

# What are Chinese Workers Thinking?

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What are Chinese workers thinking? Few questions have been more freighted with tense significance for the Chinese state in recent years. Taking advantage of the concatenation of the repressive shockwave it sent through the Chinese public in 1989 and the post-1993 economic boom that resulted partly therefrom, and having gained confidence from the success of price reform which was also made possible in part by the crackdown, the leadership has since the mid-1990s begun to hurdle perhaps the most politically dangerous obstacle remaining in the pathway of “socialist reform” or, from another ideological perspective, capitalist transition: the restructuration of state socialist industry, involving massive layoffs and the subjection of China’s vaunted proletariat to layoffs, plant closures, employment insecurity, loss of social welfare benefits, and the vagaries of the labor market — in a nutshell, the rise of unvarnished wage labor.

The government has been moving ahead with this social (counter-)revolution with a determination and pace that suggests a definite level of confidence. Yet it has also shown signs of deep anxiety about the potential and, indeed, actual conflagrations occasioned by its remaking of the Chinese working class. It has tried to bottle up information about major outbreaks of proletarian protest, with more success than can possibly be evaluated

at present.<sup>1</sup> The public security apparatus has made it very difficult for Chinese and foreign scholars to conduct research on contemporary workers' politics, citing the profound political sensitivity of the present situation.<sup>2</sup> More positively, in 1994 the government promulgated a major labor law, and set its massive trade union bureaucracy to work explaining and enforcing it, in the hopes that some rationalization and regulation of working conditions and remuneration would help preempt conflict. It has been keeping its finger closely on the pulse of worker politics, in the form of periodic massive surveys.<sup>3</sup> Researchers with the official labor union federation admitted candidly that the federation now regards its main purpose as promoting working class stability (稳定).<sup>4</sup> It wants not just to control but also, like many Western scholars and observers, to comprehend what China's workers are thinking.

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<sup>1</sup>For just one example, an enormous protest in which over 20,000 enraged workers in Nanchong City, Sichuan, laid siege to the city hall for thirty hours, parading their factory manager around town Cultural Revolution-style in the agonizing "airplane position", was successfully hushed up in the Chinese media, to the consternation of even some local journalists. See Matt Forney, "We Want To Eat," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 June 1997, and personal communication with Mr. Forney.

<sup>2</sup>Personal experiences and anonymous communications.

<sup>3</sup>The largest is the quinquennial survey of workers' thinking undertaken since 1982 by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (中国全国总工会). For its report on the 1992 survey, see 走向社会主义市场经济的中国工人阶级 (北京: 中国全国总工会, 1993).

<sup>4</sup>Personal communication.

## Q Methodology

The question is as fraught with substantive and methodological complexity as with political significance. The most common approaches to analysis of the political thinking of a group or class such as China's workers are surveys, in-depth interviews, and observation of political expression. Each of these has a distinct objective. Quantitative surveys usually target specific opinions and attitudes, usually seeking to correlate them with specific social, economic and political characteristics of those who hold them. In-depth interviews are useful for probing a broader range of questions, the deeper meanings that subjects attach to their experiences, and some of the reasons why they think as they do. Observation of political activity can provide a window into the thinking that lays behind it. My current research project makes some use of all of these approaches. But in pursuing them, I have often run up against the uneasy sense that I am missing something, that the information did not always add up in expected, simple or comprehensible ways. The meaning of what I would learn through standard surveys, interviews, and accounts of political behavior seemed to depend on understanding a larger question: how do China's workers put together the pieces that I was apprehending? How do they organize their social and political thinking in general?

Q-methodology is designed to focus on this overall sensibility or outlook. Its objectives are: to try to understand the complex structure of subjects' thinking as a whole — *i.e.*, the ways in which they link their ideas on a variety of subjects, and to piece together its substantive content and texture. Q-methodology's unit of analysis is not the

individual subject, but the presumably coherent patterns of thinking that may exist in the population of subjects. This differs from ordinary quantitative opinion and attitude surveying (*R*-methodology), where the unit of analysis would, in this case, be some set of views of Chinese workers as well as those workers' characteristics, and where the goal would be to elucidate which kinds of workers have which beliefs. *Q* begins with the hypothesis that there are discrete, coherent and comprehensible ways of thinking within a population, and tries to find them. It does not, however, prejudge how many there are, of what they may consist substantively, or how coherent each of them may be.<sup>5</sup> These are, indeed, what it tries to discover.

