

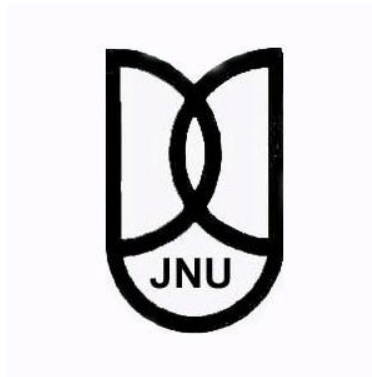
**WORKERS AND URBAN SPACES IN POST-SOCIALIST CHINA: A
STUDY OF COMMUNITY, LEISURE AND RESISTANCE, 1994-2008**

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

for award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

REEJA NAIR



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2019



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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled “**Workers and Urban Spaces in Post-Socialist China: A Study of Community, Leisure and Resistance, 1994-2008**”, submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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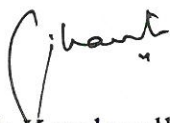
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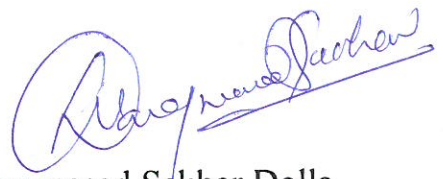
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For my Parents

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CLB	China Labour Bulletin
DRC	Development Research Center
FYP	Five-Year Plan
GETDD	Guangzhou Economic and Technological Development District
HRS	Household Responsibility System
ILO	International Labour Organization
LCL	Labor Contract Law
MHURD	Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NPC	National People's Congress
PRC	People's Republic of China
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise
TVE	Township and Village Enterprise
UN	United Nations
WPCP	Working People's Cultural Palaces

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Gaige Kaifang*: Reform and Opening Up

The year 1978 was a watershed in Chinese contemporary history as the year when it dismantled the iron curtain and emerged out of self-imposed insularity. Market forces made fresh inroads into China once again after a brief hiatus of the socialist period under Mao Zedong. Not only for the Chinese polity, but for the society as a whole, and workers in particular, who constituted the backbone of the economic spectacle, the economic reforms heralded a major turning point, when the Chinese leadership under the helm of Deng Xiaoping decided to “reform and open up” its economy. Once identified as the vanguards of revolution and the masters of enterprises, the economic reforms exposed workers to the vagaries of the market. This ensued a parallel transformation in the nature as well as the status of workers to mere commodities and factory work hands.

The labour regime in China underwent tremendous changes with the adoption of the ‘reform and opening-up’ policy at the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1978. It signified a transformation of labour relations at every level- worker- state, workers-enterprises/*danwei*, and even a change in the state-management relations. The workers, who until then were ensured the eudaemonia of the iron rice bowl, were now faced with the ‘smashing of the iron rice bowl’ with work, housing, health benefits- characteristic of the socialist period- being gradually done away with. The reforms paved the way for a revamp of the class structure with the working class being replaced by the new middle-class as the new subjects of national importance. This exemplified a parallel shift in the political imagination where consumption substituted production as the new engine of economic growth. Besides shifting class coalitions, the Reform period witnessed conflicting interests between the state and the workers, but more importantly, between the workers and the management. Structural changes that the Chinese political economy was undergoing lay at the core of this transformation. However, a

parallel attempt at socio-cultural engineering was crucial to the process of recasting the masses, and workers in particular, to ensure political legitimacy.

China's ideological structure graduated into various phases before clearly defining the character of China's path of economic development and the status of labour in that process. It paved the way for the changes at the level of policy-making that were in the pipeline given the shifting political climate. Constitutional amendments led to further structural changes. In 1993, for instance, the Preamble of the Constitution was amended to include the concept of "reform and opening up to the outside". Also were added the phrase "prosperity and power", legitimizing the harboring of notions of prosperity and power, a move away from the Mao days, when these were considered an anathema to the society. Most importantly, Article 15 underscored "regulation by the market", giving it albeit a supplementary role in economic planning for national growth. A clear definition of state's basis of economic planning was given for the first time, where the transition from socialist public ownership to socialist market economy was indicated.

Article 15:

The state practices economic planning on the basis of *socialist public ownership*. It ensures the proportionate and co-ordinated growth of the national economy through overall balancing by economic planning and the *supplementary role of regulation by the market*.

In 1993, this was amended to:

The state has put into practice a *socialist market economy*. The state strengthens formulating economic laws, improves macro adjustment and control and forbids according to law any units or individuals from interfering with the social economic order.

Regarding labour per se, Article 42 posits that work is glorious and that it should be voluntary. Their position as the masters of the country remains unchanged in letter:

Work is the glorious duty of every able-bodied citizen. All working people in state-owned enterprises and in urban and rural economic collectives should perform their tasks with an attitude consonant with their status as masters of the country.

This provides an insight into the gradual changes effectuated by the ‘reform state’- suggestive of the cautious approach towards reform and modernization, and hence, ideological reorganization, wherein market intrusion was couched in socialist vocabulary in order to ensure political legitimacy. As the Preamble to the 1982 Constitution mentions:

The basic task of the nation in the years to come is to concentrate its effort
on socialist modernization.

The central tenets of China’s economic reform, Giovanni Arrighi argued, were tautly tuned to the revolutionary legacies which recognized the importance of maintaining social stability as an important aspect of political legitimacy. In his opinion, the reason behind the singular rise of China could be attributed to the opening of its economy to Smithian dynamics based on market-based growth. Considering the precarious political climate, wherein “conservative” elements persisted, it became all the more important for Deng Xiaoping and his cohort of reformist party cadres to seek ideological legitimacy. This was achieved by underscoring the ideals of national prosperity and economic development as the primary agenda of the new state. Amending the Constitution in consonance with these changes then became inevitable to the course of reform. Here, labour still remained the “masters of the enterprise” and “dictatorship of the proletariat” the norm. But in essence the path was being paved for the market to take over China’s fledgling economy and embark on the capitalist road, which had begun to be extolled as “Socialism with Chinese characteristics”. These preparatory changes laid the ground for the socio-cultural changes in the realm of labour, particularly from above.

1.2 The Labour Landscape

As the reforms in the industrial labour regime during this period show, both continuities and discontinuities coexisted to constitute the paradox of “market socialism” in China from 1978. The Chinese state, having embraced the path of globalization, deemed it necessary to ‘rework its proletariat’ (to borrow the term from Sally Sargeson 1999) in order to create an atmosphere favourable for foreign investment. This transformation led to a parallel transformation not just within the labour economy- nature of labour market, labour processes, production- but also within workers’ culture. This was crucial in shaping workers’ dissent in China, particularly in the 1990s and the 2000s.

In the 1990s, China witnessed a growing number of labour protests, dotting the industrial landscape from the “rustbelt” (north-eastern industrial zone characterised by protests of laid-off workers) to the “sunbelt (southern industrial zone characterised by protests of young migrant workers in global factories)”. More number of workers were taking to the streets for protests; they were spontaneous and sporadic as well as organised protests, unfolding the range of workers’ protest repertoire from everyday passive resistance by individual workers to mass sit-ins and shutdowns etc. The promulgation of the Labour Law in 1994 further intensified the protests, which grew distinctly rights-based. Chan and Siu (2012) distinguish between rights-based protests and interest-based protest, the former demanding legal compliance in the event of violation of legal rights, while the latter demanded going beyond the confines of the law. With the deepening of the enterprise restructuring and lay-offs, massive bankruptcies, wage arrears etc. marking the new industrial labour regime, an escalating labour-capital conflict signalled the departure from the socialist days when workers were the putative ‘masters of enterprises’. While to outrightly proclaim such reactions to the new regulatory labour regime as displaying some form of working class consciousness or a mere “protest of desperation” (Lee 2007: 12) can be contentious, one can begin by a deeper examination of the factors that shaped workers’ resistance in China during this period. Instead of limiting the focus to solely political-economic factors, this study intends to look at as to what extent workers’ culture determined workers’ resistance during this period. It explores two aspects viz. leisure and community, and how they formed a crucial part of working lives in cities.

According to E.P.Thompson (1963), productive relations determine class experiences and they in turn give rise to class consciousness. Class experiences, for him, included workers’ subjective responses to exploitation in not only movements of struggle, but also in families, communities, and leisure-time activities (Sewell 1986: 8). In China, workers’ leisure before 1978 was highly politicised and directly regulated by the state through Workers’ Clubs and Workers’ Cultural Palaces, which were affiliated to the provincial trade unions, subordinate to the ACFTU (All-China Federation of Trade Unions). They held several activities ranging from sports, theatre, art, literary training and most importantly, political mobilisation and trade union education for workers (Xing 2011: 91-92). Workers were thus informed with socialist ideology and these institutions soon became sites of mobilisation

for Mao's mass campaigns. However, with the implementation of economic reforms, workers' leisure was divested of its links to any political ideology. Especially after 1989, the focus was to maintain social stability and engage masses in a 'democratic consumption of leisure' (Wang 2001: 73). In February 1994, the State Council passed a regulation instituting a 44-hour work week, with at least one day off a week. This was codified when the Labour Law was passed later that year in July and followed up by the provincial governments beginning the double leisure day campaign in 1996. Workers' leisure soon became subsumed by market forces and a new depoliticised discourse of leisure- leisure as capital- was coined and promoted by the state (Wang 2001: 73). Workers began spending their leisure time either hanging out at public parks, internet cafes, watching television, or playing *mahjong*, billiards, poker or video-games at street-corners, open-spaces around restaurants, video-game parlours etc. Although the state relaxed direct control over workers' leisure as long as there were no 'threat' to social stability, there have been instances of government crackdown on illegal video-game parlours frequented by migrant workers, which are generally perceived as 'chaotic' places. However, these leisure activities formed a significant part of workers' experience and their perception of themselves as the exploited section. For instance, private letters written by workers, recovered from a fire in Zhili toy factory, contain details about their working conditions, social and material conditions, their attitudes towards work, family and relationships etc. indicating how time spent beyond the workplace- writing letters, casual gathering, playing sports etc. was crucial in building workers' identities (Chan 2002).

Worker communities form another important aspect of workers' experiences and identities. In his seminal study, 'The Strength of Weak Ties', sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973) discusses the relevance of social relations to obtain resources and shows how strong ties (such as family ties) and weak ties (ties with less interactions) provide a source of material support and new information, respectively. In China, traditional networks such as family and place ties play a crucial role in gaining access to the labour market, labour migration as well as workers' everyday survival (Zhang 2001; Lee 1998; Perry 1993). These ties can be either developed within the workplace or within living spaces such as workers' villages, dormitories etc. Workers fall back on these ties for their day-to-day survival in the cities. The presence of *hukou* as well as the deepening of housing reform from 1998 implied a

housing crunch, particularly for the migrant workers, who then either took rented housing in urban villages or chose industrial dormitories. For instance, a case study of an urban village in Shenzhen shows how newly arrived migrant workers rely heavily on relatives or fellow villagers for seeking jobs, temporarily putting up in flats, borrowing money etc. (Siu 2015). Although these ties are constituted by the daily tensions and conflicts of life, and its experience of industrial struggle, it is also be characterised by competition and conflict. However, it created a sense of shared experiences crucial to the forging of workers' identities.

In addition to workers' culture, a holistic approach to workers' resistance in China, however, has to be situated within the broader political-economic processes that shaped workers' lives in the cities.

1.3 Literature Review

An extensive amount of work has been done on mapping the lives of the urban workers in China after 1978. The themes range from migration, citizenship, welfare to workplace ethnographies, studies on labour movement, role of civil society etc. More recently, in the aftermath of reforms, as rapid urbanisation, commercialization and marketisation engulfed the Chinese society and its effects gradually surfacing, a parallel effort to capture these changes and its impact on urban working lives can be witnessed in the scholarship. While tropes such as urban planning, urban poverty, commodity housing, urban consumer culture, urban villages (*chengzhongcun*), middle-class and grassroots leisure culture etc. grow prominent in urban studies, scholars have begun locating urban workers within this miscellany of issues.

The literature reviewed below has been thematically divided into three categories:

- Workers and community
- Workers and leisure
- Worker identities and class action

Workers and Community

The studies on workers and community formation reviewed here show that the focus is placed on themes such as the making of physical spaces and its impact on workers, ties to their neighbourhood, building of social networks etc. Urban developments in China is mostly studied at the macro-level (migration, socio-spatial changes, housing development etc.), very few studies have examined them at the micro-level such as that of a migrant neighbourhood, and how one sees these developments unfold in these small pockets. In his study, “The Poverty of Transition: From Industrial District to Poor Neighbourhood in the City of Nanjing, China” (2007), Fulong Wu tries to understand urban poverty in China through a study of the formation of poverty neighbourhoods such as migrant enclaves. Using the concept of the ‘poverty of transition’, he examines the transformation of an industrial district in Nanjing into a poor neighbourhood. Explaining the concept of the ‘poverty of transition’, Wu argues that urban poverty cannot be understood merely as a result of market inequalities. This concept emphasises on the ‘inequalities reinforced by the market and the institution of exclusion under different regimes’. He looks at several variables of institutional policies to justify his argument. He summarises these developments: de-industrialisation drives industrial workers and the self-employed at the margin into a poverty trap; exploited and hardworking rural migrants, not covered by official welfare support, are becoming the working poor; housing privatisation serves to convert low-income households into homeowners of low-capitalised assets; the new minimum living standard regime contains the poor and maintains the stability of poor neighbourhoods. Apart from showing how social processes are shaped by macroeconomic processes, this study has brought micro-study into the academic discussion on urban China by examining urban poverty and macroeconomic changes at the level of the neighbourhood.

Another work that examines urban developments at the level of the neighbourhood is, “Changes in Traditional Urban Areas and Impacts of Urban Redevelopment: Case Study of Three Neighbourhoods in Nanjing, China” (2004), where Fulong Wu and Shenjing He highlight the importance of neighbourhood-based social interactions to marginal populations in the cities such as migrant workers. They argue that, ‘against the backdrop of massive urban displacement and rapid redevelopment, the effect of dismantling

neighbourhoods could be detrimental to a sustainable urban society and the positive social objectives should be seriously considered in the process of urban redevelopment'. Through a case study of three neighbourhoods in Nanjing, Gaogangli, Wusuocun and Pingshijie, they examine the changing rationale behind urban development in the post-Mao era and its impact on the environment as well as the socio-economic fabric.

Expanding on the aspect of integration of workers to the living spaces, Li Zhang shows how social networks and the patron-client relationships forged by migrants with local landowners and local officials play a significant role in the negotiation of space. In her work, *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power and Social Networks within China's Floating Population* (2001), she examines the spatial and power relations that constitute the urban village of Zhejiangcun in Beijing to show how community strategies are adopted when confronted by public agencies. Documenting the bulldozing of the neighbourhood in 1995, she shows how these networks were relied upon in averting the crisis, however unsuccessful, but later community reconstruction happened on these same lines. Interestingly, she portrays the role the 'migrant bosses' or migrant leaders play during such contingencies, thereby expanding the scope by laying out the social organization in the neighbourhood. She, thus, shows how urban development leads to processes of community construction and reconstruction as well as production of new forms of space, power and networks.

In a similar study of community and neighbourhood sentiments, "Migrants, Urban Villages and Community Sentiments: A Case of Guangzhou, China" (2010), Huimin Du and Siming Li provide an account of the migrant workers living in the urban villages of Guangzhou and the level of community sentiments displayed by them. They study variables such as community satisfaction and community attachment to show how they play an important role in integrating the migrant workers as a marginal population into the cities. According to them, 'the urban villages offer no more than a shelter'. However, social networks, neighbourhood quality, local intervention and neighbourly relations, all play a crucial role in shaping workers' community sentiments.

Fulong Wu and John Logan in their paper, “Do Rural Migrants ‘Float’ in Urban China? Neighbouring and Neighbourhood Sentiment in Beijing” (2016) look at the assimilation of migrant workers into the neighbourhoods where they live. The fact that rural migrants are termed as the ‘floating population’ by the state itself in China, indicates the presence of a strong perception that they are only temporary residents in the city, and hence not likely to build strong local ties. However, by delineating patterns of socialising of migrant workers within the neighbourhood, and with the urban homeowners who are permanent residents of the city, they show how this in turn strengthened neighbourhood and community sentiments amongst workers. They argue that, ‘contemporary social changes – including education and homeownership – may actually reduce neighbouring, while rural migrants’ marginality makes them more dependent on their local social network’.

Workers and Leisure

As more and more studies on consumer culture, elite and grassroots leisure culture emerge, simultaneous efforts are made to study working class leisure culture. These studies show the importance workers’ leisure culture has in understanding state- society relations and in the shaping of working class subjectivities. Shaoguang Wang’s (1995), study, “The Politics of Private Time: Changing Leisure Patterns in Urban China”, examines the shifting boundaries between private and public space through mapping the change in leisure patterns from 1949 to 1995, when Mao’s socialism gave way to Deng’s Reform era. It shows how leisure has always remained a regulated domain in both regimes and how state tries to exercise power through its control on leisure activities. However, it argues that market forces have eroded the state’s ability to interfere in this sphere and resulted in the expansion of private space. Further, state hegemony, according to the author, is not impenetrable, as the governed find ways of circumventing impositions and restrictions. These attempts by the state to control and the by the governed to free themselves constitute the politics of leisure. Leisure thus becomes the site of struggle that constantly redefines the relationship between the state and the society.

A similar theme of state intervention and regulation of leisure is followed by Unn Malfrid. H. Rolandsen in her work *Leisure and Power in Urban China: Everyday Life in a Chinese*

City (2011). Arguing on similar lines, her work shows how the shift towards individualization of leisure experience is a result of power exercised by the state by creating structures that cause people to change their behaviour, where the role of local authorities become crucial. It also demonstrates how the official version of leisure or the “PRC leisure ethic” has limited influence on people’s actual practices of leisure. However, the argument is qualified by the caveat that transgressions are allowed as long as they don’t threaten the social order. Thus, the space for negotiation is created by the production and reproduction of spaces, which in turn, according to Rolandsen, is emblematic of the relationship between the government and the governed.

Physical space as leisure and cultural space is another recurrent theme we find within this corpus of literature. The role that the Workers’ Clubs, Workers’ Cultural Palaces, urban parks etc. play in defining workers’ leisure culture is central to the theme. In his work, “A Political Park: The Working People’s Cultural Palaces (WPCP) in Beijing” (2013), based on archival sources, and by comparing Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) use of urban parks under socialism to how they were used in the former Soviet Union and in the United States, Chang-tai Hung argues that, ‘the WPCPs reflect the conflict between the state and society, resulting in the domination of the former over the latter and the rapid loss of citizens’ private space in China’. The politicisation of public parks, according to him, was evident by the fact that rather than an urban amenity, these spaces were used as a domain by the CCP to introduce political campaigns and propaganda exhibitions; they were used to promote labour policies, international diplomacy and Party politics under the disguise of a recreation area. Moreover, these spaces also permitted the state to keep a close watch and get rid of any threats to the Party. However, during the Reform period, as long as leisure activities did not pose a major threat to the state, recreational freedom was allowed. He thus associates leisure to freedom in his study of workers’ leisure and cultural spaces.

On the other hand, scholars such as Xing (2010) and, Qiu and Wang (2012) studied leisure as a defining feature of working class subjectivities. In his work, “Urban Workers’ Leisure Culture and Public Sphere: A Study of the Transformation of Workers’ Cultural Palaces in Reform-Era China”, Guoxin Xing looks into the leisure culture of the urban Chinese working-class through a case study of the Workers’ Cultural Palace in Zhengzhou in Henan

province. He investigates the communicative and cultural activities of the Zhengzhou workers, including operas, revolutionary songs, dramas and political discussions within urban spaces to delineate the shifting working class subjectivities in post- Mao China. According to him, the case of Zhengzhou workers signifies the emergence of a ‘re-politicized space’ which formed a public sphere that was also attended by the urban workers. They held political discussions related to class inequalities and other related issues, and sang revolutionary songs recollecting the past under the Mao regime. In this proletarian public sphere created by the workers, Xing argues, ‘class consciousness is nurtured as distinct from the Chinese middle class’. Critiquing the scholarship that declares the end of class within Chinese politics, he shows that a contested public sphere has emerged in China’s class-divided society, along with the return of class politics among workers.

Similarly, linking leisure and class consciousness, Jack Linchuan Qiu and Hongzhe Wang in their study, ‘Working Class Cultural Spaces: Comparing the Old and the New’ (2012), show that cultural transformation is central to class formation. Making a departure from the Marxist tradition of linking class consciousness to economic and power structures, their conception of class and class consciousness follows the tradition of E.P. Thompson (1966), which emphasizes lived experiences and actual human relationships in historical processes ‘in the making’. They look at performing arts and exhibitions and understand culture as the distinctive way of expressing, articulating, and reproducing working-class life, essential to the class identity and class consciousness of China’s working classes. They conclude that culture always exists, although its content and means of expression vary over time and that different working-class groups have different working-class cultures that may or may not be congruent with each other. In their opinion, the cultural spaces – tangible built environments and intangible relationships – embody and reflect the social structures of the working-class.

In the context of Shenzhen’s public spaces, the theme of leisure and its relation to work and social capital have been explored by two researchers who have studied the Da Lang Laborer Square. Bas Hendrikse, in his thesis titled, ‘The Impact of Work on Leisure Patterns of Chinese Migrant Workers’ (2013), while examining how the nature of work

influences leisure patterns of white collar and blue collar workers in Da Lang, he argues that work flexibility plays an important role in determining the leisure pattern of these workers. While the white collar workers have more flexible working hours and better wages that enable them to do certain activities more frequently, the blue collar workers are constrained because of their inflexible working hours and lesser wages. Fabian Koning, on the other hand, in his thesis titled, 'The influence of Bottom up Organized Leisure Activities on the Social Capital of Young Migrants' (2013) explores how leisure influences the social capital of young migrant workers in Da Lang. He concludes that leisure activities are crucial in shaping the social network and capital of migrant workers in cities.

Worker Identities and Class Action

The scholars studying working class movement delve into aspects such as the methods of protest, legislations, repertoires of protest, labour rights and class consciousness. Jean-Philippe Beja, for instance, in his article, "The New Working Class Renews the Repertoire of Social Conflict" (2011), studies the changes in the repertoires of protest with the increasing popularity and use of communication technologies among workers for analysing the changing nature of working class movement in China. According to him, 'collective walk', "sleep- in", "collective- tourism" etc. have emerged as the new repertoires of protest among the urban workers. The use of ICTs helped them draw these tactics from various other protest movements in China such as the rights defence movement. Internet and SMS have drastically changed the method of worker mobilization in comparison to the methods of mobilization of the previous generation. The protest repertoire of the new generation was defined by the fact that China's one- child policy ensured that the new and younger generation were better educated, and thus, had better access to new communication technologies. Using Charles Tilly's definition of a social movement where he notes that a sustained challenge to authority is a crucial aspect of every social movement, Beja concludes that the emergence of a social movement can be anticipated if instability of any form or the threat to call a strike poses a kind of a sustained challenge to the authority. However, the limitation remains in the fact that the constraints and curbs that are imposed by the government on media and other tactics of mobilisation such as workers relying on intellectuals, who as a result face stringent censorship of their academic works, given the

opportunities for the workers to adopt alternative strategies of protest repertoire, escapes mention.

Chris King Chan and Pun Ngai, on the other hand, assess collective action/ strikes focusing on the specific process of proletarianisation in China and its contribution to the rise of labour protests. In their article, “Making a New Working Class? : A Study of Collective Action of Workers in South China”(2009), they argue that majority of the protests and resistances in China involved conflict between the management and the workers at the point of production, which was concurrently engendered with labour organising in dormitories and communities. The type of living space or workers’ accommodation such as the workers’ dormitories, hostels and migrant communities provided the opportunity for organizing collective actions and strikes. They were organized not only on the lines of locality, ethnicity, gender and peer alliance in a single workplace, but were also based on the attempts to enhance the unity of workers as a strong workforce that included not merely social networks and ties, but sometimes even involved strike tactics at a cross-factory level. Such strikes and resistances were mostly based on workers’ interests, coupled with a strong sentiment against foreign capitalists and an awareness of workers’ rights. The article points out that the new working class is increasingly aware of and participates in interest-oriented and class-oriented labour protests.

Exploring the idea of moulding migrant worker- subjects in Shenzhen and Guangzhou as a neoliberal governance exercise, scholars Junxi Qian and Junwan’guo Guo in their article titled, ‘Migrants on Exhibition: The Emergence of Migrant Workers Museums in China as a Neoliberal Experiment in Governance’ (2018), argue that the reason behind the emergence of migrant workers museum in recent times is to create the image of a model migrant worker tailored to the economic and material demands of the times. As a result, self-enterprising and hardworking migrant workers are eulogized as model migrant workers who positively respond to a shifting economy.

In her seminal book on labour protest, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China’s Rustbelt and Sunbelt* (2007), Ching Kwan Lee documents the conditions of workers in China and their resistance to the state narrative of economic reforms and industrialisation

undermining workers. A distinction in the pattern of labour activism among the state workers and the migrant workers is made, attributing it to political and economic decentralisation of Chinese government, a 'decentralised legal authoritarianism'. Apart from labour protests, focus is placed on the social identities of workers and their relationship to the legal system. She concludes that there is a 'hidden alliance' between workers and other groups such as farmers and urban homeowners in their fight for claiming their legal rights.

Anita Chan's works on workers' movement examine the nature of issues surrounding labour that is evolved in China during the Reform period as well as the nature of workers' rights as perceived not only in China but at a global level, and its implications for political upheaval and workers' movement in China. She applies Jacek Kuron's idea of monopoly of organization by the state, in "China's Troubled Workers"(1997), where she argues that the state fears that a relaxation of the Party's organizational control over workers will brew chaos. According to her, friction between labour and capital is inevitable given the 'contradictions between a liberalizing marketplace and denial of its major participants any major share'. She thus posits two trajectories for the future- an evolutionary regime within which the state loosens its grip over the workers, or a revolutionary regime, within which the workers take over. The present state is extremely wary of the latter and hence emphasises over social and political stability.

In *China's Worker's Under Assault: The Exploitation of Workers in a Globalizing Economy* (2001), Anita Chan maps the arena of labour rights, and emphasizes the need for focusing on non-core labour rights such as limited work hours, a living wage etc., within a political climate where the discourse surrounding the international labour movement is dominated by a contest for core-labour rights such as freedom of association, collective bargaining etc. She underscores the importance for keeping a balance between civil and political rights as well as the protection of social and economic rights. This eventually narrows down to the debate over maintaining a balance between human rights and labour rights, as well as the relationship between both.

Gaps in the Literature

A class discussion around Raj Chandavarkar's *Origins of Industrial Capitalism* and its treatment of the protests led by Bombay's textile workers piqued my curiosity about the politics of the everyday, and became an entry point into understanding the importance of everyday lives of workers in China, otherwise carrying the tendency of being shrugged away and relegated to the peripheries of academic research. Although non-Indian academic research has attempted to grapple with the importance of the politics of the everyday in understanding contentious politics in China, a similar rigour is absent in Indian approaches to social contentions in China. This work is a humble contribution towards addressing this lacuna in understanding workers' politics in China. By establishing a link between workers' politics to the aspects of the everyday such as everyday social interactions at leisure and in the neighbourhood spaces, it has endeavoured to plug the gap in the larger literature on labour politics in China.

A review of the available literature sheds considerable light on the following facets. One, urban spaces shape working class history. Two, labour economic processes simultaneously set in motion various social processes. Three, neighbourhood and community become crucial in the face of survival strategies. Finally, a distinct working class identity as opposed to middle-class identity is forged through working class leisure culture. However, the corpus of literature has two limitations: First, it fails to establish a clear link between community, leisure and resistance. There is a lacuna in China's labour studies or urban studies regarding the impact these changing leisure patterns or the forms of community formation has on shaping worker subjectivities. Second, it also fails to elucidate the impact of labour economic processes on the social organisation in the neighbourhood. This is important as the social organisation of the neighbourhood will be crucial in our understanding of the changing nature of labour mobilisation and working class politics. This study has attempted to plug these gaps and to bring community and leisure back to the core of our understanding of state- society relations in China.

1.4 Definition, Rationale and Scope of Study

French leisure theorist Joffre Dumazedier defines leisure as,

“activity - apart from the obligations of work, family, and society - to which the individual turns at will, for either relaxation, diversion, or broadening his knowledge and his spontaneous social participation, the free exercise of his creative capacity.”

(Dumazedier 1974:133)

Considered dichotomous to work, leisure is generally construed to be time free at one's disposal, where the individual has the freedom to engage in any non-work activity. Leisure is not entirely non-political as most assumptions of leisure presume. As Chris Rojek puts it,

“The common-sense notion that leisure is primarily about play and relaxation, or that it can be compartmentalized or segregated from the rest of life, is therefore replaced with the more radical proposition that leisure is always and already, political.”

(Rojek 2005:24)

This study employs the above two definitions of leisure to demonstrate that workers' leisure cannot be displaced from the political in the Chinese context.

For defining community, this study adopts sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies' definition of community. Alan Macfarlane explains, Tonnies' described *Gemeinschaft*/community as a 'life based on bonds of kinship, geographical bonds and the sentiment of belonging to a group (blood, place and mind) (Macfarlane 1977:631).

Finally, the term 'post-socialist China' lays out the background of the study denoting the shifts that occur in the aftermath of economic reforms essentially as a post-socialist phenomenon. Following Arif Dirlik's usage, this study defines post-socialism in China as such:

“Postsocialism is of necessity also postcapitalist... in the sense of a socialism that represents a response to the experience of capitalism and an attempt to overcome the deficiencies of capitalist development. Its own deficiencies and efforts to correct them by resorting to capitalist methods of development are conditioned by this awareness of the deficiencies of capitalism in history. Hence postsocialism seeks to avoid a return to

capitalism, no matter how much it may draw upon the latter to improve the performance of actually existing socialism.”

(Dirlik 1989:364)

Most studies on workers’ resistance approach it from the perspective of political economy—the economic reforms, changing attitudes of state towards workers, the labour-management dispute, state response to labour conflicts etc. This study intends to approach workers’ resistance from a cultural paradigm and ascertain how aspects like leisure and community can shape workers’ actions. It examines two interlocked trajectories through which workers’ resistance in China can be captured: first, the depoliticisation of workers’ leisure culture in the post-socialist period; second, the social organisation within worker communities. The years between 1994 and 2008 are particularly interesting in this respect as it offers to demonstrate how the workers’ socio-cultural milieu is recasted by the state and assimilated by the market forces in the 1990s. It also shows how despite the new strategies adopted by the state, workers have responded by converting existing spaces into a ‘proletarian public sphere’ that informed their resistance against the state.

The case study focuses upon the migrant workers in Shenzhen and looks beyond the particularities in the nature of working class agitation created by the political economic context of reform to explore how this context is crucial to the evolution of the modes and resources of resistance of migrant workers. Rather than merely reiterating the binary of power versus resistance, this study has tried to unpack the various trends and processes such as urbanisation and commercialisation that redefined workers’ culture. Thereby, it aims to provide a fresh approach to the study of workers’ culture, resistance and state-society relations in China in the post-socialist period.

The limitations in the field entailed methodological limitations in conducting surveys or interviewing workers. As a result, the methodology is limited to observation-based approach and inferences from interviews with experts based in Hong Kong; a mainland perspective is limited to two Chinese scholars who responded on conditions of anonymity. These limitations opened new doors towards approaching the subject of migrant workers identities. The discovery of the Shenzhen Bao’an Migrant Workers’ Museum was one such door that opened a fresh way of looking at the theme of migrant worker subjectivities and

the role of the state in morphing collective memories. Moreover, the study also utilised translation resources keeping in mind the language inefficiency.

1.5 Research Questions

- How do urban spaces shape workers' experiences?
- In what ways do workers including migrant workers' experience and adjust to the city?
- What forms of social relations and networks prevail within the workers' communities?
- What are the various shifts that have occurred in the realm of workers' leisure in the post- socialist period?
- In what ways have the politico- economic processes structured the making of workers' communities and workers' leisure in cities?
- How has the state regulated the socio-cultural milieu of the workers in the post-socialist period and to what extent?
- How have workers responded to efforts of regulation by the state?
- What roles do social ties and leisure culture play in enabling workers' protests?

1.6 Hypotheses

- The depoliticisation of workers' leisure culture created an organizationally fragmented working class in the post-socialist period.
- Community and neighbourhood ties among workers help forge working class identities and provide robust support in organising and enabling labour protests.

1.7 Research Methodology

This study adopts E.P.Thompson's cultural and experiential analysis of class consciousness. In his seminal study of the emergence of class consciousness within the English working class in the 1830s, Thompson shows how the cultural traditions amongst

the workers along with their experience of exploitation at the workplace were transformed via political agitations into class consciousness. According to Thompson, cultural factors influenced the way in which people made sense of their conditions and responded. ‘Class experience’, in his opinion, includes ‘workers’ subjective responses to exploitation in not only movements of struggle, but also in families, communities, and leisure-time activities’. This analysis is crucial to the present study on workers’ resistance in China and the role of leisure and community.

This study employs the quantitative as well as qualitative analysis approach and includes tools like conceptual analysis and critical analysis to test the hypotheses raised by the study. Using archival data, structured and semi-structured interviews and participant observation, it will investigate the case study undertaken by this study. The primary sources include government white papers and reports, speeches by leaders, Chinese newspapers, yearbooks, statistics, etc.

The independent variables include leisure culture, community ties and social networks, while the dependent variables include workers’ resistance and the nature of working class. The intervening variables are the economic reforms and the labour economic processes.

1.8 Structure of the Study

The introductory chapter traces the historical context of the workers’ movement in post-Mao China, particularly situating it within the economic reforms, thereby setting forth the background of the study. It outlines the major themes that this study engages with and lays out a review of the literature, contextualising this study within the larger academic analysis on workers resistance in China.

The second chapter gives an overview of urbanisation in China and the impact it had on workers. The chapter traces the various ways through which urbanisation could be understood in the socialist transition countries such as China, and it tries to locate workers within this larger framework of urbanisation. Further, it looks at what does it mean to work in a Chinese city and how do the workers encounter the city beyond the realm of the factory. It will explore aspects such as housing and *hukou*, and the everyday spatial practices that

form their notion of citizenship (or the lack of it). Rather than merely study how the city moulds the workers, it looks at how workers mould the city through developing alternate forms of urbanisms.

The third chapter discusses the role of neighbourhoods in building and sustaining workers' solidarity. It looks at how the social organisation of the neighbourhood, as displayed through workers' social ties and networks, is shaped by the political-economic processes and workers' survival strategies, which in turn provides resources for the social and political redefinition of worker's resistance.

This chapter has three sections. The first section tries to understand the making of workers' living spaces. It explores the social spaces at the micro-level- the neighbourhood, housing and the street- as manifested through the politics of migrant housing, *hukou* and urban development. It delineates the broad political economic processes that shaped the two major type of workers' housing in urban China during the Reform period: factory dormitories and private rentals in urban villages, and trace its link to the larger politics of production and growth. The second section examines the nature of social ties and networks prevalent among rural migrant workers. It looks at the various functionalities involving these ties and networks such as access to the labour market, migration, housing etc., and how certain ties embody a power relationship. The final section draws a link between these two categories and worker actions. It tries to understand the role of social spaces such as dormitories and migrant enclaves/ neighbourhoods through Lefebvre's concept of social spaces, and explain its significance for workers' everyday lives and social reproduction of labour, and expands it to see them as spaces of empowerment. It concludes with an analysis of these two categories to investigate its potential in generating a parallel narrative of urban processes to that of the state.

Fourth chapter studies the organisation of leisure in the aftermath of economic reforms. It assesses how workers' leisure has been influenced by commercialisation and marketisation, and the role the state plays in recasting workers through an intervention in the private realm.

The first section provides a background of workers' leisure culture as it existed under the *danwei* system during the Mao period and traces the shift that took place in the post-Mao period, with increasing marketisation and commercialisation, and how it remoulded workers' identity and consciousness. The second section delineates the new spaces of leisure, and how these spaces are crucial to workers' everyday existence. The leisure activities formed a significant part of workers' experience and shaped their perception of themselves as the exploited section. This, the chapter argues, was crucial in building solidarity during moments of resistance.

The fifth chapter examines the nature of migrant workers' resistance in Shenzhen through the analysis of workers' everyday urban experiences outside the workplace. It looks at the parallels and contradictions of migrant workers' lived experiences in Shenzhen as against the state's cultural narrative of workers' urban experiences, and how it constitutes and shapes working class subjectivities, as manifested in the form of protests.

Based on the critical analysis, the last chapter draws conclusions on two aspects, one, the transformation of state-society relations through the categories of leisure and community, two, whether leisure and community act as catalysts or restraints for labour mobilisation.

CHAPTER TWO

URBAN 'FROM BELOW': LOCATING 'WORK' AND WORKERS IN CHINESE CITIES

“Some were lured from the countryside by the glitter and promise of wages of the industrial town; but the old village economy was crumbling at their backs. They moved less by their own will than at the dictate of external compulsions which they could not question: the enclosures, the Wars, the Poor Laws, the decline of rural industries, the counter-revolutionary stance of their rulers”.

(Thompson 1963: 445)

2.1 Introduction

While lucidly capturing the lure of the city in England during the Industrial Revolution, E.P. Thompson, in his seminal work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, points out the Hobson’s choice that the workers were confronted with in the face of dispossession of land- stay behind and perish in poverty or take up a better-paid job in the city and escape impoverishment. Predictably, many chose the latter. These workers were either attracted or forced to move to the city for a better life and wages, in the wake of the Enclosure movement and dispossession of land. While describing the impact that the Industrial Revolution had on the English masses in general, and workers in particular, Thompson observes, “During the years between 1780 and 1840, the people of Britain suffered an experience of immiseration, even if it is possible to show a small statistical improvement in material conditions” (Thompson 1963: 445).

