The State of Workers: Labour Protection versus Workers' Individualities, 1949–1966

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Abstract

This study explores the individualities of China's industrial labourers through their diverse responses to the labour protection project, one of the most significant and ambitious initiatives promoted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to benefit workers during the Mao era. This dissertation shows the interaction between the party's ideal labour protection policies and real workers' behaviours through examining the practice of the following five aspects of the labour protection policies: the management of workplace accidents, the use of PPE, heatstroke prevention, workers' recuperation in sanatoriums, and state-initiated activities to battle industrial fatigue. I argue that the CCP's focus on the policies, inspections, agreements, education, collective activities, the use of equipment, and health recovery treatment fell short because it failed to meet workers where they were, instead idealizing them as an advanced proletariat. In fact, workers were a heterogeneous group riven by many divides created by personal characteristics and individual desires.

Keywords: labour protection; workplace safety; PPE; heatstroke prevention; sanatoriums; industrial fatigue

Acknowledgements

In 2016, as a graduate student at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, I was struggling with my MPhil thesis and in desperate need of a historical study of people's everyday lives aside from Sheila Fitzpatrick's *Everyday Stalinism*. In the first several hours of my search in the Polyu library on one day in October, I found nothing useful—until a white book spine with a line that reads *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism* caught my eye. I took down the book and started to read.

To be honest, I did not recognize the name of Jeremy Brown, one of the editors of this book. Even though I had already read the translated book *Dilemmas of Victory*, I did not realize the editor Zhou Jierong and Jeremy Brown was the same person at that time. It is, Zhou Jierong, or Jeremy Brown, who later became one of the most significant mentors in my academic career. For this reason, I would like to dedicate my highest respect and gratitude to Jeremy Brown, and his comrade Timothy Cheek from UBC, who is the other most significant mentor of mine. Without your tutelage, I would never have walked this far on this marvellous academic journey. I will cherish the past five years of personal growth in Vancouver and your encouragement and critics as long as I live.

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List of Acronyms

BMA	Beijing Municipal Archive
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCRCA	Contemporary China Research Clippings Archive and Film Catalogue
GRRB	*Gongren ribao* [Workers' daily]
HPA	Hebei Provincial Archive
LDBHTX	*Laodong baohu tongxun* [Labour protection bulletin]
NBCK	*Neibu cankao* [Internal reference]
RMRB	*Renmin ribao* [People's daily]
SMA	Shanghai Municipal Archive
SPA	Shanxi Provincial Archive
TJRB	*Tianjin ribao* [Tianjin daily]
TMA	Tianjin Municipal Archive
XMWB	*Xinmin wanbao* [Xinmin evening news]

Introduction: Labour Protection and the Chinese Working Class

One day in September 1964, the editorial office of *The Party's Work Weekly*, the official journal of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Shanghai Municipal Committee, received a letter from a worker at the Shanghai No. 9 Cotton Mill.[1] The worker wrote:

> In our factory, some leaders often organized workers to play "fancy dress shows" with banging gongs and drums to give night shift workers a lift when they were tired. Among these dress-up characters, most were men who disguised themselves in female attire. Some of them dressed up as demons. Some workers even stuffed cotton in their clothes to make "fake breasts." This was disgusting. Some workers took a stick to poke the fake breasts. More seriously, some shows with "reactionary elements" also appeared. A worker was dressed as a reactionary military officer, with a short pistol on his belt and a cigarette in his right hand. He embraced another male worker dressed as his wife with his left arm, patrolling the workshop around with wide steps. Some cadres were enthusiastically giving them musical accompaniment with gong and drum. I don't even know what they wanted to express![2]

The factory leaders organized these fancy dress shows for good reasons. Since July 1964, the production quota had increased in the factory and production shifts had grown from twelve to eighteen shifts per week. Some workers had not worked the night shift for more than two years. Many of them often dozed off in the second half of the night. To deal with this problem, some cadres in the workshop organized the shows mentioned in this letter to "give workers a lift and disperse the sleepyheads."[3] In addition to the show entitled "Reactionary Officers Insulting Women" (*fandong junguan wuru funü* 反动军官侮辱妇女) mentioned in the letter, the workshop leaders also organized

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[1] *The Party's Work Weekly* was an internal publication by the administrative office of the CCP Shanghai Municipal Committee. The first issue was published in late 1958. In 1966, it ceased publication. Most of the articles published in this weekly were submitted by party cadres or personnel from local factories, enterprises, schools, and other organs or work units in Shanghai. Unlike *Internal Reference* articles, which were mostly internal investigative reports, articles in *The Shanghai's Work Weekly* were edited and published in feature and editorial styles. Most of the articles focused on what the party deemed "problematic issues" and provided rich details about the everyday lives of Shanghai people between 1958 and 1966.

[2] "Gongchang yeban de huazhuang yanchu" 工厂夜班的化妆演出 [Make-up shows in the night shift], *Dang de gongzuo,* no. 37 (September 1964): 15.

[3] "Gongchang yeban de huazhuang yanchu," 15.

many other fancy-dressed plays such as "Clam-shell Demon" (*bangke jing* 蚌壳精), "Pigsy" (*zhubajie* 猪八戒), and "Three-Hairs Learns Business" (*Sanmao xue shengyi* 三毛学生意).

On September 24, 1964, the editorial office of *The Party's Work Weekly* published the letter with a short review criticizing the workshop leaders for organizing shows to keep workers energized: "The socialist working enthusiasm of the masses is the fundamental guarantee for the completion of production tasks. To mobilize enthusiasm for socialist production, we must raise the political consciousness of the masses through political and ideological education. Some cadres from the linen workshop of the Shanghai No. 9 National Cotton Mill attempted to invigorate night shift workers by organizing make-up performances as a substitute for ideological and political education to promote production. Such a practice is obviously inappropriate."[4]

This was how the party officials commented on the activities organized in the factory floor in the Shanghai No. 9 Cotton Mill. However, aside from the party cadres and the worker who sent the letter, most people in the factory floor, including workshop leaders and workers, did not see anything wrong with this shows. When the cadre investigators from the editorial office asked Wang Genfu, the branch secretary of workshop A, and Chen Lindi, the branch secretary of workplace C why they had to do this, Chen replied: "If we did not do this, the workers would doze off, so they just had to perform such hilarious plays." The workshop party branch secretary and workshop union chairman also said: "We know these [happened]. As for the specific content of the performance, I do not know. I heard from workers that this method was effective in [battling workers' fatigue], so we don't ask about it."[5]

The worker who sent the letter to *The Party's Work Weekly* claimed that such shows were "extremely ridiculous" and labelled them as "monsters and demons." This meant that this worker did not appreciate such shows for some reasons—these activities

[4] "Gongchang yeban de huazhuang yanchu," 15.

[5] "Gongchang yeban de huazhuang yanchu," 15.

might be indeed not to their tastes, or these workers had to follow the party's steps to criticize what they defined as "absurd and ridiculous" activities at the time of the Socialist Education Campaign in 1964. If my interpretation of the letter is mostly speculative, the message from the factory floor leaders' responses is more straightforward. Many workers still appreciated and benefited from the shows. The entertainment value of the fancy-dressed shows at the Shanghai No. 9 Cotton Factory successfully met workers where they were and melded entertainment with collective life and further boosted workers' morale. However, the notion of diverse body clocks and personalities and tastes failed to be recognized by the party officials. Instead, they simply needed a "one size fits all" regimented approach based on ideological education and mobilization to boost up workers.

This story triggers a question inside my head about the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) management of industrial labourers during the Mao era. After ascending to national power, the CCP heralded workers as the leading class of the newborn socialist regime. In addition, the party claimed itself to be the representative of the Chinese working class. Nevertheless, the story shows that the party never seemed to understand or simply did not want to understand those they called the masters of the nation.[6] This study is an attempt to solve this puzzle. I will explore the diverse personalities and individualities of Chinese industrial labourers through their reactions to the labour protection project (*laodong baohu* 劳动保护), one of the most significant and ambitious projects promoted by the CCP to reduce risks to Chinese workers from exposure to safety and health hazards and to maximize industrial productivity in the 1950s and 1960s. The party's disregard for workers' diverse personalities and individualities ended up leading to the failure of the initiatives to benefit workers.

[6] This was by no means an empty promise, especially in the early years of the Mao era. When examining this piece of history, Elizabeth Perry writes: "Looking back on this period more than a half century later, one may be inclined to disregard such declarations of proletarian hegemony as little more than empty verbiage manufactured by a cynical state. But there is evidence that at the time many workers, as well as many union cadres, took these pledges quite seriously." Elizabeth J. Perry, "Masters of the Country? Shanghai Workers in the Early People's Republic," in *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, ed. Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 59.

The Origin of Labour Protection

The concept of labour protection is not universally acknowledged or commonly used in all temporal and spatial contexts. It is historically rooted in the labour movement in nineteenth-century Europe and is ideologically based on class struggle theory. In 1850, the Parliament of the United Kingdom abolished the Ten Hours Act. In response, Friedrich Engels published an article entitled "The Ten Hours' Question" in *The Democratic Review* in March 1850. In this article, Engels argued that the so-called "protection for labour" provided by capitalists was a "small installment," a deceptive tactic of bourgeois reformism to lower the guard of the English working class.[7] Thus, Engels urged that the working men of England should stop asking for "protection for labourers" but struggle for "the political and social ascendancy of the proletarian class," which could enable them to "genuinely protect themselves."[8] In the 1920s, the Soviet regime enshrined labour protection as a state policy. According to Nikolaĭ Bukharin, Bolshevik and Marxist theoretician and economist, a socialist regime itself could be understood as a practice of labour protection because "all the conquests made by the working class on its way towards communism are in their essence directly or indirectly equivalent to labour protection." In addition, Bukharin argued that labour protection in a socialist state was more embodied in its "special sense," which referred to the safeguarding of workers "in the factory, in the workshop, and in the mines" from harmful conditions which affect the workers in the actual labour process."[9] Specifically, labour protection encompassed the following major fields of focus: the normal working day, the

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[7] Engels wrote: "Working men of England! If you, your wives, and children are again to be locked up in the 'rattle-boxes' for thirteen hours a day, do not despair. This is a cup which, though bitter, must be drunk. The sooner you get over it the better. Your proud masters, be assured, have dug their own graves in obtaining what they call a victory over you. The virtual repeal of the Ten Hours' Bill is an event which will materially hasten the approaching hour of your delivery. .....surely you will not be satisfied to be paid off with a small installment. Ask, then, no longer for 'Protection for Labour,' but boldly and at once struggle for that political and social ascendancy of the proletarian class which will enable you to protect your labour yourselves." See Friedrich Engels, "The Ten Hours' Question," in *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Vol. 10 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978), 276.

[8] Friedrich Engels, "The Ten Hours' Question," 276.

[9] Nikolaĭ Bukharin and E. A Preobrazhenskiĭ, *The ABC of Communism* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 348–351.

prevention of workplace accidents and occupational diseases, the improvement of factory sanitary conditions, and the strengthening of workers' physique.[10]

These means, of course, were not unique to the Soviet Union or other socialist regimes. Since the late nineteenth century, both what Tom Dwyer calls "industrial capitalists," a type of industrialist who treated investment in working conditions as a way to increase productivity and hence profits, and social reformists in the capitalist world had sought to find ways to improve the working conditions of industrial labourers. People have commonly acknowledged such initiatives as HSE (health, safety, and environment) or "occupational health and safety" instead of "labour protection," which literally emphasized the political significance of the initiatives by highlighting the beneficiaries of the policies.[11] In other words, if capitalists and social reformists practiced HSE to mediate conflicts between labourers and employers, in the eyes of socialist regimes, the point of implementing labour protection was not only to maximize labour productivity but self-fulfillment of the socialist political ethic.

Labour Protection in China and Its Significance

As early as 1931, the CCP introduced several labour protection policies, such as the protection of child labour and the eight-hour day, in the Jiangxi Soviet Base Area. These policies were simply copied from the 1922 Labour Code of the Soviet Union.[12] It was not until 1949, when the CCP seized control over the heavy industries in Northeast China, that the CCP began to put more labour protection policies, based on the Soviet model, into real practice. After the Yiluo mining accident in February 1950 which I will discuss in chapter 1, China's industrial and labour departments, in tandem with trade unions at all levels, began to implement specific labour protection measures in factories and mines in major industrial sectors, such as launching safety inspections and promoting

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[10] Bukharin and Preobrazhenskiĭ, *The ABC of Communism*, 348–51.

[11] Tom Dwyer, *Life and Death at Work: Industrial Accidents as a Case of Socially Produced Error* (New York: Plenum Press, 1991), 17.

[12] Huang Jinlin 黄金麟, *Zhengti yu shenti: Suweiai de geming yu shenti, 1928–1937* 政体与身体: 苏维埃的革命与身体, 1928–1937 [Polity and body: The Soviet revolution and the body, 1928–1937] (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 2005), 288–310.

the use of PPE (personal protective equipment). The party also provided workers with various measures to improve their occupational health, such as workers' recuperation services in the early 1950s and the prevention and treatment of occupational diseases as advocated by China's labour and medical officials in the 1960s.

Labour protection not only remained one of the priorities for China's labour and industrial departments at all levels during the Mao era but also continuously affected the daily lives of Chinese workers. Such effects might not be as abrupt or violent as what periodic political campaigns brought to workers, such as the plunge in some workers' living conditions resulting from the downsizing movement in the early 1960s.[13] These effects, however, were long-lasting and pervasive, equally decisive in affecting workers' lives whether they were covered by the policies or not. As I will show in this dissertation, some workers were able to wear safety equipment distributed by their factories as daily attire and to enjoy rich food during their stays in workers' sanatoriums, but some bedridden workers had to endure the pain of work-related injuries without any compensation.

Historical writings on workers' HSE have mainly focused on the health and safety legislation in European countries and the US in the early twentieth century and the topic's close relation to the rise of a modern state or risk society.[14] But studies of labour protection in China are out of proportion to the scale of its impact in history. In addition to those articles shamelessly written in Chinese aimed at flattering the achievement of the

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[13] The downsizing movement was the largest state-led migration during the Mao era. It aimed to reduce urban workforce recruited from the countryside during the Great Leap Forward. In this movement, what the party identified "redundant workers" were sent back to the countryside to do agricultural works. As explained by Jeremy Brown, the Downsizing movement was "an attempt to patch up the crippled socialist economy, to restore grain production to pre-1958 levels so that urban industry could continue to exploit artificially cheap raw materials from rural China. Jeremy Brown, *City versus Countryside in Mao's China: Negotiating the Divide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 105.

[14] For example, see Roger Cooter et al., *Accidents in History: Injuries, Fatalities and Social Relations* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997); John Fabian Witt, *Accidental Republic: Crippled Workingmen, Destitute Widows, and the Remaking of American Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Peter Itzen, Birgit Metzger, and Anne Rasmussen, eds., *Accidents and the State: Understanding Risks in the 20th Century* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018). Tom Dwyer, *Life and Death at Work: Industrial Accidents as a Case of Socially Produced Error.* (New York: Plenum Press, 1991). Arwen Mohun, *Risk: Negotiating Safety in American Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013). Julia Moses, *The First Modern Risk: Workplace Accidents and the Origins of European Social States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

CCP, a small group of scholarly works have focused on the imperfect implementation of the party's safety regulations at every level and have provided convincing explanations for why Chinese industrial workers had to endure frequent workplace accidents, poor working conditions, and extra working hours even though they were protected by a well-planned labour protection program during the Mao era. For example, as Jeremy Brown argues, "making money and meeting production quotas have trumped accident prevention, especially during intense pushes for rapid industrialization, such as the First Five-Year Plan and the Great Leap Forward."[15] Andrew Walder also describes how the party's celebrated production drive backfired in the wake of the Anti-rightist Campaign: "Workers pushed to endure long shifts made mistakes because of fatigue; safety regulations ignored in the push for speed led to fatal accidents."[16] In addition, as many scholars, including Lin Yunhui, Jackie Sheehan, and Joel Andreas, have mentioned, the lack of supervisory power of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) and local labour unions also contributed to the failure of the implementation of safety and hygiene regulations in China's industrial workplaces in the Mao era.[17]

I acknowledge the validity of these observations, but I find that most of these studies have not adequately considered meaningful changes in HSE. During some periods, the party's pursuit of production output and profit indeed led to the existence of safety and health policies in name only. The party's labour protection policies, however, were not always thrown aside by factory administrators and local industrial and labour departments. There is ample evidence suggesting that in the first few years of the 1950s, and the early years of the 1960s, safety and health regulations were by no means a mere scrap of paper in many enterprises, especially in those state-run factories and mines. My

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[15] Jeremy Brown, "When Things Go Wrong: Accidents and the Legacy of the Mao Era in Today's China," in *Restless China*, ed. Perry Link, Richard P. Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 15.

[16] Andrew G. Walder, *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 175.

[17] Lin Yunhui 林蕴晖, "1950 Niandai Guanyu Gonghui Gongzuo Fangzhen de Zhenglun 1950 年代关于工会工作方针的争论 [Debate on trade union's working principle in the 1950s], *Xuexi shibao* 学习时报 [The study daily], April 9, 2007, http://www.china.com.cn/xxsb/txt/2007-04/09/content_8088479.htm; Joel Andreas, *Disenfranchised: The Rise and Fall of Industrial Citizenship in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Jackie Sheehan, *Chinese Workers: A New History* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 13.

study brings the history of HSE to the Mao era and is precisely concerned with the situations where local party authorities, labour departments, and local factory administrators took labour protection policies seriously.

A James Scott Question

Up to this point, one can find that I am dealing with a "James Scott question": why did a certain scheme of labour protection to improve the workers' conditions fall short? In *Seeing Like a State,* Scott provides four elements that lead to failure in what he calls the "tragic episodes of state-initiated social engineering": state simplifications, high-modernist ideology embodied in the "version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress," the willingness and capacity of an authoritarian state to use the full weight of "its coercive power to bring these high-modernist designs into being," and "a prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans."[18] Historians of modern China have successfully adapted his theory to explain why some ambitious social projects initiated by the KMT government came to failure. For example, Seung-Joon Lee devotes a chapter in his study of how the KMT government dealt with the food shortage in Canton in the early twentieth century to show the KMT's "blind trust in Western science and technology and how these interests led to the technocratic and instrumental misunderstanding of the nature of rice supply and consumption."[19] This explanation echoes the second element from Scott. Arunabh Ghosh's recent study of statistical work in the early days of the PRC has demonstrated that Scott's idea is helpful to understand similar cases in the context of the Mao era.[20]

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[18] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 4–6.

[19] Seung-joon Lee, *Gourmets in the Land of Famine: The Culture and Politics of Rice in Modern Canton* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 16.

[20] As Ghosh argues: "Adapting James Scott, then, we may ask, what does it mean to 'see like a socialist state?' As the chapters in Parts II and III show, the adoption of socialist statistics led to two distinct kinds of state incapacity: infrastructural and technoscientific." Arunabh Ghosh, *Making It Count: Statistics and Statecraft in the Early People's Republic of China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 10; 127–213.

