sup>47</sup> White Paper on Labor and Social Security, In <http://www.china.org.cn.htm> April 29, 2002.

period has, to some extent, amplified the women's question at different levels of policy discussions.

Thus substantial amount of literature suggests the development of a gendered labour market and a resultant increase in labour unrest in China since social reforms of late 70s: labour resistances that are channelled through organised labour unrest and collective inaction in modern factories. The weakening of state corporatist institutions - All China Federation of Trade Union and Women's Federation - and the retreat of the state from certain economic spheres, on the one hand, and the unquestionable control of the patriarchal state over social and cultural spaces, have, to a large extent, succeeded in restricting these organised labour resistances within individual enterprises. For capturing the forms of these gendered labour resistances and its social and political ramifications, this study, will delineate the institutional and cultural forces that have shaped gendered labour market in the post-1980s China.

The study that contextualizes secondary status of female labour within the post - 1980s socio - cultural setting, following Ong, will examine the new forms of techniques that control women in public and private spaces. As for him, "in addition to the division of labour, new techniques of power operate through controlling a series of spaces - the body, the shop floor, public space and state -that define permissible and impermissible cultural forms in society."<sup>48</sup> Besides analysing the role that the patriarchal order has played in the reproduction of gendered norms that govern the Chinese women in family and work place, the study will further explore the function of state apparatuses, local working of global capital, enterprise management and the pattern of internal labour migration in the shaping of gendered labour market structure and forms of resistance in China. Considering the localistic nature of resistance organised around horizontal relations among workers having same experiences from individual

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<sup>48</sup> Aihwa Ong, *op. cit.* no.1, pp. 291-94.

management, the study, following Anita Chan, introduces concepts like 'societal corporatism,' 'grassroots interests' and 'social discourses' to capture these micro dynamics besides examining their social and political ramifications.

### **Hypotheses**

1. The development of a gendered post-Mao labour market being structured by the intersection of state agencies, the local working of capital and already configured local cultural forms has led to the proliferation of female labour in low status manual jobs.
2. The influx of women into industrial jobs and public spaces has significantly restructured gender relations both in family and public spaces resulting in the rise of gendered labour resistances that have multiple ramifications on state policy.

### **Research Questions**

1. What institutional and cultural forces have shaped the structure of the Chinese labour market?
2. What are the implications of female migration on the development of the labour market?
3. How have gender relations been restructured with the influx of women into the industrial jobs and urban public spaces?
4. How the resultant improvement of their economic and personal autonomy affected the social relations?
5. What are the multiple ramifications of labour resistance on state and its policies?

### **Methodology**

The study invokes a genealogy of forces that have produced the gendered values that govern Chinese women. Genealogy, a critical evaluation of both the origin of the values and values of the origin,<sup>49</sup> involves a reading of a range of specific texts – like academic writings, policy documents and

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<sup>49</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 26.

cultural events – that reflect/reinforce differentiated power relations in the family, workplace and in society.<sup>50</sup> This approach enables an analysis of a battlefield shaped by the intersection of institutional, structural and cultural forces in China to make intelligible the multiple forms of labour struggles, and strategies and tactics, for which “neither dialectic, as a Hegelian logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication can account.”<sup>51</sup> Genealogy, as a dominant approach to examine the micro-power relations in the society, has considerable support in the academic circles after the Nietzschean turn in European political philosophy in the 1960s, and later by 1990s in China, with the development of a relatively independent academic sphere.

As they require new theoretical constructions to capture the dynamic social processes in the 1990s, the conflicting social changes that have led to the marginalization of sections of Chinese citizens from the political and economic spheres have multiple ramifications on the Chinese academics. For instance, the current reordering of Chinese academics – if one were to use Foucaultian language, ‘an epistemological change’ from grand Marxist theories of class struggle to studies on locally restricted struggles of different groups of political subjects, who are excluded from political and economic processes – has popularized studies on subaltern subjects among scholars during the period. Genealogy, in a Nietzschean logic, an approach to liberate the subjugated forces in the society, has received acceptability in scholarly writings in this context. For example, in the article “Nietzsche, the Chinese Worker’s Friend,” Landa argues that Nietzsche, who is an enemy of socialism and of capitalism, is the true

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<sup>50</sup> Hubert Dreyfus and P Rabinow, *Michael Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982). See also, Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: The Athlone Press, 1983), p. xxi.

<sup>51</sup> Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power”, In Colin Gordon, (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980)..



friend of Chinese proletariat. He argues that Nietzsche apparently joins the worker's protests against the machine and against capital.<sup>52</sup>

In the case of many scholars, who participate in the academic field of action, a critique of economic relations in the post-Mao period inevitably may lead to an open attack on state sponsored consumerism as well as Chinese modernity. One of the major aspects of this debate in the 1990s is the theoretical discourses of 'Chinese postmodernism' that may celebrate "an utopian space [developed with the social reforms] for [the] reconfigurations of social and class relations, [and] for the imagination of community, nation, and democracy."<sup>53</sup> Since Chinese postmodernism is associated with the celebration of the advent of a new society in which a commercialized and amoral popular culture held sway, for many scholars, only a critical mobilization of a tradition of strong intellectual advocacy can hope to show the way towards any serious resistance. For instance, through a genealogy of violence in Chinese society, Wang Hui argues that the state repression of the social movements in 1980s popularized neoliberal policies in China.<sup>54</sup> Neoliberalism, which has no intension to conceal the reality of unemployment, the disappearance of social security, the increase in the number of the poor, and other such features of social division behind the myth of "transition," is dependent on the forces of national and supranational policy and economic power. In order to establish its discursive hegemony, it is also heavily relied on a theoretical discourse circulated by formalist economist.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, Tani E. Barlow uses genealogy to identify a female subject position, which is outside the state sponsored discursive construction of "national women." Here, *nuxing*, a sexed subject – the other of humanist Man – is associated

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<sup>52</sup> Lay Landa, "Nietzsche, the Chinese Worker's Friend," *New Left Review*, no.236, July/August 1999, pp. 3-5.

<sup>53</sup> Xudong Zhang, "Postmodernism and Post-Socialist Society: Cultural Politics in China after the 'New Era'," *New Left Review*, no. 237, Sept/Oct 1999, pp. 77-106.

<sup>54</sup> Wang Hui, "The Year 1989 and the Historical Roots of Neoliberalism in China", *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, vol.12, no.1, (2004) pp.7-70.

<sup>55</sup> Wang Hui, op. cit. no. 27.

with alternatives, and as a subject position it allows women to engage in purposeful action both in society and in workplace. The capturing of the dynamic processes of micro power struggles, which are operating in accordance to what Nietzsche called "Will to power"<sup>56</sup> is central to these genealogical analyses.

The worker's resistances under conditions developed out of the strict state control over society in the post-Mao period, further, have great similarities with that of Nietzschean conception of 'modalities of power' examined by Foucault.<sup>57</sup> Both of them are locally shaped and delimited. For instance, Spivak from a similar position argues that the arena of the subaltern's consciousness is situational and uneven, and the subaltern's subjectivity is locally shaped and delimited.<sup>58</sup> Aihwa Ong in his article "The Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity" argues that worker's struggles and resistance in the newly industrialized nations of the South are "often not based on class interests or class solidarity, but comprise individual and covert acts against new techniques operating through the control of social spaces - family, workplace, public space etc. Therefore, he substitutes the concept of "cultural struggle" for class struggle.<sup>59</sup> And for Pun Ngai, Chinese migrant female workers acquire the *dagongmei* (working girls) identity under politics of identity and difference in the modern factory spaces.<sup>60</sup> This understanding of grassroots struggle is fundamentally different from Mao's conception of mass movement, organized around class and class consciousness.

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<sup>56</sup> According to Nietzsche, the really fundamental instinct of some human beings aims at the expansion of power. In that quest they undertake risks—even at the cost of truth and ethics. Their struggles—great and small—always revolve around superiority, greed and exploitation—in accordance to with the "Will to Power." See, Friedrich Nietzsche, no. 40.

<sup>57</sup> Edward W. Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power", In David Couzens Hoys (ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>58</sup> G C Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography", In R Guha and G C Spivak (eds.) *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>59</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit. no.1.

<sup>60</sup> Pun Ngai, "Becoming Dagongmei (Working Girls): The Politics of Identity and Difference in Reform China", *The China Journal*, no. 42, (Jul., 1999), pp. 1-18.

To examine the multiple forms of practical tactics and discursive strategies that China's factory women adopt to determine the locus of power in the workplace and in the gendered labour market, the study would use Michel De Certeau's notion of 'tactic of every day life,' as calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus in a terrain of the other,<sup>61</sup> and Michel Foucault's notions of 'discipline' and 'the insurrection of the subjugated knowledge.'<sup>62</sup> Similar studies on cultural struggles are common in post-Mao China scholarship—Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang's article "Spatial Struggles: Postcolonial Complex, State Disenchantment, and Popular Reappropriation of Space in Rural Southeast China" and Ching Kwan Lee's "Familial Hegemony: Gender and Production Politics on Hong Kong's Electronics Shop floor" are examples. Thus, the genealogy of forces—in someway or other taken up by the lineage of writers starting from Nietzsche, Deleuze, Foucault, De Certeau—would make possible an examination of a historic context that shapes Chinese women as active agents.

Apart from the above standpoint, which is necessary to understand the local struggles for power, the study will rely on Anthony Giddens's concept of 'structuration' to examine the ramification of these grassroots struggles on consolidated grand social and political structures in China. Structuration asserts that active agents play a vital role in transforming consolidated social and political structures.<sup>63</sup> For Giddens, social structures, as norms and resources, are used by active agents, who in their interactions transform them with the changing historical context. This approach will enable the study to examine the restructuring of gender relations with the influx of women into industrial cities and public spaces,

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<sup>61</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 37.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Foucault, "Two Lectures", In Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980)..

<sup>63</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1984), pp. 20-22.

and the political ramifications of the popular reappropriation of space since the social reforms in China. This study, by drawing a lineage through Nietzsche, Deleuze, Foucault, De Certeau and Giddens, argues that Chinese women can speak without being represented by any institutions, whether it is party, trade union or intellectuals. Linking all these diverse theoretical and methodological writings with their shared interest in micro power relations in society is essential to any subaltern conceptualization of gender segregation and resistance.

## 2 Gendered Labour Market Segregation and Resistance in Post-Mao China: Institutional, Structural and Cultural Forces

### Introduction

Of the numerous changes that took place in the post-Mao China, the development of a dynamic labour market is significant both in the studies on women as well as on China's changing state-society relations. While many scholars are critical of its gendered nature, the development of labour market is seen as a space for new possibilities for at least a section of Chinese population, which they never had during the Maoist period. For instance, the proliferation of urban female labour market has liberated sections of Chinese rural female population from the direct control of patriarchal family. And the development of autonomous trade unions since the early 1990s is also a major change. The chapter, therefore, will examine the newly shaped institutional, structural and cultural forces that have shaped both the structures of the gendered labour market and the forms of gendered labour resistance. It will also study the new forms of disciplinary techniques that control female body in public and work spaces. To understand the changes in post-Mao China better a brief background is necessary, which forms part of the following section.

### Background

Marginalisation of women, through confining them to the reproductive roles, is done extensively throughout in the Chinese long history; Mao, for instance, in his pre-revolutionary writings, had challenged the Confucian tradition for pulling Chinese women into centuries of servitude.<sup>1</sup> He ridiculed the traditional double standard in the Chinese society that has excluded women from inheriting property and from all important

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Croll, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women: Rhetoric, Experience and Self-perception in Twentieth-century China* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), pp. 69-77.

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positions, yet required them to behave with utmost propriety. He therefore has called the Chinese youth to oppose the traditional Confucian arranged marriages. However, later on when he took control over China's political apparatuses, under the influence of Marxist doctrine he started to emphasize more on production relations. Along with other personal relations, gender relations too had lost their importance during the period.<sup>2</sup> A brief examination of the gender relations during the Mao's period can open an analysis of continuities and discontinuities in the gender relations since the introduction of "open door" policies in the late 1970s.

As it is argued before, the consolidation of Marxism as a 'discursive formation,' if one were to use Foucaultian language, has significantly marginalised gender and other personal relations from Mao's political priorities. Moreover, the labour and production relations that had gained importance were not only directed for the socialist industrial development, but were also planned for a distinctive social structuring, that involved the introduction of communes and an urban-rural dichotomy.<sup>3</sup> The iron curtain that was erected between the urban and the rural, for example, was planned to enforce a strict political control on individual's status by developing differentiated labour environment, which could nurture peasants in rural areas and workers in urban areas. This art of naming and classification was central to Mao's politics. Central to this politics was the hukou registration,<sup>4</sup> which was aimed at the equal

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<sup>2</sup> Zhang Heather Xiaoquan, "Understanding Changes in Women's Status in the Context of the Recent Rural Reform" In West, Jackie et al, (eds.) *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999) pp. 49-54.

<sup>3</sup> Lisa Rofel, for instance, has developed similar arguments on factory management in post-Mao China through introducing Foucaultian concepts like panopticons. See, Lisa Rofel, "Rethinking Modernity: Space and Factory Discipline in China," *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1994), pp. 93-114.

<sup>4</sup> State Council, PRC, "Administrative Measures on Arresting and Eviction of Urban Vagrants and Beggars" (Beijing: State Council Issue, 1982), see also, Tiejun Cheng and Mark Selden, "The Origins and Social Consequences of China's Hukou System" *The China Quarterly*, no.139 (September 1994), pp. 644-45.

distribution of social resources to the different sections of the population.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the state during this period had exercised a monopolistic control over all categories of jobs, which it assigned equally according to well-defined rules.<sup>6</sup> The bureaucratic allocation of labour in China was based on the Maoist ideology that labour is not a commodity but a national resource.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore as part of the larger state policy, the private labour rights of workers virtually had been eliminated, workers of both sexes therefore were safeguarded with a well developed social security network. Because of this workers in general and female workers in particular were heavily dependent on the state initiatives for every form of entitlement. This has constrained the development of female personality, during the period, mainly around the state, state sponsored institutions like communes, and the patriarchal family. While the development of the labour market has opened up new avenues for female personalities to flourish at least in selected sectors of Chinese economy, the segregation of female labour at different level of the social and economic spheres are significant, and cannot be neglected because of its implication on Chinese women.

### **Gendered Labour Market Segregation in Post-Mao China**

Gendered segregation of labour is a significant feature of post-Mao labour market, with female labour increasingly being segregated to the low paid and low status jobs, the resultant labour relations effectively impose new forms of control over Chinese women both within and outside work places. This has become absolute since the beginning of large-scale women participation in the labour force after the inauguration of reforms in late

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Saich, "Reform and the Role of the State in China" In Robert Benewick et al, *Asian Politics in Development: Essays in Honour of Gordon White* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 33-49.

<sup>6</sup> Yanjie Bian, "Guanxi and the Allocation of Urban Jobs in China," *The China Quarterly* no. 140 (Dec, 1994), pp. 971-73.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 973.

70s and the development of a new economic order. In a survey among 28,000 workers in 20 enterprises in Shenzhen, Huang, for instance, has found 63.5 per cent of them to be women.<sup>8</sup> Ethnographic data of the time suggests that a major chunk of the work force in flourishing industries like textiles, electronics, foot wears, toys, tourism, domestic services and sex work concentrating around China's special economic zones and other newly industrialized districts are *dagongmei*/working girls from rural areas.<sup>9</sup>

ILO report of 2002 also suggests that Chinese female labour market participation is much higher than many countries in the North and South, standing at 80.3 percent in 1995 when compared to 70.8 per cent in the USA as of 2000, 59.6 per cent in Japan as of 2000, and 56.9 percent in Brazil as of 1998.<sup>10</sup> Although the economic reforms have created new employment opportunities for certain categories of women,<sup>11</sup> the restructuring of the Mao's social structures - urban-rural divide, communes and the paternalist state - have dragged the *dagongmei* (working girls) into new forms of labour relations<sup>12</sup> that are fundamentally different from those of Mao's period.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the advance of market forces has imposed different outcomes to different categories of labourers, the drastic shrivelling of social security network since the advance of the

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<sup>8</sup> Cen Huang, "The Qiaoxiang Irony: Migration Labour in Overseas Chinese Enterprises" In Leo Douw et al, (eds.) *Qiaoxiang Ties: Inter Disciplinary Approaches to 'Cultural Capitalism' in South China* (London: International Institute for Asian Studies, 1999), p. 219-20.

<sup>9</sup> Arianna M Gaetano and Tamara Jacka (eds.), *On the Move: Women in Rural to Urban Migration in Contemporary China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). See also, Yaoming Chen, "The New Choices of Migrant Labour" *China News Digest* (CND) 16, Jan.

<sup>10</sup> ILO Statistical Database, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market, 2001-2002* (Geneva: ILO, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Zhang Heather Xiaoquan, "Understanding Changes in Women's Status in the Context of the Recent Rural Reform" In West, Jackie et al, (eds.), op. cit. no. 2, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "From Organised Dependence to Disorganised Disposition: Changing Labour Regime in Chinese Factories" *The China Quarterly*, no. 157 (1999), pp. 44-71.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



market forces for example has brought female workers into a self-help situation. While, female workers in large enterprises in special economic zones are often neglected from political and legal support. Since it is quite clear from the proliferation of gendered labour resistance in the early 1980s that much of the female labour flocks in China's advanced industries and special economic zones are not only segregated from higher status and paid jobs, but also from basic political and economic rights. To capture the dynamic processes of gendered labour segregation in the post-Mao China in more detail, the following section will examine the institutional and the cultural forces that have shaped the structure of gendered labour market.

