

Mobility and Relations of Power and Domination in One Enterprise of the Guangdong Province

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For Marxists, society is dominated and directed by the employers' class. Nowadays, in China, it is not easy to determine the outline of this dominant class. Twenty-first century's Chinese society, while being more egalitarian than that of before 1949 (*jiefang qian*, before the liberation), is also socialist-capitalistic society in which the 'mantra' of economic development does not forbid to get rich. For 'Chunming', a women chain-worker in a plastic toy factory of Dongguan, Guangdong Province, "to die poor is a sin" (Chang 2008 : 47, 64).

China has entered in the era of globalization. The Chinese economy and its industrial sector are more and more 'globalised' and depend on export. This is why the Chinese government attempts to do its utmost possible to relaunch national internal consumption in order to reduce the perverse effects of crises like that of 2008. In China, even if the Party is also present in the private enterprises, the employers of private enterprises are not particularly protected. Workers however are the first to lose their job in case of crisis. They are very vulnerable for they have neither insurance nor social protection.¹ Nevertheless, the political approach of the society does not change neither can it change even if the workers, still more than the peasants, have become the vulnerable class. Chinese workers who nowadays travel more and more in the entire world, from China to Asia or to Africa, are much more informed than in the years 1980-1990 during the Deng Xiaoping's reforms.

In 2010, following the encounter with an enterprise manager of the factory under study, it has been possible that this inquiry takes place at Tanzhou, in the south of the southern Province of Guangdong. This factory is situated in the south of Zhongshan and in the north of Zhuhai nearby Macau where I have been studying Chinese society for more than five years. This study is also the result of a long field experience in other Chinese provinces from 1986 till 2010. This article tries to present a short sociological study on the question of 'power and domination' based on an inquiry made in a factory. Domination or subordination are often "as rooted in culture" (Boudon 1982 : 426). Nevertheless, since not long ago, the Chinese worker tries to find some space for his or her own rights (Pun 2005 : 196). The field work in a factory, in two periods in 2010, is not long enough. One will nevertheless be able to attempt to understand this particular Chinese society² and to situate this inquiry's results in relation with the "beautiful success" of Izraelwicz (2005 : 12) or the "globally favorable vision" of Chieng (2010 : 124) and that of the Chinese worker, a rather "mistreated" citizen, of Domenach (2009 : 23).

Methodology And Preliminary Explanation

This short essay can be defined as a flying over a private enterprise in 2010, at the start of a capital decade for China that marks the beginning of a new era following a world-wide economic crisis. The present study is based on non directive interviews of workers and cadres of a factory. Some life stories of the workers are collected, yet not detailed here, in order to understand the journey from the village to the city where the studied enterprise is located. The interview is being held in the workshops of the factory, in the case of the cadres it can be held outside of the factory

¹ That makes a great difference if one compares with the French system. In France, the million of unemployed foreseen to be at the end of law in 2010 worries rightly so as much politicians of the left as those of the right.

² "Why is the structure of Chinese society like that, the only answer is to be found in its history and its cultural schemes" (Chao 1983 : 190).

during a meal. The points touched upon are the geographic and professional origin, the age, the family, the number of months or years passed in the enterprise, the salary, the good or less good impression about the factory and eventually the conflicts with the direction of the enterprise. Being given the Chinese importance of salaries that also for a Chinese touch upon the issue of domination and power, this essay will probably talk too much about them. The Chinese precedence order that concerns the seniors (different from the western system) is more traditional in a rural milieu than in the cities; it would be interesting to compare the familial behaviour of these workers after several years of work in a city factory.

We have not had the occasion of encountering real cases of conflict in the factory under study, but some reasons of possible conflicts are mentioned. There is no particular order for the collection of data. The interviews have been held only after an agreement in principle with the factory direction has been obtained. I have tried to take into account the experience of these workers. The confidential details of the interviewees will obviously not be published.