In these studies, the authors all mention the term "idealization" or "idealized" to identify the policymakers' enthusiastic visions of the projects they promoted. Inspired by this idea, my study seeks to present a story detailing the interaction between the party's "ideal" labour protection policies and "real" workers' behaviours by focusing on the cases of accident prevention, the use of PPE, heatstroke prevention, workers' recuperation, and a movement initiated to "strike a balance between work and rest (*laoyi jiehe* 劳逸结合)." But unlike the findings of previous scholarship that the idealized object was the policy itself, what I find in the case of labour protection is that the idealized object is the beneficiaries of the program. In other words, the policymakers of labour protection policies adhered to a faith that Chinese workers possessed various merits and capabilities, or, at the very least, had tremendous potential to understand and practice protective measures developed by China's labour officials. Workers, however, were not as perfect as the party thought them to be. The CCP's focus on policies, inspections, agreements, education, collective activities, the use of equipment, and health recovery services fell short because it failed to meet workers where they were, instead idealizing them as an advanced proletariat when in fact, workers were a diverse, heterogeneous group riven by generational, gender, and other divides based on personalities and individual desires. More importantly, because the party put Chinese workers on a pedestal after 1949, when workers showed disobedience to labour protection policies, the party would not directly criticize workers for their violations of safety rules or health plans but instead took mild measures to correct workers' mistakes wanting to avoid walking back from its pledge to workers. This further exacerbated the failure of the party's labour protection policies.

The Diversity of the Chinese Working Class and Industrial Relations in the Mao Era

This study builds on an important body of scholarship exploring the internal diversity and social segmentation of the Chinese working class in the twentieth century. In 1986, Gail Hershatter and Emily Honig published their path-breaking studies of the

formation of the Chinese working class in pre-1949 China.[21] It was through the lens of new social history and E. P. Thompson's new labour history in ways which interpreted and analyzed the Shanghai and Tianjin workers' "class, gender and urban/rural character, as well as their emerging consciousness, organization, and revolutionary role" that Hershatter and Honig successfully challenged Jean Chesneaux's argument that the Chinese working class was a homogeneous group with the common class consciousness and a uniform revolutionary agenda. For example, as Emily Honig argues: "the perdurance of many regional prejudices underlines the fact that the pre-Liberation female workforce was in no sense a homogeneous one."[22] In her study of labour strikes in pre-1949 Shanghai, Elizabeth Perry goes further in delineating the divisions among Shanghai workers. As the author argues: "geographical origins, gender, popular culture, educational attainments, work experiences are the features of a worker's milieu that structure lasting traditions of collective action, also, playing critical roles in the disunity among labourers."[23]

The working-class divisions and internal diversity continued to exist after 1949. In 1988, Andrew Walder published the landmark study of the pattern of authority in industrial enterprises in post-revolutionary China. In this study, Walder identifies the existence of the "patron-client tie" and "principled particularism" in China's industrial enterprises, which enable him to dismantle the "image of totalitarianism" and "group theory," two approaches that had been used by western scholars to understand state-society relations in Communist China. Walder's discovery stems from his observation and analysis of the division within the workforce in China's industrial enterprises. As Walder argues:

> By referring to the distinction between activists and nonactivists as a "social fact," I am pointing to a status difference among workers that is just as "real" as any division based on skill, pay, or ethnicity in the

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[21] Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); Gail Hershatter, *The Workers of Tianjin, 1900–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 1–8.

[22] Honig, *Sisters and Strangers*, 5.

[23] Elizabeth J. Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 5; 214.

> workforces of other countries. In the communist factory, the distinction is easily the most politically salient social-structural cleavage. On the shop floor and outside of work, this social cleavage is marked by general resentment and open antagonism toward activists and by their social isolation from the rank and file.[24]

Qualifying Walder's argument, Elizabeth Perry reveals "deep divisions within the Chinese working class itself" in her study of Shanghai's strike wave in 1957. As Perry argues: "These splits [among workers] did not follow the 'activist' versus 'non-activist' dichotomy that might be anticipated from previous analyses of political participation in Communist China. Instead of political status, socio-economic and spatial categories—permanent vs. temporary workers, old vs. young workers, locals vs. outsiders, urbanites vs ruralites—were the more salient lines of division."[25]

My study shares a similar ambition with these works but differs from them in the following aspect. Most previous studies of labour activism or mass factionalism approached by presenting divisions within the working class emphasize either group characteristics or political networks, or what Andrew Walder calls "horizontal distinctions based on skill or pay" or the vertical patron-client tie.[26] I recognize that group characteristics were one of the most prominent components of the working-class divisions. For this reason, I do not ignore group characteristics of Chinese industrial labourers in my observation of their behaviours in response to labour protection policies. For example, in the cases of workers' refusal to observe safety regulations and reluctance to use PPE, one can still see many generational and gender divisions among workers. Such divisions also partially accounted for the unsuccessful implementation of the policies.[27]

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[24] Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 166.

[25] Elizabeth J. Perry, "Shanghai's Strike Wave of 1957," *The China Quarterly* 137 (March 1994): 14.

[26] Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism*, 164.

[27] As I will show in chapter 1 and 2, in the late 1950s, the party entrusted whom they considered as "old workers," those who joined the workforce before 1949, to educate young workers with safety knowledge because they believed that old workers were more experienced in workplace safety. However, in reality, many old workers, with a habit of turning a blind eye to work safety, planted fatalism in young workers' minds and even encouraged them to breach safety rules. Some female workers seemed to be less willing to

The internal diversity of the Chinese working class, however, was even more complex than scholars have imagined. Workers' individualities were prominent, even among those from the same backgrounds. Inspired by Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun's study, which examines how "personal inclinations and ambition" inclined workers to "adopt the high-risk strategy of challenging party committees and work teams" during the Cultural Revolution, I emphasize that diverse personalities and individual desires—the understanding of risks, aesthetic preferences, appetites for food quality and quantity, ways to spend time outside of work—were key factors contributing to their behaviours or actions against the rules or regulations. For example, as I will show in chapter 1, some workers ignored safety regulations because they adhered to fatalism, or knowingly risked their lives working in dangerous conditions for simply showing off their peerless skills or courage.[28]

Workers' different responses to the party's labour protection policies based on diverse personalities will further contribute to the study of labour relations in the Maoist era. Over the past few decades, scholars have found a common ground that China's industrial workplaces were by no means typical communist organizations in which workers were strictly controlled, as described by first-generation western scholars such as Franz Schurmann.[29] As Elizabeth Perry argues, workers' activism during the 1957 strike wave showed that workers were "not clay in the hands of partisan potters to be fashioned according to their design." Instead, they were still "shaped by their culture of origin and workplace position."[30] Mark Frazier's study of the formation of Chinese industrial workplaces in the twentieth century has also demonstrated that workers in the post-1949 China were able to shape their workplaces: "the Chinese industrial workplace was made, in effect, through a process of conflict and coalitions among workers, managers, and state officials over several critical decades that bracketed the Communist regime's founding in

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wear safety helmets compared to male workers because they found that the unsightly safety helmets, covering their long hair, made them look like old ladies.

[28] Elizabeth J. Perry and Xun Li, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 66.

[29] Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 220–308.

[30] Perry, *Shanghai on Strike,* 253.

1949."[31] Joel Andreas's study examining "the evolution of industrial relations in China from 1949 to present" has shown that China's industrial labourers achieved a degree of rights to citizenship and autonomy in their workplaces during the Mao era.[32]

Like all these previous works, I seek to highlight workers' subjectivity and agency in industrial relations in the Mao era. As the case study of salt soda shows in chapter 3, workers' preference for sweet flavour prompted China's labour authorities and soda manufacturers to improve the formula. In other words, workers' taste preferences played an important role in shaping labour protection policies and could encourage the party's labour authorities to accommodate them. More importantly, the cases discussed in this study are distinct from most previous ones, which have highlighted workers' agency through the lens of workers' acts of resistance or adaptation toward some policies exploiting them or other examples of unfair treatments. For example, in addition to the above-mentioned works, in a case study focusing on the behaviour of labour deception among workers in the TY Factory in the Mao era, Jia Wenjuan argues that "the TY Factory workers' use of deception was not a form of proactive resistance but rather an adaptation."[33] The dualistic framework of "resistance-adaptation" falls far short of capturing the complexity of industrial relations in the Maoist era. Shi Yifan's recent study in which he puts forward a new theoretical framework of "participatory totalitarianism" has contributed to fixing the flaw of the "dichotomy between state and society in which ordinary people either support or resist state power."[34] As the cases in my study show, labour protection policies were designed for benefiting workers and boosting productivity instead of exploiting them. With this in mind, workers' various reactions that defeated the original purpose of the policymakers can hardly be described as forms of resistance or survival strategies. On the contrary, I tend to see workers' reactions to labour protection

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[31] Mark W. Frazier, *The Making of the Chinese Industrial Workplace: State, Revolution, and Labor Management* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[32] Joel Andreas, *Disenfranchised: The Rise and Fall of Industrial Citizenship in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 10.

[33] Jia Wenjuan, "Labor Enthusiasm and Deception," *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series* (2012): 1.

[34] Yifan Shi, "Leisure, Lifestyle, and Youth Subcultures in China, 1949–1987" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2021), 5.

policies as actions without well-defined intentions. They were a normal expression of human individual characteristic and desires.

Sources and Methodology

I draw on a variety of sources including archival documents, newspapers, internal journals and bulletins, education reportage, safety manuals, textbooks of labour protection memoirs, literary works, and oral history. The *Labour Protection Bulletin*, a periodical on labour protection policy sponsored by ACFTU, offers abundant detail on how labour protection policies were issued and implemented in the 1950s and early 1960s. The rich collections of internal sources in the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Baptist University help me to understand the actual labour conditions in many industrial workplaces, as well as workers' reactions to labour protection policies and their diverse psychological motives.

Among these types of sources, many internal bulletins, such as *The Party's Work Weekly* (*dang de gongzuo zhoukan* 党的工作周刊) and *Beijing Work* (*Beijing gongzuo* 北京工作) published in the 1950s and 1960s, are the most insightful. In these internally circulated (*neibu faxing* 内部发行) bulletins, an unprecedented number of interesting details about the everyday lives of workers are recorded, such as the night shift workers at the Shanghai No. 2 National Cotton Mill who organized cross-dressing performances to refresh themselves in 1965, and the workers at the First Xinhua Factory who spent their evening hours strolling the streets or playing poker. Similar cases were also recorded in the *Xinmin Evening News*, the Shanghai evening paper and one of the most important newspapers used by recent scholars to approach the social history of the PRC.

Archival documents from Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Shanxi Province offer many details about how labour protection policies were practiced at the regional and enterprise levels, especially during the years before 1958 and the early 1960s. Even though the accessibility of these sources was restricted during my research, I was still fortunate enough to have access to a portion of the records on the handling of mining disasters and factory accidents. Through the details of these cases, I could still fathom the

diverse mentalities behind workers facing workplace risks. The Tianjin Federation of Trade Union's reports on managing workers' sanatoriums held in the Tianjin Municipal Archive directly contributed to the formation of chapter four of this dissertation, in which one can see how workers satisfied their desires for food during their stay in workers' sanatorium.

In Taiyuan and Tianjin, I conducted a dozen oral interviews in 2019 and 2020. Among my worker informants, the oldest one was Mr. Li, born in 1927, who spent his youth in a textile factory run by the Japanese in Tianjin and continued to work as a textile worker after 1949. The second oldest was Mr. Wang, a miner born in 1934, who worked as a miner at a small kiln in Shanxi in the late 1940s and then became a leader in the Guandi Shaft of the Xishan Coal Mines after the mid-1950s. These interviews provide a lot of information about the working conditions in several factories and coal mines. These accounts included accidents that they experienced or witnessed, as well as descriptions of the management of workplace safety during the Mao era.

Mao-era state propaganda on China's industrial labourers played an extremely important role in showing the divergence between the party's ideal of workers and their real behaviours. In a recent article on how PRC historians should use primary sources critically, Sigrid Schmalzer encourages the brave use of state propaganda in the writing of PRC history.[35] By sharing a dialogue from a propaganda article produced in 1966, Schmalzer argues that "conversations in this and similar propaganda pieces may well be faked, but on another level they represent a real dialogue between the vision of socialism the state wanted to convey and the state's understandings of its audience—officials struggling to simultaneously transform both material reality and political consciousness in the rural areas."[36] The way I use Mao-era state propaganda, including literary works and newspaper reportages, echoes Schmalzer's proposition. Many conversations, statements, and anecdotes of workers portrayed in propaganda narratives during the Mao era might be fabricated, however, these propaganda texts (or visual texts) could not only

[35] Sigrid Schmalzer, "Beyond Bias: Critical Analysis and Layered Reading of Mao-Era Sources," *Positions: Asia Critique* 29, no. 4 (November 1, 2021): 761–65.

[36] Schmalzer, "Beyond Bias," 763.

reflect realities on factory floors but also exhibit what the party envisioned as ideal images of China's industrial labourers. In addition, authors of those propaganda narratives would often design some roles with negative characters, such as workers reluctant to follow safety regulations or to use safety equipment, to act as foils to those positive characters. The depictions of the negative characters also provide many details about workers' mentalities and personalities not available in archival documents or other official publications, such as the various mindsets that contributed to workers' violation of safety rules or workers' distinct taste preferences in choosing safety equipment.

Archival and oral sources have become increasingly essential in approaching the history of the PRC. What is more important, however, is how to use these sources properly. The use of archival sources would involve a great deal of risk if scholars simply reproduced both archival information and their narrative styles in academic articles without any further analysis. As demonstrated by some cases in this dissertation, even the statistics on accident rates gathered by the Tianjin Textile Unions in 1952 contained several calculation errors. In addition, historians of PRC history are not as fortunate as Andrew Thomas, who was able to use an article written by Colorado miners themselves to restore the scene where they were making friends with rats and mules in the mine shafts in the first two decades of the twentieth century.[37] Chinese labourers had few opportunities to voice their experiences, especially after 1949. Historians of the PRC had to resort to official documents containing workers' voices when dealing with what they experienced on factory floors. These workers' voices, which were spoken through the official's writings, might not represent their "true thoughts" at that time and need to be read carefully.

Using oral history interviews also faces many risks. In my experience of conducting oral interviews, I found that many accounts provided by worker informants are identical to Mao-era propaganda. In other words, these informants may have internalized official discourses or deliberately avoided expressing what they perceived to be worthless information that did not fit the official discourse. For example, in my first

[37] Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 135–56.

interview with an erstwhile miner "Old Yang" (*lao yang*), he complained that my questions about workplace accidents lacked "positive energy" (*zheng nengliang* 正能量). In the second interview, after a liquid lunch, Lao Yang offered me a Shanxi ballad created by miners describing how they masturbated in the mine shaft.

For these reasons, I use archival and oral sources I have collected in accordance with the following principles. First, to filter out official narrative styles to avoid reproducing what the source producers attempted to articulate in the historical context. Second, to avoid directly using any concluding statements that exist in archival documents produced by official authorities when using them. For example, as I will explain in the first chapter, in many accident statistics produced after 1949, for example, we can see a conspicuous category of accidents caused by a "lack of safety education," which was a mild expression used by many local labour departments to identify those accidents resulted from workers' negligence. In addition, I use oral information with great restraint and focus mostly on my informants' descriptions of the accidents they experienced and the working conditions they witnessed.

Aside from chapter 1, the remaining chapters do not heavily rely on quantitative methods and structural analyses that have been commonly used by social scientists to investigate the conditions of workers. There are two reasons for this. First, the data on accident rate during the Mao era is episodic and inaccurate. Second, this method poses limitations in explaining workers' specific actions and the complexity of human nature. As sociologist Raymond Geuss argues: "Every point in a Cartesian coordinate system is construed as having a determinate distance from the x-axis and from the y-axis. This way of thinking is of extremely limited usefulness when one is dealing with any phenomenon connected with human desires, beliefs, attitudes, or values."[38]

Chronology and Chapter Arrangement

The main body of my dissertation consists of five chapters, each of which examines a specific aspect of the party's labour protection policies and unearths a

[38] Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 2.

specific personality of Chinese workers displayed in their responses to this aspect. Chapter 1, "safe production," explores the CCP's management of workplace safety in the 1950s and 1960s. After handling the Yiluo accident on a grand scale in 1950, the CCP launched a cluster of safety movements featured by mass engagement and supervision. Unfortunately, workers were not as perfect as the party expected them to be in terms of complying with safety rules. Given the party's false optimism about workers' consciousness to avoid accidents and its disregard for the divergent understandings of risks among different generations of workers, as well as its tendency to downplay workers' fault in actual accidents, the mass-based safe production movement failed to genuinely protect the safety and bodily health of workers as the party claimed.

Workers' disregard of workplace safety not only manifested itself in their disobedience of regulations but their refusals to use PPE, which is the subject of chapter 2. Since 1949, China's labour authorities and trade unions had spared no efforts to encourage the use of PPE in enterprises and mines. From the perspective of the top authorities, PPE was not only the item that could shield workers from accidents and occupational diseases in the actual labour process but also a tangible expression of the superior status of the Chinese working class in the new society. Nevertheless, much protective equipment was less appealing to workers. The party attributed workers' refusal to use PPE to a lack of appreciation of the significance of safe production and the party's good intention. In reality, worker had particular preferences about the design, user experience, and style of various equipment, contributing to their reluctance to wear PPE.

Aside from aesthetic preference, workers' taste preference prompted them to resist another item pertaining to labour protection policies: salt soda, a curious drink developed to prevent workers from contracting heatstroke. Chapter 3 examines the history of salt soda in Maoist China. I correct previous scholars' mistakes about the origin of the salt soda and focus on workers' refusal to drink salt soda. I argue that salt soda did not get an anticipated result because the manufacturers of salt soda were concerned only with salt soda's therapeutic effect and ignored its quality. Workers refused to drink salt soda simply because they disliked its salty and bitter flavour. Responding to workers' complaints, the manufacturers in Shanghai and other places

upgraded the formula in order to make salt soda more palatable. Workers' taste preference turned salt soda from a remedial drink into a common pop modified to workers' satisfaction. During this process, the original purpose of factories in providing salt soda was defeated.

For edible things beneficial to workers' health, workers are concerned not only with quality but also with quantity. Chapter 4 explores the workers' recuperation program introduced in the early 1950s and recuperating workers' lives during their stays in sanatoriums. In the vision of China's sanatorium organizers, recuperating workers should be able to comply with the sanatorium schedule and should not delay returning to their work instead of yearning to linger at sanatoriums. However, most recuperating workers in various sanatoriums in China enjoyed material benefits while ignoring most regulations and rules set by their organizers. They were extraordinarily responsive to the food therapy, a weight-gain method considered by sanatorium organizers as the key to enhancing workers' health levels. The excessive (and even at times, wasteful) material benefits in sanatoriums promoted individual autonomy and many desires among workers, especially their appetite for high quality food. This reflects the poverty and limited access to ample nutritious food outside of sanitariums in the early period of the Mao era and is a further example of worker agency.

The last chapter focuses on the party's initiatives to battle industrial fatigue among workers in the 1950s and 1960s. Under the premise that the eight-hour workday could hardly be ensured in most factories and mines, many enterprises adopted methods that focus on the improvement of workers' rest quality and encouraging workers to participate in what the officials called "Workers' Sport" (*gongren tiyu* 工人体育). But for various personal reasons, some workers showed little enthusiasm for the organized activities. In the early 1960s, the party launched a campaign aimed at reducing fatigue among people from all walks of life caused by extremely heavy workload during the Great Leap Forward: striking a balance between work and rest. Local labour authorities and factory leaders rescheduled timetables to reduce workers' hours and ensure that they received enough rest, especially eight hours of sleep each day. However, many workers chose not to spend their rest time, especially their evening hours, on sleeping or any other

activities that the party believed to be beneficial to recovery from fatigue, such as playing chess, reading, and doing light sports. It is clear by examining how China's industrial workers spent their time in the 1960s that workers' own lifestyles were not something constructed by the party alone, but rather were also shaped by their understanding of lives and perception of fatigue.