### **Institutional, Structural and Cultural Forces in Post-Mao Gendered Labour Market**

As much of the studies on gendered labour market in post-Mao China links this phenomenon either to one or two of the differentiated forces that have produced it, they therefore rarely capture the whole discernable processes attached to it. The post-Mao gendered labour market, a result of multiple phenomena, rather is shaped by the interaction of a number of institutional, structural and cultural forces – state, state agencies and policies, global capital, factory managements, workers unions and the already confederated cultural forces. And if one were to take Aihwa Ong's words to place the above argument differently, the 'new techniques of power'<sup>14</sup> that control women, both in family and work places, are spread across a series of spaces – such as, the body, the shop floor, public spaces, family and state – may also define the permissible and impermissible cultural forms in the society. From this formulation, the gendered labour segregation not only has implications on Chinese women's access to

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<sup>14</sup> Aihwa Ong, "The Gender and Labour Politics of Postmodernity", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 20, (1991), p. 285.

different levels of jobs, but also on her social and political behaviours in the larger social spaces.

### **Institutional forces**

Of the different institutional forces that influence extensively in the development of a gendered labour market, the role of the state is of greater importance especially in a society like China. The state and its local agents play a decisive role in Chinese social order in shaping every discernable aspect of individual's life. And since the Chinese state by nature is patriarchal, much of its policies have gendered consequences. For example, gendered consequences of the social reforms started since late 1970s have been much noted in the Chinese press and in scholarly publications, with numerous studies of female facing greater threats of laid-off in the post-socialist China. For many scholars, the noticeable withdrawal of state from selected social and the economic spheres in the post-Mao China though may have opened up new employment opportunities for different categories of Chinese woman, has dragged her to a self-help situation.

Moreover, for its smooth withdrawal from some sectors of the economy, the state since the late 1980s has introduced numerous policy measures targeting enterprise ownership and scientific management.<sup>15</sup> These measures are aimed at improving the efficiency and profitability of these enterprises in the market economy. Simultaneous implementation of the labour contract systems, aimed to enhance the mobility and productivity of labour, has introduced contract-based employment relations in China.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> You Li, *China's Enterprise Reform: Changing State/Society Relations after Mao* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 24-27.

<sup>16</sup> People's Daily (1992), "The Trade Union Law was Passed in April 1992", 9 April, p.3, see also, Hilary Josephs, "Labour Law in a 'Socialist Market Economy': The Case of China" *Colombia Journal of Transnational Law*, vol. 33, pp. 559- 581.

Hence, these measures have placed workers, in general, and female labourers, in particular, into a disadvantageous position.

The 'new safety net' that has been built by pooling contributions from the state, the individual enterprises and the individual employee into insurance funds is aimed to shed the non-productive financial responsibilities of individual enterprises. In tandem with these new industrial policies, the reforms of the old age pensions, medical care, unemployment, maternity benefits, are also been implemented. Obviously the absence of an effective social security net has forced the labouring classes to depend on individual enterprises for wage earning. These noticeable changes in the tri-party relation – state, enterprises and working classes [that have considerably curtailed workers' bargaining power with the enterprise] – have pulled state sector workers into a self help situation.<sup>17</sup> The resultant uncertainty of job has imposed greater pressures on female manual workers in the state sector.<sup>18</sup>

Other important institutional force that influences the development of gendered labour market is transnational capital. In the non-state sector enterprises in special economic zones (SEZs) and other more developed eastern and coastal areas – where transnational capital as a structural force plays a pivotal role – the state-global capital nexus for profit and economic security have created gendered production policies that successfully marginalised the interests of the labourers.<sup>19</sup> Of the 380,000 foreign invested enterprises in the period 1980 to 2001, almost 90 per cent of them

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<sup>17</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "The Labor Politics of Market Socialism: Collective Inaction and Class Experiences among State Workers in Guangzhou" *Modern China*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Jan, 1998), pp. 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Huang Xiyi, "Divided Gender, Divided women: State Policy and the Labour Market" In Jackie West et al, (eds.) *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), pp. 98-100.

<sup>19</sup> Yuchao Zhu, "Workers, Unions and the State: Migrant Workers in China's Labour-intensive Foreign Enterprises" *Development and Change*, vol. 35, no. 5 (Nov, 2004), p. 1012.

are located in China's coastal areas<sup>20</sup> with more than 70 per cent of them are labour-intensive manufacturing enterprises, having large flocks of docile migrant – mostly female – labour force. These migrant workers, who do not have basic protections, are often threatened with low wages, late payment, forced overtime, poor working conditions and occupational hazards.<sup>21</sup>

Since these migrant workers are not considered as eligible for availing the benefits of state welfare programs, they often face other disadvantages such as lack of urban residential status, welfare entitlement and absence of education and organizational experience. This has made them vulnerable to exploitation and mistreatment.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, China's state corporate institutions – such as All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) and Woman's Federation (WF) – have so far failed to develop a practical mechanism to accommodate migrant workers' demands. Migrant workers, subsequently, are forced to dependent on informal societal corporations to protect themselves.<sup>23</sup>

### **Structural Factors**

Labour sub-systems developed with the structural changes of the late 1970s act as structural factors that determine the nature of labour and work environment in the post-Mao China. Paul Bowles and Xiao-yuan Dong have identified four labour sub-systems each with a differentiated labour environment, state owned enterprises, urban collectives, township

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<sup>20</sup> People's Daily, 15 October, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Anita Chan, "Labor Standards and Human Rights: Case of Chinese Workers under Market Socialism" *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 20, no.4 (1998), pp. 886-904.

<sup>22</sup> Beijing Bureau of Labour and Public Security, "Administrative Regulations on Resident Registration for People Coming to Stay in Beijing" (Beijing: Beijing Bureau of Labour and Public Security, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Gordon White et al, *In Search of Civil Society: Market Reform and Social Changes in Contemporary China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

and village enterprises and joint venture enterprises.<sup>24</sup> For them, the structures of these labour sub-systems are determined by the interplay of different configurations of forces – state agencies, global capital, managerial strategies and gendered norms. And that these forces also would shape the forms of ownership, production strategies and production relations.

State-owned enterprises (SEZs), tend to be more capital-intensive, are still largely under the control and regulation of the state agencies. Production relations here, principally, are determined by gendered and discriminatory state policies that are implied in the managerial production strategies vis-à-vis a competitive market economy. Here the labour politics that are dominated by formal institutions—Communist Party, ACFTU and WF—are also shaped by a plethora of various discriminatory administrative regulations, in terms of wage levels, welfare provision and job allocations. Although, since late 1970s state-owned enterprises have experienced an increase in the influx of casual or contract workers—mostly female labourers recruited mainly from countryside – they have systematically excluded these workers from the benefits of the welfare projects of the state. Moreover, most of these welfare projects are linked to the urban *hukou* system.<sup>25</sup>

Many ethnographical studies about the state-owned enterprises have revealed the prevalence of forms of gender segregation and gendered wage gaps.<sup>26</sup> In conformity to the corporate discourses prevailing in industrial centres in south-east Asia, factory managements in these enterprises, during the period, began to subscribe gendered images and

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<sup>24</sup> Paul Bowles and Xiao – Yuan Dong, “Globalisation, Privatisation and China’s Industrial Labour System,” In Robert Benewick et al, (eds.) *Asian Politics in Development: Essays in Honour of Gordon White, Asian Politics in Development: Essays in Honour of Gordon White* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 274-275.

<sup>25</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 1-14.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

ideas of the submissive and hard working 'oriental girl' for legitimising the greater efficiency of female labour for manual work.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, male dominated factory management often tend to assign skilled jobs more to men than women. This has effectively segregated female labour into occupations which are low paid, mostly labour-intensive and less prestigious.<sup>28</sup> To a certain degree, *urban collectives* too have the same form of labour relations that can, in effect, segregate female labour to less prestigious sectors.<sup>29</sup>

Labour politics in the township and village enterprises (TVEs), a more diverse sector directly linked to township and village governments, is shaped by the forms of ownership, production structure, managerial strategies and the working of local cultural forms in the factory.<sup>30</sup> The forms of ownership in this sector can be of collective, shareholding, partnership and private holding in nature. These enterprises, commonly planned to fulfil the local employment maximisation objectives, are staffed predominantly by local residents. Yet here also, migrant workers are employed in significant number.<sup>31</sup> Though ACFTU and WF have set up branches in few larger enterprises, labour organisations in this sector are principally informal in nature.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, the preferential state policies for public ownership in township and village enterprises as well as the patriarchal character of rural societies are playing an important role in the allocation of jobs in these sectors.<sup>33</sup> For

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<sup>27</sup> A. Knox, *Southern China: Migrant Workers and Economic Transformation* (London: Catholic Institution of International Relations, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "Engendering the Worlds of labour: Women Workers, Labour Market and Production Policies in the South China Economic Miracle" *American Sociology Review*, no. 3, pp. 382- 82.

<sup>29</sup> Pat Howard, "Rice Bowls and Job Security: The Urban Contract Labour System" *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no.25, (Jan, 1991), pp. 93-114.

<sup>30</sup> Huang Xiyi, op. cit. no. 18, pp. 93-95.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Bowles and Xiao - Yuan Dong, op. cit. no. 24, p. 275.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 275.

<sup>33</sup> Huang Xiyi, op. cit. no. 18, p. 94.

instance, when jobs at the state-owned township enterprises – the most esteemed one – are primarily given to former cadres or to influential people and their families, at the village collectives, they are allocated democratically to local households. Yet because of the patriarchal nature of the society, it is usually man who takes up these jobs in both cases. While in the private township and village enterprises – the lowest in the ownership rank – jobs are given to those who are left.<sup>34</sup> These differentiations in job allotment may also be due to the dominance of man in the local politics.

Similar to that of state-owned sector, joint venture (JV) sector concentrating in the special economic zones and open areas in the coastal provinces too embraces a flock of gendered labour force. As workers here are contract labourers – predominantly young and low-skilled female labourers drawn both from urban and rural areas<sup>35</sup> – they are regularly under the risk of managerial hire and fire policy.<sup>36</sup> Workers in wholly owned foreign enterprises (WOFEs) may possibly have to face the same situation everyday. Because of their illegal status in urban spaces these contract labourers also lack any sort of welfare benefits and organisational protection.

Further, the diverse labour accumulation strategies of these enterprises have combined an increasingly heterogeneous workforce that includes women, children and migrant peasants.<sup>37</sup> This has effectively curtailed any form of organised labour movement in this sector. Moreover, here also the gendered images and ideas of the submissive and hard working 'oriental

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<sup>34</sup> Pat Howard, *op. cit.* no. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Dalia Davin, "Migration, Women and Gender Issues in Contemporary China" In T. Scharping (ed.) *Floating Population and Migration in China* (Hamburg: Institute of Asian Studies, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, *op. cit.* no. 17, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Aihwa Ong, *op. cit.* no. 14, p. 282.

girl,' are effectively used to exploit the female labour.<sup>38</sup> For instance, Salaff writes "[t]here is a substantial mushrooming of corporate discourses that are explaining [managerial] preference for rural unskilled, docile, female labour force."<sup>39</sup> Thus, despite the fact that female labour marginalisation has become a common feature in all these labour sub-systems; one can also observe difference in the forms of power domination on the shop floor.

Besides the above examined vertical segmentation into sub-systems, post-Mao labour market is horizontally segregated along the lines of nationality, race, gender, sex and age.<sup>40</sup> Ethnographic data suggest that the horizontal segregation of workers on the shop floor is used both by management and workers for protecting their respective interests.<sup>41</sup> For instance, when managements use these forms of segregation for enhancing control over a multi-ethnic work force through the breaking up of workers' unity, workers employ their horizontal ties - based on ethnic and locality based identities - for the protection of their interests.<sup>42</sup> These modes of horizontal corporatism in individual enterprises are used by the workers to protest against state policies and global capital, which are embedded in managerial strategies.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the power relations among the workers and between workers and management on the shop floor, a creation of the specific pattern of the deposition of body in structured time and space in the modern factories, are essential for the reproduction of new forms of gendered labour politics in the post-Mao China. Many scholars have described the post-Mao factory regulations as a scheme to

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<sup>38</sup> Janet Salaff, *Working Daughters of Honk Kong* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Aihwa Ong, *op. cit.* no. 14, p. 289.

<sup>41</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "Factory Regimes of Chinese Capitalism: Different Cultural Logics in Labour Control" in Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (eds.) *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 115-142.

<sup>42</sup> Anita Chan, "Revolution or Corporatism? Workers and Trade Unions in Post Mao China" *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 29, (1993), pp. 31-62.

<sup>43</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, *op. cit.* no. 17, p. 6.



control human bodies by depositing them in specific time and space. This means that all work-related features and processes of the time—division of labour, hierarchy, technology, and human relations—are not value neutral and innocent. Rather, they are embedded with social, political and economic underpinnings. Taylorist production procedures<sup>44</sup> that are popularly employed in many industrial enterprises both in state and non-state sectors are complemented by surveillance techniques, operating through the control of time and motion of workers in space.<sup>45</sup>

These disciplinary techniques, like Foucaultian techniques of power, are “ultimately fasten in sex, making the body the ultimate cite at which all strategies of control and resistance are registered.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, these techniques, with a principle aim of increasing labour productivity, frequently define the industrial presentation and working of the body in the work place. Factory women in China, for example, often felt that the “tight work disciplines” that are extended even to the regulations on clothing and footwear have effectively policed their body by constraining them.<sup>47</sup> Ching Kwan Lee describes Taylorist techniques as “strict control over space, time and body to create docile and obedient work attitude on the shop floor.”<sup>48</sup> For Aihwa Ong, they also involve a fragmentation of skills of the labourers, done through the stripping away of workers judgments and by treating them as appendages of the machine. Not only that, it also involves a fragmentation of their skills into simple procedures that are intended to obtain high labour productivity within a strict time

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<sup>44</sup> Taylorist production procedures involve the disposition of body in strictly controlled space and time to create docile and obedient work attitude on the shop floor. See, Aihwa Ong, *op. cit.* no. 14, p. 290.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290-91.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995)

<sup>47</sup> Aihwa Ong, *op. cit.* no. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, “Familial Hegemony: Gender and Production Politics on Hong Kong’s Electronic Shop Floor” *Gender and Society*, no. 7, pp. 529- 47.

economy.<sup>49</sup> These techniques only permit managements to maximize their knowledge on each worker but also enable them to display workers whenever and wherever they are necessary.

Further, women workers, who comprise reasonable portion of the China's labour force, under these managerial techniques are identified not merely as urban or rural people, but more specifically by their region and ethnic identities. These exaggerated and manipulated labour identities are invoked to divide and rank the work force, for preventing labour resistance, and to develop a hierarchy along the lines of the imagined cultural traits of each individual.<sup>50</sup> Pun Ngai writes about an interview with Mr Chou, a factory director in Shenzhen, who has developed a particular knowledge about each kin-ethnic and locality group in his factory:

he believed that different groups had different sorts of personalities and work capacities suitable for different kinds of jobs. His imagination, or invention, of their peculiarities shaped the hierarchy of the labour force inside the factory. He viewed the Chaozhou *mei* as submissive, attentive and clever, and thus suitable for accounting and personnel work.

The Hakka *mei* were shy, reticent but industrious. They were good listeners and good followers, so you could rely on them, and after training they were fit for mid-level management such as work supervisors or production-line leaders. Chou said the Hakka *mei* were often seen by other employers in Shenzhen to be inferior to the Cantonese. But he himself thought they were better, because the Cantonese had more choices of upward mobility and so were not as loyal as Hakkas...

Chou thought the Hubei *mei* were better than the Hunan *mei* since the poorer the region, the harder working the workers. Hubei *mei* were considered good operatives-they were more dextrous and more willing to work hard.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit. no. 14, p. 290.

<sup>50</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "Chinese Labor in the Reform Era: Changing Fragmentation and New Politics," In Christopher Hudson (Ed.), *The China Handbook* (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), pp. 237-238.

<sup>51</sup> Pun Ngai, "Becoming Dagongmei (Working Girls): The Politics of Identity and Difference in Reform China", *The China Journal*, no. 42, (Jul., 1999), pp. 7-8.

Though these migrant women – who are often discriminated both by local government and local peoples in job hiring, promotions and rights of residence – are excited to show off their capabilities, they are segregated to the low status jobs through an everyday culture on the shop floor, built around notions of gender norms and behaviour.<sup>52</sup> This everyday culture is not only structured through elaborate rules controlling the spatial and temporal dimensions of workers' daily routine, but also through shop floor discourses involving both different management personnel and workers. Moreover this has been imagined in such a way as to serve the respective interests of both management and workers on the shop floor.<sup>53</sup> As Foucault notes, these

discourses can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.<sup>54</sup>

Discriminatory discourses apparently directed towards rural migrant workers are a common feature of everyday work culture in China's modern factories. These discourses through juxtaposing farming and industrial work are planned in a way to reinforce a hierarchy of values in which factory work occupies a higher rank. Moreover, they are intended to allow those in supervisory roles to produce malleable subjects. As Pun Ngai writes about her field work in Meteor electronic factory in Shenzhen: "late one afternoon I was drowsy. Our production-line supervisor, He Chuan, holding a route-finder, suddenly showed up in front of Meifang [co-worker from countryside] and yelled, "what the hell are you doing? You're going to spoil this casing. Such a big scratch here... You know you're not ploughing a furrow, don't you? These products are very

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 28, pp. 382-83.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Foucault, "Two Lectures", In Colin Gordon, (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980).

expensive; you couldn't pay for it even if you worked in the fields for a year... Then he turned his eyes to me, [author is a local from Shenzhen] and showing a sense of embarrassment, added, "These village girls are always like that, difficult to teach."<sup>55</sup> These forms of everyday discriminatory language explain a cultural construction of an imagined hierarchy along a rural-urban binary that always have a preference for urban locals in strategic jobs in the factory.