*Q*-methodology is intensive with respect to individual subjects. It focuses on the internal patterning of **individual** subjects' responses to a relatively large set of questions (*cf.* *R*, which concentrates on the responses of a large number of subjects to relatively small sets of questions<sup>6</sup>). While in *R*-methodology the researcher disaggregates individual subjects into their parts (*e.g.* their age or gender and their opinions on some subject), *Q* does not do so, because it is interested in the subjects' overall patterns of thinking. Thus, *Q*-methodology can operate with a small sample, in contrast with *R*-methodology, which

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<sup>5</sup>It does, as just noted, give its subjects the benefit of the doubt by beginning with an assumption that there is some definite coherence in their overall thinking — a coherence that may not be evident to an analyst operating within a very different historical, material, existential and cultural frame. *Q* is a tool that such an analyst can use to bridge the gap. That said, *Q* is also a tool for evaluating the level of coherence in the views it is able to unearth.

<sup>6</sup>*R*-methodology questionnaires may, of course, contain as many items as *Q*-methodology ones. But *R*-methodology looks at subjects' responses to smaller, discrete subsets of questions one at a time; *Q*, by contrast, always analyzes the entire set of responses at once.

requires a large sample in order to be able to achieve some confidence in linking particular characteristics to particular views within a sample and then in extrapolating those linkages to a wider population.<sup>7</sup>

Even though *Q* operates with a small number of subjects, it necessarily involves sampling. It hypothesizes that there are discrete patterns of thinking in a population, which can only be comprehended by analyzing the thinking of individuals whose own patterns of thinking reflect those patterns in the population. In *Q*, the sample should be chosen to reflect in a broad way the general characteristics of the wider population. But issues of representativeness of specific traits are less important than in *R*, since the *Q*-methodologist is not attempting to link the findings to particular characteristics of subsets of the population (e.g., whether men or women of certain age ranges hold different opinions or attitudes).

## **Reconstructive Methodology**

Because *Q*-methodology is oriented to elucidating overall patterns of thinking, it is not surprising that it has been taken up in recent years by scholars influenced by post-structuralism and discourse analysis. With its orientation to patterns of subjectivity, it has proven a useful tool for those interested in putting their subjects in a more central place methodologically – in uncovering their patterns of thinking, outlooks, or

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<sup>7</sup>For the methodological justifications on this point, see Steven R. Brown, *Political Subjectivity: Applications of Q Methodology in Political Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 66.

*weltanschauungen*, in letting the subjects speak in their own voices, and in limiting the analyst's role more to that of a listener, organizer and recorder for them. John Dryzek and Jeffrey Berejikian have, for example, set about what they call "reconstructive inquiry", whose goal is to "determine...how individuals...themselves conceptualize...their own political roles and competences."<sup>8</sup> In the reconstructive approach, "categories are sought in its subjects, rather than specified by the analyst...The idea [is] that the analyst should attend closely to subjects' own constructions of politics..."<sup>9</sup> To find a way to do this while still maintaining a quantitative approach, Dryzek and Berejikian assembled their survey using statements "drawn from those actually made by individuals involved".<sup>10</sup> Since my objective is to try to apprehend some of the ways that China's workers conceive their world and their situation in it, and to weave their specific views and ideas with each other into an apprehension of their wider pattern of thinking, it seemed important to find a way to let them to speak as much as possible in their own terms. Reconstructive methodology therefore seemed appropriate and potentially promising.

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<sup>8</sup>John S. Dryzek and Jeffrey Berejikian, "Reconstructive Democratic Theory," *American Political Science Review* 87, 1 (March 1993): 48.

<sup>9</sup>Dryzek and Berejikian: 49.

<sup>10</sup>Dryzek and Berejikian: 50.

## Operationalization

In order to explore what Chinese workers are thinking using Q- and reconstructive methodology, I developed a survey questionnaire comprising sixty items. They covered a range of topics in which I am interested, based on some of the theoretical approaches that I believe can explain significant aspects of working class consciousness.<sup>11</sup> Following Dryzek and Berejikian's reconstructive methodology, I developed the specific items not out of my own thinking, but rather using language drawn directly from the world of the workers I was studying – words, phrases and formulations that originated with them or at least were likely to feel as naturalistic and familiar as if they had.