General Situation

In China there are more than two hundred million workers working in cities who come from the countryside. The migration from village to cities is a fundamental issue. Still fifteen or so years ago, many peasant families thought it was enough that a member of the family works outside of the village to insure essential food and vestment needs of the family, two key requisites in Chinese culture (Lee 1994 : 238). For a good number of these migrant workers, tilling the fields is “too harsh” a job (Xu 2000 : 197). The attraction for earning money and the lack of pocket money in a rural milieu are some reasons for migrating towards the cities. The reasons of the migration are at the same time sociological and economical (Xu *ibid.*: 203). The financial reason, to earn one’s life better than in the countryside for a work as hard yet really different is perhaps not any more as important nowadays, for migrant workers ask themselves more questions about advantages and disadvantages of working in a city. At its start it is certain that this new life as a young worker is not easy and can create some disappointment (Xu 2000 : 201). For others the factory is part of life and it is why the province of Guangdong has begun in 2010 to give rights of residence which were impossible to imagine some years before. The lack of *hukou*, the permit of residence outside of the village for the migrants of rural origin, hinders the moves and the social life of the majority of these workers. Familial pressure to get married in the village can also play a role in the young ladies’ envy to leave and work in factory. To return to the family for Chinese New Year is a well respected tradition. In the case of the factory under study, the seven hundreds or so workers come in greater part from villages of southern China, from Guangxi, Hunan and Sichuan.

Modes of recruiting

As far as these workers are concerned, the employment offices (*laodongju*) are still too bureaucratic and some workforce assignments may seem to be irrational. Many workers chose therefore to work in factories they know by social relation, *guanxi*, or in an industrial district of which they have heard about through their sisters, brothers, cousins or friends of the same village. The term *guanxi* is as well a linguistic construction as a politico-economical social practice (Xu 2000 : 89). In 2010, the factories prefer to directly recruit the workers and very rarely the cadres by posting the number of necessary workers and the proposed salary on the walls of the factory. This billboard on red background attracts the attention of job seekers. Many workers have now made good secondary studies and have no particular formation except the semiskilled workers like the metal turners. Some enterprises try to filter through tests the work-force at hiring-time. At the Tanzhou factory under study, there is no hiring time testing.

A context that at times thwarts workers’ satisfaction. Restructuring

Concerning the production process, problems exist at various stages: the management, the taxation, the rigid fixing of prices and the supply of bad quality raw materials (Gipouloux 1981). All that has a direct incidence on the quality control that still poses problem in China. The Japanese enterprises in China are since the reforms of the 1980 years always in advance in this domain. This is fundamental for export. But in the car building industry one knows that in June 2010 these same enterprises may have had some problems. These social conflicts mainly concern salaries (*The Washington Post* 7.6.2010 ; *South China Morning Post* 10.6.2010).

The context of enterprises' restructuring and the 2008 crisis have been weakening factors. The measures taken with regard to certain enterprises: to close down, to suspend, to regroup and modify (*guan, ting, bing, zhuan*) are still topical. This is the case for Dongguan district which has been more affected than others by the 2008 crisis. Before that crisis, there were about ten thousand enterprises around and in the city of Dongguan, which is a lot, and there is much less in 2010. These too numerous factories could not any more export normally, hence an increased economical risk and the possibility of real closing down of the factories.

Formation in progress

As far as formation is concerned, the already ancient study by Gipouloux (1981) emphasizes a real deficiency. In the case of this study, only 21% of higher cadres had graduated of secondary school and 14% had university college formation; at that time, there was therefore some educational deficiency. It was the very beginning of the great socio-economical development of China. It was the dawn of private intensive industrialisation of China and education was not yet oriented towards facing the future and prodigious economical taking off of China. This lack of formation was one of the causes of numerous problems that state enterprises have been submitted to in the years 1990. On the other hand, at that time, many cadres were seeing in the reforms some direct threats against their political and social position (Gipouloux 1981 : 15, 26, 76). In the factory under study in 2010, the great majority of workers had finished their secondary studies and had a diploma.

The Factory

The machine continues to indirectly modify the chain of power employer-worker. My study of the Tanzhou case³ shows the crucial place of the machine. The very technical fabrication of the moulds to make the elements of plastic toys through injection-transfer clearly shows the importance of the machine. The use of these particular machines requests a two week formation. The moulding through transfer is convenient for the complex plastic pieces as in the Tanzhou factory. These pieces for miniatures reproduce perfectly the heads, the bodies and the dress of famous sportsmen, like those of baseball players Babe Ruth (1895-1948) and Joe Morgan, of basketball players like George Gervin and Kobe Bryant or of icons like the Prince of Persia. After the production of these pieces, the following stage is the printing of drawings and of colours. This requests from the worker the mastery of machines able to print one to four different colours. These machines and the products that are issued from them must be without any defects. The quality control is much more urged upon here than in other factories.