Moreover, these cultural discourses on the shop floor have played crucial role in constructing gendered norms and behaviours, which can create images of femininity and masculinity. Ching Kwan Lee writes about a shop floor discussion in Way's Electronic Company, where she has done field work, as "Thus when Ling, the forelady, found flaws in women's work, she would jokingly but loudly ask the worker, "How can you be so careless? You're a woman, aren't you?" If the worker happened to be unmarried, a further comment followed, "How can you expect to find a husband if you're so 'heartless'!" The floor manager, Richard, drew his favourite analogy between the external look of a notebook computer and a women's face. In handling both, he often told workers, "You have to put your mind and heart in it." With similar logic, to cajole younger women to be more cooperative, [to the production strategies of the factory] Richard reminded them that disobedient girls were considered "boyish" and were undesirable marriage partners."<sup>56</sup> Often, discourses of these kind that are regularly heard on the shop floors across the eastern coast would normalise an imagined femininity, proper to the production strategies of individual firms.

For these reasons, these strategies of constructing discourses are powerful mechanisms of control, as they would make truth claims, normalising

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<sup>55</sup> Pun Ngai, *op. cit.* no. 51, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, *op. cit.* no. 48, p. 537.

practices, naturalising power relations and constitute identity of individual workers on the shop floor.<sup>57</sup> Along with the repressing and subordinating operations of elaborate factory norms, they seek to train, correct and make workers more productive. Therefore, to avoid being discriminated against or depreciated on the shop floor, rural female workers, under the situational compulsions, have to try hard to change themselves in harmony with modern work ethics. These forms of regular self-technologizing, as Foucault would argue, are the core of power relations in modern Chinese shop floor.<sup>58</sup>

### Social and Cultural Forces

Social and cultural forces in post-Mao China play an important role in placing man and women in differentiated labour markets. To be more precise, marginalisation of Chinese woman from higher status jobs is done through culturally constructed notion of her weakness and thereby confining her to the reproductive role. As in the case of gender relations during the Maoist period, the post-Mao China gender differences are extensively rooted in the same Confucian code of beliefs and conduct.<sup>59</sup> These beliefs and conduct that are sustained by the circulation of ancient sayings – such as, “investing in a girl is a loss” – have reproduced the patriarchal norms that govern Chinese women. During the period, Confucian order not only plays an important role on the Chinese woman’s

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp. 537-539.

<sup>58</sup> In his studies on subject and power, Michel Foucault identified four major types of modern “technologies,” each a matrix of practical reason, which could produce disciplined modern subject. Among the four, those are technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power and technologies of self, technologies of self give individuality to people. According to him words, technologies of self “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform I themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” See, Michael Foucault, “Technologies of the Self” In L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the Self* (London: Tavistock, 1988), pp. 18-19.

<sup>59</sup> Elisabeth Croll, *Endangered Daughters: Discrimination and Development in Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 134.

life and but also it compels her to be dependent on a gendered labour market for gaining greater economic and personal autonomy.

Moreover, the Chinese family constitutes an important space for the reproduction of gender norms and behaviour. Though the 1949 revolution and post-Mao reforms have massively rearranged marriage and family relations in China, they rarely challenged the gender hierarchy within it. Moreover, the search for social stability and security in the post-Mao period has encouraged the traditional patriarchal family cohesiveness. By directly imposing greater political pressures on the private life of women, the state demographic engineering reflected in policies, such as, *One Child Policy* of 1979 has only reinforced the gender discrimination.<sup>60</sup> As rural and urban families under the patriarchal mindset preferred a boy child, this policy has significantly increased the infant mortality for girls. Even, girls lucky enough to survive can only expect a diminished quality of life, and they are increasingly deprived of any forms of entitlement. For many poor peasants, the typical attitude in the country side is that "while farming makes money, schooling takes money."<sup>61</sup> This has constrained rural farmers from sending the girl child to school. During the post-Mao period, these rural women with low levels of education and skills are pulled to the bottom of the labour hierarchy as manual labourers. To understand why young rural women migrate to industrial cities and come to terms with despotic factory regulations, one needs to look at their multilayered subjectivities. Many of them have personal goals such as gaining experience, saving for dowry or financing their education. Some

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<sup>60</sup> Delia Davin, "The Single - Child Family Policy in the Country Side", in Croll, Davin, and Kane (eds.) *China's One - Child Family Policy* (Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan, 1985). See also, Marlyn Dalsimer and Laurie Nisonoff, "The Implications of the New Agricultural and One - Child Family Policies for Rural Chinese Women" *Feminists Studies*, no.13 (3), pp. 583- 607.

<sup>61</sup> Elisabeth Croll, op. cit. no. 59.

may have fled their homes to evade arranged marriages.<sup>62</sup> This suggests that the patriarchal order has only augmented female labour migration.

Besides this, differentiated institutional and discursive factors have had an important role in naturalizing the gendered labour market in post-Mao China.<sup>63</sup> The dispersion of images and ideas about 'gender' and 'femininity' in the period is increasingly modified by the growing exotic and erotic representation of rural non-Han women – both by state and private agents – in public places.<sup>64</sup> Both in the state and private media as well as in the modern theme parks, non-Han minority women from countryside are increasingly portrayed as colourful, cultural/traditional and more sensual. Dru Gladney views this as the “oriental orientalism” and the objectification of the minority other and the majority/Han self in post-Mao China.”<sup>65</sup>

These new forms of objectification of the minority female other, simultaneously, have reinforced the mushrooming of such forms of discourse that may celebrate the corporate preferences for rural 'unskilled' and 'docile' working woman – a dull witted working animal that can be trained for hard and tedious work. A Japanese manager, for instance, has claimed that factories prefer “fresh female labourers [that] after some training is highly efficient” because women such as these are easier to be shaped to their requirements.<sup>66</sup> These corporate discourses on femininity may label her innocence as “natural” that are not spoiled by modernity.<sup>67</sup> These languages of essentialism and commodification of minority rural

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<sup>62</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 41, p. 125.

<sup>63</sup> Jude Howell, “State Enterprise Reform and Gender: One Step Backwards for Women?” In Robert Benewick et al, *Asian Politics in Development: Essays in Honour of Gordon White* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 84.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, pp. 85-86.

<sup>65</sup> Dru Gladney, *Dislocation China: Reflections of Muslims, Minorities and other Subaltern Subject* (London: Burst and Company, 2004), pp. 53-54.

<sup>66</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit. no. 14, p. 292.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 292.

women, which are producing a 'dull witted working animal image' for rural women, have been followed by a substantial corporate integration of rural female labour into their work force.<sup>68</sup>

The migrant industrial workers, primarily rural women peasants, under conditions that are shaped by the working of the party-state, the capitalist market and the patriarchal culture therefore are accumulating ambiguous and overlapping identities. For Pun Ngai, these new social identities – that have been created for those women, who take advantage of rural-urban disparities, and regional and gender inequalities for gaining greater personal autonomy – are manipulated both by enterprise managers and supervisors for creating malleable workers. This process of marking rural women with new identities, for her, may involve the 'production of difference' and the 'production of language' in the shop floor, and can establish a hierarchy between the rural and the urban, the northerner and the southerner, and male and female, both within and outside the factories.<sup>69</sup>

*Dagongmei*, a Cantonese term imported from Hong Kong for denoting this new kind of labour relations, has multi-layered meanings. *Dagong* means 'working for the boss' or 'selling labour' essentially connotes commodification and a capitalist exchange of labour for wage. *Mei* means younger sister. It denotes not merely gender, but also marital status – *mei*, therefore, has a cultural connotation of single, unmarried and younger girl with lower status. In contrast to the term 'worker/*gongren*' that carries the highest status in the socialist rhetoric of the Maoist period, this new word signifies a lesser social status.<sup>70</sup> These daily politics of language along with

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<sup>68</sup> Janet Salaff, op. cit. no. 38.

<sup>69</sup> Pun Ngai, op. cit. no. 51, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 2.



the plays of difference have pulled the rural female labourers to the bottom of the newly formed social and labour hierarchy.<sup>71</sup>

### Resistance on China's Shop Floors

The diversity of industrial relations in China's advancing modern cities and big industrial enterprises, linked to Taylorist procedures, have raised questions about workers' struggles to capitalist production strategies, struggles that must be investigated in the context shaped by the interaction of state agencies, the local workings of capital and already configured local power/culture realms both in and outside the workplace. Noticeably, labour resistances that have proliferated since the opening up policies of late 1970s are mostly situational and uneven, and delimited. According to Aihwa Ong, instead of direct labour-capital confrontations, these resistances are channeled through oppositional tactics in workplace, embodied desires, and alternative interpretations and images of factory life.<sup>72</sup>

### Everyday Tactics and Polemical Confrontations

As individuals entering the modern Chinese factories are provided with an economically motivated and stereotyped identity, post-80s labour unrests mainly are channelled through cultural struggle on the shop floor. Cultural struggles on the shop floor are common in most of the industrialised coastal regions. For instance, managerial favouritism towards local groups—Cantonese and Chaozhou *ren*—has intensified competition among local groups and migrants in the Canton factories.<sup>73</sup> In Guangdong and other advanced coastal provinces, the provincial outsiders or the *waisheng ren*, mostly migrants from rural areas, may have to resist management's derogatory images either through adopting the

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<sup>71</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 48, p. 531.

<sup>72</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit. no. 14, p. 296.

<sup>73</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 25, p. 12

capitalist work ethic and modern values or through working hard to show their industriousness.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, the diffusion of negative images of migrant women in public imagery in these regions has further increased their vulnerability. Especially, since the opening up of economy, local media started to disseminate images that give *waisheng ren* a secondary status in public imagery. The media often criticize factory women as “micro-devils” and “bad women.”<sup>75</sup> Factory girls have often complained of being looked down upon by society because of their low status job, which “does not give a person a face.”<sup>76</sup> For instance, in a major fire in a Shenzhen factory owned by Hong Kong subcontractors over eighty-five female workers were trapped in barred windows and sealed doors and killed. Which none of the feminists groups in the city took it up seriously. Human rights group argued that 90 percent of foreign joint ventures in China flouted safety rules with the help of corrupt local officials. This incident opened a series of public debates in the second half of 1990s.

In the TV talk shows and the media discussions that followed the incident, they were being hardly mentioned with their gender status. Rather, these female workers were referred to as ‘migrants,’ a stigmatized term in coastal China. The workers who managed to survive the incident were disciplined by employers by invoking their illegal status in the city.<sup>77</sup> What is more, they are time and again excluded and bullied in all facets of daily life.

This cultural environment in the region has reinforced particular forms of labour relations that may divide workers based on their ethnic and locality based identities. For instance, Ching Kwan Lee writes “different locality or ethnic groups in the work-place seldom talk to each other, let alone make

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit.no. 14, p. 292.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 293.

<sup>77</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 41, p. 135.

friends across the cultural boundaries.”<sup>78</sup> These distrusts are further worsened by managerial manipulation of their relations for economic ends. Besides the tight managerial control over work time and movement in factory space, the mutual creations of negative images have extensively aggravated these daily conflicts.<sup>79</sup> If from the eyes of urban local workers, migrant rural female workers are portrayed as uncivilized, lazier and dirtier, then migrants also carry negative images of local Cantonese. Often they consider local urban workers as rude, too proud, crafty, and never to be trusted. From the common feeling of migrant workers, “These are the people who tread on my feet and remind me daily that I am a lesser human.”<sup>80</sup>

At the same time, to cope with these increasing social exclusions both within and outside the work place, migrant female workers, over time, have developed forms of informal ties and strategies among themselves. Though these locality and ethnicity-based ties apparently are manipulated by management to recruit labourers from countryside and to control a multi-ethnic labour force in the factory space, they also have provided an arena for bloc formation in the work-place. Like Michel De Certeau’s notion of ‘tactics of everyday life,’<sup>81</sup> these everyday tactics that migrant workers invoke to subvert the power dominations on the shop floor are often fluid and strategic. These informal ties – that could be based on regional as well as ethnic or kin – are used by migrant workers to react to different occasions. For example, placing kin members in the same work division or assembly line for exerting some sought of control over the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 17.

<sup>80</sup> Pun Ngai, op. cit. no. 51, p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 37.

work process, though with strict limitations, is a common feature of Chinese labour politics.<sup>82</sup> As Pun Ngai observes:

The line leaders in the Meteor factory [in Shenzhen] would place their own group's members on their line so as to extend their influence over the labour process, while the supervisors would train their relatives as line leaders to facilitate control in the ever-present contest over the speed and the rates of pay.

For the line workers, having their kin or fellow locals in supervisory positions was the only possible way to guarantee their job security. Kin or fellow locals in the work place also helped you to get a "good job," and in times of sickness and absence you could turn to your kin or fellow locals to finish your remaining work. Factory rules stated clearly that nobody could help others to punch their time card, but helping kin in this fashion was nonetheless common. Women continued to protect their relations or co-villagers even if that meant confronting and bending the rules.<sup>83</sup>

### Collective Inaction and Labour Militarism

The institutional imperatives of Chinese state socialism have generated a particular logic of societal resistance. The strong organizational control over society by state, on the one hand, and the incentives offered by the socialist institutions, one the other, have severely limited organised labour politics.<sup>84</sup> Visibly, labour politics under these institutional settings are oriented specifically around particular 'cultural experience'<sup>85</sup> in individual enterprises. For instance, Ching Kwan Lee has introduced two guiding concepts: 'collective inaction'<sup>86</sup> and 'labour militancy' for explaining the behaviour of workers with same 'structures of feeling'.<sup>87</sup> Collective inaction is referred to examine the nature of workers' politics in the

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<sup>82</sup> Pun Ngai, op. cit. no. 54, p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 6-7.

<sup>84</sup> Xueguang Zhou, "Unorganized Interests and Collective Action in Communist China" *American Sociological Review*, no.58, pp. 54-73.

<sup>85</sup> E. P. Thompson's path-breaking book *The Making of the English Working Class*, a critic of Althusserian structuralism, exposes the cultural underpinnings of class formations in the English society. For him, tradition, culture, and language inform worker's collective responses to and apprehension of economic and political changes. Central to his theory of class is the notion of collective 'everyday experiences' that the workers encounter under specific time-space constraints. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Book, 1963), pp. 8-12.

<sup>86</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 17, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 12, p. 48.

advanced coastal region. This involves public demonstrations, complaint letters, strikes, and sit-ins etc. While, labour militancy, is commonly seen in various interior provinces such as Hubei, Hunan, Liaoning, Sichuan and Shaanxi. This is practised predominantly by desperate workers in loss making enterprises, who have nothing to lose.

Since the massive worker's turnout in the 1989 pro-democracy movement,<sup>88</sup> these forms of labour militancy have been continually increasing. Ching Kwan Lee cites that according to official union statistics, "in 1990 there were some 1,620 incidents of arbitrated labour disputes that include strikes and slowdowns, involving some 37, 450 workers" and still then there has been an increase of 87 per cent in each year up to 1993.<sup>89</sup> In 1993 alone, the number of arbitrated labour disputes has reached 12,358, of which public enterprises accounted for more than half of the total.<sup>90</sup>

In coastal and southern cities, labour militancy is predominantly concentrated in foreign-owned enterprises involves mostly migrant workers. According to Ching Kwan Lee, official statistics from Shanghai, for instance, indicate that between 1991 and 1995, there had been a threefold increase in arbitrated labour disputes involving foreign firms, and for the first half of 1996, out of a total of 200 labour disputes, 80 per cent involved foreign investors.<sup>91</sup> Spontaneous walkouts and strikes are frequently reported in Guangdong press in the same period. For instance, out of 1,100 labour disputes in Shenzhen between 1993 and 94, 90 per cent occurred in foreign-owned firms.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Andrew G Walder and Gong Xiaoxia, "Workers in the Tiananmen Protests: The Politics of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation" *Australian Journal for Chinese Affairs*, no. 29, pp.1-29.

<sup>89</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 17, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, no.32, 16 June 1994.

<sup>91</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, op. cit. no. 17, p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

According to a scholarly report, cited by Ching Kwan Lee, there was a four-fold increase in collective protests – that include a multiplicity of resistance, labour movements, nationalist movements, feminist movements– from a total of 8,700 in 1993 to 32,000 in 1999.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, the national total of arbitrated labour disputes in the period between 1994 and 2000 also indicates a substantial increase, for instance, 93,649 arbitrated labour disputes and 6,767 arbitrated collective disputes, involving 358,531 employees, were registered in 1998. And in 1999 they were substantially increased to 120,191 and 9,043 respectively involving 473,957 workers. In the year 2000, these were registered at 135,206 and 8,247, respectively, involving 422,617 employees. By 2001, the number of arbitrated labour disputes has increased to 154,621, and in the case of arbitrated collective disputes, the number is registered to be 9847. Number of employees involved in these labour disputes has also increased consistently in this period reaching 467,150.<sup>94</sup> This reflects the form of labour politics under China’s changing state-society relations.