These workers all live in Tianjin, where I have concentrated my research. Strictly speaking, this paper ought to be entitled “What Are Tianjin Workers Thinking?” The Chinese proletariat is simply too large, too widely distributed over a vast country, and too variegated to comprise a category about which much of real significance can be said. I chose Tianjin as a case study because it lies roughly toward the center of several continua pertaining to level of economic development, reform policy, and the effects thereof.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>These include the labor process, shopfloor politics and authority relations, the market (including especially the labor market), the work unit (单位), class, the state, reform policy, ideology, and workers' sense of their political efficacy.

<sup>12</sup>Tianjin has not been at the forefront of industrial “reform” policies such as privatization or globalization compared with the likes of Guangzhou and Shanghai, and whose economic performance has been somewhat ahead of national trends but not extraordinary so. From 1991 to 1999, gross value of industrial output in Tianjin grew 14.2% per year, compared with 10.9% nationally. It is more difficult to find consistent time-series data on household income over this period, but the following may provide a rough guide: in 1999, urban “real income” (实际收入) in Tianjin was ¥7,671, which was 368% higher than the average urban “cash income” (现金收入) of ¥2,087 in 1991. Comparable national figures are ¥5,889 and ¥1,996, a 295%

This does not make Tianjin typical or representative of China's working class, of course, since there is no defensible reason to collapse its rich variation at all, much less to do so toward the center of major analytical dimensions.

To put my Q-survey together, then, I combed the original Chinese-language transcripts of my own in-depth interviews with workers for items to place in the survey. To supplement these, I also scoured newspapers that are regularly read by the workers I would be surveying (mainly the 工人日报 [Workers' Daily] from 1995-97 and Tianjin's 今晚报 [Evening News] from 1997), the television programs they see, the political slogans they read and hear, and government documents, publications, announcements and surveys they encounter. From all these I selected statements that seemed particularly expressive and commonplace. I collected over two hundred statements on the range of subjects in which I am interested, and selected sixty — mostly from my interviews — that seemed most likely to enable workers to express their thinking on those subjects. I then arrayed them in random order on a questionnaire, placing next to each a scale from -6 to +6 on which the subjects could express their level of disagreement or agreement. Finally, since Q-methodology does have to be broadly mindful of the question of representativeness, the questionnaire also included just a few items on the subjects' background: their gender, their age, the ownership sector of their enterprise, whether or not they were laid

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increase. Tianjin's average urban real income in 1999 was significantly below that of Shanghai (¥10,989), Guangdong (¥9,206 [*n.b.*, this is **not** Guangzhou, which would surely be higher]), and Beijing (¥9,239). Sources: 中国统计年鉴 (*Statistical Yearbook of China*) 2000 (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2000), p. 319; 中国统计年鉴 (*Statistical Yearbook of China*) 1992 (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 1992), p. 288.

off at the time they were surveyed, and the economic condition of their enterprise. The survey appears in the appendix.

Because of the ways in which the language in the questionnaire items was constructed, it can sometimes contain ambiguities — or what appear to the analyst, with her or his own external perspective, to be ambiguities. As Dryzek and Berejikian say so aptly, ambiguity “is the nature of political language.”<sup>13</sup> But any effort by the analyst to reduce putative ambiguity in advance would undermine the reconstructive project, by forcing the subjects to speak through (by responding to) the analyst’s “clarified” language rather than that of the subject’s own world. The *Q*-methodologist can hope that such ambiguities will be “resolved by each subject and reflected in his or her placement of a statement in relation to other statements.”<sup>14</sup>

In this study, the questionnaires were administered by a research assistant to seventy-four industrial workers in Tianjin in the fall of 1997 and the spring of 1998. Such an *n*, which is untenably small for *R*-methodology, is ample for *Q*-methodology.<sup>15</sup> The subjects were selected through indirect social contacts by my research assistant, who did not know them personally. In order to try to maximize the truthfulness and frankness with which subjects responded, an informal site off factory grounds was used, and neither I nor any government or enterprise official was present. Since *Q*-methodology

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<sup>13</sup>Dryzek and Berejikian: 51.

<sup>14</sup>Dryzek and Berejikian: 51.

<sup>15</sup>Dryzek and Berejikian, for example, used thirty-seven.

does not strive for strict statistical representativeness of a larger population, this mode of selection is not as problematic as it would be for *R*-methodology. At the time they were surveyed, the respondents were all industrial workers. They ranged in age from xxx to xxx. XXX were male, xxx female, and xxx failed to complete that question. XXX worked in state-run enterprises, xxx in “collective” firms, xxx in a foreign-domestic joint-venture plant, and xxx in private industrial enterprises. XXX reported that their enterprises’ economic condition was average (一般), xxx poor (不好), and xxx good (好). XXX were employed, and xxx laid-off.