Although not entirely similar to the English case, industrialisation in China has followed the same trend. But for the migrant workers flowing into the city in droves, as a rural surplus labour forced out of agricultural land, the industrializing city has always captured their imagination either as a distant land where they could realize their dreams and aspirations or as the last stop before drowning into poverty. This image of the rural migrant workers flocking to the cities has become synonymous to China’s urban story, and any discussion on China’s rapid urban growth will be incomplete without an account of the rural migrant workers.

Lived experiences and culture, according to Thompson, are important in shaping working class consciousness and form the crux of his book on the class consciousness of the English working class. Although explaining the making of working class subjectivities through an experiential and cultural analysis, he reminds his readers that these class experiences are not entirely divorced from the material, or the productive relations. “The class experience”, he reasserts, “is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born or enter involuntarily” (Thompson 1963: 9). This chapter is thus an effort to examine the political and economic contexts that shaped the new productive relations into which the migrant workers were thrust into.

The sections below give an overview of urbanisation in China and the impact it had on workers. The chapter traces the various ways through which urbanisation could be understood in the socialist transition countries such as China, and it tries to locate workers within the larger framework of urbanisation. Further, it looks at what does it mean to work in a Chinese city and how do the workers encounter the city beyond the realm of the factory. It will explore aspects such as housing and *hukou*, and the everyday spatial practices that form their notion of citizenship (or the lack of it). Rather than merely study how the city moulds the workers, it looks at how workers mould the city through developing alternate forms of urbanisms.

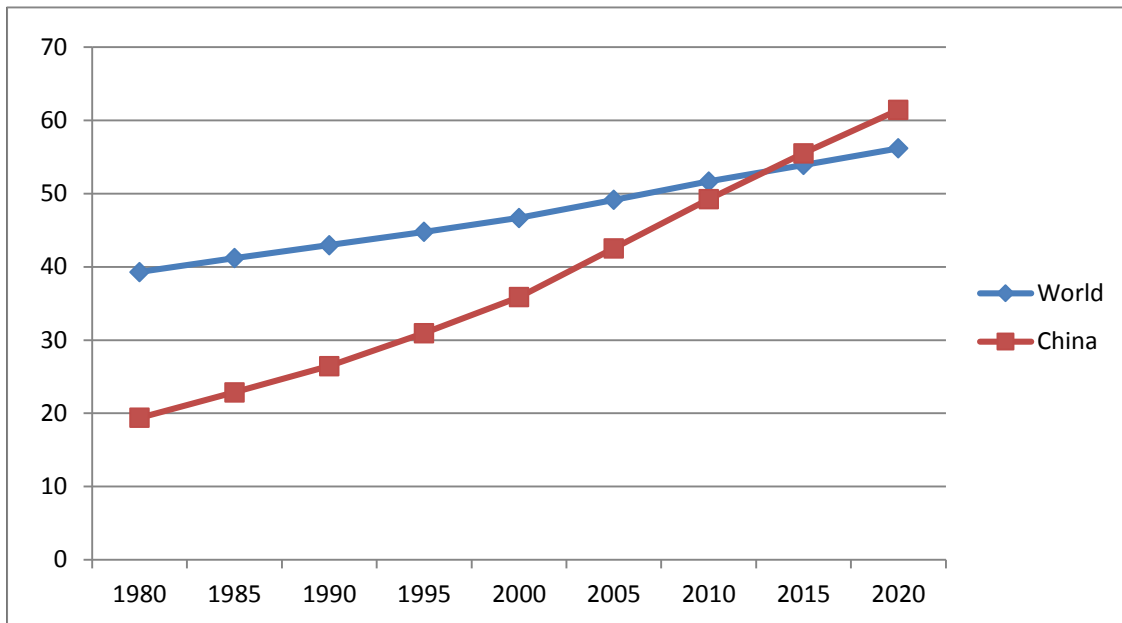
2.2 Urbanisation with Chinese Characteristics: An Overview

Marking a landmark in urban development in 2011, China's urban population crossed the half-way mark for the first time, to have 51.27% of its population living in urban areas (National Bureau of Statistics), while the migration of people from rural to urban areas kept increasing. The percentage of urban population in China increased from 17.9 percent in 1978 to 59.2 percent in 2018 (World Urbanization Prospects, 2018). While Britain took hundred years to witness urbanization of such scale, it took America sixty years (China: Planning for an Urban Future). According to the United Nation's (UN) World Urbanization Prospects (2018), while the growth in world urbanisation levels between 1950 and 1980 was 9.7 percent, urban population was about 29.6 in 1950 and it rose to 39.3 in 1980. Between 1980 and 2018, it grew at 16 percent Asia's overall urbanisation levels also

increased from 9.6 percent between 1950 and 1980 to 22.8 percent and between 1980 and 2018, driven mainly by the shifting urbanisation patterns in China from slow to rapid urbanisation. In 2007, more than 50 percent of the population in the world began living in urban areas. Today, world urbanisation levels has reached 55.3 percent, while the urbanisation levels in Asia reached 49.9 percent in 2018, at the threshold to cross the 50 percent landmark. Asian countries, according to Li Zhang et.al (2016), witnessed the most rapid urbanisation in the last few decades as compared to other countries, mainly because of rapid urbanisation levels in China.

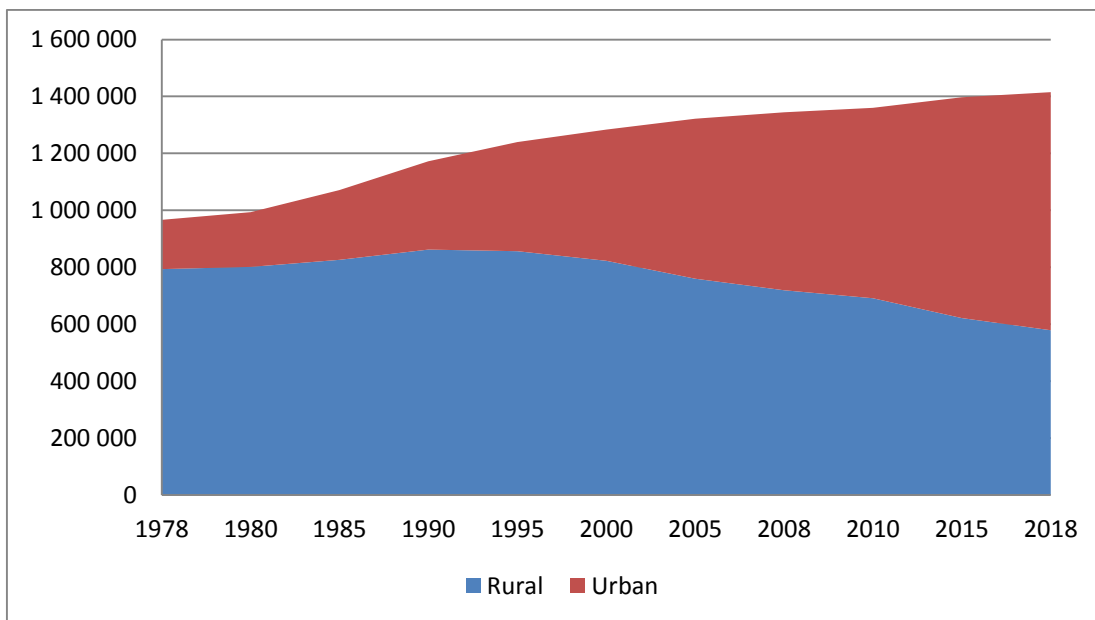
By 2018, the Chinese population had reached 1.4 billion and accounted for almost 20 percent of the world's total population. China's urbanisation level increased by 41.3 percent within 40 years from 1978 to 2018, by 17.4 percent more than the population increase of all other Asian countries combined, 19.2 percent more than middle-income countries as a group, and nearly 17 percent higher than the world average. Between 1978 and 2018, China's urban population increased to 664 million— a quarter of the world's total urban population increase (World Urbanization Prospects, 2018). It is estimated that China will be adding another 255 million to the world's total urban population between 2018 and 2050, making it second only to India's contribution of 416 million. Together, China, along with India and Nigeria, are estimated to account for 35 per cent of the world's urban population growth during this period. This makes China's urbanization globally significant and provides all the more reason to peruse China's urban phenomena. The figures below (2.1, 2.2, and 2.3) provide a graphic representation of the urbanisation levels in China as compared to the world pattern.

Figure 2.1: Percentage of Population at Mid-Year Residing in Urban Areas, 1980-2020



Source: Compiled using data from *UN World Urbanization Prospects 2018*.

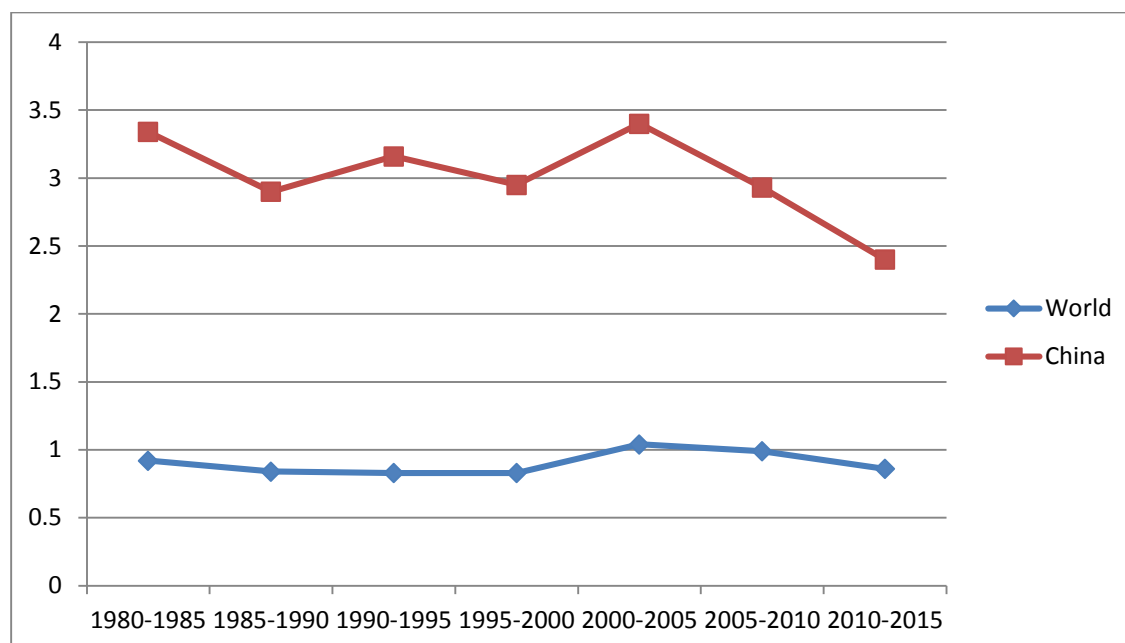
Figure 2.2: Annual Rural¹ and Urban Population at Mid-Year, 1978-2018 (thousands)



Source: Compiled using data from *UN World Urbanization Prospects 2018*.

¹The *UN World Urbanization Prospects 2018* defines the term ‘rural population’ as “de facto population living in areas classified as rural.”

Figure 2.3: Average Annual Rate of Change of the Percentage Urban²³, 1980-2015 (per cent)



Source: Compiled using data from UN World Urbanization Prospects 2018.

The urban system in China comprises of two major units: cities (*shi*) and towns (*zhen*). Urban settlements without the city status or officially approved cities are termed as “designated cities” (*jianzhishi*). One aspect of understanding Chinese urbanisation is to trace the changing definitions of urbanisation and the factors central to defining urbanisation in China. While the official definition for 'urban' has seen vast changes over the years, one common definition of urbanisation has been 'the percentage of population that lives in places classified as urban rather than rural.' China's first population census of 1953 lacked any clear definition of an urban population. The first attempt at defining 'city' during the Mao period was made in 1955 when the State Council released a document titled, *Decisions by the State Council Regarding the Establishment of Cities and Towns*. While administrative status and the size of the population formed the primary criteria for

² The *UN World Urbanization Prospects 2018* defines the term 'percentage urban' as the “Urban population as a percentage of the total population.”

³The *UN World Urbanization Prospects 2018* defines the term 'urban population' as the “de facto population living in areas classified as urban according to the criteria used by each area or country”. Thus, unless specified, any mention of the term, 'urban population', includes both the urban *hukou* as well as the non-urban *hukou* holders.

defining cities, the nature of economic activity was also included as a criterion. *Shi* was defined as below:

The city (*shi*) is an administrative unit that belongs to and is under the leadership of a province, autonomous region or autonomous prefecture. Cities and towns with a clustered population of more than 100,000 may be designated *shi*. If indeed necessary, cities and towns with a clustered population of less than 100,000 may acquire the status provided that they are important industrial and mining bases, seats of provincial-level state government agencies, relatively large centres for the collection and distribution of goods, or important cities and towns in remote border regions. The suburban districts of *shi* should not be too large.

In the years following the release of the first document on cities, many changes were made to the criteria for defining cities, particularly based on the size of the population. Contesting the definition of ‘urban’ based on the size of the population, Kingsley Davis had pointed out that urbanisation is not the same as urban population increase, but it is a ratio, rather than an absolute number. It is an index of transformation from traditional rural economies to modern industrial ones (Davis 1965). Neglecting the shifting nature of economic activities while defining the ‘urban’ had its own limitations as was reflected in the 1990 Census.

The methodology applied to define rural and urban in China has changed in different censuses. Urban population is generally defined as the population residing in “urban” areas in these censuses. It is described fundamentally in two different ways as de facto and de jure, and the *hukou* system plays an important role in this. The 1990 Census adopted an administrative method to define ‘urban’. According to the 1990 Census of China, the population residing in cities included the population who had a local *hukou* and those who had no *hukou* but had been living in the city for at least one year prior to the Census. Geographically, all *shiqu* or “city districts” that came under provincial-level and prefectural-level cities were categorised as urban, whereas for the county-level cities and towns, only those areas which had a Residents’ Committee was categorised as urban. This approach of categorising urban areas was highly administrative as it depended on the administrative rank of the city and the boundary of an administrative unit. However, it was characterized with major limitations because in some cases the urban administrative

designations and administrative boundaries did not clearly reveal the actual degree of urbanization or urban activities. For instance, when industrialization and urban designations did not converge in many regions, the problem became more severe. According to Chan and Hu (2003), the methodology adopted in the 1990 Census thus resulted in either significant under counting of the urban populations in some townships or over counting in many large cities as well as in some county-level cities. The 2000 Census definition, according to them, was an improvement upon the 1990 Census definition as it was more aligned to the international practices of defining the concept of urban. It introduced three new criteria for defining urban areas:

- (a) whether or not an area has an average population density of 1,500/sq.km;
- (b) whether or not the local government is located in the area; and (c)
- whether or not the area is contiguous to an area where the local government is located.

(Chan and Hu 2003: 54).

Chinese urbanisation took place in three stages: planned phase, 1949-1977; reform and opening up phase, 1978-2013; new phase beginning from 2014. While the first and the second phases emphasised on the quantity of urbanisation, the current phase emphasises on the quality of urbanisation. The period 1949-1960 saw unrestrained urbanisation; counter-urbanisation took place between 1960 and 1977; post-1978, China witnessed rapid urbanisation. The period of restrained urbanisation, 1949-60, saw China's urban population grow from 58 million in 1949 to 131 million in 1960. The urban population nearly doubled in 11 years, and the urbanisation level increased by 9.2 percent from 10.6 percent to 19.8 percent (NBS 2005). This period saw post-war reconstruction, Soviet assistance, urban rebuilding and investment in urban industries and infrastructure. In the phase of counter-urbanisation, 1961-77, *hukou* system was institutionalised and expanded in 1958. As a result, 1960-63 saw the rate of urbanisation decline by 2.91percent During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), 43 million urban residents were sent to work in the villages as part of erasing the urban-rural distinctions and elimination of class distinctions (Liu 2009). It also served to relieve employment pressure in urban areas.

Before 1978, China pursued a policy of controlled urbanisation. Kam Wing Chan (1994) notes that before 1978, urbanisation in China was mostly a result of high industrial growth

despite lacking a growth of urban population due to restrictions placed on mobility as part of the *hukou* system. China, thus, according to him, witnessed under-urbanization during these years. Earlier, cities were conceived as bases of industrial production soon after the creation of PRC. They formed the core of the nation-building process, but were still perceived only as important as the rural areas. The emphasis was not to over-urbanize. This was reflected in the mass political campaigns that were to follow. Both urban and rural industrial development became the focus from 1958 as was evident in the “Great Leap Forward” Campaign (1958-1960). Its objective was to have a “steel mill in every backyard”. The government invested heavily in industrial stocks but very soon it discovered that these stocks were not profitable and did not perform well. The early political campaigns that were concentrated in cities and towns to promote industrialisation did not help in accelerating urbanisation, as it increased by a mere 1 percent in 1960. In addition, in 1958, the introduction of *hukou* system to control the massive influx of rural labour force into cities reversed the urbanisation trend. In order to avoid over-urbanization and a pressure over urban resources, the formalisation of *hukou* system imposed restrictions on rural-urban migration, by assigning residency certificates to people by birth, or based on their parents residency, thereby curbing further urbanisation. Thus, between 1950 and 1978, urban population residing in urban areas had increased only by 6.1 percent from 11.8 percent in 1950 to 17.9 percent in 1978, before the onset of administrative changes in the aftermath of reform and opening up.

With China’s “opening up”, and the introduction of economic reforms in 1978, urbanisation levels increased drastically across China. The number of cities and towns increased phenomenally. Cities formed the core of the economic reform process. This phase of rapid urbanisation, 1978-present, is characterised by Household Responsibility System (HRS), a system governing land tenure and sharing of agricultural produce between rural collectives and individual households; allowed peasants autonomy in production and management. It increased agricultural productivity. It not just ‘liberated’ the rural productive forces but also created conditions favourable for rapid urbanisation.

Scholars attribute multiple reasons to the urbanisation phenomenon in China. Critiquing the emphasis laid on industrialisation to understand earlier patterns of urbanisation, Zhang

(2016) asserts that, more than industrialisation, the shifting ownership structure better explains the changes in the urbanisation process. She attests how in the context of urbanisation in the post-1978 period, it is the transformation in the ownership structure from public ownership to multiple ownerships that fuelled urbanisation in China. The transformation within the ownership structure had multiple ramifications. One, within the rural ownership sector, at the household level, the decollectivisation of agriculture released the rural surplus labour, forcing them to migrate to the cities in search of better opportunities. Two, within the urban ownership structure at the enterprise level, the factory managers now had the power to hire and fire with an easily available cheap pool of rural surplus labour that now formed a major share of the urban labour market. Chan (2010) states, “decollectivization of agriculture, *hukou* reforms and relaxation of migration controls in the early 1980s and in the late 1990s have resulted in large volumes of “temporary” migrants to cities, many of whom are also “rural migrant workers” (*mingong*)”. He further elucidates the socio-economic location of the category of *mingong* by defining them as “a group of industrial and service workers with rural *hukou* working mainly in cities”, who are “not legally considered as urban workers, and are therefore not eligible for the regular urban welfare and rights that are available to any urban resident. Nor are they supposed to settle in their destination and make it their permanent residence.” China’s rapid economic growth during the period of reform and opening up could be largely attributed to the surplus generated from low labour costs, and rural migrant workers had a major role to play in this success story. According to Duan Chengrong, the Head of Population Studies in Renmin University, one of the major reasons for urbanisation and urban growth in China is the migration of population from the countryside to the cities (Fan 2008: 65). The surplus rural labour migrating to the cities and working for cheaper wages attracted increasing foreign direct investment into China, and in particular, south China had a major role to play as it spearheaded the reform and opening up process. Thus, in the early 1980s, the total number of rural migrant workers amounted to almost 30 million. However, by the end of 2008, their number had risen to 140 million (Chan 2010: 69). Table 2.1 shows the increase in rural-urban migration from 1950-2000.

Table 2.1: Net Rural-Urban Migration, 1950-2000

Period	No. of years covered	Average annual size (millions)	Share (%)
1950-1957	8	3.35	60
1958-1960	3	8.50	82
1961-1965	5	-5.62	NA
1966-1977	12	0.93	31
1978-1982	5	6.69	78
1983-1990	8	8.04	74
1991-2000	10	12.55	80
1950-2000	51	5.10	67

Source: Chan and Hu (2003) p.58.

Administrative fiat was another significant reason for an increasing urban population in China (Chan 2010; Zhang 2008). The unique spatial arrangement of “city leading county” (*shidaixian*) or “city controlling county” (*shiguanxian*) that was instituted in 1979 was indicative of it, where counties were placed under the administration of cities in order to boost their economies. For instance, in Liaoning province, all the counties were brought under the administration of cities. This was followed by the policies *chexiangaiishi* and *shixianheyi* in the same year. While the former meant “abolishing county and establishing city”, the latter meant “combining city with county”. Table 2.2 shows the increasing number of newly designated cities in China from 295 in 1984 to 663 in 2000 a growth of 368 cities in 16 years. The cities with the population below 200,000 saw the maximum number of increase while the cities with a population of 1 million had been witnessing a steady growth until 2000.

Table 2.2: Number of Designated Cities

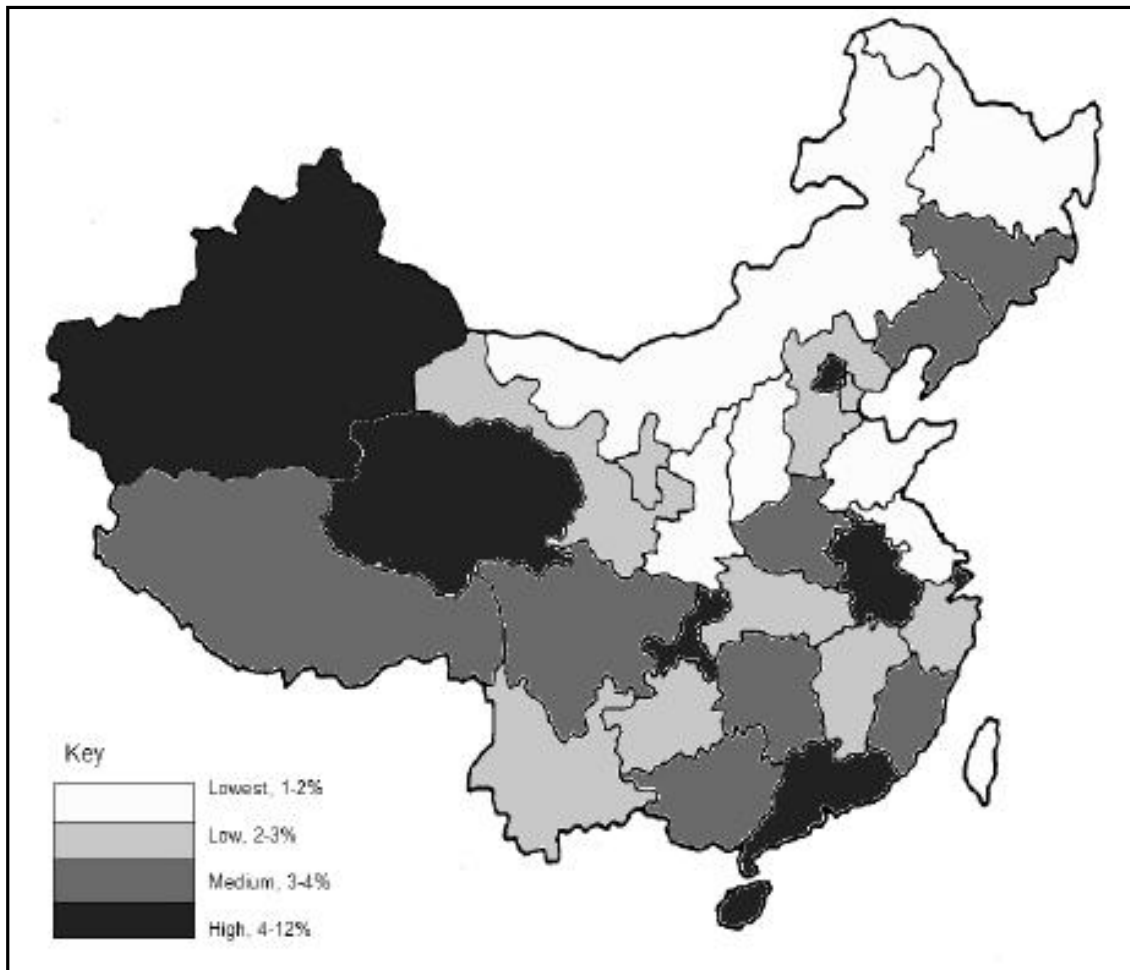
Year	Total	>2 millions	1–2 millions	0.5–1 million	0.2–0.5 million	<0.2 million
1984	295	8	11	31	81	164
1985	324	8	13	31	94	178
1988	434	9	19	30	110	266
1989	450	9	21	28	116	276
1990	467	9	22	28	117	291
1991	479	9	22	30	121	297
1992	507	10	22	30	66	379
1993	570	10	22	36	160	342
1994	622	10	22	41	175	374
1995	640	10	22	43	192	373
1996	666	11	23	44	195	393
1997	668	12	22	47	205	382
1998	668	13	24	49	205	377
1999	667	13	24	49	216	365
2000	663	13	27	53	218	352

Source: Zhang (2008) p.456.

China had been rapidly transforming from a dominantly agricultural society into an increasingly urban society during the Reform period. Market forces were beginning to play a significant role and the 1980s witnessed an increasing decentralisation of power. The race to secure the status of city has also to be situated within the context of a decentralized administrative and fiscal system, where the local state was conferred with relatively more powers regarding decision-making. Since the responsibility of generating revenues now lay with the local government, there was an increasing regional

competitiveness for attracting funding from the state and foreign investment. The status of city enabled both. As Ma and Cui (1987) note, cities are an integral part of the central planning system and are included in the state budget. They receive more financial support as compared to other urban centres for urban development projects and services. According to Zhang (2016), the transformations in the relations between the Centre and the local governments as exemplified in the fiscal decentralisation policy led to the development of local accumulation regimes, which in turn, strengthened the role of the local governments as drivers of economic and urban growth.

Figure 2.4: Average Annual Growth-Rate of Cities by Provincial-level Unit, 1991-2000

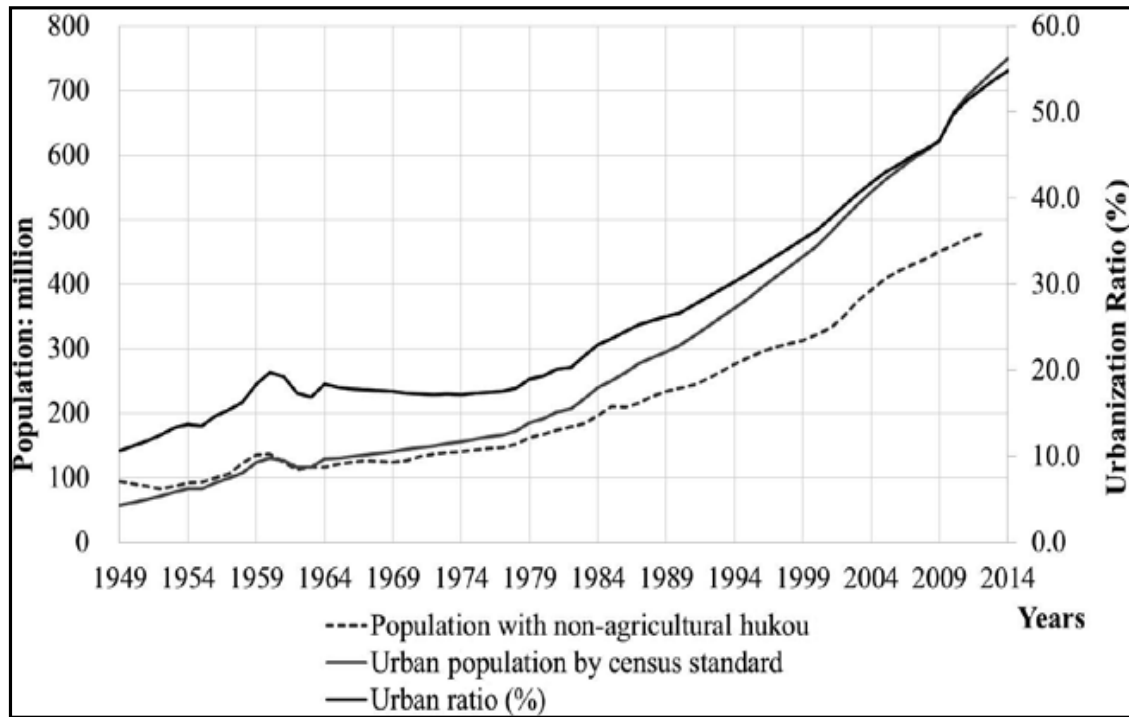


Source: Chan (2010), p. 47.

Along with the various stages of urbanisation, the spatial development of urbanisation in China also occurred in phases, where the earlier phase of urbanisation focused on southern and eastern China, while the new phase focuses on central and western China. The figure below (Figure 2.4) shows the average annual growth rate of population of the cities by provincial-level unit. The three “hot spots”, Guangdong, Beijing, and Shanghai, are in the high growth group; so are Chongqing, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Hainan, and Anhui. Interestingly, the lowest growth group is basically in the “north” and “northeast” quadrants, probably related to the retrenchment of manufacturing in the regions in the 1990s.

The extent of urbanisation varies from region to region due to different development trajectories (Li 2008). The regional disparities in the extent of urbanisation created disconnect in the quantity and quality of regional urbanisation. This was accompanied by a deepening of rural-urban disparities towards the end of the 1990s. Relatively lower consumption and the crisis of overproduction in the face of the 1997 financial crisis aggravated the urban situation in the late 1990s. These issues formed the crux of the reconstituted urbanisation policies in the later years, as evident in the Five-Year Plans. City and town-based urbanisation was the main emphasis of the Tenth Five Year Plan (2001-2005). Three key methods were designed to promote towns-based urbanisation: 1) allowing conversion of agricultural to non-agricultural *hukou* for rural residents permanently relocating to towns within their counties; Figure 2.5 shows how non-agricultural *hukou* holders rose sharply after 1999. 2) land reforms designed to create secondary markets in farming rights by allowing farmers to permanently sell off their rights to other farmers to encourage economies of scale in production; and 3) promotion of industrialisation in towns with implied approval of conversion of agricultural land to town construction land (largely for industrial parks). The third policy design, industrialisation in rural towns, particularly in relation to the township and village enterprises, was not as successful, owing to which the cities saw a huge influx or surplus rural labour seeking better job opportunities.

Figure 2.5: Chinese Population with Non-Agricultural *Hukou*, Urban Population, and Urban Ratio, 1949–2014



Source: Zhang, Legates and Zhao (2016), p.16.

The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2006-2010) had the development of metropolitan regions across the country, and promotion of an urbanisation process through “balanced development” of cities and towns regardless of their size, as the key policy focus. Both the central as well as the local governments had the policy design to plan and control development at a scale that encompasses both rural and urban focused developments. Emphasis was also laid on competitive metropolitan and balanced development of different size cities. Moreover, the 2008 National Urban and Rural Planning Law covered planning of urban systems, cities, towns, and villages; for urban planning, the law covers master planning and detailed planning. Urban and rural planning was required to be based on National Economic and Social Development Plan conducted by the local Development Research Centers (DRCs) and to link up with Land Use Master Plan (by land bureau).

Socialist urbanisation has been understood using categories such as under-urbanization, urban hiatus, zero urban growth, etc. mostly trying to understand the irregular urbanization

pattern in socialist and post-socialist countries. In Szelenyi's conceptualisation of urbanisation in transitional economies, "many features of socialist urban development are now decaying rapidly, and those that still survive are increasingly in contradiction with the emergent socio-economic reality of the region" (Szelenyi 1996: 288). But the trajectory of urbanisation in China or what could be called, 'urbanisation with Chinese characteristics', displays the survival and continuity of the socialist features working in tandem with the market forces. In the context of China's urbanisation, the co-existence of *hukou* along with the new urban labour market is one of the best examples. Capturing the paradoxes of Chinese urbanisation, Zhang observes that, "from the view of urban transformation, the Chinese city is becoming capitalist in many respects. At the same time, the socio-spatial template inherited from the pre-reform system continues to shape current urban development."

2.3 Reforms, Industrial Labour Regime and Urbanisation

The need to develop the productive forces was a major concern for the Chinese government in the 1980s in its drive to accomplish the Four Modernizations of agriculture, industry, science and technology and defence. As Deng Xiaoping iterated in one of his talks in May 1980,

"in order to build socialism we must first of all develop the productive forces, which is our main task. This is the only way to demonstrate the superiority of socialism".

(Xiaoping 1980: 313)

The need to 'develop the productive forces' became the driving factor of all major economic policies during this period. The rural reforms in the form of the Household Responsibility System and industrial reforms in the 1980s reflected this concern.

Since 1950s, "unified allocation" was put into practice, especially for skilled workers, as the primary principle of administrative allocation of jobs. This was later extended to include the entire urban labour force. In addition to this system of allocating jobs to workers, there emerged a de facto system of job tenure in the state-owned enterprises and big collective enterprises. Popularly known as the "iron rice bowl", the process of labour

allocation under this system was highly state administered. The state agencies were either directly or indirectly responsible for ensuring jobs for the labour force in the cities through the labour bureaus and the labour service companies, respectively. Strong welfare provisions from the enterprises accompanied the provision of job tenure. It guaranteed a wide array of social provisions such as education, housing, health services, etc. In such a scenario, state enterprises would function like welfare states.

Nevertheless, it also had certain restraints that affected the productivity and the efficiency of the enterprises. The system was distinguishable for its relatively poor level of inter-enterprise, inter-sector as well as inter-regional mobility, over manning or unemployment on the job, and seniority constituting the sole criterion for obtaining remuneration or promotion within the firm rather than performance being the deciding factor. In addition, production efficiency was not easy to ensure given the fact that a worker could not be fired by the enterprise on the grounds of incompetence (Josephs 1997).

The situation was exacerbated particularly during the Reform period with a worsening unemployment situation in the cities. In 1980, the official unemployment rate stood at 4.9 percent, although several scholars claim that the actual rate was far higher than the official account (Table 2.3, Figure 2.6). Reforms within the agricultural sector in the form of the introduction of the household responsibility system and the dismantling of the commune system released agricultural labourers from collective farming and created a pool of rural surplus labour that flooded the urban areas in search of better employment opportunities. To compound the situation further, there existed an inherent dualism between the state-owned enterprises and the collective enterprises. Employment for workers was more lucrative within the state sector as compared to the collective sector because the workers had no access to the iron rice bowl in the latter (Thinghong and Xiaogang, 2009:86). As a result, workers rushed to the urban areas searching for “real jobs” within the state sectors (Table 2.4).

Another factor that aggravated the unemployment scenario in the cities was the return of the urban youth who were sent to the rural areas during the Cultural Revolution. This also contributed to the increasing trend of migration from the rural areas to the cities. From the

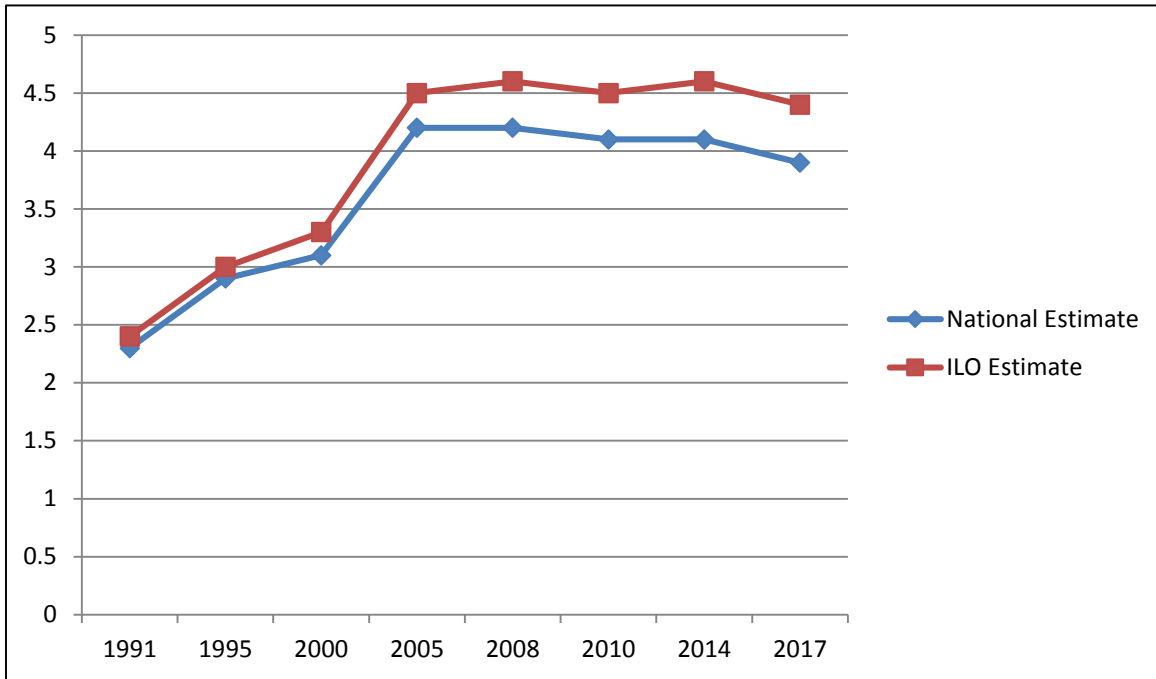
perspective of the state, unemployment had created a section of disgruntled youth who were on the lookout for job opportunities but at the same time also capable of disturbing the social stability. This flow of migrant population to the cities in search of better life opportunities was one major factor that set the stage for China's urbanization during the Reform period.