As shown above, the focus of the dissertation was workers' individualities reflected in their various reactions to labour protection policies instead of a single event or entity that existed in a certain geographical and temporal context. In light of this, I arrange the chapters by theme instead of by chronological order. In addition, as long as the discussion of labour protection follows a chronological order, it may have a great risk to fall into the rut of orthodox party history (*dangshi* 党史)—to list the policies promulgated by the party during a certain historical period such as the Great Leap Forward or Cultural Revolution, rather than to effectively display the implementation and unintended effects.

Adopting a thematic structure in this dissertation, of course, does not mean that the narrative in each chapter would disrespect the PRC chronology. There were many significant moments that steered the development of labour protection policies in the first two decades of the PRC. Some moments were exactly from what Gail Hershatter calls the "campaign time," playing a dominate role in making some specific aspects of labour protection policies prevail over others.[39] The campaigns initiated by the CCP to pursuit higher industrial outputs—the "Increasing Production and Practicing Economy" between 1950 and 1953, the First-Five Year Plan in the mid-1950, and the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s—directly caused fluctuations in the labour authorities' interventions in workplace safety. The remedial polices of these radical campaigns issued in the 1960s brought an immediate reduction in workers' hours. While the timing of some moments did not overlap state-initiated campaigns but were influenced by non-human factors, such as climate change—the unpredictable occurrence of extreme hot summers in 1953 and 1956 rapidly drove the widespread use of salt soda. Most importantly, thanks to these

[39] Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 4.

critical moments, where the top authority encouraged workers, local labour authorities, and trade unions to voice their complaints about safety and health issues during the periods between 1950 and 1953, the Rectification Movement in late 1956, and the first few years of the 1960s, today's historians were able to learn what was happening to workers in their workplaces after more than half a century. It was the outspokenness of the people involved in some of these episodic campaigns that left marks in China's history as their voices were profoundly documented.

To further facilitate readers' understanding of the changing context of labour protection policies, I offer a table detailing the major events related to the party's labour protection policies in chronological order, as well as how workers experienced these events. Some of the events, such as the 1950 Tianjin factory inspections and the 1956 directive issued by the Ministry of Labour on implementing the "Three Major Regulations," involved many specific fields of focus, which are discussed in separate chapters. Another purpose of the table is to eliminate redundancy caused by repetitive narrative of similar background information in different chapters.

Events	Time	Experience
The term "labour protection" appeared in Chen Duxiu's article entitled "My Opinion on the Current Political Situation" in 1920. The Beiyang government promulgated the Provisional Factory General Regulations stipulating that factory employers should provide workers with safety equipment to protect workers from potential safety hazards in the workplace. This was the first government-issued occupational safety and health regulation.	The 1920s	Working conditions in China's most factories were miserable. According to the letter by consul J. W. O. Davidson in 1924, "the factories at Tientsin are for the most part overcrowded, badly ventilated, and generally unsanitary. Machinery is often left unfenced with the result that frequent accidents occur, especially to children." Working conditions in rug workshops in Beijing were as follows: "dark, dusty, and unventilated; no sanitary appliances; no protective or co-operative organization."
National Industrialists and social reformers on the GMD side launched	The	Safety regulations were basically established in some of China's large

the Industrial Safety Movement, marked by the establishment of the Industrial Safety Association in Shanghai and the publication of the journal *Industrial Safety.* On November 17, 1931, the CCP promulgated a labour law in the Soviet Base Area. Japanese occupiers promoted the use of PPE in the railroad and mine industries they controlled.	1930s	enterprises and mines. For example, miners in the Datong Coal Mines had access to wicker hats and safety lamps. The 1931 labour law, which was heavily biased in workers' favour, created serious fear among factory employers and spoiled a normal labour discipline that was supposed to exist to maintain productivity.
The Sixth Labour Conference was held in Harbin. The conference passed the resolution to restore the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). The CCP set out to establish a new safety system managed by labour authorities and industrial departments in tandem with the ACFTU.	The 1940s	Some enterprise workers in liberated areas were equipped with PPE such as gloves and facial masks. According to a report by Chen Baoyu in 1948, most enterprise leaders saw PPE as a type of "immediate interests," a sort of tangible material benefit.
The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference passed the Common Program. Article 32 stipulated that: "For the present period, an eight to ten-hour clay should in general be enforced in publicly and privately operated enterprises, but under special circumstances, this matter may be dealt with at discretion. The people's governments shall fix minimum wages according to the conditions prevailing in various localities and trades. Labour insurance shall be gradually established. The special interests of juvenile and women workers shall be safeguarded. Inspection of industries and mines shall be carried out in order to improve their safety devices and	1949	The accident reporting system introduced in 1950 was a mere formality in the first decade of the PRC. Many enterprises and mines encountered many difficulties in carrying out safety inspections and establishing their safety management systems. According to Jiang Tao, then vice director of the department of labour protection of the Ministry of Labour, enterprises that had established safety agencies were still in minority by 1957.

sanitary facilities. Local labour authorities and trade unions began to establish China's sanatorium network. The first national-level sanatorium: The Qianshan Workers' Sanatorium was established in Liaoning Province. The Department of Labour Protection (DOL), a sub-affiliated agency of the Ministry of Labour, was established.		
A methane explosion occurred in the Ligou shaft, Henan Yiluo Mines at 6:45 pm, on February 27, causing 174 deaths and 39 injuries. The CCP identified this incident as the "most serious accident due to negligence since the establishment of the PRC." After this accident, the CCP established the mass-based safe production policy as the guiding principle of safety works in China. The DOL promulgated the Provisional Regulations (Draft) on Factory Hygiene, the first national-level factory hygiene regulation after 1949. This regulation promulgated that factory employers should provide workers with safety equipment. On May 4, 1950, the Finance Committee of the Council of Administrative Affairs issued the "Reporting Method of Casualties in Public and Private Factories and Mines," which was the first accident reporting system in the Mao era. The Ministry of Labour and ACFTU began to jointly conduct safety inspections and establish workplace safety management systems in thousands of enterprises and mines.	1950	

To support the war effort in the Korean Peninsula, the CCP launched a nationwide campaign of "Practicing Economy and Increasing Production."	1951	The period between 1951 and 1956 saw a steady decline in accident rates at the national level. An increasing number of workers were equipped with protective equipment. However, many workers began to suffer from serious industrial fatigue caused by overtime. Workers' overtime reached its peak in 1953 and 1956, respectively. An increasing number of workers were taking PPE for private use. Demands for PPE by enterprise workers in liberated areas went beyond what the party officials deemed permissible. The party's labour official criticized workers for simply regarding PPE as material benefits. Salt soda played an increasingly important role in heatstroke prevention on factory floors. But many workers did not like the taste of salt soda. Recuperating workers experienced weight gain because they benefited themselves from abundant food and showed less interest in other sanatorium services. Many workers showed less enthusiasm for physical exercise.
The General Administration Council issued the "Decision on Labour Employment Problems," which urged China enterprises to carry out the eight-hour workday as much as possible. The Tianjin Steel Mill introduced the use of salt soda to alleviate workers' suffering from heat stress in their workplaces The Second National Labour Protection Conference was held in Beijing. During the conference, Jia Tuofu, vice director of the Central Financial Committee put forward the slogan with a far-reaching influence on the party's labour protection work: "Safety is for production and production must be safe	1952	
The hot weather in the summer of 1953 led to the widespread use of salt soda on factory floors. The achievement of the workers' sanatorium network occupied an important position in state propaganda. The Ministry of Labour started the publication *Labour Protection Bulletin* The ACFTU invited Soviet labour protection experts to give lectures in the training sessions in Tianjin.	1953	

The National Sports Committee initiated the Workers' Sports Movement, including organizing workers to do physical exercise, especially radio callisthenics.	1954	
The Ministry of Labour held the first labour protection cadres training session in Beijing. Soviet experts (Ladygin and Kuznetsov) were invited to deliver lectures. Many enterprise unions began to organize the signing of labour protection agreements between factory administrators and workers.	1955	
The Ministry of Labour issued the "Three Major Regulations," which were the most important safety and health regulations in the Mao era.	1956	
The Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Health, and the ACFTU organized the first national conference on exchanging experience in heatstroke prevention. Some manufacturers of salt soda began to adjust the formula of salt soda.	1957	Workers' complaints about the poor labour conditions they had endured over the past several years began to emerge. Phycologist Li Jiazhi published an article in which he argues against Ladygin's point that workers should never be held accountable for accidents.
Many enterprises have streamlined their safety management agencies. In 1958, Mao introduced the term "to strike a balance between work and rest."	1958–1959	The central labour authorities' efforts were nothing more than empty obligations. Workplace accident rates skyrocketed, and workers experienced unprecedented severe industrial fatigue. Salt soda was used as an energy booster to sustain workers for long hours.

The Ministry of Labour and the National Bureau of Statistics jointly updated the accident report system The party launched the movement of "Striking a proper balance between Work and Rest," which reinforced the Three-Eight System (Eight Hours of Sleep, Eight Hours of Work, Eight Hours of Entertainment) and emphasized that "enterprises should guarantee eight-hour sleep for workers."	1960–1965	Many workers stayed up at night. Some of them read novels or chew the fat all night long. During the day, some of them were drowsy and absent from work. Some workers went to the cinema and strolled the streets. Overtime and endless meetings made a comeback in 1964.
The party's labour authorities restored many safety and health regulations abandoned during the Great Leap Forward, as well as introduced some new occupational health regulations. *People's Daily* published an editorial calling for "balancing work and rest" in 1966. This was the last time the party reinforced labour protection policies before the Cultural Revolution.		

Chapter 1. "Workers Understand Work Safety Best": Safe Production Movement in the 1950s

"We have got big trouble!" Hearing the news, Fu Baoxian, a sixteen-year-old miner, stormed out of the cave-dwelling and ran to the shaft a few hundred meters away. It was 7:00 p.m. on February 27, 1950.

The run left Fu breathless. When he arrived at the shaft entrance, he was yanked aside by an old miner before he could get steady on his feet. "Kid, stay away!" The old miner yelled at him. At that moment, he saw people all around the shaft entrance shuttling to and fro with barn lanterns in their hands. He also saw miners taking turns going down the slope to the underground, and shouting to each other, "Be safe! Save the living first!"

He asked around and found out that just over ten minutes earlier an explosion had occurred in the Ligou shaft (李沟矿井) of the Yiluo mines (宜洛煤矿).[40] The shockwave hurled coal blocks to the ground and the fallen blocks soon obstructed the smoke-filled tunnel. More than 200 miners were trapped in the unventilated tunnel with no way to escape.[41]

"I can't bear to think about it. 174 living people were gone in a blink of an eye." When the seventy-eight-year-old Fu Baoxian recalled the Yiluo accident sixty-two years after, the lingering fear and cries of the grief-stricken families of the victims still made his hand tremble. "At that time all the victims were lying on the ground for their families to identify. There were casualties everywhere, the sound of crying everywhere, and many corpses were so charred and deformed that they were unrecognizable!" By the time the last corpse was moved out on April 22, the rescue operation had lasted fifty-five days. In

[40] The Ligou shalf of the Yiluo mines was located seventy miles southwest of Luoyang City, Henan Province.

[41] The description of the Yiluo accident in this chapter is primarily based on Fu Baoxian's narrative and Wang Yinshuan's recollection. As one of the witnesses of this accident, Fu gave an interview to *Dahebao* in 2012. He provided many details about the Yiluo accident that were missing in official documents. See *Dahebao* 大河报 [Great river newspaper], October 12, 2012, A12.

the end, this accident resulted in 174 deaths and 39 injuries.[42]

This was a critical moment in the early days of the PRC. On the eve of the CCP's ascension to national power in 1949, the party promised that poor safety conditions in mines and factories would be radically improved and claimed that this would become a major task for the people's government.[43] This accident that occurred only six months after the founding of new China, however, brought shame to the new ruling party.[44] For this reason, the party took it very seriously and handled the aftermath of this accident in a big way. In the month following this accident, more than 3,500 people received fifteen kilograms of rice, millet, and wheat each and at least 100 kilograms of coal per household as compensation from the local government. Fu clearly remembered someone saying: "The 'higher authorities' (*shangtou* 上头) take care of us so well. The Communist Party now really treats us as masters this time!"[45]

But this was just the first step. The party's determination to defend its promise where workers would enjoy safer working conditions manifested itself more in how they punished "people in charge" (*fuze ren* 负责人). At the end of March, the investigation team released its findings: the explosion was directly caused by miners' smoking. In addition, the investigation team claimed that the shaft was severely eroded because of

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[42] Shortly after this explosion, the Xinyu Mining Company launched a rescue operation. The administrative office of Luoyang Prefecture and the local government of Yiyang County also sent medical personnel, public security officers, and troops to the accident site to assist rescue workers and maintain stability. Wang Yinshuan 王银栓 and Wang Fuqing 王富清, "Hanjian de Yiluo meikuang wasi baozha" 罕见的宜洛煤矿瓦斯爆炸 [An unprecedented gas explosion in the Yiluo coal mines], *Yiyang wenshi ziliao* 8 (1994): 131.

[43] In the Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference adopted by the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference on September 29, 1949, article 32 stipulated that: "Inspection of industries and mines shall be carried out in order to improve their safety devices and sanitary facilities." See *The Common Program and Other Documents of the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Poltiical Consultative Conference* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1950), 12.

[44] This sense of disgrace could be detected in the speech of Deng Zihui (1896–1972) at the Fifth Executive Meeting of the Central People's Government Military and Political Committee of Central and South China held on March 29, 1950: "The reactionary Kuomintang government had always trampled people like grass and was even more indifferent to the deaths and injuries of working people. The people's government ought to take responsibility for the lives and property of our people, first and foremost for the lives of the people, especially working people. We must firmly oppose the attitude of treating the lives of workers as mere trifles." *RMRB*, April 4, 1950, 1.

[45] *Dahebao*, October 12, 2012, A12.

long-term coal stealing by some miners, and therefore had difficulty withstanding the blast of the explosion.[46] Seventeen people were identified as responsible for this accident. Accused of "blindly bolstering the production campaign" with a bureaucratic workstyle of neglecting safety, five leaders were dismissed from their positions.[47] The chief engineer Shi Xinlin was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Zhang Baosan, the work branch leader, and Mao Decai, the mine supervisor, received capital punishments. They were sentenced to death for leading miners to steal coal and damaging the mine and were quickly executed by shooting. The executioner was named Ning Tianbao, a part-time "gunner" from the mine police office. As a native of Yiyang County, Zhang Baosan was lucky to have relatives who buried his corpse after getting a bullet. Mao Decai, a native of Hebei Province, was shot and fell headfirst into a pit. He was left alone for a long time, becoming a "lonely ghost."[48]

On June 7 and 26, 1950, the CCP's mouthpiece *People's Daily* carried editorials expressing the official reflection on this accident. "To eliminate accidents, we must first and foremost rely on the working class. Since workers have been engaged in production for a long time, they know the best about the conditions in factories and mines. Therefore, they understand the importance of safe production because of their own stake." As stated in these editorials, "only by adhering to a 'safe production' (*anquan shengchan* 安全生产) policy that highly relied on the working masses and establishing a 'real responsibility system' could workplace accidents be eliminated in the future."[49]

Since then, safe production has become an iron law that the party and labour authorities have required China's enterprise administrators to keep in mind. However, during most years of the Mao era, the mass-based safe production policies did not free China's industrial workplaces from suffering frequent accidents. Even though the scarcity

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[46] On March 8, an investigation team jointly organized by the Ministry of Fuel Industries, the Ministry of Labour, and the ACFTU arrived at the accident site. Two days later, the Central Control Committee also sent a three-member inspection team led by senior supervisor Peng Da (1918–2005) to inspect the management of the Yiluo mines. *RMRB*, March 25, 1950, 1.

[47] *RMRB*, June 24, 1950, 6.

[48] *RMRB*, June 24, 1950, 6.

[49] *RMRB*, June 24, 1950, 6; *RMRB*, June 7, 1950, 2.

of available sources has made it almost impossible for contemporary scholars to precisely measure accident rates in twentieth-century China, it is still safe to say that China's industrial workplaces were rife with various life-threatening risks after 1949. Just opening up a single inner-party investigative report *Internal Reference* (*neibu cankao* 内部参考), one can see that reports about industrial accidents appear in almost every issue. According to a statistical report released by the Ministry of Labour in the 1990s, the national mortality rate per 1,000 persons in enterprises at the county level and above ranged from a high of 0.549 in 1951 to a low of 0.186 in 1956 between 1950 and 1957.[50] It is worth mentioning that the accident and work-related injuries reporting system, which was introduced by the Government Administration Council and the Ministry of Labour in May 1950 and modified several times thereafter, performed practically no function during most of the Mao era, especially before 1960. In other words, the actual situation was far more serious than what the above-mentioned figures suggest.[51] But even so, these figures were still much higher than those of countries such as Germany and Japan during

[50] Mao Zengqing 毛增青, "Dui woguo si ci shigu gaofa yuanyin ji duice de tantao" 对我国四次事故高发原因及对策的探讨 [A discussion of the causation of the four periods of high incidence of accidents in China and the countermeasures], in *Quanguo anquan shengchan guanli fagui yantaohui lunwenji* 全国安全生产管理法规研讨会论文集 [Proceedings of the national workshop on safety production management regulations], ed. Zhongguo laodong baohu kexue jishu xuehui 中国劳动保护科学技术学会 (Beijing, 1994), 414.

