

## OLD WORKING CLASS, NEW WORKING CLASS

Reforms, labour crisis and the two faces of conflicts in Chinese urban areas

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Since the end of 1993 and the call for the creation of a 'modern enterprise system', the reform of the state-owned sector has led to a complete reshaping of the structure of urban employment. The separation between ownership and management rights, the spreading of the shareholding system, and the emphasis on the financial profitability of enterprises have all gradually destroyed the paradigm of urban socialist employment. This paradigm was based on an ideological principle: the urban enterprise must not be merely an economic entity, it has to assume social and political responsibilities. Most urban workers were employed by enterprise units (*qiye danwei*) in charge of every aspect of their social lives. Not only were workers enjoying a life tenure job but they were also provided with a wide range of welfare facilities in different sectors of social life (housing, health, pension, etc.). Apart from these social functions, the *danwei* system operated as a political entity, further controlling its employees' lives.<sup>1</sup> Andrew Walder has defined the labour relations produced by the *danwei* system as neo-traditional. The monopoly on the distribution of material rewards and the total control of cadres over the mechanisms of social promotion led to the appearance of an 'organized dependence', structured through clientelist networks between workers and cadres.<sup>2</sup> Unlike what has emerged in Western capitalist countries, the relations between workers and management were not based on the general principle of labour exploitation and a clear conflictual frame of organic ties connecting workers and power.<sup>3</sup> This left the door open to conflicts, but conflicts which were themselves developing within the political apparatus and solved through internal bargaining.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, the *danwei* system and the paradigm of urban socialist employment were highly fragmented. The splits involved the working class (old qualified workers/contractual young workers, big enterprise workers/

small enterprise workers, etc.) and the status of the *danwei* (central/local units, big/small units).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it is important to observe that urban areas were not entirely devoted to public employment. In fact, a small minority of workers were not enjoying the benefits provided by the *danwei* system. Employees of collective small-scale enterprises enjoyed the same working conditions as contractual workers forming altogether a new type of Chinese proletariat. The *danwei* and the socialist employment systems represented the general framework in which the relations between workers and cadres functioned during the Maoist period. Every *danwei* constituted a 'small society' (*xiao shehui*), a 'village within a city' dominated by the feeling of belonging to a community.<sup>6</sup>

The reshaping of labour relations started in 1986 with the introduction of the labour contract, abolishing the life employment system and allowed the enterprise to fire and hire people according to economic rationality. Besides, the *danwei* welfare system was replaced by a state welfare system.<sup>7</sup> The objective of the reform was to alleviate the social and political burden of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) with the aim of improving their financial situation.<sup>8</sup>

Since 1994, the pace of restructuring has increased to a great extent. This acceleration does not have its origins in policies and regulations adopted by the central government, but rather in official declarations allowing local authorities and enterprises to transform general orientations into practical decisions.<sup>9</sup> In addition, local authorities and enterprises have largely used these new opportunities to reshape the structure of urban labour and to redefine labour relations through a commodification of the workforce. Henceforth, as a commodity, the workforce must have an economic utility and create wealth.<sup>10</sup> This radical change has led to a massive phenomenon of redundancies. According to the Research Institute of the Commission of Planification, 13 million people were laid off in 1997.<sup>11</sup> Other sources give 12 million people laid off in 1998 and 11 million in 1999.<sup>12</sup> Quite clearly, there is a complete withering of the *danwei* system of protection (including payment of pensions) and, as a result, an impoverishment of an important portion of the urban population. In recent years, a significant number of demonstrations, petitions, sit-ins and violent actions have taken place in most big cities, protesting against the degradation of living conditions of certain elements of the working class.

This kind of phenomenon is quite common in both developed and developing countries. But, because of the particular position that the urban working class occupies in the Chinese political scene, the situation of these industrial workers deserves special attention. As seen above, the Chinese urban working class is different from the 'classic' working class. Its insertion within the political apparatus and its dominant position in the cities has led to its protests generating immediate political outcomes. This social unrest has raised two sets of parallel questions. First of all, are conflicts challenging

the organic ties which have linked the urban working class and the socialist state since 1949 to such an extent that urban workers could develop autonomous political actions?<sup>13</sup> Do they represent a danger for social stability? Secondly, is the state able to change as a result of the new situation, and in which direction?

In order to answer these questions it is necessary to insist on regional variations. The proportion of SOE employees in the workforce, the size and scope of redundancies, the strategic importance and financial availabilities of the place are some elements, amongst others, which determine the behaviour of the different actors. In this chapter, the main hypothesis is that urban China is living a double phenomenon. In certain regions, mainly the coastal provinces, where the opportunities for re-employment exist, a new kind of labour relations is emerging alongside a process of 'normalization' of working conditions, labour conflicts and the relations between the state and the workers. The second phenomenon concerns industrial provinces and cities of the northern and central regions. In this case, not only are redundancies very important but the prospects for employment are very grim. In such a context, the local state (mainly the municipal authorities) is involved in a socialization of its modes of actions and of its ways of functioning in order to 'soften' the social consequences of reforms. At the same time, far from breaking organic ties with the political apparatus, workers try to preserve a new kind of dependency based no longer on the enterprise, but directly on the state. This attempt leads to a 'ritualized social bargaining' in which people in need organize themselves (through regular and peaceful demonstrations and reasonable demands) in order to maintain a constant, non-political but efficient pressure on local governments. Nevertheless, here also the regional variations are very important and the conditions of bargaining are highly differentiated from place to place.

### The social consequences of restructuring

Although unemployment is the most important social outcome of SOE reforms, it is very difficult to evaluate the unemployed population. Despite the numerous declarations concerning redundancies, the official number of the registered urban unemployed (*dengji shiye*) remains quite stable: 4.76 million people in 1994 (unemployment rate:<sup>14</sup> 2.8 per cent),<sup>15</sup> 5.53 million in 1996 (3 per cent),<sup>16</sup> 5.77 million at the end of 1997 (3.1 per cent)<sup>17</sup> and 6 million at the end of 1998 (3.5 per cent). Moreover, not only has the number of staff and workers (*zhigong*) remained stable between 1994 and 1997 (148 million against 146 million) but the number of SOE staff and workers remained unchanged during that same period (108 million against 107 million).<sup>18</sup> This apparent paradox can be easily explained by the fact that Chinese statistics have a very restricted approach to unemployment. The unemployed population comprises only urban people fired by bankrupt

enterprises benefiting from unemployment insurance funds. Apart from this population, Chinese officials and enterprises have invented some particular categories of people who have no job but are not considered as unemployed. According to the regime, China remains a socialist country and unemployment cannot structurally exist. Thus, to be without a job is necessarily a temporary situation.

Most redundancies take the form of laid-off employees (*xiagang*) who no longer work but are supposed to continue to receive part of their income, for which they are accounted as staff and workers. That is why they are not considered to be unemployed but rather of temporary non-working status. They are supposed to be re-employed shortly after being laid off. Needless to say, it is difficult to give an evaluation of this population category. If the numbers vary according to different sources, it is mainly because of the evolution of the meaning of the term *xiagang* itself. In fact, this status is becoming gradually less temporary. On that point, it is interesting to notice that some local authorities have set up 'laid off certificates'<sup>19</sup> in order to provide preferential opportunities to the *xiagang*. This kind of 'labelling' reveals the fact that the laid-off status is no longer provisional.