### Conclusion

Though the influx of rural women into the industrial cities and urban spaces may have, to some extent, liberated women from direct patriarchal control by improving her personal and economic autonomy, they have been systematically segregated to low status jobs in the labour market through gendered norms and behaviour in the shop floor. This has raised questions about workers’ responses to capitalist production strategies. These workers’ struggles are mostly shaped by the interaction of state agencies, the local workings of capital and already configured local power/culture realms both in and outside the workplace. Noticeable, labour resistances that are proliferated since the opening up policies of late

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<sup>93</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, “Pathways of Labour Insurgency” In Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden (eds.), *Chinese Society: Changes, Conflict and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 80.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p. 76.

1970s are mostly situational and uneven. Instead of direct labour-capital confrontations, these resistances are channeled through oppositional tactics in work place, embodied desires, and alternative interpretations and images of factory life.

### **3** Labour Migration and Changing Gender Relations: Social Ramifications

#### **Introduction**

The current pattern of internal labour migration, which has widely transformed the gender relations in post-Mao China, can only be captured within a realistic understanding of the context shaped out of the reforms initiated since the late 1970s. After the death of Mao, the new reformist camp under Deng Xiaoping laid grand plans for restructuring the Maoist social and geographical structures. Thus the 'communes' were dismantled. In conjunction with this, the 'dual structures' of the Maoist period that produced differentiated economic and social relations in urban and rural China were discontinued. On the other hand, the restructuring of the *hukou* system has reduced the political control over people's mobility across domestic spaces in post-Mao China. These restructurings have brought about dramatic changes in China's social, political and economic spheres. One among the important aspects of the restructuring of the economic spheres is the opening up of domestic economy to outside world, more precisely to the global capital. The resultant large-scale industrialization has increased the demand for cheap labour in the new industrialized regions. These have resulted in the proliferation of a dynamic labour market, especially in the newly developed Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and big cities in the coastal provinces leading to large-scale increase in internal labour migration. Among different types of mobility present, which include the urban-urban, rural-urban, movement of educated middle class etc., the rural-urban peasant migration is of great significance.

One aspect of the development of labour market is the proliferation of female labour market, especially across the coastal provinces. This has led to the large-scale rural-urban female migration during post-Mao China. The proliferation of female labour market and the resultant increase in



female labour migration have brought about many positive and encouraging outcomes in the daily life of Chinese women. For many reasons, one could observe changes in the pattern of female social and cultural engagements in the broader social spectrum. Certainly, the most important amongst them evidently is present in the proliferation of the gendered labour resistance in China's modern industrial cities. The above-mentioned gendered labour resistances are important, precisely because of the precarious position that women have received in China's public imagery. Being described as simple, sensual and cultural; the rural female industrial labourers in the public imagery are brought to silence by the repression and exploitation released from the part of traditional patriarchal family relations and, the urban social and economic relations. But after the proliferation of the female labour migration and the resultant improvement in female economic and personal autonomy, they have come out with different forms of resistance against these repressive forces. Therefore, it is appropriate to argue that women are active agents in the changing post-Mao state-society relations.

Adding force to the changing role of women, the increasing female labour migration has not only enhanced their personal and economic freedom, but also has liberated sections of rural female population from direct patriarchal control of the traditional Chinese family. And therefore it keeps open new possibilities for them. This chapter is aimed to capture the social ramifications of the post-Mao female labour migration. Since it is important to contextualise the post-Mao gendered labour migration within a historical backdrop for theorising the new patterns and trends, the following section looks at the historical background.

## Internal Migration in China: Historical Reading

Chinese transgressions<sup>1</sup> of geographical boundaries are not a new phenomenon. For centuries, the upward social mobility is inherently linked to the geographical mobility of individuals. During the imperial period, several Chinese had travelled extensively across the empire to gain access to commercial opportunities, education, or high office. The fact that the Chinese trading expansion in the imperial period<sup>2</sup> and the development of its enterprises in eighteenth and nineteenth century Southeast Asia, strengthens the above argument. Moreover, the presence of a dynamic Chinese diaspora spread across the globe and particularly in Southeast Asia is a historic reality in the contemporary global scenario.

Nevertheless, people's mobility across geographical spaces in China has extensively been modified by the organisation of political powers in those respective periods—whether it is imperial, or semi-colonial, or nationalist, or post-liberation and post-Mao periods. Put differently, migration in China has historically been shaped by different political and rhetorical mechanisms, whereby political groups controlling the state apparatuses can exchange emotional values to secure material support from those

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<sup>1</sup> Transgression, a concept essential to Georges Bataille's theory of 'eroticism' that defines a fundamental experience embodied in an elemental dynamic between discontinuity and continuity, is further developed in late 1970s by Michael Foucault in his celebrated essay "Preface to Transgression." Central to the theory of eroticism, which Foucault took up to capture the different 'modalities of power' in his works on political and sexual subjects in late 1970s and 1980s, is a profound complicity between law and the violation of law, taboo and transgression. More precisely, these binary groups have a dialectical relationship. It is only through the transgression of a taboo; one can feel an anguish of the mind, which signals the existence of the taboo. In other words, a taboo, whether it is social, political or geographical, is not possible without transgression, or vice versa. And therefore organised transgression and taboo makes social life what it is. Here, transgression is used to explain peoples' violation of geographical taboos and political norms to come to terms with new geographical spaces and cultural communities. See, Michel Foucault, "Preface to Transgression" in D. F Bouchard, (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice: Selected Interviews and Essays* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> J W Cushman, "The Khaw Group: Chinese Business in Early Twentieth-Century Penang", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 17, (1986), pp. 58-79.

people involved in the movement.<sup>3</sup> For instance, until the mid- nineteenth century, the Qing state had imposed controls over migration, and the emigration was banned during the period. But after facing a series of defeats in the hands of foreign powers, the Qing state had to turn to its migrant subjects for financial assistance to strengthen the state apparatuses. This political move was followed by a mobilization of a new narrative on a 'new nationalist community' through conducting ceremonies, temple- building, literary contests, and public lectures. This was intended to incorporate the migrant population into the ambit of the nationalist community.<sup>4</sup>

Similar political and discursive restructurings are commonly prevailing in Chinese history. Of these, the Maoist restructuring of social and political institutions for the construction of socialist society had imposed enormous pressure on people's geographical mobility in China. Since the Maoist strategies for social development had been organised for the construction of identities – peasants and workers – specific to closed social spaces along urban and rural lines, the geographical mobility of people during the period was under strict state control. Moreover, these policies were intended to rearrange the historically formed relations between social and geographical mobility through the restructuring of urban-rural hierarchy. The state's civilisational rhetoric that had supported these political projects was intended to produce a 'socialist citizen' who would be fundamentally different from the feudal and capitalist subjects.<sup>5</sup>

The political rhetoric of the time had indeed reflected the Maoist objectives when more and more government documents started to represent

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<sup>3</sup> Prasenjit Duara, "Nationalists Among Transnationals: Overseas Chinese and the Idea of China, 1900-1911" In Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (eds.), *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 39-40.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>5</sup> Sara L. Friedman, "Embodying Civility: Civilizing Processes and Symbolic Citizenship in Southeastern China", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol 63, no. 3, (August 2004), p. 709.

countryside as politically advanced and they began to downplay the importance of industrial cities. Furthermore, the state policies, on the one hand, encouraged young people and intellectuals to go to the rural areas to make revolutionary changes. Where as, on the other hand, the state imposed heavy restrictions on peasants' migration from rural to urban centres. *Hukou* system was implemented to tackle with the economic crisis and the famine in 1960s since the failure of Great Leap Forward. Consequently, China entered into a low net rural-urban migration in the period.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the stringent state control over food rationing and registrations on urban residential permit, for most of the ordinary population cities remained better places for upward social mobility.<sup>7</sup> Though limited, the period also saw rural-urban migration.<sup>8</sup> Yanjie Bian in his study on implications of *Guanxi* on job allocations argues that Chinese people's use of personal relations for urban jobs and social mobility are inversely related to the forms of bureaucratic control over social and economic spheres. Though the scholar confirms a declining urban migration in the 1960s and 1970s, he argues that even the stringent state controls of the period were not enough for a total curbing of rural-urban migration.<sup>9</sup>

This historical approach suggests the dominant classical liberal and Marxist readings of migration as problematic. While, liberals identify migration with that of the rational individual choice, the Marxists link this phenomenon with the demands of world capitalist system. But more

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<sup>6</sup> Hein Mallee, "Migration, Hukou and Resistance in Reform China", In Elizabeth J Perry and Mark Selden (eds.), *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 84-85.

<sup>7</sup> Xin Liu, "Space, Mobility, and Flexibility: Chinese Villagers and Scholars Negotiate Power at Home and Abroad", In Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (eds.), *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 92-93.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> Bian, Yanjie, *Guanxi and the Allocation of Urban Jobs in China*", *The China Quarterly*, no. 140 (Dec., 1994), pp. 971-72.

precisely people's transgressions of geographical boundaries are determined by the material conditions of their place of origin and destination. For that reason, through the study it is contended that for many of these migrants, migration is a form of personal tactic for redefining the material presence of body in specific power relations both in rural family and society. And, therefore, it can be argued that the patterns of rural peoples' transgressions of geographical boundaries are determined by the interplay of social, economic and political forces in their localities.<sup>10</sup>

### **Changing Patterns of Migration in Post-Mao China**

However, it is important to note that the increase in labour migration in the post-Mao period is the latest shift in an age-old tradition that associated social power with upward mobility. To capture the recent trends in these new waves of peoples' mobility one should consider the reordering of the social meanings associated with urban and rural spaces since the "opening" of China's domestic economy to the global capitalism. Since the late 1970s the country has undergone an astonishing economic transformation. However, this growth increasingly has been uneven, with a great deal of the economic activities concentrating on the eastern seaboard. In the mean while much of the interior provinces have been lagging behind in terms of development. Not surprisingly, the economic development in the coastal region has generated huge demands for labour that has been satisfied by the movement of peoples from underdeveloped rural regions. At the same time, the rising urban prosperity has disseminated new forms of social imagination across the country that would directly link peoples' dream for social mobility to an urban life.

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<sup>10</sup> Lei Guang and Lu Zheng, "Migration as the Second-Best Option: Local Power and Off-farm Employment", *The China Quarterly*, vol. 181, (March 2005), pp. 23- 24.

Noticeably, the estimates of the number of migrant population in contemporary China vary from 80 to 160 million.<sup>11</sup>

The census of 1990 counted two types of rural-urban mobility in China: permanent and temporary migrations. A permanent migrant is defined as someone whose move is officially sanctioned by the granting of a household registration in the new place of residence. This category of people remained stable at two percent of the population in 1980s. Whereas temporary migrants are those who live in a place where they are not registered for more than a year. These groups of people stand in sharp contrast to the glittering skyscrapers and large highways of modern urban China.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, public discourse and metaphors circulated on these people, time and again, have revealed highly negative images.<sup>13</sup> As a group, these migrants are referred to in the media and in parlance as *liudong renkou*—the portion of the urban population that is ‘temporary’ or ‘mobile.’ Normally, they are referred to as ‘floating population’ in urban public discourses. Some of these people are easily identifiable in the cities; hanging around outside rail and bus stations, working on construction sites, and operating stalls or providing services on the streets.<sup>14</sup>

### Post-Mao Segregated Labour Migration

When compared to most of the countries in North and South, female participation in labour migration is much higher in China. For instance, female labour participation in China’s urban labour market stands at 80.3 per cent in 1995.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, migration in China is highly selective in terms of gender, sex and age. Predominantly, young, single and male are

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<sup>11</sup> ILO Statistical Database, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market, 2001-2002* (Geneva: ILO, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Bingqin Li, “Urban Social Exclusion in Transitional China”, *Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion London, Working Paper 82*, (March 2004), p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Hein Mallee, *op. cit.* no.6, p. 97.

<sup>14</sup> Borge Bakken, “Norms, Police and the Problems of Control”, In Taciana Fisac and Leila Fernandez-Stembridge (eds.), *China Today: Economic Reforms, Social Cohesion and Collective Identities* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 128-29.

<sup>15</sup> Hein Mallee, *op. cit.* no. 6.

preferred for skilled and high status jobs, while, women take up employment in assembly line factories, garment workshops, hotels, restaurants and rest of the service sector. Substantial number of female workers can also be found as domestic workers, small traders and sex workers.

This lower position of women in most migration streams can be attributed to various factors. Of these factors the role of state agents is decisive. For instance, the state initiated “open door policy” in the post-Mao period has brought about “flexible strategies of accumulation” in the coastal China. Integral to these rapid changes is the massive introduction of modern transportation and telecommunication technologies, leading to new waves of “time-space compression” in the flow of capital, people, commerce and images.<sup>16</sup> The resultant reordering of social meanings of urban spaces has brought new rounds of rural-urban migration in contemporary China.<sup>17</sup> One crucial aspect of these rounds of internal migration is that they are not directly administrated by the state. Instead, many individuals are voluntarily on the move. The possibilities of getting access to the special economic zones or overseas locations of wealth have become one of the central concerns in everyday life. Hence Xin Liu correctly identifies that “the economic reforms in China have not only brought foreign investments and economic growth but also opened up various kinds of opportunities for travelling and mobility; not only built sky-scrapers and highways but also changed the conceptions of space and time; not only brought television and telephones into many households but also reconstituted everyday consciousness of space.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origin of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 240. See, also David Harvey, *Space of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 58-59.

<sup>17</sup> Xin Liu, op. cit. no.7, pp. 92-93.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

## Gender and Labour Migration

The indirect outcome of some state policies is that they effectively curtailed the urban opportunities for different groups of people. The *hukou* reforms are an example for this type of policy. Obviously, this means that the current reordering of spatial hierarchy creates new forms of inequality among people. For instance, even after the increase in female labour migration, mobility across spaces is denied to many of the rural women. Much of the problems that confront women in the post-Mao period begin with the representation of women in legal documents as a matter of biological difference. Though these legal documents readily accommodate women's reproductive needs in the workplace, they, without a doubt, present these issues less as a social problem. As many of these laws are structured around women's reproductive functions, these legal regulations run the risk of reinforcing the stereotype image that the primary role of a woman is reproduction. For that reason, they can have a practical effect of keeping women out of certain categories of work and even from migration.<sup>19</sup>

This stereotype vision of women reflected in the state laws gets moral support from China's Confucian traditions. Confucian thought defines a woman in terms of her obligations to her husband as a wife and to her son as a mother. Moreover, it conceives women as the weaker sex, meriting special protection. Indeed, these gendered legal and cultural systems along with family system have shaped women's desire to migrate in post-Mao China. For example, all individuals in China are expected to live within their family circle unless there is good reason for them to do otherwise, but the feeling that this is appropriate is stronger in the case of women. In the public discussions on women, they are considered to be

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<sup>19</sup> Margaret Y. K. Woo, "Chinese Women Workers: The Delicate Balance between Protection and Equality", In Christina K. Gilmartin et al (eds.), *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 25-6.



more vulnerable and less capable of dealing with the outside world. And, therefore, single women are often seen as in need of protection and supervision of their families.

For instance, Song Lina takes a similar position when she argues that the women she confronted during her field experience in *Handan* in Hebei provinces do not initiate migration but merely follow their men-folk. Moreover, women migrants are more likely than their male counterparts to have family members who have also left rural areas. She further argues that

In the sample of *Handan* rural-urban migrants, 52 percent of the women had family members working in an urban area and 51 percent had family members with them in *Handan*. In contrast only 30 percent of men had family members with urban jobs and 21 percent had family members living in *Handan*. In other words, households with female migrants were also more likely to have other migrants. This may imply that these female migrants were not the first but subsequent migrants from their households, or that they migrated along with other family members, such as parents or husbands.<sup>20</sup>

### **Women, Labour Migration and Segregation along Age**

Segregation of female labour in China may not be planned purely around gendered social and political norms, but also is structured for a differentiated treatment among same sexes along different ages. Even though substantial amount of ethnographic data suggest the more opening for men initiating migration, there are writings on Chinese labour market that suggest the development of urban jobs for young rural women.<sup>21</sup> Studies on the topic have underlined an increase in female participation in manufacturing and service sectors, especially in special economic zones. Obviously, this openness of the post-Mao labour market to rural young

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<sup>20</sup> Song Lina, "The Role of Women in Labour Migration: A Case Study in Northern China", In West, Jackie et al, (eds.), *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), p. 74.

<sup>21</sup> Dalia Davin, "Migration, Women and Gender Issues in Contemporary China", In T. Scharping (ed.), *Floating Population and Migration in China* (Hamburg: Institute of Asian Studies, 1997).

female workers has influenced many rural families' attitude towards sending young unmarried women to urban industrial centres.<sup>22</sup>

However, labour migration for married women is still seen as undesirable in the rural public perception and therefore it is difficult for rural middle-aged women to migrate without the consent of their family. Moreover, the everyday exercise and power relations in the family also confine married women to their families. For instance, if she were a mother, in most cases, according to rural practices, issues of bearing and raising children are duties that no married woman, no matter she is a worker or a peasant farm woman, can free herself. And in the absence of the migrant husband in the rural family, married women are even expected to do the agricultural work assigned to her household. Hence, major divisions of urban female migrants in the post-Mao period are young women from rural areas.

