

Work and Labor in China

Season, Year

Day, Time

Classroom

Dr. Lefeng Lin

Email

Office:

Office hours: Day Time, or by appointment

Overview

China's transition to a market economy has resulted in forty years of rapid and nearly uninterrupted growth. It increasingly dominates the production of all sorts of goods, from the very low end and labor intensive, to the high value and capital intensive. Behind this spectacular emergence as a world power, there has been a dramatic reformulation of work and labor politics. In order to understand current trends in the contemporary global economy, it is of crucial importance to understand the dynamics of labor and employment within China.

The central theme of this course is twofold: 1) China's reforms have led to a dramatic reformulation of employment relations in the country, which have in turn engendered massive resistance from workers; and 2) The capacity of state and employers to respond effectively to this challenge holds important implications for the future of the global economy.

We will begin with a section on the **Historical Background** of labor issues in China. Here we will see the role the labor movement played in bringing the Communist Party to power in 1949, and the relatively privileged position urban workers enjoyed during the period of state socialism. However, we will also see that the Mao era did not bring about the liberation of the working class as promised, but resulted in new forms of labor control and conflict. This background will be necessary to understand subsequent changes in the 1980s and up until the present.

The bulk of readings will be divided into five inter-related, yet analytically distinct themes. **Marketization** will focus on the process of market reforms and commodification of labor that began in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s. Key to this process was rural de-collectivization and the emergence of a new class of migrant workers. **Mass Migration and the New Chinese Workplace** describes the emergence of the migrant working class, how reforms impacted the state-owned sector, and what working conditions are like in the new private sector. Particular attention will be paid to the gender component of work, as this is crucial to understanding evolving workplace relations in contemporary China. We will cover working conditions in manufacturing, the service sector, and construction. **Worker Resistance** details how commodification and a lax regulatory environment have resulted in a rapidly expanding cellular insurgency in China. We will cover the distinct modes of resistance among workers in the state--owned and private sectors. **Responding to Conflict** covers the attempts by the state, unions, and

NGOs to ameliorate the growth of labor instability over the past twenty years. We will analyze how legal reforms, union activities, NGO services, as well as corporate social responsibility have impacted labor conditions in China. Finally, the course will conclude with a section on **Global Significance**. Here we will see the profound impact that China's rise has had, and will continue to have, on the dynamics and structure of the global economy. This will reveal that changes in Chinese labor politics hold profound implications for the future of capitalism and world society more broadly.

Learning Objectives

- (1) Students will have a broad knowledge of industrial and labor relations in contemporary China.
- (2) Students will understand how political and economic forces bring about changes in work and employment relations in China, as well as the critical dynamics of responses from workers, civil society, and the state.
- (3) Students can apply the knowledge to explain and analyze work and employment issues in China.

Required Readings

Lee, Ching Kwan. 2007. *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hung, Ho-fung. 2009. *China and the Transformation of Global Capitalism*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Course Requirements

Class Participation (20%)

- Students are expected to attend and participate in class discussion. This means coming to class prepared to ask questions about and comment on the readings, as well as listening and responding to the lecture and other students. Using your cell phone, tablet, or laptop for any reason other than taking notes will negatively impact your participation grade.
- Certain groups of students will be "on call" for each class, meaning that I will call on you to respond to questions about the reading.
- You are allowed three unexcused absences – no need for you to inform me ahead of time. Except in extraordinary circumstances, there is no excused absence. For each class you miss beyond the first three, you will lose two points off your final grade.

In-Class Quizzes (40%)

- Two in-class quizzes will be given, date TBA.
- Students will not be allowed to make this up. Exceptions include a serious illness, a serious family emergency, university-related travel, or a religious observance. All make-up quizzes must be arranged before the quiz. If you do not contact the professor before the in-class quiz, you will not be allowed to take a make-up quiz.

Final Paper (40%)

- Additionally, students will be required to write a 10-12 page paper. Paper topics will be of the students' own choosing but must relate broadly to the issue of work and labor in China. The essay must make a specific argument and support this argument through a reading of available secondary materials. A required 1-2 paragraph proposal (which counts toward your final paper grade) will be due on TBA. I will provide feedback on the proposal, and the final essay must be submitted to (Canvas) by TBA.

Honors Credit:

If you are eligible to receive honors credit for (class number), it is your responsibility to make the appropriate course registration and to contact Professor Lin. In order to receive honors credit, you must write an analytical article on a chose topic, following the guidelines for (university specific or instructor-made). For grading purposes, your grade on the proposal will be averaged with that of your group projects.