The computers that were only on a "reduced scale" inside Chinese factories in the 1980's (Gipouloux 1981 : 65) are present everywhere inside Chinese enterprises in 2010. In the toy factory studied in 2010, the secretariat, the direction, the engineers and every sector of production have

³ I have not contacted the China Enterprise Management Association (CEMA) and the Laboratory of Industrial Economy of the Academy of Social Sciences, although very useful to be authorized to make interviews of persons in charge and of workers. I have taken into account the study by Gipouloux on state enterprise (1981). My study concerns one private enterprise.

computers. The workshops have modern machines and the metal-turning and moulds fabrication workshop requires computers still more than the other 'departments'. The moulds will serve to inject industrial resin, most of the time produced in China, to fabricate plastic pieces.⁴

One factory in 1981

Studied by Gipouloux (1981 : 67, 71), the Beijing factory of 1 300 workers (in two teams working for eight hours each) and 400 technical and administrative cadres (among which 50 engineers) is a 'classical model' composed of one director, his bureau and adjunct directors.

The first level is technical: Projects, Technology, Experimentation, and the Engineer's Bureau.

The fabrication level comprises three levels: 1.– Production, Supplies; 2.– Basic Construction. Transport, Equipment and energy, Techniques and security; 3.– Marketing, Services.

The administration comprises: Work, Finances, Administration as such and Education.

The political department (rather cut down in a private enterprise) is composed of: Security, Propaganda, Organisation of cadres and Syndicates.

The assembly department comprises three departments: Assembly, Manufacturing of pieces and Components' control.

Half of the workers of this factory is of between 18 and 30 years of age. The majority of these workers is of the 2nd grade of qualification. The workers of the 3rd and the 4th grades are of between 30 and 40 years old. Those of the 5th and the 6th grades are 40 or more years old. These grades do not necessarily correspond to a real know-how. The majority of the personnel graduated from secondary middle school. Many new workers are recruited in secondary schools and have not been able to enter the university. Before 1990 it was very difficult to pass the competitive examination of entrance into the universities, nowadays one must first pay, which even so is less penalizing but excludes the poorest.

An other factory in 2010

Of course, many factories in Guangdong province make toys. The private plastic toy factory of Tanzhou under study, established in 2006, comprised 700 workers in Spring 2010 (760 by the end of September), although in 2008 there were one thousand workers. This indicates a passed crisis not fully concluded. The employer is from Macau, but the factory director has done good studies in Hong Kong and above all has a ten years or so of enterprise experience in the province of Guangdong. The workers work only eight hours a day, from Monday till Saturday, from eight o'clock to noon and from 13:30 till 17:30. One hooter marks the time: beginning and end of work, and noon break for lunch. In relation with the ethnological study of Pun (2005 : 94, 128), there are no great differences concerning the time passed in factory. As this ethnologist notes it, there are differences of dialect and of accent depending on the origin of personnel that can introduce disputes. Some manipulations and favoritism can exist. This is the case of a paint workshop of our factory; those of Guangxi, neighboring province of Guangdong, are rather favoured and some of them can as a consequence get a less constraining post or else they would not get that post for their level of study is not enough. They come from the same village, that of the head of the workshop and some are following him from factory to factory since about ten years already. This type of relation that could also be between school mates, members of a network of relations derived from local compatriotism or from possible relations of any kind, is called *guanxi* (Vandermeersch 2003 : 105). "In the village every one knows every one and one is 'switched on' in many ways." In the city, this is different (Chang 2008 : 270).

⁴ For the injection molding, see *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 21, Chicago, 2003, pp. 326-328.

The workers of the Tanzhou factory come mainly from southern rural China: Guangxi, Hunan, Sichuan and Yunnan. Rarely do they come from Guangdong province for then they would more easily speak Cantonese, the most used language in the factory in question. They can also be from the North, Hubei and from Hunan (Migration 15.9.2010). The barriers between provinces and regions are removed. The country enters into a new era of fusion and exchanges (Liang 2004). Most of the workers however have no residence permit (*hukou*) in the district and the province of their factory, that would give them more rights; they often are linked to a rural region, their place of origin. It is necessary to insist on this point that penalizes the workers. The state tries to remedy it in 2010.

The simplified organization chart of the factory is as follows:

1. The direction (two direction offices and one reception room), the administration and the management (one single office) and the stock management strictly speaking.
2. The technical level comprises five engineers and the following workshops;
3. Supplies and technology, Moulds fabrication by metal-turning, Production divided in workshops: moulding by plastic injection, paint (three workshops), printing (*tempo* printing), assembly and packing (nine assembly lines). At all levels the quality control (QC) is very important (all in all 15 women and three men).
4. Transport.
5. Security.