Although the different figures available are contradictory, most of them conclude that the proportion of re-employed *xiagang* is quite small. According to surveys done by the State Council and other labour departments, until 1997, 20 million people were laid off, and 70 per cent of them were re-employed or forced to go on early retirement by 1998.<sup>20</sup> Other sources estimated then the rate of re-employment to be 60 per cent.<sup>21</sup> The scenarios given by other researchers are much grimmer. For instance, in 1996, laid-off workers remained, on average, for three years and nine months without a job, and at the end of that same year, only 26 per cent of *xiagang* were re-employed.<sup>22</sup> In the case of Shanxi, about one-third of laid-off workers were re-employed,<sup>23</sup> while in Liaoning it was about 25 per cent.<sup>24</sup> Even in Shanghai, where the problem of employment is less serious than in other parts of the country, 34.8 per cent of *xiagang* waited for one year before finding a new job, 24.1 per cent between one year and two years, 18.2 per cent from two years to three years, and 22.9 per cent more than three years.<sup>25</sup> It is very difficult to estimate the number of re-employed workers, given that most of the re-working *xiagang* are involved in self-subsistence activities (*zimo zhiye*), i.e. petty and unstable jobs like peddling, repairing, shoe-shining, etc. For instance, already in 1997, amongst the 4.8 million *xiagang* who got a job that year, 2.8 million of them were employed in the private sector (with about 1.9 million of them being in the 'self-subsistence sector').<sup>26</sup> The majority of laid-off workers lack qualifications and therefore have serious difficulties in finding a new job.<sup>27</sup> In addition, some of the *xiagang* people are forced to go on 'early retirement' (*tiqian tuixiu*), contributing therefore to an artificial decrease in the real number of *xiagang* workers. Table 4.1 gives a general estimation of unemployment.

Table 4.1 Unemployment estimates

Years	1994	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Numbers*	6.5	13.5–15.5	14.7–17.2	16–19	15–20	22–25
Proportions**	3.4	6.6–7.6	7–8.2	7.6–9	7–9.3	10–11.3

Sources: 'Xiagang zhigongde shenghuo . . .' (1997); Sun (1998); Ma (1998); Li (1998); Fan (1998).

Notes:

\* Registered unemployed plus laid-off without having been re-employed yet (in million).

\*\* Proportions of the unemployed population to urban unemployed persons and employed persons (in %).

According to Chinese researchers, 'hidden unemployment' (*yinxing shiye*), i.e. the surplus workforce, was 35 million in 1996<sup>28</sup> and 30 million in 1997.<sup>29</sup> Numbers from the Statistical Bureau (quoted by a Hong Kong review)<sup>30</sup> estimate that between 550,000 and 600,000 people were fired every month in 1997 and 1998, and both the unemployed and the *xiagang* reached 37 million people (35 per cent of workers and employees). Obviously, this figure takes into account the re-employed laid-off.

In order to give a more precise picture of the situation of unemployment it is important to include in our estimations another kind of people: the victims of partial or delayed payment of wages (*touqian gongzi*). These workers have a job but no salary and often do not work any more or only part-time. Under such circumstances, they can be considered as an alternative type of unemployed, as employers break the labour contract by stopping or reducing the payment of labour. Most of the time, this phenomenon is a consequence of financial difficulties, according to some sources, some enterprises take advantage of the official declarations on the necessity of reshaping urban labour in order to diminish wages, without firing an extra amount of workers. For instance, in Jixi (Heilongjiang), 440,000 workers from the Bureau of Mining received about 40 Rmb per month in the mid-1990s.<sup>31</sup> According to a paper published in April 1994, 80 working units had not paid wages and bonuses to 300,000 employees since November 1993 and 180,000 other workers had received only one-third or two-thirds of their wages.<sup>32</sup> About 300,000 workers from the four most important mining plants of Heilongjiang had not been paid at all for several months.<sup>33</sup> In 1995, more than 70 per cent of SOEs put off, at varying degrees, the payment of wages.<sup>34</sup> In Taiyuan, some people were not paid for fifteen months in 1995.<sup>35</sup> In 1996, Hugang (Huhehot Steel Company) employees only received 50–70 per cent of their wages for eight months.<sup>36</sup> At the end of June 1996, in the whole of Liaoning, 7,847 companies, or 14.2 per cent, were behind with salaries (7,000 in October 1995). This lack of payment concerned 1,702 million workers for a total amount of 2.81 billion Rmb (or 1,650 Rmb per head), which represents an increase of 170 per cent and 290 per cent respectively compared with the previous year.<sup>37</sup> In the north-eastern provinces, 4.26 million workers and retired people lacked

an income because of delays in payment in June 1996.<sup>38</sup> In Zibo (Shandong), 44.8 per cent of workers no longer received an income.<sup>39</sup> By 1998, 12 per cent of Chongqing employees did not receive any income at all.<sup>40</sup>

Nationwide figures confirm this whole phenomenon. According to trade unions, 10 million workers were victims of delay in payment of wages in 1995<sup>41</sup> and more than 70 per cent of SOEs put off at varying degrees the payment of wages.<sup>42</sup> Vice-Premier Wu Bangguo estimated at 11 million the number of Chinese workers not having been paid or only partially paid in the first four months of 1997.<sup>43</sup> According to another official source, 12.8 million retired people and workers were in that situation in 1996 and 13.8 million people in the first nine months of 1997.<sup>44</sup>

The blurred nature of Chinese statistics on unemployment reflects the difficulties faced by the Chinese authorities in dealing with the question of jobless people in a unified and transparent manner, both for ideological reasons (because China remains socialist and therefore cannot produce non-workers) and for pragmatic reasons (because of the socio-political danger of a 'head-on' attack). It is therefore a matter of making the reshaping process acceptable by dividing it up, by fragmenting the problem while multiplying policies or even leaving the companies to sort themselves out, as with postponed wages. That way, the Chinese authorities can maintain the fiction of a non-violent transition from the socialist paradigm to the new 'modern labour market'. The problem is that the victims of the SOE restructuring do not live in a fiction but rather in a (difficult) reality.

Apart from redundancies, urban dwellers are also struck by two additional problems. The first one concerns the reform of the welfare system. In most places, the previous system – based on the payment by the enterprises of health expenses and pensions – is collapsing while the new one is far from being able to establish a social security net. The old age protection system (*yanglao baozhuang zhidu*), the health protection system (*yiliao baozhang zhidu*), as well as the unemployment protection system (*shiye baozhang zhidu*),<sup>45</sup> are all based on the contributions of enterprises and workers to funds managed by local authorities, but are unable to assume a universal protection. First of all, the enterprises are not willing to pay the due contributions, as some of them do not have enough funds, and others prefer to save money for investment purposes. Second, the total wages on which the contributions are calculated have declined in certain regions.<sup>46</sup> Third, as funds are badly managed, it is not rare to discover that large amounts of money have disappeared or have been transferred to private accounts. For instance, in 1998, 8.2 billion Rmb devoted to the payment of 1.8 million retired workers were embezzled.<sup>47</sup> As a result, the urban population has experienced for several years a neat decrease in social security: many urban dwellers have not had their health expenses reimbursed,<sup>48</sup> *xiagang* people and a proportion of registered unemployed have not received any money at all, and millions of retired people have suffered delays in the payment of their pensions.



The second problem lies in the commodification of previously freely provided social facilities like schooling and housing. For several years, school fees and rents have increased to a great extent.