Table 2.3: Urban Registered Unemployment and Unemployment Rate in China, 1980-1994

Year	Urban Unemployment (10,000 persons)	Unemployment Rate (%)
1980	541.5	4.9
1981	439.5	3.8
1982	379.4	3.2
1983	271.4	2.3
1984	235.7	1.9
1985	238.5	1.8
1986	264.4	2.0
1987	276.6	2.0
1988	296.2	2.0
1989	377.9	2.6
1990	383.2	2.5
1991	352.2	2.3
1992	363.9	2.3
1993	420.1	2.6
1994	476.4	2.8

Source: M.Warner and G.Lee (2007), p.4.

Figure 2.6: Unemployment, total (% of total labor force)



Source: Compiled from International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database.

Table 2.4: Persons Entering Employment in Cities and Towns, 1978-1984 (in millions)

Item	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Total	5.44	9.03	9.0	8.2	6.65	6.28	7.22
<i>1. Major Sources</i>							
Labour force in cities and towns	2.75	6.89	6.23	5.34	4.08	4.07	4.50
Rural labour force	1.48	0.71	1.27	0.92	0.66	0.68	1.23
Graduates	0.38	0.33	0.8	1.1	1.17	0.93	0.82
Others	0.83	1.10	0.7	0.86	0.74	0.60	0.67
<i>2. Assignment</i>							
State-owned	3.92	5.68	5.72	5.21	4.10	3.74	4.16
Collective	1.52	3.18	2.78	2.67	2.22	1.71	1.97
Individual workers	-	0.17	0.50	0.32	0.33	0.84	1.09

Source: M. Warner and G. Lee (2007), p.5.

Unemployment in the cities had reached to such proportional levels in the early 1980s that it had become the primary concern for the policy makers. Deng Xiaoping's speech delivered at a cadre conference in January 1980 reflected the concern regarding unemployment and social stability. During his speech, he warned that if urban unemployment was left unchecked, it would pose a substantial threat to the "stability and unity" of the country (White 1987: 370). The economic and labour policies of the 1980s thus orbited around the issue of unemployment in the cities. An example of this was the introduction of the labour contract system. This policy was a manifestation of the policy concerns of the Chinese leaders, as a response to increasing production inefficiency as well as rising unemployment levels. It postulated a restructuring of the state-owned enterprises in order to improve its production efficiency- thereby creating more employment- and to overcome the competition it faced from foreign goods that were now flooding the domestic market. But most importantly, job tenure came to be replaced with labour contracts which were mostly short-term or temporary, as it tended to serve the purpose of the management. The introduction of the hire and fire principle created labour flexibility by allowing the employers the freedom to remove workers at will. This engendered a change in the nature of the labour market as it created a pool of temporary workers or informal labour. Workers already employed were also persuaded into entering into short-term contracts or risk getting laid-off. In 1994, the Labour Law formalized this mode of employment as the only kind of labour relationships that workers could enter into with the management.

The introduction of the labour contract system symbolized a shift from two old traditions for the workers: one, contract labour replaced the iron rice bowl or the urban tenure system and two, a labour market replaced administrative allocation of jobs to workers. While the former led to an increasing labour mobility in the enterprises, within and without, the latter provided managerial autonomy. The impermanence of the labour contract which the workers were forced to enter into with their employers, and was liable to certain terms and conditions or even terminable by law now substituted the certitude of the social contract the workers already had with the state under the socialist regime. This new institution indicates how the state perceived the meaning and the role of contract. On the one hand, contract was perceived as the answer to China's employment crisis, on the other hand, it

served as a tool to control labour relations indirectly while leaving decision-making to the management.

Labour relations witnessed a sea change within this new industrial labour regime, as workers' prospects were now more tied on the vagaries of the market as well as their own skill of securing a job. Their relationship with the enterprises changed as their association with *danwei* (work unit) was replaced with a divorcing of socio-cultural as well as any welfare functions attached to *danwei*. Production and profit became the two key motives of the enterprises in the Reform period. This was accompanied by a parallel shift in the state perception of workers as vanguards of revolution being substituted with their new role as a major driving force of the economic growth.

But central to this discussion is the fact that while the state had ensured that the Chinese workers receive "cradle to grave welfare benefits" as well as lifelong employment before 1978, now workers' lives were characterized by precariousness and marginality within the cities. This forms the crux of workers' urban story in the new China that was created post-1978.

2.4 Working in Chinese Cities: Reforging Workers Urbanisms

In the previous section, it was shown how the economic reforms necessitated a change in the industrial labour regime which in turn led to the creation of an urban labour market. The transnational production processes required cheap labour which was available in the form of the rural surplus labour released from agriculture and driven to the cities in search of better wages. Although 'work' or 'production' formed a central component of workers' relationship to the city, it cannot be merely confined by it; it transcends beyond it and encompasses the realms of 'consumption' as well. It includes aspects such as health, education, housing, and even leisure, all of which constitute a crucial part of workers' urban experience. While this urban experience also reinforces the class experience of the workers, it is pivotal in informing workers' claims to the right to the city (or the lack of it). The social movements that redefine the city is dependent on this claim to the right to the city, a thesis that Harvey and before him, Lefebvre had propounded.

2.4.1 Hukou and Housing: A New Spatial Order

China's urbanisation process, to a large extent, has been shaped by its land and housing policies. Previously, under the social contract, the state determined the land and housing policies during Mao period. All land in China, both rural and urban, was owned by the state. Rural collectives owned and operated rural land, and in urban areas, the municipalities managed them. Housing in urban areas was allocated under *danwei* or work-units of state-owned enterprises that determined workers' housing, education, health and material requirements. *Danwei* was a form of social organisation of the masses that provided the workers with social and cultural facilities turning them into small self-sufficient communities (Lu and Perry 1997; Lue et al 2001; Bray 2005). Property rights, private ownership, land transactions, land and housing markets were virtually non-existent in the urban areas earlier. According to Yang and Chen (2014), the housing sector was conceived to be “social”, not “economic.”

However, after 1978, when Deng Xiaoping introduced reforms in the land and housing sector, market became a crucial factor in shaping the land and housing sector, leading to the creation of property market, real estate and housing market. The concept of land use rights was introduced whereby land could be leased for a period of 30-70 years on payment of a certain amount of land use fees, while the state still held sole ownership of all lands. Rural lands were leased out by rural collectives, and urban land were either leased to private individuals or developers by municipalities or *danwei* or the municipalities themselves developed the land for development purposes. Although it complicated the property rights regime in China, the dual land market was created that shaped the present-day Chinese cities, as it led to the development of the urban villages.

The spatial restructuring of Chinese cities has been heavily shaped by these factors. In addition, the mobility of capital and individuals also played a key role in changing the dynamics of the cities in China. The *hukou* system and its subsequent relaxation facilitated the influx of migrant labour into the cities spatially transforming the character of urban spaces. While increasing commoditisation of housing and competition to attract foreign investment has also changed the function of urban spaces. Migrant housing is an interesting example of this spatial change, and the Pearl River Delta exemplifies the case of spatial

change excellently. Apart from generating social disparities in the housing allocation, the commodification of housing market also created urban socio-spatial differentiation. The urban spatial structure witnessed a transforming change with the development of a housing market with glaring spatial hierarchies. For instance, the work-unit housing which dotted the industrial landscapes of the cities, paved the way for housing in the form of gated communities and informal housing in the form of private rental housing in urban villages.

Urban housing disparities deepened in the aftermath of housing reform and enterprise restructuring. Different social groups witnessed different social impacts from the deepening of housing reform in the 1990s. The CCP membership, *guanxi*, rank and size of the work unit, income, age and education were crucial factors in determining the impact. While the government cadres and the middle-class benefitted the most, the migrant workers were the worst affected. However, the industrial workers who already lived in work-unit housing and who had the means to buy them when they were being sold off were better-off as compared to the rural migrant workers. But the prospects of these workers depended on the kind of state-owned enterprises they were attached to. The larger the enterprises the better the work-unit housing that the workers lived in. Thus, even enterprise-wise, the housing reform had a differential impact.

Economic reforms and socialist legacies thus played an instrumental role in shaping the housing market during the 1990s and the 2000s. Under the new regime, private ownership was legitimised. Housing consumption emerged as the foremost symbol of private ownership. The housing reform was intended to encourage private ownership and strengthen consumption patterns to boost the economy. Despite the explicit support provided by the state, growth of housing consumption was slow and gradual in the 1990s and 2000s as several other institutional factors such as *danwei*, *hukou*, job and income affected the access to private housing. Other socioeconomic factors such as family ties, marital status and size of the household also affected the housing choices made by people, thus forcing many to depend on work-unit housing which was comparatively cheaper than commodity housing. Thus, housing choices in China were affected by historical, institutional as well as socio-economic factors. This is attested by a housing survey conducted by Siming Li and others in Beijing during 1980-2001, where they show that

institutional elements such as *danwei* and *hukou* still shape the residential mobility of individuals in Beijing. In addition to these factors, the life-course of the individual also is an important factor in shaping residential mobility. According to them, residential mobility in Beijing is not a housing-adjustment process. Different factors such as age, marital status etc. affect an individual's housing decisions (Li 2004). Further qualifying this argument, Wang and Li (2002) contend that the rich and the middle-class residents prefer particular districts in Beijing, depending on the appearance of the neighbourhood, giving rise to gated communities. This, in their opinion has led to the emergence of a spatial differential in housing and a 'differential residential structure', as certain pockets of the cities are dotted with gated communities, while the peri-urban areas are witnessing a mushrooming of urban villages where migrant workers are concentrated.

The housing conditions of migrant workers in cities were also deplorable. Since they had no access to public housing, and since commodity housing was not affordable to majority of them, they chose to live in cramped spaces of the cheap rental housing available in the urban villages. They saved money by sharing their accommodation with as many people as possible, especially with family, friends or relatives. The housing policies also failed to include migrant workers and thereby marginalising them institutionally. Yet another mode of housing available to them was the factory dormitories. However, they were just another extension of control by the management.

Due to the prevalence of *hukou* restrictions on rural migrant workers and also because of the lack of a government housing policy that recognised the rights of rural migrant workers to live and work in the city, the rural migrant workers had to rely on alternative options such as factory dormitories or private rentals in the urban villages. Describing urban villages, Liu et al (2010) point out that these are a "mixture of rural and urban society" which apart from providing "interest for urbanized villagers" also provides "low-cost residential space for migrants". These migrant enclaves that emerged are at the same time a result of rapid urbanisation and urban expansion into the rural areas. While the cities expanded and surrounded the adjacent rural areas, they incorporated them into the urban system, while the land ownership still remained with the rural collectives, leading to a dual land ownership. Such informal spatial arrangements arising out of urban expansion into

rural territories are called *chengzhongcun* or urban villages. Unlike the squatter settlements found in many other developing countries such as India and Brazil, the urban villages are not squatter settlements, despite having an unplanned existence and land-use. However, these spaces are seen through the lens of the illegal both by the state and the urban *hukou* holders. *Hukou* thus led to housing inequalities and thereby became an institutional deterrent that marginalised the migrant workers socially as well as spatially (Wu 2002; Li and Duda 2011: 151). According to Zhou and Cai (2008), migrant workers were not only culturally blocked from integrating into urban life as outsiders or *waidiren* but also institutionally blocked. Migrant workers' relationship to the city was shaped by this socio-spatial exclusion.

Hukou system, along with the industrial labour regime in China was highly exploitative and the state played a crucial role in contributing to this fact. An example of this case is the way young unmarried rural migrant women are attracted to the cities to work as *dagongmei* or female migrant labour in the cities. Adopting a developmental strategy, the state attempts to alter the nature of the labour market, which also has gendered implications. The creation of a dormitory labour regime and the changing production processes also means that more and more young female workers are drawn to particular kinds of jobs. The *hukou* system particularly plays an important role in this process of gendered migration. The demand for unmarried women labour is higher since the urban labour market, because of *hukou* is highly gendered and consists on comparatively lesser percentage of married women.

Zhiming Cheng (2014) argues that old generation workers are being replaced by a new generation, with new attitudes and approaches to work and urban life, new difficulties at work has been posing new challenges for rural-urban governance. Comparing both generations of migrant workers, their experience of survival and strategy, she looks at how this new generation has been shaped by, and shaping China's urban development and capitalism. She makes an enquiry into the social events and changes that have shaped both these generations differently. She looks into how migrant workers in these cities interact with regional socio-economic changes. She argues that although there was a difference in perception and attitudes toward work, home and city life, strategies and modes of resistance

between the older generation and the newer generation of migrant workers, *hukou* became a major determinant of the quality of life migrant workers had in the cities and the state played a crucial role in shaping the lives of workers in the city.

2.4.2 Road to Better Wages? : Proletarianisation of Chinese Workers

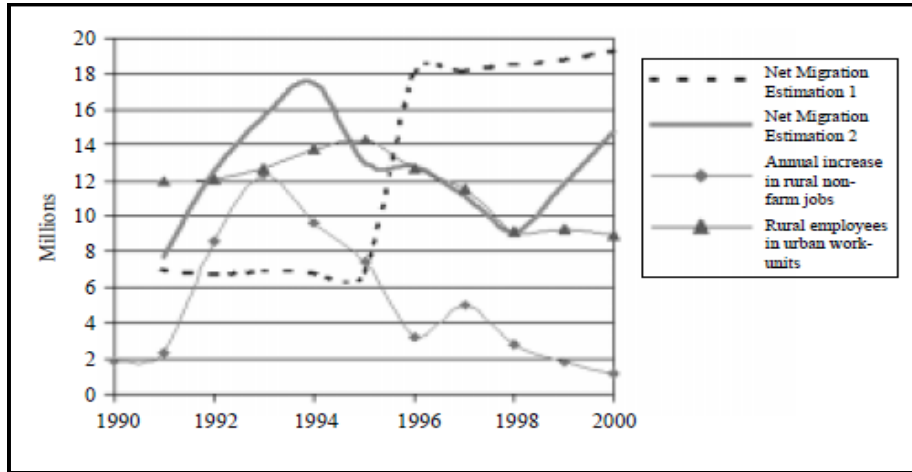
Shown in the table below (Table 2.5) are the number of workers from rural areas employed in urban work-units, the annual increase in the number of industrial or non-agricultural jobs held by migrant labour, the number of urban labour supply directly coming from the rural areas, and the number of new urban labourers involving *nongzhuangfei* (workers who convert their *hukou* status from agricultural to non-agricultural). These statistics provide some broad insight into the rural-urban migration occurring in the 1990s in China.

Table 2.5: Rural-Urban Migration, 1990-2000 (in millions)

Year	Rural employees in urban work-units	Annual increase in non-agricultural jobs held by rural labour	New urban labour supply	
			Directly from rural areas	From <i>nongzhuangfei</i>
1990	NA	1.76	0.74	0.68
1991	11.98	2.33	0.82	0.66
1992	12.03	8.58	0.98	1.36
1993	12.71	12.33	0.98	1.27
1994	13.72	9.66	1.84	1.26
1995	14.31	7.43	1.62	1.39
1996	12.65	3.21	1.48	1.20
1997	11.53	4.99	1.00	1.33
1998	9.13	2.79	0.87	0.93
1999	9.29	1.79	0.90	0.87
2000	8.97	1.18	1.04	1.00

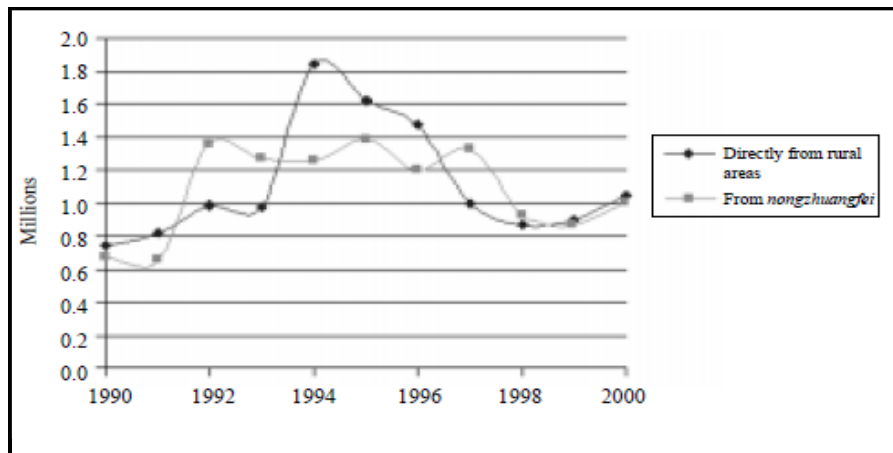
Source: Chan and Hu (2003) p.61.

Figure 2.7(a): Net Rural-Urban Migration and Related Rural/Urban Employment Trends, 1990-2000



Source: Chan and Hu (2003) p.60.

Figure 2.7(b): New Urban Labour Supply, 1990-2000.



Source: Chan and Hu (2003) p.60.

As shown in Figures 2.7 (a) and (b), the 1990s saw a spurt in migration of workers from rural to urban areas, who were feeding into the urban labour supply as the rural income from non-farm jobs began sliding.

In the 1990s, proletarianisation happened through three major routes: when workers came from the rural agricultural areas, when they came out of underperforming state-owned enterprises in the cities, and finally, when they came through the collapse of the township and village enterprises (TVEs). Workers from rural agricultural areas were being displaced

to the cities. Between 1980 and 2007, around 120 million workers had migrated to the cities. While some farmers reaped the benefits from the abolition of the commune system and the introduction of the household responsibility system, and became rich, the marginal producers were the ones badly affected. They bore the brunt of having small plots, poor soil quality, low prices for produce, lack of better resources as well as cadre corruption. As a result, many migrated to the cities in search of better employment opportunities, even though they lacked an urban *hukou* and thus entered into permanent temporariness. In the cities, peasant migrants do not have residency rights and become long-term transients. The *hukou* system created dual citizenship where the people are tied to their places of birth through the access to social benefits. Despite this, a large number of peasants migrated to the cities thereby putting pressure over the urban resources.

The collapsing state-owned enterprises also created a pool of new wage labour. State-owned enterprises were the core of industrialisation under the Mao regime and most of these workers were employed in the cities. In the 1980s, around 70 million workers were working in the enterprises in the urban areas. However, increasingly this kind of employment was being gradually replaced by temporary workers who could be hired for lesser wages and no social insurance at all. This is the repercussion of the 1994 Labour Law that formalised contract as the sole term of employment as well as the 1988 bankruptcy law that allowed the employers to lay off permanent workers if the enterprise was facing bankruptcy. The 1994 Labour Law had also ensured that the state was no more responsible for the welfare provisions of the workers. A directive issued later also permitted employers to retrench workers for improving production efficiency. These changes had major implications in the late 1990s. The late 1990s witnessed massive layoffs. Compounding this situation further was the crisis of overproduction in the wake of the Asian financial crisis of 1997. It marked a transition from the economy of scarcity to the economy of surplus production. The state-owned enterprises saw a massive reduction in employment from 70 percent to 33 percent in the early 2000s. By the early 2000s, employment in the state-owned enterprises had halved, with over 30 to 40 million workers displaced (Walker and Buck 2007: 43).

The dissolution of the Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) also created a pool of rural surplus labour. The TVEs had thrived when the commune system was dismantled and the household responsibility system established when China had entered the initial phases of economic restructuring. Local governments owned and managed the TVEs and inherited the socialist legacy of providing jobs and social benefits to the villagers, and also supported agriculture and rural infrastructure. The TVEs had increased at a rapid rate by the early 1990s, when more than 100 million people were employed by over 25 million enterprises. They accounted for 40 per cent of the total manufacturing output of China. The restructuring of the state-owned enterprises had major repercussions for the TVEs. Since most of the TVEs functioned as subcontractors to the state-owned enterprises, when many of them declared bankruptcy in the 1990s and faced shutdowns, thousands of TVEs faced financial crunch as they were faced with mounting bank loans. Thus, many workers in the rural areas migrated to the urban areas, when the TVEs were dismantled. Thus, the TVE workers were also incorporated into the proletariat pool in two stages: first, when they were employed as TVE workers still within the socialist obligations, then as workers fully exposed to the vagaries of the market (Walker and Buck 2007: 44).

As the rural surplus labour abandoned farming and migrated to the cities in large numbers, as enterprises laid off workers in thousands, they all formed a pool of industrial reserve ready to take up any job that came their way. Thus, Marx's concept of industrial reserve is relevant to the discussion on Chinese rural surplus workers. According to ILO estimates, the industrial reserve in China constitutes over 20 percent of the urban workforce even today. The pressure over urban unemployment had thus increased and in turn has turned more and more workers poorer. Unpaid wages, pensions, loss of housing, health services etc. had put enormous pressure on the workers during the Reform period.

Lacking an urban *hukou*, the rural migrants had no access to urban social benefits such as housing, healthcare etc. Because of their comparative temporariness, they were termed as 'floating population' and even more discriminated by the local urban residents who saw them as outsiders, and not belonging to their society. Thus, they were institutionally marginalised as well as socially alienated from the cities. While workers were attracted to the cities for better employment opportunities and to meet the industrial targets at far

cheaper rates, the *hukou* system played a systematic role in relegating them to the peripheries and preventing them from amalgamating into the cities. It thus helped in maintaining cheap labour, and relieving the pressure on urban infrastructure, but simultaneously boosting economic growth (Walker and Buck 2007). Nevertheless, these spatial practices were crucial in determining workers' encounter with the city and shaping their class experience.

The *hukou* system and the continuous rural-urban migration stratified the urban society in multiple ways. The population residing in cities could be categorized into permanent migrants, temporary migrants and non-migrant locals, based on their urban *hukou*. While the permanent migrants were better off in social capital and labour mobility, the temporary migrants were the worst, and were marginalized to the city peripheries. Without any urban citizenship, they had to pay for obtaining access to any urban services. Treated as outsiders by the locals, they were devoid of a sense of belonging to the cities. The emergence of urban villages within this context thus has to be seen as a subaltern response from to the larger developmental changes taking place in the economy.

2.5 Summary

Emphasizing on the significance of 'right to the city' or a collective right in shaping urbanization, David Harvey (2008) explains,

"The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights."

Social movements and the social actors involved in such movements play a crucial role in claiming the right to the city while shaping the process of urbanization. The workers in China, although engaging in sporadic protests which do not necessarily translate into a large-scale movement, played a crucial role in shaping the processes of urbanisation through their everyday lives, and the choices and decisions they make. These choices and

decisions made by the workers constituted what could be called an alternate urbanism or a worker urbanism that the workers developed in response to the skewed process of urbanisation, and that was markedly different from the earlier urbanisms that characterised workers during the pre-Reform period. From being the privileged members of *danwei*, they now constituted one of the marginal sections of the society.

The structural changes that had occurred during the Reform period not only shaped the industrial labour regime and the urban transformation in China, but also recasted workers' relationship to the city. Urban spaces had changed the meaning of work. From the earlier version of an iron rice bowl, where work was characterized as hereditary and permanent, work in the post-socialist period had become increasingly precarious. The household registration system or *hukou*, on the other hand, further intensified the exploitative nature of work within the global capitalist production system. It also determined the socio-spatial location of migrant workers within the cities as compared to the local residents. Given the socio-spatial inequalities between rural migrants and local residents in the cities and the discrimination they encounter from various quarters, social ties and networks become their sole resort for survival within the city as will be delineated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

SPATIAL POLITICS OF WORKERS: COMMUNITY TIES AND RESISTANCE

3.1 Introduction

Emphasizing on the global impact of China's urban process, Harvey (2008) claimed that urbanisation in China has become the primary stabilizer of global capitalism; more so after 2012, when China's urban population officially crossed the 50 percent mark. The narrative of China's urbanisation, however, has been predominantly a narrative of the state and the capital, and how these forces determine the urban processes and its constituents. Its urban story will not be complete without locating the rural migrant workers, who play a major role in producing the city and its related urbanisms. Shifting away from a state-led urban process to that of a worker-led one, this chapter explores the various ways through which migrant workers navigate city life and create their own urbanisms. It studies the nature of traditional social ties and networks existing among migrant workers, and the role they play in shaping workers' actions in the city. In doing so, they create unique socio-cultural landscapes such as migrant enclaves or neighbourhoods, which is a microcosm of worker urbanism. In a context where *hukou* defines the right to the city, this can be seen as a subaltern response to the conception of the urban and the modern by the state.

Worker communities form an important facet of workers' experiences and identities. In his seminal study, 'The Strength of Weak Ties', sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973) discusses the relevance of social relations to obtain resources and shows how strong ties (such as family ties) and weak ties (ties with less interactions) provide a source of material support and new information, respectively. In China, traditional networks such as family and place ties play a crucial role in gaining access to the labour market, labour migration as well as workers' everyday survival (Zhang 2001; Lee 1998; Perry 1993). These ties can be either developed within the workplace or within living spaces such as workers' villages, dormitories etc. Workers fall back on these ties for their day-to-day survival in the cities. *Hukou* as well as the deepening of housing reform from 1998 implied a housing crunch, particularly for the migrant workers, who either took rented housing in urban villages or

chose industrial dormitories. For instance, a case study of an urban village in Shenzhen shows how newly arrived migrant workers rely heavily on relatives or fellow villagers for seeking jobs, temporarily putting up in flats, borrowing money etc. (Siu 2015). Although these ties are constituted by the daily tensions and conflicts of life, and its experience of industrial struggle, it is also be characterised by competition and conflict. However, it created a sense of shared experiences crucial to the forging of workers' identities.

Marxist scholarship provided a teleological narrative of labour movement suggesting that a mature class consciousness would replace community consciousness. However, with the linguistic turn in labour historiography in the 1980s, the move was to an understanding of class as a discursive structure. Thus, while E.P. Thompson found direct relationship between experience and consciousness, Gareth Stedman Jones emphasised on the linguistic determination of experience. However, Margaret Somers drove the narrative away from a totalizing conception of class to a narrative of fragmentation and disunity. She introduced the notion of narrative identities to argue that social beings are constituted through a plurality of narrative identities and social actions have to be understood within these narrative structures.

In his work *From Space to Place and Back Again*, drawing attention to the inherent conflict involved in the making of places, David Harvey (1993) argues that places are constructed through a struggle between the residents and capital. They are potential sites of resistance, mutually constituted the struggle between the global and the local. By describing what places are, as against spaces, he emphasizes on the inherent conflict involved in the making of places, as against production of spaces, constructed wholly by capital. This chapter borrows from Harvey to develop a conceptual framework in order to understand the social processes involved in the shaping of workers actions. It qualifies Harvey's analysis of place-making to add that while social conflict is crucial to the process of place-making, places also are important in determining social conflicts, and as Lefebvre observes, spaces are not abstract, they are constituted by social relations. As such, it becomes important to study this mutually constitutive phenomenon of place and social conflict, in order to understand how workers shape the urban processes and create their own urbanism.

The studies on workers and community ties show that the focus is placed on themes such as the making of physical spaces and its impact on workers, ties to their neighbourhood, building of social networks etc. Recent studies have provided some insightful understanding of urban changes at a macro-level, e.g. social and spatial segregation, the division between rural migrants and urban households, changes in land uses. To a lesser extent, urban changes are examined at the microscopic level of the neighbourhood. This chapter explores the link between community ties and workers' resistance, and its link to the residential spaces of workers. First, it examines how the building of workers' solidarity is defined by the nature of the spatial organization of worker's housing, in the form of dormitories and neighbourhoods in urban villages. Moreover, it looks at how the social organization of the neighbourhood, as displayed through workers' social ties and networks, is shaped by the political-economic processes and workers' survival strategies, and how it is crucial for the social and political redefinition of worker's resistance.

This chapter has three sections. The first section delineates the nature of workers' housing in China. It explores the social spaces at the micro-level- the neighbourhood, housing and the street- as manifested through the politics of migrant housing, *hukou* and urban development. It also examines the broad political economic processes that shaped the two major type of workers' housing in urban China during the Reform period: factory dormitories and private rentals in urban villages, and trace its link to the larger politics of production and growth. The second section assesses the nature of social ties and networks prevalent among rural migrant workers. It looks at the various functionalities involving these ties and networks such as access to the labour market, migration, housing etc., and argues that the continued relevance of these traditional forms of association attests to the individual resistance of the workers to the alienating tendencies of proletarianisation discussed in the previous chapter. The final section draws a link between these two categories and worker actions. It highlights the role of social spaces such as dormitories and migrant enclaves/neighbourhoods through Lefebvre's concept of social spaces, and explain its significance for workers' everyday lives and social reproduction of, and expand it to see them as spaces of empowerment. It concludes with an analysis of these two categories to investigate its potential in generating a parallel narrative of urban processes to that of the state.

3.2 Workers' Housing: The Political and Economic Contexts

Private ownership was the most dominant form of housing when the Communist government came to power in 1949. It remained so until the late 1950s when the government carried out large-scale nationalization of land and private housing in urban areas (Wu, 1996). Table 3.1 shows the increase in private housing as compared to public housing in some major cities in 1955. Private housing had declined to 20 percent of the total housing stock by the late 1970s, and public housing had become the predominant form of housing, accounting for 74.8 percent of the total housing stock (Hou et.al 1999).

Table 3.1: Distribution of Property Rights to Housing Stocks in Major Cities, 1955 (%)

	Publicly Owned	Privately Owned	Foreign Owned
Beijing	44.35	53.85	1.8
Tianjin	43.41	53.99	2.6
Shanghai	25.8	66	7.6
Jinan	22	78	
Qingdao	57.9	37.9	4.16
Shenyang	64	36	
Harbin	55.31	40.2	4.46
Nanjing	37.75	61.3	0.95
Wuxi	19.75	80.25	
Suzhou	14	86	

Source: J. Chen et. al (2013), p.16.

The urban residential areas were organized into a ‘cellular structure consisting of semi-independent work unit compounds, each of which was in effect a mini-society’ (Wu and He, 2004). The traditional urban areas comprised of these work unit compounds, in addition to the old city areas and shanty towns. Ideologically congruent with its socialist

principles, urban housing in pre-reform China was considered a 'redistributive' good rather than a 'private' good. The provision, distribution and management of housing were controlled by the state through administrative allocation of housing via work-units. The state financed, built, owned and managed most of China's public housing (Yang and Chen 2014). As welfare 'good', public housing was allocated to employees and workers of the public sectors as well as the state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Municipal housing authorities and work units were the two main providers of public housing. However, they were mainly allocated and administered by the work units rather than state agencies (Wu 1996). A worker's association to the *danwei* or work-unit, in addition to criteria such as occupational rank, years of working experience, and the number and ages of family members, determined the kind of housing provided by the state (Kim 1987).

The growing need to be rapidly incorporated into the world economy during the Reform period entailed that workers' housing was now determined by both global and local factors. Urbanization, transnational labour processes and land commodification played a major role in shaping workers' housing in the 1980s and 1990s. Economic reforms and globalization also brought about a new kind of labour regime in the form of the dormitory labour regime. A new mode of management of production and a new labour-capital relationship enabled reproduction of labour in the dormitory labour regime (Yan and Yi 2006). Although worker dormitories were not an entirely new phenomenon in China, it underwent a functional reconfiguration during the Reform period. Pre-1978, work-residences were instituted for work units of state or collective enterprises for housing a permanent urban workforce under the socialist planned economy. According to Ngai and Smith (2007), the reconfigured worker dormitories are 'an outcome of global capitalism and the legacies of socialism intended to capture a short-term labour use for rural migrants'. In order to meet the global standards in the new transnational production process, on-time delivery or just-in-time labour system, having workers on tap etc. were all crucial to the management of production. This implied having workers at disposal round the clock to meet the demands of global capital. The deterritorialisation of production, according to Harvey (2001), has mandated a disposable workforce in order to meet the demand of production in a particular time-frame. Making living arrangements for workers in the dormitories ensured this was possible.

Between 1979 and 2008, the level of urbanization in China increased from 19 percent to 46.6 percent (Wu 2012). This engendered an intensification of the process of rural-urban migration. As the table below (Table 3.2) shows, the number of migration grew at an alarming rate from 1978 to 2008. While the right hand side shows that over the years several measures have been used to gauge the size of the migrant labour population, the *waichu nongmingong* defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as ‘the urban residents employed in the non-agricultural sector outside their home for at least six months’, increased dramatically from 30 million in 1989 to 70 million in 1994, and it doubled to 140 million in 15 years by 2008.

The accelerated growth of rural migrants in the cities had important spatial implications. It implied a housing crunch given that rural migrants had no urban *hukou* and hence, did not have access to public housing. This spurred the demand for inexpensive and accessible housing in the peripheries of the cities where property rights were ambiguous. The introduction of the land leasing system in 1988 allowed land-use rights to be transacted in the market while the state maintained the ownership of land. Informal spatial development in the form of informal settlements such as *chengzhongcun* or urban villages was a product of this ambiguity. As Wu (2012) puts it, ‘urban villages are created by the disjuncture of the dual land use system’. The private rentals began mushrooming in urban villages. The shifting approach to workers’ housing was an outcome of the shifting political economic inclinations of the new reform state.

Table 3.2: Migrant Labour Population Growth, 1978-2008 (millions)

Year	Peasants going out to work	Other descriptive statistics of the Migrant Population
2008	140	225-“migrant workers”
2007	135	150-“mobile population”
2006	132	
2005	126	200-“peasants employed in nonagricultural workforce”
2004	118	90-“migrants moving to cities above the county level”
2003	110	40.3-“migrants engaging in intra-provincial migration for 1+months”
2002	102	39-“migrants engaging in intra-provincial migration for 1+months”
2001	89.9	36.8-“migrants engaging in intra-provincial migration for 1+months”
2000	106	28.2-“migrants engaging in intra-provincial migration for 1+months”
1999	102	
1998	95	
1997	86	
1996	80	
1995	75	<20-“peasants who migrated out of their home province”
1994	70	40-“temporary residents”
1993	62	22-“national inter-provincial migration”
1992	51	
1991	42	
1990	22	
1989	30	10-“national inter-provincial migration
1988	26	
1987	28	
1985	25	
1983	3	
1980	2.5	
1978	2	

Source: Becker 2014, pp.29-30.

Urban geographer Fulong Wu (2012) attributes multiple reasons for the development of urban villages in China, one of them being dualistic land ownership. While urban land is state owned, rural land is owned by the rural collectives. According to Wu, during urbanization, many rural agricultural lands were converted for urban uses. As a result, many rural villages were encircled by expanding urban built-up areas because of rapid urban expansion, literally resulting in ‘villages in the city’ or urban villages. Peri-urban villagers capitalized on the possession of prime land by building cheap rental housing for migrant workers as they were found surrounded by newly converted urban land. Lax management and the fact that rural farming households fell beyond formal development controls only intensified village densification. Owing to shortage of land, village committees in densely-populated peri-urban areas allowed vertical expansion of houses leading to the growth and gradual concentration of rental housing for migrant workers in urban peripheries.

Since the ‘breaking of the iron rice bowl’ and the termination of the social contract, workers’ housing has been left at the mercy of the market forces, leading to the marginalization of migrant workers are marginalized by the state. The failure of the government in providing housing for the migrant workers entailed the mushrooming of urban villages and rental housing in the city peripheries .The popularity of rental housing in urban villages can also be attributed to the gray area within property rights that arises out of the nebulous administrative apparatus in these sociospatial structures. It is relatively easy for a migrant worker to rent a room in an urban village since the landlords generally expect little or no paperwork for renting out rooms to migrant workers (Liu, 2000). According to a survey conducted in Dongguan and Guangzhou in 1999, most migrant workers preferred renting privately owned housing. This was followed by those who choose employer-provided dormitories and self-built shelters on constructions sites (Zhang et al. 2003).

The transnational production also shaped China’s road to urbanisation and spatial development. The continuous flow of capital, technology, production resources and labour force, facilitated by the new international division of labour, (Chan, 1996) determined the new urban spatial arrangement. For instance, the initial development of cities and factories

around the coastal areas, apart from being an outcome of a coordinated government policy, was also a response to the enormous capital flows that was channelled to the coastal regions from Hong Kong, and was subsequently followed by the mushrooming of migrant enclaves around those factories. A loosening of *hukou* regulations encouraged more and more peasant workers to travel to the Sunbelt cities in search for better employment opportunities. Urban villages provided a cheaper alternative to migrant workers facing discriminatory housing policies. As a result, a large number of migrant communities sprung up around these urban villages that provided an alternative to worker dormitories.

The housing choices of migrant workers are symptomatic of the discriminatory housing policies implemented by the government. Yaping Wang (2005) contends that although there are two kinds of urban poor in China: the one with an urban *hukou* and the one without an urban *hukou* who migrate from rural areas, the latter suffered severe housing crisis and was excluded from any official housing provision. Apart from being culturally marginalized, migrant workers are also marginalized institutionally, and housing is just one of the many institutions that relegate workers to the peripheries of city life. A study by Min Zhou and Guoxuan Cai (2008) of workers residential patterns in the Guangzhou Economic and Technological Development District (GETDD) shows how the public policies of a developmentalist state, in this case, China, are aimed more towards controlling migrant workers rather than ensuring their assimilation into city life. They show that residential segregation of migrant workers (*wendiren*) in the GETDD as against local workers (*bendiren*) who live at a commutable distance from the factories has only aggravated social exclusion and marginality.

The housing policies aimed at urban poor omitted any mention of migrant workers as a constituency deserving housing provision owing to rural *hukou*. This institutionalized exclusion, in the form of *hukou* and housing policies, was manifested spatially when the city peripheries were being dotted by migrant enclaves in urban villages/*chengzhongcun*. The developments in the land and housing market, and the institutional exclusion of migrant workers from housing shaped the formation of migrant enclaves or neighbourhoods. As a result, the rural migrant workers became more firmly attached to the social organization of the neighbourhood.