### **Female Labour Migration and the Ethnic Segregation**

Another important aspect of female labour migration in post-Mao China is the differentiated treatment they receive in the places of destination based on their ethnic identities. These social biases for dividing female labourers along their ethnic identities have their origin in the post-Mao state projects for building spiritual civilisation. The post-Mao campaigns for "the building of socialist spiritual civilization," concerning both with material and spiritual forms, has been first taken-up for discussion in the Third Plenum of the Communist Party's Eleventh Central Committee in 1978.<sup>23</sup> Subsequent campaigns under the banner aimed to transform the ostensible Maoist ideology of the Cultural Revolution period from peoples' thinking and behaviour and to construct a 'symbolic ideal citizenship' suitable for the post-Mao market socialism. In a strictly Foucaultian twist, a series of

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<sup>22</sup> Aihwa Ong, "The Gender and Labour Politics of Postmodernity", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 20, (1991) p. 288.

<sup>23</sup> Sara L. Friedman, op. cit. no. 5, p. 701.

spiritual-civilization campaigns, aimed for the enlightenment of rural Chinese minority population, have been implemented. Most important targets of these campaigns are rural non-Han women. Successive political rhetoric of these campaigns intentionally have linked the images of an "ideal citizen" with the images of modern *Han* women, by celebrating Chinese modernity as a *Han* political project these rhetoric have started to underplay the importance of minority culture. Consequently, the civilisational and behavioural differences between Han ethnicity and other minority ethnicities have led to the intensification of cultural conflicts among Chinese women in social and economic spheres of life.<sup>24</sup>

The increase in female mobility across different ethnic and political boundaries in the post-Mao period has lead to the augmentation of these cultural conflicts, as mobility opens possibilities of access to other social, cultural and nationality spaces. Moreover, it has happened at a time when other ethnic groups in China are expected to emulate the *Han* ethnic behaviour in their social life. Similarly in the economic sphere, China's female labour force, during the period, is structured with *Han* ethnic groups at the top of the hierarchy. Further, the *hukou* system, introduced to have some form of control over rural-urban migration, has intensified the segregation of rural female migration along ethnic lines, because much of the ethnic female groups in the eye of law are illegal residents in Chinese cities. They are considered to be as second-class citizens without urban residential permits.<sup>25</sup> This has consolidated horizontal relations among these rural female workers who are on the move. The proliferation of *guanxi* relations among female workers of similar ethnic groups has further augmented the segregation of women along ethnic lines: these types of *guanxi* based ethnic groupings are employed by female workers

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<sup>24</sup> Pun Ngai, "Becoming Dagongmei (Working Girls): The Politics of Identity and Difference in Reform China", *The China Journal*, no. 42, (Jul., 1999), pp. 1-18.

<sup>25</sup> Hein Mallee, *op. cit.* no. 6, pp. 84-86.

as a group strategy for protecting their interests in the exclusionary social relations in urban China.<sup>26</sup>

### **Female Labour Migration and Public Discourses**

Public discourses on female labour migration explicitly reflect the social tension that has developed out of Chinese women's multiple transgressions of the social norms, sexual taboos and political and ethnic boundaries etc through mobility. Since the beginning of the economic reforms in the late 1970s, substantial amount of academic and journalistic writing has been circulated about rural female migrants. Much of these writings give an impression that migration in such large numbers and within such a brief span of time is a major problem. Ethnographic and sociological studies among urban dwellers suggest that much of the urban residents are troubled by the rising competition for scarce urban resources and the resultant overall reduction in the quality of city life. Moreover, the increase of prostitution in urban spaces since the augmentation in rural-urban migration has given an exotic and erotic image to migrant female workers in the post-Mao popular imagery. Urban public often relates rural female migrants to every thing that is immoral and uncivilised.

### **Female Labour Migration and Social Ramifications**

Whenever there are rapid structural changes together with a clear lack of state control in some areas - especially in the movements of peoples and goods across space - there could be a noticeable loss of ideological direction and a common feeling that previously prevailing moral values are disappearing. Indeed, this is reflecting in the popular perception in China today that there is a lack of shared norms that could inform individual attitudes and behaviours. This significant breakdown in the

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<sup>26</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "From Organised Dependence to Disorganised Disposition: Changing Labour Regime in Chinese Factories", *The China Quarterly*, no. 157, (1999), pp. 64-65.

former normative frame of reference is visible in the changing lifestyle of the Chinese people. As Taciana Fisac writes about it; “[a]n explicit example, which is perceptible just walking along the streets, is the lack of respect for traffic regulations. But there is also, for instance, a clear lack of formal regulation in different aspects of social life.” The author defines this as “social anomie,” a term related to Durkheim’s sociology.<sup>27</sup> Put in other way, the peoples’ social and geographical mobility, which is organised around new forms of personal desires, has brought about a popular appropriation of social spaces in the post-Mao China. In the case of women, who has used the current processes of time-space compression in the flow of people, goods and images for personal goals, their movement across geographical spaces broadly has influenced in two ways: one, the female labour migration has considerably restructured the gender relations in post-Mao China; two, it has opened up new possibilities for Chinese women in the evolving social and economic spaces.

### Female migration and the Changing Gender Relations

Female labour migration since the late 70s has considerably restructured gendered norms and social taboos that have shaped relations between the two sexes in post-Mao China. Though the patriarchal nature of the Chinese society is not yet radically changed during the post-1980s, the female migration has significantly improved the position of women in family and rural social settings. The increasing mobility of rural unmarried women across the geographical spaces has widely reduced direct patriarchal family control over their life. Moreover, the urban jobs, eventually, have improved the economic and personal autonomy of at least a section of rural women. Their everyday interactions with urban

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<sup>27</sup> Taciana Fisac, “Social Anomie and Political Discourses in Contemporary China”, In Taciana Fisac and Leila Fernandez-Stembridge (eds.), *China Today: Economic Reforms, Social Cohesion and Collective Identities* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 150.

public lead them to acquaint with modern notions of gender and the role of family. The proliferation of modern education, though limited to certain sections of female population, has, over time, enabled them to challenge certain consolidated social norms and taboos that traditionally controlled Chinese women.<sup>28</sup>

*Mobility, Social Power and the Changing Role of Patriarchal Family in China:* social and spatial mobility of Chinese women since the introduction of social reforms in the post-Mao China have noticeably restructured the role of patriarchal family in contemporary China. Chinese family, as elsewhere, is a closed space headed by father or husband: a Foucaultian panopticon,<sup>29</sup> where comprehensive surveillances on Chinese women can be maintained. Hence, Chinese family system through series of surveillance techniques can effectively govern the thought and behaviour of women. Alongside the Chinese family system, the rural public discourses that consider women as more vulnerable and less capable subjects have further reinforced the patriarchal order. For that reason, Chinese family is an important space where China's gender norms are reproduced. However, the post-Mao female labour migration, to some extent, has reorganised the disciplinary power in Chinese family.<sup>30</sup>

For instance, the increase in the female mobility across space in the post-Mao period has produced what Doreen Massey calls "the geometries of power" whereby mobility empowers them to transgress the disciplinary

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<sup>28</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit. no. 22, p. 293.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Foucault in his celebrated work *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* reveals the genealogy of modern prison. His examination of modern closed spaces like factories, schools, barracks, hospitals etc., reveals a form of power that has produced modern disciplined political subject in medieval Europe. As part of the project, Foucault examines the discursive presence of new disciplinary techniques found in Bentham's 'panopticon,' a circular architectural structure where cells are arranged around a central viewing tower in such a way as to ensure permanent visibility. Michael Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage books, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Donald M. Nonini and Aihwa Ong, "Chinese Transnationalism as an Alternative Modernity", In Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (eds.) *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 10-11.

power of Chinese family. In other words, those women who are on the move can use the new round of "time-space compression" to transgress the power relations in the family. He asserts that global capitalism not only produces "entail homogenization" and "time-space compression" but also geometries of power by producing social, economic and political differentiations associated with mobility.<sup>31</sup> He adds:

For different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement.

Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some indicate flows and movements, others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, Janet Salaff, in her study of women and Chinese family in Hong Kong, argues that parents view daughters as "poor long-term investments." In reality, working daughters have seen themselves paying back their natal families for giving them life and nurture before they left home. In fact, urban jobs for women under this "filial conducts" are merely sources for repaying parents the cost of bringing up a "useless" daughter. Further, she assumes that working daughters do not gain power in a family structure that is more like an 'exchange system'.<sup>33</sup> Along with this mix of family obligations and growing personal autonomy, one must look at the pattern of capitalist revitalization of the ancient patriarchal power relations.

One of the important aspects of the current scholarly debates on industrial organisations in China is whether they are paternalistic or despotic in

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<sup>31</sup> Doreen Massey, "Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place", In J. Bird et al, (eds.), *Mapping the Future: Local Cultures, Global Change* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 59-69.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

<sup>33</sup> Janet Salaff, "Women, the Family, and the State in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore", In Richard p. Appelbaum and Jeffrey Henderson (eds.), *States and Development in the Asian Pacific Rim* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), p. 259.

nature. However, ethnographies suggest that industrial relations are neither exclusively despotic nor anti-paternalistic but involve different disciplinary schemes institutionalised by local capitalist and cultural practices. For instance, corporate discourses in mainland China often celebrate the notion of “Asian family” to describe a paternalistic relation with workers in the work place. These discourses define workers as “children” who should obey their parents/supervisors in the factory. Further, larger enterprises in special economic zones even provide the facilities for living in singles’ dormitories, having more buying power and enjoying the urban life. Thus, despite the claims that capitalism can destroy the traditional cultural behaviours these examples rather suggest a reorganisation of patriarchal family order.<sup>34</sup>

*Circulatory Migration and the Diffusion of New Ideas on Gender:* an essential aspect of post-Mao urban migration is that it is strongly characterised by circulation.<sup>35</sup> Even though, rural residents are now allowed to migrate into urban areas, they still suffer discrimination in terms of entitlements to welfare, education and health and are routinely denied access to better forms of employment. This encourages them to maintain strong links with their native places and to return to their villages after staying in cities for few years. Moreover, each time such returning cohort of migrants is replaced by fresh cohort. Indeed, this “circulatory migration” as identified by Delia Davin has complex effects on rural communities, as rural migrants through their interaction with urban public would indoctrinate modern ideas on gender and family and carry with them to their villages.<sup>36</sup>

More than that, women who are living in the rural areas can be affected by migration either because they migrate themselves or because they are left

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<sup>34</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit. no. 22, p. 289.

<sup>35</sup> Delia Davin, “Women and Migration in Contemporary China”, *China Report*, no. 41, (2005), p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Delia Davin, op. cit. no.35, pp. 32-34.



behind. If they themselves migrate their mobility would separate them from family members and thus disrupts the day-to-day functioning of family power structure. Adding to that, her absence in the family could even end up in a restructuring of the traditional sexual division of labour in individual household, as the residual members of the family should have to do the work that the migrant member has left behind. More precisely, if the migrants are female, the other female members in the family have to reorganise the 'inside works' among themselves. For instance, much of the public documents since the increase in internal migration reveal the official concerns over the fall in the agricultural production basically due to the changes in the structure of labour force in rural China.

Further, scholarly writings on the impact of migration left out female member in rural households propose an ambivalent picture. A number of them suggest that the growth in rural-urban migration in the post-Mao China has forced the left out female members in rural households to take up the low-status jobs left by the migrant members.<sup>37</sup> Contrary to this standpoint, Lei Guang and Lu Zheng argue that 'gaining civilisation' through migration or leaving local off-farm jobs in rural area is a second-best option for Chinese villagers. For them, the current waves of mobility are largely determined by the political situation in rural China, as it shapes the forms of off-farm employment available to each village. The discriminatory processes of off-farm employment allotments in rural China are shaped by local political institutions. The off-farm employment allotments in rural China are shaped exclusively by the political capital of villagers to influence cadres and influential peoples of the local power structure. Besides, these local employment distribution processes are highly gendered in nature.<sup>38</sup> Obviously, under these local power relations

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> Denyse Verschuur-Basse, *Chinese Women Speak* (London: Praeger, 1996).

the losers have no other option but to migrate to urban centres. Further, the possibilities of getting better wages in cities add force to rural peoples' desire to migrate. Therefore, according to them, villagers' choices to migrate are largely determined by their failure to secure comparable off-farm employments in rural areas. This may happen because of their lack of political capital to influence the official allocation of such jobs.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the development of various off-farm employment opportunities in rural China offers many possibilities for women. And the resultant development of female headed families and rural small-scale enterprises in the post-Mao China has significantly changed women's status in rural social settings.

*Migration and extramarital relations:* since the 90s extramarital relations became a standard fare in Chinese public rhetoric with television commentators discussing it from a range of ethical positions. The period also saw a substantial amount of scholarly studies on the social consequences of extramarital relations in urban China.<sup>40</sup> Many of them give an alarmist account of a growing number of "yellow army" of money-hungry women who threaten the institution of marriage as well as the public health and safety. For addressing this issue, the state has revised the marriage law in 2001.

Some scholars have tried to see the problem as a consequence of China's post-80s turn towards "Western values" and the resultant proliferation of "money worship." They have offered a critique of contemporary Chinese culture: they conclude that the decline of the Maoist ideology has led to the erosion of all moral resources, leaving Chinese people with a nihilistic hedonism that promotes an outright commodification of sexuality in the

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<sup>39</sup> Lei Guang and Lu Zheng, op. cit. no. 10, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China* (London: Continuum, 1997).

form of prostitution and concubinage.<sup>41</sup> Several studies have linked it to the post-80s rural-urban migration and the increase in social core-periphery gaps in China's urban centres.<sup>42</sup> Diverging from these accounts James Farrer and Sun Zhongxin in their study on extramarital love based on field studies in Shanghai argue that many of their interviewees have tried to avoid defining their extramarital relations as purely practical, sexual and economic. Moreover, they have justified their relations with what is often labelled as ethical rhetoric.<sup>43</sup>

Taboos on female sexual behaviour play an important role in the reproduction of patriarchal order. Because of the multiple forms of surveillance techniques and repressive power relations both within and outside family, Chinese women, even to this day, have suffered for breaking the taboos of virginity and chastity. Since the increase in extramarital relations in the post-80s urban China there has been a considerable restructuring of these social taboos to respond to the new reality. Blaming rural female migrants for the proliferation of prostitution is common among urban public discourses.<sup>44</sup> What is more, the post-80s even witness the institutionalisation of brothels for containing the female sexuality in urban spaces. The government controlled media often criticised rural factory women with reputations as "micro-devils" and "bad women."<sup>45</sup> Reflections of these social changes can also be analysed in China's female writings: most of them have tried to portray a new type of women. According to these writers, sex for the new Chinese women, who

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<sup>41</sup> Wang Xiaoying, "The Post-Communist Personality: the Spectre of China's Capitalist Market Reforms", *The China Journal*, vol.47, (January, 2002), pp.1-17.

<sup>42</sup> Dalia Davin, op. cit. no. 35, pp. 29-30.

<sup>43</sup> James Farrer and Sun Zhongxin, "Extramarital Love in Shanghai", *The China Journal*, vol. 50, July 2003 pp. 4-6.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pp. 2-4.

<sup>45</sup> Aihwa Ong, op. cit. no. 22, p. 292.

decide to ignore what the world may say, is an instinctive drive, an ultimate happiness.<sup>46</sup>

### Labour Migration and Socio -Cultural Changes

In the prevailing higher discourses among influential academicians, TV commentators, policy-makers and city planners, labour migration is seen as a major force of change that will have a negative impact on the cities. These discourses not only reflect the forms of damage that the rural migrants have inflicted on modern Chinese urban social and political institutions but also in ways reinforce the popular stereotype perception of rural migrants as the 'new underdogs.' If truth be told, rural-urban migration has played an important role in the urbanisation of China, especially the coastal region, in a very short span of time since the implementation of reforms in the late 70s. China is one of the fastest urbanising countries in the world.

In Guangdong province, for instance, the percentage of the population officially designated as rural migrants almost doubled, from 18.6 percent in 1982 to 36.8 percent in 1990. Since the definition of what is 'urban' is frequently changing in China, many scholars have admitted that these data may have several problems. For instance, a survey of the same period has estimated that 41 percent of the new urban dwellers in Guangdong as migrants, mostly coming from the rural areas.<sup>47</sup> One important factor for these large-scale peasants' movement to urban centres is the rising surplus labour force in the countryside. In fact, this surplus rural labour force has been used for the industrialisation of China's new urban centres in coastal regions and the new Special Economic Zones. Moreover, the state policies for the industrialisation of rural areas has led to the urbanisation of

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<sup>46</sup> Li Ziyun, "Women's Consciousness and Women's Writing", In Christina K. Gilmartin et al (eds.) *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 314-15.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher J. Smith, "Migration as an Agent of Change in Contemporary China", *Chinese Environment and Development*, no. 7, pp 14-55.

Chinese countryside in the post-Mao period. It is estimated that in Guangzhou alone more than a million peasants had migrated to the newly developed towns and cities in the 90s.