### Social unrest and regional variations

Already in 1993, more than 6,300 strikes of different forms involving some 320,000 people, 440 cases of disturbances of the public order and 210 cases of rebellion occurred in different cities.<sup>49</sup> Another source quoting a document from the Ministry of Labour included 12,000 conflicts and 2,500 sit-ins, destructions of machines, strikes and detentions of cadres.<sup>50</sup> In 1995, about 480,000 persons attended more than 3,700 meetings, strikes, petitions and demonstrations in enterprises, administrative organs, mining plants and working units all over the country.<sup>51</sup> According to an internal report published by a Hong Kong review concerning 120 cities, 1,520 demonstrations, protest meetings and petitions gathering 1.85 million signatures occurred from January to September 1996. On 52 occasions the troubles led to violence, and 820 people were injured (citizens, state and party officials, and policemen). That same year, 1,740 strikes and 370 attacks on state and party organs occurred.<sup>52</sup> In 1997, the situation worsened (455 strikes and demonstrations broke out). This increase in social instability seemed to be linked to the sudden acceleration of the reforms after the XVth Party Congress. Local authorities used this opportunity to eliminate small and medium sized enterprises, forcing workers to resign, to go on early retirement or to buy shares of unprofitable enterprises.<sup>53</sup> From January to October 1997, 115 cases of attacks on party and governmental buildings were reported. These numbers seem to be below those of 1996 but the incidents were more violent: 320 cadres were injured and 10 killed.<sup>54</sup> In 1998, about 3,300 demonstrations, protest meetings and petitions took place, 400 of them leading to violence.<sup>55</sup>

Social unrest in urban areas is usually viewed as a direct result of political instability. But in order to measure its political impact, it is necessary to measure the nature and meaning of protest movements. In fact, it appears that behind social unrest lay very different social and geographical situations. Due to the limited available local monographs on urban social problems, it is rather difficult to draw a precise picture of local variations. Although internal provincial differences between cities are certainly very significant, the analysis needs to be limited to general and rough statements at the regional level. First, it is helpful to distinguish two geographical groups. The first one could be named the 'labour post-crisis' group, including the developing coastal provinces (Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai). The second one includes most of the central and northern provinces (Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Sichuan, Hunan, Shandong, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Hebei, Hubei, Henan), where SOE restructuring takes the form of a labour crisis.

The differences between these two groups are based on three aspects of protest movements. First of all, trouble cases are far more significant in the second group.<sup>56</sup> In cities like Shenyang or Wuhan, troubles occur on a nearly daily basis in certain periods. Second, in the first group of provinces, protest movements are limited to an enterprise whereas in central and northern regions social unrest involves social categories. Finally, in coastal provinces, conflicts generally concern working conditions and labour payment. In other provinces, the question at stake is living conditions in post-reshaping urban society. This is probably the most important point, as it is directly linked to the status of labour in post-socialist China. From this point of view, it is possible to distinguish two different Chinas, one where labour supply remains important (although under new conditions), and another one where finding a job is a rare opportunity.

But before going deeper into this matter, it is necessary to note that the variations in the status of labour depend on different factors, particularly the proportion of employment in SOEs before the restructuring process. In the north-eastern regions (Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning), 65 per cent of the urban workforce was working in SOEs in 1994. In Sichuan, Henan and Shaanxi, the proportion was respectively 68 per cent, 71 per cent and 77.5 per cent against 53.4 per cent, 52.7 per cent, 50.8 per cent in Fujian, Guangdong and Zhejiang.<sup>57</sup> As a consequence, the size of surplus workforce and the number of redundancies vary to a great extent between the two groups of provinces. In 1997, amongst the 13–14 million laid-off, 1.6 million were living in Liaoning province. At the end of 1997, nearly 13.7 per cent of the Chinese *xiagang* who had not yet obtained a new job were living in Liaoning.<sup>58</sup> A second factor concerns the extent of re-employment. In coastal provinces, economic growth offers more opportunities to the *xiagang* to find new jobs in foreign investment factories or even in modernized enterprises. In Fujian, there were only 140,000 *xiagang* without a job<sup>59</sup> by the end of 1997, against 710,000 in Shandong and 1.23 million in Liaoning.<sup>60</sup> In Shaanxi province, only one-third of laid-offs got a new job.<sup>61</sup> Even in Shanghai where the proportion of SOE employees was quite high (67.3 per cent), 1.1 million laid-off were re-employed from a total of 1.3 million.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the ‘jobs’ obtained in the two groups after being laid-off were not always the same kind. Most of the new occupations in the second group were self-subsistence activities (*zimo zhiye*). The working conditions in coastal provinces are certainly very bad but the fact that workers are so numerous at least allows them to develop solidarity.

### **Towards post-socialist labour conditions**

Most conflicts which have taken place in coastal provinces concern wage levels and working conditions. The enterprises involved are usually Hong Kong, Korean, Taiwanese and Japanese-invested factories, or otherwise



collective, private and SOE enterprises working as subcontractors for foreign companies.<sup>63</sup> For instance, in May 1994 there was a strike at the Hong Kong-invested Weiwang Company in Zhuhai: over 2,000 workers asked for an increase in wage of 30 per cent in order to compensate for an inflation rate of 21 per cent.<sup>64</sup> In Zhuhai Meida Cassettes Factory, some workers went on strike to protest against new regulations imposing fines for late working, forcing workers to supervise each other.<sup>65</sup> In March 1996, 600 workers of the Xiede Hardware Manufacturing Factory, set up by a Hong Kong businessman, went on strike. The demands were reasonable (an increase of 1 to 3 Rmb per hour), but the boss refused, and the workers were beaten by the police.<sup>66</sup> In July 1998, over 200 workers from the Hong Kong-owned Chong Xing Qiu Spectacles Factory took part in a collective protest in front of the Cha Shan government offices. The workers had not been paid for three months.<sup>67</sup> Protest movements also take place in SOEs, although they take the form of collective inaction like 'collective goldbricking, withdrawal of effort, spontaneous work stoppages and quasi sit-ins'.<sup>68</sup>

According to Lee Ching Wan, the collapse of the neo-traditional 'organized dependence' in Guangzhou has led to the emergence of a new dependence she names 'disorganized despotism'. Despotism 'denotes three aspects of labour management relations: labour's institutional dependence on production work for livelihood, imposition of coercive modes of labour control and workers' collective apprehension of such control as violations of their material interests and moral precepts'.<sup>69</sup> The term disorganized 'refers to the disarticulation of diverse reform measures as providing the institutional context for a despotic regime'.<sup>70</sup> In the same spirit, Anita Chan uses the term 'bonded' labour market<sup>71</sup> to describe the new kind of labour relations which is appearing in the non-state as well as the state footwear industry. The workers have to pay a 'bond' (*yajin*) and to accept low wages and bad working conditions.<sup>72</sup>

What is emerging behind these developments is a new labour status – and even a new working class. In reading reports concerning working conditions in the SOEs, collective, private or export-oriented foreign controlled enterprises, one is struck by similarities with nineteenth-century European factories or today's developing countries' export sector: 'Young women forced to work seven days a week, 12 hours a day, earning as little as 12 to 18 cents an hour with no benefits, housed in cramped, dirty rooms, fed on thin rice gruel, stripped of their legal rights, under constant surveillance and intimidation'.<sup>73</sup> Many workers have been victims of factory explosions and fires, as in Jinjiang city (Fujian), where 32 workers locked in a dormitory were killed.<sup>74</sup> These young women are often migrants coming from remote rural areas, with no protection, and are fired as soon as they develop serious health problems.

The presence of migrant workers in most coastal cities is crucial: in Guangzhou, more than one-third of urban employees are registered migrant

workers,<sup>75</sup> and in Dongguan nearly 90 per cent of production line workers are migrants.<sup>76</sup> This situation contributes to a general reassessment of wages and working conditions. Those workers who remain in SOEs are compelled to accept a new labour relationship based on exploitation.<sup>77</sup> They have to behave as normal workers paid to create revenues for the owner of the capital. It is not surprising that, at the same time, they are discovering what the European working class has practised for a long time: everyday forms of 'resistance of the weak'<sup>78</sup> as well as embryonically organized collective actions, such as spontaneous strikes. From such a perspective, social unrest in coastal provinces could be the prelude to the emergence of workers' movements as an answer to the development of 'disorganized despotism', but this is very difficult to gauge at present. According to publications from dissident organizations, the number of trade unions in coastal provinces is increasing. But other sources of information note the development of secret localistic groups<sup>79</sup> that try to protect the interests of their members in organizing different forms of collective actions, often using blackmail, extortion and violence.<sup>80</sup>

