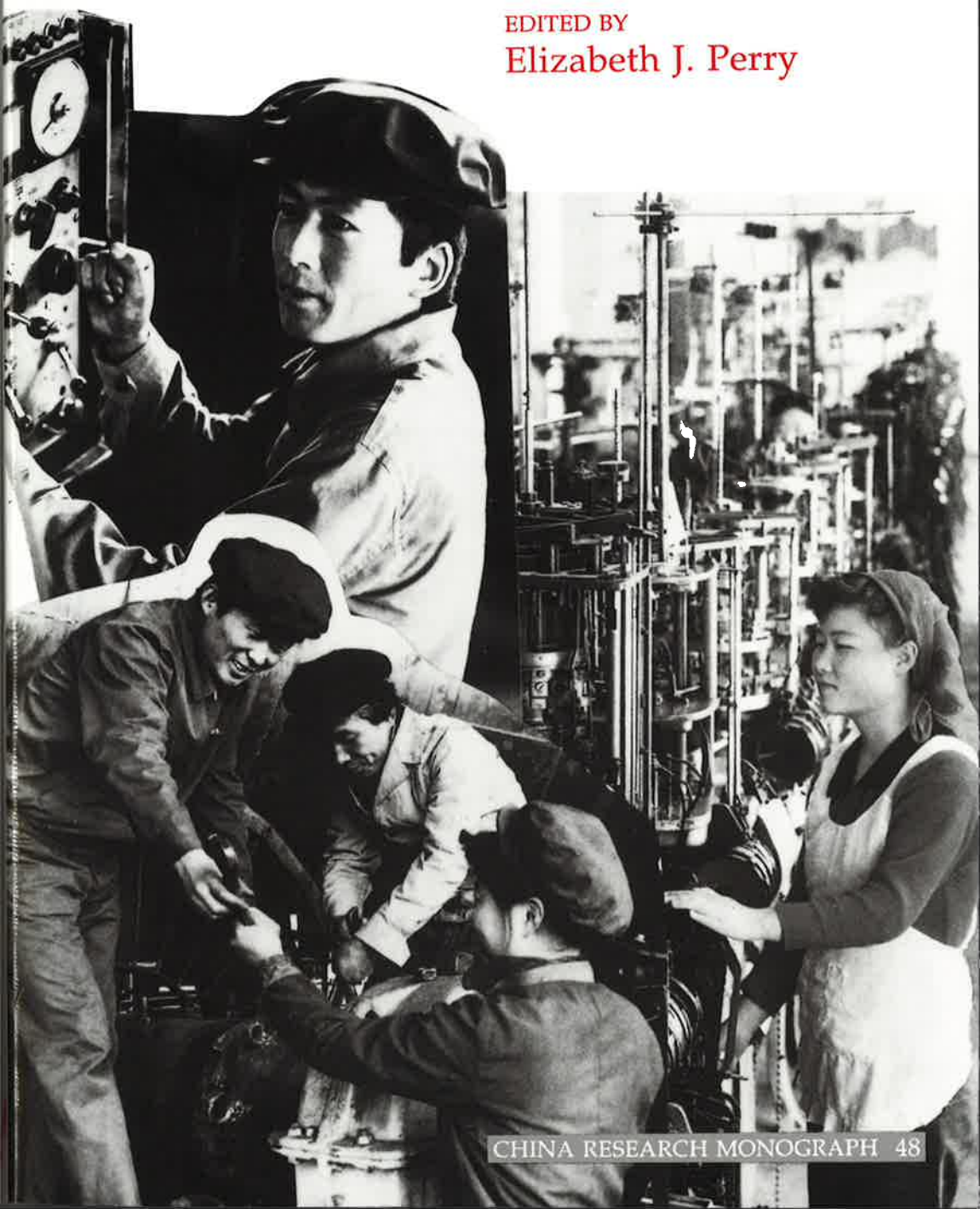


Putting Class in Its Place

Worker Identities in East Asia

EDITED BY

Elizabeth J. Perry





INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES
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CENTER FOR CHINESE STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

Putting Class in Its Place: Bases of Worker Identity in East Asia

ELIZABETH J. PERRY

The stunning success of East Asia's industrialization drive over the past half century has prompted many a social science effort at explanation. Although scholars have generally stressed the role of activist state bureaucracies in promoting economic development,¹ an important subtheme in the literature spotlights the quiescence of labor as a key factor.² The combination of strong states and weak workers is often credited with the phenomenal growth rates enjoyed by East Asian newly industrializing countries (NICs) in recent decades.³ Government regulation and repression, we are told, militated against unionization or collective protest on the part of workers and facilitated the exploitation of low-cost labor in producing goods for export.