[51] It was not until 1956 that the Department of Labour promulgated the first nationwide accident reporting system. However, the system was not well implemented by local enterprises and labour departments. According to a report jointly published by the Department of Labour and the National Statistics Bureau in 1960, there were several major problems in the implementation of the accident reporting system. First, monthly fatal accident reports and quarterly accident reports were often submitted late. "In about one-third of the regions, accident reports were delayed by one or two months. In some areas, accident reports were not submitted at all." Second, the accident statistics were inaccurate and late in many cases. In some areas, there was a big discrepancy between the consolidated figures of monthly fatal accident reports and the summary figures of fatal accidents. "The difference could be as much as 50 percent. In some areas, the figures of the first three months were still reported in the fourth quarter, while in others, the figures were about twice as high." Third, some statistics included fatalities and injuries in the steel industry, while others included fatalities and injuries in rural communes. To solve these problems, the Ministry of Labour and National Statistical Bureau upgraded this system. For more details, see Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guojia tongji ju 中华人民共和国国家统计局, "Laodong bu guanyu jin yibu guanche zhixing gongren zhigong shangwang shigu baogao guicheng he shixing xin de shangwang shigu baobiao de tongzhi" 劳动部关于进一步贯彻执行工人职员伤亡事故报告规程和试行新的伤亡事故报表的通知 [Circular of the Ministry of Labour on further implementation of the regulations on employee casualty reporting and trial implementation of the new casualty statement], January 28, 1960, TMA, x0283-c-000978-006; For more information about the delays and low accuracy of the results in statistical works in the 1950s, see Ghosh, *Making It Count,* 151–52.

the same period.[52]

Why were workplace accidents so prevalent during the Mao era even though workers were safeguarded with a long-term safe production policy? The first reason was crystal clear. As Jeremy Brown argues, "Making money and meeting production quotas have trumped accident prevention, especially during intense pushes for rapid industrialization."[53] In addition, as Joel Andreas argues: "The ACFTU played a critical role during the period of socialist transformation but one characterized by sharp contradictions. Because union leaders were Communist cadres bound by party discipline, they were compelled to carry out decisions made by party authorities, but they were also expected to represent the needs and concerns of the workers. This often placed them in a difficult position."[54] The "difficult position" resulted in trade unions' powerlessness to supervise factory leaders to practice safety regulations. [55]

Both explanations involve a situation where factory managers and local labour departments were blind to the party's well-designed safety policies and regulations. But in fact, these policies were not always ignored. Going beyond previous scholarship, in this chapter I analyze a built-in problem of the mass-based safe production policies. The CCP's focus on policies, agreements, and education aimed at enabling workers to manage workplace safety built on its optimistic but false estimation of the Chinese working class. The party assumed that China's industrial labourers were a group of people who unanimously and conscientiously adhered to work safety. In reality, however, workers' attitudes towards safety varied according to their personalities, experiences, and, most importantly, a generational divide. It was not only the practical problems of the rapid industrialization after 1949 that drove the CCP to control workplace accidents, but also the CCP's pledge to the working class. But precisely for this reason, given the party's ill-founded optimism about workers' consciousness to overcome workplace risks and its

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[52] Richard E. Wokutch and Josetta S. McLaughlin, "The U.S. and Japanese Work Injury and Illness Experience," *Monthly Labor Review* 115, no. 4 (1992): 3–11.

[53] Brown, "When Things Go Wrong: Accidents and the Legacy of the Mao Era in Today's China," 11–36.

[54] Andreas, *Disenfranchised*, 28.

[55] Also see Lin, "1950 niandai guanyu gonghui gongzuo fangzhen de zhenglun," http://www.china.com.cn/xxsb/txt/2007-04/09/content_8088479.htm.

choice to downplay workers' fault in actual accidents, the CCP's mass-based safe production found it difficult to really "protect the life safety and bodily health" of workers as the party claimed.[56]

To test this argument, I will first examine how the party empowered workers to participate in the management of workplace safety by focusing on two nationwide safety movements: the safety inspection movement between 1950 and 1953, and the movement that focused on the signing of labour protection agreements starting in 1955. Next, I proceed to investigate workers' propensities to cause accidents stemming from two mindsets: accidental fatalism and irrational optimism. A generational divide and work experience have a significant impact on the distribution of these two mindsets. In addition, by deciphering official accident records and statistics, I demonstrate that the so-called "lack of safety education" was a euphemism used by the party to define those accidents caused by workers' negligence and reveal that there was a tendency for China's labour authorities to downplay workers' responsibilities in accidents. In the end, I focus on the party's efforts to promote safety education and show how the distinction in the understanding of workplace risks between old and new workers contributed to setbacks in safety education.

Safe Production Movement in the 1950s

The Yiluo accident accelerated the CCP's pace in improving safety and hygiene conditions in China's industrial workplaces. Since 1950, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACTFU) and the Department of Labour Protection under the Ministry of Labour had begun to establish a new safety management system copied from the Soviet Union. At the enterprise level, workplace safety was managed by two types of agencies: the Safety Engineering Branch (*anji ke* 安技科) under the factory administration, and the Labour Protection Committee (*laodong baohu weiyuanhui* 劳动保护委员会) subordinate

[56] "Protecting the life safety and bodily health of workers" was the most common description of the purpose of labour protection policy in the CCP's lexicon. For example, see Zhonghua renmin gonghe guo laodong bu laodong baohu ju 中华人民共和国劳动部劳动保护局 ed., *Xin Zhongguo de laodong baohu* 新中国的劳动保护 [Labour protection in new China] (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 1959), 1.

to the enterprise-level trade union. In most cases, the Safety Engineering Section was responsible for providing technical solutions to accident prevention and handling accidents, while the Labour Protection Committee oversaw workplace safety. Technically, these two types of agencies stood in a complementary relationship in the operation of the system but trade unions along with their affiliated enterprise-level labour protection committees played a more active role. According to an investigation conducted by the ACFTU, 8,096 enterprise-level labour protection committees had been established by 1957. The membership of these committees was normally made up of worker activists advanced in safety work. Some of these activists were trained as safety inspectors (*anquan yuan* 安全员) enforcing safe work practices and procedures, while some others were in charge of providing workers with safety education. By the end of 1957, the number of labour protection activists had reached 260,000.[57]

As the new safety management system was being established in China from top down during the 1950s, the labour departments of the central government and the ACFTU jointly initiated two nationwide movements: the great safety inspection movement between 1950 and 1953, and the movement that focused on the signing of labour protection agreements between 1954 and 1957. On February 28, 1950, the day after the Yiluo accident, the Ministry of Industry issued the "Resolution on Establishing the Production Responsibility System," calling for building a "detailed responsibility system in every enterprise."[58] As the first responder to this resolution, the Northeast People's Government issued a resolution in March 1950, ordering that safety inspections should be immediately carried out in all mines and factories in the first week of April.[59]

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[57] Jiang Tao 江涛, "Liangnian lai de qunzhong laodong baohu gongzuo he dui jinhou gongzuo de yijian" 两年来的群众劳动保护工作和对今后工作的意见 [Mass-based labour protection work in the past two years and suggestions on future work], in *Jiceng gonghui laodong baohu gongzuo jingyan* 基层工会劳动保护工作经验 [Experience on conducting labour protection work in grass-roots unions], ed. Zhonghua quanguo zonggonghui laodong baohu bu 中华全国总工会劳动保护部 (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1957), 7.

[58] "Gongye bu guanyu shengchan zeren zhi de jueding" 工业部关于生产责任制的决定 [Directive by the Ministry of Industry on the production responsibility system], *Youse jinshu* 有色金属, 5 (March 1950): 2.

[59] "Dongbei renmin zhengfu gongye bu guanyu jiaqiang anquan zerenzhi jinxing baoan da jiancha de zhishi" 东北人民政府工业部关于加强安全责任制进行保安大检查的指示 [Order by the Ministry of Industry of the Northeast People's Government on enhancing safety responsibility system and conducting safety inspections], *Youse jinshu*, 5 (March 1950): 2–7.

In the following months, as responses to the resolution issued by the Ministry of Industry, local labour departments carried out several inspections on a massive scale in various industrial sectors in China's major industrial cities such as Qingdao, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Beijing as initiatives to reduce accident rates and bring the "responsibility system" into real effect.[60] By late 1953, safety inspections had gradually become routine in China's major industrial sectors. "Major inspections" were mostly conducted quarterly. But when serious accidents occurred or there was a significant increase in accident rates in particular industries, local labour departments and trade unions would conduct ad hoc inspections. According to a 1957 report from Di Zuozhi (1914–1993), then deputy division of the Labour Protection Department of the Ministry of Labour, there were five major safety inspections performed in the industrial sector in Northeast China between 1950 and 1953. In East China, 13,436 enterprises got safety inspections, compared to 2,192 in Central and South China, 1,893 in Southwest China, and 1,173 in Northwest China. Over the three years, more than one million unrecognized safety hazards had been identified, and about sixty to seventy percent of them were resolved. Fatal accidents were 10.7 percent less in 1951 than in 1950, and 39.1 percent less in 1952 than in 1951.[61]

In late 1953, the end of the Korean War and the Patriotic Campaign of Increasing Production brought a temporary halt to this nationwide movement.[62] As the CCP was making all-out efforts to construct heavy industry during the First Five-Year Plan, to ensure continuous improvement in accident prevention, the CCP's labour departments replaced safety inspections with a "long-term approach" of requiring enterprises to draw

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[60] *RMRB*, March 23, 1950, 2.

[61] Di Zuozhi 邸作之, "Difang gongye qiye laodong baohu gongzuo he dui jinhou gongzuo de yijian" 地方工业企业劳动保护工作和对今后工作的意见 [Labour protection work in local industrial enterprises and suggestions on future work], September 27, 1957, TMA, x0084-c-000533-013.

[62] In order to ensure the supply of materials for Chinese troops at the front line of the Korean battlefield, the CCP launched the "the Patriotic Campaign of Increasing Production" in the second half of 1950. In the CCP's view, to strengthen the protection of workers and promote safe production were important in maintaining the "working enthusiasm of patriotic workers." For this reason, many of the safety inspections launched in various places since 1951 were carried out in the name of promoting the "the Patriotic Campaign of Increasing Production." This did not mean, however, that safety inspections had been permanently removed from the party's safety agenda since 1953. See *RMRB*, December 19, 1950, 2.

up their safety plans.[63] In order to reinforce the implementation of this approach, the ACFTU launched another nationwide movement in 1955 with the central task of signing "labour protection agreements," which was a tri-partite agreement between workers, trade unions, and factory administrations designed to ensure the proper use of funds in developing safety engineering.[64] It was in 1950 that the ACTFU recognized the importance of this Soviet "advanced experience" in facilitating workers' supervision in workplace safety. With the help of Soviet experts, the Harbin Railway Management Bureau began to tentatively promote the signing of labour protection agreements among its affiliated 123 working units in 1953.[65] By 1956, according to a document jointly issued by the Ministry of Labour and ACFTU, in thirteen provinces and three municipalities, 1,572 enterprises had signed labour protection agreements.[66]

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[63] In a *People's Daily* article published on September 14, 1953, the author Lao Xuan wrote that conducting safety inspections was just a "staged approach" suitable for the condition of the national economic recovery period rather than a thoroughgoing approach to prevent accidents in China's industrial workplaces. In November 1954, the Ministry of Labour issued the "Circular on the Preparation of Plans for Safety and Engineering Labour Protection Measures for Factory and Mining Enterprises," which required both state-owned and private enterprises to prepare safety plans in conjunction with their annual financial plans for 1955. According to the official statement, this was necessary for the state to "normalize safety work, to establish normal production order, and to ensure the continuation of the safe production policy" during the period of "planned economic construction." See *RMRB*, September 14, 1953, 2. Also see Zhu Cishou 祝慈寿, *Zhongguo gongye laodong shi* 中国工业劳动史 [The history of Chinese industrial labour] (Shanghai: Shanghai caijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 734.

[64] This type of agreement was first introduced by the Soviet Trade Unions as a type of collective agreement designed to ensure the "development of social democracy in the sphere of production. Morris L. Weisberg, "The Transformation of the Collective Agreement in Soviet Law," *University of Chicago Law Review* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1949): 444–81.

[65] According to Wang Yiqing (1908–1963), then vice director of the Department of Labour Protection of the Ministry of Labour, after the Harbin Locomotive Repair Plant signed the labour protection agreement in 1954, not only were fatal accidents and major accidents eliminated but also the number of minor workplace accidents was reduced by 66 percent compared to the same period in 1953. Wang Yiqing 王亦清, "Guangfan kaizhan qianding laodong baohu xieyi shu de gongzuo" 广泛开展签订劳动保护协议书的工作 [Making the signing of labour protection agreements widely available], *LDBHTX* 78 (January 1, 1956): 22–3.

[66] The ACFTU claimed that this Soviet experience was not yet ready for a nationwide application at that time because enterprise-level trade unions had not yet been widely established in the vast majority of enterprises in China. Since 1954, the signing of labour protection agreements had begun to take off as a nationwide movement. During the first half of 1955, enterprises in Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Shandong, Shanxi, Sichuan, Jiangxi, Shanghai, and Tianjin were either "preparing to sign or had already signed labour protection agreements." In Beijing, more than twenty enterprises had already signed labour protection agreements by June 1955, and many others were preparing to do so. According to *Labour Protection Bulletin*, by the fourth quarter of 1955 more than fourteen ministries and commissions had issued circulars requesting their affiliated enterprises to "actively begin the process of signing labour protection

These two safety movements embodied the party's basic strategy to improve work safety, that was, to empower workers to participate in the management and supervision of workplace safety. In terms of methods and procedures, the safety inspection advocated by the party's labour authorities and trade unions after 1949 differed markedly from the conventional inspections that originated in England and Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. Take a prototype safety inspection conducted by the Beijing Municipal Labour Bureau in the mines run by the Jingxi Mining Company in late 1949 as an example. On December 14, 1949, a *People's Daily* article praised this inspection as having played a remarkable role in reducing the accident rate. As reported by the article, the central task of the inspection was the pre-inspection meeting. Before the inspections were formally carried out, the inspection team convened a meeting for the leaders of the Shijingshan Mines and asked them to "mentally prepare for the upcoming inspections." Then, the mine administrators and union members organized workers to reflect on the work-related injuries they had experienced and to share their experiences in a group discussion. Upon completion of the inspection tours, the factory union collected workers' concerns and detected potential hazards and submitted them to the factory management committee. In the end, the committee determined who should be disciplined and rewarded based on actual circumstances.[67]

Even though this inspection was a preliminary attempt made by the local labour department before the central government formally promoted safety inspections nationwide, it demonstrated that the safety inspection advocated by the party was more of a type of mass mobilization to which inspection tours in the workplace were of secondary

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agreements." Many industrial unions, such as the Railway and Road Haulage unions, and local federations of unions in Hebei, Hunan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Fujian, and Gansu Provinces, also issued similar orders and circulars. Zhi Xin 志新, "Muqian qiye xingzheng he jiceng gonghui qianding laodong baohu xieyishu jiankuang" 目前企业行政和基层工会签订劳动保护协议书简况 [Brief summary report of the current situation of the signing of labour protection agreements], *LDBHTX* 63 (June 5, 1955): 880; "Xuduo danwei zai jiji kaizhan qianding ladong baohu xieyi shu de gongzuo" 许多单位在积极开展签订劳动保护协议书的工作 [Many work units are actively working on signing labour protection agreements], *LDBHTX* 78 (January 30, 1956): 28; Laodong bu 劳动部, "Laodong bu quanguo zong gonghui guanyu bianzhi 1957 nian anquan jishu cuoshi jihua he qianding laodong baohu xieyi shu de lianhe tongzhi" 劳动部全国总工会关于编制 1957 年安全技术措施计划和签订劳动保护协议书的联合通知 [Joint circular of the Ministry of Labour and the ACFTU on the preparation of planning safety measures and the signing of labour protection agreements], September 21, 1956, TMA, x0084-c-000462-001.

[67] *RMRB*, Dec 14, 1949, 2.

importance. Through such inspections, workers were expected to speak out their concerns about potential safety hazards and thereby be engaged in the management of workplace safety. In many following inspections, "let workers speak out" became the main goal inspection teams sought to achieve. Such a purpose could be more evidently detected from some "unsuccessful inspections" criticized by the local labour department of Tianjin between late 1951 and early 1952. For example, in July 1951, the Labour Protection Department of the Tianjin Metal Union formed a joint inspection team consisting of labour protection committee members, public health specialists, and representatives from the Tianjin Labour Bureau to conduct a safety inspection at the Tianjin Electric Plant. Before the inspection was carried out, the factory administration had already been informed of the inspection date. When the inspection team arrived at the plant, they were briefed by some factory administrators on the safety conditions first, and then spent more than an hour inspecting the workshop. Even though the inspection team identified "a lot of hazards" during the inspection tour, afterward they only admonished the factory administrators and asked them to defuse potential hazards. As stated in an official report produced by the Tianjin Municipal Labour Bureau, aside from the factory union members and administrators, "workers had little chance to speak up with their concerns."[68] In the summer of 1951, the Tianjin Labour Bureau sent inspection teams to several electric power factories. Apart from workers from the Yongli Alkali Plant, who were encouraged to tell their concerns about safety conditions, most workers at the other plants were not even informed of such inspections.[69] Lü Zhengang, head of the production group at the Tianjin Vehicle Repair Plant, said, "We knew nothing about them [the inspection team] when they came to our factory. We thought it was just a tour group."[70] The fact that the labour authorities defined these cases where workers were not involved in the inspections

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[68] "Muqian shaoshu gongchang anquan weisheng jiancha gongzuo diaocha qingkuan" 目前少数工厂安全卫生检查工作调查情况 [Investigation of current safety and health inspections in some factories], September 6, 1951, TMA, X0084-c-000070-015.

[69] "Muqian shaoshu gongchang anquan weisheng jiancha gongzuo diaocha qingkuan," September 6, 1951, TMA, X0084-c-000070-015.

[70] Tianjin shi laodong ju laodong baohu ke 天津市劳动局劳动保护科 "Muqian Tianjin shi shaoshu gongchang anquan weisheng jiancha gongzuo qingkuang ji cunzai de wenti" 目前天津市少数工厂安全卫生检查工作情况及存在的问题 [Current condition of safety and health inspection and existing problems in a few factories in Tianjin], September 6, 1951, TMA, X0084-c-000070-014.

or failed to speak out as "faulty" demonstrated the party's strong will to draw workers into the management of safety.

Compared to safety inspections, having workers sign labour protection agreements was, from the party's perspective, a more direct way to involve them in supervising workplace safety. As the above cases documented in official reports have shown, not all workers had opportunities to express or were willing to express their concerns during safety inspections. For this reason, China's union leaders considered the signing labour protection agreement as a "powerful weapon" to facilitate workers' participation in the supervision of workplace safety. As Jiang Tao said in 1955: "They [labour protection agreements] have a solid mass base and can involve more workers [in the supervision]. Therefore, [by doing this], we can gather the wisdom and strength of the masses, make the measures to improve labour conditions more realistic and more in line with the demands of the masses, and further ensure the completion of the measures on schedule with the support and supervision of the masses."[71]

Between 1955 and 1957, many articles introducing the achievements of signing labour protection agreements appeared in official publications such as *Labour Protection Bulletin* and *Labour*, highlighting the unprecedented effect of labour protection agreements in rendering workers more opportunities to articulate their concerns. As the Taiyuan Mining Machinery Union stated in a report issued in 1955: "Our workers had complaints about safety conditions in the past, but they seldom spoke out [about their concerns]. After workers signed the labour protection agreement, now they are made aware of their supervisory rights."[72] Hua Xiaomei, a female worker at the Shanghai No. 1 Cigarette Factory, said, "In the past, I always thought the 'safe production' was just the

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[71] Jiang Tao 江涛, "Qingchu sixiang zhang'ai, jin yibu kaizhan qianding laodong baohu xieyishu de gongzuo" 清除思想障碍，进一步开展签订劳动保护协议书的工作 [Turning around mental blocks and carrying the signing of labour protection further], in *Zuohao qianding laodong baohu xieyi shu de gongzuo* 做好签订劳动保护协议书的工作 [Doing the signing of labour protection agreements well], ed. Zhonghua quanguo zonggonghui laobao bu 中华全国总工会劳保部 (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1956), 9.