Whatever the evolution of the labour conflicts may be, it is clear that the neo-traditionalist 'organized dependence' is collapsing. It is striking to notice that the local authorities rarely interfere in the new labour relations set up between workers and enterprises. Not only do governments, labour bureaus and trade unions hardly ever intervene during conflicts,<sup>81</sup> they rarely try to protect the workers' rights. In fact, they often even tend to suppress any attempt to form independent trade unions.<sup>82</sup> Thus, workers feel that trade unions are on the side of the capitalistic entrepreneurs and are more interested in doing business with Hong Kong and Taiwan people than in defending their workers. When protest movements succeed, it is generally because workers have to fight against both the enterprise management and the local labour bureau and trade unions.<sup>83</sup> Local authorities content themselves in taking general measures in order to limit social instability. For example, it is forbidden in Guangzhou to fire a worker whose spouse is unemployed or who has been in the job more than ten years and is within a five-year period of retiring.<sup>84</sup>

However, at the very same time, new kinds of dependence are emerging. The bonded labour market and disorganized despotism contribute to the fragmentation of the new working class. The social and geographical origins of the workers determine their status, their working conditions and their income level. Urban SOE workers experiment with new labour relations, but they are better treated than migrants.<sup>85</sup> They can use social relations (*guanxi*) and protections to limit the consequences of the normalization of the working class. Within the migrant population itself, the status of the different local groups depends on their ability to protect their interests and to weave relations with the local powerholders.<sup>86</sup>

### Conflicts and socialization of the state

What is most striking in the protest movements in central and northern SOEs is their standardized aspect.<sup>87</sup> Whatever the cause of the incident, it usually starts with people gathering in the centre of the town in front of the municipal government building. This fact witnesses the growing importance of municipal authorities as the main interlocutors of the angry population. The protesters block a main crossroads in order to be received by the officials, giving them a petition or a set of documents including their demands. The incident usually lasts for a short time, either because the officials agree to receive the representatives and deal with the problem, or because the police intervene and disperse the crowd, usually in a peaceful way. But in other cases, the scenario may be quite different. According to the Hong Kong press, in 1997 riots took place in Zhengzhou, Kaifeng (Henan) and in Jinan (Shandong), where buildings were looted and police cars set on fire by protesters. Over 500 persons were injured in front of the party committee of Hebei province during fights between petitioners and the police.<sup>88</sup> In Shaoyang (Hunan), 1,000 laid-off workers looted the director of the local police administration's office in order to protest against the arrest of five of them, who were suspected of attacking the party committee building and the office of a factory boss.<sup>89</sup> Sichuan is the province where the most violent incidents occurred. In July 1997, according to dissident sources, over 100,000 Mianyang protesters were brutally dispersed by the police: about 100 people were injured and 80 arrested. According to Sichuan officials, only 700 citizens attended the demonstration and 9 were put into custody. According to them, the financial problems facing the employees of an enterprise on the verge of bankruptcy were at the origin of unrest in the city.<sup>90</sup> In October 1997, the Hong Kong media reported fights between the police and 300 workers from the Radio Factory in Zigong. They had not been paid since the year before. The protesters blocked a crossroads for three hours.<sup>91</sup> The authorities admitted the incident but they claimed that the protesters were only 30 retired people who had not received their pensions and denied that violence occurred.<sup>92</sup> Because of the very grim situation in the region at the time, it is possible that the sources described different movements taking place simultaneously. Demonstrations broke out again in Zigong in March and April 1998, but this time with no violence. The protesters were *xiagang* and retired workers who no longer received any money from their enterprises. They demonstrated and blocked the streets in the centre of the town.<sup>93</sup>

However, apart from these cases, the troubles are dealt with by relatively 'soft' means, especially if we compare them with the way the authorities deal with rural troubles. In urban areas, the authorities seem to prefer to negotiate. Even in Shaoyang where the troubles were particularly violent, the local government played the card of moderation and ordered to free the

five detainees. Local authorities try to calm the protesters down and to satisfy some of their demands, promising for example the payment of due wages and pensions or giving emergency aid to the people in need. Arrests are not frequent except when the protest is violent – but even in this case only the leaders are usually put into custody – or when dissidents are involved.<sup>94</sup>

Most movements are spontaneous and lack any form of organization. Very few sources provide examples of organized strikes and demonstrations by structured organizations.<sup>95</sup> However, if they exist, they do not seem to have developed to a great extent as they remain very discrete and are rarely noticed even in internal documents and informal discussions with researchers. For reasons explained below, they probably do not represent an important force among workers for the time being.

The demands of the protest movements are usually not connected with political objectives. Even when the redundancies or closures are contested (which is rarely the case), the aim is not to contest the policies themselves but rather the social consequences of the SOE reshaping, such as the non-payment of wages and pensions, or the absence of social and financial protections for the laid-off.<sup>96</sup> There is no question of really defending the old system or opposing the reforms. Most of the slogans are pragmatic: ‘we want to eat’,<sup>97</sup> ‘we want food and work’,<sup>98</sup> ‘we must exist, we need justice’, ‘save the people’,<sup>99</sup> ‘we want wages’, ‘respect for the old workers’, ‘we need money to live’, ‘we want our pensions’,<sup>100</sup> etc. These demands reveal in fact the appearance of a ‘new poverty’ phenomenon in urban areas as a result of the increasing unemployment rate.<sup>101</sup>

Leaving aside certain periods (notably the Great Leap Forward), poverty has always been limited to a fringe group of the population, seen as ‘the enemies of the regime’ and to a minority which had no access to the system of public employment. Even though the urban population affected by poverty is still limited, the fact that millions of urban citizens are meeting growing difficulties in their daily life is a real shock for urban society. Official statistics classified only 12 million urban residents as poor,<sup>102</sup> and 8 per cent of workers were considered to have encountered difficulties in their daily life in 1994, against 5 per cent in 1993.<sup>103</sup> In 1996, the number of urban poor was contained between 12 to 20 million.<sup>104</sup> Actually, these estimates only concern the absolute poor (*juedui pinkun*), i.e. those whose income does not enable them to buy basic essentials.<sup>105</sup> Other figures include people suffering relative poverty (*xiangdui pingkun*), i.e. people whose income is largely below the average income. According to Zhu Qingfang, there were 30.8 million poor people in 1995: 12.4 million people in absolute poverty, 11.5 million unpaid workers and retired people, 4.9 million unemployed and 1.9 million old and handicapped. In 1996, the average income per capita of poor people decreased by 12 per cent, reaching 1,321 Rmb per year (30 per cent of urban average income), and 90 per cent of people in absolute poverty lived in the

centre and the west. In fact, 30 per cent were poor due to delays in wage payment, 20 per cent because of unemployment, 17 per cent for not having received their pensions, 10 per cent for earning low wages, 10 per cent because of inflation and 5 per cent because of being old or handicapped.<sup>106</sup> In 1995, the employed represented 53.9 per cent of the poor and the retired 16.7 per cent.<sup>107</sup> In 1997, 85 per cent of poor families lived in the centre and the west, among whom 38.4 per cent lived in the three north-western provinces (Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning).<sup>108</sup>

This rapid increase in poverty is parallel to an increase in the gap between social categories. In 1995, 41 per cent of urban dwellers saw their income decline,<sup>109</sup> and in 1997 the number increased to 45 per cent.<sup>110</sup> Obviously, the emerging social polarization has increased the resentment of people in need against the undesired consequences of reform.