Despite their acknowledged contribution to the seemingly miraculous expansion of their national economies, East Asian workers themselves were seen as politically excluded and impotent. Frederic Deyo notes of workers in East Asia that "nowhere—not in their workshops, firms, communities, or governments—have they been able to influence the political and economic decisions that have shaped their lives."⁴ Whereas an

¹ See especially Chalmers A. Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925–1975* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982); Alice H. Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Robert Wade, *Governing the Market: Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

² Frederic C. Deyo, *Beneath the Miracle: Labor Subordination in the New Asian Industrialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

³ See Frederic C. Deyo, *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), esp. chaps. 4, 5, and 6.

⁴ Deyo, *Beneath the Miracle*, p. 1.

earlier generation was inclined to attribute this political weakness to a Confucian cultural heritage that demanded unquestioning obedience to higher authority, more recent approaches emphasize structural factors: political controls, relations of production, community organizations, and the like.⁵ In either case, the mentalities and everyday practices of workers themselves have tended to escape serious examination; scholarly attention has centered instead upon those larger forces—whether cultural or structural—that allegedly compel workers to subordinate their own interests to the dictates of workplace authorities.

Taken as a whole, the essays in this volume mark a departure from the existing scholarship on East Asian labor. Much of the comparative work to date has been undertaken by generalists who lack facility in East Asian languages; in contrast, the contributors to this collection have all conducted extensive primary research in Chinese, Japanese, and/or Korean sources. The result, we hope, is a more in-depth and nuanced view of aspects of East Asian working-class life than available in other comparative volumes. Although many of the contributors are known for their previous analyses of labor relations from a political economy perspective, here they shift lenses somewhat to look more intensively at the concerns of workers themselves. Using a variety of fresh sources—ranging from short stories and novels to diaries, interviews, and attitude surveys—the authors reveal an East Asian workforce that is a good deal more feisty than commonly believed.

The substantive topics as well as the methodologies and approaches presented in the forthcoming chapters are heterogeneous, as one would naturally expect from a group of scholars trained in diverse disciplinary backgrounds (history, anthropology, sociology, and political science) who work on quite different societies (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China). Despite such variance, however, the contributions converge in highlighting the proactive dimensions of working-class practice. Whether focusing on conflicts surrounding unionization in the Japanese steel industry half a century ago (Gordon), the quest for humane treatment

⁵ For an argument about the Confucian origins of management relations in Taiwan factories, see Robert H. Silin, *Leadership and Values: The Organization of Large-Scale Taiwanese Enterprises* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). The most systematic structural arguments appear in Deyo, *Political Economy*, and idem, *Beneath the Miracle*.

ONE

Conditions for the Disappearance of the Japanese Working-Class Movement

ANDREW GORDON

Some Japanologists will question the premise of this essay. Why discuss the disappearance of something that could never have existed in the first place? These commentators deny that “working-class” movements, consciousness, or culture are relevant concepts for the study of Japan. A classic of this genre is the 1970 book *Japanese Society*, by the well-known anthropologist Nakane Chie. She presents Japan as a “vertical” and “homogeneous” society, both historically and at the time of her writing. She also denies the possibility for significant social action on the basis of horizontal classes:

Even if social classes like those in Europe can be detected in Japan, and even if something vaguely resembling those classes that are illustrated in the textbooks of western sociology can also be found in Japan, the point is that in actual society this stratification is unlikely to function and that it does not really reflect the social structure. In Japanese society it is really not a matter of workers struggling against capitalists or managers but of Company A ranged against Company B.¹

A decade later, Murakami Yasusuke and his colleagues presented a grand argument in a similar vein. They stressed that vertical, hierarchical social structures modeled on the Japanese household (*ie*) have been central and durable across centuries of history, and they explicitly connected these underlying structures to a contemporary (1980s) “Japanese management system” that relied on

¹ Nakane Chie, *Japanese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). This is a modified version of *Tate shakai no ningen kankei* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1967). Quotation at p. 87.