[72] Taiyuan kuangshan jiqi chang 太原矿山机器厂, "Taiyuan kuangshan jiqichang qianding laodong baohu xieyishu de jingyan" 太原矿山机器厂签订劳动保护协议书的经验 [The Taiyuan Mining Machinery Factory's experience in signing labour protection agreements], in *Zuohao laodong baohu xieyishu de qianding gongzuo*, 27.

team leaders' business. But when I saw the labour protection agreement, I understood that the party was caring about us and the 'safe production' was everyone's business."[73] In a 1956 article published in *Labour*, Zang Yanhu also mentioned that after some textile workers signed labour protection agreements, whenever they met their factory directors or union leaders, they would ask: "When will the items listed in the agreement be completed?" These workers also said, "In the past, we were encouraged to express our concerns. But we did not know how. Now we have the agreement. We know how to do it."[74]

These discourses recorded in official documents might not reflect the true voices of the workers, but they conveyed the intent of China's labour authorities to promote the signing of labour protection agreements, which could be further ascertained through the reactions of some enterprise leaders. For example, when some local labour authorities emphasized the legal effect of the agreements and their role in encouraging mass supervision in 1956, some factory administrators felt increasing pressure to sign the agreements. After the labour protection agreement was signed at the Tianjin Mimeograph Factory in 1956, the labour protection committee asked the safety engineering section to display a big-character poster of the agreement. Upon hearing this news, the factory director said, "Now they put me on the spot!"[75] At the Lizhong Acid Plant, the director grumbled as follows, "I must write a self-criticism before I sign the agreement!"[76] A

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[73] Shanghai shi qing gongye weiyuanhui 上海市轻工业委员会, "Zhongqing bu zai Hu gongchang qianding laodong baohu xieyi shu gongzuo zongjie baogao" 中轻部在沪工厂签订劳动保护协议书工作总结报告 [Summary report by the Ministry of Light Industry of the signing of labour protection agreement in factories in Shanghai], May 15, 1956, SMA, c11-2-209-147.

[74] Zang Yanhu 臧衍祜, "Guanyu fangzhi qiye qianding he shixian laodong baohu xieyi shu de qingkuang he yijian" 关于纺织企业签订和实现劳动保护协议书的情况和意见 [Situation and opinions on the signing of labour protection agreements in textile enterprises], *Laodong* 劳动 no. 1 (January 1956): 26–8.

[75] Zhongguo diyi jixie gonghui Tianjin shi weiyuanhui 中国第一季机械工会天津市委员会, "1956 nian laodong baohu xieyi shu de qianding he shixian qingkuang de zongjie baogao" 1956 年劳动保护协议书的签订和实现情况的总结报告 [Summary report of the signing of labour protection agreement and its accomplishment in 1956], TMA, January 28, 1957, x0045-y-000035-005.

[76] Tianjin shi gonghui lianhe hui laodong baohu bu 天津市工会联合会劳动保护部, "Guanyu laodong baohu xieyishu yu zhigong daibiao dahui zhong de laodong baohu gongzuo de qingkuang diaocha baogao" 关于劳动保护协议书与职工代表大会中的劳动保护工作的情况调查报告 [Investigation report of the signing of labour protection agreements and the labour protection work in employee representative assembly], TMA, November 15, 1957, x0044-y-000375-002.

similar reaction also came from Yang Jiangen, the deputy head of the power division of the Shanghai No. 1 Cigarette Factory. After signing the agreement, Yang said very anxiously, "I've been worried almost every day since I signed the agreement. What do I say to workers if the agreement is not fulfilled as scheduled?"[77]

This was how the mass-based safety movements looked on paper. In reality, the safe production movements encountered various obstacles. As mentioned in the introduction, when meeting production quotas became the priority during the push for rapid industrialization, safety was always left aside. This was a brutal but irrefutable fact about Maoist China (and even the post-Mao era).[78] In addition, many local labour authorities and trade unions suffered from the inability to carry out safety movements at the grassroot level.[79] Even when movements took place, complaints from factory administrators still suggest that local labour authorities promoted these movements with multiple purposes: through launching safety inspections and signing labour protection agreements, local party organizations could further establish control over Chinese industrial enterprises by mobilizing workers to pressure enterprise leaders to improve safety conditions during the period of the transformation to state socialism.[80] But leaving aside these problems, one could not deny that the most fundamental purpose of the safe

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[77] Shanghai shi qinggong ye weiyuanhui, *Zhongqing bu zai Hu gongchang qianding laodong baohu xieyi shu gongzuo zongjie baogao*, May 15, 1956, SMA, c11-2-209-147.

[78] One can easily comprehend this fact just by looking at the interjection of Mao Zedong at the Chengdu Conference in March 1958: "In industry, we need to spend a little catching up with the UK. In each province, there are to be five hundred people ready to die. The number will be 10,000 in one year, 100,000 in ten years. We need to get prepared." Wang Chaoxing 王晁星, *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* 毛泽东思想万岁 [Long live Mao Zedong thought] (1968), 52.

[79] Even Jiang Tao himself admitted that by 1957 enterprises that had established safety agencies were still in the minority. Even if in those enterprises where labour protection agencies had been established, a considerable number of labour protection activists and even union leaders were confused about their jobs and "felt that they had nothing to do," let alone able to organize any safety movements. See Jiang Tao, "Liangnian lai de qunzhong laodong baohu gongzuo he dui jinhou gongzuo de yijian," 7–26.

[80] A speech by a Tianjin labour official in 1957 can support my statement. After the completion of socialist transformation in Tianjin in 1957, at a forum on labour protection held in November of the same year, a leader of a district labour department openly stated that the labour protection promoted in private enterprises in the past was "mainly to supervise capitalists and an approach to conduct class struggle. When joint state-private ownership is accomplished, the task of labour protection in our district is currently to improve labour conditions." Shi laodong ju 市劳动局, "Qu laodong baohu zuotan hui zongjie fayan cailiao" 区劳动保护座谈会总结发言材料 [Summary report of the speech in the district-level labour protection symposium], November 8, 1957, TMA, x0084-c-000533-007.

production movement was to improve safety conditions, as China's officials were aware that workplace safety goes hand-in-hand with increasing production. This could be affirmed in the famous slogan coined by Jia Tuofu (1912–1967), the director of the National Planning Commission, which dominated the language on workplace safety before 1984: "Production must be Safe; Safety is for Production" (*shengchan bixu anquan, anquan weile shengchan* 生产必须安全, 安全为了生产).[81] The party launched the mass-based safety movements focusing on safety inspections and the signing of labour protection agreements on the premise that workers were spontaneously conscious of work safety and understood the significance of safe production. "To eliminate accidents, we must first and foremost rely on the working class. Since workers have been engaged in production for a long time, they know the best of the conditions in factories and mines." As *People's Daily* editorialized: "They understand the importance of safe production because of their own stake." As I will show in the next section, at least in the 1950s, however, the CCP's judgement that "workers understand the significance of safety production best" was an overly rosy expectation.

Troublemakers

Grabbing a driving belt of an electronic running pulley, Tang Wenjiang asked his workmate Chen Ruixian to switch on the three-horsepower motor. Tang was fully confident in his powerful hands and firmly believed that this tug-of-war between the running pulley and himself, without any doubt, would end in his victory. When the running pulley operated after Chen started the motor, the belt slipped through Tang's fingers and separated the flesh from his bone.

This accident took place in the Tianjin Woollen Factory in October 1951. It did not arouse any attention from any government authorities of Tianjin at that time. It was not until August 8, 1952, when a textile worker named Li Haishun was injured in the reeling workshop, that the Tianjin Control Commission mentioned Tang's accident in the report on Li Haishun's accident. According to the description in this report, the reason

[81] Dangdai zhongguo congshu bianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo de laodong baohu*, 7.

Tang Wenjiang tried to stop the motor belt with his hands was to show that he had more strength than Chen Ruixian, when they had nothing to do during the lunch break.[82]

As demonstrated by Tang's case, not all workers were as aware of workplace safety as the party expected them to be. Tang's behaviour was by no means a unique case during the Mao era. According to my investigation of many cases of work-related injuries documented in both official and unofficial sources produced in the 1950s and 1960s, there were many accidents directly caused by workers' own negligence. Various psychologies drove many workers to violate safety regulations or intentionally work in unsafe conditions. In the study of the safety engineering in nineteenth-century England coal mines, Tom Dwyer labels two types of miners in terms of their "representation of accidents." One was the "fatalistic worker," and the other was the "autonomous worker."[83] These two terms are appropriate to describe many Chinese workers who adopted two types of mindsets predisposing them to cause accidents during the early years of the Mao era.

The first type of mindset was based on the fatalistic belief that accidental tragedies were not preventable and fundamentally determined by the combination of natural forces, will of heaven, and fate. Some local newspaper accounts published in the 1950s showed that many Chinese workers, especially miners, fatalistically accepted accidents. For example, according to a 1953 *Workers' Daily* article, most workers at the Jiangxi Xiaolong Tungsten Mines "held superstitious beliefs" to "resign themselves to their fates (*tingtian youming* 听天由命)" and were "burning incense and praying to the Bodhisattva [for ensuring safety]."[84] Some articles published in *Guangzhou Daily* in 1953 and 1954 reported that in Guangzhou's Nanhua, Xiguan, Huangsha and some other material handling stations, many material handlers often muttered when accidents

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[82] Tianjin shi renmin zhengfu jiancha weiyuanhui 天津市人民政府人民监察委员会, "Tianjin maozhi chang gongren Li Haishun gongshang shigu diaocha cailiao" 天津毛织厂工人李海顺工伤事故调查材料 [Investigation report of the workplace accident of a worker named Li Haishun from the Tianjin Woolen Factory], October 1952, TMA, x0104-c-000685-006.

[83] Dwyer, *Life and Death at Work,* 16.

[84] *GRRB*, June 14, 1953, CCRCA.

happened: "I had bad luck! It is predestined!"[85] Ma Peixun, chairman of Shanxi Federation of Trade Unions, also mentioned similar cases in a conference report in 1957: "Most of the miners in the Yangquan mines believed that 'those who were doomed to die in the shaft will not drown in the river.'"[86]

It was not only Chinese workers who adhered to such a fatalistic belief in the 1950s.[87] But it has persisted in China for an incredibly long time.[88] By the end of the nineteenth century, this fatalistic belief was still prevalent among Chinese workers, especially among miners. In many mines, miners established temples to worship the Kiln God, asking for his protection for their safety.[89] Moreover, many mining regulations issued in late Qing China indicated that workers were required to recognize such a fatalistic belief. For example, as the "Xinshan Coal Mine Regulation" stipulated: "Before working in the shaft, miners should sign a guarantee: 'I will accept my misfortune as dictated by heaven if accidents happen.'"[90] Similar stipulations could be found in the "Regulations for the Establishment of the Eastern Mines in Fengtian" promulgated in 1897: "If any person perishes from excavating for coal, he shall be paid ten taels of silver

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[85] *Guangzhou ribao* 广州日报 [Guangzhou daily], November 17, 1953; November 28, 1953; December 5, 1953; March 13, 1954, CCRCA.

[86] "Shanxi sheng zong gonghui Ma Peixun zhuxi de jianghua" 山西省总工会马佩勋主席的讲话 [Speech by Ma Peixun, the chairman of the Shanxi Provincial Federation of Trade Unions], March 8, 1957, SPA, c006-0009-0382-0010.

[87] For more on the history of accident fatalism, see Robert Cambell, "Philosophy and the Accident," in *Accidents in History: Injuries, Fatalities and Social Relations*, ed. Roger Cooter and Bill Luckin (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 22–23.

[88] Historians in traditional China were always stingy in giving an account of an ordinary man, but not for Dou Guangguo, a lucky guy who survived a cave-in that killed more than 100 miners in his youth. After Dou resumed the family relationship with his elder sister the Empress Dou, the emperor conferred Dou a rank of Zhangwu Marquis. When talking about his life, the well-known philosopher Wang Chong (27–97 CE) said: "The shaft collapsed. More than one hundred people died. Guangguo was the only survivor. For this reason, he was destined to bask in glory." Wang Chong, *Lunheng* 论衡 [Disquisitions], ed. Beijing daxue lishixi, vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 1471.

[89] On the Kiln God worship in nineteenth- and twentieth-century China, see Zhang Yueqin 张月琴, "Meiyaoshen xinyang yu minguo chunian de Shanxi Datong kuangqu shehu" 煤窑神信仰与民国初年的山西大同矿区社会 [Belief in the Kiln God and the society of Shanxi Datong mining area in the early republican period], *Minsu yanjiu* 民俗研究, no. 1 (2013): 108–14.

[90] Lin Zengping 林增平 and Zhang Kaiyuan 章开沅, eds., *Xinhai geming shi* 辛亥革命史 [The history of the Xinhai Revolution], vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980), 217.

and one coffin."[91]

Such a fatalistic belief toward accidents served as a reasonable explanation for why it was very rare for workers to fight against life-threatening risks. Chinese workers had begun to respond to many kinds of unfair treatment from both Chinese and foreign employers in the form of strikes and riots since the early 1870s. However, their reactions to accidents were mostly passive. For example, after the boiler explosion occurred at the Qingxi Steel Mill, many workers escaped from the factory.[92] Of all the recorded industrial actions that happened from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, only a handful of strikes were triggered by a workplace accident. According to David Pong's investigation, there were twenty-eight strikes that occurred at large, mechanized industries from 1870 to 1894. But none of them was triggered by an accident.[93] Elizabeth Perry's investigation also demonstrates that from 1898 to 1919 only two of the fifty-three strikes launched by unskilled workers in Shanghai were directly caused by "injured workers."[94] The later critics, including labour activists, both socialist and nationalist revolutionists, leftist writers, and party historians, have widely considered this situation a manifestation of a lack of "class consciousness" among Chinese workers. However, it is not so much a manifestation of a lack of "class consciousness" as workers lacking sufficient knowledge of whether accidents were preventable and controllable. In other words, such claims have ignored the firm adherence of workers to the fatalism that they thought they were doomed to get injured or killed by an unpredictable accident. Just as a folk rhyme recited by the miners in the Mentougou Mines said: "As long as I enter the shaft, there is a thirty percent chance of a fatal accident. I have no idea if I can get out

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[91] "Kaiban Fengtian dongbian kuangwu zhangcheng" 开办奉天东边矿务章程 [Rules of running the Eastern Mines in Fengtian], in *Zhongguo jindai gongren jieji he gongren yundong* 中国近代工人阶级和工人运动 [The working class and labour movements in modern China], eds. Tang Yuliang 唐玉良 and Liu Mingkui 刘明逵 (Beijing: Zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 2002), 368.

[92] Liu Xingming 刘兴明, "Zhongguo shouge gangtie zhong gongye: Qingxi tiechang" 中国首个钢铁重工业: 清溪铁厂 [The first steel industry in modern China: The Qingxi Ironwork], *Wenshi tiandi* 文史天地, March 4, 2022, https://movement.gzstv.com/news/detail/M4mNG/.

[93] David Pong, "Government Enterprises & Industrial Relations in Late Qing China," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 47, no. 1 (March 2001): 16–17.

[94] In general, the most common causes of industrial conflicts were low wages, various forms of illicit wage withholdings, tardy payment, excessive deductions for food, increased workload or hours, unfair firing of workers, excessive deductions for food. See Appendix A and B, Perry, *Shanghai on Strike,* 261–64.

alive. Four stones squeeze a piece of meat. It's hardly bearable even if I am not dead."[95]

The second mindset was driven by what John Fabian Witt calls "irrational optimism" in describing how American workers estimated the risks they faced at the turn of the twentieth century.[96] This irrational optimism fell into two specific broad categories, one in which workers were ignorant of risks and one in which workers underestimated risks. The first category covered newly recruited workers mostly. As a 1953 report by the Department of Labour Protection of the Beijing Federation of Trade Union stated, some young workers newly recruited in 1953 were curious about machines. They often touched the machines casually so that they were injured.[97] As documented in a 1953 article by the Beijing Local Industry Bureau, 80 percent of the 1,700 newly recruited workers were from rural areas. Because they had never seen a machine before, most of them often fiddled with the machines and eventually caused accidents.[98]

Workers belonging to the second category were mostly self-perceived "quick-witted" people. Many of them arrogantly believed their superb working techniques or innate aptitude for the management and use of machinery tools would allow them to overcome risks. Their overconfidence in their working skills would lead them to violate safety regulations. As some miners who refused to wear mining lamps in Huainan Coal Mine said in 1956: "Fists won't fall on the true martial artists. Iron rods won't stab an old hand. Although there are many crows in the sky, how many times can crow poop fall on your head?"[99] Some of them, like Tang Wenjiang, even deliberately worked in hazardous conditions to show off their physical prowess or incomparable skills. According to a 1954

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[95] Yuan Shusen 袁树森, *Lao Beijing de meiye* 老北京的煤业 [Coal industry in old Beijing] (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2005), 251.

[96] Witt, *Accidental Republic,* 32.

[97] Beijing shi gonghui lianhe hui laobao bu 北京市工会联合会劳保部, "Guanyu 1953 nian jishu Anquan gongzuo zongjie he laodong baohu gongzuo baogao" 关于 1953 年技术安全工作总结和劳动保护工作报告 [Summary report on technical safety work and labour protection work in 1953], August 30, 1953, BMA, 016-001-00020.

[98] Beijing shi difang gongye ju bangongshi 北京市地方工业局办公室, "Juzifang zhuanwa chang zhongshi anquan shengchan" 驹子房砖瓦厂重视安全生产 [The Juzifang Brick and Tile Factory attaches importance to safety work], December 7, 1953, BMA, 016-001-00379-00010.

[99] *NBCK*, February 24, 1955 (34): 173.

newspaper article, many workers in Wuhan breached safety rules because they wanted to "make an exhibition of their abilities" (*lu yi shou* 露一手). Consequently, they often got injured in their workplaces.[100] A story published in *Xinmin Evening News* in 1954 also suggests that many more workers shared a similar mindset with Tang Wenjiang and deliberately exposed themselves to workplace risks:

> There was such a worker in the East Station of the Shanghai Railway Bureau. He climbed to the top of a stationary train and walked around as if nothing had happened. Jumping from one car to another, he yelled to the people on the ground with pride, "See! I am flying down!" Seeing this scene, some staff at the spot rushed to call him down from the roof and reprimanded him. After talking back a few times, this worker felt ashamed and went on to promise: "I won't do it again."[101]

Workers with longer work experience appeared to be more susceptible to underestimating workplace risks. As a 1953 *Guangzhou* Daily article stated, after operating the machines for several years, some workers in the Guangzhou Linen Factory believed that the performance of the machines was under their belts. Therefore, they thought that practicing safety regulations did not matter at all. A linen loom operator named Huang Xiaoying even said: "I know clearly how many screws are in this machine. Why would I worry about an accident?[102] This category of workers always had this saying hanging on their lips: "I have been doing it this way for decades but have never had an accident!" This saying often served to express workers' discontent when safety inspectors or other workers tried to correct their violations of safety rules. At 11:30 a.m. on April 30, 1953, in a shaft of the Xiguo mines, Linfen, Shanxi Province, a coal pillar rib fell on and killed the coal digger Zhang Guizi. Zhang's last words before his death were with his fellow worker Lü Jianzhong, who had warned him about his breach of the safety

[100] *Changjiang ribao* 长江日报 [Yangtze river daily], June 13, 1954, CCRCA.

[101] *XMWB*, November 29, 1954, 6.