But even if political questions are not totally absent, the protest movements do not seem to develop a critique of the regime. For instance, social problems are often connected with corruption, although under what could be identified as a 'populist' approach: the protesters demand honest leaders; they criticize managers who lay off people but spend money in travelling and banquets; they criticize the individual entrepreneurs (*getihu*) who are supposed to make easy money or peasants who come in town and sell vegetables at (supposed) expensive prices; etc. But, as in 1989, no political position is assumed except a defence of the socialist roots of the regime. According to internal sources, leftist slogans have been shouted during demonstrations: 'long life to socialism' (*shehuizhuyi wansui*), 'we want a true socialist system not a false one' (*yao shehuizhuyi, bu yao jia shehuizhuyi*), 'against the new bureaucratic capitalistic class' (*dadao xin guanliao zichanjieji*). In particular, many old workers feel betrayed by the party, stating the following: 'we gave our youth to the party and now it has abandoned us, we ask our children for help, but they have been fired'.<sup>111</sup>

So, it seems that there are neither signs of contestation of the regime nor a tendency towards the development of a political movement. Unlike what is happening in rural areas, protest movements rarely try to popularize their struggle by contacting the media or referring to the law in order to justify their demands. In other words, protesters do not seem to have the intention of breaking the organic ties which link them to the regime. The reason for this conservative approach is quite simple. It seems that very few people consider that the reshaping of urban employment is avoidable. Most workers seem to accept the idea that political decisions have to be based, not on political principles, but rather on the socio-economic interests of 'society'. This fact suggests that China is experiencing what Hannah Arendt calls 'the rise of the social', i.e. 'the emergence of society – the rise of housekeeping, its activity, problems, and organizational devices – from the shadowy interior of the household, into the light of the public sphere'.<sup>112</sup> The notions of economic rationality, production efficiency, profit law, accumulation, income,



consumption, investment and poverty tend therefore to be put right at the centre of political action.

Thus, the question at stake now is no longer whether the socialist system needs to be replaced, but rather how to cope with the consequences of the depolitization of politics. In such a context, the most rational and pragmatic form of protesting is to 'blackmail' authorities. In order to reach this objective, workers can play two cards: first, the ideological card (as the regime is still pretending to be socialist, it cannot refuse to help the workers), and second, the 'socialist stability' card (in most places, SOE workers or former workers still represent the great majority of the population, so in order to protect social stability, local authorities must limit the consequences of the SOEs restructuring). This latter tactic is quite efficient. Not only do local authorities try to avoid violent confrontation,<sup>113</sup> but they are usually very keen on reaching an agreement with the protesters. The fact that the negotiations take place at the grassroots level eases the dialogue and improves the efficiency of popular pressure.

The reluctance of workers to develop political autonomy can be explained by a parallel evolution in the political apparatus itself. As a result of unemployment and poverty crisis, local governments have been compelled to adopt new attitudes and new policies. In that sense, the urban society is experiencing something very close to the double phenomenon which Jürgen Habermas identifies with modernity, i.e. an 'etatization' of the society and a socialization of the state. 'Etatization' of the society means that the state takes on a growing number of social duties and then creates a state dependency. This is precisely the case of urban China, as the withdrawal of the social burden by enterprises compels the local state to be in charge of the social reproduction of part of the urban population through charity activities. Socialization of the state means that the state gradually orients its policies toward the satisfaction of social needs and delegates to society a number of activities it previously assumed.

In many places the struggle against unemployment and the support of the poor have become the two main concerns for local authorities. Grassroots administrations like labour bureaus, street bureaus or residents' committees, as well as mass movements like the women's federation and the trade unions, have gradually abandoned their political duties and concentrated their efforts on solving unemployment and organizing charitable work. The re-employment programme (*zaijiuye gongcheng*) set up by the Labour Bureau has been aimed to stimulate the supply of jobs through different means (training programmes, development of a labour market, creation of new jobs, especially in the service sector, etc.) in order to redeploy the laid-off.<sup>114</sup> Within the framework of this programme, trade unions have set up 100 technical and professional training centres, local labour bureaus have created 4,000 employment agencies, and the mass movement street bureaus, and residents' committees have set up 50,000 employment service centres.<sup>115</sup> In



May 1998 there were 30,000 training centres in China.<sup>116</sup> Thanks to this programme 4.3 million jobs have been created and 34,000 institutions have helped 8.7 million people to be re-employed. Moreover 3 million persons have attended professional training sessions.<sup>117</sup>

The enterprises engaging laid-off workers enjoy preferential tax policies.<sup>118</sup> Those *xiagang* who want to set up a business receive some financial support. In Shenyang and in Hunan, authorities have set up a '*xiagang* card' including different advantages.<sup>119</sup> For instance, Shenyang's Planning Department lends land and the Trade and Industrial Department (concentrated on patents and market management) charges them half of the management tax (*guanlifei*).<sup>120</sup> In fact, Shenyang's street offices (*jiedao banshichu*) seem to play a determining role in the creation of street markets, where most of the traders are *xiagang*. One of these offices spent 6.5 million Rmb in the creation of six street markets (flea markets, agricultural product markets, etc.), employing 3,500 *xiagang*.<sup>121</sup>

The implementation of an 'anti-poverty policy' is another way of describing how the state is considering its functions in urban areas. Unlike the situation during the Maoist period, the problem of poverty concerns too many people and is too serious to be met with only the help of friends and relatives, and thus the state has been compelled to promote the creation of a welfare system for urban poor. The first initiatives took place in Shanghai in 1993 and then in Xiamen, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Qingdao and Wuxi. The main measure has been to set up a guarantee system of a minimum basic income (*zuidi shenghuo baozhang zhidu*).<sup>122</sup> The head of a family in this situation has to contact the residents' committee and the street office which are entitled to check the case and to approve the demand. The file is transmitted to the Ministry of Civil Affairs (*mingzheng bu*), which pays subsidies through the street office.<sup>123</sup> The minimum basic income was 114 Rmb per month in 1993, 136 Rmb in 1994, 155 Rmb in 1995 and 164 Rmb in 1996.<sup>124</sup> These represent an average income, as every city can determine its own amount. In 1995, 100 cities had established a minimum income of between 96 and 170 Rmb.<sup>125</sup> In 1997 the figures were respectively 200 cities and between 80 and 250 Rmb.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, state and grassroots institutions have also put in place a charity system in order to struggle against the newly emerged poverty. The trade unions play a leading role in the 'programme for providing warmth' (*song wenhuan gongcheng*) approved in 1994, whose objective is to collect funds to help urban dwellers in need. The funds are used to pay emergency aid, to distribute basic essentials, to help people paying electricity bills, etc.<sup>127</sup> According to a vice-president of the Chinese trade unions, they set up 17,000 local branches of this programme, with a budget of 2 billion Rmb. Four million families benefited from the programme subsidies in 1997.<sup>128</sup> Apart from the trade unions, every institution is supposed to help the poor. For instance, in Shanghai, 50 working units gave 2.9 million Rmb to workers in

necessity, so that they could enjoy the New Year Festival. National leaders visit regularly poverty-stricken cities, bringing comfort and money to people.<sup>129</sup> However, this phenomenon does not lead to the creation of non-governmental organizations or associations which would be the last stage of the socialization of the state. Since new orientations of the different institutions have been adopted as an attempt to survive in the new environment, there is no question of them accepting outsiders. Citizens can take initiatives to help people getting jobs but under the control of local institutions and within the framework defined by them. Rich entrepreneurs can give money to poor people but charity must remain 'public' and must follow the official channels.