The data were coded in the normal way, with each respondent treated as a case (arrayed as rows) and the score on each question treated as a variable (arrayed as columns). But then the matrix was transposed, because *Q*-methodology treats the overall thinking of each of the respondents — not their responses to individual items — as the object of study. That is, the columns — which normally represent the dependent variables — now consisted of full array of each subject’s responses. The transposed matrix was then subjected to factor analysis, a statistical technique designed to find underlying patterns among the many variables across cases of a data set.<sup>16</sup> Factor analysis extracts an indeterminate number of factors, which are statistical clusters of scores.<sup>17</sup> Each factor has

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<sup>16</sup>There are several ways to conduct factor analysis. In this case, a varimax rotation of a centroid solution -- which is the most standard -- was used.

<sup>17</sup>The number of factors that will be extracted from a data set depends on the specifics of the data; taken together, all the factors will explain all the variation in the data.

an eigenvalue, a statistic representing the total amount of variation in the matrix explained by each factor. It is the analyst's job to examine the results of the factor analysis to decide how many of the factors – which are at this point nothing more than mere statistical relationships – actually stand for anything, and what it is they stand for, in the real world that is supposedly being reflected in the data set.

To begin to make those judgments, I examined the output of the factor analysis (table 1). The output of the statistical manipulation does not itself provide a guide to the number of factors to be analyzed (analogous to the way, for example, that certain correlation statistics can have significance tests). That is up to the analyst. I initially planned to examine the first five, thinking that that appeared to be a good break-point (since the subsequent four factors were all with a narrow range of 4 to 4.5), and that together they accounted for over half of the variation in the data. However, since only two respondents corresponded most strongly to factor 4 (see below), and since these two were, upon inspection, actually quite dissimilar in their responses to quite a few items, I decided to stop at factor 3. In effect, at this point in the analysis I was being guided by the statistical analysis of the quantitative data to an hypothesis that there are three potentially coherent patterns of thinking among the workers surveyed.

Table 1: Factor Loadings

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of variation explained	Cumulative % of variation explained
1	16.20	21.9	21.9
2	8.80	11.9	33.8
3	5.86	7.9	41.7
4	4.62	6.2	47.9
5	3.88	5.2	53.2
6	3.31	4.5	57.7
7	3.13	4.2	61.9
8	2.99	4	65.9
9	2.94	4	69.9
10	2.45	3.3	73.2
11	1.98	2.7	75.9
12	1.85	2.5	78.4
13	1.75	2.4	80.7
14	1.60	2.2	82.9
15	1.45	2	84.9
16	1.36	1.8	86.7
17	1.21	1.6	88.3
18	1.14	1.5	89.9
19	1.11	1.5	91.4

Thus far, however, that hypothesis remained purely an artifact of statistical analysis. The factor analysis by itself does not spit out a list of what the patterns of thinking represented by each of the factors are. What they might be, and how coherent

might actually prove, remained to be uncovered, albeit with the help of the statistics. In order to do that, I then searched for individual subjects whose own patterns of thinking corresponded well to those of each of the three factors. To do that, I examined each respondent's loadings — *i.e.*, the coefficient expressing the correspondence between that respondent and the factor — on each of the three factors, and sought out the factors on which they had the highest loading above an acceptable minimum. To define a minimally high loading, I took as a reference point Steven Brown's criterion of  $2.58\left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{N}}\right)$ , where N equals the number of Q statements<sup>18</sup> — in this case, .34.<sup>19</sup> Where subjects loaded higher than .34 on more than one factor (among the first three), I categorized them within a particular factor only if their highest loading was at least .1 higher than their next one. Subjects who did not meet either of these criteria were omitted. I then computed the mean scores on each item in the questionnaire of all the subjects categorized under each factor. This produced a representation of the actual pattern of thinking to which the factor was pointing. Those means appear in table 2. To facilitate analysis, the items have been placed in topical order (rather than in the randomized order in which they appeared on the questionnaire).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Brown, 263.

<sup>19</sup>N=59. Item #40 was erroneously printed across two pages on the survey, resulting in few responses. So it was discarded in the analysis.

<sup>20</sup>Obviously, some items fit under more than one category, a fact which complicates the task of interpreting the data, but does not change the statistical analysis or the interpretation.

## Findings

Now at last the central question of this analysis can be posed. Do the mean factor scores, which up to this stage in the analysis are still just statistical constructs, point to distinct, coherent outlooks that may exist among the working class? Do they represent distinct forms of working class thinking? At first glance, no. Upon careful scrutiny, the answer appears to be that they do. Each specific outlook can be given a shorthand name, which I have added at the top of the appropriate columns on table two.