While being assimilated into the urban way of living through ‘work’ in the city, the migrant workers are at the same time relegated to the peripheries of these urban societies in every aspect- social, cultural and institutional. Housing, thus, merely becomes another method through which the workers are marginalized in the cities. The various contestations that are generated during the dual processes of assimilation and marginalization create survival strategies in the form of what Ananya Roy calls 'subaltern urbanisms', whereby, workers create alternate political spaces to claim their right to the city. Community ties and networks play a significant role at this stage in organizing these alternate spaces that eventually become crucial in defining workers' resistance. The proliferation of the urban villages is revealing of the counter-mechanisms employed by the migrant workers in response to the institutional marginalisation they face in the form of *hukou*. Migrant workers coming to the cities, who are systematically sidelined from access to affordable housing, are forced to fall back on their family and friends from their villages. Chinese familial traditions require that these migrant workers who are already working in the cities take the responsibility of taking care of their family members and fellow villagers who migrate to the cities. In most cases, they end up sharing their rooms that they rent in the urban villages with these new migrants as they are cheap. The need to find cheap housing options while working in the city thus, served to further strengthen these community ties and networks. Thus, urban villages inadvertently became alternate social spaces where migrant workers sought to claim their right to the city and as Du and Li (2010) put it, the urban villages had become more like a shelter or a refuge to the migrant workers.

3.3 Community Ties and Networks: Defying Capital?

Sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies described *Gemeinschaft*/community as a ‘life based on bonds of kinship, geographical bonds and the sentiment of belonging to a group (blood, place and mind) (Macfarlane 1977:631). Mark Granovetter has shown the relevance of social relations to obtain resources, and how strong ties (such as family ties) and weak ties (ties with less interactions) provide a source of material support and new information, respectively. In China, traditional networks such as family and place ties play a crucial role in gaining access to the labour market, labour migration, housing as well as workers’ everyday survival. These ties can be either developed within the workplace or within living

spaces. Workers fall back on these ties for their day-to-day survival in the cities. Personal networks facilitate migration, which in turn reproduces and extends the network. As Charles Tilly (1990) puts it, “they provide a setting for life at a destination, a basis of solidarity and mutual aid as well as division and conflict”. This section will outline the nature of community ties and networks amongst workers in Chinese cities, and delineate its importance to workers' everyday urban experience and identities.

In traditional Chinese society, according to Fei Xiaotong (1985), people were primarily connected in two ways: *xueyuan*, blood bonds and *diyuan*, place bonds. Community ties were a combination of ‘consanguinity’ (*xueyuan*) and ‘regionalism’ (*diyuan*). The mode of association was dependent on these ties, and was characterized by Fei as a ‘differential mode of association’ or *chaxugeju*, where individuals were connected to each other through overlapping networks and were differentially associated to each other. People made sense of their society through these organizational principles. In order to understand the social organization of the neighbourhood, it is important to understand the organizational principles on which the society is based. He concludes that these ties were antithetical to the modern market economy. However, later studies have shown how these ties were drawn upon to develop businesses within and outside China (Honig 1992; Goodman 1995). Bryna Goodman (1995), for instance, shows the role of native-place ties in the formation of sojourning communities in Shanghai and in nationalist movements at the turn of the twentieth century. She concludes that these traditional social networks, rather than hampering a modern market economy, form the very basis upon which rural migrants organize their social and economic lives in the cities.

Workers’ social ties and networks played an important role in finding employment (or re-employment) in cities and contributing to the process of migration. According to Granovetter (1974), social networks provide two kinds of resources while seeking jobs: information and influence. In the Chinese case, scholars such as Yanjie Bian (1997) show how the strength of ties determined the nature of access to the labour market. According to Bian strong ties such as family and relatives provide the influence in getting a job while weak ties such as work colleagues are relied on to attain information regarding employment opportunities. In a study conducted in 2000, Yandong Zhao (2002) elucidates the nature of social ties and networks possessed by the laid-off workers in Wuhan, and the strength or

weakness of each one of them. He shows that the laid-off workers' ties with the family and relatives were the strongest, followed by friends and colleagues. This meant that they fell back on these ties for information or influence (making recommendations) regarding employment opportunities more than they relied on any indirect ties (Table 3.3). However, he also points out although they had higher network densities⁴ as compared to urban citizens, the laid-off workers possessed poor embedded resources⁵ (Table 3.4). In other words, they possessed a lower social capital in comparison to the urban citizens. This explains the reason why workers depended more on informal methods of job search as compared to formal methods (government employment services, advertisements etc.).

Table 3.3: Laid-off Workers' Tie Strength according to Role Relation

Role Relation	Average Score of Tie Strength	Total Number
Family members	86.71	30
Relatives	74.14	83
Schoolmates	66.52	27
Friends	63.49	104
Colleagues	63.29	40
Neighbours	61.72	34
Comrades-in-arms	60.64	5
Fellow provincials or townsfolk	47.67	1
Acquaintances	41.80	21
Teacher/master & Student/apprentice	36.12	1
Indirect ties	14.68	28

Source: Zhao 2002, p.564.

⁴ Zhao (2002) calculates network density by counting the proportion of relatives in the workers' network as they represented the strongest ties that workers had, as network density implied 'the general level of linkages among the network members'.

⁵ Zhao (2002) calculates embedded resources through the method of 'position generator'. Its aim is to 'measure the social capital embedded in personal networks'. Its underlying hypothesis is that 'certain structural positions in a society represent corresponding social resources'.

Table 3.4: Social Capital of Laid-off Workers in Wuhan and Citizens in Four Chinese Cities

Indicators of Social Capital	Laid-off Workers	Urban Citizens
Network Size (person)	20.97	35.30
Network Density (%)	49.44	28.36
Embedded Network Resource Score	24.47	27.90

Source: Zhao 2002, p.563.

Existing scholarship on community ties and social networks have looked at the nature of social ties (Zhang 2001) or have stressed the role it played in the processes of migration (Chan 1994; Li 1996; Davin 1999; Siu 2015) and labour recruitment (Li 1996; Zhao 2002), in determining housing choices (Siu 2015), and also in developing a sense of belonging to the city amongst workers (Du & Li 2010; Wu & He 2005; Wu & Logan 2016). The focus in the literature has been placed on themes such as the making of physical spaces and its impact on workers, ties to their neighbourhood, building of social networks etc. Recent studies have provided some insightful understanding into urban changes at a macro-level, e.g. social and spatial segregation, the division between rural migrants and urban households, changes in land uses etc. To a lesser extent, neighbourhood has been examined as a potential site for contentious politics.

More recently, scholars have started exploring the links between social ties and protest activity. They look at the role social ties play in the process of mobilization for protests. Emphasizing on the inhibiting role that social ties play in protest activities, Yanhua Deng and Kevin O'Brien (2013) show how local officials employed 'relational repression' to demobilize protesters in an environmental protest. He shows how social ties of the protestors were turned against them and were used to apply emotional pressure for withdrawing protests. In this case, social ties played an important role in curtailing protests. On the other hand, Jeffrey Becker in his book, *Social Ties, Resources and Migrant Labour*

Contention in Contemporary China, has provided an elaborate analysis of the role social ties play in labour contention. According to him, social ties, particularly, ‘weak’ ties or workplace ties, have been instrumental in the dissemination of information and thus, enabled protest activity (Becker 2014).

However, these studies fail to look at the embeddedness of these social and community ties within the arena of a neighbourhood, and how this affects protest activities. Social ties, cannot be understood in isolation to space. As Lefebvre explains in his seminal study on the production of space, space is a social product and social relations constitute space, and the social character of space affects the spatial practices and perceptions (Lefebvre 1974). Neighbourhood, as a social space is thus constituted by the myriad social relations embedded within that space that shapes their sense of self and informs workers’ social and political actions.

In a study of the Wenzhou migrant community in Beijing, Li Zhang sheds light on the social organization of the migrant neighbourhood of Zhejiangcun, the nature of social networks prevalent within it and the mutually constitutive relationship (Zhang 2001). Kinship ties and native-place networks played a significant role here in sustaining the migratory flows and the early formation of Wenzhou migrant community in Beijing. These traditional networks provided the organizational framework for the migrants’ social life and private businesses. *Xueyan* (blood bonds) and *diyuan* (place bonds) were relied upon by migrant workers in the cities for mobilizing social resources, organizing merchandise production and trade, and recruiting more workers from their hometown.

Although we get a picture about the wide network of social relationships the migrant community have developed in Beijing city, her work is less about the migrant working class, and more about the entrepreneurial migrant community. The migrant workers fall beyond the purview of her study. The kind of social relationships workers develop when they borrow credit to survive spurts of unemployment, to meet medical expenses, to indulge in consumerist products like mobile phones etc. is an interesting aspect to explore (Chen, Zhou, & Ye 2014). It can provide an insight into the relationships of power that exist among the multiple relations workers enter into for their daily survival, and how these

relationships shape their subjectivities. These social networks function as regimes of power shaping their sense of self and conduct (Zhang 2001).

Social networks were crucial in the sustaining of workers' lives within the cities. Workers found their own ways of transgressing the isolating tendencies that factory production imposed upon them. Based on the letters of workers at the Zhili toy factory in the 1990s and ethnographic fieldwork at Jade Village's Pearl factory in Shenzhen, Kaxton Siu found that writing letters to their friends and relatives during leisure time was an important way through which workers shared their lived experiences. The overarching role of social networks in providing support-material and emotional cannot be emphasized enough in this act of sharing experiences. Not only do social ties and networks play a major role in migration, labour recruitment processes or determining housing choices, it is central to workers' lives in the cities and shaping workers' urban experiences.

Social ties and networks were also relied upon by workers to develop a sense of belongingness in an otherwise alienating city life. The fact that they faced social marginalisation within the city that considered them to be outsiders and uncivilised made the migrant workers more cohesive as a community. As Wu and Logan (2014) point out, “contemporary social changes – including education and homeownership – may actually reduce neighbouring, while rural migrants’ marginality makes them more dependent on their local social network.”

Chat rooms and other electronic devices were instrumental for workers' social interactions in the cities. This was an important factor in providing agency to the workers by allowing them to make choices in the labour recruitment processes, being informed about an abusive employer to new employment prospects etc. (Siu 2015), apart from facilitating the mobilization of workers during protests (Qiu 2009). Internet became widespread in China as urban transformation picked up pace in the 1990s and 2000s. There was a drastic increase in combined tele-density which included fixed lines, Little Smart and mobile phones, and Internet usage in the period between 1978 and 2006. The juxtaposition of the increase in ICTs with the urban transformation that occurs with rising employment in private and tertiary sectors could be explained through an increasing need to remain in

touch with relations back at home as workers began migrating into cities to take up employment. Thus, while workers did become aware of the vicissitudes of the labour market as Qiu (2009) argues, it will be erroneous to imagine that workers were completely unaware of the labour market opportunities before the advent of ICTs. Working class ICTs, thus, created new ways of social interaction and networking. It created new networks, and provided easier access to the existing networks thereby, nurturing and sustaining them.

The fact that these traditional forms of associations that were prevalent among the villagers continue to prevail despite the modernizing and civilizing project of capitalism testifies to the defiance that workers uphold against the alienating tendencies of capitalism. Making critical observations about the alienating tendencies of capital, Marx notes:

A direct consequence of the alienation of man from the product of his labour, from his life activity and from his species-life, is that *man* is *alienated* from other *men*....man is alienated from his species-life means that man is alienated from others, and that each of the others is likewise alienated from human life.

(Marx 1844:17)

Proletarianisation of workers thus entailed that workers became more and more individualised. However, what we observe in China during the Reform period is that not only have community ties and networks prevailed among migrant workers in their journey to the city, but they further strengthened these bonds and continued to wield increasing importance in the lives of migrant workers who were forced to fall back on these ties as a strategy of survival in the cities. Although not entirely similar to Luddism⁶ among the textile workers of 19th century England, which was also a reflection of their resistance to their proletarianisation, the importance of community ties for migrant workers in China attested to the individual resistance or defiance to the process of proletarianisation initiated under the economic reforms.

⁶The Luddite movement began in 1811 in Nottingham by the textile workers. They began breaking down factory machinery in protest against its increasing use which they knew would displace them eventually.

3.4 Workers' Ties and Resistance

In the past few years, China has been witnessing a growing number of labour protests, dotting the industrial landscape from the “rustbelt” to the “sunbelt”. Even while this study is being carried out, the strike map of China Labour Bulletin (CLB) recorded 967 mass incidents involving issues like lay-offs, wage arrears, lack of compensation etc. in the last six months. More number of workers are taking to the streets for protests and as many of them are resorting to legal mechanisms to address their grievances. The nature of working class protests in China has been spontaneous and sporadic as well as organised at the same time unfolding the inherent dynamics of protest repertoire, which ranges from everyday passive resistance by individual workers to mass sit-ins, shutdowns etc. Nevertheless, as the reasons precipitating these protests suggest, it is a response to the changes effected by the reform regime in its drive towards “socialist modernization” in the last three decades. Issues like lay-offs, wage arrears, overtime and lack of compensation, characteristic of the new industrial labour regime, reflect an escalating labour-capital conflict, a departure from the socialist days when the interests of capital were in concordance with the interests of workers. It is important to discover the roots of present struggle in those of the past in order to understand the teleology of workers' power. The closure of the factories and the retrenchment of the workers created a sense of loss amongst workers.

The increasing diversification of labour relations due to the rapid growth of the private sector (Table 3.5) and the deepening of economic reforms with the beginning of its second phase meant more and more workers were beyond the direct control of the state and were coming under market influences, which posed a challenge to the state as was obvious in the increasing number of labour disputes reaching the labour arbitration tribunals, wildcat strikes, stoppages and some mass worker protests (Potter and Li 1996)⁷ and the lack of institutional capacity to address labour problems in the non- state sector (Leung 2007).

⁷ Pitman. B. Potter provides the figure of 60,000 cases of labour disputes in the period between 1986 and 1994.

Table 3.5: Growth of Private Firms, 1989-1994

Indicator/Year	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Number (1000)	91	98	108	140	238	432
Growth (%)		8.4	9.9	29.5	70.4	81.7
Owners (1000)	210	224	241	303	514	889
Growth (%)		6.7	7.6	25.7	69.6	73
Workforce (1000)	1426	1478	1598	2015	3213	5594
Growth (%)		3.7	8.1	26.1	59.5	74

Source: Yingqiu Liu (2002), p.3.

Given the legacy of working class movement in China, and their knowledge of the strength of the movement and the changes they were capable of affecting, enacting a labour law seemed imminent for the government. These conflicting imperatives of protecting workers rights as well as ensuring continued reform were important in deciding how the 1994 Labor Law took shape. The antithetical goals of capital growth and workers' interests presented the government with the challenge of accommodating diverse interests and this became evident in the text of the law. The second phase of economic reforms saw a uniform implementation of the labour contract system, through its incorporation in the 1994 Labor Law—which apart from codifying its use, expanded its implementation across all enterprises— while at the same time providing protection to foreign capital in China.

The response to an increasing exploitation came in the form of backlash from the community of workers with increase in the number of mass incidents, wildcat strikes, slowdowns etc. that threatened to disturb the social fabric of the Chinese state. The Ministry of Public Security estimated that there were 87,000 public protests in 2005, a six percent rise over the previous year. Although the Ministry reported a steep drop in disturbances during 2006, the *South China Morning Post*, a Hong Kong newspaper,

reported that the Chinese government began stopping the national media from covering protests and strikes, and many experts question whether the unrest has actually lessened (Rogal 2007). Caught under this crossfire of social instability and continued economic reform, the Hu- Wen regime witnessed a snowballing of social laws, particularly a slew of labour laws, like the Labor Contract Law (LCL), the Law on Mediation and Arbitration of Labor Disputes and the Employment Promotion Law, of which the LCL passed on January 1, 2008- aimed at addressing problems such as the low rate of use of labour contracts, the short-term nature of most labour contracts, the lack of protection of workers etc.- is of particular significance to the discussion here.

In addition to using legal and administrative avenues for redressal, workers across the country continued to stage protests, particularly in response to factory closures and non-payment of wages. From January to September 2008, protests over wages in arrears accounted for nearly half of all mass incidents handled by the Guangdong Public Security Bureau. In Dongguan, mass incidents of this type in which workers blocked main roads accounted for 40.5 percent of the total; group petitions accounted for a further 22 percent and strikes 8.1 percent (China Labour Bulletin 2009).

Twelve of the disputes discussed in the report by CLB were directly related to economic difficulties faced by the enterprise concerned, and were triggered by factory closures and/or the boss skipping town. A study conducted by McDermott et.al at Dalian in 2007 provides the multiple reasons for which workers approached the Labour Arbitration Councils (LACs). As the table below (Table 3.6) shows, most of the workplace- related disputes in the state-owned enterprises arose from the failure to pay wages on time. This was followed by disputes related to lack of compensation for workplace injuries, and disputes related to labour contracts. The latter involved disputes arising out of lawful or unlawful layoffs, default on severance packages at layoff etc.

Table 3.6: Reasons for Disputes in the State Undertakings

	Number	Percent
Disputes relating to workplace injury	12	18.5
Workplace injury	12	18.5
Occupational disease	1	1.5
Death on business	0	0.0
Death not on business	2	3.1
Disputes relating to Labour Contract	23	35.4
Unlawful layoff	7	10.8
Lawful layoff	6	9.2
Layoff without prior advice to employee	1	1.5
Failure to pay default compensation according to contract term	5	7.7
Default to pay severance at layoff	5	7.7
Wage Disputes	22	33.8
Failure to pay within established time limit	19	29.2
Insufficient wage payments according to contract	4	6.2
Failure to pay overtime pay	1	1.5
Unlawful salary deduction	0	0.0
Failure to pay employee benefits	0	0.0

Source: McDermott (2010), p.23.

On 9 November 2007, several hundred workers at Nicewell Ceramics' Guangzhou plant blocked roads near local government buildings to protest wage arrears of more than two million yuan. Two days earlier, the Chairman of the Taiwan-based parent company had informed the city government that he had been forced by "gangsters" to flee the idled plant (China Labour Bulletin 2009). In another 14 cases, worker protests were triggered by managements' attempts to survive the economic downturn by violating workers' rights and interests. Typical tactics included cutting wages or firing workers and hiring new ones at

lower rates, paying no (or less than the legally mandated) compensation for contract termination, or forcing employees to resign. On 4 January 2007, workers at the notorious Italian-owned DeCoro furniture factory in Shenzhen staged several protests after the company announced relocation plans. Management only allowed employees to stay on if they accepted a 20 percent pay cut. The plant had witnessed numerous protests in the past, such as in November 2005, when some 3,000 employees struck in protest at the beating of workers' representatives who asked the Italian managers for an audit of wages (China Labour Bulletin 2009).

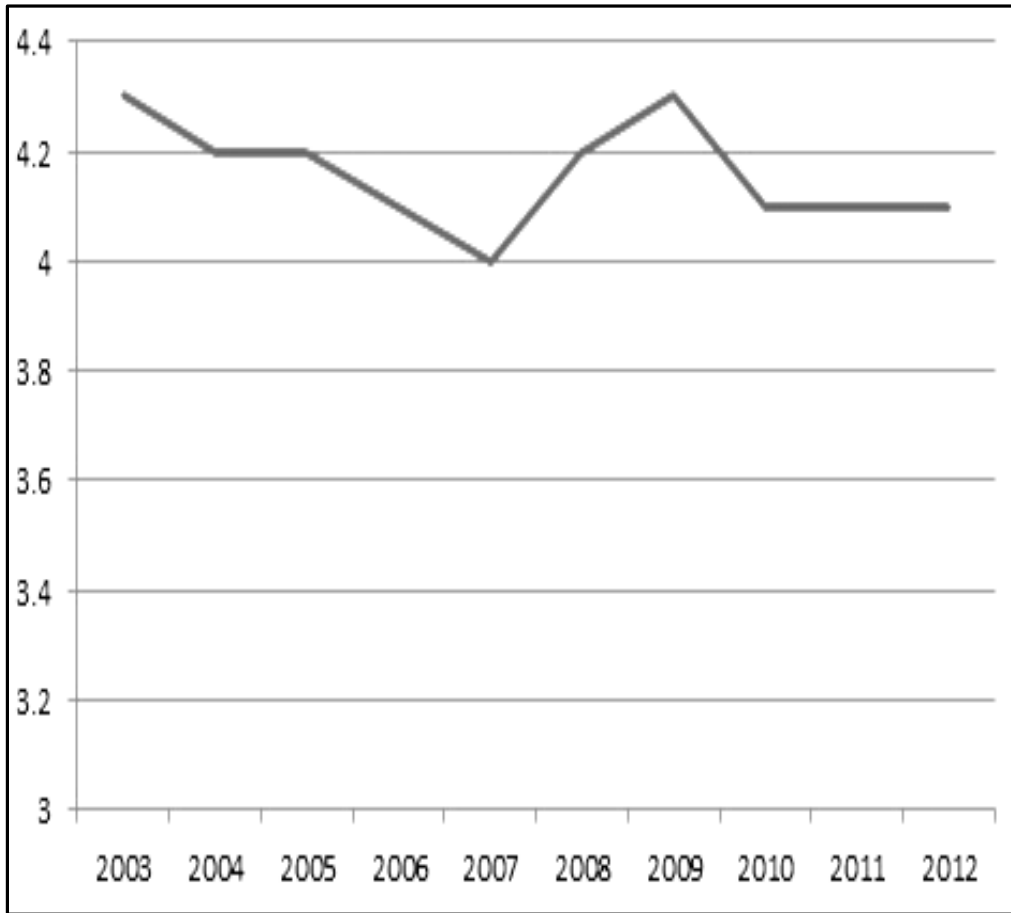
Establishing a new social protection system- in order to replace the system of *danwei*, diluted during the period of economic reforms- had become imperative for the Chinese state in the wake of an alarming rise in the number of labour disputes (Table 3.7). The rate of unemployment had also not been showing any significant change and remained a cause of concern for the state (Figure 3.1).

Table 3.7: National Total of Arbitrated Labour Disputes, 1994-2007

Year	Arbitrated Labour Dispute (cases)	Arbitrated Collective Dispute (cases)	Employees Involved
1994	19,098	1,482	77,794
1995	33,030	2,588	122,512
1996	47,951	3,150	189,120
1997	71,524	4,109	221,115
1998	93,649	6,767	358,531
1999	120,191	9,043	473,957
2000	135,206	8,247	422,617
2001	154,621	9,847	467,150
2002	184,116	11,024	608,396
2003	226,391	10,823	801,042
2005	314,000	19,000	740,000
2006	447,000	14,000	680,000
2007	500,000	13,000	650,000

Source: Friedman and Lee (2010), p.517.

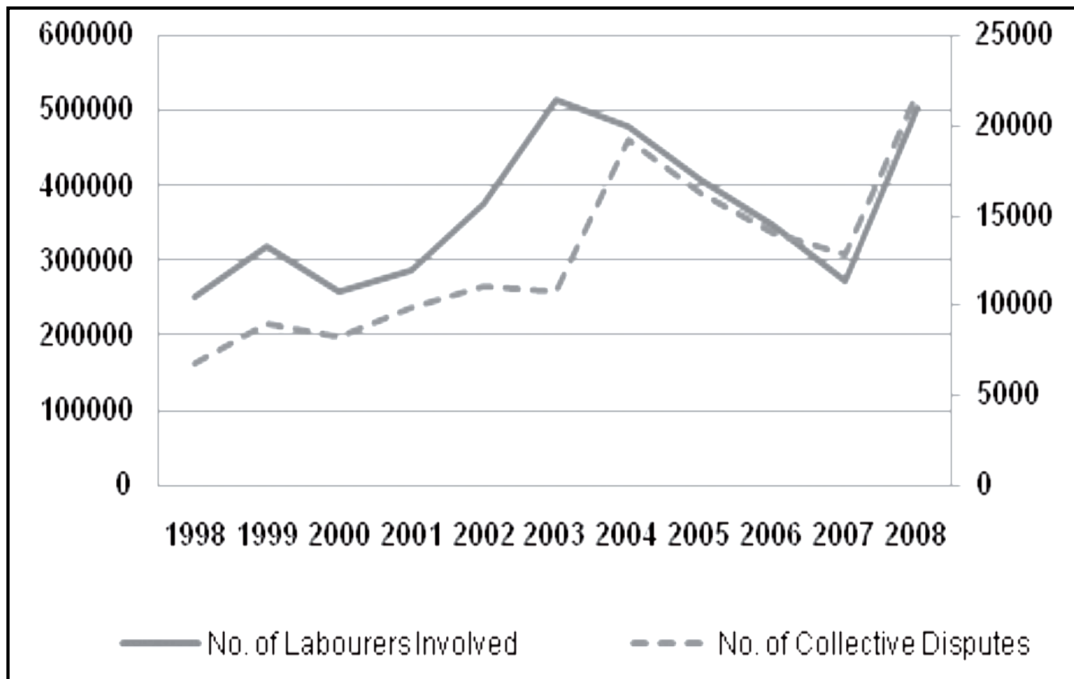
Figure 3.1: China's Official Unemployment Rate, 2003-2012



Source: Ping (2011), p.21.

According to official estimates, collective labour disputes surged from around 5000 to 21,880 in 2008 (Ping 2010: 23) (Figure 3.2). A study of 100 labour disputes sourced from online media, conducted by China Labour Bulletin in 2009, concluded that 58 of these cases involved migrant workers, 34 included ones with an urban *hukou* and urban resident workers were involved in only 8 cases (China Labour Bulletin 2009).

Figure 3.2: Trends in Collective Labour Disputes, 1998- 2008



Source: Ping (2010), p.25.

Amidst this, the issue of informal workers was becoming an Achilles' heel for the government, with worker protests becoming commonplace in the working class neighbourhoods. According to Lu Zhang, informalisation induces both resistance and fragmentation among workers. Invoking Karl Polanyi's double-movement thesis, she states that the current deregulation of the labour market in China is provoking a corresponding "counter movement" (Zhang 2012: 133). With the rise in the number of mass incidents involving labour, especially temporary and agency workers, the government was faced with the exigency of passing the Labor Contract Law in 2008, aiming to provide a legal channel to the workers to vent their anger.

The protests during this period of transition, according to Ching Kwan Lee, particularly by the workers in the rustbelt, can be categorized into nonpayment protests, bankruptcy protests and neighbourhood protests (Lee 2007). The bankruptcy protests became frequent as large numbers of workers were laid-off when companies increasingly filed for bankruptcy under the policy of 'grasping the big and letting go of the small' from 1997 (Table 3.8). Many small and medium enterprises suspended production in the face of

competition from rural industry and private and foreign enterprises. The nonpayment protests included protests over unpaid wages and pension arrears. According to official statistics, the number of enterprises and workers involved in pension arrears have soared (Table 3.9). Since many cash-strapped enterprises found it difficult to contribute to the social pooling system of labour insurance, where apart from the employee contribution, the employers had to contribute a sizeable sum to the pension fund, widespread protests erupted over pension arrears by retired workers. The neighbourhood protests involved claims over public services and urban resources. Since working class neighbourhoods in China were work-unit-based, the work units were responsible for provision and maintenance of public services. Problems erupted when enterprises defaulted on subsidies for services to the respective government offices. Lee cites the example of Liaoning to argue how winter heating became a contentious social issue in the late 1990s.

Table 3.8: Bankruptcy Cases Accepted by Courts, 1990-2003

Year	Number of cases accepted	Year	Number of cases accepted
1990	32	1997	5,697
1991	117	1998	7,746
1992	428	1999	5,622
1993	710	2000	7,219
1994	1,625	2001	9,110
1995	2,348	2002	8,615
1996	6,227	2003	7,673

Source: Lee (2007), p.50.

Table 3.9: Pension Arrears, 1996-2000

	Number of units on arrears	Number of workers with pension arrears
1996	692,272	1,040,448
1997	1,122,486	1,268,098
1998	Data unavailable	
1999	29,919	3,647,004
2000	43,617	3,881,006

Source: Lee (2007), p.49.

Borrowing ideas from theories on protest by Tarrow and Tilly, scholars like Xuegang (1993), Hurst (2004) and Becker (2017) argue that the ‘structure of political opportunities’ plays an important role in shaping the choices of actors taking part in protests. According to Zhou Xuegang, a unified structure of state socialism in post-1989 China created uniformity in workers’ responses to grievances. The diversity of the regional economies, according to Hurst, also created variations in workers’ approach to protest. Becker argues that protest opportunities for migrant workers occurred in three stages: the creation of migrant labour as a separate class in 1980s, the emergence of a labour protection regime in the mid-1990s, and the integration of migrant labour into that regime, coupled with the creation of migrant specific protections, beginning in 2003-2004 (Becker, 2014). The economic assumption theories behind working class protests were questioned by E.P.Thompson. According to him, cultural traditions were important to understand crowd behaviour. Social ties, particularly, ethnic and village ties, played an important role in the process of working class formation.

Compounding these factors was the fact that China did not have autonomous trade unions unlike other countries. The labour contract system that replaced the ‘iron rice-bowl system’ which ensured lifelong employment for workers was first approved by the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) as early as 1979. In 1994, the Labor Law formally instituted a tripartite framework for labour relations that included the trade unions,

employers and the government. Article 33 allowed for trade unions to sign collective contracts with the employers on behalf of the workers:

The employees of an enterprise as one party may conclude a collective contract with the enterprise as another party on labor remunerations, work hours, rests and leaves, labor safety and sanitation, insurance, welfare treatment, and other matters.

Nevertheless, the Law remained silent on the independence of the legally sanctioned trade union system in China, the ACFTU which lacked organizational independence and being a part of the Party- state machinery, is more accountable to the Communist Party of China (CPC). A Leninist transmission- belt character of the trade unions also made sure that the workers' interests were sidelined, and the Party-state had more control over the trade unions. Party cadres have been dominating the ranks in ACFTU since 1945 and this continued even after 1978 when, according to a 1990 estimate, they constituted 80 percent of the leadership positions within the trade unions in state enterprises; similarly for foreign enterprises, all the trade union leaders were Party Directors of its Personnel Department (Potter and Li 1996: 774). The CPC-led trade unions acted as the 'putative' representative of workers' rights, playing the role of a facilitator of government's labour policies in order to pave the way for a smooth legislating process. They functioned as transmission belts communicating Party's policies to the workers as a mechanism adopted by the state for seeking policy legitimacy regarding labor issues. This intervened in their ability to organize and take aggressive action against unjust management policies and practices.

Based on the interviews with migrant workers in 2007, particularly those in the Pearl River Delta region and the Yangtze River Delta region, Becker (2014) points out the distrust towards trade unions among migrant workers. This was reflected in the poor membership and dismal participation in union activities by the workers (Table 3.10).

Table 3.10: Migrant Worker Union Participation

	Union presence at the workplace	Union membership	Participation in union activities
Yes	28 (11%)	16 (6%)	16 (6%)
No	238 (89%)	249 (94%)	251 (94%)
Total	266	265	267

Source: Becker 2014, p.79.

Thus, the limitations on the formal organizational capacity of the workers posed by the role of the state pave way for alternate modes of organization and mobilization. Workers, thus rely on immediate social resources in the form of social ties and networks for mobilization and organization during collective actions.

The significance of local, community and native ties have been emphasized by scholars such as Emily Honig (1986), Gail Hershatter (1986) and Elizabeth Perry (1993) who argue that *tongxiang* or native-place ties were central to labour politics in China. Their works show how in the early twentieth century, social identities were generated and social actions determined through the formation of *tongxiang* enclaves. Not entirely monolithic entities, these associations were fragmentary in nature and especially divided based on native-place origins. Although Honig and Hershatter attributed the failure of a successful revolutionary labour movement until the 1940s to these intra-worker differences, Perry differs in her approach by arguing that ‘the solidarities forged by the politics of place facilitated militance, though not necessarily in a class-conscious fashion’ (Perry 1993).

Locating the source of working class differentiation in the politics of place and production, Perry’s work on the labour politics in Shanghai in the early 20th century studied the implications these divisions held for political mobilization. The local guilds of the artisans as well as the gang associations played an important role in organizing strikes in the late 19th and early 20th century in Shanghai. Skilled and unskilled workers, the factory foremen/forewomen, the labour contractors etc. were tightly knitted into the native-place networks around which the guilds and the gang associations were formed. While the skilled

workers or artisans from the South formed guilds, the unskilled workers from the North were drawn to gang associations such as the Green Gang or the Red Gang. The strong community ties that made up these associations were crucial in building solidarities during protests. For instance, in November 1914, the carpenters and the cement masons supported the painters of Shanghai in a united strike for higher wages. This cross-trade solidarity was noticeable for its composition of strikers from Shanghai, Ningbo and Shaoxing areas. Moreover, the guilds also played an important role in the negotiation process. Similarly, in July 1919, a forewoman from Hubei who was sentenced to prison for fomenting protest in a cotton mill was defended by a lawyer hired by the Hubei Native-Place association.

Pun Ngai (2005) extends this thesis to the 21st century to show how women in workplaces continue to be encircled by *tongxiang* and kin relationships which provide them support in the city. Apart from the role that these networks played in migration, labour recruitment, housing, she argues that these ties were utilized by the management at the shop floor for improving production efficiency and profit maximization, and to increase the control over workers.

In his doctoral thesis, “The Challenge of Labour in China: Strikes and the Changing Labour Regime in Global Factories” (2008), Chris King-Chi Chan puts forward the idea of a ‘contested despotism’ where the ‘emerging labour regime’ in the factories is characterized by a strengthened working class consciousness, especially amongst the skilled migrant workers, who rely on informal networks as an organizing base for workers’ protest. The rapid expansion of global capitalism, according to him, has intensified class struggle at the workplace and beyond, making their protests a major challenge to the state authorities and global capitalists. The significance of local, community and gang-based networks amongst the Chinese workers in articulating their discontent into a common demand riding on a ‘culture of solidarity’ is highlighted for its role in working class formation.

Chan and Ngai (2009) argue that majority of the protests and resistances in China involved conflict between the management and the workers at the point of production, which was concurrently engendered with labour organizing in dormitories and communities. The type of living space or workers’ accommodation like the workers’ dormitories, hostels and

migrant communities facilitated collective actions and strikes, that were organized not only on the basis of locality, ethnicity, gender and peer alliance in a single workplace, but were also based on the attempts to enhance the unity of workers as a strong workforce that went beyond exclusive networks and ties, and thus sometimes even involved cross-factory strike tactics. Such strikes and resistances were mostly based on workers' interests, coupled with a strong anti- foreign capital sentiment and a discourse of workers' rights. They observe that the making of a new working class is increasingly conscious of and participating in interest-based or class-oriented labour protests.

With the growth of Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) in the 1980s and 1990s, the SOEs faced competition from rural industries as well as foreign enterprises. Many loss-making SOEs had to suspend production. Bankruptcy protests intensified in the 1990s, particularly after 1997, when the policy of 'grasping the big and letting go off the small' was formally implemented by the central government. A case of an unprofitable roller chain factory mentioned by Yongshun Cai (2002) is noteworthy for the role played by both ICT and neighbourhood space in facilitating the mobilization of workers for protests. When the restructuring of the enterprises deepened during the 1990s, many enterprises that were registering losses shut down their factories and filed for bankruptcy. The roller chain factory was one of them, and it stopped production in 1993. Although it paid 70 percent of workers' salaries initially, workers eventually stopped receiving any payments. Workers, initially, carried out individual or small- scale collective actions, because the scattered housing of workers made it difficult to mobilize them for protests⁸. However, when workers decided to step-up their efforts by going for a concerted action against the factory, peasant-workers and those workers who owned telephones were the ones who coordinated the mass-scale labour protest asking for government intervention. Unlike other workers who were scattered because of the housing provision, peasant-workers lived more closely to each other. Thus, it was easier for them to organize protests with their fellow workers. Similarly, telephones also enabled some workers to share information and mobilize

⁸Not all workers were provided housing by the rolling chain factory that was making losses because of poor product sale. While some did get assigned housing by the industrial bureau, most of them either took up private rentals or lived with family members who already had work-unit housing. A few others such as the peasant-turned-workers who were recruited when the factory had expanded into the nearby villages continued to live in the same villages or other nearby villages.

workers for the protest.

Ching Kwan Lee (2007) gives another account of a bankruptcy protest in 2002 by the workers at Liaotie, also known as the Liaoyang Ferro-Alloy factory. Beginning in 1996, production in the factory had been suspended periodically due to poor fortunes. This had an impact on the wages, pensions and benefits of different sections of workers- the factory had not paid them since 1998. The factory owed sixteen months wages to its currently employed workers, pensions to the retired workers and benefits to the laid-off workers, when they finally decided to organize protests. More than one thousand workers participated in the protest in May 2000, demanding payment of wages and pension. Instead of addressing their issues, the workers faced crackdown by the police, and the Labor Bureau also refused to help citing political pressure, while the enterprise trade union reprimanded them for taking out protests. Given the constraints and limitations faced by workers in fighting for their interests, and an adverse trade union curbing their organizational capacity, the only option they held was to mobilize workers based on their social ties and networks within and beyond the workplace. In the face of declaration of bankruptcy in late 2001, the workers escalated the movement by engaging in cross-factory mobilization tactics. Workers across Liaoyang were urged to join the protests that happened in March 2002 when a thirty-thousand strong demonstration took place in front of the city government building.

The Liaotie workers adopted multiple methods of mobilization, all of which involved social ties and the neighbourhood playing an important role. They held meetings within the working class neighbourhoods. A worker describes how they met at the elderly activities room within the neighbourhood during the struggle in order to discuss the course of the movement and to organize the protests. They also communicated among each other through open letters and posters posted on the walls of the neighbourhood buildings and factories. Familial and friendship ties were invoked particularly for the inter-factory mobilization during the movement. One Liaotie worker describes,

Workers in this factory have relatives and spouses in other factories, spreading the news and solidarity across firms. . . . We did not mobilize other factories, but we used open letters as a way of encouraging more Liaoyang

people to join us. We posted flyers announcing the date and time of gatherings and petitions only in our own residential neighborhoods. But anyone who wants to find out can come and see these flyers.

- Workers' interview, Ching Kwan Lee (2007), *Against the Law*, p. 106.