Consequently, in the popular imagery the migrants are often associated with all most all urban disorder since the increase in rural-urban mobility in the 80s. For Hein Mallee, from the point of view of local power relations in urban society migrants primarily are 'outsiders.' "As newcomers, and especially because their legal position is at best ambiguous, they are easily exploited. They have little leverage to make claims on public resources. Indeed, their position is precarious in ways analogous to the plight of illegal aliens in many other countries."<sup>48</sup> In all of the Chinese cities there is a 'detention station' designed for the keeping of a variety of unwanted people, before being sent to the countryside. Though there have been serious variations in the meaning of the signifier 'unwanted' since the late 40s depending of the social and political situations. In 1982, the State Council of People's Republic of China has issued "Administrative Measures on Arresting and Eviction of Urban Vagrants and Beggars" to confirm the entrance of unwanted elements into urban spaces.<sup>49</sup> For instance, in 1986, the detention station in Guiyang City reportedly contained the following people: 1,972 'blind vagrants,' seventy-four beggars, twenty-seven swindlers, eighty-six thieves, eighty-two pick pockets, 111 people who had been cheated, fourteen people who had come in contact with the authorities, five people engaged in chaotic sexual relations, eight prostitutes, two gamblers, three women traffickers, seven fortune tellers, twenty-three mentally ill, and eighty-four retarded and

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<sup>48</sup> Hein Mallee, *op. cit.* no. 6, p. 97.

<sup>49</sup> State Council, PRC, "Administrative Measures on Arresting and Eviction of Urban Vagrants and Beggars", *State Council Issue* (12<sup>th</sup> May 1982).

handicapped people.<sup>50</sup> This form of detention and deportation is common in urban China.

*Migration and Rural Social Changes*: albeit of this continuing urban exploitation and the marginalisation in the urban spaces the labour migration to industrial centres has significantly transformed the rural social life. Most important of this is the restructuring of the traditional labour divide in the rural society since the increase in peoples' mobility in the 80s. Social relations in rural China has been characterised by a culturally imposed labour divide between sexes along production and reproduction. This gendered labour divide that has effectively confined female labour within family is central to the rural patriarchal order.<sup>51</sup>

Perceptible diversification of labour market has opened new spaces for female labourers to find job outside the rural arena. The progress of female labour market can also be considered as a radical shift from the Maoist strategy for female employment. Since much of the policies for female employment during the Maoist period were organised around a paternalistic socialist state, they had substantially curtailed female personal autonomy. Moreover, Mao's stress on the 'class struggle' theme did immeasurable harm to gender issues during the period. And the introduction of the 'communes' had constrained all forms of independent female movements. What is more, many feminist scholars have cited evidences of CCP's reluctance to attack the structure of patriarchal authority in rural China. For them, the central concern of party leaders, during the period, was not to alienate their rural power base—the leaders of patriarchal family in rural China.<sup>52</sup> Incompatible to Maoist top-down strategy for female employment and gender equality, the development of

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<sup>50</sup> Hein Mallee, op. cit. no.6, p. 97.

<sup>51</sup> World Bank, "Understanding Inequality", *Sharing Rising Incomes: Disparities in China* (Washington: The World Bank, 1990), pp. 27-52.

<sup>52</sup> Christopher J. Smith, *China and the Post-utopian Age* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), pp. 289-320.

labour market in post-Mao China has opened up possibilities for multiple personal strategies and employment opportunities for women.

*Migration and the Changing Lifestyle:* as part of the “open door” policy of the state that led to the gradual erosion of Maoist ideology of the Cultural Revolution from the cultural spheres, these new waves of rural-urban migration are tactically incorporated into the post-Mao state civilisational projects. Central aim of these projects is the appropriation of the larger rural population into a national ‘citizenship,’ which is suitable for economic liberalisation. It is apparent that the internal migration in contemporary China has been part of the over all strategy for the introduction of appropriate modern lifestyles in the social sphere.<sup>53</sup>

The post-Mao “civilisational project”<sup>54</sup> is part of a larger process; aimed at the establishment of a “symbolic citizen,” who is eligible for the membership in the new nation.<sup>55</sup> Mao aimed this process for the elimination of feudal cultural patterns – for instance, dressing and marriage practices, or labour patterns and formalised same-sex relations as well – from a larger section of rural society and to establish a socialist citizenship. For example, Sara L. Friedman has cited the disappearance of *Hui’an* women’s head covering [*gin’a*] and the popularisation of nationally acknowledged ‘simple dressing styles’ during the radical Maoist period. On the other hand, this art of cultural engineering in the post-Mao period was done through the state sponsored “open door” policy for the free movement of goods, images and people.

With several new dress codes re-emerging and old one disappearing from the rural society, the period saw the radical reshuffling of both Maoist and

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<sup>53</sup> Sara L. Friedman, op. cit. no. 5, p. 689.

<sup>54</sup> “Civilizing project,” a concept developed by Prasenjit Duara to explain a sense of civilization as a progressive movement that bring true and proper civilisational values to all, is used by Sara L. Friedman to explain the processes that regulate the cultural spheres in Maoist and Post-Mao period. Ibid, p. 688.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

the feudal behavioural reminisces. The old Maoist universal “socialist dressing patterns” has increasingly become irrational in the post-Mao period. The internal rural-urban mobility along with increasing flow of global visual images and goods into China’s countryside have popularised Western fashion and lifestyle in contemporary China.

### **Conclusion**

Post-Mao female labour migration, through multiple transgressions of gender norms, sexual taboos and political restrictions, has considerably restructured the Chinese patriarchal order. Mobility along the space has empowered Chinese women to transgress the disciplinary power of Chinese patriarchal family. What is more, the uncontrolled internal mobility of people, goods and images has encouraged social restructuring in the post-Mao China. For Taciana Fisac, this social anomie is due to the unrestricted production of human desire for social and spatial mobility after the reforms of late 1970s: as Deleuze identifies this type of behavioural problem being fundamental to capitalism when he defined capitalism as a “desire-machine.” This has led to the breaking of normative framework, and thereby has created a state of society characterized by the lack of consistent normative structure. This in turn has led to the visible popular appropriation of social spaces, which has multiple ramifications on state and its policies.



## **4** Gendered Labour Market and Migration: Political Ramifications

### **Introduction**

The development of a gendered labour market and the resultant increase in the female labour migration, the two dynamic processes developed out of a correlation of diversity of factors that include institutional, structural as well as cultural ones in the post-Mao China, have multiple ramifications on state, state policies and the changing state-society relations. Under the environment of liberalisation and privatisation, these two processes have both repressive as well as liberating effects for different sections of Chinese citizens to demand political and economic rights in the society. For instance, when manual labourers, predominantly rural women, in China's textile and electronic industries demand for better wages and working conditions, then the middle class women, who have utilised the social and geographical core-periphery relations for economic advances, have argued for greater economic autonomy and political freedom.

The partial retreat of the state from several forms of welfare programmes for labourers, on the other hand, has affected all sections of labour force, leading to the proliferation of labour unrest in the period. And, at the same time, the increasing gap between the rural and urban living standards and the resultant influx of rural residents, predominantly young unmarried women, to urban spaces has added force to general lawlessness in cities, a phenomenon that Taciana Fisac has termed as "social anomie."<sup>1</sup> This has strengthened popular dissatisfaction among urban dwellers to different state policies on internal migration. From this perspective, the development of a gendered labour market has augmented diverse strains

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<sup>1</sup> 'Social anomie' for Taciana Fisac is a general lawlessness, created out of the uncontrolled movement of peoples, commodities and images across the social spaces. Taciana Fisac, "Social Anomie and Political Discourses in Contemporary china" In Taciana Fisac and Leila Fernandez-Stembridge (eds.), *China Today: Economic Reforms, Social Cohesion and Collective Identities* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 150.

of grassroots struggle, which are putting pressure on state and its policies. The chapter with a bottom-up approach to the Chinese polity examines the impertinent representation of women in political discourses, the new pattern of interest articulation in post-Mao Chinese society, and the political ramifications of the discernible grassroots resistance on state and its policies.

### **Post-Mao Chinese Polity: A Reading**

The UNDP in its report of 1995 argues that even after the emergence of the market forces, when compared to many other countries of third world, the gender equality in China has been more or less sustained. The report suggests that by 1995 China ranked 111 in the UN human development index (HDI), but it ranked 71 on the gender-related development index (GDI) and as high as 23 on the gender empowerment measure (GEM).<sup>2</sup> Yet, the Chinese women, especially rural unskilled women, are at disadvantageous position in the society. On the one hand, Chinese women have shared with men the benefits brought by the reforms such as better economic and career opportunities, higher living standards and more desirable life styles. On the other hand, many women have found themselves at a disadvantageous position in the labour market and face a more insecure future.

Furthermore, at least at first sight, women's status appears to have worsened. Since the introduction of reforms, there has been a decline in the proportion of women's representation in the National People's Congress (NPC) and other political institutions. For instance, women constituted 21 percent of Standing Committee members at the Fourth NPC in January 1978, but have come down to 9 percent at the Sixth NPC in January 1983.<sup>3</sup> However, with gender relations in China generally

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<sup>2</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Shang Xiaoyuan, "Women and the Public Sphere: Education, NGO Affiliation and Political Participation" In Jackie West et al., (eds.) *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation* (New York: St Martin's Press, INC, 1999), p. 195-96.

improving over the last fifty years as women shed many of the shackles of an old patriarchal system through entering into almost all walks of life and creating one of the highest female employment rates in the world, the number of Chinese women holding leading positions has been increasing over the past few years. Women accounted for 16.8 percent of the total number of representatives in the 15th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, 21.8% in the ninth National People's Congress, and 15.5 percent in the ninth Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.<sup>4</sup> This does not mean, however, that women have gained an equal right of participation with their male counterparts. In fact, the rate of elected women officials is still low, and most of them serve in lower-level positions. And in the higher politics, there are only a few women officials, a phenomenon known as "pyramid-shaped distribution of women in leadership".

Moreover, women in China experience low political participation at all levels, especially at the village and township level as a result of, among other things, gender based discrimination and early retirement.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, women's participation in grassroots politics, especially in NGO politics, has considerably increased over the period.<sup>6</sup> Along with this development, the rise in women's oriented NGO politics in China is often seen as important for the growth of an embryonic civil society. Academic studies, those interested in the representation of gendered interests in this developing civil society, for instance, have started to provide detailed descriptions of history, organizational structure and work focus of selected women's organizations and networks such as the Women's Research

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<sup>4</sup> National Population and Family Planning Commission of China, "Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment", In <http://www.npfpc.gov.cn/genderpro.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> UN China Home, "About China: Gender Equality" In [http://www.unchina.org/about\\_china/html/gender.shtml](http://www.unchina.org/about_china/html/gender.shtml).

<sup>6</sup> Shang Xiaoyuan, op. cit. no. 3.

Institute and the Jinglun Family Centre. However, citing civil society<sup>7</sup> as a space for female empowerment in China has its own problems, since the civil society based women's organisations and NGOs, if one were to use Foucaultian language, are inclusive in their basic characteristic, they can contain every form of women's political assertion.<sup>8</sup> These non-governmental organisations, developed with the neoliberal social and cultural setting, moreover, are incapable of addressing the growing gendered inequalities and exploitations in China developed since the late 1970s. Therefore, this study rather identifies relatively violent gendered labour movements, polemic attacks and different forms of cultural resistances as new patterns of female affirmation in post-Mao Chinese political order. For instance, in a similar formulation, Aihwa Ong argues that the advance of these forms of resistance can engender a new self and community, potentially challenging the construction of civil society. Hence, the ever-increasing marginalisation of women from political spaces has placed women as one among the subaltern subjects along with the ethnic minorities and Muslims, who are in constant conflict with the Han male-dominated party-state. Therefore, the gendered labour resistances proliferated since the introduction of the reforms, as illustrated in the

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<sup>7</sup> Antonio Gramsci in his prison notebooks, for instance, has categorically rejected any undialectical separation of state and civil society. For him, civil society is a space through which the political elites attain an ideological hegemony. And therefore he stresses that "in concrete reality, civil society and state are one and the same." See, Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 207-208.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Foucault in his studies on subject and power has introduced a new theory of power, which he developed out of Nietzschean genealogy of power. Unlike the earlier conception of power as that can be transferred from one locus/person to other, for instance, from state to civil society or vis-à-vis, this theory argues that power operates as networks and interpersonal relations. These forms of power relations are important for normalising certain form of hierarchies and exploitations in the modern society. If we apply this theory in this case, we can easily conclude that these NGOs and women's organisations attached either to global capital or the Chinese state are containing real female political affirmation. See for a theoretical engagement, Michael Foucault, "Two Lectures", In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

second chapter, are directed against discriminatory state policies, patriarchal order and the working of global capital.

Another factor in the whole struggle for power is that the centrality of economic development in the post-Mao China has effectively marginalised much of the women's issues from dominant political debates. For insistence, the dominant political debates of the period are primarily organised between the reformists' and the revisionists' camps in the early stages of the reforms, and since the 1990s between a group of divergent left political thinkers and activists, on the one side, and the official think tanks, on the other.<sup>9</sup> The revisionists argued for developing state social security system and the revitalisation of Mao's mass organisation. The reformers under Deng Xiaoping; who above all stood for developing the production forces, argued for maintaining social and political differences among the population and regions, a strategy for the modernization of the country. The 'socialism with Chinese characteristics,' a proposed policy document that Deng was supposed to present at the Third Plenum, XIth Central Committee, held in Beijing from 18 to 22 December, 1978, appeared as the inaugural discourse of the XIIth Party Congress, held in September 1982. This document, which stressed material development, rejected class struggle as the fundamental dynamic of social change. Central to the ascendancy of reformers in China's discursive and practical spheres is the marginalisation of concerns over democracy and social justice. The social movements of the late 80s were a response to the phenomenon. Wang Hui traces the genealogy of neo liberal policies in the massive state repressions of students' and workers' movements in 1989 in Beijing.<sup>10</sup> The essential demands of workers and intellectuals during the Beijing movements were political democracy, media freedom, and

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<sup>9</sup> Wang Hui, "Fire at the Castle Gate" *New Left Review*, no. 6, November-December 2000, pp. 74-79

<sup>10</sup> Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 46-64.

freedom of speech and association, as well as the establishment of the rule of law.<sup>11</sup>

Especially after the suppression of the social movements of the 80s, many of the intellectuals and politicians belonging to the state apparatuses have concluded that radicalism has come to an end. The neo liberal arguments that have received greater circulation in the state political discourses in the early nineties indeed have started to celebrate the gradual development of civil society from the market economy. For them, the marketisation would produce a new middle class that could provide the basis for civil associations and the resultant civil society would then blossom into a democracy. Their concern therefore is not democracy as such but market. On the contrary, followers of new left argue for political democracy.<sup>12</sup> For them, democracy that people want is not just a legal framework to protect the rights of the citizen rather it is a comprehensive social value.<sup>13</sup>

When contextualising women issues within the political debates, one can find two important features of post-Mao Chinese politics: one, political processes in China involve the interplay of diverse forms of social resistance against the existing social and economic orders; two, the centrality of economic development in these debates has consistently marginalised women's issues from the discursive fields. However, the proliferation of female labour market and the resultant increase in the female labour migration opened up new spaces for them to manoeuvre. As these female migrant labourers are relatively out of the direct

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> New left, a political label developed in 1997-98, according to Wang Hui, has its first appearance in a short article in *Beijing Youth Daily*. Prominent academicians like Gan Yang and Cui Zhiyuan, who have been members of the camp, have conducted academic seminars and public appearances during the period. Central to this political position is whether a balance should be kept between central and local governments, market and planning principles. For that it chooses a nexus between market and state: that is, more precisely, it chooses for relations between interest groups and power structures, economic forms and political systems. See, Wang Hui, op. cit. no. 9, pp. 74-79.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

patriarchal family control and enjoying more economic and personal autonomy in the distant industrial centres, at least some sections of them have managed to develop their own individuality, which was unachievable during the Maoist period. It could easily be argued that, even under the repressive power relations in the gendered labour market, when compared to Maoist China, female personality has flourished during the post-Mao period. Obvious evidence is the changing patterns of their political demands. The political rights and questions they demand and sought for answering respectively are of diverse in nature, they include representation at different levels of state apparatuses, greater economic and personal autonomy, better wages, improved working conditions, equal status in personal relations etc. As these demands are relatively new, none of the state corporatist institutions in China, whether it is Women's Federation (WF or *Fulian* in Chinese) or All China Federation of Trade Union (ACFTU), can address them properly. These contradictions are visible even in the representation of women in Chinese political discourses.