### **Factor I: Market Socialism**

Factor one seems to refer to what could be called “market socialism” — a view that appreciates the value of the market and the political relations behind it both in the enterprise and the wider state, while still retaining a commitment to some core socialist values. Starting at the shopfloor, the piece rate wage system is fair (8) and consistent with socialism (17), and management does not abuse it (32).<sup>21</sup> Workers are responsive to the needs of their firms, which are now significantly market-oriented (24). Work is mildly interesting (59), a finding consistent with Michael Burawoy’s analysis of the capitalist workplace.<sup>22</sup> Yet it is not a particular source of pride (48). While managers should give

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<sup>21</sup>Parenthesized numbers refer to the question numbers in table 2 (which are also the ones used on the original Chinese questionnaire).

<sup>22</sup>Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); \_\_\_\_\_, *The Politics of Production* (London: Verso, 1985). The reasons for this sentiment could be similar as well. Workers I interviewed reported

workers more leeway on the shopfloor — which might help workers deal better with shortages (as they did, according to Burawoy, under state socialism) — management is also right to exert authority to keep indolent workers on their toes (47, 3, 22). By contrast, in the Maoist period workers were more assiduous and coöperative on the shopfloor than they are today (13). Perhaps for this reason, workers can have a positive effect on their enterprise's economic situation (46).

Turning to authority relations in the firm, it is unclear whether workers are still “masters of the enterprise” (主人翁) as they were meant to be in Maoist days — and, in this view, still should be (56, 44). Contracts are not particularly useful in protecting workers (2). Workers retain some capacity to resist egregious management demands such as unpaid overtime (42), though they also fear faulting the management (20). Managers do not fear the workers, and in fact they push them around as if they were not fully human (26). Holiday gifts and dispensations do not represent a real spirit of generosity to workers (15). Managers certainly do not respect workers' knowledge and talent, and they have much less quotidian intercourse with workers than they should (36, 33).

Markets are basically fair (as we shall see in the discussion of class relations below). They do bring unemployment, which is a serious problem but one that's inevitable (14, 27, 12). In fact, the labor market itself provides the means to cope with them (55).

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that they engaged in the same shopfloor “games” that Burawoy identifies as a source of work interest in capitalist firms.

Contracts, the state's approach to institutionalizing labor relations under marketization, are in fact undermined by those very market forces (23).

The work unit (单位) — a key institution of state socialism — has been somewhat undermined by marketization, but it still retains its importance to workers in several key arenas. It provides fewer benefits than before, and workers should not rely too much on it for their economic security (57, 18). And unemployment — one aspect of marketization — has weakened affected workers' attachment to their work units (16). But for those still in work, the factory is still like a home — 以厂为家 in the Maoist-era colloquialism — and an important locus of social life (7, 5), even if it is the enterprise's bottom line that is now most important (38). Work-unit housing remains important to those seeking to marry (39). Such benefits as are still provided are distributed reasonably fairly (52).

Turning to issues of class, the market produces reasonably fair outcomes (31, 6). In particular, the fact that workers' livelihoods now depend on the economic health of the enterprise in which they happen by sheer good or bad fortune to have found themselves when marketization was brought in in the late 1980s is only mildly unfair (50).<sup>23</sup> Class does not determine people's life chances particularly strictly (37). Yet inequality is something of an issue, and it is undermining class solidarity (21, 29). The working class's position in society is declining, and workers are exploited (9, 41).

At the level of the state, policy and ideology, there is no alternative to state

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<sup>23</sup>See Marc Blecher, "Hegemony and Workers' Politics in China," *The China Quarterly* 170 (June 2002): 283-303.

enterprise reform (35). Yet that need not mean the triumph of capitalism: socialism should be, and in fact is being, reformed, not abolished, which limits exploitation (51, 53). As we have seen, piece rate wage systems, which have become commonplace, are consistent with the socialist principle of pay according to work (17). Yet unions do need to be stronger (54). It would help the working class if more young workers joined the Party (4), though it's not necessarily desirable for a worker to be China's leader (10). As we have seen, market socialist thinking is cynical about the true spirit behind holiday gifts (15). Bureaucratism remains a significant problem (1). And workers should be more altruistic (19).