Early in March the greatest innovation was the construction of a new building to put up on one floor the women workers and below the workers. This four story building, with a cantina, has been finished in July and accommodates about only ten percent of the workers. Those who eat and live in the new cantina do not receive noon and evening meals indemnities. Since July 2010, the majority of labourers continues to be lodged outside of the factory. This obligation to work and to sleep in the factory is elsewhere the most frequent and creates certainly a strong constraint that does not exist in the case of the factory under study. Actually since the construction of a residence and a cantina for the labourers of the enterprise, few want to take advantage of it. They are freer to chose than in other factories. As we see it this enterprise tries to diminish the risks of conflict and does not constraint anyone. One young celibate worker, graduated from a good professional school, arrived at the end of September, acknowledges that, when one comes from afar, to lodge in the factory makes life much more simpler and allows to avoid losing time in finding out a room outside of the factory. Few workers are married yet not a few live as couple. To lodge the workers in the factory allows the enterprise a better control and this enters also in the domains of domination. The enterprise under study penalizes the least it can the workers.

A very reduced number of workers graduated only from primary school. Almost all the workers have completed their secondary studies and about eight percent have successfully passed the final examination of pre-university college. However at the direction and the administration level, apart from the person in charge of the factory who has done good studies in Hong Kong, the personnel graduated from secondary school and rarely from college. The five engineers and one cadre have completed successfully their higher studies. One only woman employee and one director speak English with some ease.

Conflicts

Power and domination can also be seen in the eventual existence of conflicts. Since conflicts are everywhere present in society, it is not strange that they be also common in industry. For Xu (2000 : 198) the workers, in particular the women, are dealt with like controlled and regulated

objects. In September 2010, one garment making factory of Tanzhou recruited only women labourers for daytime or night time work. The woman worker in uniform, who numerically prevailed in the work line up to 2010, is constraint to a “greater productivity... (that) generates subordination” (Balandier 1985 : 136). This subordination can push to envy getting as much money than those who are richer than oneself. This is called the ‘red eye disease’ (*hongyan bing*), a great evil in the modern Chinese society.

As for other migrant workers, the globalization makes that Chinese workers are confronted with the perverse effects of this global process, as in Constantine, in Algeria, in March 2009 (Constantine 2.4.2009 ; Parrenas 2001). This exposure to violence, linked with the wrath of young Algerians against these workers, makes Chinese workers think who can understand all the implications of their low salaries and, in consequence of that, incite them to demand higher salaries. This penalizes Chinese enterprises which become less competitive. If in the future it becomes more difficult to find labourers on the work market in China, the employers will not have any other solution than to better pay their workers. An other solution is to employ these closer to their domicile (Migration 2010). This is not easy.

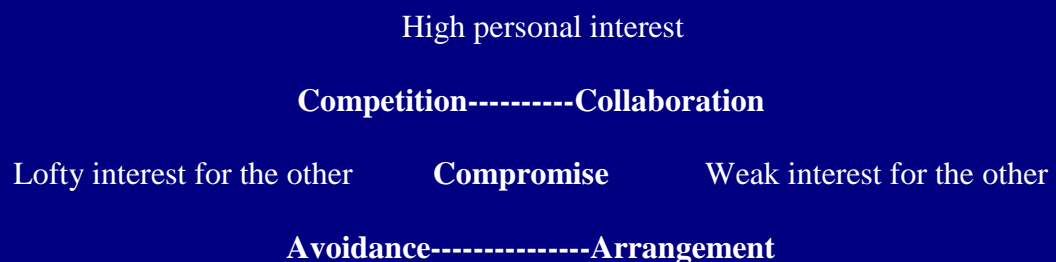
Unemployment, partly linked to globalization, is not so frequent, but was quite common in 2008.⁵

Many workers of Guangdong province are said to have returned into their province of origin (Chinese source, *Le Monde* January 10 2009). A good example is given by a diminution of the number of enterprises during this latest economic crisis. This unemployment can generate conflicts or at least be very constraining.

There are four styles of conflicts resolutions : 1. By entering into competition, 2. By collaborating, 3. By making compromises, in avoiding or ignoring the problems, 4. By arrangement, that is by placing the other’s demands before one’s own interests (Onishi 2010 : 1). To enter individually in competition is difficult indeed even impossible for the workers. This is the ‘Chunming’s case’, a woman worker who escaped from her toys factory in Dongguan (Chang 2008 : 46-7).

A more serious case of competition is the obligation of the boss of an enterprise in construction materials to pay for the hospitalisation fees of a sick worker (Film of Sheng Huofei, 8.3.2010). This is a new theoretical case, yet it is significant for it shows that, when the law is for him, the worker, even in a very difficult case, can finally win. In the enterprise studied in 2010 I have been able to assist to few conflicts. One contention of two workers who wanted to quit their post of assembly in order to take earlier advantage of the three days of holydays from the 1st to the 3rd of October 2010 does not merit particular attention. This is a case of simple competition. Put back in their own place by their cadre on that day, they have resumed their work and left at 17:30 as their comrades.