Accommodations: Please send the instructor an email by the end of the second week of the course if you are eligible for special arrangements or accommodations for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course. This may be the case if English is your second language, you have a travel schedule from student athletics, or you experience a physical or psychological condition that makes it difficult for you to complete assignments without some modification of those tasks. Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the (a university institution). Their website has detailed instructions about how to qualify: <http://www/> Provide a copy of your accommodations request to the instructor.

If you wish to request a scheduling accommodation for religious observances, send an email by the end of the second week of the course stating the specific date(s) for which you request accommodation; campus policy requires that religious observances be accommodated if you make a timely request early in the term. See the university's web page for details: <http://www/>

Academic Integrity: As with all courses at the (university), you are expected to follow the University's rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. The standards are outlined by (Office of) at (Website). According to (rule number), academic misconduct is defined as:

For a complete description of behaviors that violate the University's standards as well as the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see (website). If you have questions about the rules for any of the assignments, please ask the instructor.

Notice of grievance and appeal rights (department specific)

Schedule of Classes (Two lectures for each week)

Week 1: Introduction

- Lecture 1: Setting the Stage
Outline of course requirements and introduction to China's importance in the contemporary global economy.

Week 2: Historical Background 1

- Lecture 1: Global Context and Historical Overview
- Hung, Ho-fung. 2009. *China and the Transformation of Global Capitalism*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. Chapter 1.
Perry, Elizabeth. 1999. "From Paris to the Paris of the East and Back: Workers as Citizens in Modern Shanghai." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41:348-73.
- Lecture 2: Shanghai, Epicenter of Labor Radicalism
Perry, Elizabeth. 1993. *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. pp.65-87.
Perry, Elizabeth. 1994. "Shanghai's Strike Wave of 1957." *The China Quarterly* 137:1-27.

Week 3: Historical Background 2

- Lecture 1: Labor Relations in the Command Economy
Perry, Elizabeth and Xiaobo Lu. 1997. *Danwei: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe. Chapter 7.
Walder, Andrew. 1983. "Organized Dependency and Culture of Authority in Chinese Industry." *Journal of Asian Studies* 43:51-76.
- Lecture 2: Labor in the Cultural Revolution
Sheehan, Jackie. 1998. *Chinese Workers: A New History*. London: Routledge. Chapter 4.

Week 4: Marketization 1

- Lecture 1: Market Reforms and the State
Harvey, David. 2005. "Neoliberalism with 'Chinese Characteristics'." In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 5.
Hung, Ho-fung. 2009. *China and the Transformation of Global Capitalism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 3.
- Lecture 2: Impact on Labor Relations – an Overview
Friedman, Eli and Ching Kwan Lee. 2010. "Remaking the World of Chinese Labour: A 30-Year Retrospective." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 48:507-33.

Week 5: Marketization 2

- Lecture 1: Reform and Workers in the State-owned Sector
Gallagher, Mary. 2005. *Contagious Capitalism: Globalization and the Politics of Labor in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1, 4.
- Lecture 2: In-class Screening – Last Train Home (2011)

Week 6: Mass Migration and the New Chinese Workplace 1

- Lecture 1: The Largest Human Migration
Ye, Jingzhong, Chunyu Wang, Huifang Wu, Gongzhi He, and Juan Liu. 2013. "Internal Migration and Left-Behind Populations in China." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 40:1119-46.
Chan, Kam Wing. 2009. "The Chinese Hukou System at 50." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 50(2):197-221.
- Lecture 2: Gender and Work
Hanser, Amy. 2005. "The Gendered Rice Bowl: The Sexual Politics of Service Work in Urban China." *Gender and Society* 19:581-600.