What, finally, of workers' politics? Normatively, it may be desirable and even possible, though disappointing in its actual practice. People, not just leaders, are responsible for what happens both to them and to society (45, 60). Bureaucratism can be fought (1). Protest such as a slowdown is not particularly dangerous (28). Yet politics today is not too useful (25). Workers only complain, but lack consciousness to organize to address their complaints (34). The state has only the mildest fear of workers (30).

## **Factor 2: Realism/Workerism**

Factor #2 is realistic about the requisites and effects of China's structural economic reforms, but it also thinks that workers have managed or can manage to stake out a place for themselves and moderate reform's effects somewhat. Piece rates are fair (8, 17). Quotas may be set high, but workers can find ways to reduce the pace of work (24, 32). Thus, management surveillance is not a problem (47). That may be the reason why

workers do not do a good job of coping with shortages or other shopfloor problems (22). Work is not boring (59).<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, some level of labor discipline does help prod lazy workers and, therefore, improves the factory (3). Workers' spirit of commitment shopfloor coöperation were greater in 1960s than today, but the gap is not thought to be as great as the market socialist view would have it (13). Workers today do take a some pride in their work, though again not so much as in the market socialist way of thinking (48).

For realism/workerism, there are some limits on managerial authority. Like market socialist thinking, workers should be "masters of the enterprise"; unlike it, though, they actually still are to a significant degree (56). What capacity and autonomy workers have is not the result of contracts (2), which in any event are undermined by market forces themselves (23). It may have more to do with actual attitudes and social relations. The leaders do respect workers' talent and knowledge (36). Market socialism may think that management does not fear the workers and that it treats them as mere labor power to be ordered about, but realism/workerism is not so sure (II, 26). Holiday gifts from managers are not necessarily instrumental (56). The leaders do respect workers' talent and knowledge (36). Workers do not long for more daily contact with factory leaders, though; to put it the other way around, they are more content with quotidian autonomy from their bosses (33). They do fear faulting the management, but notably less than under market socialism (20). Their somewhat lower resistance to doing overtime if not

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<sup>24</sup>Hypothetically, this view could reflect workers' playing "games."

offered extra pay (42) may, therefore, spring from the sense that if they do such work they are not so much caving in to a harsh demand by management as making something of a choice.

Markets are not necessarily unfair (31), though they are viewed as less fair than under market socialism. By contrast, though, the labor market in particular is reasonably fair (6) – a place, perhaps, where workers achieve their due. Unemployment not a big concern (14), even though state benefits are insufficient to allay concerns about it (27). Realism/workerism is much milder in attributing unemployment to reform (12). Compared with market socialism, here workers need retain even less loyalty to their state or collective firms now that employment security and benefits are gone. They should seek their own benefit by following the market (55). Wage differentials are not too great, and do not undermine working class unity (29). Perhaps partly for this reason, wage differentials based on the economic health of the firm are not particularly unfair (50).

The work unit remains a focus of sociability and, somewhat less, identification (7, 41), even in the face of extended unemployment (16). The latter view may stem in part from the fact that realism/workerism is more dubious about the work unit than market socialism is. It need not provide housing for people to get married (39), and in general it is not a particularly effective provider of security (57). Moreover, such benefits as are provided are not distributed particularly fairly (52). As in market socialism, what matters most about the enterprise is its bottom line (38).

The working class' position in society is not declining. Inequality is not a major issue, as it is for market socialism (21). Nor is it corrosive of class solidarity (29). Like market socialism, workers are exploited (41), but class is not a strict determinant of life's outcomes (37).

Turning to the state, policy and ideology, like market socialism, realism/workerism thinks that state industry must reform, and that socialism should be reformed rather than abolished (35, 31). Yet, consistent with its workerist sensibility, it also believes that socialism has been undermined, and that exploitation has gone quite far. It inclines to the view that unions should be stronger and more workers should join the Party (54, 4). In line with its realism, though, it feels more strongly that a worker should not lead the country (10), and it is less worried about bureaucracy (1). In contrast with market socialism, realism/workerism does not expect workers to be more altruistic; it is all right for them to pursue their self-interest (19).

In terms of workers' politics, while realism/workerism agrees with market socialism that "people should control their own destiny" (60) and that they are partially responsible for social outcomes (45) — though, following its realism, it is less sanguine about the power of popular forces than leaders. Nonetheless, is it not as negative about politics than market socialism. It agrees that there is some space for worker politics in China today (28, 30), and it is also pessimistic, though much less so, about workers' capacity to use it (34).