Conflicts : Table in short 1 (Onishi 2010 : 2)



⁵ Unemployment (*shiye*) is a word taboo. One says in an euphemist manner : “to leave one’s post or one’s job” (*xiagong*).

Weak personal interest

The ‘employers’ when it is the matter of conflicts with the ‘subordinates’ can argue to show that they are right. The worker, when he has a conflict with his foreman or his ‘boss’ can also, in principle, argue to prove to be within his own rights. This was hardly possible in the years 1980-1990. Even in 2010, few workers launch themselves alone or even in group in a ‘competition’ against the boss. There may also be a conflict between a cadre and his subordinates; in that case the one who is the superior may sometimes want to show that in fact he is right in order to show his power and that he is within his own rights (Onishi 2010 : 2). Power in this short article is principally considered as a relation between the social actors, the workers and the boss or the direction of the enterprise, here a factory. The relations between power and knowledge can turn actions into objects and therefore are not to be analyzed as issued by a knowing subject who would be free. The Chinese worker is not really free, but since 2010 his condition is markedly improving. Power can be based on coercion but it needs more or less the worker’s consent, except for what concerns the sanction. In 2010, the Chinese worker has in principle the possibility to leave at month’s end, but it is not easy if he has not completed his work contract.

Chinese Workers In 2010

It seems that the history of work in enterprise in China can divide itself into five periods: 1949-1980, and the 80s, 90s, 2000s and 2010 years. This can be discussed. In 1980 the Deng Xiaoping reforms (*gaige gaifang*, reform and opening up), in 1990 the industry modernization, 2000 the mass production and 2010 the forthwith entry into globalization. In fact in 2010 China has really entered into the era of globalization.

However, Chinese ethics and kinship are, it still seems to me, centered “on the cult of the ancestors and the filial piety” (Chao 1983 : 1). It is the reason why the relation between the chief of enterprise, considered as sovereign, and his subjects (directors, personnel and workers) is paternalistic. The Tanzhou factory is an atypical case of private enterprise that does not enter into this most common case of paternalism. Often, the boss in Tanzhou leaves great power to the director of the factory and to his assistants. He happens nevertheless to gather his personnel in groups and to show himself rather hard, but that does not correspond to the classical case of the chief of enterprise finally rather despotic that one thinks of.

The most common ‘paternalism’ derives from cultural norms sanctioned by the Chinese laws and moral values. Ten years of Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and of criticism of Confucianism, have changed little in an evolving China, ethics are still based on benevolence (*ren*). This virtue of humanity “pushes the human being to avoid what could for others be a source of misfortune and suffering” (Miribel and Vandermeersch 2010: 48). China from an economical point of view is a capitalistic country, modern and then ‘globalized’, but the society remains neo-confucianistic. In particular the boss/worker relationship reproduces rather well the duties and obligations of the subjects vis-à-vis the emperor or the suzerain. These moral values exist even if one can speak of possible corruption that may exist even in the factory of Tanzhou here under study.

In a sociological study in China, it is not possible to forget that the 2008 crisis, which has not impacted the Chinese macro-economy, has nevertheless touched the workers but also their employers. These two classes are dependant of new laws that have a tendency to create a new relational ethics. In a conflict the worker has a greater chance to win against his boss but the procedure is very long. For the first time in 2010 one sees social movements that are centred on the factory, but for all that it is not easier for an isolated worker to defend his case against his boss as shown in the film de Sheng Huofei, mentioned supra.

The socio-economical context

South of Guangzhou is the district of Dongguan, large industrial centre touched by the 2008 crisis. Unemployment is therefore possible (*Guardian* 17.5.2009). Tanzhou, in the south-east, has been less affected by this crisis (interview on 3.3.2010 of Mei Xiangdong, one of the Directors of the Economic Bureau of the city of Tanzhou). However, the statistics of some 300 enterprises and factories of this same city date back to 2007 (www.tanzhou.gov.cn/2007/); it is therefore not possible yet to compare with the years 2008 and 2009. The Tanzhou enterprise under study, that produces plastic toys, counts in 2010 less workers, about 700 as we have noted it.