TWO

Work, Culture, and Consciousness of the Korean Working Class

HAGEN KOO

The dominant theme in the writings on East Asian labor is its docility, its organizational weakness, and its exclusion from politics. Indeed, nowhere in capitalist East Asia can we find strong organized labor or a strong labor party. In these countries, as Deyo observes, "organized labor plays a politically marginal and insignificant role in national affairs. Labor organizations confront employers from a position of weakness in collective bargaining, industrial work stoppages are few and generally easily suppressed, and there is rarely more than symbolic labor participation in economic policy-making." This docility of labor, most scholars agree, has played a critical role in bringing rapid economic development in Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Yet rapid industrial growth in this region, as Deyo continues to note, "has not altered the weak political position of labor," and "labor movements in general remain controlled and inconsequential."¹

Furthermore, when and where labor actions occur, they seldom express class conflicts or class interest. In her critical review of the ethnographic literature on factory women in Asian industrializing societies, Aihwa Ong concludes that these workers "rarely construct their identities or organize themselves in terms of collective or global interests." She further argues that "workers' struggles and resistances are often not based upon class interests or class solidarity, but comprise individual and even covert acts against various forms of control. The interest defended, or the

¹ Frederic Deyo, *Beneath the Miracle: Labor Subordination in the New Asian Industrialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 3-5.

THREE

Class Identity without Class Consciousness? Working-Class Orientations in Taiwan

NAI-TEH WU

The problem of (working) class formation is one of the main foci in sociological studies of stratification. Under what conditions and through what processes will a class develop into a collective actor, or, at least, acquire a similar ideological disposition? That is, under what social, economic, and political circumstances do members of a class change from a "simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes"¹ into a class? Because the working class in industrial society is assigned by many theories a significant role in the process of social change as well as in the fight for social justice, the problem of working-class formation has attracted wide attention and research.

Various theories have been proposed to explain the formation or nonformation of the working class and its particular political disposition in various societies. The approaches include the cultural-historical perspective of E. P. Thompson as well as emphases on the role of the state; the effect of the mobilization of opposing classes; and the effects of social mobility, the status system, and economic development and income distribution, to list only a few.² Moreover, variation in the processes of class

The data used in this paper are from the project "Class Structure and Class Consciousness" sponsored by the National Science Council in Taiwan, series number NSC82-0301-H001-032.

¹ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Cited from Jon Elster, ed., *Karl Marx: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 254.

² E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz Press, 1963). On the role of the state: Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, eds., *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the*

FOUR

Changing Literary Images of Taiwan's Working Class

HSIN-HUANG MICHAEL HSIAO

Social science approaches to literature have received little attention in Taiwan. The relevance of literature to social change has therefore been ignored by most social scientists. Though literary critics have attempted to relate the changing motifs and themes of literature to external social and political transformations, a systematic analysis of this important subject is still unavailable. Our understanding of the dynamic ability of literature to reflect as well as refract the changing social reality in different phases of Taiwan's postwar development remains impressionistic, though instructive.

Literature and Society

The conventional way in which literary experts analyze the relations between literature and social change is to compare the similarities and differences between writings produced by different cohorts or generations of authors. In recent years, as more and more collections of Taiwanese writers' works have been published, this approach to Taiwanese literature is becoming plausible. It is possible to detect a number of interesting differences in the authors' social concerns, their views of how society operates as well as their notions of how society ought to be. Prior to the 1970s, before the younger generation of Taiwan-born writers became influential, Taiwan's literature reflected very little social concern, and most authors deliberately avoided any sensitive social and political issues in their works. In the 1950s and 1960s, under the hard authoritarianism of the Kuomintang (KMT), civil society was completely demobilized and atomized; hence the passivity of writers was understandable.

FIVE

Owner, Worker, Mother, Wife: Taipei and
Chengdu Family Businesswomen

HILL GATES

Let labouring men stride in the streets.
Let radiant columns file through the squares.
Ah Ch'ing (Bold 1970:339)

In delight I watch a thousand waves of growing rice and beans,
And heroes everywhere going home in the smoky sunset.
Mao Zedong (Bold 1970:176)

They tease one another in coarse accents.
An occasional joke helps to banish fatigue.
The lingering flavour of rustic stories
Puffs rings of smoke that lengthen in the air,
Recalling to mind many a summer night at home in the backyard.
Once, twice, a thousand times—it never grows stale.
Now it is being brought to fresh life in this city landscape
To make its listeners nostalgic.
This vast building brings them together from all over the land;
Strangers have now become brothers.

... ..

Whose shoulders are cast in bronze
That they can sustain knocking against slabs of stone or iron?
There are also family worries and illnesses
That blur their vision of the colours of the toiling seasons.
An instant of dizziness or carelessness
Will end in a heap of blood and flesh,
Or the usual striking out of a name
From the register of Heaven!