### **Factor 3: Mild Contentment**

This way of thinking is basically satisfied with and, therefore, acquiescent to the status quo. On the shopfloor, piece rates are fair (8), though there is some doubt about their consistency with socialism (17). Workers are somewhat responsive to needs of firm (24), and, in contrast with market socialism and realism/workerism, they do a good job coping with shortages (22). Work is not boring (59). Management is not oblivious to workers' capabilities, so workers do not have it especially hard (32). Workers do like autonomy from shopfloor management (47). Yet managerial discipline is needed to keep lazy workers in line (3). Workers may have been somewhat more committed to work, and had somewhat more shopfloor coöperation, than in 1960s, but this is felt less strongly than by market socialism and realism/workerism (13). Work is a much greater source of pride as well (48).

Here views about authority relations within the firm are the blandest. There is the weakest commitment to the view that workers should be "masters of the enterprise" (44). Workers might resist unpaid overtime, but only weakly (42). Management doesn't fear the workers, and tends to treat them as labor rather than people (11, 26), but less so than in the view of market socialism (though, to be sure, more than realism/workerism). Likewise, workers fear faulting managers (20), managers don't sufficiently respect workers' talents (36), and they should have more daily contact with workers (33), though all these views are less pronounced than under market socialism.

Markets are marginally fair (31, 6). Unemployment is not a serious concern, and the most positive view of all the factors is taken of the effect of losing one's job (14, 27). Moreover, mild contentment actually takes a positive view of the inequalities in pay resulting from different enterprises' economic performance (50). While there is still considerable skepticism about the value of contracts, there is less of it than in market socialism or realism/workerism (23).

Mild contentment too thinks of the factory as a home and something of a source of sociability (7, 5), even in the face of extended unemployment (16). It is ambivalent about the value of benefits such as housing and economic security, and the fairness with which they are distributed (39, 16, 52). The enterprise's bottom line is important, but less so than under market socialism or realism/workerism (38).

Likewise, class is the least determinative of individual outcomes here (37), despite a definite sense of exploitation (41). The working class is in decline (9), though that does not necessarily conflict with the general theme of contentment in light of the relatively low salience of class here.

The conviction that state enterprises must reform is, not surprisingly, held significantly less strongly in mild contentment (35). Likewise, there is the strongest sense that the country is still socialist, that exploitation is limited, and that socialism should be reformed rather than abolished (53, 51). In this same vein, there is the weakest support for strengthening unions (54), and no sense at all that it would help workers for more of

their younger ranks to join the Party (4), even though there is very mild support for a worker leading the country (10). Bureaucracy gets its lowest level of concern here (1).

Looking finally at workers' politics, mild contentment agrees with market socialism and realism/workerism that ordinary people share responsibility with leaders for social outcomes, and that people should control their own destiny (45, 60). Yet politics is only minimally useful (25) and, unlike the other views, mildly risky (28), even though it is only here that the state is thought to fear the workers (30). As in market socialism and realism/workerism, however, worker politics so far is not effective (34).

## **Implications**

These data suggest that Chinese workers in Tianjin in 1997 were thinking in several distinct and coherent ways about the deep structural reforms — including significant layoffs and the rise of wage labor and the labor market — that have been put into place in the past few years. Each of these outlooks involved a complex and textured admixture of positive and negative postures toward various aspects of the structural reforms. Each is reasonably coherent, suggesting that workers have found ways to make sense of their rapidly changing world. None of the outlooks is firmly or fundamentally oppositional. To take the most potentially explosive issue, concerns about unemployment are real, but they are tempered by a sense that the levels are tolerable, that other issues (especially wages) are more important, and/or that there are ways to cope.

On the one hand, these findings may help explain why, despite some sizable outbreaks of opposition, the overall political situation has remained stable through what

are already several years of profoundly damaging attacks on China's large, strategically located, and historically radical working class.<sup>25</sup> They challenge explanations for overall working class quiescence and defeat that emphasize political repression and disorganization.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, however, it is probably premature for the Chinese state to let out a sigh of relief about working class threats to its political future, for several reasons. First there is no direct or simple equation between dominant forms of consciousness and popular collective action. A small but determined minority can, under specific circumstances, kindle latent anger, resulting in conflagrations whose severity is out of proportion to the sentiments of even a large majority.<sup>27</sup> Second and related, each of the outlooks contains certain critical elements — however mild — on which anti-state hostility could potentially feed. Third, in a moment of political or economic crisis, Chinese workers' thinking could change very rapidly and unexpectedly.<sup>28</sup> How many Chinese leaders or citizens, and how many foreign China scholars and observers, predicted the Cultural Revolution or the 1989 protests?