[102] *Guangzhou ribao*, July 13, 1953, CCRCA.

rule: “I have been digging [coal] for decades! Am I still no better than you [in terms of knowing how to dig coal]?”[103]

In addition, if this type of workers had experienced workplace accidents, many of them would see injuries as credentials of seniority in a particular industry. For example, some stamping machine operators in Shanghai believed that “out of ten operators there are nine who don’t have all their fingers left. If you never lose a finger, you are not a good operator.”[104] In the eyes of many foundry workers in Qingdao, “if we don’t get burned once or twice, we cannot afford to be called foundry workers.”[105] Some workers in the Shanghai national cotton factory No. 1 said, “Monks have ordination scars as coppersmiths have scars. How can you acquire unrivalled skills if you don’t get hurt on the job?”[106]

Factors contributing to Chinese workers’ accident proneness in the Mao era, of course, were not limited to the fatalistic beliefs and irrational optimism described above. Interestingly, one can hardly find these descriptions in reports and statistics containing accident causations identified by labour officials. As I will show in the next section, in many accident statistics, China’s labour officials phrased workers’ negligence as “lack of safety education.” This is one of the most distinguished features of Mao-era accident statistics.

The Phrasing of Accident Causation in Statistics

On July 15, 1951, Tianjin hosted a grand exhibition on industrial hygiene. The organizer, the Tianjin Industrial Hygiene Experimental Institute had prepared 1,650

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[103] Shanxi sheng renmin zhengfu Linfen qu zhuanyuan gongshu 山西省人民政府临汾区专员公署, “Guanyu songcheng Shanxi sheng Linfen qu Xiguo meikuang yu Yicheng meikuang shigu diaocha baogao shu de baogao ji chuli yijian” 关于送呈山西省临汾区西郭煤矿与翼城煤矿事故调查报报告书的报告及处理意见 [Regarding the submission of the investigation report of the accidents in the Xiguo coal mine and Yicheng coal mine in the Linfen District and processing opinions], June 20, 1953, SPA, c006-0005-2000-0004.

[104] *Shanghai xinwen ribao* 上海新闻日报 [Shanghai news daily], October 17, 1952, CCRCA.

[105] *Qingdao ribao* 青岛日报 [Qingdao daily], August 29, 1952, CCRCA.

[106] *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报 [Liberation daily], August 28, 1952, CCRCA.

exhibits. After reviewing the preview in early July, the Tianjin Industry Bureau asked the organizer to replace posters and photographs reflecting workers' carelessness because they claimed that workers' negligence should not be exposed in the exhibition. They also stressed that the exhibits in the safety pavilion must be arranged to reflect the development of safety equipment and safety education. As finally displayed in the formal exhibition, only 1,187 exhibits were retained. An exhibition board showing an accident caused by workers' violation of operation regulations in the No. 2 Textile Machinery Factory was placed in a position that was relatively not prominent. In addition, this exhibition area was themed as "safety education."[107]

This case helps us to decipher a word game: "lack of safety education" and "workers' negligence" were somehow synonymous in the official narrative. In other words, "lack of safety education" was a mild expression commonly used by China's labour officials in accident statistics and reports to identify accidents directly caused by workers' negligence. The motivation behind the party's avoidance of mentioning the workers' faults is not so difficult to fathom. First, as mentioned earlier, one of the purposes of the party's active intervention in the management of workplace safety was to establish its control in factories. Thus, the party's labour officials tended to minimize the causal relationship between workers' various misconducts and accidents in terms of assigning accident responsibilities, and in many cases shifted the blame to administrators of factories and mines. This tendency was already evident in the party's handling of the Yiluo accident in 1950. In the investigation report, the investigation team slightly mentioned workers' smoking but wrote elaborately on the damage to the mine shaft by mine directors stealing coals. But according to Fu Baoxian, the punishments were completely unfair to Mao and Zhang. "Smoking in the mine shaft was common at that time. But I don't believe the accident was caused by stealing coal. Being a miner was a tough job at that time," said Fu. "We worked as coal diggers for wheat only. The stolen

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[107] Jia Ge 贾鸽, *Xin Zhongguo jianli chuqi Tianjin de yibing jiqi fangzhi*, 1949–1966, 新中国建立初期天津的疫病及其防治, 1949–1966 [Epidemics and prevention in Tianjin in the early years of the founding of new China: 1949–1966] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2014), 89; Tianjin shi renmin zhengfu gonggong weisheng ju 天津市人民政府公共卫生局, "Tianjin shi gongye weisheng zhanlan hui zongjie" 天津市工业卫生展览会总结 [Summary of the Tianjin industrial hygiene exhibition], September 25, 1951, TMA, x0053-y-000106-014.

coal could neither be sold nor eaten. Who would steal coal? The official verdict against Mao and Zhang was entirely for finding a scapegoat."[108]

Second, as the case of the 1951 exhibition suggests, it was a slap in the face to the party that claimed that workers understood workplace safety best to admit that workers had a propensity for causing accidents. Thus, when China's labour officials handled an accident seriously, they would avoid directly condemning workers who were held accountable. In the years following the Yiluo accident, China's labour officials continued to exercise the principle that workers should not be directly blamed for causing accidents. This even became one of the guiding principles in the regulation of work safety in the mid-1950s, especially after Soviet labour protection expert G. A. Ladygin visited China in 1955. At a training course for labour protection cadres in Beijing in March 1955, Ladygin stressed that "letting workers bear the responsibility for accidents means that we are not taking a firm stand on the struggle against accidents."[109] For some scientists in China, interestingly, such a view was debatable. In a 1957 academic paper analyzing the causation of accidents, phycologist Li Jiazhi euphemistically contested Ladygin's idea: "We should not take a one-sided interpretation of the expert's (Ladygin's) discourse that workers are not responsible for any accidents, let alone finding the causes of accidents among workers. This would confuse the real causes of accidents."[110] Li's discourse implied that it seemed to be commonplace before 1957 for factory administrators and labour cadres to avoid holding workers responsible for accidents.

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[108] *Dahebao*, October 12, 2012, A12.

[109] G. A. Ladygin was the head of the labour protection department of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions. In March 1955, the Ministry of Labour held a camp training for labour protection cadres in Beijing. Ladygin was invited to give lectures at the training courses. See Sun Andi 孙安弟, "1949–1978 nian: xin Zhongguo laodong baohu zai mosuo zhong quezhe qianjin" 1949–1978 年: 新中国劳动保护在摸索中曲折前进 [1949–1978: labour protection in new China was moving forward in a zigzag way], *Laodong baohu* 劳动保护, no. 6 (June 2021): 18.

[110] Li Jiazhi studied in the Department of Psychology at Tsinghua University in 1935 and graduated from the National Southwestern Associated University in Kunming in 1940. In 1950, he received his master's degree in psychology from the UCLA. Li Jiazhi 李家治 and Xu Liancang 徐联仓, "Gongye shigu yuanyin de chubu fenxi" 工业事故原因的初步分析 [A preliminary analysis of the causation of industrial accidents], *Xinli xuebao* 心理学报 1, no. 2 (December 1957): 192.

The cases of Qiu Caikang and Wang Cunbo, probably the most widely publicized workplace accidents that took place during the Mao era, provide further evidence to my discovery that the party would avoid mentioning workers' fault when handling accidents. On May 26, 1958, in the Shanghai No. 3 Steel Mill, a steelworker Qiu Caikang was splashed by molten steel that fell from the bridge crane, sustaining burns covering 89 percent of his entire body skin. Doctors at the Shanghai Guangci Hospital succeeded in making Qiu survive. On January 2, 1963, Wang Cunbo, a young worker at the Shanghai Machine Tool Steel Die Factory, severed his right hand above the wrist when operating the machine. After a seven-hour operation, Dr. Chen Zhongwei replanted Wang's right hand by some miracle. At the time of each accident, the CCP launched overwhelming propaganda tactfully transforming the account of the doctors' salvaging of Qiu and Wang into the manifestation of the party's concern for workers and the superiority of socialism. According to the recollection of Tang Zhenchang, the chief editor of *Wenhui bao* (Wenhui Daily 文汇报) in 1963, Qiu "had a responsibility in the accident."[111] Similarly, Ba Jin, one of the most influential writers active in modern China, wrote two reportage articles based on both accidents: A Battle to Rescue Lives (*yichang qiangjiu shengming de zhandou* 一场抢救生命的战斗) and The Hand (*shou* 手). The latter contained an inconspicuous detail that Wang Cunbo's accident resulted from his violation of the operating rules.[112] However, these details were missing in the propaganda.

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[111] As Tang Zhenchang recalled, the first secretary of the CCP Shanghai committee Ke Qingshi asked the editorial office of *Wenhui bao* to highlight "Qiu's indomitable fighting spirit" and not to write about the doctors when reporting on Qiu's incident. In addition, Tang also said, "This was an accident in which Qiu had a responsibility. But we must carefully avoid mentioning this. Every time I think about this story, I blush." See Tang Zhenchang 唐振常, *Fanxian zazou* 繁弦杂奏 [Interweaving notes] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1997), 260.

[112] This was how Ba Jin documented Wang's incident in his reportage: "Wang Cunbo, a young benchworker, is in his twenties. Shortly after he was on his shift that day, he saw that there were few people working on the punching machine. So, he volunteered to work as a substitute worker on the punching machine. Soon after the machine started to run, he found that the mould was out of position. He immediately reached out to make it to the right position. Suddenly, he realized that his action was against the operation procedure. He tried to take his hand back but he made a panic mistake. He accidentally stepped on the switch and then the plunger tip plunged. With a clack, the plunger tip severed Wang's right hand above the wrist." See Ba Jin 巴金 and Yan Ping 燕平, *Shou: duanshou zaizhi de gushi* 手: 断手再植的故事 [Hand: A story of hand replantation] (Shanghai: Shaonian ertong chubanshe, 1964), 3.

Based on the above analyses, one can draw an inference that accidents caused by "lack of education" documented in official statistics basically refer to accidents caused by workers' negligence. Therefore, by consulting more accident statistics by ACFTU or local trade unions in the 1950s one could see that workers' negligence, which appeared as "lack of education," was still the major cause of work-related accidents. According to the accident statistics conducted by the Textile Workers Union of China, of 590 accidents that occurred in the textile sector in Shanghai in April 1953, 183 were caused by "lack of safety education," accounting for 31.01 percent of all accidents, compared to 31.69 percent in May 1953.[113] Of all 356 accidents reported in Tianjin in 1953, accidents caused by "lack of safety education" accounted for 36.52 percent, far exceeding the number of accidents caused by other reasons.[114] According to the statistics compiled by the Beijing Municipal Committee of the First Mechanical Trade Union, in 1955, 4 percent of the 9,276 workers in the heavy industry sector in Beijing were injured on their jobs. 65.5 percent of which were caused by "distraction" and 20 percent were caused by "lack of safety education."[115] In the first half of 1955, 35.18 percent of the accidents that occurred in the heavy industry sphere in Tianjin were caused by "lack of safety education." This percentage was 47.19 percent in the Tianjin Steel Mill in the same period.[116] At the Fourth National Labour Protection Conference in 1960, Mao Qihua (1903–1997), the director of the department of labour protection of the Ministry of Labour, mentioned that the Labour Protection Bureau had analyzed 100 accidents. The conclusion was that

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[113] Fangzhi gonghui 纺织工会, "Sannian duo lai fangzhi gonghui laodong baohu gongzuo zongjie" 三年多来纺织工会劳动保护工作总结 [Summary of labour protection work of textile unions over the past three years], 1953, TMA, x0045-y-000099-010.

[114] Zhongguo fangzhi gonghui Tianjin shi weiyuanhui laobao bu 中国纺织工会天津市委员会劳保部, 1953 nian laobao gongzuo zongjie 1953 年劳保工作总结 [Summary of labour protection work in 1953], August 17, 1954, TMA, x0045-y-000099-009.

[115] Zhongguo diyi jixie gonghui Beijing shi weiyuanhui 中国第一机械工会北京市委员会, "1955 nian laobao ke gongzuo zongjie" 1955 年劳保科工作总结 [Work summary of labour protection branch in 1955], December 1955, BMA, 079-001-00055-058.

[116] Zhongguo zhonggongye xiehui Tianjin weiyuanhui laobao bu 中国重工业协会天津委员会劳保部, "Youguan anquan shengchan fangmian de jige wenti" 有关安全生产方面的几个问题 [A few questions about safe production], July 4, 1957, TMA, x0045-y-000020-013.

among the 100 investigated accidents, 48 were caused by "carelessness," and twenty were caused by "lack of safety education."[117]

It is not my intention in showing these statistics, of course, to emphasize that China's factory administrators or labour authorities could be exempted from accident responsibilities in the 1950s, nor is it to suggest that the lion share of accidents in the 1950s should be properly attributed to workers' fault. What I would like to emphasize through decoding the presentation of China's accident statistics is that the vast majority of Chinese workers were not as being aware of work safety as the party assumed. In addition, the party's use of "lack of education" to describe workers' negligence not only served the purpose of saving its face when workers' actual behaviour contradicted what the party had already proclaimed, but also indicated that the party believed that workers had a lot of room for improvement in terms of work safety. In the following section, I will examine how the party promoted safety education among workers and what safety education looked like in practice.

Safety Education

Before 1953, only a few factories and mines had introduced a safety education system. It was not until 1954 that safety education appeared on the agenda of the Central Ministry of Labour, marked by the promulgation of the "Decision on Further Strengthening Safety Education."[118] There were two specific forms of safety education, one was the "three-level safety education system" for new workers, which was first introduced in 1953 by Dalian Chemical Plant, and the other was the regular education system for workers of all ages including lectures, study groups, seminars on recollections

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[117] Mao Qihua 毛齐华, "Gaoju zongluxian hongqi, dali yongqiang laodong baohu gongzuo, wei shengchan jianshe dayuejin fuwu: zai di sici quanguo laodong baohu gongzuo huiyi shang de baogao" 高举总路线红旗,大力加强劳动保护工作, 为生产建设大跃进服务—在第四次全国劳动保护工作会议上报告 [Hold up the red flags of the general line, vigorously strengthen labour protection work, and serve the production in the Great Leap Forward—[Mao Qihua's] report at the fourth national labour protection work conference], *Laodong*, no. 22 (1960): 7–17.

[118] *Dangdai zhongguo* congshu bianji weiyuanhui 《当代中国》从书编辑委员会, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo de laodong baohu* 当代中国的劳动保护 [Labour protection in contemporary China] (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 1992), 234–37.

of accidents, and safety regulation examination. Since the mid-1950s, many local labour unions had also begun to hold sessional training sessions for enterprise-level union leaders or labour protection activists. Some of them were trained to become full-time safety inspectors, while the others oversaw instructing workers with safety operations and improving safety regulations in the factories. The focus areas of safety education varied among factories and industries, however, there were two common threads: first, ideological education that focused on dispelling workers' fatalistic belief that accidents were unpreventable and, second, technical education aimed at preventing workers from violating safety rules or regulations.

Providing workers with natural scientific knowledge was a major component of safety education. As highlighted in many official accounts, the recipients of this type of education were mostly old workers. For example, at the Hunan Liruan Yangdong Coal Mines, the mine administrators began in the mid-1950s to hold safety science lectures and workers' study groups. According to a 1959 *Labour* article, by attending such lectures or activities many miners began to understand why and how accidents occurred. After attending a lecture about mine fires, an old miner named Li Yiyin said: "Now I understand that 'ghost fire' is just the methane fire."[119]

It is worth noting that the CCP was not the first authority to recognize the importance of eradicating fatalistic beliefs among workers. As early as the 1930s, some Chinese national industrialists and labour authorities began to argue that one of the keys to improving industrial safety was to shatter the fatalistic belief about accidents.[120] The CCP, however, unlike these national industrialists, took a firmer stand in compelling workers to abandon such beliefs because fatalism was utterly incompatible with the ideology to which the party subscribed. Thus, much ideological educations also focused

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[119] Li Xingyuan 李兴元, "Maque wo chu fenghuang, xiao meiyao chuang qiji" 麻雀窝出凤凰，小煤窑出奇迹 [A phoenix from a sparrow's nest, a miracle from a small coal kiln], *Laodong* no. 6 (April 1959): 27.

[120] For example, as Shen Jichao, chief engineer in the Jiangnan Paper Mill, argued in 1944: "As time goes on, scientific knowledge becomes widespread. The fatalistic belief of 'Man's fate is as uncertain as changing weather' is no longer accepted by most people with good education. Science has allowed people to avoid many natural disasters. Similarly, in factories, the issue of industrial safety has attracted much attention and research." Shen Jichao 沈季超, "Gongye anquan" 工业安全 [Industrial safety], *Zhongguo gongye* 中国工业 2, no. 3 (1944): 28.

on instilling workers with knowledge related to Dialectics of Nature or dialectics materialism. As a 1953 case shows, the labour protection group of the North China Administrative Committee invited some local military representatives to give a lecture on the history of social development at the sixth branch of the Tianjin United Steelwork. The focus of the lecture was to preach the idea that "men can control machines" by introducing Engels's work "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Human."[121]

In 1957, Mao published "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People," offering a new theoretical ground for local labour departments to justify the preventability of accidents. As Mao Qihua stated at the Fourth National Conference on Labour Protection in 1960: "Those who believe that 'accidents are inevitable' regard the possibility of accidents as reality and ignore the subjective initiative of people. This erroneous view weakens people's will to struggle, and the consequence is that accidents continue to happen."[122] In the same year, at a meeting in Shanxi Province, Zhang Yu stated: "Bureaucrats believe that production is a 'battlefield' where death is inevitable. Such a view suggests that they are outright cowards when facing natural disasters and accidents. Pessimists always deny the subjective initiative and repudiate the fact that 'man is the determining factor.'" Similar statements were repeatedly emphasized in the safety inspector training course held at the Beijing Steel Mill in 1960: "Production is the battle against nature, having two sides: safety and unsafety. To improve safety, we must first and foremost recognize the side of safety and work out methods to prevent accidents.

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[121] Huabei xingzheng weiyuanhui laodong ju laodong baohu zu 华北行政委员会劳动局劳动保护组, "Tianjin lianhe zhigang diliu fenchang anquan shengchan de jidian jingyan" 天津联合制钢厂第六分厂安全生产的几点经验 [Some experiences of safety production in the sixth branch of the Tianjin United Steel Mill], *Laodong* no. 6 (April 1953): 42.

[122] Mao Qihua 毛齐华, "Gaoju zong luxian hongqi, dali yongqiang laodong baohu gongzuo, wei shengchan jianshe 'da yuejin' fuwu" 高举总路线红旗, 大力加强劳动保护工作, 为生产建设"大跃进"服务 [Hold up the red flags of the general line, vigorously strengthen labour protection work, and serve the production in the Great Leap Forward], in *Anquan shengchan shiliao xuanji* 安全生产史料选辑 [Collected sources of safe production], ed. Zhongguo anquan shengchan xiehui shizhi weiyuanhui bangongshi 中国安全生产协会史志史志委员会办公室, vol. 1 (Beijing: Yingji guanli chubanshe, 2019), 240.