In her interview with the Liaotie workers, one worker succinctly described the Spring Festival celebration of 2002 in the working class neighbourhood of Liaotie,

It all began during the Chinese New Year (in February that year). It was a particularly bad year for many. In my neighborhood, a couple who worked in our factory had only 182 yuan to spend for the Spring Festival. They had a kid and two elderly parents. How could you have a New Year with that little money? They could not even afford cooking oil and were not given any heating allowance. In the same residential area, we saw our cadres living in big apartments and coming home from their shopping sprees with nicely wrapped gifts. They were celebrating bankruptcy! Some elderly workers were particularly upset and they sang the "Internationale" during the New Year. I heard that song several times. The lyrics made such good sense these days—Arise, ye starving slaves! Arise, ye oppressed people of the world!

- Workers' interview, Ching Kwan Lee (2007), *Against the Law*, p. 106.

Festivals were an important occasion of celebration for the entire working class neighbourhood. Since workers and the officials/cadres lived in the same neighbourhood, to see them splurge while they starved during the New Year induced a sense of injustice and unfairness in them. A letter by one worker captured this sense of injustice quite well,

Corrupt officials are rising and dancing, while bankrupt workers wipe their tears and hide their faces. People with conscience can only sigh and gaze into heaven. . . . Our heads are lowered and our hearts are broken. Salute to the four comrades [the four arrested labor leaders]!

- Worker's open letter, Ching Kwan Lee (2007), *Against the Law*, p. 110.

The space of the neighbourhood was crucial in invoking a sense of solidarity among workers who shared the same experiences as against the corrupt officials. The division of interests and experiences were stark enough to create class solidarities amongst workers. Thus, apart from helping in the dissemination of information and strategy with relative ease, the neighbourhood also enabled in shaping workers' class identities.

During the course of the protest, the relevance of social ties became more distinct when the workers had to ensure their daily survival with no wages and pensions. They relied on their families and friends during times such as these for survival. The example of one worker representative is the case at hand. After being unemployed for two years since Liaotie declared bankruptcy, he ate and slept at his parents' apartment and was dependent on his father's pension to pay for his son's education while his wife worked as a waitress in a nearby restaurant. This shows that the social ties were also crucial to ensure that the movement sustained. While the worker representative fought for the rights of the Liaotie workers, he could survive on his parents' work benefits that were a legacy of the socialist period.

Apart from workplace related issues, workers also faced problems with their housing needs. While enterprises faced protests over nonpayment of wages and bankruptcy, there were parallel protests arising out of issues within the neighbourhood. As enterprises filed for bankruptcy, they defaulted on their payment of enterprise subsidies to the respective government offices. Working class neighbourhoods were replete with issues related to maintenance, utilities and provision of public services. A more recurrent issue in this regard was the issue of heating supply during winters. Because workers' housing did not have individual household meters fitted, when factories defaulted on paying heating subsidies to the utilities company, and workers could not afford the payment, the entire heating supply was cut off until everyone paid. This spurred protests by workers against heating companies, who then insisted the factories to make the payment. Lee (2007) provides an example of one such case of neighbourhood protest in Tiexi, the largest and the oldest working-class district in Shenyang. An account related by a factory worker in Tiexi provides us a glimpse into how workers organized and mobilized for such protests,

In late October (2002), the heating company began posting flyers in our neighborhood's notice board, announcing that our factory owed them 4.8 million yuan of heating fees and another 4 million yuan of maintenance fees. Each household had to pay 1,200 yuan, otherwise it would stop providing heat this winter. No one wanted to pay and many who were owed wages were unable to pay. When some of us ran into one another in the courtyard and started grumbling about our freezing apartments, we decided to ask people to gather the next day at 8 am to go to the utility company. So, fifty to one hundred workers would come each time. It's a fifteen-minute walk,

and marching on the streets created a scene Police would come, and once we told them it's about a heating problem, they would leave us alone. The utility company saw us and called our director to come immediately. He promised the company would pay the debt and asked them to resume heating. It's the enterprise's responsibility. By gathering in public, we exerted pressure on city officials. Who among the leadership is not concerned about social stability these days? They cannot afford to ignore problems of heating because those old pipes would crack and burst if they stop heating completely. That's why there is always a trickle of heat in our apartments, not enough to keep people warm, but so the pipes would not explode.

- Workers' interview, Ching Kwan Lee (2007), *Against the Law*, p. 88.

In another case of neighbourhood protest involving protests over lack of maintenance of water pipes and supply in Tiexi, one woman worker narrates how workers were mobilized on the spot for a road blockade,

Pipes inside the apartment building used to be maintained by the work unit. In theory, it should now be the responsibility of the Housing and Property Bureau, as the work unit no longer manages workers' housing Pipes outside the building should be maintained by the Water Work Company. The problem is that neither of these departments nor the district government want to take responsibility, and the enterprise has collapsed. We have had flooding of white [clean] water and black [dirty] water. . . . We are the masses, the residents; what should we do? We can only complain to the Street Committee (*jiedao*) and the secretary is desperate. One day, he took a loudspeaker and addressed the residents, saying, "For the sake of our neighborhood environment and sanitation, residents please come to block the road." Several hundred people responded, and ten minutes later, we occupied four major intersections of the road from Shenyang to Liaozhong. . . . Public security arrived first on the scene, and then all the leaders of the enterprises came. Within two months, all the pipes in the neighborhood were replaced.

- Workers' interview, Ching Kwan Lee (2007), *Against the Law*, p. 89.

The above protests demonstrate that not just did the workers utilize the spaces available within their neighbourhood for mobilisation, they were able to share their grievances regarding heating trouble, thereby developing a sense of shared experiences through such acts. The courtyard spaces within their residential area provided the backdrop for this, as these were the spaces where workers ran into each other on a frequent basis. At the same time, the fact that workers lived in close proximity to each other made sure that techniques

of mobilization such as loudspeakers could be used to make announcements and gather workers for an immediate mobilization.

The protests by rolling chain factory workers, the Liaotie workers and those in Tiexi are relevant to the discussion on social ties and protest mobilization on multiple accounts. One, it shows the importance of physical spaces, in this case, the working class neighbourhood, for the organization and mobilization of workers during collective action. Two, it shows how class identities were configured within working class neighbourhoods. Three, it provides snippets of how workers' social ties were crucial for their survival during the course of the protests.

Workers, according to Lee (2007), 'made use of their everyday social organization, the work-unit residence' for protests. As she articulates, 'state work units provide the physical sites of communication and coordination, organize workers' interests, and define the boundary of the aggrieved community'. Citing instances of protests amongst the oil workers, she argues that the fact that the government transferred workers between oil fields and workers, as a result, had personal networks and familial ties across the oil industry, contributed to the spread of protests within this industry. She gives examples of the Daqing oil field protests against unfair severance packages that lasted for more than two months, the oil workers' protests in Lanzhou, Gansu, and in Hebei and Shandong to show that horizontal coordination amongst workers helped spread and sustain these protests.

3.5 Summary

With the economic reforms, the meaning of work has transformed, especially for the young rural migrant workers. Work, no more meant a sense of power, pride or dignity. Instead, it was replaced by feelings of alienation, despair and hopelessness. In a context where working classes were being more fractured over ethnic lines, and were increasingly pushed into the margins of the cities, into the ranks of unorganized, informal labour, exploring new conceptions of class and class politics became necessary for the renewal of labour history. As a result, the larger literature on community consciousness and class consciousness became interlinked. Social ties provide the structural framework for understanding social action, and the neighbourhood and dormitories formed an organic node to this.

This chapter identified a link between workers and the spaces they inhabit which in turn reshaped the landscapes of the city. It led to the creation of new informal spatial arrangements such as *chengzhongcun*. Social ties and networks played an important role in this process by shaping class subjectivities among the Chinese workers during the 1990s and the 2000s. While the institutional limitation set by *hukou*, labour contract system etc. ensured that the workers were peripheral to the top-down project of the conception of urban spaces in China, through the making of proletarian niches such as the migrant enclaves within the cities, workers created a parallel subaltern urbanism within China. Social ties were central to this process of place-making through which workers asserted their agency in the production of the city-space.

CHAPTER FOUR

NEGOTIATING THE STATE: WORKERS' LEISURE CULTURE

4.1 Introduction

French leisure theorist Joffre Dumazedier defines leisure as,

“activity - apart from the obligations of work, family, and society - to which the individual turns at will, for either relaxation, diversion, or broadening his knowledge and his spontaneous social participation, the free exercise of his creative capacity.”

(Dumazedier 1974:133)

Considered dichotomous to work, leisure is generally construed to be time free at one's disposal, where the individual has the freedom to engage in any non-work activity. Leisure is not entirely non-political as most assumptions of leisure presume. Neither are leisure relations, according to him, relations of freedom. They are, instead, relations of control and resistance (Rojek 1985). Therefore, they bear the potential of penetrating state hegemony. As Chris Rojek puts it,

“The common-sense notion that leisure is primarily about play and relaxation, or that it can be compartmentalized or segregated from the rest of life, is therefore replaced with the more radical proposition that leisure is always and already, political.”

(Rojek 2005:24)

Traditionally, in China, the concept of leisure or *xiu xian*, has been influenced by the ancient Confucian and Taoist traditions. The harmony between man and nature, a fundamental concept of Taoist tradition, is central to the Chinese leisure practices such as *tai chi*, mountain hiking, walking in the parks etc. The Confucian philosophy, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of a relatively free and leisurely mind, which characterizes a state of being only when a country is well-governed (Huimei Liu et al, 2008).

This chapter employs the above two definitions of leisure to demonstrate that workers' leisure cannot be displaced from the political in the Chinese context. In order to understand

the relevance of leisure in shaping consciousness, it adopts E.P. Thompson's cultural and experiential analysis of class consciousness. In his seminal study of the emergence of class consciousness within the English working class in the 1830s, Thompson shows how the cultural traditions amongst the workers along with their experience of exploitation at the workplace were transformed via political agitations into class consciousness. According to Thompson, cultural factors influence the way in which people make sense of their conditions and respond. 'Class experience', in his opinion, includes 'workers' subjective responses to exploitation in not only movements of struggle, but also in families, communities, and leisure-time activities'.

While the previous chapter examined how community ties were crucial in shaping workers action, this chapter approaches leisure spaces as spaces where the strengthening of these community and social ties was taking place. It analyses the nature of workers' leisure in the aftermath of economic reforms to show how workers transcended the limits drawn by the state to create their own niches of transgression. This, the chapter argues, was crucial in shaping and building their class identities. The first section provides a background to workers' leisure culture under the *danwei* system during the Mao period and discusses the depoliticisation of workers' leisure culture after 1978, with increasing marketisation and commercialisation, and how it was crucial in remoulding workers' identity and consciousness. It also examines the role of the state in recasting workers through an intervention in the private realm. The second section delineates the new spaces of leisure, and how these spaces are crucial for workers' everyday existence. The leisure activities formed a significant part of workers' experience and shaped their perception of themselves as the exploited section. This, the chapter argues, is crucial in building solidarity during moments of resistance.

In his seminal study of the emergence of class consciousness within the English working class in the 1830s, E.P. Thompson shows how the cultural traditions among the workers along with their experience of exploitation at the workplace were transformed via political agitations into class consciousness. According to Thompson (1963), cultural factors influenced the way in which people made sense of their conditions and responded. Productive relations determine class experiences and it, in turn, gives rise to class

consciousness. ‘Class experience’, Thompson argues, includes “workers’ subjective responses to exploitation in not only movements of struggle, but also in families, communities, and leisure-time activities” and “class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas, and institutional forms” (Thompson 1963:10). This analysis is crucial to the present study on workers’ resistance in China and the role of leisure.

4.2 Creating a ‘Socialist New Man’: Workers’ Leisure under Socialism

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, most of the institutions in China were inspired and modelled along the Soviet-style. The workers’ cultural palaces were no exception. Serving the purpose of a site for recreational and cultural activities for industrial workers, workers’ cultural palaces along with workers’ clubs (which served workers of a single enterprise) constituted a unique socialist working-class cultural institution. It housed cinema halls, concert halls, libraries etc. where workers and their families could spend their leisure time. They functioned as establishments that organized leisure and cultural activities for workers, and a few scholars have argued, indoctrinated them with socialist ideology.

The aim of the Communist state was to instil socialism among the masses and create a new subject, workers as ‘masters’ of the socialist state. Workers’ leisure before 1978 was thus highly politicised and directly regulated by the state through Workers’ Clubs and Workers’ Cultural Palaces (*gongren wenhua gong*)⁹, which were affiliated to the provincial trade unions, subordinate to the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). They held several activities ranging from sports, theatre, art, literary training, but most importantly, political mobilisation and trade union education for workers (Xing 2011: 91-92). Workers were trained in socialist ideology and these institutions soon became sites of mobilisation for Mao’s mass campaigns. Defining the role of Workers’ Clubs in Soviet Russia, Hatch (1994) remarks that these cultural institutions were “schools of communism” and

⁹ Workers’ Cultural Palaces in China were inspired and modelled along the Stalinist cultural institution for workers known as *dvorets kultury*, which was directly translated into *wenhua gong* by the Chinese.

“organizers of the proletarian community” and were used as a “tool of cultural policy” by the Party.

The spatial politics surrounding places of leisure could be traced back to the 1920s when the Communist movement began in China. Workers’ schools and clubs, such as the Changxindian or the Anyuan Workers’ Clubs, were established by Communist leaders with an attempt to raise political consciousness amongst workers, and a larger aim of organizing and mobilizing workers for political struggles. These clubs normally comprised of a classroom, a library and a recreation centre. However, as Deng Zhongxie, a Communist leader with the Beijing Communist Group argued in 1925, the ultimate objective of workers’ clubs was to organize workers for struggling with capitalists, developing their class-consciousness by education, and training them with management capabilities for governing a workers’ state in the future, instead of providing a home to workers for entertainment, mutual aid and literary school. He asked, “Before capitalists are toppled down, how can workers have fun?”

The first cultural palace was set up in 1950 in Beijing named The Working People Cultural Palace as a ‘school and amusement park’ for workers in Beijing. It was built all across China numbering approximately 26,000 according to an All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) survey conducted in 2006, and almost all of these were built before 1978. All the workers’ clubs and workers’ cultural palaces were affiliated to the provincial trade unions and were subordinate to the ACFTU. They were funded by the trade union and mainly subsidized by state revenue. Trade unions levied membership fees on the workers, which was less than one percent of their monthly income to finance the cultural palaces. Various forms of programmes and activities took place ranging from political mobilization and trade union education, cultural and sports activities to expertise and literary training, specialized interests (radio, inventors, chess, sewing, painting and calligraphy), and social and civic life (library, dancing) (Xing 2011). Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, workers from the workers’ clubs and cultural palaces were directly involved in Mao’s mass campaigns such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution etc.

The importance of workers' culture and the organization of workers' leisure was evident from the extensive debates over 'mass culture' and Mao's contributions to these debates, which later contributed to the ideological underpinnings of these cultural institutions. The debates revolved around the role of art and literature and the meaning of 'mass culture'. Consistent with his analysis of class, 'mass culture' for Mao was essentially a socialist mass culture or a proletarian culture, and the role of art and literature was to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers. Moreover, the Soviet tradition also influenced the construction of 'mass culture' in China. The Soviet palaces of culture, touted by authorities as an ideal location for the workers to enjoy leisure time, appeared profusely in the 1920s and 1930s. Stalin created 'parks of culture and rest' in the 1920s in line with Marx's notion that rest and leisure are important elements of workers' life.¹⁰ Under the drive to create a proletarian culture, the famous Gorky Park built in 1928 was conceived not just as a site of entertainment but also as a political arena to propagate official doctrines. In the early 1950s, the officials from the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Parks (BMBP) invited Soviet experts to Beijing in order to offer their advice for the construction of WPCP. The purpose of these spaces was, as Trotsky puts it, for the 'culturalization' of the masses by shaping leisure to create a proletarian culture. But according to Xing (2011), the rendition of workers' cultural palaces as no more than spatial dimensions of acculturation of the masses ignores an important aspect: how do these spaces empower the working class in its social and cultural experiences. As such, he focuses on the emancipatory role of these avenues of leisure provided by the socialist state. He argues that the discursive production of class consciousness and a socialist vision within the workers was crucial in building working class subjectivity.

The idea behind these cultural institutions during the period of 'socialist construction' was to create new worker-subjects who were not only the 'masters' of the socialist enterprises but also the vanguards of revolution, and to use Mao's term, a Socialist New Man. As Mao emphasized the need to have continuous revolutions to weed out the 'capitalist roaders' who perpetuated bourgeois thinking, this new worker-subject were to act as the foot

¹⁰ In *Gundrisse, Notebook VII*, Marx defines free time as the time for the full development of the individual...which is both idle time and time for higher activity. He emphasises the importance of leisure for the social production of the worker.

soldiers armed with the socialist thought. This was evident in their role during the Cultural Revolution, when they responded to Mao's call to 'clear away the evil habits of the old society', and participated in mass struggle sessions.

During the Cultural Revolution, the slogan, 'destroying the four olds' and 'cultivating the four news', was announced through the *People's Daily* editorial titled, 'Sweeping Away All Monsters and Demons', on 1 June, 1966. The four olds of old thoughts, culture, customs and habits were to be replaced by new thoughts, culture, customs and habits. This had an implication on the consumption patterns that were considered 'bourgeois'. Many historical and cultural heritage sites were destroyed; services such as manicures, beauty treatments etc. were banned for being 'bourgeois'. According to Ma Huidi, cultural and recreational life during this period revolved around revolutionary thoughts, and consisted of reading the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, and attending royalty dances¹¹ and model operas¹² (Huidi 2017). Groups gathered at the workshops, streets, playgrounds etc. to engage in these activities in the evening. The meeting halls of work units were also used for the performance of dramas and screening movies of revolutionary significance. Labour unions organized recreational and sports activities for workers, including the work-break exercises in the mornings and afternoons. It included sports activities such as table tennis, volleyball, and badminton, which were popular in the 1960s. Listening to radio, playing chess or cards, reading, and watching movies were the other main forms of recreation before 1978 (Huidi 2017).

Many aspects of public and private life that were considered bourgeois were targeted and publically ridiculed during the Cultural Revolution. It ranged from the consumption of commodities with a touch of 'bourgeois lifestyle' such as cosmetics, antique handicrafts, cultural relics etc. to acts of civility such as 'please' and 'thank you'. In 1963, two dramas, *Never Forget* and *The Young Generation*, were produced with negative characters that were criticized for pursuing 'bourgeois' leisure practices (Wang 1995). In another instance, Ma Huidi (2017) recounts a story of her uncle who listened to radio as a pastime, but had to discreetly tune in to foreign broadcasters for fear of being denounced as a 'rightist'.

¹¹Dances performed to display loyalty to Chairman Mao.

¹² Eight operas with revolutionary themes directed by Jiang Qing, Mao's wife.

Economically, by 1978, China had become one of the poorest countries in the world with its per capita GDP being one-fortieth of that of US (Zhu 2012). It is in the aftermath of these historical events that one needs to understand the reconstruction of the post-Mao Chinese society and economy and role of leisure within this larger frame of shifts.

4.3 From Worker to Worker-Consumer: Workers' Leisure under Reform

With the implementation of economic reforms, workers' leisure was divested of its links to any political ideology. Especially after 1989, the focus was to maintain social stability and engage masses in a 'democratic consumption of leisure' (Wang 2001: 73). In February 1994, the State Council passed a regulation instituting a 44-hour work week, with at least one day off a week. This was later codified when the Labour Law was passed later that year in July and followed up by the provincial governments beginning the double leisure day campaign in 1996. Workers' leisure soon became subsumed by market forces and a new depoliticised discourse of leisure- leisure as capital- was created by the state (Wang 2001). Workers spent their leisure time either hanging out at public parks, internet cafes, watching television, or playing *mahjong*, billiards, poker or video-games at street-corners, open-spaces around restaurants, video-game parlours etc. Although the state relaxed direct control over workers' leisure as long as there were no 'threat' to social stability, there have been instances of a government crackdown on illegal video-game parlours frequented by migrant workers, which are generally perceived as 'chaotic' places. How did these changes come into place? What were the motivations behind these changes? Were these changes sudden or were they gradual?

The tenet of 'socialist modernization' as the path to revitalise the country had dominated the political discourse since the early 1980s. While efforts towards modernisation were taking place in the fields of agriculture, industry, defence and science and technology, there was a simultaneous need to 'modernize' the masses as well to become a modern and civilised country. Apart from the economic rationale behind it, consumption was also seen as the route to become a modern and civilised country. Producers were replaced by consumers as the new model subjects, and the realm of leisure consumption manifested

these changes. Workers were not unaffected by these changes. From being mere producers, their role was gradually being transformed into a producer-consumer who would enthusiastically participate in the new ‘consumer revolution’. However, a gradual reorganisation of the ideological structure was essential for laying the foundations for the social changes that were to be set in motion. The next section traces the ideological reorganisation for creating the political basis for consumption and thereby laying the foundations for the emergence of a leisure economy.

4.3.1 Developing a Leisure Economy: Political Foundations

At the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1978, the focus of the Party and the state shifted from ‘continuous revolution’ to economic development and the ‘reform and opening up’ of the country to market forces. The primary task of the Party was not ‘class struggle’ anymore; instead ‘socialist modernization’ became the new task of the Party as well as the state. Further, the 1982 Constitution, by subsequently incorporating the principles of “reform and opening up” and “socialist market economy” sought to legitimise the transition from Maoist ideals of socialism and class struggle. In 1993, the Preamble was amended to include the concept of “reform and opening up to the outside”. Article 15 of the Constitution underscored “regulation by the market”, giving market albeit a supplementary role in the economic planning for national growth. In 1993, a clear definition of state’s basis of economic planning was given for the first time, wherein the transition from socialist public ownership to socialist market economy was indicated. Meanwhile, Article 16 gave agency to the state enterprises in decision making where matters of operation and management were concerned, a shift away from the earlier status where decision making in the state enterprises was a state prerogative.

Article 15 stated that:

The state practices economic planning on the basis of *socialist public ownership*. It ensures the proportionate and co-ordinated growth of the national economy through overall balancing by economic planning and the *supplementary role of regulation by the market*.

In 1993, this was amended to:

The state has put into practice a *socialist market economy*. The State strengthens formulating economic laws, improves macro adjustment and control and forbids according to law any units or individuals from interfering with the social economic order.

Article 16 underscored:

State enterprises have decision-making power in operation and management within the limits prescribed by law.

Regarding labour per se, Article 42 asserted:

Work is the glorious duty of every able-bodied citizen. All working people in State-owned enterprises and in urban and rural economic collectives should perform their tasks with an attitude consonant with their status as masters of the country.

These gradual changes effectuated by the reform state was suggestive of the cautious approach towards reform and modernisation that necessitated an ideological reorganisation, wherein market intrusion was couched in socialist vocabulary in order to ensure political legitimacy. As the Preamble to the 1982 Constitution highlighted:

The basic task of the nation in the years to come is to concentrate its effort *on socialist modernization*.

The roadmap for rebuilding the nation was laid down in the Sixth Five-Year Plan ratified by the State Council in December 1982. The Plan stated that the objective was:

To strengthen production and improve economic efficiency to increase the government's revenue, to gradually increase expenditure on economic and cultural construction

..... make proper employment arrangement for labor forces in the cities and towns, and continuously improve the material and cultural life of people both in cities and the rural areas based on the growth of production and productive efficiency.

Thus, the objectives for the fiscal period, 1981- 1985 included strengthening the enterprise production and efficiency, the employment for labour-force in cities and towns, and eventually constructing the cultural life of the masses. But apart from these, the other main

objective was to create a new consumption structure that was attuned to the changes in China's political economy:

To keep the supply and quality of consumer products in line with the growth of social purchasing power and changes in consumption structure, and to keep market prices stable.

This was crucial as it set the course for the future decisions of the government in the realm of leisure. Also was added the phrase "prosperity and power" into the Preamble in 1993, legitimising the harboring of notions of prosperity and power, a move away from Mao's era when they were considered an anathema to the society. The development of the leisure economy has to be understood within this shifting political and economic climate of the Reform period.

This was accompanied by concomitant changes directly addressing the question of leisure. Thus, Article 43 of the Constitution enshrined leisure time as a fundamental right of the workers. It prescribed a predefined working hours and vacations for the workers underlining the importance of leisure under the new regime:

Working people in the People's Republic of China have the right to rest.

The State expands facilities for the rest and recuperation of the working people and prescribes working hours and vacations for workers and staff.

Article 22 created legitimation for the new path of consumption culture that China was to undertake with the caveat that all cultural activities should 'serve the people and socialism'. However, it simultaneously emphasised on the freedom to engage in cultural pursuits, a stand diametrically opposed to the previous regime where the masses had to toe the government line of 'revolutionary struggle' in the cultural sphere. Article 47 of the Constitution stated,

Citizens of the People's Republic of China have the freedom to engage in scientific research, literary and artistic creation and other cultural pursuits. The State encourages and assists creative endeavours conducive to the interests of the people that are made by citizens engaged in education, science, technology, literature, art and other cultural work.

Highlighting gender equality, but more importantly, legitimising the participation of women in the cultural sphere, Article 48 iterates:

Women in the People's Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, in political, economic, cultural, social and family life.

Defining the role of the state within the reconstituting of the realm of leisure, Article 22 posits:

The State promotes the development of art and literature, the press, radio and television broadcasting, publishing and distribution services, libraries, museums, cultural centres and other cultural undertakings that serve the people and socialism, and it sponsors mass cultural activities.

China's ideological structure, thus, graduated into various phases before clearly defining the character of China's path of economic development and the status of leisure culture in that process. It prepared the way for policy changes at all levels that were in the making given a shifting political climate. Considering the precarious political climate, wherein "conservative" elements persisted, it became all the more important for Deng Xiaoping and his cohort of reformist party cadres to seek ideological legitimacy. This was achieved by underscoring the ideals of national prosperity and economic development as the primary agenda of the new state. Amending the Constitution in consonance with these changes then became inevitable to the course of reform. Here, labour still remained the "masters of the enterprise" and "dictatorship of the proletariat" the norm. But in essence the path was being paved for the market to invigorate China's fledgling economy and embark on the capitalist road, which had begun to be extolled as "Socialism with Chinese characteristics". These preparatory changes also invariably laid the ground for the changing attitude towards consumption.

In his National Day speech of September 1979, Marshal Ye Jianying, the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), criticising the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, asserted that Mao's Cultural Revolution was 'a blunder and a failure' that had caused a decade of destruction (Baum 1994). In the same speech, the term 'spiritual civilization' was used for the first time as a response to the emphasis placed on economic growth and productivity under the new regime under Deng Xiaoping. He urged

for the construction of both not only the ‘material civilisation’ or *wuzhi wenming*, but also the ‘spiritual civilisation’ or *jingshen wenming*. In 1981, emphasising the significance of a ‘socialist spiritual civilization’, Deng introduced the ‘Five Stresses and Four Beautifies’. It included, stress culture, manners, hygiene, order and morality; beautify soul, language, behaviour, and environment. They form an integral part of the Chinese conception of ‘socialist spiritual civilization’. According to him, ‘spiritual civilisation’ encompassed education, science, culture, communist ideology, morality, and a revolutionary attitude (Barne 2013).

The post-Mao state project of leisure has to be situated historically within its socialist legacy. The introduction of the concepts of ‘socialist spiritual civilization’ and ‘material civilization’ could be seen as attempts made by the post-Mao leadership to recast the social fabric of the post-Mao Chinese society, and the economy, in the aftermath of the upheavals of the previous decade. The building of a ‘spiritual and material civilization’, as envisaged by the new leadership, was the primary impetus behind the regulation of leisure, and this required an intervention in the realm of the private. The state made a conscious effort at shifting the nature of leisure from ideologically motivated activity to a consumption-oriented activity. A growing concern by the government towards the kind of lifestyle a modern nation should pursue in its quest towards a ‘socialist spiritual civilization’ is reflected in the communique of the third plenary session of the 12th Central Committee of the CCP in 1984, where the term ‘lifestyle’ is mentioned thrice:

The reform of the economic institutions will lead not only to important changes in people’s economic life, but also to profound changes in lifestyle and mentality of the people.

As the same time as we try to set up vigorous socialist economic institutions, we should also make an effort to ensure a civilized, healthy, and scientific lifestyle that is suited to modern development of productive forces and social progress will be developed in the whole society while backwardness, ignorance, and decadence will be discarded.

Such a lifestyle and mentality are important parts of the development of socialist spiritual civilization and a great force impelling the reform of the economic institutions and the development of material civilization.

- Communique, Third Plenary, 12th Central Committee of CCP, 1984.

Although the state continued to regulate leisure, unlike during the Mao period, it avoided any direct administrative role in the realm of leisure.

In the aftermath of the ‘reform and opening up’ policy of 1978, workers’ leisure culture was reinvented to accommodate the needs of the market. This change entailed a parallel transformation in workers’ subjectivity when a new worker- subject was created in the form of a worker-consumer. The 1990s saw efforts by the state at various realms to generate a new discourse of the ‘public’ and ‘leisure’ in line with a new project of consumerism. Workers were not passive receivers of these changes, although they were not unaffected by them. They discovered their own ways of circumventing the leisure ethic imposed by the state, which was proof of the gaps and fissures within the perception that the state was in complete control of the private lives. The following sections will delineate the shifts and responses to the changing leisure culture.

4.3.2 Constructing a New Leisure Culture

China’s opening up in 1978 unleashed market forces not only in housing and industries, but also in the realm of leisure. The changes began in the 1980s with the commercialisation of public spaces and in the 1990s with the institutionalization of working hours in the 1994 Labour Law to an 8-hour work day and a 5-day work week. According to Article 3 of *The Regulations of the State Council on the Hours of Work of Employees 1994* (promulgated by the People’s Republic of China State Council Decree 146 on February 3, 1994),

The employees shall work 8 hours a day and 40 hours per week.

Stating the purpose of these regulations, Article 1 highlights:

These Regulations are formulated according to relevant provisions of the Constitution aimed at rationalizing the employees’ hours of work and rest, protecting the employees’ right to rest, mobilizing their good initiatives, and promoting the socialist modernization of the country.

Although this was not the first move to codify leisure time in China¹³, the rationale for passing this legislation for regulating working hours was the need to identify the need for more leisure time to enhance productivity and more importantly, domestic demand (*China Daily*, 1992). As market forces began expanding, consumer thought became an important driving factor behind instituting leisure time in the 1990s. This was more so in 1995 and 1999, when revisions were made to the law to introduce double leisure day or a forty-hour workweek and long weekends in the form of ‘Golden Week’ respectively, that included three seven- days off on Spring Festival, May Day and National Day. However, in 2007, May Day weekend was replaced by holidays on other cultural festivals with the revised *Regulation on Public Holidays for National Annual Festivals and Memorial Days*; currently, China has 115 holidays per year. Finally, in 2008, annual leaves were made paid-leaves when China implemented the *Announcement of the State Council on the Regulations of Paid Annual Leave of Employees*. Table 4.1 gives a short overview of the reforms in the holiday system in China since the establishment of the PRC.

Thus, whilst the state had retreated considerably in the post-1978 era, allowing space for the entry of market forces, it retained significant control over certain realms of the private sphere, and leisure was one of them. Jing Wang, while highlighting the role of the state and significance of the state intervention, makes case for a state that reinvented statecraft and emerged as a historical agent to democratize society’s access to cultural goods having realized the potential of the site of culture where ruling technologies could be deployed and converted simultaneously into economic capital (Wang 2001). Thus, a new consumerist leisure culture was invented in the 1990s through the ‘popularization of the discursive construction of leisure’ (Wang 2001) through extensive media campaigns. Simultaneously, efforts were made to present China as a safe consumer haven to the public through several measures. For instance, the Beijing city government’s Hard Strike Campaign in 1996 targeting criminal elements was appreciated by people from various rungs of the society. Similarly, a series of legal interventions such as formulating a Customers’ Civil Statute, Tourists’ Civil Statute and the Law of Consumer Rights’ Protection, according to Wang, stretched the ‘clichéd semantics of socialist civilization to accommodate the modern culture of consumerism’ (Ibid).

¹³The first time leisure was codified in law was on 23 December 1949, when the State Council published the *Regulation on Public Holidays for National Annual Festivals and Memorial Days*.

Table 4.1: Reform of Holiday System in China, 1940-2008

Time	Policy	Details
December 23, 1949	Published <i>Regulation on Public Holidays for National Annual Festivals and Memorial Days</i>	New Year's day (January 1), Spring Festival (The New Year's Day of lunar year, the second and third day of the first month of the lunar year), Labor's Day (May 1), National Day (October 1, 2)
February 3, 1994	Published <i>Provisions on Working Hours of Workers and Staff</i>	Changed the worker's working hour from 48 hours to 44 hours a week (the working day was changed from six days to five-and-a-half days)
May 1, 1995	Amend <i>Provisions on Working Hours of Workers and Staff</i>	Changed the worker's working hour from 44 hours to 40 hours a week (the working day was changed from five-and-a-half days to five days)
September 18, 1999	Amend <i>Regulation on Public Holidays for National Annual Festivals and Memorial Days</i>	The statutory holidays of Spring Festival, May Day, and National Day were adjusted for a three-day holiday each
December 16, 2007	Amend <i>Regulation on Public Holidays for National Annual Festivals and Memorial Days</i>	Shortened the three-day Labor Day vacation to one day; added traditional festivals such as Tomb-sweeping Festival, Dragon Boat Festival (the fifth lunar month) and Mid-Autumn Festival (lunar calendar August 15), each has a one-day holiday

Source: Shen et.al (2018), p.141.

In his seminal work of consumption, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1970), Jean Baudrillard argues that consumption has brought about a new epoch of capitalism

where reproduction of the mode of production is dependent on reproducing the act of consumption. The rapid inflow of foreign capital along with the attempts to increase production efficiency by massive restructuring of SOEs, expanded the domestic production capabilities. Overproduction, thus, became a concern for the authorities by the end of 1990s. Consumption had become the primary goal of the new Reform state that was reeling under the consequences of overproduction and the Asian Financial Crisis, more so in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the nation had the parallel task of entering the WTO. According to Ngai (2003), the quest for consumption is driven by China's need to increase its global competitiveness and an aspiration for a First World status. A new consumer-subject has replaced the producer-subject as the ideal citizen within the state discourse. Concomitant to this phenomenon is the emergence of consumption as a new mode of governmentality and a new political technology employed by the Chinese state, where everyone has the 'freedom of consumer choice'¹⁴ (Ibid.). Although how democratically accessible it is to all could be subject to debate, the 'consumer revolution' - to borrow Deborah Davis' term - was certainly a mass mobilized phenomenon. Refuting the democratizing power of consumption, Ngai argues that consumption only appears to be democratic because of the subsumption of production¹⁵.

Shopping or window shopping as a leisure practice emerged during this period. During the 1950s and 1960s, all consumer goods were rationed off to people through the work units. Consumption was undermined in favour of socialist construction and the desire for commodities condemned as a bourgeois lifestyle. Goods were produced in planned quantities, and could be bought only in limited amounts as per coupons issued to every family according to a rationing scheme (Huidi 2017). Cloth, shoes, bicycles, foodstuffs etc. were all available in limited quantities, and were sold in rationed amounts. Commodity fetishism had not become prevalent until the urban consumer revolution that China

¹⁴ In her article, *Urban Consumer Culture* (2005), Deborah Davis argues that consumer revolution provided people with the freedom to make consumer choices.

¹⁵ In her article, 'Subsumption or Consumption? The Phantom of Consumer Revolution in 'Globalizing' China', Ngai defines 'subsumption of production' as 'the process whereby the extraction of surplus is hidden and suppressed by the overvaluation of production and its neo-liberal ideologies of self-transformation'.

witnessed in the 1990s and the 2000s. The only luxury goods available were bicycles, wristwatch, radio and sewing machines- the Four Big Things or *si dajian*.

However, this changed after 1978. There were waves of consumption as portrayed through the *san dajian* or the Three Big Things wave. It started with colour televisions, washing machine, refrigerators in the 1980s, stereos, air conditioners and microwave ovens in the 1990s to higher education, apartment and car in the 2000s. With televisions gaining popularity, television shows and movies were imported from Japan, Taiwan, India and other countries. Leisure at home was gradually becoming a common practice around this period, and changing the experience of leisure for Chinese.

Workers' leisure practices were no different. Chinese workers were also influenced by consumerist culture and a depoliticized private time in post-Mao China. Since 2000, the WPCP has also been reinvented to adapt them to the needs of the market economy. The affiliation of the WPCPs was to be detached from the trade unions and was to be transferred to the cultural departments of local authorities. This move was crucial as under a corporatist governance regime of the local governments where the emphasis was on generating revenues, it led to the commercialisation of these spaces. Divesting them of their affiliations to the ACFTU was also symbolic since it meant that these were no more spaces exclusively assigned for the workers but for the masses in general. It engendered a transformation of activities from a socialist proletarian culture to include activities that served the urban 'public'. The Henan Provincial Workers' Palace, for instance, promoted activities such as 'All People's Body-Building Activities' and 'Urbanite Cultural and Sports Activities' to serve all the city dwellers. When VCRs were gaining popularity in the 1980s, and when they were still rare in the Chinese cities, WPCPs found that opening video rooms was a profitable venture (Wang 1995: 15). The exorbitant charges render the indoor facilities of the WPCPs- which have now been rented out to KTV boxes, discos and ballrooms- virtually inaccessible to the workers who earlier had to pay only a nominal amount to gain access. While younger and middle-class consumers utilize the indoor facilities, the outdoor space is crowded with migrant workers. The WPCPs have thus changed from organizing workers' leisure to catering to the leisure consumption demands of the city dwellers (Xing 2011).

Although the government was wary of autonomous formal associations or voluntary organizations, several voluntary organizations emerged beginning from the 1980s. Recreational groups also formed a part of these voluntary associations. Xing (2011), for instance, describes how self-organized workers often gathered in the public parks in a working-class district in Zhengzhou for leisure-time activities. They engaged in singing songs, dancing, performing local operas, kicking shuttlecocks, or practicing *taichi*. Further describing their leisure activities from his fieldwork in Zhengzhou, he observes,

“All participants join in their groups, which attract audiences. Various forms of fitness are self-made by workers and are widely popular among them. In the evening, around one hundred people gather in an urban park and practice a newly invented group fitness exercise. Participants pat their hands, arms and shoulders while speaking a pithy formula in a rhythm with four beats to a line. In the residential compounds of five state-run textile factories, the configuration that is the legacy of Maoist socialism, workers play poker or Chinese chess in the late afternoon in the open-space around the restaurants that fill the pedestrian streets. The usual scenario is four players in a poker game or two rivals in a chess game with many spectators surrounding and intervening. Below a bridge arc in the western industrial zone of Zhengzhou, dozens of *mahjong* desks are set up in the daytime and workers sit gambling.”