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<sup>25</sup>On working class radicalism even in the Maoist period, see Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Boulder: Westview, 1997).

<sup>26</sup>The reasons why workers have responded with these and other forms of consciousness remain to be discovered, though. I have begun to reflect on them in "Hegemony and Workers' Politics in China."

<sup>27</sup>Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia are good examples. In both, large majorities do not partake of the nationalistic hatreds that nonetheless dominate the situations.

<sup>28</sup>Timur Kuran has endeavored to theorize the general potentiality for political proclivities to shift rapidly and unexpectedly. See Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never," *Politics and Society* xxxx



13. 我认为现在工人的生产积极性没有五、六十年代时候大，工人的凝聚力也在减弱。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
14. 失业比工资更受关注。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
15. 温暖年年送，年年不温暖。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
16. 如果我下岗一年或更长我会找份临时工，但我仍是原单位的一员。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
17. 社会主义经济原则是公平的。它的基本原则就是“按劳分配”。那么计件工资、物质鼓励是社会主义的公平措施。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
18. 单位给我住房、医疗保险和养老金、这会使我好多事不好开口。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
19. 工人应该重义轻利。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
20. 在工厂里，工人不敢给厂长挑刺。不小心就挨开了。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
21. 中国国内出现的贫富差距是不可避免的，但在可控范围内。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
22. 在生产中发生材料不足、设备有问题，工人一般想办法解决或者对付。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
23. 合同不是真正的合同，总是要变。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
24. 只要有活，工人总尽力去干。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6

25. 参加政治活动不如干点实事业。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
26. 在某些干部眼里，工人只是任由驱使的劳动力。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
27. 下岗不是很难受，因为再找工作时可以从厂里得一点钱。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
28. 搞政治、怠工很危险，躲得远越好。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
29. 现在不同企业，行业，地区的工资和劳动报酬的差距太大，破坏工人阶级的团结。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
30. 政府怕工人闹事。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
31. 市场竞争总起来说是公平的，因为它提供了个人充分施展能力的空间。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
32. 领导规定计件率、定额等等，他们会考虑到工人干的比较顺利、不用干得很辛苦。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
33. 工人们最不理解企业领导不接触，不关心职工群众。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
34. 工人对厂里并不是没有意见，但工人常常只发发牢骚而已，并没有很强的组织起来提出问题、争得自身权利的意识。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
35. 国有企业必须彻底改革，否则将不会有什么前途。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
36. 领导不尊重人才和工人的知识。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6

37. 工人阶级是主力军，  
并不是指个人的地位。  
对个人而言，逼着你转变观点，  
去学习，去找活干。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
38. 工人们最关心的是企业的  
经济效益。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
39. 单位如果不给住房  
结婚就很困难。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
40. 如果工人觉得厂里有不合理的事，  
他们有办法向领导反映。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
41. 企业的财富来自工人。 \* -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
42. 厂里要我加班要是不给加班费，  
我就不干了。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
43. 企业领导管理水平不高。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
44. 工人应该是厂的主人翁。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
45. 社会上发生的事不论好坏，  
不但领导有份  
而且人民也有份。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
46. 工人在提高他们企业的经济状况  
方面作不了什么。它依靠领导的  
能力、政府的行为和市场。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
47. 工人们最烦的是上级领导  
频繁地检查工作。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
48. 工人以工作而自豪。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
49. 企业领导搞特权以权谋私。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6

50. 同一厂里不同车间定购量  
不同工资就不同，  
这是不公平。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
51. 改革社会主义比放弃它要好。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
52. 单位分配住房、医疗保险和  
养老金平等，这才是公平的。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
53. 中国还是一个社会主义国家，所以  
管理者不会很重的压榨工人。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
54. 工会和工人代表大会是代表工人  
利益的组织、作用亟待加强。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
55. “面子”固然重要，但“饭碗”更重要。  
市场经济条件下，没有“铁饭碗”，  
不管国有、集体还是个体私营，  
哪儿有机会就到哪儿去。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
56. 工人还是厂的主人翁。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
57. 我还是认为“铁饭碗”好，  
旱涝保收，心里觉得踏实。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
58. 有些企业家族化，  
大小官位均由亲属把持。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
59. 作为一个工人也没有什么奔头，  
作一天和尚撞一天钟。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
60. 自己的命运应该由自己主宰。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6

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\* Omitted in the analysis. See footnote, page 13.