Ts'ang K'e-chia (Bold 1970:333-34)

The Chinese Cultural Revolution in the Factories: Party-State Structures and Patterns of Conflict

ANDREW G. WALDER

During the 1950s the Chinese Communist Party established a new regime of labor relations that anchored workers to their workplaces, within which Party-state organizations would play an active political role. As the movement of labor between urban factories was restricted to a bare minimum, factories became the focal point for the establishment and funding of a wide range of benefits, from apartments and meal halls to medical insurance and treatment and pensions. Party organizations within factories (as in other organizations) exercised control over the allocation of raises and promotions and could influence employees' access to other benefits (especially housing).

Factory Party organizations sought to develop networks of loyal rank-and-file Party members and other "political activists" and "backbone elements" who were given preferential access to career opportunities and benefits in exchange for their loyal support of the Party organization and its labor policies. Indeed, the primary way in which workers could aspire to promotion off the shop floor was through active participation in Party-sponsored political activities: in the Party organization, Communist Youth League, union organization, the factory militia, or by working for factory security departments by observing and reporting on the

The research for this paper was funded by grants from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Wang Institute for Chinese Studies, and the Luce Foundation. Eugene Wu of the Harvard-Yenching Library kindly lent us his personal copy of the compilation of red guard materials cited frequently in this paper. Gong Xiaoxia provided invaluable research assistance. The arguments and interpretations offered here are my responsibility alone.

Chinese Sex Workers in the Reform Period

GAIL HERSHATTER

Over the past fourteen years, at first occasionally and then with increasing frequency, foreign reporters, tourists, and businessmen in China have returned with reports that prostitution has reappeared in Chinese cities. Since the mid-1980s, official Chinese broadcasts and publications have also intermittently discussed prostitution, usually in the course of a campaign to eliminate it. To date none of these campaigns has been successful, and it seems likely that prostitution will continue to be an important source of income for a variety of sex workers, pimps, hotel staffs, massage and beauty parlor owners, roadside stall operators, and the police—to name only some of the groups who are involved with the developing sex trades.

This essay explores the appearance of female prostitution in 1980s and 1990s urban China, after three decades of apparent absence. It makes a preliminary attempt to describe how prostitution is organized and to whose financial benefit. As prostitution has once again become a feature of Chinese society, it has become embroiled—as it was before 1949—in a larger public discussion about what kind of modernity China should want and what kind of sex and gender relations should characterize that modernity. Accordingly, it is important to ask not only how and where sexual services are sold, but also what meanings are attributed to such transactions by sellers, buyers, government regulators, and social critics in contemporary China. How has the state categorized and sought to regulate reform-era prostitution? What do other significant groups—emergent social scientists, Women's Federa-

My thanks to David Roberts for research assistance and to Emily Honig and Wang Zheng for accompanying me on my fieldwork trip to the Hongqiao Hotel.

Regional Identity, Labor, and Ethnicity in Contemporary China

EMILY HONIG

Compared to the prominence of ethnic identities, divisions, and antagonisms as issues in U.S. labor history, ethnicity is almost completely absent in studies of labor in China. This absence may be partly due to the seeming racial homogeneity of the population (some 90 percent of which is Han) and the concomitant notion that ethnic identities are rooted in racial or national distinctions. Thus, only groups officially designated as “national minorities” in China—such as Koreans, Uighurs, Kazaks, and Miao—and their relations with the dominant Han people are considered arenas for the exploration of ethnicity. And few studies of such “minorities” have attended to the intersection of their ethnic identity and work experience.

Yet as anthropologists have begun to insist on the socially constructed dimensions of ethnicity, we can begin to identify and analyze potential ethnic divisions among people who share racial and national identities. Recent anthropological scholarship argues that cultural differences invoked as ethnic markers are not limited to physical or primordial characteristics. Ethnicity does not involve inherent traits brought by people from one place to another, but instead involves a process of creating and articulating boundaries between groups of people in specific local and historical contexts.¹ Such an analysis has recently been explored in the

¹ See, for example, Karen Blu, *The Lumbee Problem: The Making of an American Indian People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); John Comaroff, “Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice and the Signs of Inequality,” *Ethnos* 52, 3/4 (1987): 301–23; Brackette F. Williams, “A Class Act: Anthropology and the Race to Nation across Ethnic Terrain,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (1989): 401–44; and Sylvia Junko

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