### **Representation of Women in Post-Mao Political Discourses**

The representation of women in the political discourses, when seen in the context of female labour market and migration, has two major characteristics. One is the discursive formation of a 'national woman' disseminated mainly through state corporatist institutions like WF and ACFTU. And other is the antithesis of the state sponsored one, which is primarily coming from the academic circles. From a genealogical analytical perspective, these conflicting discursive constructions of 'woman' may explicitly involve the diverse theoretical debates and political positions over gender relations in post-Mao China. Tani E. Barlow, for instance, has identified three discursive subjects - *funu*, *nuxing* and *nuren* - each with long, complex histories and specific efficacy as a

position that allows women to engage in purposeful action in socio-political life.<sup>14</sup>

### Tracing Mao's Legacy in Post-Mao State Discourses on Female Empowerment

The restoration of the *funu* – national woman – protocol in the late 1970s begins with the decision of Women's Federation (*Fulian*) to document women's gains under communism. Behind this move is to assign *Fulian* the role of protecting the interests of a section of political subjects, which Chinese Communist Party Central Committee identified as *funu*: national "woman." Therefore, as an arm of the government, *Fulian* is reorganised to heed the Central Committee's call to reinstate *funu*—an old ideological subject of the Mao's China—as the agent of post-Mao modernization. The advance of *funu* protocol has its origin in Mao's powerful propaganda campaigns during the years of the party's guerrilla war. They set *funu*—national female subject—up against "feudalism," "imperialism," "bureaucratism," "the west," "individualism," and "bourgeois feminism."<sup>15</sup>

Similar strategies for the construction of a pan-national subjectivity to Chinese women can be identified in the post-1980s China. For instance, *Fulian* made the momentous decision in 1980s to establish archives and research centres at county and urban units and to encourage amateurs to write true local histories of the Chinese women's movement. This has raised criticism among Chinese and Western scholars as these writings primarily are intended for the reestablishment of the inextricable relation

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<sup>14</sup> *Funu* a popular word for "women" in Chinese can also be understood to mean "female subject in Maoist state discourse." In post-Mao China *funu* protocols and powers are both an effect and a constituent part of Mao's once powerful state rhetoric. Nuxing, on the other hand, refers "women as sexed subject and the other of humanist Man." In everyday language *nuren* has ordinary role as a signifier to women as a category: a correspondent to "women" with a small "w." See, Tani E. Barlow, "Politics and Protocols of *Funu*: (Un)Making National Women", In Christina K. Gilmartin et al., (eds.) *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State* (London: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 339-341.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 345.



between proletarian national revolution and communist women's liberation. Moreover, critics, time and again, cite the numerous divergent local trajectories of women's struggles to show the exclusionary nature of these *Fulian* documents.

Much of the state initiatives for the empowerment of women are implemented through *Fulian* in the post-Mao period. And more on its part, especially after the National Women's Congress meeting in the 1978, *Fulian* started to recover resources that it had lost during the Cultural Revolution. There is a reasonable increase in the investment in developing local branches at municipal levels as well as both in state and private sector enterprises. For instance, concerns about the impact of the post-80s reforms are reflected in the efforts made by the *Fulian* to increase women's quotas in politics and economy at every level. Shang Xiaoyuan quotes an interviewee, a local cadre of the *Fulian*, joking about their effort: "Our WF required quotas for everything except prisoners."<sup>16</sup> The federation's campaigns for women's quotas have generated heated social debates on the topic. A great many documents, articles and speeches have been published and the journal *Women of China* even had organised an interesting discussion on "women and power" in 1992.<sup>17</sup>

Even after these efforts, Chinese women's participation in mass organisations— *Fulian* and All China Federation of Trade Union—in the post-Mao period, for many reasons, has registered a consistent decline. Much of the studies maintain that discrimination against women, both in the process of selecting cadres or representatives as well as in the society as a whole as the reason for this decline. Some of them blame the patriarchal nature of the society, and others argue that the insufficient quality of *funu* to compete with men is the true cause of the decline in female political participation in China. But more fundamental to this

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<sup>16</sup> Shang Xiaoyuan, op. cit. no. 3, p. 209.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 196.

phenomenon is the insufficiency of these mass organisations to represent the diverging interests of Chinese women in the post-80s social and economic settings. Many critics of *Fulian* are open to argue that federation is not competent to handle new problems confronting *funu* during this period. For instance, privatization of domestic relations, retreat of state from social justice, tacit consent to retrograde beliefs about women's intellectual inferiority, and a coalition of those who would expel women out of politics (the widely accepted "back to the kitchen" phenomenon), all are effects of reforms that could potentially demoralize women since they can foreclose women's access to the influential spheres of Chinese political and economic power.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, *funu*, as a hegemonic subject position that has been constructed mainly under mutually reinforcing discursive and bureaucratic arrangement, as well as *Fulian*, as a mass organisation for national women, have failed to represent the divergent subject positions that those Chinese women obtain in different social and economic conditions in post-Mao China. *Fulian* also has a basic problem; as Tani E. Barlow points out that the federation sees itself as "an institution of social administration when it ought to be representing [*daibiao*] women." The federation's dependency on the state means that it "lacks an independent will" and therefore it is not in a position to represent anyone.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in reality *Fulian*, being a vertical functional institution placed under strict central control, would rather serve the purpose of blocking any horizontal coalescing of female interests outside its purview.<sup>20</sup>

### **Alternative Discourses on Women and Labour**

Under politically relaxed and economically liberal times there has often been a greater scope of transmitting the grassroots discontents against

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<sup>18</sup> Tani E. Barlow, op. cit. no. 14, p. 342.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp. 346-47.

<sup>20</sup> Anita Chan, "Revolution or Corporatism? Workers and Trade Unions in Post Mao China", *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 29, (1993), pp. 35-36.

different forms of social and political control. As in the case of post-Mao China these forms of social and political changes have opened new spaces for the interplay of some fundamental human instinct: the desire for the expansion of power. With the relative development of female personality since the proliferation of female labour market, reflections of this can easily be identified in the discursive and political spheres. The post-Mao discourses on “women” are characterised by their mutual conflict following what Nietzsche called “Will to power.”

Adding force to this phenomenon, lack of legal support during the period has destabilized the Maoist ideological state apparatuses. This has undermined the entire apparatuses that brought women to consciousness of their own mass subjectivity [*funu*]. Further, the women’s history projects conducted for the construction of ‘national women’ by Women’s Federation in the 1980s had opened new waves of debate on gender, communist revolution and women’s local struggles. The improvement in Chinese women’s economic and personal freedom since the proliferation of female labour market has further generated theories that could eventually relocate categorical “women” beyond *Fulian’s* compass altogether.

### **Patterns of Sectoral Interest Articulation in Post-Mao China**

In the context of Chinese politics, trade unions and women’s federation are defined as mass organisations under the leadership of the Communist Party. Studies on Chinese politics, both of the Maoist and the early years of post-Mao periods, describe them as an integral part of state apparatus. However, in the recent past these mass organisations have undergone significant changes. For instance, many of the trade unions in China, during the period, have transformed themselves from official trade unions to independent labour organisations. Many of these mass organisations failed to represent the diverging interests of their specific constituencies. As it is explained in the second chapter, sectoral interests, under the

changing state-society relations in the post-Mao China, are articulated primarily through a complex social process that involves cultural struggles and societal corporations.

### **A historical Approach towards Labour Movement in China**

A historical reading of Chinese labour conflicts contextualises the late 1980s social movements within the changes in state - society relations after the reforms. Anita Chan, for instance, through identifying five undisturbed phases, where workers had turned upon the party-state in protest, has concluded that the lack of knowledge about these worker's struggles among Chinese in general and above all among the younger generations illustrates how successful the party-state is in obliterating any collective memory of the earlier confrontations.<sup>21</sup> This reading explicitly reveals the incompatible conveyance of sectoral interests, in the public consciousness, that are explicitly involved in the unadulterated interplay of forces, which mould the course of Chinese polity.

Primarily, conflict in these five undisturbed phases was between the sporadic popular affirmations of difference - economic, political, and cultural etc. - *vis-à-vis* the intransigent pan-nationalist interpretation of interests by political elites. For example, when students and intellectuals

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<sup>21</sup> According to Anita Chan, the first conflict occurred immediately after Liberation, when the Communist trade unions lost out in a struggle for independence from the party. The second conflict erupted in 1956-57 during the Hundred Flowers period. It ended with the imprisonment of workers and union activists and the fall of Lai Ruoyu, the new chairman of the ACFTU. The third round of confrontation, accompanied by violence on a massive scale, occurred during the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 69). In terms of the number of people involved, the duration of the struggle, and the number of workers ultimately jailed or killed, it greatly surpassed the 1989 workers' movement. The fourth period of political confrontation arose when groups of workers took to Tiananmen Square in 1976 to commemorate Zhou Enlai's death. The activities of these workers were subsequently recorded in official histories, but the incident itself was interpreted as a popular rebellion against the tyranny of the Gang of Four, rather than as a movement that had any working-class content. The fifth cycle of confrontation occurred, of course, with the popular protest movement of 1989.<sup>21</sup> Yet once again the role of the workers (and the trade unions) became subordinated in public consciousness to the high profile of the students. The government this time sought to condemn worker participants as unemployed vagrants and hooligans. See, Anita Chan, *op. cit.* no. 20, p. 33-35.

fought the late 1980s social movements for democracy and freedom of speech, the workers – caught in a repressive reality developed with the economic liberalisation and the retreat of state from welfare programs – fought for social justice.<sup>22</sup> And therefore these struggles, especially of the late 1980s, are targeted primarily on state and its policies. Yet, diverging from the previous four upheavals, the 1989 workers' movements were composed of two parts, reflecting the direction that Chinese society might take in the 1990s: one, All-China Federation of Trade Union's institutional agitation from above; two, independent spontaneous protest from below.<sup>23</sup>

### **Interest Articulation in Post-Mao China**

Like in the case of any of the communist states, representation of sectoral interests in Chinese political processes too is done through creating vertical mass institutions functioning under state control. Since the introduction of communist rule, ACFTU and WF (*Fulian*)—though modified several times in 1950s, 1980s and 1990s—have served as the institutions of 'functional corporatist representation.' According to Leninist 'transmission belt' imagery, these institutions have a dual function: together with the top-down transmission of national interests—for example, mobilisation of workers for labour production on behalf of nation's collective good—to the particular sections of population they have to protect the particular interest of their constituencies, through bottom-up transmission. But this dual characteristic has inherent contradictions, as in all most all communist states the bottom-up transmission has always been suppressed by the strong state apparatus.<sup>24</sup>

For example, studies on workers' participation in the 1980s upheaval have categorically rejected any significant ACFTU involvement in the episode.

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<sup>22</sup> James C. F. Wang, *Contemporary Chinese Politics: An Introduction* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 6-8.

<sup>23</sup> Jeanne L. Wilson, "Labour Policy in China: Reform and Retrogression", *Problems of Communism*, vol. 39, no. 5, (1990), pp. 44-65.

<sup>24</sup> Anita Chan, op. cit. no. 20, p. 37.

The liberal wing of ACFTU in particular was engaged in mediatory role between the hard-line party elites and rebellious workers, though some union cadres were engaged in organising workers to stage protest actions.<sup>25</sup> But the workers who were caught in a hopeless situation in the second half of 80s – with an erosion of incomes due to double-digit inflation, along with an erosion of fringe state benefits and more importantly a volatile job security – were the vital forces in organising grassroots struggles. Clearly, this ever noticeable dynamics of communist ‘state corporatism’ operating along with cyclical episodes of workers’ explosion and suppression is the key to explore the probable future trajectories of China’s political development.

As Daniel Chirot has pointed out the existing state corporatist institutions play a crucial role in controlling the maturation of horizontal interest articulation in China.<sup>26</sup> The state political campaigns and violence –the crack-down on the Democracy Wall Movement (1980-81), the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign (1983-84), and the Beijing massacre of 1989 – moreover have disbanded any form of sectoral interests in post-Mao China.<sup>27</sup> Yet, the ‘social Darwinism’ that is associated with economic liberalism, over time, has proliferated public anger,<sup>28</sup> which these state corporatist institutions couldn’t appropriate totally. Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden, for instance, argue that this proliferation of a wide-ranging patterns of resistance and pressures have ramifications on popular consciousness and state-society relations.<sup>29</sup> For instance, the development of a relatively open discursive sphere, with a diversity of sectoral interest, is a crucial outcome.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Chirot, “The Corporatist Model and Socialism”, *Theory and Society*, no. 9, (1980), pp. 363-81.

<sup>27</sup> James C. F. Wang, op. cit. no. 28, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Wang Hui, op. cit. no. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden, “Introduction: Reform and Resistance in Contemporary China”, in Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden (eds.), *Chinese Society: Changes, Conflict and Resistance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 7-16.

Sectoral interests in the Chinese society, since the introduction of reforms in 1980s, according to Anita Chan, could broadly be of three kinds, revolving around the issues of industrialization and modernization. *The technocratic-managerial social engineers*, a group of enthusiastic economic reformers, include enterprise managers, economists, well-known academics, high-level intellectuals, writers, journalists, etc. Being the leading interest group, their economic doctrine is the driving force behind the Chinese economic modernisation. And they in fact even have lambasted workers privately for being lazy by nature and being consumed by a dysfunctional egalitarianism. Their economic strategies are aimed to empower the managers at the expense of the Party bureaucrats and, *vis-à-vis* the workers, to employ scientific management and thereby aiming to project the economic phase as 'liberal' and 'democratic.' On the contrary, *the conservative social engineers of the nomenclatura*, predominantly, the victims of Mao's attack on 'revisionism,' are more conservative in their language on reform, yet critical of Maoism. This group wants to maintain the state corporatist institutions, and more precisely for averting any popular upheaval they may demand for two-way traffic through corporatist channels. Peng Zhen for instance has been a major exponent of this line. The third group, *the labouring classes and their allies*, in her construction, includes industrial workers, mostly white-collar workers. They are of course less educated than technocrats and Party nomenclatura, and have severely limited access to political power. In the people's Congress structure and indeed in the CPPCC, they are contemptibly underrepresented. For example, of the 2,970 delegates to the 7th National People's Congress (NPC), 'worker and peasant' representatives together comprised only 23 percent.<sup>30</sup>

These workers nevertheless have other supporters and self-imposed allies, who predominantly are intellectuals working on industrial workers and

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<sup>30</sup> Anita Chan, op. cit. no. 20, pp. 46-49.

trade unions. They include 'intellectuals who work for *Gongren Ribao* (The Workers' Daily) or for the magazine *Shidai* (The Times), the ACFTU's journal during the 1980s, academicians who undertake research on workers, and teachers and students of the *Gongyun Xueyuan* (the Workers' Movement College), which trains trade-union cadres.'<sup>31</sup> They fight together with workers for attaining their cause.

If put theoretically, the increasing grass root struggles of these social actors have led to the 'structuration'<sup>32</sup> of a variety of political and social structures after the introduction of reforms in the late 1970s. An analysis of violence in the Chinese society would elucidate precisely how individual personalities and historical contingencies have played a decisive role in transforming popular unrest into political challenges or political and social transformation. The growing gap between the greater and lesser beneficiaries of the reforms indeed has generated plenty of dissatisfaction in contemporary China. Moreover, under the conditions of economic liberalisation and political decentralisation, living and working conditions of different groups of Chinese citizens have become increasingly heterogeneous and therefore their demands to the state and the market may diverge. Facing very different dilemmas, these diverse interest groups amongst today's protesters would frame diverging strategies that can rarely be confined to consolidated political categories – class, gender, regionalism, nationality etc. Considering the growth in grass root struggles, state since the 80s has taken a relatively liberal position by legitimizing the popular protests directed towards local officials and private capital as integral part of the normative processes.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 48-9.

<sup>32</sup> Unlike many of the French thinkers who have undertaken researches on social power, Anthony Giddens's concept of 'structuration' asserts social actors as active agents, playing a vital role in the transformation of consolidated social and political structures. See, Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1984), pp. 29.



Further, four laws, particularly relevant to workers' living conditions were passed: the Enterprise Law, the Bankruptcy Law, the Trade Union Law and Labour Law. Under pressure from different interest groups in the Chinese society, ACFTU tried to interpose different views. One of the more important structural developments since the late 1980s is the emergence of autonomous trade unions in China. The Beijing Autonomous Workers' Federation is an example of well organised and well staffed autonomous trade union. But these structural changes have little implication in a transition period of Chinese labour regime as defined by Ching Kwan Lee as a change from 'organised despotism' to disorganised despotism.<sup>33</sup> For instance, even though the subordination of trade unions to the Party in China's Special Economic Zones has been weakening, in all most all cases, this has been effectively replaced, over time, by managerial domination or despotism under hegemony of market and state. And more important is the fact that none of the popular debates—mainly on the issue of laid-off workers—have seriously taken up the women's issues.<sup>34</sup> The predominance of male administrators and staff in much of the trade unions further marginalised women's interests from state corporatist politics.<sup>35</sup>

Much of the women's problems in post-Mao China, moreover, are means for the society to resolve many other major social problems, like excess labour, labour productivity and so on, which may contradict the state modernisation projects. The curbing of the women's social benefits, salary, employment opportunities, and promotions, associated with enterprise self-management, discretionary hiring and contract systems, for instance, are aimed to maximise profitability in a market economy.<sup>36</sup> Shang

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<sup>33</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 169-70.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>35</sup> Shang Xiaoyuan, *op. cit.* no. 3, pp. 197-98.

<sup>36</sup> Li Xiaojiang, "Economic Reform and the Awakening of Chinese Women's Collective Consciousness", In Jackie West et al. (eds.), *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation* (New York: St Martin's Press, INC, 1999), pp. 364-366.