It must be understood that accidents are avoidable."[123]

The efforts to dispel fatalism among workers were far less than effective in the Mao era, at least for miners. My interviews with several worker informants in the Xishan Coal Mines in Shanxi Province suggest that fatalism remained widespread until the use of hydraulic mining safety equipment led to a marked reduction in mining accidents in the 1980s. For example, Yang Qingmin, who worked for the Xishan Coal Mines from 1974 to 1978, still used "to be obsessed with some devilish idea" (*guimi xinqiao* 鬼迷心窍) in my interview with him in 2019 to describe his feeling about two minor accidents he experienced in 1975.[124] One day in 1975, Yang and three other miners were rolling an ore car out of a mine. When the car reached a waterlogged area, it overturned. Yang, who was holding the car, was suddenly squeezed between the car and the coal wall. He was so young that he could move agilely. In a moment, he rolled himself into a ball and curled his legs up to protect his chest. Seeing this, the miners around him ran to pick up the ore car and pull Yang out. Yang was then carried by a strong miner to the bathroom to take a bath, then sent back to the dormitory. When he woke up the next day and found his chest unscathed, he breathed a sigh of relief:

> As you know, there were often pools of water on the ground in the shaft. I knew that it was easy to get into an accident in such a place, so I was very careful to hold on to the mine car. But somehow, it still overturned. I was so scared at that time. But before I could settle down, an older miner yelled at me, "Fuck! You make trouble almost every day! Stop working there, sooner or later you're going to die there!"

Yang said he became a bit warier after the accident. Nevertheless, he was involved in another accident shortly afterward:

> It's hard to say if it's "superstition" or not. It was as if I was just standing there and waiting for the accident to come. There were two tracks under the mine, not

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[123] Beijing shi laodong ju laobao ke 北京市劳动局劳保科, "Liangang chang gongduan zhang xiaozu anquany yuan xunlian ban baogao" 炼钢厂工段长小组安全员训练班报告 [Report on the safety personnel training course for section chief group in steel mill], January 19, 1960, BMA, 110-001-01035-00016.

[124] In 1974, Yang Qingmin, who had just graduated from high school, read about a piece of news that the Xishan Coal Mine in Taiyuan was recruiting miners. For a living, he moved from his hometown Yuncheng to Taiyuan to work as a miner. In 1978, he left the Xishan mine and became a high school teacher. During his four-year career as a miner, he encountered danger twice. Interview 1.

> too far apart. Two ore cars were running on opposite sides of the tracks. I was standing in the middle of the two tracks, shouting "pull, pull" to one of the cars. Suddenly, I realized that there was something wrong. Why was I standing in the middle? When the car approached me, the person pulling the car saw me and braked suddenly. But, you know, inertia still carried the car to me. My legs got caught between the two ore cars. 'Oh, no, it finishes my legs off,' I thought. When some miners separated the two cars, I found my leg got swollen. I burst into tears. After that, I was taken to the hospital. The next day, I tried to get down to the ground to see if I could walk. Fuckin' good! I could! You see my legs work well now, but at that time my legs were really swollen.

Even though Yang did not become disabled, he rested in the hospital for three months. Yang recalled that the mine's safety department did not give any explanation of the accident, nor did they conduct any post-mortem analyses of the accident. But for Yang, the cause of the accident was simple: "I knew I couldn't stand there, but I did. I don't think I was aware of it. I was just there and waiting for a hit.[125]

Yang's account of the accident expresses his subscription to fatalism— these two accidents were doomed to happen and perhaps it was his fate that allowed him to survive both. Like Yang, many of my worker informants provided vague accounts of their understanding of fatalism. Wang Jihao, a miner who was born in 1934, asserted in my interview that he has always believed that accidents were avoidable. "Before liberation, there had been many people who believed in the Kiln God in my place. There were much fewer after liberation. But some leaders still believed in that [the Kiln God] and preserved a temple. But I was very aware of safety. I've been a miner my whole life, and I have never had a scratch on my skin." He said, "As long as you pay attention to safety, you can avoid accidents definitely. But if you don't, accidents are bound to happen." However, unlike Yang, Wang Jihao became a leader of the Guandi shaft of the Xishan mines in 1957. As a party cadre, his role in serving the party made him realize that he could not entrust his life to the Kiln God: "I could no longer believe in that after I became a party member in 1957."[126] The account of Wang suggests that those who asserted that they believed that accidents were preventable might not be able to escape fatalism.

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[125] Interview 1.

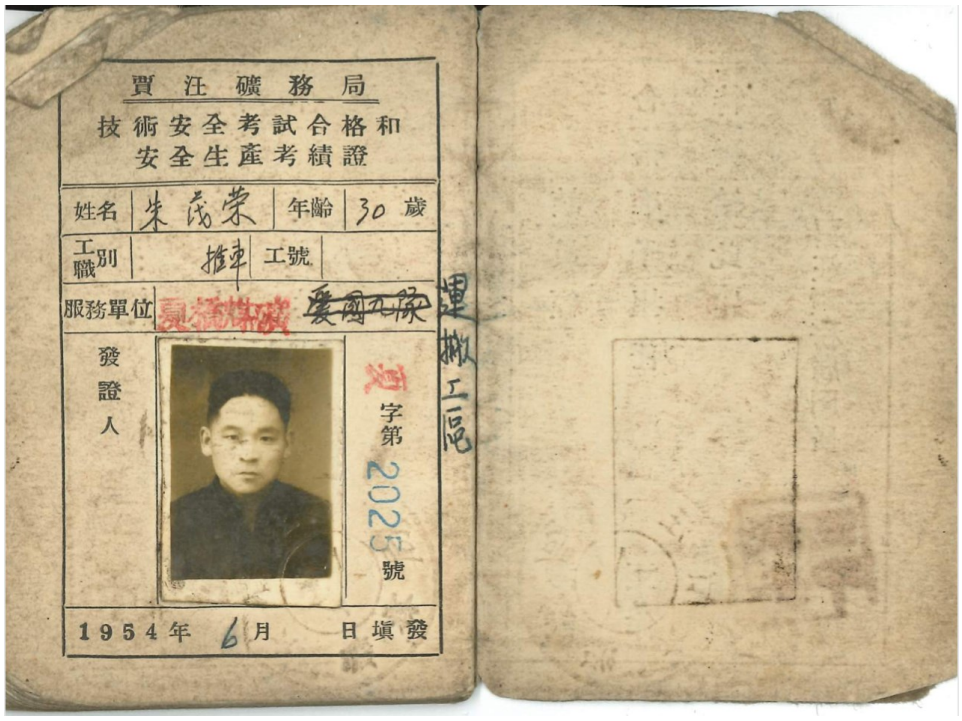
[126] Interview 2.

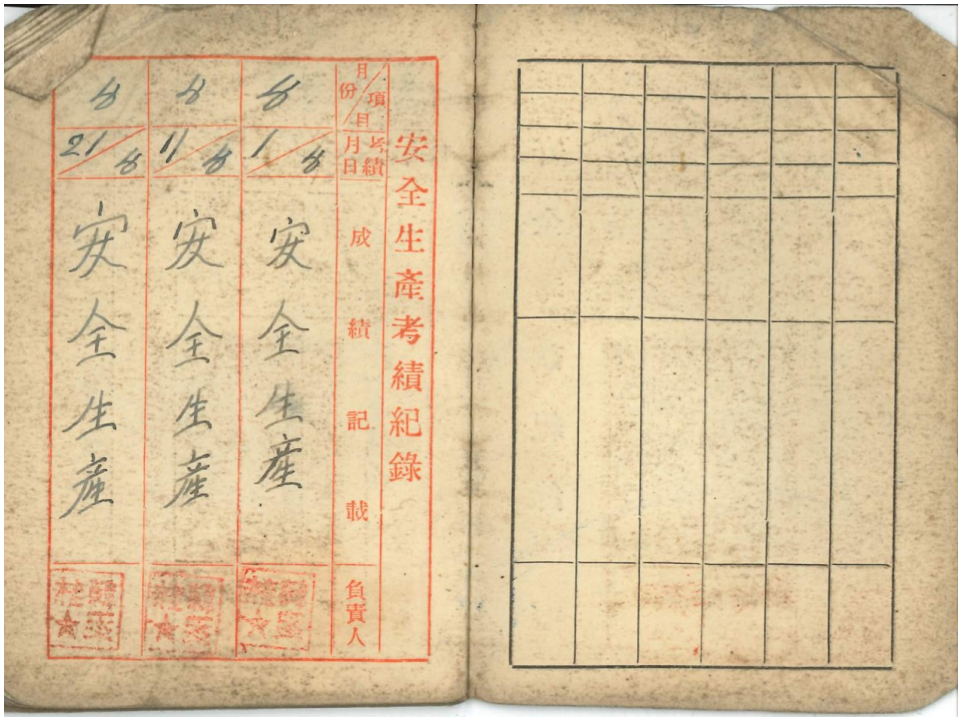
Compared to ideological education, technical education reached a wider audience but was targeted mostly at young workers in most industries. After the CCP initiated the FFYP in 1953, China's industrial enterprises began to recruit an increasing number of young workers. In this context, the party claimed that there was a growing need to promote safety education among young workers without experience in production. In 1955, some major industry ministries such as the Ministry of Textile Industry and the Ministry of Dye Industry updated the stipulations on safety education. Most parts of these stipulations were concerned with young workers. However, the practice of safety education aimed at young workers encountered many problems. For many factories, those illiterate workers first posed a serious challenge to the deployment of safety education. In Shijingshan Iron and Steel Mill, many workers did not understand the term "regulations" or "systems" when they were instructed by lecturers in 1952. They also found it difficult to complete the written test of safety knowledge. As a result, ten percent of the workers failed the test. To deal with this problem, the factory replaced written tests with group oral tests. As a result, the pass rate got higher and the failure rate was only three percent.[127]

Workers who passed the test were given a "certificate of safe operation" as a sign of completing safety training. In principle, workers were required to carry the certificate, containing one or two pages for recording accidents, when they were on duty. Once workers were injured on the job, they should provide the certificate before getting first-aid in the hospital. In addition, such a certificate was also used for verifying workers' eligibility of being selected as advanced productive labourers. For these reasons, this safety education system endorsed by the safety work certificate brought a great deal of discontent among workers. In workers' eyes, the safety certificate was just a tool for "recording their demerit points," seemingly having no connection with improving workplace safety. Li Fengming, a stack worker in Tianjin No. 2 Cotton Spinning Factory said, "This thing is really strict. I can't work [with this]." An unnamed worker also said,

[127] *Anquan jishu laodong baohu tongbao* 安全技术劳动保护通报 [Safety engineer and labour protection bulletin], vol. 3, July 28, 1953, TMA, x0084-c-000189-003.

"My goodness! Just write down some accidents now [on the certificate]!"[128]





[128] *Anquan jishu laodong baohu tongbao*, vol. 8, November 24, 1953, TMA, x0084-c-000189-003.

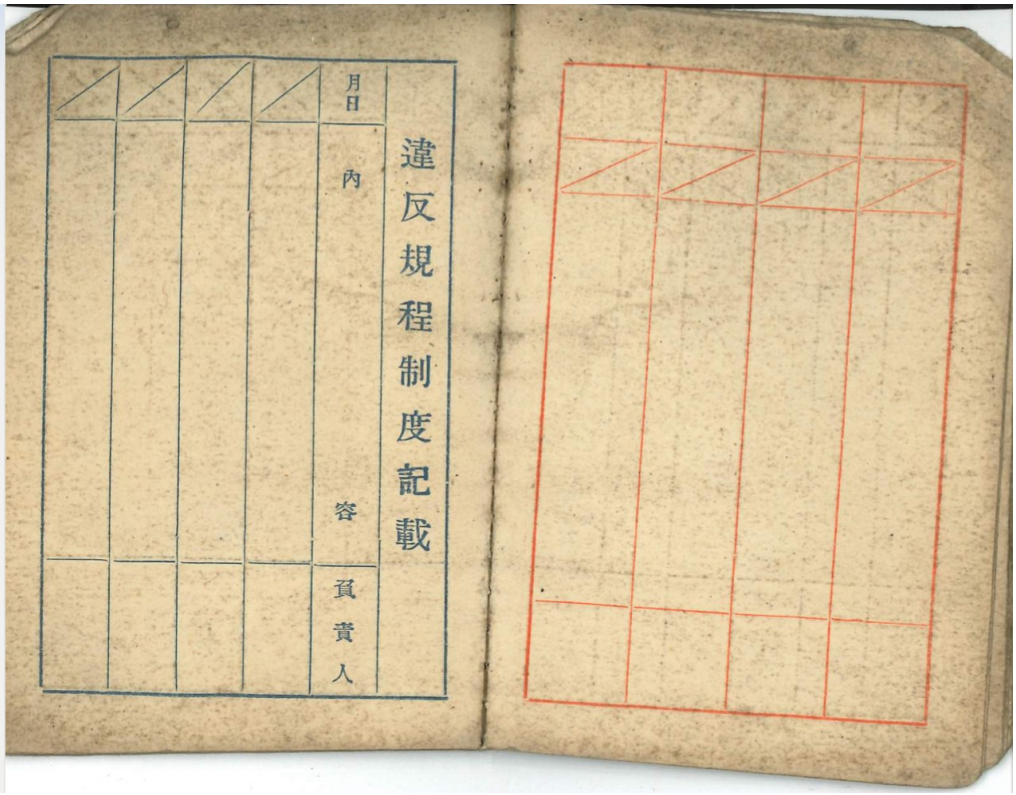


Figure 1. A certificate of safe production for miners in the Jiawang coal mines, 1954.

Workers who failed safety tests were not allowed to work. However, in many cases, the factory leaders would bend the rules. Chu Wanzheng, a welder at the No. 2 Cotton Spinning Mill, failed to pass the safety test in 1952. It was originally decided by the collective discussion that he would not obtain a certificate. However, the factory leaders asked him to "make a deep self-criticism with a pledge" and let him get the certificate anyway. Through this method, 98 percent of the workers obtained the certificate in the end.[129] This case shows that safety education did not contribute to strengthening workers' safety awareness but imposed an extra psychological burden on workers. In addition, the practice of linking individual safety records to the eligibility of being selected as model workers or advanced producers did have a counterproductive result: if workers had a minor workplace injury, they would not report the injury. Guan Qingwen, a female worker who was born in 1937 in Tianjin and joined No. 105 Factory

[129] *Anquan jishu laodong baohu tongbao*, vol. 8, November 24, 1953, TMA, x0084-c-000189-003.

in 1956, said, "At that time, almost no one reported minor accidents because they were afraid that if they did so, it would tarnish the 'collective honour' and deprive them of the eligibility of being selected as labour models."[130]

It was arguable whether or not the "three-level safety education" system had real effects in preventing accidents. At least in some factories, almost any workers could pass safety tests—regardless of whether they had acquired safety knowledge or not. The following evidence suggests that many workers involved in accidents had been inculcated with safety knowledge. In July 1957, the Tianjin Labour Bureau submitted an accident report to the Municipal People's Committee of Tianjin, which included nineteen cases. Of the nineteen cases, only four involved workers who had never received safety education. On November 27, 1956, at 1:10 p.m., in the Haymaking Factory of Jinnan, 24-year-old female worker Fan Wenge, who had received safety education, had her fingers crushed by the machine because she found using protective equipment too troublesome. On January 11, 1957, Liu Ji, a 29-year-old male worker at the Tianjin Zhicheng Printing and Iron Paper Mill, was in a bad mood because his leader had just refused his request for a lighter toolbox. In a trance, he placed a bowl used for catching dripping oil under the still-running gear wheels and his fingertips were severed by the machine. This worker had also received safety education.[131]

In 1957, many enterprises began to abandon the "three-level safety education." In the same year, the party introduced a policy called "combining old workers with young workers," which ushered in the subsequent phase of safety education in China's industrial sectors. [132] Informed by this policy, old workers were entrusted with a more active role in

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[130] Interview 8.

[131] Shi renwei bangongshi 市人委办公室, "1957 nian shi laodong ju youguan shangwang shigu wenti de baogao cailiao" 1957 年市劳动局有关伤亡事故问题的报告材料 [Report materials about injuries and accidents in 1957 by the Municipal Ministry of Labour], July 30, 1957, TMA, x0053-c-001479-001.

[132] As Li Xuefeng stated in 1957: "The working masses can be roughly divided into three groups. The first group consists of old workers [who began their careers] before liberation. They experienced torture in the old society. After liberation, they have been stood the test of previous movements. They are the backbone in enterprises. The second group consists of workers who joined enterprises after liberation. They have experienced democratic reform and the education of General Line. The third group consists of workers who joined enterprises after 1954 without being toughened by intense class struggle and education." *RMRB*, August 22, 1957, 1.

guiding young workers in safe production. In a similar vein to the CCP's explication of why the mass-based safe production movement was important to improving workplace safety, the party explained that old workers were more experienced in operating tools and machines and more aware of potential risks in the workplace. More importantly, "old workers," the group of workers who had joined the workforce before 1949 as the party defined, had experienced working in the "old society" and first-hand knowledge of the brutal safety conditions before 1949. For this reason, they were entrusted to "ideologically" inspire young workers to pay attention to work safety and value the party's efforts to improve their safety conditions. As a matter of fact, "combining old workers and new workers" as an experimental education method had already been promoted in some factories in the early 1950s as "advanced experience." On April 23, 1953, *Tianjin Daily* extolled the two-year accident-free experience of the forging section of the Tianjin Bicycle Factory. According to *Tianjin Daily*, some old workers, such as Sun Yazhou and Feng De, often taught young workers how to operate machines safely and saw this as "their duty and a concrete manifestation of their responsibility for national construction and factory production." It was also reported that Sun Yazhou, who started working at the age of fourteen, often recalled that he was dismissed for work-related injuries in the factory ruled by the Japanese. For this reason, Sun often used his own experience to educate new workers, asking them to "take care of the machines and pay attention to safety."[133]

The new method of safety education was based on the party's assumption that old workers were more aware of workplace safety than young workers. However, as shown by the analysis above, this was a false assumption. Old workers with longer length of service, who were more susceptible to the mindset of "irrational optimism," were not less prone to causing accidents than younger workers in the first decade of the Mao era. The following statistics can prove this observation. According to a statistic by the Tianjin Committee of the China Textile Industry Union, among all the injured workers in the six factories of the Tianjin National Cotton Company within the second half of 1952, workers with less than six months of service and those with more than five years of

[133] *TJRB*, April 23, 1953, 2.

service accounted for 34.85 percent and 32.98 percent of all the 373 injured workers, respectively.[134] From January to November 1953, 49.43 percent of the injured workers in the same factories had more than five years of service.[135] According to a statistical report made by the Tianjin Committee of the Heavy Industry Department, between January 1957 to May 1957, 33.64 percent and 34.55 percent of the total number of injured workers in the heavy industry system in Tianjin had one year's service and five years' service or more, respectively.[136] In a report generated in 1954, the Tianjin Committee of the Textile Union highlighted that injuries and deaths predominated among "old workers" with more than five years' service and temporary workers.[137]

More importantly, not all workers who had witnessed the cruel working conditions in the old society could be able to maintain modesty toward new workers. Some old workers had experience in participating in what the party defined as revolutionary struggles before 1949, such as being a member of trade unions organized by underground party members or participating in strikes against capitalists. For this reason, they acquired relatively higher political credentials after liberation, which made them prone to falling into complacency. In order to highlight their political seniority, they would deliberately flout safety regulations developed by people they considered to be rookies in the workforce. A pamphlet introducing the revolutionary history of the Shenyang Locomotive Factory shows a case reflecting this mentality. There was a senior worker whose nickname was Old Ding in the Shenyang Rolling Stock Factory. Before 1949, Old Ding had led a struggle against the factory director, who was a "takeover official" (*jieshou dayuan* 接收大员), and participated in strikes against wage deductions.