Although they are encompassed in one same province, there are still differences between the industrial centres of Shenzhen, Dongguan, Tanzhou and Hong Kong. The private enterprises do not obey to the same rules on both sides of the frontier Shenzhen/Hong Kong. The code of work and the 'Basic Law' of the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of Hong Kong provide a cadre which makes that 'corporate governance' of enterprises in People's China, and in Hong Kong, does not obey to the same laws, until 2047 in principle. However it must be noted that the Communist Party (CPC) is always very powerful, more than one third of the employers of private enterprises in People's China are members of the party (Domenach 2009, Halimi 2010). The state continues to play an active role in what concerns these socio-economic activities. This appurtenance to the CPC creates a certain unity; private factories, although more flexible, work in the same politico-structural cadre as the state enterprises, which is not the case of Hong Kong. Although there exist some cadres of the party in the Tanzhou factory under study, their role is very discreet, that would probably not be the case in a state factory like that studied by Gipouloux.

These workers, in majority women (actually, not in the factory under study), come from a rural milieu and play an important role when they come back in their village. This will not be studied here but Murphy thinks that this has an influence on the marriages, the family, the familial relations, the women position in society, the property transfers, and could even contribute to the urbanisation of the countryside (Murphy 2002). The majority of workers of the Tanzhou factory are celibates, but the tendency being to work in factory for a longer time since the working conditions are getting better, about ten percent are married, but their spouse often remains in their village. The celibates may live in couple and in the considered factory many do not want to live in dormitory for they are less free and would not be able to contact their spouse or companion. The wives of the cadres very rarely live nearby the factory, they take care of the family in the main residence of the couple.

The salaries

The salaries of the workers are paid in cash at the end of the month. The workers want to be better paid and it has been obvious in 2010, yet it is not always easy to find some work and one must sometime wait for hours in front of different factories before getting hired. By comparison it must be noted that at the beginning of the 1990 years one worker earned only about 5 Renminbi per day of work (nowadays 0.5 Euros). Sometimes even now the salaries are still rather not high, that is less than 100 Euros per month; the worker may find himself obliged to accept the proposed salary and may regret it if the conditions of work and liberty are really constraining. The comparison shows nevertheless that from the point of view of salary the worker has progressed a lot.

The Chinese worker of 2010 has not much in common any more with the one of the years 1980 as far as claims are concerned, but that does not prevent him nevertheless from being financially exploited by his boss. The Chinese laws oblige the employers to give a minimum salary called *Zuidi gongzi guiding* [the lowest regular wage]. Presently the monthly salary of an ordinary worker in the province of Guangdong is about 1,000 RMB (*Renminbi*) or yuan (about 100 Euros).

That does not mean to say that the workers in factory have all that salary. When it is difficult to find some work as during the short crisis in 2008, it is certain that enterprises have a tendency to hire for less. As an article of the *Financial Management Center* shows (see : Salaire minimum...), the workers who look for a job, in particular after the Chinese New Year, may keep go on to be fooled. The minimum paid by the enterprise for noon and evening meals, in general taken after four hours of work, is of twice 5 RMB (0,5 Euros).

The salary of workers that permits to improve the conditions of rural families plays therefore a hidden yet not to be neglected role. The issue of minimum salary leads back to th case of a highly qualified woman worker in charge of Quality Control (QC) in the toys factory under study at Tanzhou. This minor cadre receives a salary that does not match her qualifications. There is nothing to be said, it regards some one who loves her enterprise and does not even think of comparing her salary with that of better paid but much less competent new comers. This cadre did not work any more at Tanzhou at the time of my second field work, that proves the mobility of personnel and a lack of attachments to the enterprise. That also proves the present difficulty to recruit women workers who are a little bit more serious in the work and often easier to direct than men workers. The cadres of the enterprise under study say also that the women are more skilful with their hands, therefore in percentage in greater number for the work on the assembly line.

Great Mobility

Great is the mobility of the workers. They change often of enterprise. In an other enterprise of Tanzhou, a worker from Henan is paid on and a half less than his colleague of the same province, one does not know why. But it is surprising that, having a one year contract, this badly paid worker, only just arrived, already thinks about leaving his enterprise in one or two months later. If it is the case, and if he finishes his month of work, the boss cannot any more legally refuse to pay him even if the worker decides to leave before the end of his contract of work. His boss has not any more the right to keep him as in the past. To sum up, the law protects better the worker in 2010. All the workers are far from knowing it and unfortunately there are litigious cases.⁶

The workers are one of the keys of the future of the Chinese society, they begin to be better informed of their rights, even if they know that they depend on their employers and on the well running of their enterprise. Cai he confirms that “the workers are better aware of their rights” (*Washington Post* 7.6.2010). The information circulates in China and in Tanzhou. It is significant that a married couple that comes from the countryside in Henan gets hired for the first time in the printing workshop of the Tanzhou factory just before Chinese New Year in 2010. They leave back home for the New Year to be in in family, to make gifts, and they come back after New Year. They are perfectly informed about their rights and their duties. It seems useful to note that it is the wife that leads the couple. It would seem that they have left the enterprise to work elsewhere in September 2010.