Week 7: Mass Migration and the New Chinese Workplace 2

- Lecture 1: Building the City of the Future
Pun, Ngai and Huilin Lu. 2010. "A Culture of Violence: The Labor Subcontracting System and Collective Action by Construction Workers in Post-Socialist China." *The China Journal* 64:143-58.
- Lecture 2: Foxconn: Production on a New Scale

Pun, Ngai, and Jenny Wai-ling Chan. 2012. "Global Capital, the State, and Chinese Workers: The Foxconn Experience." *Modern China* 34(4):383-410.
Recommended documentary: *Dreamwork China* (2011)

Week 8: Mass Migration and the New Chinese Workplace 3 and In-class Quiz

- Lecture 1: Journey to the West
Zhu, Shenjun, and John Pickles. 2014. "Bring in, Go up, Go West, Go Out: Upgrading, Regionalisation and Delocalisation in China's Apparel Production Networks." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 44:36-63.
- Lecture 2: In-class Quiz 1

Week 9: Worker Resistance 1

- Lecture 1: The Political Economy of Worker Protest (Paper Proposal Due)
Lee, Ching Kwan. 2007. *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 1.
- Lecture 2: The Political Economy of Worker Protest (continued)
Lee, Ching Kwan. 2007. *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 2.

Week 10: Worker Resistance 2

- Lecture 1: The "Sun Belt"
Lee, Ching Kwan. 2007. *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 5, 6.
- Lecture 2: A New Labor Movement?
Pringle, Tim. 2013. "Reflections on Labor in China: From a Movement to a Movement," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112:191-202
Silver, Beverly J. and Lu Zhang. 2009. "China: Emerging Epicenter of World Labor Unrest?" in *China and The Transformation of Global Capitalism*, edited by Ho-Fung, Hung. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Week 11: Responding to Conflict 1

- Lecture 1: Legal Reforms

Clarke, Simon, Chang-Hee Lee, and Qi Li. 2004. "Collective Consultation and Industrial Relations in China." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 42: 235-54.

Chen, Feng. 2007. "Individual Rights and Collective Rights: Labor's Predicament in China." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40:59-79.

- Lecture 2: Stability Maintenance

Su, Yang and Xin He. 2010. "Street as courtroom: state accommodation of labor protest in South China." *Law & Society Review* 44(1):157-84.

Chen, Feng and Yi Kang. 2016. "Disorganized Popular Contention and Local Institutional Building in China: A Case Study in Guangdong." *Journal of Contemporary China* 25(100):596-612.

Week 12: Responding to Conflict 2

- Lecture 1 : The All-China Federation of Trade Unions

Chen, Feng. 2009. "Union Power in China: Source, Operation, and Constraints." *Modern China* 35:662-89.

Liu, Mingwei. 2010. "Union Organizing in China: Still a Monolithic Labor Movement?" *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 64(1):30-52.

- Lecture 2: Union Reform?

Hui, Elaine Sio-ying and Chris King-chi Chan. 2015. "Beyond the Union-Centered Approach: A Critical Evaluation of Recent Trade Union Elections in China." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 53(3):601-627.

Deng, Yunxue. 2016. "Strikes and Workplace Collective Bargaining in the Auto Parts Industry in Guangzhou." In *China at Work: A Labour Process Perspective on the Transformation of Work and Employment in China*. Edited by Mingwei Liu and Chris Smith. Palgrave Macmillan.

Week 13: Responding to Conflict 3

- Lecture 1: Corporate Social Responsibility

Pun, Ngai and Ngai-Ling Sum. 2005. "Globalization and Paradoxes of Ethical Transnational Production: Code of Conduct in a Chinese Workplace." *Competition and Change* 9:191-200.

Yu, Xiaomin. 2008. "Impacts of Corporate Code of Conduct on Labor Standards: A Case Study of Reebok's Athletic Footwear Supplier Factory in China." *Journal of Business Ethics* 81:513-529.

- Lecture 2: NGOs

Lee, Ching Kwan and Yuan Shen. "The Anti-Solidarity Machine: Labor NGOs in China." 2011. In *From Iron Rice-Bowl to Informalization: Markets, State, and Workers*

in a Changing China. Edited by Sarosh Kuruvilla, Ching Kwan Lee and Mary Gallagher. Cornell University Press.

Fu, Diana. 2017. "Disguised Collective Action in China." *Comparative Political Studies* 50(4):499-527.

Week 14: The Crisis and Global Significance

- Lecture 1: The Crisis

Chan, Kam Wing. 2010. "The Global Financial Crisis and Migrant Workers in China: 'There is No Future as a Labourer; returning to the Village has No Meaning'."

International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 34(3):659-77.

- Lecture 2: Chinese Labor and the Future of the Global Political Economy

Hung, Ho-fung. 2009. *China and the transformation of global capitalism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Chapter 10.

Week 15: Wrap Up

- Lecture 1: In-class Screening – We Are the Workers (2017)

Lecture 2: **In-class Quiz 2** and Final Paper Due