- Guoxin Xing, *Living with the Revolutionary Legacy*

Considered a debased game during the Maoist era¹⁶, *mah-jong* re-emerged as the new obsession during the post-Mao period. Street corners were refashioned as spaces to spend leisure time. *Mahjong* desks, billiards tables, video-game machines etc. were set up at street corners where workers gathered to either play or watch others play, or just hang about. Thus, streets emerged as spaces where workers gather for leisure. May Day had also become consumerist-oriented when workers were encouraged to consume more. They either watched movies or went for shopping or ate fine food on this day. The significance of the movement, according to Pun Ngai, has changed from the glorification of productive labour to an incitement for all to ‘indulge in a high tide of ostentatious consumerism’ (Ngai 2003).

¹⁶Government had excluded *mah-jong* playing from working class culture during the Mao period.

As a stark contrast to workers' leisure practices, the leisure practices of the middle-class suggested a segmented leisure market. Unlike workers, the middle-class thronged the bars, dance halls, cafes, discos, bowling alleys, clubhouses or golf courses. Since post-Mao economic reforms have depoliticized leisure, a more commercial leisure culture has been re-introduced to meet the booming Chinese middle class. Accordingly, leisure culture, characterized by Westernization and commercialization, has polarized leisure patterns in terms of income level (Wang 1995). The gulf between haves and have-nots has separated the urban population spatially in leisure, which represents, in Marx's view, a haven from the 'dull compulsion of economic relations' (Ibid). The spatial segregation has an impact on the formation of workers' identity.

During his fieldwork, Xing (2011) found that when asked about leisure time workers did not think that they had the luxury of engaging in leisure. They normally perceive cultural and leisure activities as something luxurious and meant for the Chinese middle class, the rich and the powerful. For these workers, leisure time meant relaxation and recuperation from physical and mental stress whereas they saw the extravagant ways of the rich and the middle-class spending their leisure time for pleasure, social status as well as relaxation (Wang 1995). This understanding, according to Xing, contained what Haug (1987) calls, 'seeds of a conscious class culture' through which Chinese workers developed their own identity as against that of the rich and the middle-class whose interests were different from theirs. This discrepancy of interests and experiences induces the workers to think about their conditions.

This new leisure culture in China is highly exclusive and accommodates only certain forms of leisure. Rojek (1995) posits that leisure under capitalism is erroneously presented as liberating and emancipating, offering freedom and choice in lives beyond work. According to him, capitalism allows space for only 'normal' forms of leisure and sees the rest as an aberration, thus underscoring its exclusivity. This can be said for China as well, as is evident in the cases of a crackdown on internet cafes and video-game parlours frequented by migrant workers. Commercial leisure avenues such as internet surfing and karaoke bars when practised by the underprivileged are considered chaotic and looked at with suspicion

by the local administration, as against those practised by the middle-class families, revealing the leisure ethic practised by the new Reform state (Rolandsen 2011).

The leisure activities formed a significant part of workers' experience and also their perception of themselves as the exploited section. For instance, private letters written by workers, recovered from a fire in Zhili toy factory, contain details about their working conditions, social and material conditions, their attitudes towards work, family, relationships etc. indicating how time spent beyond the workplace- writing letters, casual gathering, playing sports etc. was crucial in building workers' identities (Chan 2002).

Discussing about the extent of state intervention in leisure, scholars within the field of Chinese leisure studies argue that the Chinese party-state successfully utilizes the field of leisure consumption as a tool to govern and pacify the population (Ngai 2003; Wang 2001; Tomba 2004; Croll 2006). In her book, *China's New Consumers*, Elisabeth Croll observes that the Chinese government has promoted private consumption in order to boost the legitimacy of the party-state in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen protests, and in order to lessen people's opposition to the one-child policy (Croll 2006: 30-31). Following the same line of argument, Luigi Tomba, contends that the development of an urban consumer society in China is 'as much the outcome of the social engineering project of the contemporary reformist state and its agencies as it has been a consequence of the opening up of the economy and society' (Tomba 2004). Jing Wang makes a vehement claim when she argues that the Chinese authorities have substituted consumption for democratization in order to pacify the Chinese population (Wang 2001). Agreeing with this, Pun Ngai (2003) qualifies the argument by stating that the consumer revolution was itself a new mode of governmentality of the Chinese state. However, Rolandsen (2011) disagrees with the above line of argument and asserts that it is important to analyse the leisure practices and spaces of leisure in contemporary China. She states the need to 'go beyond the level of official rhetoric, and examine the discrepancies between official policy statements and propaganda on the one hand, and the actual interaction between the state and individuals or groups of individuals on the other'. She locates her argument within the agencies that people possess for overcoming state or market domination. This is aided by the complicity of the profit-minded local state agencies that enforce official policies with remarkable

flexibility. Thus, official control could also turn out to be a mere rhetoric, as Wang (2001) points out.

Rolandsen (2011) notes that according to the popular culture critique, ordinary people are easily led astray and must thus be guided by an informed elite. According to her, the Chinese leisure market, with all its KTV boxes, cafés and fast food franchises, is not merely about pacifying the masses through a freedom to consume or as a way of linking the national economy to the global economy. This reductionist view ignores the fact that ‘what the consumer buys from a karaoke franchise is not simply a microphone and access to a standardized list of pop hits. What consumers pay for is just as much the opportunity to socialize with whomever they please in a comfortable environment and behind closed doors’. The consumers have more agency than what is attributed to them by the current Chinese literature on leisure. The leisure-time activities that take place in spaces of commerce are not entirely determined by dominant ideologies or discourses of leisure. Rather, consumers have a better say in deciding the leisure practices that they choose to engage either in spaces delineated by the PRC leisure ethic or beyond.

Shaoguang Wang (1995) concludes that although market reforms and commercialization have eroded the ability of the state to control leisure, this ‘retreat’ is intentional as it enables ‘mass enthusiasm’ for the Four Modernizations goals that were formally adopted in 1977 under Deng Xiaoping. However, what commercialization has definitely resulted in, according to him, the depoliticisation of leisure. Although depoliticisation did not necessarily mean losing control over leisure but loosening control¹⁷. He states, ‘profit has replaced ideology to become the primary concern for most of the providers of recreational products, including state agencies’ (Wang 1995:27). The impetus for this was provided by the process of fiscal decentralization, and the need for local state agencies to generate revenues. This spawned two parallel processes: on the one hand, there was a regulation of the kind of leisure practices that masses engaged in and on the other hand, an ‘indifference zone’ was produced by the state whereby the gray zones of leisure thrived and generated revenues for the local state. The official discourse of leisure or the ‘PRC leisure ethic’,

¹⁷ Wang explains that ‘Control’ had different connotations for Deng as compared to Mao. While the latter used it for ‘dictating’, for the former, it meant ‘curbing’ and keeping *luan* or chaos in check.

according to Rolandsen (2011), is shaped by the concern for China's competitiveness in the global economy. Part of the 'national pedagogy'¹⁸ of the party-state that aimed at improving the Chinese populations through a 'civilizing process', The PRC leisure ethic was concomitant to the adoption of the twin concepts of 'material civilization' (*wuzhi wenming*) and 'spiritual civilization' (*jinsheng wenming*), one aiding the other. This entailed a distinction between 'healthy' (*jiankang*) and 'unhealthy' (*bu jiankang*) leisure. Characterization of certain places as 'chaotic' and occasional crackdown on places such as internet cafés, KTV boxes etc. occurred to convince the masses of government's intention at maintaining social order and thereby maintaining the state legitimacy. Thus, any leisure practice that eroded the legitimacy of the state came to be categorized as 'unhealthy' leisure. With the creation of a binary between 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' leisure, the state further facilitated the deepening of the social and spatial divisions within the society. Although not illegal, the urban underclass, particularly the young migrant workers, who frequented these places were discriminated against. These experiences of discrimination are crucial in reinforcing class divisions and shaping the class subjectivities of workers.

The shaping of working class subjectivities and identities is a complex process in China. For the workers, the move from socialism to market socialism engendered a changing subjectivity from producers to producer-consumers in an increasingly consumer society. While the class divisions reinforced by workers' leisure practices has the potential to enable an insurgent working class, it simultaneously also has the potential to neutralise the insurgent identities. As Pun Ngai (2003) points out, the faux 'freedom to consume' that ensued from the consumer revolution¹⁹ that contributed to the creation of workers as desiring subjects. This parallel process of the creation of new subjectivities in the form of worker-consumers ensures that workers' aspiration for social mobility is fulfilled through consumption, however temporary, partial, or imaginary it may be. Ngai cites examples of young female migrant workers or *dagongmei* who, in their attempt to climb up the social ladder resort to imitate the middle class leisure and consumption practices. She draws a

¹⁸A term used by Ann Anagnost in her book, *National Past-times: Narrative, Representation and Power* (1997) in order to describe the state project of 'civilizing' the Chinese population.

¹⁹A term used by Deborah Davis in her book, *Consumer Revolution in Urban China* (2000) in order to describe the phenomenon that occurred in the 1990s and 2000s.

picture of young female migrant workers dreaming to escape the monotony of rural life for the multitude of opportunities that city life promises. These promises include the possibility of a new identity and a new lifestyle of which wearing jeans, appearing glamorous, shopping in downtown, engaging in leisure travel are all a part of. The fact that these aspirations are fulfilled, although temporarily, sustains that desire. Nevertheless, as Ngai reminds us, in their quest for modernity and reducing the social disparity between them and the city dwellers, migrants possess a passion to consume, which instead enables in inscribing their social locations as the urban underclass. Talking about the process of consumption, Baudrillard (1970) observes that consumers do not just consume products or services, but signs of differentiation that determine their status in the society. The process of consumption, he states, is the

“process of classification and social differentiation in which sign/ objects are ordered not now merely as significant differences in a code but as status values in a hierarchy.

...you never consume the object in itself (in its use value); you are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status”.

(Baudrillard 1970: 80)

The acts of wearing jeans, going to cafés, fast-food stores, visiting Window of the World and Splendid China²⁰ or shopping downtown are thus not mere acts of consuming goods and services, but efforts towards escaping from the alienating tendencies of the production process and achieving a sense of satisfaction, while at the same time elevating their social position in the city as compared to other city-dwellers. However, the very same act itself makes them stand out as was evident in the case of this young worker who was called out by a fellow for being out of place at the Window of the World (Ngai 2003:485).

The socioeconomic developments in the Reform era recasted working class subjectivities wherein workers ceased to exist as mere producers. Far from possessing a monolithic identity, workers’ now possessed multiple subjectivities and identities in the form of a

²⁰Middle class attractions that the *dagongmei* visit during their leisure time, as cited by Pun Ngai (2003). Although the tickets to these leisure spots are expensive, the workers save money to visit these places.

producer-consumer. This recasting of workers identities influenced the way they perceived their role as producers, as now city emerges as the protagonist in shaping their perceptions and aspirations. With the deepening urban-rural gulf, and the transformation of their role from ‘masters of the enterprises’ to disadvantaged groups or *ruoshi qunti*, workers began looking beyond their position in the factory alone. Today, their life within the city is a crucial factor in shaping their subjectivities. It is this motley of factors that shape their subjectivities that in turn influence the way workers respond in moments of struggle.

4.4 ‘Leisure is Political’: Niches of Transgression

In his conceptualisation of leisure, Chris Rojek reiterates that leisure is political, and is never only about rest, play or recreation. Workers’ leisure culture reflects workers’ struggle for livelihood. According to Xing (2011), while the Chinese state and the hegemonic capitalist culture try to co-opt workers, the workers display an inherent resistance to it. There are several ways through which penetrate the hegemonising tendencies of state and capital. Reviving Maoist class discourse by employing collective memory of the past through cultural activities is one way of resistance.

In the urban parks of Zhengzhou, working-class conscious discourses are remembered through amateur Yuju Opera performers who perform revolutionary and socialist themes, such as Liu Hulan, Marriage of Xiao Erhe, The Red Lantern, Chao Yang Gully. Another cultural form that the workers resort to for reviving the class discourse in post-Mao China is singing revolutionary songs or Red Songs in urban parks. In Chongqing, for instance, pensioners regularly meet in the parks to sing revolutionary songs and ruminate on the bygone days when workers were the ‘masters of the enterprises’ (Beja 2015). In Zhengzhou, workers and their family members that included old retirees, teenagers and kids, gathered in the corners of the parks every night on weekdays and every Saturday morning to sing songs of Chinese revolutionary themes and former Soviet Union popular songs (Xing 2011). On weekends, they even had musician and a conductor lead the singing. Some workers even gather and debate Mao Zedong Thought. The reason they do this is to keep alive the Chinese revolutionary and socialist legacies and transfer it to the newer

generations (Weil 2006). Thus, singing revolutionary songs during leisure time went beyond just singing for leisure, but held a political connotation.

This activity, in later years, came under government scrutiny as was testified in the Luoyang case that occurred in 2010. Workers normally gathered in the public parks in Luoyang to sing revolutionary songs and remember Mao. It is noted that in 2010, the local government employed a group of thugs to beat one worker cultural activist and intimidating the workers from holding such cultural activities. This was a response that came out of the fear that workers might develop class-consciousness and mobilize for collective action, and disturb the social harmony (Xing 2011). Highlighting the resistance displayed by workers through their leisure practices, Xing states, “while commercial culture in post-Mao China has greatly changed most people’s lifestyle, working-class culture has developed in its own way and drawn on old-fashioned genres imbued richly with class discourse”.

Collective past-times are common among workers in China. Workers tend to satisfy individual pleasure in leisure through engaging in social and collective exercises and activities. Workers reinvented any individual and performing form of leisure into a collective game. Shuttlecock-kicking or *jianzi* is one example. Originating as a traditional individual sport, workers often gathered together in teams to play this game. Collective sports activities such as these were significant as they developed or fractured solidarities, cooperation, loyalty etc. Workers also gathered at parks to exercise in groups, which also took the form of the banned *Falun gong* practice in some cases (Xing 2011). Solidarity, cooperation, group loyalty, mutual aid, self-sacrifice and collectivism are cultivated through group action among Chinese workers. These are important aspects that help workers organize themselves and mobilize in case of protests.

Describing the emergence of workers leisure spaces in the public outside of the commodified spaces of leisure such as the Workers Club and Cultural Palaces, Xing (2011) notes,

In the residential compounds of five state-run textile factories, the configuration that is the legacy of Maoist socialism, workers play poker or Chinese chess in the late afternoon in the open-space around the restaurants that fill the pedestrian streets. The usual scenario is four players in a poker

game or two rivals in a chess game with many spectators surrounding and intervening. Below a bridge arc in the western industrial zone of Zhengzhou, dozens of *mahjong* desks are set up in the daytime and workers sit gambling.”

- Guoxin Xing, *Living with the Revolutionary Legacy*

Mahjong along with billiards and other sports such as shuttle-cock and kicking had become quite popular among the workers. They either met in the parks for these activities or rented them from nearby shops. The street corners or empty paces outside the restaurants became common spots for these activities where the workers would meet for leisure or just hang out for a smoke and chat. Thus, streets emerged as a ‘proletarian public sphere’ where workers not just gathered for leisure, but also forged an informal collective because of their shared identities and interests. These spaces eventually become crucial for mobilisation in the event of a protest.

Even the consuming practices of workers such as shopping, is not an individualising project as Pun Ngai demonstrates. She describes how the *dagongmei* of the electronic factory in Shenzhen discussed fashion and makeup during their leisure time and ‘dressed up’ in their dormitories after returning from shopping to display their transformed selves. Leisure time practices, according to her, bound them into a ‘collectivity through their shared dreams and desires to become a new subject’ (Ngai 2003).

In the factory shop floor as well, workers attempted to reclaim their spaces and articulate their notion of the newly imposed spatial discipline in the factories in the aftermath of restructuring of the SOEs- through leisure practices. In her fieldwork in the silk weaving factories of Hangzhou, Lisa Rofel (1992) shows how workers took long breaks sitting at the shop floor chatting and how young male workers left their places at the loom to take extended cigarette breaks, or sit outside and relax in the sun. The workers thus interpreted discipline and leisure in their own way. The workers who sat at the shop floor flaunted their assertion of space and power by complaining loudly about the new pressure of production. Not only was this a reappropriation of space, according to Rofel, these acts of leisure were not small, but denoted a subversion of the space that was relegated for production. It was a ‘brazen challenge’ to the reform attempts by the new Reform state,

and the management that implemented it. Rofel puts it succinctly, ‘the spatial productions of modern subjectivities collide with polysemous histories of past spatial relations’. Leisure, thus, proved to be a contested terrain and a site of struggle between labour and capital.

In the letters recovered from a fire at the Zhili factory in Guangzhou, Anita Chan describes how the workers shared experiences about work in the factory and city life with friends from different factories and with relatives. They wrote about several issues such as low wages, long work hours, finding another job, loneliness and isolation in the city etc. They also talk about what they do during leisure time-window shopping, occasionally going to a café etc. (Chan, 2002). However, writing letters in itself could be seen as a leisure time activity. As Chris Rojek contends in his work *Decentring Leisure*, leisure cannot be viewed as an isolated cultural sphere or practice. It has to be seen as an activity contingently subsumed in other cultural forms, structures and symbols. It has to be understood as a social phenomenon (Rojek, 1995). The act of writing letters allowed workers to recuperate from the drudgery of long working hours at the factory and a monotonous city life, in this case, life within the boundary wall of the factory, since the Zhili workers stayed in dormitories. Writing letters allowed workers to articulate their feelings about their working lives and thereby develop a sense of shared experiences that are crucial in developing consciousness and solidarity. Leisure could thus also be seen as an important aspect of social reproduction of labour, while at the same time, it served to act as an important occasion to nurture social ties and networks.

Junxi Qian (2014) examines performativity in constituting cultural meanings, reproducing everyday identities, shaping social interactions and building mutual engagements. According to her, the performance of cultural identities in public spaces entails forging of temporary social relations within the immediate context of spatial practices. She explored the cultural practices and social life- everyday leisure, entertainment, and cultural activities- occurring at the public spaces in post-reform China. In her opinion, public leisure is a cultural terrain in which meanings are discursively and corporeally communicated, new social relations enacted, and cultural identities negotiated and displayed.

Building on Qian's notion of performativity (2014), this section has read workers' leisure as a terrain where workers' identities are negotiated and displayed, and new social relations forged. It investigated workers' social life at spaces of leisure- home, streets, public parks, workplace etc. The social relations formed are expressive of their intentions, desires and identities which are contingent upon social situations. The social world of workers is constituted by events and the social settings within which these events take place. The literature on social interactions demonstrates that cultural identity is not a private matter, rather it has to be situated in public social settings. The self emerges out of social interaction, according to Cooley (1992), while Mead (1972) and Blumer (1969) show how people derive meanings from social interactions and engage in actions in response to those meanings. According to Carr et al (1992), the social construction of public space possesses a symbolic dimension, with meanings and values attached to spatial practices and experiences. The public space is saturated with meanings and symbols, according to Low (2003).

Workers' spaces of leisure today denote a key site where both working-class culture and commercial culture are juxtaposed. The depoliticisation of workers' leisure culture in the post-socialist period has created a new worker subject, that of a worker-consumer. However, a distinct working-class identity as opposed to middle-class identity is forged through working-class leisure culture owing to a segmented leisure market that creates a distinct spatial segregation. The structure of feeling among workers is that they are an excluded and marginalized class as post-Mao China takes the path of capitalist development. Also, these spaces provide workers the avenue to socialise and build relationships that became crucial especially during moments of struggle.

An examination of one particular aspect of leisure, namely the information and communication technologies (ICTs) help in establishing the political function of leisure. It shows how social relations are forged or nourished and identities displayed in the realm of ICTs as a leisure practice, and at the same time how these identities are mobilized during protests. It will examine the development of working-class networks through the 1990s and 2000s, and the role that ICTs played in nurturing those networks. It focuses on the

interchangeability of the role of ICTs as an avenue of leisure as well as a mode of mobilization for protests.

Modern ICTs such as the Internet and mobile phones appeared in China in the 1990s, and could be afforded only by the upper classes. They were not popular amongst the workers until the late 1990s when ICTs became less expensive and more widespread. Internet cafés, mobile phones, second-hand phones, used computers, and Little Smart low-end wireless phones became commonly used among the working-class, and especially as a leisure practice. As the table below (Table 4.2) shows, there was a rapid rise in the use of ICTs among workers from 1999-2007.

Table 4.2: Growth of ICTs among Workers in China, 1999-2007

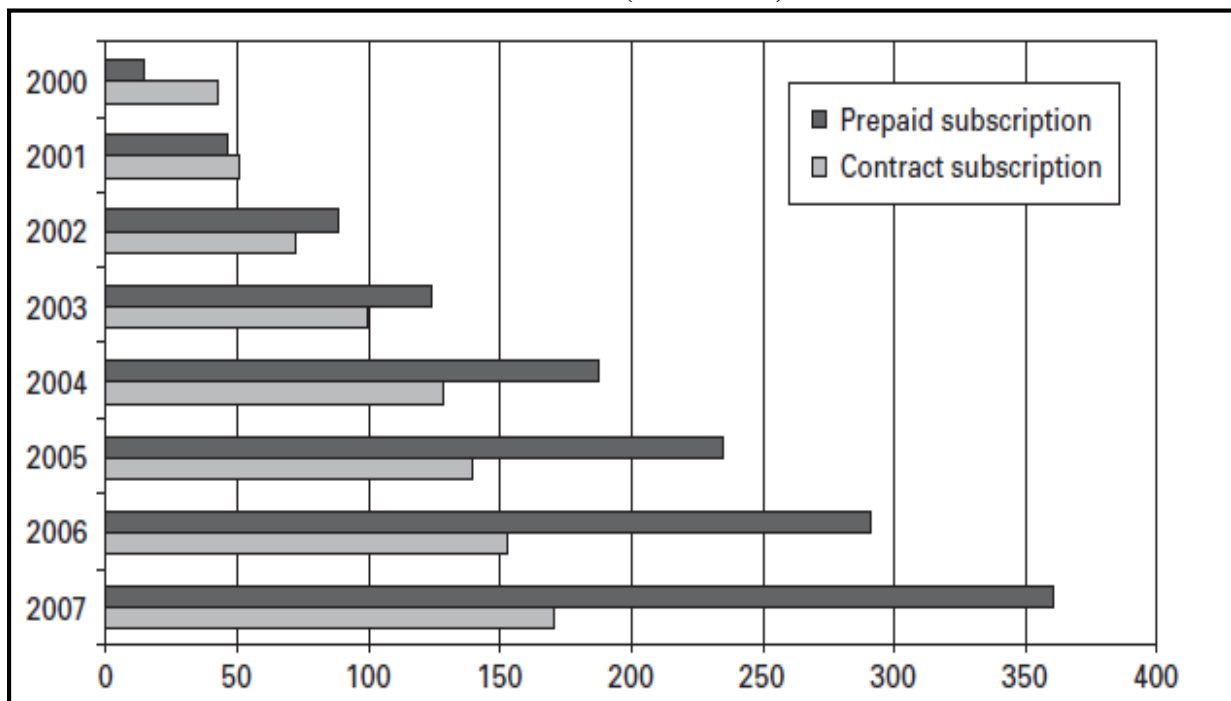
Year	Internet café user population (millions)	Prepaid mobile phone subscription (millions)	SMS traffic volume (billion messages)	Little Smart subscriptions (millions)
1999	0.98	NA	NA	0.6
2000	4.64	14.9	1.4	1.3
2001	5.19	46.2	18.9	6.0
2002	11.47	88.6	90.0	13.0
2003	16.14	124.4	137.1	37.3
2004	23.03	187.8	217.8	65.2
2005	29.97	235.0	304.7	85.3
2006	44.25	290.6	429.7	91.1
2007	71.19	360.9	592.1	84.5

Source: Qiu (2009), p.4.

Prepaid wireless services were very popular among workers as compared to contract subscriptions as their low income made the former more affordable than the latter. The

number of prepaid subscriptions for mobile phones also increased between 2000 and 2007. From 14.9 million in 2000, it grew to 360.9 million in 2007, far exceeding the number of contract subscriptions (Table 4.2; Figure 4.1). The popularity of prepaid subscriptions among workers could be gauged by the thriving sale of prepaid phone cards as a major business in working class neighbourhoods or migrant enclaves.

Figure 4.1: Prepaid and Contract Subscriptions in China’s Mobile Phone Market, 2000-2007 (in millions)

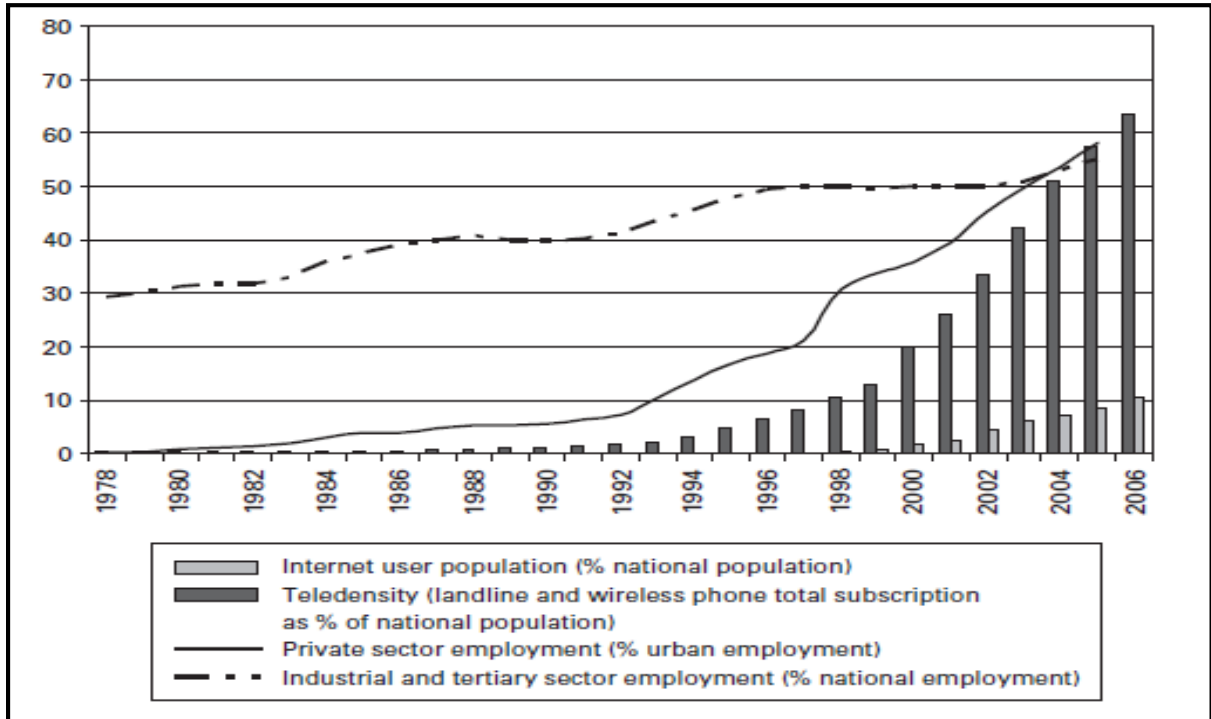


Source: Qiu (2009), p.75.

Internet became widespread in China as urban transformation picked up pace in the 1990s and 2000s. The figure below (Figure 4.2) shows the drastic increase in combined teledensity which included fixed lines, Little Smart and mobile phones, and Internet usage in the period between 1978 and 2006. It juxtaposes the increase in ICTs with the urban transformation that occurs with rising employment in private and tertiary sectors. This could be explained through an increasing need to remain in touch with relations back at home as workers began migrating into cities to take up employment. Cybercafés or

wangba (Net bars) began to be frequented by workers since they were inexpensive²¹ and workers would ‘kill time, relax and socialize’ in these places (Qiu 2009). Between 1999 and 2008, the internet café users increased from about 60,000 to 71.2 million (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.2: Urban Transformation and ICT Growth in China, 1978-2006

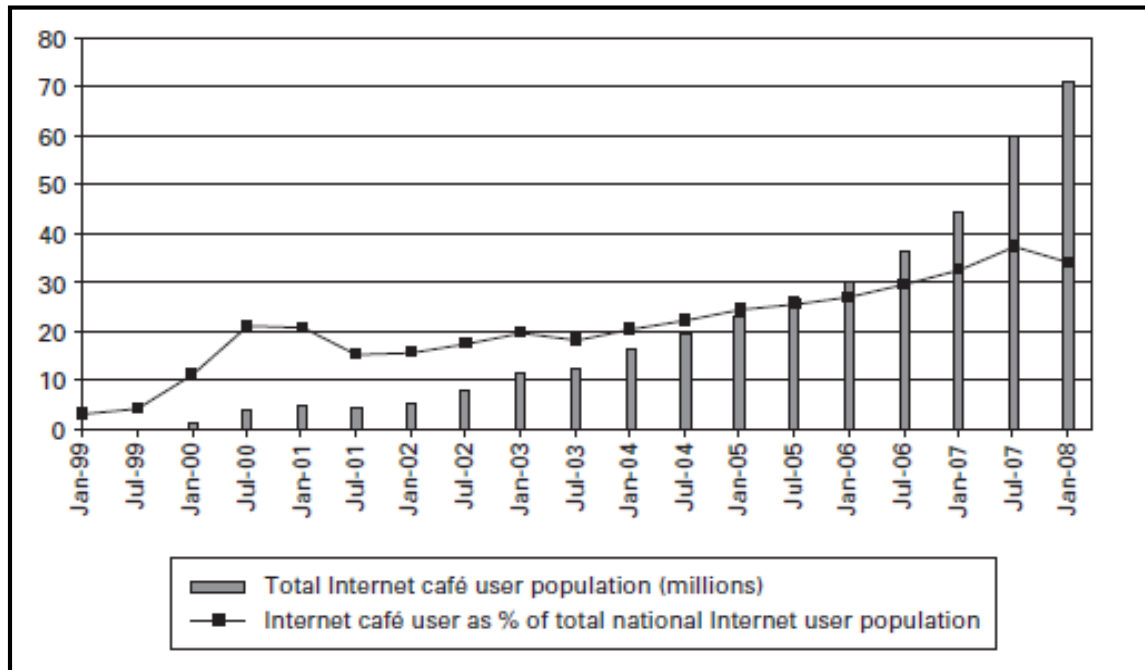


Source: Qiu (2009), p.6.

According to Yu and Ding (2004), a survey conducted amongst migrant workers in Jinan in 1998 showed that less than 5 percent considered news media instrumental while making decisions to migrate to cities. In Shanghai, 58.9 percent of migrant workers think mass media are of little or no help in providing informational services to workers (Tao 2005). The growth and popularity of ICTs among the working class need to be situated within this lacuna of information, as well as a renewed access to leisure and socialisation that was provided by phone bars, internet bars, mobile phones, etc.

²¹91.4 percent of the Net bars charged less than 2 yuan per hour (China Youth Network Survey, 2004).

Figure 4.3: Growth of Internet Café User Population in China, 1999-2008



Source: Qiu (2009), p.25.

Jack Linchuan Qiu (2009) observes that a new social category has emerged in the wake of the diffusion of ICTs within the working class, namely the ‘information have-less’, who have access to information through wireless phones and Internet, despite having limited resources as compared to the upper classes. In his opinion, in many ways, ICTs played an important role in empowering workers. For instance, it enabled them to remain updated with information on new job opportunities. In a case in Dongguan, several workers in a factory quit to join another factory providing better work benefits. This happened after workers shared SMS in the middle of their workday informing each other about better jobs in the plants nearby. Qiu adds that a better access to information flow enabled workers to resist the isolating tendency of labour discipline intended to increase factory productivity and which forced workers little leisure time in between work. In many cases, the organization of labour also extended beyond the shop floor into places of residence through the dormitory labour system tending to appropriate their leisure time. By transgressing these barriers, ICTs created a new network society where they formed the core of social interactions and networks.

While workers did become aware of the vicissitudes of the labour market, it will be erroneous to imagine that workers were completely unaware of the labour market opportunities before the advent of ICTs. It is important to qualify Qiu's arguments by adding that while workers previously shared information through family and regional networks that emerged out of face-to-face interactions, working class ICTs created new ways of social interaction and networking. It created new networks, and provided easier access to the existing networks thereby, nurturing and sustaining them.

ICTs also facilitated the mobilization of workers for protests. William Hurst (2004) notices that collective labour actions in China witnessed 'cohesive organization' and increased in numbers from the 1990s. Qiu (2009) argues that most of these labour actions were engaged into by workers who shared physical spaces and lived together, such as the SOE employees living in working class neighbourhoods. They use the Internet, for instance, to organise themselves as was evident in the December 2004 strike at Uniden Electronics Ltd. in Fuyong town, Shenzhen.

Uniden is a Japanese electronics factory that specialized in making cordless phones, walkie-talkies etc., most of which was supplied to Wal-Mart. The strike at Uniden began with the dismissal of a worker who had worked with Uniden for nearly 10 years without any severance pay. Workers were mobilized through the Internet. Emails were sent to workers stating the fifteen demands raised by the workers, including the permission to form a trade union and the introduction of a permanent contract for workers who had served for more than ten years. It said that if the factory failed to meet their demands, industrial action would be taken. The next day workers began the strike when the factory ignored their demands. Production workers walked out from the production building, and were soon joined by the technical staff the next day.

In the above strike, workers relied on blogs to express their grievances and update about the progress of the strike action. Blogs were posted on a Chinese blog portal called Blogcn.com, which was widely used for reporting by the press although they disappeared from the portal later due to censorship. According to a *New York Times* report, workers

even sent coded messages to each other using their mobile phones displaying a growth in communication and coordination among workers during protests (French, 2004).

The relevance of ICTs in empowering workers could also be measured through the response of the state and capital towards various forms of communication used by workers. For instance, the period after the Tiananmen protests in 1989 saw the emergence of a state regime of censorship, especially of media (Zhao 2008). After a brief period of political liberalization of the media during the Democracy Wall movement in 1978-79, whereby workers' journals and newsletters flourished as a means of communication, the 1990s saw the re-emergence of media control as a ruling technology. The role of government agencies involved in communications were expanded and strengthened. The period saw severe state repression of unofficial journals and newsletters published by worker activists. In 1999, for instance, a workers' newsletter, *Chinese Workers' Monitor (Zhongguo Gongren Guancha)*, published by laid-off workers of northwest China to expose corruption in their factory, came under state repression when the workers faced criminal prosecution for the 'crime' (Zhao 2008).

With the widespread use of the Internet, workers' blogs started facing the heat. With respect to the response of capital to the use of ICTs by workers within the factory, Qiu notes how in 2006 the factories in the Pearl River Delta had curbed the use of mobile phones by workers during factory hours. Some factories even placed metal detectors to ensure that workers did not sneak in their mobile phones into the shop floor. This came in the aftermath of an increase in minimum wages by local authorities that were not necessarily complied by every factory. The ICTs was instrumental in allowing the workers to exercise their agency which otherwise was being undermined by the capitalist forces.

While the state attempts to curb workers' space to resist, workers found their niches of transgression through their counter-hegemonic practices. ICTs played an important role in the development of class consciousness and the shaping of class subjectivities among the Chinese workers during the 1990s and the 2000s.

4.5 Summary

Studies on workers' leisure have been inadequate. The existing studies deny agencies to workers even at leisure. They look at how the state has continuously organised and defined workers' leisure. Although workers' leisure was predominantly organized and institutionalized by the state in the pre-1978 period, the state began receding direct intervention from this realm after 1978 to give more space to market forces. Rather than reading consumption as a ruling technology, and rather than searching for the 'hidden transcripts' as some studies have by borrowing James Scott's idea, this chapter made an attempt to bring workers agency back into the narrative on workers' leisure culture. It is a look at how workers actively create their own spaces of struggle in a highly depoliticized atmosphere after 1978, where a class- discourse came to be replaced by a consumer-discourse.

Though the leisure culture of workers provided avenues for shaping workers' social relationships and solidarities, it did not translate into a working-class consciousness or a political consciousness, as was evident during the pre-1978 period. The depoliticisation of workers' leisure culture created a fragmented working class in the post-socialist period. But a fragmented working class did not mean that that affinities or solidarities were completely absent. The leisure culture did enable workers to develop a sense of shared experiences and create transitory solidarities during moments of struggle that were largely issue-based. Workers utilised spaces of leisure to develop and enhance social relationships, which they then mobilised in the event of a protest. Establishing these relationships can itself be seen as an act of defiance in an alienating production process. Thus, it extends Pun Ngai's contention in her seminal work *Made in China* that *dagongmei*s a Chinese subaltern embodied the dual processes of domination and resistance. It goes beyond the *dagongmei* to include migrant workers as a whole who represented the Chinese subaltern that was subjugated but at the same time defiant.

CHAPTER FIVE

WORKERS' RESISTANCE AND URBAN SPACES

5.1 Introduction

The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978 heralded a radical change for the workers in China. The reform and opening of China's economy to the market forces began to transform China's social, economic and political configurations. The "Four Modernisations" goals, introduced by Zhou Enlai, were adopted by Deng Xiaoping after 1978, which in turn set in motion to a number of radical changes in the economy. It included modernization of industries as an integral component, and enterprise restructuring was seen as crucial for the modernization of industries to improve production efficiency. While the goal for modernization of industries set the sight on economic growth, what it excluded was the interest of workers. Under the new map for growth, the status of the workers was undermined; from being the masters of enterprises they were reduced to being mere engines of economic growth. This meant increasing unemployment or lack of any employment security for the worker, in addition to extreme rural-urban wage disparities.