### Confrontation and ritualization

Apart from the standardized modes of action, the analysis of protest movements brings another process to light: a ritualization of social anger. It would seem that protesters have adopted a mode of action based on frequent and peaceful demonstrations in those provinces where the SOE restructuring was launched earlier than in the rest of the country. In particular, in north-eastern China's industrial cities and in big industrial centres like Wuhan, protesters have tended to gather in front of municipality buildings or in the centre of the town on a weekly and even on a daily basis. According to internal sources, from January to September 1998, there were between fourteen and fifteen protest movements in Wuhan.<sup>130</sup> In Shenyang, the same frequency was noticed.<sup>131</sup> Their tactic consists of putting the retired on the front line in order to deter repressive measures, as well as being present as often as possible in order to create a quasi-permanent pressure on officials. The demands are very simple: the protesters claim for money and food. As the protest discourse relies on the official ideology, retired people become very useful: they are the living examples of the contradiction of the regime, as China is not only supposed to be a socialist country giving priority to the people's interest, but the government's policy ought to provide for those who have given their lives to socialism. The tactic seems to be relatively effective. In many big cities of central and northern China, wages, pensions and subsidies are distributed in a ritual way three or four times a year, in particular before the New Year and the National Day.<sup>132</sup>

Although the places which have this ritualization are by far the most stricken by unemployment, the social situation there does not seem particularly unstable. It is possible to explain this apparent paradox precisely by the fact that the seriousness of the social crisis created by SOE restructuring has forced local authorities to 'socialize' their policies more than elsewhere. For example, Liaoning is one of the first provinces to have implemented the reform of SOEs. It is also a province largely devoted to heavy industry and therefore especially concerned by 'hidden unemployment'. As a result, at the

end of 1997, nearly 13.7 per cent of the Chinese *xiagang* who had not yet obtained a new job were living in Liaoning.<sup>133</sup> In 1997, there were 430,000 registered unemployed (3.7 per cent of the urban active population)<sup>134</sup> and 1,230 million *xiagang* without jobs (10.6 per cent),<sup>135</sup> giving an unemployment rate of 14.3 per cent excluding workers without wages. As a result, local authorities had to emphasize social work, allowing even the development of small business, including often prostitution.<sup>136</sup>

In other provinces like Sichuan the situation is quite different. The reshaping has started later and SOE employment and heavy industry are of less importance. In these provinces, redundancies began around 1999 and protesters still hope to protect their jobs by limiting their demonstrations against the closing down of enterprises.

Hence the forms of social unrest can be seen to reflect the process of reform. According to researchers and officials, the first years of restructuring (1994–96) seem to have been years of confrontation. The protest movements took the forms of strikes and violent demonstrations aiming to preserve the socialist employment paradigm. In a second stage, when it appeared that the SOE restructuring was unavoidable, bargaining, blackmailing and constant pressure took the lead in the means of contest. In central provinces, the evolution seemed to follow the same logic. However, ritualization of protest and socialization of the state have depended on the ability of local authorities to collect funds in order to ease the social outcomes of the reform. These funds can have several origins. They can be collected from successful enterprises (if they exist). They can also be obtained from local banks with the central government's authorization, or directly from the public budget. In this case it is not only the economic situation which is at stake but the political status of the region.<sup>137</sup>

Ritualization and socialization depend also on the existence or not of other problems with which local authorities have to deal. In Liaoning, the unemployment problem is essentially urban, whereas in Sichuan the surplus rural workforce represents another and not less important battlefield. Quite clearly, analysis at the provincial level makes any predictions highly hypothetical. The evolution of the double process depends on various local factors. For example, one year after the Mianyang events, Chinese newspapers echoed a propaganda campaign aimed to prove that all problems had been solved. Efforts were made to stimulate the economy and the growth rate reached 15 per cent in 1997, nearly double the national figure. Undoubtedly, central authorities played a determinant role in this success, probably in providing funds to 'stimulate the economy' but also in intervening directly in the local economic policy. The city government spent 15,000 Rmb to help every *xiagang* to find a job and the local re-employment programme costed 200 million Rmb. The origin of this huge amount of money was justified by the municipality saving money in public infrastructure expenses.

Moreover, it is striking to notice that the Changhong Group, one of the most successful examples of SOE modernization, is based in Mianyang and has the financial and political ability to stimulate local business: 300 new enterprises (many of them subcontracted) have set up a business in Mianyang.<sup>138</sup>

### Concluding remarks

Despite its limited scope, the analysis of urban conflicts seems to reveal that the Chinese working class is experiencing two different sets of conditions. The first one concerns the coastal provinces in which the question at stake is not the elimination of a working class but the emergence of a new one. In these regions, not only has the public sector never played an important role in employment but the economic growth which has taken place in the last fifteen years has radically changed the situation of employment. In the 'reformed' SOEs and in foreign investment enterprises, conflicts are of a post-socialist nature. Here, social unrest takes place in a context of deterioration of labour conditions and of income reduction. The new demands witness the 'normalization' of the working class after three decades of socialism. As regards the state, it appears that local authorities have largely withdrawn from the economic field and have cut organic ties with the workers. The passive behaviour of trade unions and local administrations during the conflicts reveal that they do not even have a role of go-between between employers and employees.

In most other provinces, the scenario is completely different. The old working class is on the verge of being liquidated and the prospects for employment appear very gloomy. The opportunities to get a proper job are very small, and many laid-off workers have to rely on personal relations and petty activities to survive. The nature of conflicts has changed along the way. During the first years of the employment reshaping, protest movements were marked by violence and the determination to avoid being laid off, but the recent conflicts reveal resigned behaviour in the workers' ranks. The reshaping of urban employment has ushered in a new phase in coastal provinces, while workers of industrial cities have entered into a political dependence which is, however, less demanding than the previous one.

In comparative terms, China seems to be following the path of many developing countries where a small part of the territory is devoted to export manufacture and the greatest part to the 'second economy', the 'informal sector' or criminal activities.<sup>139</sup> In fact, the picture is quite different. It is true that workers in coastal provinces are the victims of exploitation in similar ways to European workers during the nineteenth century and most workers of the developing countries today. However, the situation in many central provinces displays a double process which changes the perspective. On the one hand, local authorities have socialized their policies in order to compensate the

withdrawal of the enterprises from the welfare sphere. The adoption of anti-poverty policies, the emphasis on the re-employment programme, the importance devoted to charity activities by grassroots administration and mass movements witness this orientation. As a result, workers no longer depend on the *danwei* but on the local state. On the other hand, workers tend to ritualize their protest in order to make it more effective. In being dismissed from the *danwei*, workers lose what has crystallized their social identity, i.e. their belonging to a labour community.<sup>140</sup> The old working class is therefore becoming a social group that has to fight to get means of subsistence.

Workers will only enjoy a good position within the process of income redistribution as long as they preserve privileged relations with the local authorities and they prevent conflicts from being solved in the public sphere. As during the 1989 movements, they have no interest in having a public debate. This is probably why conflicts generally do not enter the political field and the democratic movement has few echoes among protesters. Democracy implies the determination of the public interest on the basis of social interests when the old working class, in losing its firm position in the production process, has lost a large part of its social legitimacy. Subsequently, workers prefer to keep clientelist relations and remain within the political apparatus, thus avoiding calling into question the bargaining deal (social stability against benefits).

By accepting the dependence on the state, urban workers can maintain a privileged position. Not only do they escape from 'slavery income', but they rarely fall into extreme poverty (begging is not a common activity in industrial cities and beggars are usually rural migrants). Nevertheless, the socialization of the state has changed to a great extent the relations between local cadres and the population. It is easier for people to put pressure on grassroots officials and on municipal officials than on the 'state' as an autonomous entity like during the socialist period. Moreover, the legitimacy given to social demands – through 'the rise of the social' – compels cadres to try to reach clear and accountable targets: new occupations, professional training, charitable actions, etc. They are to a certain extent supervised by the urban population. But only to a certain extent, as the socialization of the state is often limited to a form of corporatism in which 'the state recognizes one and only one organization . . . as the sole representative of the sectoral interests of the individuals, enterprises or institutions'.<sup>141</sup> In other words, mass movements have changed their activities (from political control to social work), but not their nature. They continue to have the monopoly of the intermediation between the urban population and the political apparatus.