Power And Hierarchic Relations

Authority is a relation that one must analyse from the point of view of the person or of the institution that sends out the command and from the point of view of the one who receives it (Boudon 1982 : 24). Here, we principally concern ourselves with the worker. Before studying the power and domination relations between boss and worker, it seems necessary to know what is power in sociology. For Georges Balandier (2007 : 92), “power results from dissymmetry affecting

⁶ Minimum salary of Chinese workers (*Financial Management Resource Center* 9.2.2010). <http://www.businessinsider.com/chinas-jiangsu-province-hikes-minimum-wages-by-13-to-lure-back-coastal-workers-2010-2> , or also <http://www.infosud.org/spip.php?article2881> (workers in the building industry).

social relations”. Weber speaks of “at least two actors”. It is the third person, an arbiter or a mediator, disinterested or exploiter, that renders possible a re-distribution of the stakes (Boudon 1982 : 426).

Can power impose itself by itself? It seems that it would depend in part on the boss’s charisma if we look at the direction of the enterprise that is not quite ‘the’ power. In the factory under study the boss prefers manage by an indirect manner from the director of the factory and of his well chosen assistants. In consequence this boss delegates often his power to thje director (but one must pursue the research, one notes a change of attitude in September 2010). This schema is rare in China for in general the boss is alone and does not delegate his power. One may suppose that if in the enterprises of China the employers of private enterprises would delegate more their power, China would perhaps be able to become the first world economic power. This is an interesting case of ‘corporate governance’. The present atypic example of less domination by the boss of this factory of Tanzhou is a rare case, a kind of exception that confirms the rule.

The authority can lose its footing if it becomes too authoritarian or arbitrary (*Ibid.* : 24-5). The thesis of Han Fei (2009 : 264) on the other hand advocates authoritarianism: “An enlightened sovereign needs only two ‘maniples’ to control his subjects: the punishments and the rewards... The subjects dread the punishments but know how to draw advantages from the liberalities of the sovereign, it suffices for him to use them in order that all fear his rigour and turn themselves towards the bestowed profit.” One would need see how that can still operate in curtains enterprises.

For certain authors, the dominant forms of production (industry, etc.) are always associated with particular systems of stratification and confirm a persistent inequality (Lanski 1966). Without being that pessimistic, the classical Chinese relation between boss and worker follows the spirit of Confucianism, confirmed by Mangzi and Xunzi, that confers to the father (here: to the chief of enterprise or to the ‘boss’) “great power and authority”. In consequence the enterprise or the family rely on the authority of the father (here: of the ‘boss’). In consequence, according to this thesis, the workers must be devoted to the boss, as the children towards their parents (Chao 1983 : 42). This schema is probably true but it does not correspond to what I have observed in Tanzhou.

My judgement is however not definitive for the duration of my study is up to now too short for me to express a more definitive assessment. These results are therefore provisory and seem a little too theoretical, but power and domination are in China particularly complex and flexible. The relations of power are visible when there is a need to coordinate multiple activities. Such is the case of the work in factory, but it is not easy to inquire on this topic. The power may also be treated as a social fact. If one accepts to consider the power as a social fact, a quantity, “the more or less marked propensity of groups and of individuals to cooperate, one will agree that this quantity is variable.” The performances are very unequal depending on the manner with which the resources, the roles and the duties of the personnes are allotted (Boudon 1982 : 429-31).

In the fabrication of new electronic products like iphones telephones, “the intensification of human labour in the sense of growing productivity” may increase the weight of subordination (Balandier 1985 : 136). That may create an enormous stress, which does not exist in the factory under study at Tanzhou for there the competition is less strong, one therefore is not obliged to intensify too much human labour. One remains in acceptable limits. By comparison in other factories, the confinement in the workshops and the housing may be much more constringent. At Tanzhou in the case under study, the working conditions and the setting of the workshops are no problems for the workers. Only the painting workshop would need a case study on a long period.

Power and domination may also be studied in relation with genders. The women are often considered easier to be commanded. For the final production there are more women than men in the factory under study. Before 2010, as far as this issue of gender is concerned, the number of women

workers in factory was much more important in the considered enterprise. But presently, the factory under study shows that it is more and more difficult to find women workers. It is possible that this deficit of female personnel will continue.