Since late 1970s, class struggle was sidelined and was dismissed as not an immediate concern for the new regime. This was signalled by the Communiqué of the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in 1979 as it put forth the need to replace class struggle and rather focus on productive forces as the main concern of the Chinese state. This laid the foundation for defining the new status of workers within a society undergoing massive structural changes. If earlier, under Mao, the workers were synonymous to socialism, their role traversed into conflicting terrains from being Mao's vanguards of revolution to being mere engines of growth under Deng. The new role of workers that undermined them to capital gave rise to a large number of labour-capital conflicts. Social stability soon became a major cause of concern for the new regime. The White Paper published by the State Council in 2002 titled, "Labor and Social Security" addressed the issue of social security of workers as a means to ensure social stability. Emphasizing the

importance of social stability, it seeks to “actively adjust labor relations and keep them harmonious and stable”, and maintains it as a top priority of governance. It further states:

The major goals of China's labor and social security efforts at the beginning of the new century are promoting employment, protecting employees' rights and interests, coordinating labor relations, raising people's incomes and improving social security.

The Reform period witnessed a paradigmatic shift in the nature of labour relations in China, where contract-based relations replaced the earlier socialist lifelong relations. This is a characteristic feature of the labour relations under a capitalist system. However, what makes labour relations unique in China is the role played by state intervention in the form of *hukou* that shaped a distinctive but a precarious labour market in China by the 1990s and 2000s. The implications of these shifting contours of labour relations cannot be understood without studying migrant workers' resistance in Shenzhen amidst Shenzhen's global city ambitions.

Against this brief backdrop, the chapter analyses the nature of migrant workers' resistance through the lens of workers' everyday experiences outside the workplace to understand the factors that shaped the resistance of migrant workers in Shenzhen. It examines state discourses of migrant workers' urban experiences as against migrant workers' lived experiences within a rapidly urbanising Shenzhen to understand how these parallel and at times contradictory processes of identity formation together constituted and shaped working class subjectivities, as displayed in the form of workers' resistance in Shenzhen. Prior to delving into the discussion on migrant workers resistance, the chapter examines the role of the labour contract system in order to map the terrain of the shifting labour relations mentioned above during the Reform period that was instrumental in shaping the protests that intensified during the 1990s and 2000s.

5.2 Redefining Labourscapes: The Labour Contract System and Resistance

An important aspect of enterprise restructuring was the introduction of the labour contract system in 1986. It was envisaged that this new system of employment relations will serve to improve the production efficiency by creating competition. Thus, the creation of a labour market by ‘smashing of the iron rice bowl’ that ensured a job tenure to the workers was concomitant to the above policy. Coupled with this move were the changes in the *hukou* policy in the 1990s which had earlier made labour mobility difficult under the Mao period. Under the *hukou* policy changes, the government deregulated the labour market, leading to a massive influx of rural migrants into the cities who were now issued temporary residency permits by the government agencies. All these changes- the labour contract system, hukou-related migration, enterprise restructuring- aggravated the employment situation in China, rather than resolving it. It thus created a section of surplus labourforce willing to take up any job and thereby contributing to the growth of an informal labour market.

The 1994 Labor Law went a step further to formalize the labour contract system, and made contract the only legitimate term of employment for workers. Article 16 defines labour contracts:

Labor contracts are agreements reached between laborers and the employer to establish labor relationships and specify the rights, interests and obligations of each party. Labor contracts shall be concluded if labor relationships are to be established.

Despite the laying down of these laws, the ambiguity within its several clauses gave space to the employers to manipulate the law for their own vested interests. For instance, Article 20 of the Law allowed the employer to enter into either a fixed term or a flexible contract with the worker, but it failed to mention the exact duration of time for a fixed contract and flexible contract. This loophole allowed the employers to enter into multiple short term labour contracts ranging from six to eight months. Article 20 states:

The time limits of labor contracts shall be divided into fixed and flexible time limits and time limits for the completion of certain amount of work. labor contracts with flexible time limits shall be concluded between the

laborers and the employer if the former request for the conclusion of labor contracts with flexible time limits after working continuously with the employer for more than 10 years and with agreement between both of the parties involved to prolong their contracts.

Another clause within the law, Article 27, legalized layoffs if the enterprise was facing bankruptcy allowed the employers to lay-off workers en-masse given the situation is explained to the trade union or the labour department. They did not even have to produce the evidence for validating their case. Article 27 states,

In case it becomes a must for the employer to cut down the number of workforce during the period of legal consolidation when it comes to the brink of bankruptcy or when it runs deep into difficulties in business, the employer shall explain the situation to its trade union or all of its employees 30 days in advance, solicit opinions from its trade union or the employees, and report to the labor administrative department before it makes such cuts.

The 1994 Labor Law also did not include the temporary workers within its ambit, leaving them open to exploitation, as the management preferred hiring temporary workers over permanent ones to rationalize the cost of labour as the permanent workers had to be given work and welfare benefits. The temporary workforce could instead be hired and fired at will depending on industrial targets. Neither did they have contracts nor were they required to be paid welfare benefits or wages as the permanent workforce would demand, creating a kind of a labour force- dualism, and a change in the nature of the labour market that is now marked by precariousness. Thus, contract came to dictate the industrial labour regime in China- from the nature of labour relations, to the production process as well as the employment structure. This would also have repercussions to their amalgamation to the city in general.

The backdrop that fuelled the need for the introduction of the labour contract system and the intensification of the process of enterprise restructuring was the drive towards modernization and economic growth. China's sustained efforts towards obtaining the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) membership in the 1980s, followed by the accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) formed an integral part of drive. The WTO agreement signed by China in November 2001 testifies to this fact. China had

to make the following commitments regarding the functioning of the state-owned enterprises in the WTO Agreement:

The government would no longer directly administer the human, finance and material resources, and operational activities such as production, supply and marketing. The prices of commodities produced by state-owned enterprises were decided by the market and resources in operational areas were fundamentally allocated by the market.

Given the increasing need and desirability of competing with private enterprises in the market, decisions by state-owned and state-invested enterprises had to be based on commercial considerations as provided in the WTO Agreement.

China would ensure that all state-owned and state-invested enterprises would make purchases and sales based solely on commercial considerations, e.g., price, quality, marketability and availability, and that the enterprises of other WTO Members would have an adequate opportunity to compete for sales to and purchases from these enterprises on non-discriminatory terms and conditions. In addition, the Government of China would not influence, directly or indirectly, commercial decisions on the part of state-owned or state-invested enterprises, including on the quantity, value or country of origin of any goods purchased or sold, except in a manner consistent with the WTO Agreement.

Given the fact that the state-owned enterprises were already facing inefficiency in production, the industrial economy had to brace themselves up to face tough competition from both foreign and domestic goods and services after promising to allow market to decide the prices of commodities produced by SOEs and resource allocation. Faced with the rising challenge of a fluid global capital, China responded by not just altering the employment structure, but also the production workforce and the organization of production in order to accommodate the needs of the market economy for economic growth. The emergence of informal employment can be situated within this backdrop. For instance, one could trace this shift in the automobile industry with the move towards Fordist/ Taylorist production techniques which was mainly based on assembly-line production where skilled workers were employed to do the core job whereas the unskilled or semi-skilled workers did the peripheral work, thereby creating a segmented workforce. Peripheral work generally employed informal workers as it did not require much skill, and thus they could be hired and fired at will. According to Albert Park and Fang Cai (2011), informality was actually a tax evasion technique in industries used by the employers,

especially by the self-employed and small private enterprises, as a reason for not reporting such employees to escape from payroll taxes for pension and other insurance schemes.

Labour relations, in the aftermath of these measures witnessed a slew of changes: increasing managerial autonomy, withdrawal of the state from playing the role of the management, diversity of ownership, etc. The class vulnerability of workers got aggravated with the intensification of informalisation (Kuruvilla et al, 2011: 16). By generating a segmented labour market and a segmented workforce, the labour relations were kept in check by creating a hierarchy among temporary and permanent, skilled and unskilled workers. This tended to create a fragmented working class with diverging workers' interests.

The 1994 Labor Law inadvertently intensified the process of “commodification and casualization of labor” (Friedman and Lee, 2010, pp.508-510), owing to lack of proper implementation and deviating strategies employed by the management to ensure a continuous supply of flexible labour, thereby leading to a drop in labour standards. In short, the “formalisation of informalisation” as evident through the increasing number of labour dispatch was characteristic of the new industrial labour regime during the Reform period (Kuruvilla et. al, 2011). What emerged in the process of such informalisation and restructuring was a duality of wages and segmented employment. For instance, the core companies offered better wages and job security as compared to the non-core companies where the degree of uncertainty regarding employment was very high and wages low. According to Kun-Chin Lin (2011), both foreign capital and state- owned capital played a role in fostering this as they heavily invested in the core companies.

The Labor Law was passed in 1994, and it institutionalized contract as the basis of labour relations between workers and employers, apart from setting certain labour standards such as minimum wages, working hours, worker rights etc. However, the antagonisms between labour and management only increased as the Labor Law now allowed workers to be laid-off and hired on short-term contracts or no contracts at all, as the restructuring of enterprises occurred around the same time. While it formalized the contract system, it failed to ensure that the contract system was properly enforced. As a result, many workers did not hold

contracts, and thus had no access to basic rights, work benefits or protection. As many as 15 percent of urban workers did not have a contract even in 2006. In fact, in the construction sector, 40 percent of workers were without any kind of contract. Interestingly, 60 percent of all contracts signed by the workers were for three years or even less, and despite that not everyone had social security. Workers continued to be exploited despite the introduction of a Labour Law.

The period between 1994 and 2008 saw an upsurge in strikes and protests, as well as workers channelling their anger into legal avenues with the new found rights under the Labour Law. With an intensification of enterprise restructuring after 1997²², mass incidents, slowdowns and wildcat strikes became a common fixture during this period, in addition to labour mediation and arbitration. In 2005 alone, the Ministry of Public Security estimated a total number of 87,000 mass incidents, marking a rise of six percent rise from the year before. However, from 2006 onwards the Ministry reported a dip in the number of mass incidents, but the media in Hong Kong, particularly the *South China Morning Post* reported that the Chinese government forced the national media from covering mass disturbances. As a result, many scholars debate if China actually witnessed a drop in the cases of social unrest after 2006 (Rogal 2007).

2007-2008 was to be a significant year for labour legislation in China, as National People's Congress (NPC), China's national legislature, passed the Labour Contract Law at the peak of the Shanxi slave labour scandal in 2007²³. The Shanxi case was an extreme example of the cases of exploitative conditions the migrant workers worked under during the period. Most of them lacked any formal contracts with their employers, but were left with no option and take up whatever work was provided to them in the cities since they lacked an urban *hukou* (*China Daily* 2006). Faced with the challenge of continuing the economic reforms despite the slew of labour protests, the Hu- Wen regime implemented a number of labour laws such as the Labor Contract Law (LCL), the Employment Promotion Law and the Law on Mediation and Arbitration of Labor Disputes. When the Labour Contract Law was

²² Radical enterprise restructuring was formally ratified by the 15th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in September 1997.

²³ Illegal brickyards in Shanxi forced migrant workers and children into almost slave-like conditions and torture.

implemented in 2008, the idea was aimed to address the limitations within the 1994 Labour Law and to address the glaring issues related to labour under the larger ambit of maintaining a harmonious society under the Hu-Wen regime. Passed on January 1, 2008, the Law was implemented as a response to the problems facing Chinese labour such as the poor implementation of labour contracts, the prevalence of short-term contracts, the lack of benefits or protection for temporary workers etc.

Article 1 of the law states:

Enacted and formulated in order to improve the labor contract system, specify the rights and obligations of both parties to the labor contracts, protect the legitimate rights and interests of the workers and construct and develop a harmonious and steady employment relationship.

- Labor Contract Law of the PRC, 2008

Protests by informal workers were also becoming common after the formalization of the labour contract system. 15 security guards working at a university hospital in Guangzhou protested against unpaid wages and social security, they were promised at the time of employment. However, in their case, they did not have a formal contract and were employed by labour dispatch agencies that were increasingly becoming common as the demand for temporary and informal labour grew. Neither were they given the promised social security, but they were owed months of wages. This is a typical example of the exploitation faced by the informal workers in every sector. Lacking any kind of labour protection, as the 1994 Labour Law fails to mention them, they are faced with unpaid wages or wages below the local minimum wage, no formal contract, lack of social insurance, poor working conditions, no rest days and/or lack of proper training.

Informal employment also existed in pre-reform China. Earlier, when there was a spike in demand, peasants were brought from the villages as temporary workers to meet the industrial targets. They engaged in seasonal employment and were paid less wages as compared to the permanent workers. Although not an entirely new form of employment, what has changed after the formalization of contract is the nature of temporariness. While earlier, if they engaged in temporary work and stay, now their entire existence was enveloped in temporariness as no longer could they go back and find better work in the

village than what they already have in the city. Given the institutionalized exploitation of informal workers, they live in a state of perpetual or “permanent temporariness”, characterizing the state of informality in a newly liberalized economy. The structure of employment also transformed drastically. By 2008, 45 percent of the urban workers in China were informal workers, of which almost 37 to 42 percent of them worked in the private sector (Park and Cai, 2009: 6, 11).

Workers in China face a number of issues ranging from wage and pension arrears, lack of contract, compensation, severance package or social insurance, long working hours etc. But the most marginalized within this section are the informal workers, though the official statistics hardly do justice to them by failing to recognize them. A study on the dismal conditions experienced by the temporary agency workers who work in an electronics factory in Guangdong, conducted by sociologist Eli Friedman for China Labor Watch, shows that these conditions are faced by most informal workers across every sector. According to the report, workers were forced to work overtime without proper compensation, not allowed many breaks, and imposed fines arbitrarily. They were not allowed to form a trade union, thus blatantly violating the labour laws and labour standards. Moreover, they lived in really poor conditions. 150 production workers lived on each floor with the total space of about 1000 sq.m. (Friedman 2003: 12).

In the aftermath of the 1994 Labor Law, dispatch labourers or agency workers were more in demand as the enterprises employed them to replace the laid-off workers. Indicative of the shifting employment structure and a growing flexible labour market in China, from 26,793 in 2001, the number of employment agencies in China rose to 37,897 in 2008, and almost two-thirds of them were funded by the local government (Cooke 2011). This could be seen as a response of the local government to the intensifying restructuring of the enterprises during the 1990s, to find an alternate source of employment generation. The labour relationship between an agency worker and the employer was more indirect, as they were informal labour, and lacked any contract, and thus were employed by labour dispatch agencies. They were characterized by glaring wage disparities and increasing precarity. Thus, the enterprise did not have to the pressure of paying them welfare benefits. Moreover, despite the introduction of a labour law regime, exploitation of these workers were

widespread, as they were not covered by the 1994 Labor Law, and thus exposed to the vagaries of the market.

In 2007, many enterprises filed for bankruptcy or relocated to interior regions, laid off workers without paying them any severance packages and owing them several months of wages, and owing pensions to the retired workers. Several enterprises were faced with severe cash crunch as a result of rising costs of raw materials, transport and fuel, tightening monetary policy, appreciation of the yuan and changes to the export tax rebate. More factories faced shutdown in 2008 and workers laid off, with the looming financial crisis of 2007-2008 which affected many export-oriented enterprises as the export markets shrunk considerably. In Dongguan, China's export-oriented manufacturing hub, 117 incidents of factory shutdowns or bosses abandoning factories were reported during the months of September and October 2008. At least 20,000 workers were owed wages or compensations due to this (China Labour Bulletin, 2009). Thus, in 2007, most incidents of labour conflicts were by workers who were laid-off or owed arrears due to shutdowns and layoffs. Many companies forced their workers to sign voluntary resignations. Nanfang Daily, a Guangdong-based newspaper, reported Huawei asking its workers who had worked in the factory for more than eight consecutive years to hand over "voluntary resignations" (*People's Daily Online* 2007).

In 2008 alone, collective labour disputes across China had risen from 5000 to 21, 880 as per official reports (Ping 2010: 23). A study conducted by China Labour Bulletin of 100 labour disputes in 2008 sourced from online media demonstrated that migrant workers' protest comprised 58 cases (China Labour Bulletin 2009). Between January and September 2008, more than half of all the labour protests focused on unpaid wages; group petitions constituted 22 percent and strikes 8.1 percent of the labour unrest (China Labour Bulletin 2009). For instance, on 7 November 2007, hundreds of workers of the Taiwanese plant in Guangzhou forced the chairman of the plant to flee and a couple of days later, they blocked major arteries of the roads leading to local government buildings protesting wage arrears that exceeded two million yuan (China Labour Bulletin 2009).¹⁴ other cases of labour protests occurred in the wake of violation of workers' rights around the same period owing to attempts by the employers to wade through the financial crisis unscathed. Reducing

wages, or evading the payment of severance packages, firing workers and hiring new ones for lower wages or forcing them to resign were the common tactics employed by the management.

In Shenzhen, management indifference towards workers was also prevalent in the 1990s. In 1994, for instance, 11 workers were killed when a factory dormitory building collapsed in Longgang, Shenzhen. Initial investigation reports blamed the Hong Kong manager for putting workers in the building despite knowing that it wasn't safe (FBIS-CHI-94-126). According to official statistics, between June 1989 and December 1990, a total of 74 strikes involving close to 10,000 workers occurred in Shenzhen and Zhuhai, of which 69 strikes were concentrated in Shenzhen alone and Bao'an district accounted for 41 of these strikes (FBIS-CHI-91-020). In January 1994, the Shenzhen City Labour Bureau received over 160 complaints from workers within a span of 10 days. The complaints were mostly related to unpaid wages, severance allowances, unreturned security deposits paid at the time of joining the factories, management misbehaviour, maltreatment of workers etc. According to statistics from the Luowu District Disputes Arbitration Office, in the Luowu district alone, outstanding wages to workers amounted to more than 100,000 yuan (FBIS-CHI-94-022).

In another case of a strike in Baoxing toy factory, a Sino-Hong Kong joint venture in Shenzhen on 15 June 1995, over 1000 rural migrant workers protested against poor wages and dismal working conditions. Their monthly wage was 192 RMB while the minimum wage level in Shenzhen was 320 RMB in 1995 and they had not received any wage increments over the past several years. Moreover, they received poor quality meals and lived in dismal conditions with no hot water supply in the dormitories. Many workers seldom took a bath. It was only after the City Labour Bureau ignored their petitions that the women workers called for a strike. Indicating towards the nexus between the management and the local officials, one woman worker shouted, "management has bought over the Labour Bureau to its side!" The management was eventually forced to agree to their demands for a wage hike and better working conditions (UN Official Report on Women Workers in China 1995:22).

The acute concern about labour disputes involving migrant workers in Shenzhen was reflected in both popular media and the discussions around it within the “top hierarchy” in Shenzhen where the need for addressing this issue by thoroughly studying them was emphasised upon. For instance, Li Hao, the secretary of Shenzhen City CPC Committee in 1991, made several appeals regarding this question urging that “all of society should *deal with the problem of the external population* in a comprehensive manner” (FBIS-CHI-91-020). In response to the rising labour disputes in Shenzhen, a commission to mediate labour disputes was set up in the mid-1990s, mediating strike incidents being one of the major foci. The commission attributed the causes behind these protests to the clientelist networks between the foreign investors and local officials that relegated workers’ interests to the peripheries in the quest to make money (FBIS-CHI-91-020).

Shenzhen Dagongzhe Migrant Workers Centre held a survey in 2008 among more than 300 workers in Shenzhen. It showed that the employers in Shenzhen provided the workers with two different sheets of paper with company seals at the time of registering, one in English and one in Chinese. They showed how the management tried to skirt the law by deploying various methods such as a blank contract paper, manipulating clauses within the law etc. to serve their own purposes. Most common methods included retrenchment, renewing contracts with workers before they completed 10 years to keep them from signing an open term contract or using staffing agencies to employ temporary workers. Since the workers hardly understood English, the survey shows that the employers used the contracts in Chinese signed by the workers to deviate the law. Still, a large number of workers lacked any formal contracts or had skewed contract terms. More than half of the workers interviewed reported having worked longer than the hours mentioned in the contract.

Relocating to the interiors was another strategy of evading payment of arrears. For instance, on 4 January 2007, workers of a foreign-owned furniture factory in Shenzhen staged a massive demonstration outside the factory after it made an announcement of relocation. Workers who accepted a 20 percent reduction in wages were allowed to continue in their jobs when the factory relocated. Protests had also occurred in 2005, when the workers’ representatives were beat up for demanding an auditing of the wages. Around 3,000 workers came out in protest of the beating of their representatives (China Labour Bulletin,

2009). Mary Gallagher contends that these practices of improper law enforcement highlight the structural problems inherent in Chinese politics that undermines the legislative processes despite the efforts to ensure transparency and public participation. It also reveals the contentious nature of labour relations prevalent in China during the Reform period.

A characteristic feature of labour protests in Shenzhen is that in most of the cases, workers came onto the streets in large numbers to claim their rights only when recourse to law failed. The fact that most workers were educated and were more aware of the law is one important factor (Lee 2007). But how does one understand these protests? What shaped consciousness of these rural migrant workers in Shenzhen in the context of precarious employment, where clientelist relations prevailed between management and the local authorities? While it is evident that migrant workers do not display a linear response to exploitation, it is pertinent to understand what explained such varied responses by workers to different situations. Why is it that in some cases migrant workers chose to suffer quietly while in some cases they chose to strike? While factors such as labour market, management and government response definitely play a role, working class subjectivities form a significant element in explaining the nature of resistance in Shenzhen.

5.3: Politics of Discourses: State Narratives versus Lived Experiences

The 1990s and 2000s in Shenzhen witnessed a rigorous attempt on the part of the local state to influence the direction of Shenzhen's economic and social development. Conforming to the tenet of building a material and spiritual civilization, the local state developed a local interpretation of the national tenet in the form of Shenzhen Spirit that intended at guiding Shenzhen's global city aspirations. The aim was to inculcate the Shenzhen Spirit among the people of Shenzhen to better serve the process of Shenzhen's integration into the global economy. But at the same time, there was a parallel and often conflictual discourse from below that served to shape the trajectory of Shenzhen's transformation. The next section examines the intersection between the state discourses and the lived experiences of workers that play a crucial role in shaping migrant workers' subjectivities and their resistance in Shenzhen. It does this by examining state discourses by analysing newspaper reports from the 1990s and the Bao'an Migrant Workers' Museum

and the Da Lang Laborer Square that were built in the 2000s and juxtaposes it with the lived experiences of migrant workers in Shenzhen.

5.3.1 ‘Zenyang zuo ge Shenzhen ren’? : Media discourse in the 1990s

After almost a decade of Shenzhen’s opening up and reform when Shenzhen was integrated into the global economy, government officials of Shenzhen began to grapple with the notion of ‘*Shenzhen ren* (Shenzhen person)’. This was reflected through the state discourse and state-controlled local media discourse of the 1990s and 2000s. The subject of the discourse was “How to be a *Shenzhen ren*?” The newspapers published deliberations happening among local government officials concerning the subject, encouraged the public to write letters to the newspapers about the subject and also started a new section dedicated to the rural migrant workers in Shenzhen. The Shenzhen Business Newspaper, Shenzhen Evening News and Shenzhen Special Zone Daily were the few newspapers that were involved with the project of defining a “*Shenzhen ren*”. The discussions with the public were over the meaning of *Shenzhen ren* was initiated by Shenzhen Business Newspaper and Shenzhen Evening News.

The fact that Shenzhen was made up mostly of migrant workers was not lost on the local officials as was expressed by Chen Zhirong, the Shenzhen Culture Office Chairperson, who acknowledged, “Our city is a place of migrants who comprise 95 percent of our population and belong to various ethnicities and have various customs and traditions but have the same objective which is establishing the Special Zone and do hard work” (*Shenzhen Evening News*, 1994). However, crime and disorder was mostly associated with rural migrant workers, and so was social instability. The member of Municipal CPPCC (Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference) and Chairman of Shenzhen City China Association for Promoting Democracy, Hao Jingtian remarked,

“many people live and work in Shenzhen and still do not consider it home, do not consider themselves as Shenzhenren. These people are dominated by short term behaviour, always feel themselves as ‘transient guest’ (*congcongguoke*), always believe ‘to earn some and leave’ (*lao yibajiu*). This kind of psychology of ‘being guest’ brought many social issues, have affected social stability and the relation between people”

Thus, social instability was attributed to the very nature of the category of migrant worker-transience, In the throes of becoming a global city (*guoji chengshi*) or a modern city (*xiandaihua chengshi*) and helming China's reform and opening up process, Shenzhen government officials were thus grappled with the pressures of projecting Shenzhen as a civilized (*wenming*) and a quality (*su zhi*) city, devoid of crime and social disorder. The statements in the newspaper article below vividly expressed this concern:

As Shenzhen is becoming a modern city, if this standard will be reached or not, ultimately it all depends upon the overall quality of the people of Shenzhen.

(*Shenzhen Evening News*, 1994)

“To be a city of high quality is an indispensable condition for Shenzhen to become an international city, and this condition cannot be introduced from somewhere else, it is within.”

(Chi Weidong, Shenzhen CPPCC, *Shenzhen Evening News*, 1994)

It became pertinent then for the local government to weave a narrative about an ideal or a “model” *Shenzhen ren* through mass media, reflecting the socialist legacy of creating “model citizens” as was identified in the making of a *Socialist New Man* during Mao's period. Reporting about the deliberations that happened during the fifth session of first Shenzhen CPPCC, a newspaper article titled, “I am a Shenzhen Person (*Wo shi Shenzhen Ren*): We all should have such a sense of home (*women meige ren douying you zhe yang yizhongjia yuan gan*)” noted that in the Conference some members raised questions such as, “Who are Shenzhen people? (*Shei shi Shenzhen ren*)”, “What kinds of people are Shenzhen ren? (*Shenzhen ren shi na xie ren*).” To this, the members unanimously agreed that *Shenzhen ren* “not only include the present 800 thousand population living in Shenzhen, but also more than 2 million people working and temporarily living Shenzhen. Some members called out in a loud voice: “People temporarily living in Shenzhen are also *Shenzhen ren!*”” Since the local officials were concerned about the fact that there is no sense of belonging among the people who came to Shenzhen, the idea behind this narrativisation was to inculcate a sense of belongingness among the rural migrant workers and to urge them to consider Shenzhen as their home. However, not every migrant worker qualified to be called a *Shenzhen ren*. The Conference further went on to describe what

kind of migrant worker could be called a *Shenzhen ren*. A *Shenzhen ren* should have the Shenzhen Spirit, had to be hardworking and working towards the goal of establishing the Special Zone and not chase high salary and complain about extra money when asked to work a little extra. S/he should “have love for Special Zone, should think of what you have contributed to the Special Zone, you cannot be selfish and acquiring your own basic things...should treat Shenzhen as your home and not have the mentality of working and leaving” (*Shenzhen Evening News*, 1994). Defining the Shenzhen Spirit, Huang Xinhua, the Vice-Minister of City Committee Propaganda Department puts it:

“...today, Shenzhen people means Special Zone people, and this Special Zone people should have the spirit of open-mindedness, creativity, unity and contribution spirit.”

(*Shenzhen Evening News*, 1994)

The emphasis on developing a Shenzhen Spirit, according to Eric Florence (2017), was “a local articulation of national policy-the simultaneous construction of material and spiritual civilization”. While the material civilisation focused on building of the Chinese economy, the spiritual civilisation focused on building a model citizen to keep up with the changing times. The Shenzhen Spirit, a culmination of both these tenets was approved by Jiang Zemin, and came to be defined as upholding values such as “deciding for oneself, strengthening oneself, autonomy, competition, taking risks and facing danger, equity, effectiveness, and legality (*zizhu, ziqiang, jingzheng, ganmao fengxian de gainian, pingdeng, xiaolu gainian, yiji fazhi gainian*)” (Florence 2017:87).

Yet another newspaper, *Shenzhen Special Zone Daily* had begun a special page dedicated to migrant workers around the same time, *World of Dagong (Dagong de Shijie)*. The focus was to glorify the silent sacrifices made by the migrant workers towards the building of Shenzhen. For instance, in an article titled, “Friday, We Walk Towards ‘The World of Workers (*Xingqiwu, women zouxiang gongren de shijie*)” in the first edition of the special page, migrant workers are depicted as “ ‘happy people’ (*kuai le yizu*) silently dedicated to the construction of Shenzhen” and the hardships faced in the city and at work, and the difficulties faced while hunting for a job in the city were couched in words such as ‘the unique experience of migrant workers in Shenzhen’ (*Shenzhen Special Zone Daily* 1994). The difficulties faced because of *hukou* regulations and a precarious labour market

where they could be hired and fired at will despite not receiving a contract from the employers or being paid wages on times are whitewashed to provide a glorified version of their work.

In another article titled, “Unusual Methods (*Bu neng chang yong de 'ban fa'*)”, a worker appreciates how a local canteen owner served him more food than he could afford since he had not received his wages on time (*Shenzhen Special Zone Daily* 1994). Rather than highlight the responsibility of the factories to pay wages on time and the fact that the migrant worker could not afford even their daily meals because of unpaid wages by the factories, the pedagogy behind the story was to show how the migrant worker was supposed to be grateful to a generous local villager who served him more than what he could afford.

Glorifying the ‘work’ of a migrant worker as the most honourable contribution by a *Shenzhen ren*, another article titled, “Working, My Proud Choice (*Dagong, wo guangrong de die ze*)”, depicted migrant workers as the “masters of Shenzhen”. Written as a story by a migrant worker who failed to clear the college entrance exam (*gao kao*) and was dejected that he had to now lead the life of a migrant worker (*dagongzhe*), it reminded the migrant workers that in Shenzhen, they are the “builders” of the Special Zone. The story continues:

That day, I came to my cousin who is a Builder of Shenzhen, and met several migrant workers who were drinking. Basically they were rejoicing their participation in the construction of a high-rise building, the proud mood, joyful manner, overflowed with the words. I was deeply moved by this. I recalled a line from a poem “the flyovers in the Special Zone was carried by our workers! (*tequ de li jiaoqiao, shi women da gong zhe gang qi lai de!*)”, I thought we working class are also the master of Shenzhen. The achievements of SAR, the results of Shenzhen are soaked with the blood and sweat of workers, what reasons do we have to feel pity about ourselves?

The migrant workers’ acceptance in Shenzhen is thus justified through the “blood and sweat” they silently shed for the construction of the city, thereby defining the kind of *Shenzhen ren* that they expect the migrant workers to be. Further it says,

Every young person wants to make a big career ahead of others. But how many silently work diligently every day for it! Being a member of the working class, my heart trembles when I think about the magnificent sight of million of workers working and the pride my cousin and his group feels.

It ended on a note that reminded them that their duty as a young migrant worker was to work and they should be proud about it. It said, “working is a platform for our youth, we should extend our youth in this platform, since we are walking in this path of working as a migrant worker, we should live a life of no regret” (*Shenzhen Special Zone Daily* 1994).

Thus, the pedagogical process of shaping individual subjectivities persisted during the Reform period as well. This has to be understood within the context of increasing labour-capital conflict that marked the industrial landscape of Shenzhen after the reform and opening up of Shenzhen and the drive towards joining the WTO in 2001 as discussed in this chapter earlier. Table 5.1 shows the spike in the number of labour disputes in the 1990s.

As there was an intensification of the reform and opening up process in the 1990s, there was a parallel need to work towards the ‘building of a spiritual civilisation’ to transform Shenzhen into a “civilized” “global city”. Thus, the idea behind the state discourse in the 1990s was to create a model worker who would diligently work towards the building of Shenzhen that had, by the 1990s, become a significant node in the reform and opening up of the rest of China.

Table 5.1: Arbitrated Labour Disputes in Shenzhen in the 1990s

Year	Total cases arbitrated	Favourable to employers	Favourable to workers	Favourable to both
1990	359	62	196	101
1991	322	55	186	81
1992	316	45	207	64
1993	2,900	463	1,896	541
1994	6,792	1,039	4,861	892
1995	8,941	1,254	7,003	684
1996	10,983	2,001	7,724	1,258
1997	13,179	3,194	5,812	4,173
1998	12,130	638	10,569	923
1999	13,280	892	9,501	2,887

Source: Ching Kwan Lee, p.178.

5.3.2. Public Spaces and Memory-making in the 2000s

Three Represents and Socialist Harmonious Society were the two significant guiding ideologies of the 2000s that determined China's path of development. While Jiang Zemin's political ideology, the Three Represents in 2002 underscored the significance of the balance between three forces- economic production, cultural development and political consensus- and guided the economic development, Hu Jintao's Socialist Harmonious Society concept in 2005, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of a harmonious society for ensuring social and political stability in China. It was a reflection of the need to plug the growing gap in the society that threatened to destabilize social harmony and the political legitimacy of the Party. The need to maintain stability and social harmony was also echoed in the projects undertaken by the local governments in Shenzhen. The construction of the Bao'an Migrant Workers' Museum echoed these concerns of the local government.

The Shenzhen Bao'an Migrant Workers' Museum was built by the local district government as a dedication to the contributions of the rural migrant workers towards the building of Shenzhen. One of the first Hong Kong-invested electronics factories in Shenzhen, Shangwu Yigao Electronics Factory was converted into the museum in 2008. It has 4 sections of exhibition halls: the first section displayed the production line as well as the living spaces of the workers; the second section displayed the history of Shenzhen's reform and opening up and the contribution of migrant workers towards it; the third section displayed the various non-work activities that workers engaged in; the final section displayed the achievements of the migrant workers. The common thread that ran through the entire museum was the valorisation of rural migrant workers and their diligent contribution to the building of Shenzhen.

The main exhibition hall comprised of several objects belonging to a few migrant workers and "donated" by them to the museum. It displayed the personal belongings they carried when they first migrated to Shenzhen such as their bags and identity cards, workplace related belongings such as contract papers signed by migrant workers, their tools and instruments, work gears, worn muddy shoes etc. and stuffs they kept in their dormitory

rooms such as brush, mirror, guitar, music records, magazines etc. The idea behind this symbolic presentation was a romanticized expression of the plight of migrant workers. To add to this imagery, was the display of pictures of migrant workers happily marrying within the same factory, studying after work or writing letters to their relatives at home in the dormitories, migrant girls laughing in the dormitory room, a few others happily working in the scorching heat, a sculpture of their worn hands etc all intended to create a sanitised memory of the exploitation of migrant workers. The fact that the migrant workers in Shenzhen worked in the most difficult working conditions, lacking labour contracts, unpaid wages, overtime work etc. was replaced with a version where these workers happily dedicated their youth to the building of the SEZ. The achievements of a few migrant workers were displayed who managed to escape the hardships and become writer, poets, supervisors, technicians, managers etc; one female worker even became a representative to the 18th Party Congress. On the one hand, it was an exhortation to the migrant workers to work hard and develop their skills to become skilled workers and on the other hand, it was a celebration of the migrant workers who succeeded to “elevate” themselves from being mere factory hands.

However, one has to read against the grain and look at who were the ones being neglected in this narrative developed by the state- the millions of rural migrant workers who could not escape their condition and were relegated to the production lines of the factory. One can conclude that one, by consciously choosing to side-line the stories of the millions who were toiling behind the production lines and construction sites, the museum attempted at providing a sanitised account or history of the rural migrant workers in Shenzhen. Two, the pedagogy here was to shape the memory of rural migrant workers and the general masses alike, through symbols and images, about the role of the rural migrant workers in the making of Shenzhen, and thereby create model migrant workers who would selflessly serve the nation. However, Junxi Qian and Junwan’guo Guo argue that the state’s attempts to whitewash the exploitation of migrant workers by creating a “myth of free individual agency of migrant workers” through the migrant workers museums migrant workers’ their “agency is constrained by political economic structures, institutions and power relations”(Qian and Guo 2018: 317) .

This begets the question were the subject-making efforts of the state completely imbibed by the workers or were they questioned by them. On the one hand, workers did imbibe the state discourse by silently suffering the exploitation at some junctures, but on the other hand, workers' resistance in Shenzhen shows that they also questioned the state discourse. But how would one glean this disjuncture and the efforts made by the workers to question the state discourse? Although experiences at the shopfloor are crucial in shaping workers' subjectivities, this work has emphasises upon the importance of experiences beyond the workplace as well in shaping them. The next section thus looks at the lived experiences of migrant workers in Shenzhen to understand how the everyday was important in shaping their subjectivities.

5.3.3 Lived Experiences²⁴

A major share of migrant workers' lived experiences in Shenzhen was determined by their community ties and living spaces. According to labour scholar Chen Feng, people from the same province tended to live together in urban villages (*chengzhongcun*). And community ties were important for workers mostly because of three reasons: 1. They got more information about jobs through the social relations. 2. Material reasons- they could borrow money from their family and friends in times of crisis. 3. Psychological: ties are important for workers as it gives them a sense of belongingness in the city.