Xiaoyuan argues that Chinese women, especially educated urban women, dissatisfied with these institutionalised discrimination, are increasingly oriented towards non-governmental organisations for registering their discontent. There is a consistent decline in women's participation in ACFTU and WF politics in post-Mao China, but at the same time Shang's field study verifies a consistent increase in Chinese women's participation in grassroots politics.<sup>37</sup>

### **State/Society Antagonism and the Ramification on State and its Policies**

The development of a gendered labour market and the increase in the female labour migration are two among the differentiated forces, which are central to the changing state-society relations in post-Mao China. The repressive as well as exploitative labour relations in these labour markets open up diverse forms of labour resistance in China, along with that the partial retreat of the state from many welfare projects, as part of its over all liberalisation and privatisation strategies, has emboldened people to express their discontents. When these new classes in the post-Mao social hierarchy demand novel forms of economic and political rights, the new middle class, which is a creation of the growing social and geographical core-periphery relations, is demanding for greater political freedom. Caught in problems of growing inequality and exploitation, Chinese women also have started to demand greater personal and economic autonomy both within and outside work place. The relaxation of the political control on many spheres of life, after the introduction of reforms in the late 70s, further has enlarged the space for the popular unrest. These dramatic post-Mao social changes and the resultant changes in the nature of the state and governance have generated confusion, both in China and abroad, on the possible trajectory of Chinese political development.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Shang Xiaoyuan, *op. cit.* no. 3, pp. 200-208.

<sup>38</sup> Two major schools and a few variants currently dominate the debates: if in the first instance, as the latest success of an Asian-style authoritarianism, China is strictly put outside the realm of Western liberal values; the other witnesses the triumph of market

Nevertheless, in the view of increasing factional conflicts in the top state and party apparatuses, especially after the increase in popular dissident movements in the early 1980s, there has been a qualitative change in the academic attitude towards the role of society in the political processes. For instance, Wang Hui writes: "already we can see signs of various forces waiting for the opportunity to attack their opponents... [Exactly in the way] as the old Chinese saying puts it: 'Fire at the castle gate means trouble for fish in the moat'."<sup>39</sup>

### **Grassroots Struggles and the Transitional State**

Most of the literatures on the Chinese polity detail political and military elites primarily because they are critical in maintaining a system or to change its direction. This approach, moreover, would also enable writers to analysis the different ways in which these elite groups may deal with independent social forces, for example, by incorporating sectoral interests, by repressing them, or by carrying on dialogue with them. Yet it would be somewhere impracticable to argue that even the most democratic political power is absolutely incapable of forcing people into a particular form of political system that requires social self-mobilization, unless the people in question have significant social and cultural capacity to do so.<sup>40</sup> The studies on structural changes of polity therefore should inevitably be a view from below.

The demonstrations of 1989 were quite unique in the post-Mao China, as it involves a coalition of different interests – students, blue-collar workers

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capitalism and the end of Maoism as the harbinger of a basically universal liberal social, political and economic order. But none of these two major movements in the studies on Chinese politics – as when the Asian-style of authoritarianism argues for authoritarian state, the liberals on the contrary have celebrated emancipatory potential of market – have seriously taken the role that the society has played in shaping the nature of polity since the reforms. See, Wang Hui, op. cit. no. 9, pp. 69-99.

<sup>39</sup> Wang Hui, op. cit. no. 9, p. 99.

<sup>40</sup> Robert P. Weller, *Alternate Civilities: Democracy and Culture in China and Taiwan* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 136-38.

and government employees etc.<sup>41</sup> This visibly unconventional congruence of their interests must be seen within the context of the profound structural changes in the society since the introduction of reforms. First and the foremost is the uneven distribution of benefits both along geographical and social terrains. For instance, many urban residents in the coastal regions have prospered as they have sufficient land under household responsibility system. However, only a portion of rural population obtained land, and the growth in job further has not been sufficient to absorb all of the existing urban labour force. And more specifically, the labour market has increasingly become stratified and with job allocation being profoundly determined by official corruption and favouritism (*guanxi*). Thus, the crowding in the labour market along with official corruption created distinct sets of grievances for workers and for students. Yet, both groups came to see their grievances as having a common source and a common remedy: "democracy."<sup>42</sup>

Since the brutal state repression of the social movements especially after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, there has been a consistent increase in the diverse form of popular dissident movements in contemporary China.<sup>43</sup> The official trade union statistics, for instance, registered somewhat 1,620 incidents of arbitrated labour disputes that involved some 37,470 workers in 1990. Incidents of collective sit-ins, slowdowns, strikes, protests, and filing of complaints increased consistently at a rate of 80 to 90 percent in the following years. Ching Kwan Lee cites a local daily report (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 June 1994:32) in 1993 that among the 12,358 cases of labour disputes more than half of the total has been accounted

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<sup>41</sup> Wang Hui, op. cit. no. 10, pp. 46-77.

<sup>42</sup> T. David Mason, "Modernization and its Discontents Revisited: The Political Economy of Urban Unrest in the People's Republic of China" *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 56, no.2, (May 1994), pp.400-424.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew G. Walder and Xiaoxia Gong, "Workers in the Tiananmen Protests: The Politics of the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation", *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, vol.29, (1993), pp 1-29.

to public enterprises.<sup>44</sup> But, in the coastal and southern cities, labour militancy concentrates primarily in foreign-owned enterprises and mostly involves migrant workers. For instance, in the period 1993-94, 90 percent of the 1,100 labour disputes in Shenzhen occurred in foreign-owned enterprises.<sup>45</sup> And the most strikingly visible feature of these popular movements, one can identify, is that all of them are aimed for a greater emancipatory social and political order.

The most important ramification of these grassroots struggles is the advancement of the concept of 'democracy' in Chinese political rhetoric. Ever since late 1980s, there has been a consistent effort on the part of the Beijing government to democratise the grassroots politics for the absorption of the diverse local interests. Regular local elections at the village and municipal levels eventually have become a common feature of Chinese polity.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it could be argued that the structural changes after the introduction of reforms have led to the transformation of party-state's mass-line politics, at least in the local levels, which in turn was aimed to absorb or repress them.

### **Ramifications on China's Domestic and External Policies**

The changing structure of state, under mounting societal pressure, has multiple ramifications on its internal and external policies. In the domestic sphere, state under pressure from growing female labour unrest has sporadically acted in support of women's rights in the family and work place. During the period, it implemented more liberal marriage laws in 1980s and in 1990s.<sup>47</sup> In 1992, a law for protecting women's rights and interests was adopted. In the 90s, laws were implemented to legitimize the

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<sup>44</sup> Ching Kwan Lee, "The Labor Politics of Market Socialism: Collective Inaction and Class Experiences among State Workers in Guangzhou", *Modern China*, vol.24, no.1, (Jan, 1998), pp. 13-17.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Chih-Yu Shih, *Collective Democracy: Political and Legal Reforms in China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1999), p. 192.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher J. Smith, *China and the Post-utopian Age* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), pp. 299-301.

role of the Party and trade unions in joint venture enterprises. Under external compulsions from Western governments and Human Rights watchers, more labour friendly laws have been introduced. The Beijing government in 1995 took initiative in conducting fourth UN conference on women in Beijing. Though most delegates accused of public boorishness and deliberate sabotage, some observers have suggested that conducting an international conference in Beijing itself demonstrated the courage of the Party–state to expose the country to potentially enormous criticism about the way Chinese women are treated.<sup>48</sup> In 2002 under the compulsion of China's WTO entry, a *White Paper on Labor and Social Security* that intends to reform the legal and social security systems was issued.<sup>49</sup>

Changes in the attitude can also be identified in the state's external policies. For instance, during Chinese premier's visit to India, a significant episode in the post-war Sino-Indian bonhomie, he explained the fundamental political goal of Chinese government as the 'governance of population' rather than real politicks. The white papers on labour and social security, and the one on democracy have been released in 2002 and 2005 respectively. The *White Paper on Labor and Social Security* argues to expand cooperation and exchange with other countries, so as to promote the role of legal and social security systems in international labour affairs.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the white paper on democracy aims for the construction of a relatively liberal democratic order under central party control. Moreover, human rights have become a key issue in China's diplomatic relations with much of the advanced world, as it started new rounds of talks on social security. In October 25, 2005 Chinese vice minister on labour and social security, Wang Dong-jin for instance has

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<sup>48</sup> Fatima Entesham Siddiqi and Sarala Ranganathan, "Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action" In Fatima Entesham Siddiqi and Sarala Ranganathan (eds.), *Handbook on Women and Human Rights: A Guide for Social Action Part 1* (New Delhi: Ramishka Publishers, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> White Paper on Labor and Social Security, In <http://www.china.org.cn.htm> April 29, 2002.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

signed a memorandum of understanding with union labour and employment secretary of India, K M Sahani to broaden cooperation on 'exchange in employment and vocational training and social security for an another three years.'<sup>51</sup> All this reflects the changing attitude of the Chinese government towards grass root level labour struggles in the changing domestic and international scenario after the 1980s.

## Conclusion

It could be easily argued that the development of the labour market and the resultant increase in the female labour migration, two among the vivid changes introduced since the beginning of reforms, have multiple ramifications on state and its policies in the changing Chinese state-society relations. As these changes set off conflicting effects on different categories of Chinese citizens, they together with other post-Mao changes have enhanced societal demands and expectations from political processes, and therefore have exerted pressure on the state and state policies for more political freedom and emancipatory economic order. Even though limited, the proliferation of different forms of grass root struggles in the period, which includes labour movements, feminist movements, different strains of nationalist movements and a multiplicity of cultural and polemic struggles conducted both within and out side the work place are examples for this societal ascendancy. For instance, Labour and women's movement, which are central to this study, in most cases are channelled through non governmental and societal co-operations, and these societal struggles play an important role in putting pressure on the state corporatist institutions to take relevant steps.

The development of a relatively independent space, especially after the development of autonomous labour unions in the late 1980s, therefore, is an important change in the Chinese polity. For example, in the academic

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<sup>51</sup> Special Correspondent, "Social Security: India, China to Broaden Cooperation", *The Hindu*, Tuesday, October 25, 2005.

studies on women, there is a substantial increase in theories, which place women as an independent subject outside the political and social powers of inherently patriarchal Chinese state and family respectively. The proliferation of an independent labour market, moreover, has restructured female subjectivity and personality of at least a section of middle class women, who managed to gain out of the current geographic and social core-periphery relations.



## Conclusion

The structural changes effected since the late 1970s have created a dynamic labour market in post-Mao China. The institutionally imposed vertical and horizontal segregation, a strategy for controlling workers through differentiated working conditions, is a significant feature of post-Mao labour market. Vertical segregation into labour sub-systems like state-owned enterprises, urban collectives, township and village enterprises, and joint venture enterprises is done through different discriminatory state policies, which categorise workers while availing the benefits of state welfare programmes. The horizontal segregation of workers along the lines of nationality, race, gender, sex and age is done through diverse disciplinary strategies operating both within society and work space.

Part of this whole process is the proliferation of female labour market in selected sections of the economy. For example, working girls from countryside constitute a substantial part of the work force in flourishing industries like textiles, electronics, foot wears, toys, tourism, domestic services and sex work concentrating mainly around China's special economic zones and other newly industrialized cities. In these industries, female labourers, through different schemes of disciplinary mechanisms, are segregated to low paid and manual jobs.

The development of female labour market and the associated growth in female labour migration has significantly restructured the social and political engagements of women in Chinese society. The expansion of labour market has both oppressive and liberating effects on the Chinese women. For instance, on the one hand, these new jobs evidently have given women new identities, which are beyond the compass of traditional identities such as "virtuous wife and good mother." On the other, the afore-mentioned developments have brought women under new forms of

disciplinary schemes, which can control women both in work places as well as in the family. Indeed, the multiple strategies of power that are targeting the material presence of body in differentiated disciplinary schemes in Chinese labour sub-systems have effectively controlled the female workers.

The repression and exploitation of women, in different degrees, depending on the forms of power operating for enhancing the economic gains in different labour sub-systems have in turn proliferated diverse forms of gendered labour resistance. Each labour sub-system is characterised by the differentiated forms of control and work environment. The labour resistances, under the post-Mao social and political conditions, are channeled through oppositional tactics in workplace, embodied desires, and alternative interpretations and images of factory life, and are targeted primarily against state policies, production policies of enterprise management, the local working of global capital and patriarchal techniques of control. For instance, affirming ethnic identities against Han nationality and modernity or organising themselves around ethnic identities are popular among urban labourers. Placing kin members in the same work division or assembly line for exerting some sort of control over the work process, though with strict limitations, is a general feature of Chinese labour politics. And polemical resistances of migrant female workers both in factory and public spaces are common in urban China. In addition to this, the post-1980s witnessed the proliferation of violent labour movements around individual enterprises. By citing the considerable presence of women in these diverse forms of labour resistances, the study regards Chinese women as an active agent for the social and political changes in post-Mao China. As a result of the development of female labour market, women started challenging some of the traditional social and political norms in Chinese society.

The development of female labour market and the associated increase in labour migration have considerably reorganized Chinese women's social and cultural engagements in the post-Mao Chinese society. The massive introduction of modern transportation and telecommunication technologies in the post-1980s has led to new waves of "time-space compression" in the flow of capital, people, commerce and images. One important factor in this whole mobility is the large-scale migration of rural female labourers to urban centres. Labour migration has created many positive effects on the Chinese women. For instance, those women who work in the factories use the new round of "time-space compression" to transgress the power relations in the family. The urban jobs and the concomitant geographical separation of working women from every day disciplinary power of the family have provided them greater freedom and new possibilities.

Yet the disciplinary schemes and the associated corporate gendered discourses and norms in urban spaces have brought women under new forms of power relations. For instance, defining rural woman's femininity through shop floor discourses and practices that link femininity to her corporation to production strategies and disciplinary schemes in modern Chinese factory is common. Besides the growing corporate discourses that link femininity to sensual and obedient working girl in urban public spaces both through visual and print media, the state, as part of its efforts to develop Han modernity, has also started to represent non-Han rural women as sensual, exotic and submissive in public spaces and theme parks. The growth of prostitution, on the other hand, has strengthened rural non-Han women's negative image in the urban public imagery. All these have led to the restructuring of patriarchal control over rural women ever since the beginning of rural-urban migration.

Moreover, for many scholars, post-Mao labour migration is "circulatory" in nature. As rural migrants in urban centres suffer discrimination in

terms of entitlements to welfare, education and health and are routinely denied access to better forms of employment, they maintain strong links with their native places. This encourages some of them to return to their villages after staying in cities for a few years. This circulatory migration has complex impact on rural communities. As the returning cohort of migrants to their villages carries with them modern ideas on gender and family, which they learn from their interaction with urban public, the circulatory migration did disseminate new values and ideals in rural society. On the other hand, the migration of one or more members in the rural household, especially female members, has led to the restructuring of the traditional rural division of labour between sexes.

Another important social consequence of labour migration is the breakdown of formal normative frame of reference, creating a form of "social anomie," which any visitor of China's big cities can observe. The large-scale internal labour migration and the failure of various agencies such as state, SOEs and private enterprises to provide adequate support system to these migrant labourers in the post-Mao China has put enormous pressure on urban social setting. It brought with it a general lawlessness, for instance, high growth rate of crimes noted with the increasing number of swindlers, thieves, pickpockets, gamblers, chaotic sexual offenders including prostitution and women traffickers. Therefore, the study argues that the peoples' social and geographical mobility, created new forms of personal desires, have brought about a popular appropriation of social spaces in post-Mao China.

From a political perspective, the growth of gendered labour market and resistance also has significant political ramifications in the post-1980s. Throughout the study, these two developments are considered as integral component of a dynamic that in turn has led to the relative affirmation of the society, which has significance in the changing state/society relations in post-Mao China. For instance, when different sections of the society,

under the diverse forms of repressive and exploitative relations in post-Mao labour market, are experiencing various forms of reality, they started demanding variety of political rights and freedom from state and society. The period saw the relatively violent societal assertions like labour resistance, feminist resistance, polemic resistance as well as different forms of cultural affirmation. These societal assertions and their dialectical relations with state and its policies, which are fundamentally different from civil society politics, does offer a new paradigm for understanding Chinese polity from below. Unlike the civil society paradigm, which may look at the growth of women's NGOs as an alternative platform for their empowerment, this paradigm considered gendered labour resistance and diverse forms of cultural affirmations as scales of female empowerment. Further, the study argued that the embryonic civil society and associated NGO-politics, developed with the neoliberal social and economic order, can not be considered as an appropriate platform for addressing the diverse women's issues of the post-Mao China.

There is a substantial increase in gendered labour resistance in post-Mao China. These resistances that are characterised by mutual conflicts are practised in a terrain that is relatively beyond the influence of state corporatist institutions. One interesting change in the period is the development of autonomous trade unions in post-Mao China. Women's participation in the grass root level resistances has consistently and considerably increased during the period. Under the changing state-society relations, these popular engagements have political importance. As many of the interests of the labourers during this period encompass contradictions with the state-sponsored national interests of economic growth, the labour resistances have multiple ramifications on state and its policies. For instance, state, under compulsion from the popular political engagements, has sporadically acted in support of women's rights in the family and at the workplace. Further it implemented more liberal marriage

laws in 1980s and in 1990s. In 1992, a law for protecting women's rights and interests was adopted. Similar changes can also be identified in its foreign policy. Thus the study contends that the growth of gendered labour market and concomitant expansion of female labour migration has relatively strengthened women resulting in the proliferation of gendered resistance in post-Mao China with multiple social and political ramifications.

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