For Pun (2005 : 196), as far as the domination of young women (*dagongmei*打工妹) working in factory is concerned, there are several factors to be studied: the disparity city/village, the Chinese laws, the difference of sexes, the family, the familial relations. Production and consumption play also a role. The strong identity of this class of female workers is certain (Lee 1994 : 12). “Twelve girls live together in a dormitory (in the case of Tanzhou, only eight). It is therefore safer to keep one’s own secrets for oneself inside the borders of this dormitory” (Chang 2008 : 3). The identity of the male worker (*dagongcai*) exists also, one should also study it in detail.

In social relations, Confucianism is not dead. Constitutive of the society, the ideal hierarchical relations are still standard practice: *san gang* the Three great Rules and *wu chang* the Five social Constants or virtues govern the following binomials: sovereign-subject (here: the ‘boss’ and the worker), father-son and husband-wife.⁷ Benevolence (*ren*), justice (*yi*), loyalty (*zhong*) and wisdom (*zhi*) are perhaps the Confucian qualities of a boss which, if he succeeds in his enterprise, make that the workers admire him and do not feel the weight of subordination.

Enterprise governance and accidents

In the Chinese reality, as the work conditions are difficult, work accidents are many, 120 000 deaths in 2005 (Domenach 2009 : 23). That may create tensions between employers and workers. The machines play also a role concerning these high figures of accidents; I do not mention the very particular case of turning; there are practically no women in this industrial specialty. One must nevertheless mention the injecting machines of a delicate handling. In the factory of Tanzhou, which has a particular service in charge of the prevention of accident since 2007, no one serious accident is signalled according to my study. The fact that there had not been any accident up to now contributes to reduce the importance of the power and domination issue in this case of study. These questions are nevertheless crucial, for in China even if the salaries seem presently to be the key of the resolution of conflicts, to stabilise the society, still more than the peasants, whatever concerns the workers is more and more important.

Conclusion

In China, at the end of the twentieth century the issue of the day was modernisation. Nowadays it is globalization. One can not ignore globalization, for the Chinese workers can be employed in Africa, in Cuba or elsewhere. In China, the labourers and the employers are nowadays more dependent on this global, sociological and economical phenomenon. One of the consequences of this global processus is the latest world economic crisis of 2008 which has been felt in the province of Guangdong. Such a crisis has therefore had sociological repercussions for the labourers of this province and in the factory under study which has rather well managed it.

The presented study case, unfortunately unique, shows an improvement of the worker condition. A more thorough and longer analysis would allow to better focus this research and could give a more general very useful vision. However despite the problems linked to a vertiginous development, the Middle Way still prevails in China. It is less the worried point of view of Domenach (2009) and more the “beautiful success” vision of Izraelewiz (2005) that takes precedence for the worker in Tanzhou in the factory under study. In order to improve the condition

⁷ The five feudal Chinese virtues are benevolence, fidelity, justice, loyalty and wisdom. For what concerns the family, essential in Beijing as well as in Tahnzhou filial piety (*xiao*) remains one of the bases of Chinese society.

of the workers, Lin Yanling, of the Chinese Institute of Industrial Relations, proposes to develop a spirit of equity rather than to search at all cost for the best possible economical gain (*Washington Post* 7.6.2010).

Power and domination cover a very vast domain. The matrix of relations of domination can not be reduced to one single term. For Pun (2005 : 196), the 'microphysics' of domination and of power is much more complex than the class relationship itself. In the case studied here, the relations of power and of domination are not very visible except at the time of meetings when the boss decides to retake in hand the command. Of course power is not exactly enterprise governance. Field work confirms that the boss-worker relationship seems to be more and more dependent on new laws that slowly transform China.

One will need to confirm the tendency of the factory under study concerning the new shortage of women workers. On the other hand, the labourers' mobility is still great. In this study case, except for the cadres, fidelity towards the enterprise is not important.

The labourers' migration is a key more general issue (Migration 2010). The migration from village to city remains fundamental and has been studied too summarily. Rightly so, the Chinese state tries to manage this issue and can give residence permit in a city where the migrant works. In 2010, in the province of Guangdong, an example is given by the attribution of a residence permit, *hukou*; the privileged labourers that obtain this permit may sojourn nearby their factory, get married and have their child legally registered in a school not far from their work place. To continue its economic growth, China that has become the factory of the world, but not only for toys, needs the workers and their sincere good will. Shown during my field research, there is perhaps a thirst for ethics which, when it is honoured by an adequate human behaviour in the enterprise, can reveal itself very rewarding.

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