Feng noted that workers coming to the cities either got to know about job opportunities in the cities through labour contractors or through their community ties or *tongxiang* networks. Although there are labour recruitment/ dispatch agencies that recruit workers, not many workers, according to him, relied on these agencies. Regarding the material support from community ties, labour scholar Kaxton Siu observed that when young migrant workers aged 15-16 years old came to the cities, they mostly came penniless and were dependent on their uncle or aunt or cousin in the cities. "There is an infamous rule in the cities", he noted, "usually employers do not issue the first month salary to migrant workers to discourage them from leaving the factory. For the first two months, the workers are

²⁴ Since interviewing workers was discouraged when the author conducted field study in 2019, given the sensitivity of the topic and the crackdown on labour NGOs especially in Shenzhen, this section is mostly based on interviews held with Hong Kong based labour scholars, activists and think tanks studying labour politics in Shenzhen and the rest of China

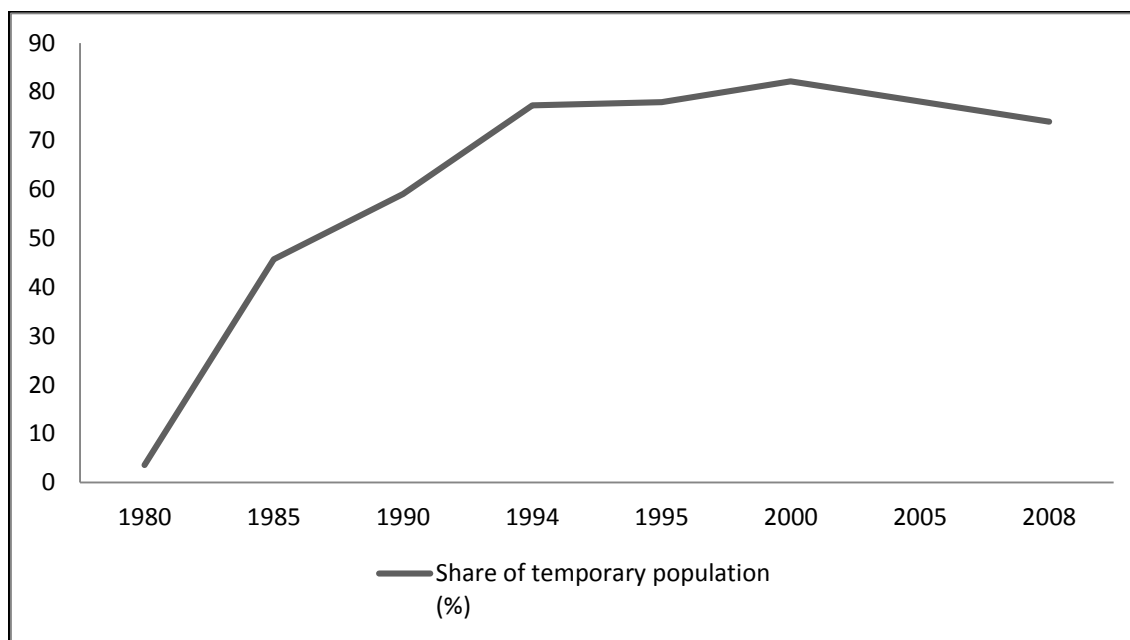
forced to borrow money from their friends or relatives to survive in the city”. Mentioning about the material support provided by community ties and networks, a Chinese scholar²⁵ noted that although there were formal credit systems built and maintained by banks, migrant workers preferred borrowing from friends and relatives as ‘face’ was easier to comprehend while borrowing money than the detailed datasheets of the bank. She observed, “among the migrant workers, informal credit mechanisms based on personal reputations and/or family linkages are far more popular because the losing or winning 面子 (face, reputation) is more understandable than the complex datasheet of bank, and information spread fast in the social networks”.

These ties were also important in providing housing choices for migrant workers. As Siu noted, the first generation migrant workers, especially the female workers mostly stayed in dormitories as long working hours and horrible working conditions required that they stay at the place of work. But after 2000, the living pattern saw a shift as more and more workers started living outside the dormitories. This, in his opinion, had to do with the loosening of *hukou* restrictions in the mid 1990s and allowing temporary residence to rural migrant workers in the cities. Earlier, rural workers who migrated to the cities and wanted to stay beyond three days had to attain permission from the local police station. But in 1985, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) extended the Wuhan model²⁶ of allowing temporary residence cards for migrant workers who wanted to stay beyond three months. In Shenzhen, through the implementation of the *Regulations on Administration of Temporary Population in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, 1995*, the local government tacitly allowed for spontaneous migration of migrant workers as the provisions allowed workers who intended to stay beyond 1 month to register for temporary residence cards. As a result, the share of rural migrants travelling to Shenzhen peaked in the mid-1990s and so did the number of population with temporary residence cards peaked in the mid-1990s as shown in Figure 5.1 and Table 5.2 respectively.

²⁵ Name not mentioned to maintain anonymity.

²⁶In 1983, Wuhan government introduced a new regulation that permitted rural migrant workers to stay in cities without local *hukou* registration. In 1985, the Ministry of Public Security issued *Provisional Regulations on the Administration of Temporary Urban Population* that extended the Wuhan model to the rest of the country.

Figure 5.1: Share of temporary population in Shenzhen (%), 1980-2008



Source: Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook, 2009.

Table 5.2: Population of Shenzhen with and without Residence Cards, 1980-2008

Year	Year-end resident population (10000 persons)	Population with residence cards (10000 persons)	Population with temporary residence cards (10000 persons)	Share of temporary population (%)	Share of Migration in Population (%)
1980	33.39	32.09	1.20	3.60	73.39
1985	88.15	47.86	40.29	45.71	97.09
1990	167.78	68.65	99.13	59.08	96.60
1994	412.71	93.97	318.74	77.23	na
1995	449.15	99.16	349.99	77.92	96.97
2000	701.24	124.92	576.32	82.19	97.84
2005	827.75	181.93	645.82	78.02	91.95
2008	876.83	228.07	648.76	73.9	na
Average annual growth rate from 1979	12.2%	7.2	33.4	-	-

Source: Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook, 2009.

The distribution of *hukou* based on skills and income contributed to increasing inequality and marginalisation of poor migrant workers in Shenzhen. Table 5.3 shows the different set of benefits accrued and qualifications required for availing a Shenzhen *hukou*. As the table shows, in 1995, the unskilled workers could not have a blue-stamp *hukou* or a regular *hukou* which provided them access to welfare benefits unlike a skilled worker who had a certain level of skill and income.

As a result, many rural migrants gradually started moving out of the dormitories and began renting cheap rooms in the urban villages. In response to the increasing demand for cheap rentals, the local Shenzheners began demolishing their own houses and substituted them with multi-storied buildings housing cheap rentals for the migrant workers. It thus became easier for the rural migrant workers in Shenzhen to form networks outside the factories. The labour NGOs also found it more convenient to engage with the migrant workers within the communities that they formed outside the factories. While they conducted surveys within these communities, they informed the workers about labour laws²⁷, their rights and thus raising their consciousness. Thus, since 2000, according to Siu, workers' capacity to mobilize has increased. This was reflected in the rising number of arbitrated labour disputes from the 1990s. As Table 5.1 above shows, the number of arbitrated cases jumped from 316 cases in 1992 to 2900 cases in 1993 after the promulgation of the *Regulations for the Handling of Labour Disputes*. However, the peak of workers' consciousness could be witnessed in the 2010 Honda strike²⁸, which he notes was as interest-based protest as against the usual rights-based protests. Their demands included a wage hike which was not just equal to the legal minimum wage but 5 times more than the legal minimum, apart from the demand to conduct trade union elections at the workplace.

²⁷In 1993, the state council implemented the *Regulations for the Handling of Labour Disputes* and in 1994, the National Labour Law was passed.

²⁸The strike took place on 17 May 2010 at the Zhongshan plant of Honda.

Table 5.3: Qualifications and Benefits for various *Hukou* Categories in Shenzhen, 1995

	Temporary <i>Hukou</i>	Blue-Stamp <i>Hukou</i>	Regular <i>Hukou</i>
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possession of a valid Temporary Resident Certificate (TRC) • No other special requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age below 45 and employed in Shenzhen, and graduated from technical schools or equivalent, holding TRC over 3 years; or with college degrees or equivalent holding TRC over 2 years; or with university degrees or equivalent holding TRC over 1 year. • Owner of private businesses aged below 40 who has paid tax of over 100,000 yuan per year for over 3 consecutive years. • Investor aged below 40; each <i>hukou</i> book is granted per one million yuan investment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age below 45 and employed in Shenzhen, holding blue-stamp <i>hukou</i> over 3 years; or with college degrees or equivalent holding blue-stamp <i>hukou</i> over 2 years; or with university degrees or equivalent holding blue-stamp <i>hukou</i> over 1 year. • Recruited university graduates, professionals, cadres and their spouses, and with the permission from Party, personnel, or labour authorities. • Demobilised servicemen under the state placement plan.
Entitlement to urban benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not specified (assumed none) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as local regular residents in the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participation in social security programme ▪ Participation in medical insurance programme ▪ Application for business licenses ▪ Application for permission foreign travel ▪ Elementary and secondary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full
Conditions for terminating the <i>hukou</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to renew an expired TRC • Committing crimes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committing crimes • Failure to pay urban infrastructure construction fee • Unemployed for 6 months or in bankruptcy • Moving out of Shenzhen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not applicable

Source: Chan and Li, 1999, pp.844-845.

Geoffrey Crothall at CLB notes that in the 1990s and 2000s, community ties were really important. During the early stages of migration, people lived in close proximity to the workplace and looked for cheap housing options in the urban villages. Wong added, given that the factory dormitories were crowded with at least 8-10 workers cramped in a small room, they preferred staying outside in rented accommodations. The Foxconn dormitories, for instance, were known to have six to eight bunk beds per room and then there are times when 12 workers sleep in the same room at the same time (Merchant 2017). Most of these dormitories also involve surveillance because of which workers prefer living outside. Mostly, married couples found it inconvenient to live under such conditions and preferred the cheap rental accommodations in the urban villages. Migrant workers, according to her, always preferred hanging out with people from the same hometown or community. They felt comfortable living together with villagers from the same region. They rent a room in the urban villages and share the room with other friends from the same village. However, in her opinion, this was more common among male workers than female workers, who found it expensive and prefer living in the dormitories. Confirming Wong's contention, Siu noted that the migrant workers rent a house outside with their relatives or people from the same village because "it is easier for them to interact with people from the same village". The pattern, according to him, is usual as younger cousins come to the city mostly through networks.

When asked if the neighbourhoods were important in shaping community ties, Siu confirmed that urban villages formed an important informal space where social networks were formed and maintained by the rural migrant workers. According to Siu, although the first generation migrant workers mostly stayed inside the dorms as living outside the factories entailed constant interrogation by the police, *chengzhongcun* was an important space where workers with diverse affinities clustered together. Migrant workers also found psychological support through their community ties as they felt comfortable "talking the same dialect and eating the same food". This was especially common among female migrant workers who worked far from home, away from their relatives or husbands, they felt comfortable talking to female workers from the same hometown. In fact, he noted that not very often married couples migrated to the city together as the skills required could

vary from city to city²⁹. In such cases, many married female migrants entered into affairs with male migrant workers from the same hometown to find emotional support.

These spaces were also important as it provided migrant workers with various leisure opportunities. Leisure was another important of migrant workers' lived experiences. Responding to my query about workers' free time in Shenzhen, Feng notes that workers' leisure activities were of two kinds: spontaneous and organised. According to Wong, there were not many organised avenues for amusement in Shenzhen in the past. Factories offered very limited leisure options. When the SEZ was designed, no leisure zone was demarcated for workers' leisure. However, Feng observed that labour NGOs played an important role in organising workers' leisure in Shenzhen, although not all workers participated in the NGO-organised leisure activities. During these activities, workers are often encouraged to open up and share experiences at work and personal life with each other. According to him, earlier, it was easier for these activities to take place under the aegis of the labour NGOs as political atmosphere was not as repressive as it is today. For instance, Performing Arts Agency (?), a labour NGO based in Shenzhen, organised workers music activities, singing and playing musical instruments. As will be discussed later, another instance of labour NGOs organising workers' leisure is in the Da Lang neighbourhood where NGOs such as Grass volunteers organise dance activities in the Laborer Square.

Informal leisure activities of workers, according to Crothall, involved chatting, shopping, meeting fellow workers at street cafes for dinner, playing snooker or pool, visiting amusement parks etc. He added, inside every migrant village there are restaurants from different regions, convenience shops and barber shops where migrant workers meet and hang out. When workers get together they often discuss about film stars, personal relationships, pressures of getting married, monetary issues and issues at the workplace. Wong noted that the workers unite together at these spots, dine together for a couple of hours and have hometown dishes. They order together at least 8-10 dishes when they dine out. The factories normally offer only 1 or 2 dishes for lunch. Another cheap leisure option,

²⁹ In Shenzhen, the demand for female migrant workers was higher as Shenzhen's industrial profile was dominated by light industry, electronics, garments industry etc. which required young women with nimble fingers to handle the products during the production process.

popular especially among male workers is, communal drinking. They either go out for cheap drinking option or just gather in their rented accommodation for drinking. Siu noted that migrant workers often visited their friends from other factories, particularly during holidays and festivals. These group leisure activities played an important role in the social reproduction of labour power. The alienating tendencies capitalistic production processed tended to deny the workers the pleasures of chatting at the workplace. There have been many cases where workers have been fined for chatting while working. Thus, hanging out with friends and families became crucial to escape the alienation created by the workplace.

Wong observed that streets, corner shops, restaurants etc. were the most popular leisure spaces among migrant workers highlighting the important role that streets and public spaces played for workers' leisure in the absence of workers' cultural palaces and workers' clubs of the Mao period. A noticeable feature of the leisure activities here is that most of them are group activities. They played cards near the corner shops and in the extended spaces available outside the corner shops. According to Wong, *mahjong* was a popular leisure activity, especially among female workers while male workers preferred playing cards. Shops did not charge for playing cards, but they charged for *mahjong*. Normally, the first round winner offered the fee for the service. Yet another cheap amusement option for workers was billiards. Shopkeepers set up tables outside their shops where migrant workers "occupy the place" for an hour. According to her, it was one of the most popular spots where workers "gathered together" and after the activity they "ate together". These shops are mostly run by fellow villagers. Workers in Guangdong also engage in a popular traditional leisure activity known as foot-washing or *xi yu*. It is a cheap leisure time activity for workers who have to pay less than 10 yuan for 1 hour. Highlighting the gendered aspect of this particular leisure activity, she points that not many female workers engaged in foot-washing. They would rather prefer going shopping.

According to Siu, migrant workers loved window-shopping. Many of the male migrant workers loved checking out the new mobile phones at the mobile phone stores. Many of these workers disliked being a worker and putting on the factory uniforms. They loved buying new clothes, getting fashionable hair-cuts, etc. that would not make them appear like a worker. The popularity of shopping among migrant workers is a testament to the

growing consumerist aspirations among migrant workers. The desire for a better life is reflected in their desire to escape the village life and migrate to the cities despite knowing that working conditions in the factories were really harsh. A migrant worker's story in the 1994 *World of Dagong* column highlighted this desire. The story was about a few migrant working girls who love wearing jeans and go to a shopping mall to buy them. They look at some special embroidered denims and have the desire to buy them (*Shenzhen Special Zone Daily* 1994). It was unclear in the story whether they ended up buying them, but it reflected the desire among the young migrant workers to appear like a middle-class person and the inability to meet the desire, I argue, makes them more and more conscious about their identity as a migrant worker. This was also evident in their everyday interactions with class in leisure spaces. Going downtown, visiting museums, historical relics and amusement parks such as the *World Park*, *Splendid China*, *Folk Culture Village*, etc. were also popular among migrant workers. Although the amusement parks were expensive, costing more than 100 yuan, according to Wong, they save money to visit these places once in a while. They visit these places with family or friends. But many a while migrant workers encounter class biases at these places. But as Ngai (2003) narrated the case where a migrant worker was shouted upon by a middle-class man in one of the amusement parks for not working in the factory and being where she "belonged", such experiences are crucial in reinforcing the migrant worker subjectivities.

The fact that workers have the desire to escape the life of a factory hand is also confirmed by Crothall who noted that many workers joined classes during leisure to enhance their skills in the hope of better job opportunities. But as Siu observed, these classes were either time-consuming or were not affordable enough for many willing to join. Crothall agreed that the realization that social mobility is limited even in the cities was crucial in shaping class consciousness among workers. He noted that many workers dreamt of starting their own businesses but not many were successful.

However, the 2000s witnessed an expansion in the leisure opportunities available for migrant workers. Efforts were now being made by the local government to transform the urban landscape and make it worker-friendly given the rise in labour conflicts involving migrant workers and an increasing need to maintain social stability. For instance, the Da

Lang Laborer Square in Bao'an district³⁰ was built by the local district government in 2007 to provide a leisure space for the locals and the vast majority of migrant workers who live in the urban village. A reflection of the concern of the local government towards the growing instability caused by the rising number of labour incidents, the construction of the Da Lang Laborer Square was a part of the efforts made to implement an 8-8-8 work-leisure-sleep schedule for the workers in Da Lang. Dotted mostly by garment, light and electronics industries, Da Lang had a sizeable number of young migrant working population who came from nearby provinces of Guizhou, Jiangxi, Henan etc. Most of these workers engaged in activities such as skating, dancing, playing badminton etc. As a study by two scholars, Fabian Koning (2013) and Bas Hendrikse (2013) shows, the dancing and music activities of migrant workers were mostly facilitated by volunteer groups such as Grass (Xiao Cao) and Lutheran (Mu en) which also had a few migrant workers as their members. Mostly women took part in the dancing activities and men mostly played badminton, basketball, skating, board games etc. then there were a few who would prefer to just sit and chat with their friends while working, as this author observed in her field visit³¹. Towards the corners of the park, a group of migrant workers playing *mahjong*, cards or backgammon was a common sight in the evenings and on holidays when they sat to play after lunch; their friends formed the group of onlookers who would enjoy watching them play. Interestingly, as pointed out by a CLB researcher, the rules of some games such as *mahjong* varied across regions. Thus, mostly workers belonging to the same region would prefer playing with each other as it was easy to follow the same rules of the game. These group games, thus, played an important role in building camaraderie and solidarities.

According to Siu, spaces for leisure increased in the 2000s with the popularisation of computer and mobile phones. Facilities such as internet bars were built by the locals for migrant workers in the urban villages. He further added that since inside factories such as Foxconn, working hours made it difficult for them to take out free time, but when workers did find free time, they loved going to internet bars to play games and send emails to

³⁰ Currently, it is part of the Longhua district as Longhua was officially separated from Bao'an district in 2011.

³¹ Some corners of the park were occupied by women who sat and chatted with each other while knitting pouches.

relatives at home. Young men, according to him, loved playing online games such as World of Warcraft, a massively multiplayer game that they play with relatives back at home, friends in nearby towns etc. women, on the other hand, wrote blogs³². Married couples also went to internet cafes to talk to their relatives and left-behind children at home through video call. Siu noted that mobile phones had also become popular among workers by the mid-2000s. Although, there were cheaper versions of mobile phones available, not always could everyone afford them. But he pointed out that some workers even borrowed money from their relatives to buy mobile phones.

Since the 2000s, mobile phones and internet have not only deepened the community ties and networks but also expanded their networks to include new contacts created at work and leisure, and in later years, this included the social media as well. Given the institutionalised exclusion of migrant workers, workers were forced to fall back on their networks built in these spaces in order to navigate through the city. These ties were then capitalised upon by the workers to gain information about new jobs, housing opportunities, borrowing money, and finally, mobilised during protests.

Emphasising on the role that everyday lives play for workers, Chinese scholar Li Na³³ shares a famous story in China about a worker:

“There is a famous sad story from 1990s that when a family had their dinner, the wife complained that only her son had no new shoes in the class, because the husband cannot afford it. Workers used to be the proud leading class in China, but at that time, lots of them were laid off and became penniless. The wife ranted on and on, but the poor father said nothing. He finished his dinner, stood up, directly went to the nearby window and jumped off the window. For him, when the everyday life was destroyed, the meaning of life was also destroyed”.

Li concludes that everyday life is the source of feeling of dignity and satisfaction for workers.

³²Siu noted that these days, many migrant workers, but especially the females, would write stories on We Chat, QQ where they share their life experiences. In fact, according to him, they even utilised these platforms for mobilization during protests by putting statement of demands on the various We Chat groups of migrant workers. To counter surveillance, they would keep on creating multiple posts.

³³Name changed on conditions of anonymity.

These lived experiences are important as it tended to shape the subjectivities of migrant workers as already discussed in the previous chapters. Community ties and leisure spaces were crucial in developing a sense of solidarity and an identity of migrant workers, separate from the middle-class whom they encountered in their everyday lives. The experiences of marginalisation through *hukou*, the community ties forged and maintained at the living spaces and at leisure spaces and the limited ability to buy consumer products were all crucial in shaping this identity of a migrant worker that was different from the one being projected by the state. The time after work was an important aspect of their everyday lives as it offered them some semblance of individual agency away from the roving eyes of the supervisor and manager. This then became as crucial as their experiences at the workplace in shaping their subjectivities. The manifestation of these shared identities found expression in the form of labour protests, a clear testament to the disjuncture in between the exhortations by the state and the ground reality as experienced by the migrant workers. The fact that workers chose to protest at certain junctures showed that their everyday experiences overpowered the all-pervasive reach of the state discourse.

When asked about shaped workers' mobilisation in Shenzhen, Crothall noted that it was always a specific event or a pay cut that acted as a stimulus to a strike or petitioning. Workers would often gather in the dormitories, factory canteens or neighbourhood cafes to share information and discuss strategies for protest or petitioning. According to Feng, labour organizing and mobilisation depended a lot on workers consciousness and networking. In this regard, he notes that the labour NGOs played a huge role in developing workers' organisation skills. However, informal organisation by workers, in his opinion, mostly depended on the regional and provincial ties of workers. They might form these ties either at the workplace or at the places they live together. He noted that workers often stay together, share experiences and act together. As a result, informal ties and living spaces, according to him, formed an important constituent of working class action in China. Chinese scholar Li, responding to my query on the role of community ties for workers' survival in the cities, observed, "the relationships among migrant workers are very important for the, especially in the case of collective acting for labor right, because migrant workers often lack the law awareness and means to protect themselves". Wong noted that earlier, workers from Sichuan and Hunan would mobilise along locality-based lines.

Workers from the same town or villages would talk either inside factories or in the dormitories. They also discussed outside factories or inside migrant villages. For instance, in the Baoxiang Toy Factory strike that broke out in Shenzhen on June 15, 1995, women workers who lived in the dormitory were mobilised when a few workers posted a notice in the dormitory calling for them to join the strike the next day. The shared space of a dormitory thus became a crucial element for the mobilization of workers during the strike (UN Official Report on Women Workers in China, 1995:22).

A 1991 newspaper report discusses about ‘regional gangs’ being formed by the striking workers “which often create disturbances and could become a factor of social instability in the long run” and how the “question of temporary external workers has become half *out of control*”. 15 strikes took place in Longgang alone involving “regional gangs” from Sichuan, Guangxi, Changjiang, Hunan (FBIS-CHI-91-020). The term “regional gangs”, here, refers to worker communities with localistic or regional ties which also in a way displays the perception of popular media and the negative perception generated against the community mobilisation by migrant workers.

Discussing about how leisure time activities facilitated mobilisation, Crothall noted that internet bars were widely popular among workers in the 2000s. He observed how internet bars played a major role in the 2010 Honda strike where workers uploaded videos of the strike, communicated with previous strikers from other factories and shared strategies with each other through online forums or chatrooms using code words. When government cracked down on internet bars, the reason given was that it was to regulate ‘unwelcome social behaviour’ such as pornography. But Crothall maintains these ‘unwelcome behavior’ was mostly associated with migrant workers. Some scholars such as Rolandsen (2011) believe that the crackdown on internet cafes by the state is to “demonstrate to the urban middle classes the efficacy of the government in its handling of the urban ‘others’”. Rural migrant workers are considered both by the state and the middle classes as the agents of chaos (*luan*) or social disorder. Thus, crackdown on these internet cafes served to strengthen the legitimacy of the government as guardians of social order. This further reinforced the perception of rural migrant workers in the society as uncouth and chaotic people.

Sharing his experience about interviewing laid-off workers in the state-owned enterprises in the 1990s, Feng noted that workers used to strategise for protests mostly during leisure time-either while having tea together in the evening or while eating together or after dinner. Restaurants often became a common spot for these workers to gather and share grievances. Informal connections, in his opinion, are important for workers and were often built during leisure time. Building a strategy and consensus is important for mobilizing, and this happens during leisure. They met in a restaurant or a tea-house to share experiences and make strategies. Eating together was another leisure time activity and an informal space where workers share their experiences and strategised.

Responding to my query regarding whether community ties with the intermediaries played a dual role for migrant workers, Siu stated that in the 1990s, the migrant workers already working in the factories would act as intermediaries in the labour market for recruiting workers from their hometowns. This brought them some monetary benefits from the company because it was easier for the management to adopt this recruitment pattern as on the one hand, it made recruitment easier and on the other hand, it became easier for the management to control workers at the production line through these senior workers turned supervisors who belonged to the same hometown as the migrant worker s/he recruited from the hometown. However, Siu reminded that the same community ties that were mobilised by the employers to control and discipline workers at the production line were mobilised by the workers in the event of a conflict with the employer. This was mostly the case, if the supervisor also happened to share similar dismal working conditions as the production line workers. This throws an interesting light on the significance of workers' everyday lives and how ties forged outside the factory play an important role in power negotiations within the shopfloor.

In another incident in Longguan district in Shenzhen, migrant workers belonging to Hunan were beaten up by the local police when a scuffle broke out between a local resident and the migrant workers after he repeatedly ignored their demands to replace the barbed wire he broke while riding his motorcycle. One injured worker said, "they didn't ask us anything and began to arrest us. They didn't reason with us. They just hit us Hunanese". In the resulting protest against the treatment meted out them, more than 60 migrant workers got

injured and one migrant worker shot dead by the anti-riot police who opened fire when 500 migrant workers stormed the local Communist Party office (FBIS-CHI-95-234). On the one hand, this incident reflected the lack of acceptance of migrant workers into the society. The witnesses to this incident reported that this clash was a culmination of long-standing tensions between migrant workers and local villagers. On the other hand, the initial response of the police towards the migrant workers is indicative of a deep-seated bias against migrant workers by the local authorities where the migrant workers were assumed to be the natural culprits before even investigating into the matter. Thus, the migrant workers experienced everyday marginalisation not just at the level of the society but also at the level of the state that served to reinforce the everydayness of the marginalisation.

Migrant workers' awareness of their non-local identity constituting the reason for their othering is expressed by how the injured worker responded when asked about the incident: "they didn't reason with us. They just hit us Hunanese." However, in the face of othering, workers often choose to respond by falling back on their community ties as was evident in this case when the Hunanese migrant workers mobilised to protest against the discrimination meted out against them. The fact that the local Party office became the target of their protest was also illustrative of one of the many instances where the migrant workers saw through the veiled Shenzhen dream the state tried to sell them.

5.4 Summary

The socialist legacy of subject-making continued into the Reform period as well. On the one hand, was the cultural narrative or discourse or propaganda of the state about migrant workers that aims at defining a model Shenzhen migrant worker, recasting memories of struggles led by migrant workers and providing a sanitised version of migrant workers' workplace and urban experience, then there was workers' lived experience that ran parallel and at times in contradiction to the state narrative. This chapter has shown how migrant workers developed ambivalent identities under the dual process of subject-making that took place in the 1990s and the 2000s. On the one hand, the state discourse tried to mould them into docile bodies that would diligently serve the cause of regional construction and on the other hand, was their own lived experiences. Workers' identities were shaped by these dual

processes. While the migrant workers bought the Shenzhen dream of working hard without complaining and making a breakthrough, their everyday reality was also pertinent as it unravelled the discrimination meted out to them in the city. These dual processes, together, created an ambivalent identity of a worker-consumer, and their response in a given situation was determined by this ambivalence. While the identity of a worker-consumer drove them to tolerate exploitation at certain junctures, the very same identity served to shape their dissent.

This chapter has explored the contradictions and the harmony of these two constituencies of working class subjectivities of migrant workers in Shenzhen arguing that in order to make sense of the ambivalent identities that are characteristic of migrant workers in Shenzhen and the rest of China, an understanding of these contradictions and harmony, within the recasting of working class subjectivities is pertinent. Although not entirely, but this, in my opinion, is crucial in understanding workers resistance in Shenzhen, and perhaps the rest of China during the period of transition.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The growth story of China could be best encapsulated by the workers of China who became the epilogue to this captivating story of the phenomenal rise of a nation. A fleeting look at the popular nomenclatures- “Made in China”, “Workshop of the World”, “World’s Factory”- that became synonymous to China during its initial years of Reform is a testament to the role played by workers in driving China’s export-led growth. Any study on labour will be incomplete without an account of the millions of workers who drive the global supply chain by constituting one of the cheapest labourforces in the world. From being the “masters of the enterprise” to being mere factory hands diligently serving the rebuilding of a nation just out of the clutches of the Cultural Revolution, workers in China have been a significant cog in the wheel in the rewriting of Chinese history, and in the process determining the global shift.

At the heart of this process is the Labour Contract Law that about structural changes during the Reform period. These changes not only shaped the industrial labour regime and the urban transformation in China, but also recasted workers’ relationship with the city. Urban spaces had changed the meaning of work. From the earlier version of an iron rice bowl, where work was characterized as hereditary and permanent, work in the post-socialist period had become increasingly precarious in nature. The household registration system or *hukou*, on the other hand, further intensified the exploitative nature of work within the global capitalist production system; and as this work has shown, it also determined the socio-spatial location of migrant workers within the cities as compared to the local residents. Any study on labour would thus be incomplete without an account of the millions of workers grappling with a number of challenges that resulted from China’s skewed pattern of development and urbanisation.

The urban process in China, in comparison to the urban processes in other countries, has distinctive Chinese characteristics owing to its socialist legacies. However, what is absent from this oft-repeated phrase of ‘Chinese characteristics of urbanisation’ is the fact that migrant workers have shaped China’s urban processes as much as any other institutional,

economic and political factors. The narrative of migrant workers' agency during the Reform period runs parallel to China's urban story and the envisioning of 'socialist modernisation' by the Chinese leaders. Although perpetually marginalised from the dominant discourse of urbanisation, workers including the migrant workers have struggled to create their own alternate urbanism which was pivotal in determining their class experiences. As this work has shown, an understanding of China's worker urbanisms provides a better insight into the nature of China's urbanisation as well as the nature of its workers' collective actions.

Though not entirely autonomous from the dominant narrative of urbanisation, as this study has shown, workers have striven to create their own urbanism through various spatial practices. The mushrooming of urban villages as a response to the rising demand among migrant workers was one such practice. Most migrant workers choose to settle down in these informal spaces owing to institutional exclusion in the form of *hukou*. However, as discussed in this thesis, community ties were a crucial factor in determining their housing choices as they formed the basis for determining workers' material and psychological well-being in the cities. The fact that traditional bonds survived against the backdrop of modernisation, as this thesis has argued, attests to the passive resistance by migrant workers against the alienating tendencies of proletarianisation that occurred in the aftermath of Reform.

Leisure practices formed another crucial aspect of worker urbanisms. While workers engaged in highly political leisure activities until 1978, economic reforms constituted a break in determining workers' leisure. With the increasing role of the market, workers engaged in more consumerist leisure practices such as shopping and travelling while at the same time engaging in group activities such as playing *mah-jong*, cards or eating out together. These practices and the class experiences that accompanied them played a crucial role in shaping their subjectivities as *dagongzhe* (migrant workers) or *ruoshi qunti* (vulnerable groups).

Economic reforms are generally seen as marking a break from socialism and a shift towards 'market socialism,' But the Chinese working bodies are in themselves a living legacy of

socialism who have collectively embodied the Maoist ideals through the years of mass political campaigns and movements. The collective socialist memory of the Chinese workers thus forms a tenacious force to reckon with despite the hegemonizing tendencies of capitalism. It impinged upon the modernizing project of the state that was set in motion after 1978, as has been discussed in the case of Shenzhen. The migrant workers' museum was an important state endeavour to create model migrant workers and morph collective memories about the migrant workers who contributed to the building of Shenzhen. Another attempt at shaping migrant worker subjectivities were found in the state-controlled media discourses on the category of "*Shenzhen ren* (Shenzhen person)" wherein traits such as hardwork, sacrifice and diligence determined if they were a true *Shenzhen ren*. Although the attempts at socio-cultural engineering by the state to create a spiritual and material civilization did bear fruit, and had implications for the process of urbanisation and migrant worker subjectivities, as this study has shown workers' response to these attempts in the form of drawing from their collective memories, social ties and networks, using working class ICTs etc. provided workers the space to negotiate through the dominant narrative imposed upon them, thereby producing parallel worker urbanisms.

Through various modalities of protest mobilisation prevalent among workers, this study has shown how there are multiple strands of continuities and breaks from the past, where the persistent struggle by the working class to claim the right to the city in China could be perceived as a socialist legacy. The social contract that was established by the state with the workers was instrumental in defining workers' social and physical spaces as well as workers' collective memories that enabled workers to draw upon them for protest mobilization- an example being the workers' neighbourhood as a site of mobilisation. However, in the wake of the dormitory labour regime for workers during the Reform period, and the gradual erosion of social and cultural spaces demarcated for workers such as the Workers' Clubs, this study has shown how the workers have utilised the extant resources for protest mobilisation. Dormitories and leisure spaces have thus emerged as sites of mobilisation. Migrant enclaves have emerged out of the skewed urbanisation process, and social ties have been instrumental in producing these informal spatial arrangements. Concurrently, these informal spaces became spaces for reproduction of labour as well as spaces that shaped labour-capital contestation.

To argue that migrant workers have ‘succeeded’ in this endeavour of producing alternate urbanisms will be an overstatement. Government crackdown on migrant workers’ physical and social spaces is a routine. At the same time, pressures from the production processes drag the workers to the brink of suicide, as was witnessed in the recent spate of suicides at several Foxconn plants in China. Nevertheless, within the hegemonizing tendencies of capital, and the modernizing project of the state, workers found their own avenues of contestation against the exploitation and marginalization arising out of state-capital nexus. This study has made an attempt to delineate the strands of contestations and the contours of transgressions that workers managed to evolve under the bulldozing effects of urbanization, and the socialist legacies that the workers inherited play a crucial role in producing these subaltern urbanisms.

As this study concludes, a discussion on urbanisation with Chinese characteristics will be incomplete without mapping the role of China’s workers in actively shaping its urban phenomenon. This study is thus an attempt at retrieving workers’ agency within the larger backdrop of urbanisation. The simultaneous processes of marginalisation of workers at both spaces of work and spaces of residence was pertinent to workers’ sense of belonging in the city, their subjectivities and thereby, the formation of identities. Even though they appeared fragmented and fractured, there were lines of remarkable cohesion and coordination on multiple fronts. This formed the core of working class movements during the Reform period.

Challenges were encountered in conducting fieldwork in Shenzhen on an issue that has grown more sensitive in China in the past few years since the crackdown on labour and environmental NGOs. Keeping in mind the research ethics, interviews with migrant workers in Shenzhen was infeasible given the heightened sense of fear of surveillance within the society, particularly after 2015, when a number of labour NGOs based in Shenzhen and the migrant worker activists associated with them faced pressure from the local authorities. Thus, to argue that social ties will become even more important to migrant workers in the coming years will not be an understatement as efforts are being made to replace the labour NGOs with the trade unions. The recent attempts by the government urging for a trade union reform could be seen as a step in that direction. However, given

the deep distrust for the trade unions among the workers, workers will be left with no choice but to fall back on each other and their community ties for support.

The struggles by the workers for a more inclusive city relies more than ever on how they mobilise their spatial ties. The spatial politics mobilised by the workers will become more important in determining their right to the city and how well they are assimilated into the city. It will thus be interesting to further explore how these developments take shape under the new regime given the new developments that have taken place since 2008 after the enactment of the Labour Contract Law. Although the Law served to protect workers' rights by specifying the need to sign labour contracts, it had also created conditions for an increasing informalisation of labour relations and a precarious labour market. It will be interesting to see how this informal sector responds to the new developments given that they find no representation at all even within the official trade union. Will it sideline them further from the Chinese Dream or will this be an opportunity to look inside for mobilisational modes?

Not just the workers, given the challenges thrust forward by the field in conducting research on labour politics under the current regime, many scholars are forced to diversify their focus to examine themes external to labour contention. Does this mean that scholars should abstain from working on this area? What will this entail for the future of labour politics in general and labour studies in particular? These are issues that require serious deliberations within the community of labour scholars as politics threaten to dislodge research and research frameworks. Given the limitations, it is important to look for and develop alternative frameworks in studying labour issues including resistance under the current disposition. This study is thus a humble attempt in addressing this limitation and narrowing the gap.

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Appendix I

Questionnaire for Scholars

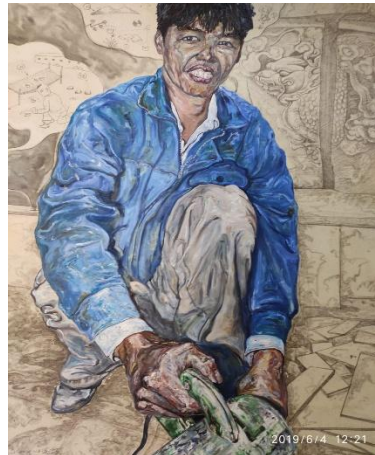
Name (Optional):

Department:

Institution/Organization:

1. What are the various housing options of migrant workers? What do you think determines these choices?
2. What about urban workers? Where do they live? Do they live as a community? If yes, what do you think explains this?
3. How do you understand the relationship between urban workers and migrant workers? Are they competitive or do they identify themselves as members of the same class?
4. What kind of relationships do migrant workers enter into? At the workplace? Outside the workplace?
5. What are the various possible places where they build these relationships?
6. How do you see the role these relationships play for workers' survival in cities?
7. In your opinion, how significant are they relationships in shaping workers' identities?
8. What are the various formal/informal credit mechanisms available for workers? What do they prefer? Why?
9. In case of informal mechanisms (Qn.9), do you see a power relationship?
10. Studies on workers' movement have sidelined the importance of workers' everyday lives such as the role of leisure. Would you like to comment on that?
11. How do you explain the shift in workers' leisure culture post-1978?
12. How would you explain the role of the market in the realm of workers' leisure?
13. The leisure market today is highly segmented in nature. Do you think this has an influence on workers' subjectivity?

Appendix II



Images from the Shenzhen Bao'an Migrant Workers' Museum



Leisure activities at Da Lang Laborer Square



Caged dormitories in Foxconn Dormitory Area in Longhua