The general impression is that the Chinese state seems 'to live on credit' in trying constantly to find resources to cope with the worsening of social problems. Until now, a major social crisis has been avoided because the local state has been able to assure social reproduction of urban dwellers. However, this analysis gives only a static picture of the situation. The two scenarios



concerning the old and the new working classes are based on highly unpredictable factors and first of all on the continuation of economic growth. The ritualized social bargaining costs a lot of money. In recent years, the state has spent 1.15 billion Rmb per year to finance funds devoted to the guarantee of a minimum basic income<sup>142</sup> and trade unions have spent 2 billion Rmb to help urban households in need in 1997.<sup>143</sup> The sum is far from being sufficient. The amount per head of the benefits is not very high and few people are affected.<sup>144</sup> In 1997, an official source estimated at 4.2 billion Rmb per year the necessary funds to help poor urban citizens.<sup>145</sup> However, even this sum seems insufficient if we take into account the number of people in need. Besides, though the re-employment programme represents a heavy burden for local and central finances, its efficiency is highly questionable. For example, it is not uncommon to see managers engaging *xiagang* 'to take advantage of preferential tax policies and firing them after a while'.<sup>146</sup>

But not only are funds insufficient, the uncertainties of employment prospects may also compel authorities to provide more and more money to support the victims of the labour crisis. Local authorities have therefore two means to cope with this growing burden. One consists in relying on public finance through bank loans and emergency funds coming from the centre; the other one by increasing local tax revenues. These two means depend on two unpredictable elements: the continuation of a high level of economic growth and the ability of the central government to guarantee an efficient redistributive system between the different regions. The latter is a recurring problem. Since the beginning of the 1980s, the government has tried to increase the level of fiscal redistribution in order to limit the disparities produced by the reform policy. It seems that until now these efforts have remained unsuccessful: despite the anti-poverty policy, coastal provinces still enjoy a privileged position. As stated earlier, the first attempt to set up a welfare system for the urban poor took place in coastal cities. Moreover, of the 2 billion Rmb distributed to poor households in 1997 by trade unions, 20 per cent were given to Shanghai families.<sup>147</sup> Quite clearly, the reluctance of the richest regions to redistribute economic gains contributes to create an inequality as regards poverty.

Finally, it is interesting to note that China's economic development has become increasingly dependent on exogenous and 'volatile' factors, mostly since the Asian Crisis. No doubt, Asia's economic recovery calls into question the existence of millions of urban dwellers among the ranks of the new working class.

## Notes

- 1 For a more precise description of the *danwei* system, see Lü and Perry (1997); Whyte and Parish (1984); Womack (1991); Yang (1989); Blecher and White (1979); Henderson and Cohen (1984).



- 2 Walder (1986).
- 3 Perry (1992).
- 4 Perry (1995).
- 5 Lü and Perry (1997); Perry (1995); Chan (1993).
- 6 Lü and Perry (1997).
- 7 On this question, refer to Wong and MacPherson (1995).
- 8 For more details on SOE reforms, refer to Naughton and Fernández-Stembridge in this volume.
- 9 For example, the XVth Congress in mid-September 1997 confirmed the principle of opening up the capital of the SOEs and the shareholding system without really defining the methods, the process and the conditions of implementation of this reform.
- 10 And not only for strictly economic purposes. As we will see, the labour market is still constrained by different social elements.
- 11 *Liaowang* (5 January 1998: 10–11).
- 12 *Agence France Presse* (Hereafter *AFP*), 28 February 1998.
- 13 Referring to what happened during the Tiananmen movement in 1989, see Perry (1992).
- 14 The urban unemployment rate refers to the ratio of registered unemployed persons to the sum of employed persons and the registered unemployed persons. It is however necessary to note that if we use this method, the ratios given by the Chinese statistics are wrong.
- 15 *Zhongguo tongji nianjian* (1995).
- 16 Li Peilin (1998).
- 17 *Xinhua* cited in *Summary of World Broadcasts, Far East* (hereafter *SWB*), 3255, S1/1–2, 17 June 1998.
- 18 *Zhongguo tongji nianjian* (1998: 127).
- 19 In Hunan (*Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, 3104, S1/3, 17 December 1997) and in Liaoning (Interview, Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences, 1998).
- 20 *Jingji cankao bao* (1998).
- 21 Sun (1998).
- 22 Ma (1998).
- 23 Watson (1998).
- 24 Kernen and Rocca (2000).
- 25 In 1996, see Tian and Yuan (1997).
- 26 *AFP*, 2 February 1998 and 4 March 1998, *Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, 3168, S2/3, 6 March 1998. See also other surveys in Kernen and Rocca (2000); *Shehuixue yanjiu*, (1997); *Jingji cankao bao* (7 February 1998: 1).
- 27 Watson (1998); *Xiaofei jingji* (1997); Tian and Yuan (1997); Jiang (1998).
- 28 Zhu (1998: 62–66).
- 29 Shen (1997).
- 30 *Zheng ming*, no. 245 (March 1998: 24).
- 31 That is about 10–15 per cent of the average wage. *Dangdai* (1994–B).
- 32 *Zheng ming*, no. 198 (April 1994: 30–31).
- 33 *Ming bao* (5 January 1995: B1).
- 34 *Jiushiniandai* (1995).
- 35 Li Meifeng (1996).
- 36 Wang Junmin (1997).

- 37 Jin (1997).
- 38 Zhu (1998).
- 39 *Zheng ming*, no. 248 (June 1998: 50–51).
- 40 *AFP*, 28 January 1998.
- 41 Zhu (1998).
- 42 *Jiushiniandai* (1995: 31).
- 43 *Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, 2950, S1/1–2, 20 June 1997.
- 44 Zhu and Jiang (1997: 221–233).
- 45 For more details, see the article in two parts written by Ge (1998); World Bank (1997).
- 46 Ge (1998); Wang Junmin (1997).
- 47 *AFP*, 25 July 1998.
- 48 Zhu (1998: 62–66).
- 49 *Zheng ming*, no. 198 (April 1994: 21).
- 50 *Dangdai* (1994b: 21).
- 51 *Zheng ming*, no. 216 (October 1995: 12–13).
- 52 *Zheng ming*, no. 230 (December 1996: 11–13).
- 53 *Zheng ming*, no. 242 (December 1997: 16–18).
- 54 *Zheng ming*, no. 242 (December 1997: 23–24).
- 55 *Zheng ming*, no. 247 (May 1998: 17–18).
- 56 *Zheng ming*, no. 230 (December 1996: 11–13); *Zheng ming*, no. 200 (June 1994: 9–10); *Wen Weipo* cited in *SWB/FE/2144*, S1/2–3, 4 November 1995.
- 57 *Zhongguo tongji nianjian* (1995: 84).
- 58 Xu, Cao and Zhang (1998).
- 59 *Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, no. 3143, S1/13–14, 5 February 1998.
- 60 *Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, no. 3163, S1/6–7, 26 February 1998.
- 61 Watson (1998).
- 62 *Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, 3129, S1/9, 20 January 1998.
- 63 Chan (1994); *Dangdai* (1994a); *Dazhong ribao* in *SWB*, no. 2039, G/12–13, 5 July 1994.
- 64 China Labour Education and Information Centre (1996).
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 *Sing Tao Jih Pao* cited in *SWB/FE/2577*, G63, April 1996.
- 67 *China Labour Bulletin* (hereafter *CLB*), no. 43 (July–August 1998: 16).
- 68 Lee (1998a).
- 69 Lee (1998b).
- 70 *Ibid.*
- 71 Chan (1998).
- 72 In a Taiwan-fund shoes factory, the workers had levied 500 Rmb deposit. The net monthly amount paid to new recruits, after deduction for meals and accommodation, was only 20 Rmb (*Zhongguo xinwenshe* cited in *SWB*, 3016, G/6, 5 September 1997).
- 73 Kernaghan (1998). See also China Labour Education and Information Centre (1995a, 1995b); and information published by the Hong Kong reviews *Change* and *China Labour Bulletin*, Hong Kong.
- 74 *SWB*, 3016, G/6, 5 September 1997. Two similar cases have recently taken place in a Japanese-invested factory in Huizhou (Guangdong) and in a tennis table factory in Yiwu City (Zhejiang), *CLB*, no. 42 (May–June 1998: 17).

- 75 Lee (1998a).
- 76 Li Cheng (1996).
- 77 Lee (1998a).
- 78 Scott (1985).
- 79 Perry (1995); Lee (1998b).
- 80 *Dangdai* (1998a). In Fujian province, the Taiwanese businessmen were complaining in 1994 about the racket they suffered from local gangs. *Zhongguo xinwen she* cited in *SWB FE*/1969, G11, 12 April 1994.
- 81 Chan (1994); *Dangdai* (1994a).
- 82 Lee (1998b).
- 83 *Ibid.*
- 84 *Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, 3104, S1/3, 17 December 1997.
- 85 Chan (1998)
- 86 Solinger (1991); Solinger (1995).
- 87 The following statements are based on the analysis of over one hundred cases of protest movements taking place in 1996, 1997 and 1998 in over thirty towns. It is only a small sample of the impressive number of incidents reported by witnesses. Cases are limited, as I have chosen them through different means (Chinese and Western newspapers, internal documents, interviews), reducing therefore the possibilities of having a wider range. The following incidents took place in Nanchong, Dujiangyan, Zigong, Yibin, Suining, Mianyang and Chengdu in Sichuan; Achang, Jiamusi, Qiqihaer, Mudanjiang and Yichun in Heilongjiang; Anshan, Fushun and Shenyang in Liaoning; Zhengzhou, Xudang and Kaifeng in Henan; Changsha and Shaoyang in Hunan; Baoji and Xi'an in Shaanxi; Taiyuan and Datong in Shanxi; Hefei in Anhui; Lianyungang in Jiangsu; Wuhan in Hubei; Zunyi in Guizhou; Shizuishan in Ningxia; Anyuan in Jiangxi; Jinan in Shandong; Maotai in Guangdong; Baotou in Inner Mongolia; and Shijiazhuang in Hebei. The frequency of incidents varies greatly according to different places. In certain cities like Wuhan, Shenyang or Fushun, troubles are very frequent. In other places like Mianyang or Zigong, they have been very specific but violent. Some cities or regions included within the first group are probably in a similar situation as the second one, and vice versa.
- 88 *Zheng ming*, no. 242 (December 1997: 23–24).
- 89 *Zheng ming*, no. 250 (August 1998: 27). Between 25 November 1997 and 3 January 1998, many incidents took place in Qiqihaer, Jiamusi, Mudanjiang and Yichun (Heilongjiang). About 15,000 workers, cadres and citizens looted the party committee building and the headquarters of the enterprises. They set police, party and government cars on fire and attacked police headquarters, custody centres and airports. Around 70 people were injured (amongst them 25 policemen), 4 people died and 150 people were arrested. *Zheng ming*, no. 243 (January 1998: 18–19).
- 90 *AFP*, 17 July 1997; *Zhongwen xinwen she* cited in *SWB*, 2976, G/4, 21 July 1997.
- 91 *Hong Kong TV* cited in *SWB*, 3049, G/4, 4 October 1997; and *AFP*, 12 October 1997.
- 92 *Zhongwen xinwen she*, cited in *SWB*, 3053, G/6, 18 October 1997.
- 93 *CLB*, no. 42 (May–June 1998: 13–15).
- 94 This is the case of Tan Li in Guangzhou and Tu Guangwen in Jiangxi. *CLB*, no. 43 (July–August 1998: 10–13).

- 95 According to *Zheng ming*, several secret organizations of workers were born in different places. *Zheng ming*, no. 230 (December 1996: 11–13). See also *Zheng ming*, no. 241 (November 1997: 36). Hong Kong press includes certain cases of terrorism. Refer to *Ping Kuo Jih Pao* cited in *SWB*, 2873, G/5 (21 March 1997).
- 96 See for example *Hsin Pao* cited in *SWB*, 2826, G/8, 25 January 1997; *AFP*, 18 June 1997; *Hong Kong TV* cited in *AFP*, 3 December 1997; *AFP*, 9 December 1997; *AFP*, 5 January 1998; *AFP*, 16 March 1998; *SWB*, 3244, G/6, 4 June 1998; *Ming bao*, 3 June 1998: A15; *AFP*, 1 July 1998; *CLB*, no. 43 (July–August 98: 23).
- 97 *AFP*, 1 July 1998.
- 98 *Ming bao* (3 June 1998: A15).
- 99 *AFP*, 19 September 1998.
- 100 Internal documents and interviews in 1997 and 1998.
- 101 On the ‘new poverty’ phenomenon see Ge (1997).
- 102 *Zhongguo xinwen she agency* cited in *SWB/FE/2175*, G/3, 10 December 1994.
- 103 *Zhongguo xinwen she agency* cited in *SWB/FE/2211*, G/5, 1 February 1995.
- 104 *Guanli shijie* (1997).
- 105 Shen (1997).
- 106 Zhu (1998).
- 107 *Guanli shijie* (1997).
- 108 Zhu and Jiang (1997).
- 109 *Guanli shijie* (1997).
- 110 Zhu and Jiang (1997).
- 111 See for example *AFP*, 18 April 1998.
- 112 Arendt (1958).
- 113 The repression is far from being absent of the strategies of control of social unrest. For instance, Zhengzhou authorities set up anti-riots corps composed of young soldiers. See *Henan Ribao* cited in *SWB*, 2960, G/5, 2 July 1997. According to internal information, similar corps have been set up in Sichuan and Liaoning. Nevertheless, the objectives of these institutions are less to ‘militarize’ society than to isolate the protesters in order to avoid the spreading of unrest
- 114 *Renmin ribao* (23 March 1995: 2).
- 115 *Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, 3244, S1/4–5, 4 June 1998.
- 116 *AFP*, 18 May 1998.
- 117 *Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, 3255, S1/1–2, 17 June 1998; Kernén and Rocca (2000).
- 118 Watson (1998); Kernén and Rocca (2000).
- 119 *Xinhua*, *SWB*, 3104, S1/3, 17 December 1997.
- 120 Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences. Interviews, July 1997 and September–October 1998.
- 121 *Shenyang ribao* (24 July 1997).
- 122 *SWB/FE/2637*, S1/2–3, XH, 13 June 1996.
- 123 *Renkou xuekan* (1998).
- 124 *Xiaofei jingji* (1997).
- 125 *Xinhua* cited in *SWB/FE/2637*, S1/2–3, 13 June 1996.
- 126 Zhu (1997).
- 127 Jin (1997).
- 128 *CLB*, no. 42 (May–June 1998: 15). *Xinhua*, *SWB*, 2810, S1/3, 7 January 1997.
- 129 Like Zhu Rongji in Jiangxi. *Xinhua*, *SWB*, 3116, G/5–6, 5 January 1998.

- 130 For some examples see *AFP*, 13 April 1998; *Sing Tao Jih Pao* cited in *SWB*, 3253, G/4, 15 June 1998; *AFP*, 18 September 1998.
- 131 *AFP*, 3 May 1998 and internal documents.
- 132 *Sing Tao Jih Pao* cited in *SWB*, 2824, S1/3-4, 23 January 1997.
- 133 Xu, Cao and Zhang (1998).
- 134 *Ibid.*
- 135 *Ibid.*
- 136 In Shenyang, there are increasing numbers of venues offering karaoke, massage and saunas.
- 137 Liaoning is of great strategic importance. It is a military base (including many army enterprises) and a communication junction between China, Korea and Russia. Therefore, to preserve social stability in Liaoning is crucial.
- 138 *Renmin ribao* (9 June 1998: 4).
- 139 Guangdong and Fujian, Liaoning and Shandong are particularly struck by smuggling.
- 140 The similarity with what happened in European countries during the 1980s is obvious. In France and in Great Britain, workers lost a great part of their contesting strength when they were laid off within the framework of the so-called 'industrial restructuration'.
- 141 Unger and Chan (1995).
- 142 *Zhongguo shehui bao* (1998).
- 143 *CLB*, no. 42 (May-June 1998: 15).
- 144 The 1.15 billions have been distributed to 2 million people, i.e. 575 Rmb per person.
- 145 *Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, 2906, S1/3, 30 April 1997.
- 146 *Xinhua* cited in *SWB*, 3241, G/7, 1 June 1998.
- 147 *CLB*, no. 42 (May-June 1998: 15).

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