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[134] Zhongguo fangzhi gonghui Tianjin weiyuanhui laobao bu 中国纺织工会天津市委员会劳保部, "1953 nian laobao gongzuo zongjie" 1953 年劳保工作总结 [Summary of labour protection work in 1953], January 22, 1954, TMA, x0045-y-000099-009.

[135] Zhongguo fangzhi gonghui Tianjin weiyuanhui laobao bu, "1953 nian laobao gongzuo zongjie," January 22, 1954, TMA, x0045-y-000099-009.

[136] Zhongguo zhonggongye xiehui Tianjin weiyuanhui laobao bu 中国重工业协会天津委员会劳保部, "Youguan anquan shengchan fangbian de jige wenti" 有关安全生产方面的几个问题 [A few problems about safe production], July 4, 1957, TMA, x0045-y-000020-013.

[137] Zhongguo fangzhi gonghui Tianjin weiyuanhui laobao bu 中国纺织工会天津市委员会劳保部, "Yi jidu gongzuo zongjie" 一季度工作总结 [Work summary of the first quarter], 1954, TMA, x0045-y-000105-001.

After liberation, the new factory director respected Old Ding very much and entrusted many important jobs to him. Gradually, Old Ding got the idea that he was the "No. 1 Authority under Heaven" (*laozi tianxia diyi* 老子天下第一) and was convinced by a well-known Chinese proverb "boldness of execution stems from great skill" (*yigao ren danda* 艺高人胆大).[138] In 1950, when he heard the factory was promoting the advanced experience of the Ma Hengchang model working cell, he made the following response—stroking his droopy moustache, Ding said mocking: "I think ah, let's just get down to production. Don't make these wicked ideas."[139]

Not only did some old workers fail to act as mentors in the presence of new workers, but they even took pleasure in instilling bad work habits in young workers. In a booklet entitled *After Working as a Labour Protection Inspector* published in 1957, the author Cai Yongbin told the story of how an old worker, Old Liu, who had more than twenty years of work experience but never paid attention to safety rules, began to change his mind after surviving an accident. This Old Liu, as depicted by the author, never used safety belts when working at height. As a self-perceived "heroic guy," Old Liu often bragged to his fellow workers about his risky behaviours:

> I've been doing this for over twenty years. See, I am still alive! It is meant to be. In the future, nothing will happen. Remember, lads! As the saying goes, if you are meant to die in the well, you won't drown in the river! If you are meant to die at midnight, you won't be alive until just before dawn![140]

One example even showed that some old workers got great satisfaction in guiding

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[138] "Takeover officials" (*jieshou dayuan* 接收大员) were officials authorized by the KMT government to confiscate properties of the Japanese or collaborators after the Sino-Japanese war in 1945. Many takeover officials did not return the pre-war capitals and properties to the Nanjing government but appropriated them for their private use. Thus, they were always called by the public as "robbery officials" (*jieshou dayuan* 劫收大员). See Paul G. Pickowicz, *China on Film: A Century of Exploration, Confrontation, and Controversy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 140.

[139] Zhonggong Shenyang jiche cheliang gongchang xuanchuan bu 中共沈阳机车车辆工厂委员会宣传部, *Lieche de yaolan* 列车的摇篮 [The cradle of trains] (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1959), 105.

[140] Given that the author did not provide any detailed information about the factory where Old Liu worked aside from mentioning that the story took place in a "forging section," I do not believe that this story was entirely true. However, considering that this booklet was a teaching material for training labour protection activists, we can assume that behavior like Old Liu's was not uncommon at that time. Cai Yongbin 蔡永彬, *Dang le laodong baohu jiancha yuan yihou* 当了劳动保护检查员以后 [After working as a labour protection inspector] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1956), 16.

their apprentices, not because apprentices really acquired the knowledge about accident prevention, but because some young workers' flattery greatly satisfied their vanity. At the Tianjin Fuxing Flour Mill, there was an old worker named Li Xiaoqing. As a show-off, Li often did two-man operations solely by himself. To make Li accept the criticism of the foreman Shi Yinghan, several young workers said to Li: "Next time, we will ask an apprentice to work with you so that we can not only ensure safety but also learn skills from you." In response, Li was puffed up with pride.[141]

It is not my intention to emphasize that the lion's share of old workers in the early years of the Mao era played a negative role in safety education. Many old workers were enthusiastic about teaching young workers safety knowledge and operational skills. Their efforts, however, might not always be rewarded with recognition from younger workers. The disrespect from many pretentious young workers not only disappointed them but also exacerbated the conflicts between the old and new. For example, at the No. 543 Factory, many new workers turned up their noses to the operation demonstration, saying, "Big deal! You've been doing this for decades but isn't that all you've done?" Some old workers responded, "Good Lord! We are teaching 'Sirs' (*daye* 大爷 arrogant idlers)! According to *Internal Reference*, in some factories in North-east China, many old workers were responsible for teaching new workers but made things difficult for new workers. Li Changting, a new worker at the Benxi Transportation Team, accidentally hurt his feet. When other workers helped him to the hospital, some old workers yelled at them, "Leave him alone, he's a contract worker!"

The party assumed, a priori, that older workers were more experienced in overcoming risks of workplace accidents. However, this assumption, which stemmed from the party's conviction that old workers had more sophisticated skills and higher political awareness, ignored the conflict between new and old workers in terms of their understanding of workplace risks, eventually defeating the party's purpose to improve

[141] Tianjin shi gonghui lianhe hui 天津市工会联合会, "Anquan shengchan jingyan jieshao: gongsi heying fuxing mianfen chang Teng Yunzhi xiaozu" 安全生产经验介绍: 公私合营福星面粉厂滕运支小组 [Experience of safe production by Teng Yunzhi work team from the joint public-private Fuxing Flour Factory], December 1957, TMA, x0044-y-000375-0014.

workplace safety through safety education.

Conclusion

Since late 1957, the safe production movement had begun to step into a very difficult position. From 1957 to 1958, many enterprises and mines dissolved their safety agencies or merged them with other functional departments in response to Mao's proposition of "streamlining our organizations."[142] This signalled the disintegration of the mass-based safety management system established in the 1950s. However, during this period, the ACFTU and many local trade unions persisted in their functions. In early 1958, as the signing of labour protection campaigns became increasingly unsustainable, trade unions pinned their last efforts to regulate workplace safety on the Staff and Workers' Representative Congress and the labour protection visitors' books hung in the workshop. In 1958, the CCP launched the Great Leap Forward. As many historians have pointed out, the bloody pursuit of profits and production outputs during the Leap rendered the safe production policy null and void. Workplace safety only existed in name. As described by Andrew Walder: "Factories experienced a wave of industrial accidents and equipment breakdowns. Workers pushed to endure long shifts made mistakes due to fatigue; safety regulations ignored in the push for speed led to fatal accidents."[143]

In the 1960s, the CCP rehabilitated the safety policies and regulations which had been abandoned during the Great Leap. In addition to continued emphasis on the mass-based safety production policy, the CCP's practice of labour protection underwent a remarkable adjustment as safety science began to take off, marked by the development of the prevention and control of occupational diseases and safety engineering. Later, after the Cultural Revolution, on December 10, 1982, the Ministry of Metallurgical Industry and the Chinese Society of Metals jointly held a symposium in Wuhan on workplace accidents in the metallurgical industry. Sun Jixiang, the representative from the Anshan

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[142] Mao Zedong, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1960), 67.

[143] Walder, *China under Mao*, 175.

Steel Mill, submitted a report reviewing the accidents that had occurred in the Anshan over the past thirty-two years and pointed out six practical suggestions for accident prevention for the "new era." According to Sun, the first point was to upgrade safety engineering technology, while the mass-based safety production policy prevailing in the Mao era was ranked fourth.[144] This echoed my discussion in this chapter from one side that the mass-based safety policy promoted in the Mao era was an optimistic ideal.

Sun's article has offered a potentially plausible explanation for the CCP's adherence to the mass-line safety policy, which is, in the early years of the Mao era, China's labour departments and industrial departments were not yet capable of deploying advanced protective equipment on an extensive scale in enterprises and mines. In 1951, Li Lisan proposed an important principle to guide the practice of the party's labour protection policies at the First Labour Protection Conference: "To meet the needs while accommodating the possibilities."[145] It is worth mentioning that this principle was just put forward in the context of the official's inability to provide adequate protective equipment in most enterprises and mines. However, this is not to say that the CCP was not completely oblivious to the importance of improved protective equipment in accident prevention. In the next chapter, I will focus on "labour protection necessities" (*laobao yongpin* 劳保用品), a term used to describe the personal equipment to prevent accidents with a deep Mao-era imprint and show how labour protection necessities were deeply integrated into the everyday lives of Chinese workers.

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[144] Sun Jixiang 孙继香, "Angang 32 nian lai gongshang shigu fenxi ji yufang duice tantao" 鞍钢 32 年来工伤事故分析及预防对策探讨 [Workplace accidents that occurred in the Anshan Steel Company in the past 32 years and the discussion of the preventive countermeasures], in *Yejin qiye shangwang shigu fenxi: yejin gongye zhongda shangwang shigu fenxi xueshu taolunhui lunwen xuanbian* 冶金企业伤亡事故分析: 冶金工业重大伤亡事故分析学术讨论会论文选编 [Analysis of accident injury and death in metallurgical industry: Selected paper of the symposium on the analysis of major accident injuries and death in metallurgical industry], ed. zhongguo jinshu xue yejin anquan xueshu weiyuanhui 中国金属学会冶金安全学术委员会 (Wuhan: Zhongguo jinshu xuehui yejin anquan xueshu weiyiuan hui, 1983), 90–94.

[145] Li Sishen 李思慎, *Li Lisan hongse chuanqi* 李立三红色传奇 [Li lisan: a red legend], vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 2004), 523.

Chapter 2. Safety Disobedience in the Name of Aesthetics and Shortage in Daily Necessities: The Use of Labour Protection Equipment in the Mao Era

In early 1951, Fu Baoxian restarted his career in the Shencun shaft of the Yiluo mines. After the completion of the handling of the Yiluo accident in July 1950, the Central South Bureau took over the Yiluo mines and resumed production by constructing a new shaft in Shencun in October 1950. On his first day of work in the new state-run mining shaft, Fu Baoxian received a new mining uniform and a safety hat. Fu could still remember what the safety helmet looked like: "It was an American-style hard hat, sturdy and good-looking, with a mine lamp on it."[146]

Fu was excited about having new equipment at that time. Before Fu Baoxian was transferred to the Shencun shaft in 1951, he had never worn a safety helmet or used any equipment. As Fu recalled: "When I was at the Ligou shaft, I had to wrap my head in a piece of rag before entering the unilluminated tunnel with a barn lantern. Every time I stepped out of the shaft with a bag of coal on my back, I felt I just came back from the dead. Only when I used the safety helmet, I could feel at ease. At that moment, I realized that the status of our miners had been greatly enhanced."[147]

In the early days after the CCP ascended to national power, there were many workers who had similar experiences to Fu. One day shortly after the CCP took over the Xishan coal mines, Wang Jihao received a pair of rubber boots for the first time in his career as a coal digger. When I asked Wang whether he had protective equipment to use before 1949, he waved his hand to me: "Before liberation, I was digging coal in a small pit. I was small at that time. I was usually naked in the shaft. Helmets? Where could I get a helmet? Who gave us, ah? Only after liberation did we have a helmet. Thus, I thank Chairman Mao and the Party."[148] Another informant Li Shaofu, who was born in 1928 and had spent his youth in a Japanese-run textile mill in Tianjin, told me in 2019: "The

[146] *Dahebao*, October 14, 2012, A14.

[147] *Dahebao*, October 14, 2012, A14.

[148] Interview 2.

Japanese did not give us anything. When an accident happened, there would be some Japanese monks (maybe Shinto priests) chanting sutras to the machine. When the KMT was in charge, we already had uniforms and gloves. But after liberation, we had more to use."[149]

In addition to initiating the nationwide safety inspection campaign in the 1950s covered in chapter 1, the CCP's efforts to improve the working conditions of Chinese industrial labourers were marked by the promotion of the use of labour protection necessities (*laobao yongpin* 劳保用品). In the Chinese language context, *laobao yongpin*, which refers to personal protective equipment (PPE) designed to protect against health and safety hazards, to a larger extent also signifies an adjective-object compound that literally means the objects used for fulfilling the party's labour protection policy.

This chapter will investigate how Chinese workers treated their safety equipment after 1949. According to the party's ideals, protective equipment was not just the items that could facilitate safe production and prevent occupational diseases, but also the expression of the master status of the Chinese working class. Nevertheless, most protective equipment was less appealing to workers. Even though in the 1950s and 1960s the party attributed workers' refusal to use PPE to a lack of ideological awareness of safe production, the fact that workers were particular about the design, user experience, and style of various equipment contributed to their resistance to PPE provided by the enterprises they worked for. In addition, many workers did not treat PPE as equipment exclusively used in the workplace but as a type of welfare. Some workers sold PPE illegally for private gain. But most workers repurposed PPE, especially gloves and facial masks made of cotton and wool, for making daily necessities such as sweaters and pants because daily necessities were comparatively scarce and not freely accessible for most people during the Mao era.

[149] Interview 7.

The Use of PPE before 1949

Based on available sources, it is difficult to investigate the exact time when safety equipment began to appear in China's industrial workplaces. As economic historian Jiang Duo argues, in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China, "the vast majority of factories in China were devoid of safety equipment."[150] In 1923, the Beiyang government promulgated the Provisional Factory General Regulations, the first factory act in modern China, which stipulated that "a factory shall provide necessary and suitable equipment for the purpose of preserving the health of its employees and preventing any dangers that may arise."[151] However, evidence suggests that this factory act had remained a dead letter since the day it was promulgated. In a letter to Sir R. Macleay (1870–1943), the British Ambassador to China, on August 10, 1924, consul J. W. O. Davidson described the working conditions in many factories in Tianjin as follows: "The factories at Tientsin are for the most part overcrowded, badly ventilated, and generally unsanitary. Machinery is often left unfenced with the result that frequent accidents occur, especially to children."[152] Also, he quoted a description of the working conditions in "numerous rug workshops" in Beijing given by a recent writer: "dark, dusty, and unventilated; no sanitary appliances; no protective or co-operative organization."[153]

The reason factory employers ignored this factory act is crystal clear. Given the fragmented political situation in the 1920s, the Beiyang government was hardly in a position to enforce the implementation of this regulation. One can presume that many employers were indeed unwilling to spend money on protective equipment and sanitary facilities. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the early twentieth century accidents were still considered inevitable. Even in those industrially advanced countries

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[150] Jiang Duo 姜铎, "Zhongguo zaoqi gongren jieji zhuangkuang chutan" 中国早期工人阶级状况初探 [Preliminary survey of the conditions of the early Chinese working class], *Xueshu jikan* 学术季刊, 4 (November 1994): 156.

[151] Sun, *Zhongguo jindai anquan shi*, 92–95.

[152] The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Parliament, *Papers Respecting Labour Conditions in China* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 96–97.

[153] The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Parliament, *Papers Respecting Labour Conditions in China*, 97.

such as Germany and England, the voices calling for "an increase in state control over industry and for accident prevention schemes including worker education, stricter plant regulations, and the use of preventive equipment," as Anson Rabinbach argues, just began to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century.[154] Even for some CCP labour activists such as Deng Zhongxia (1894–1933), the demand for improving living and working conditions of Chinese labourers at that time was limited to the establishment of the eight-hour workday and the protection of child labour. Thus, it is not surprising that Chinese labourers in the 1920s were barely equipped with any protective equipment.

In 1929, the KMT government promulgated a new factory act that stipulated employers should install machinery safeguarding devices and provide workers with PPE in the workplace. In fact, one year before the promulgation of the 1929 Factory Act, in Shanghai, the most industrially developed region in China, the Shanghai Bureau of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce (*nong gong shang ju* 农工商局) had enacted the Rules of Factory Safety Equipment, a government act detailing the safety devices and equipment to be equipped in factories. This was the first time that wearing goggles and respirators was made mandatory for steelworkers and workers exposed to acid and alkaline substances in modern China. In addition, article 103 and 104 stipulated that workers should not wear loose-fitting clothes and female workers should bind their hair or wear a hat on the job.[155]

In May 1933, the Association of Industrial Safety (*gongye anquan xiehui* 工业安全协会) was founded in Shanghai.[156] This was the first non-governmental organization that advocated industrial safety in modern China, signalling the emergence of what Tom Dwyer called the "industrial capitalist," a type of capitalist with an orientation "to invest in working conditions in order to increase productivity and hence profits."[157] Under the

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[154] Anson Rabinbach, *The Eclipse of the Utopias of Labor*, 73.

[155] Sun, *Zhongguo jindai anquan shi*, 159–77.

[156] Sun, *Zhongguo jindai anquan shi*, 273–75.

[157] On May 6, 1933, at the preparatory meeting for the establishment of the Association of Industrial Safety, the sponsors, including the general manager of the Tianchu MSG Factory Wu Yunchu and some other industrialists in Shanghai, made a declaration titled "The Origin of Forming the Association of Industrial

advocacy of this association, several of China's leading enterprises, including those located in Shanghai and elsewhere, began to develop various safeguarding devices and PPE. Many examples of such equipment were displayed at the Exhibition of Industrial Safety and Hygiene organized by the Factory Inspection Division of the Ministry of Industry in 1936 in Shanghai.[158] By the eve of the Sino-Japanese War, in the factories affiliated to the Shenxin Company, the bellwether in China's textile industry in pre-1949 China, workers in special jobs such as bleaching or dyeing were widely equipped with goggles and rubber gloves.[159]

As the national industrialists, labour reformists, and government officials were campaigning for improving factory safety and sanitary conditions in China's major industrial cities such as Shanghai, Wuhan, and Qingdao, the CCP was staging a rival show in the mountainous areas in Jiangxi. On November 17, 1931, the First National Soviet Congress passed a labour law requiring that employers in the Soviet Base Area should provide workers with working uniforms and personal safety equipment like eye protectors or respirators. However, unlike the KMT side promoting the use of safety equipment with practical motives of enhancing productivity, the CCP promulgated the labour law, which was simply copied from the Soviet Labour Code of 1922, for the sole purpose of gaining support of labourers and to consolidate its rule in the Soviet Republic. The 1931 labour law, which was heavily biased in workers' favour, created serious fear among factory employers and spoiled a normal labour discipline that was supposed to

Safety," saying that "the advocacy of industrial safety is not only based on the moral ground but also on our recent understanding that ensuring workplace safety is of great benefit to the enhancement of productivity." See "Fakan ci" 发刊词 [Foreword to a new periodical], *Gongye anquan* 工业安全 1, vol. 1 (1933): 1–2.

[158] This association launched a journal entitled *Industrial Safety* (*gongye anquan* 工业安全), which was the earliest publication aimed at providing the latest information about industrial safety at home and abroad. The association gave a free handbook on boiler safety to industrialists nationwide in 1934. As a response, some industrialists from Shantou, Jiaxing and other places sent letter to the association to ask for the handbook. This suggests that the pursuit of industrial safety was already a widely accepted concept in the 1930s, at least among industrialists in China's major industrial cities. Shiye bu zhongyang gongchang jiancha chu 实业部中央工厂检查处, ed., *Gongye anquan weisheng zhanlanhui baogao* 工业安全卫生展览会报告 [Report on the safety and hygiene exhibition] (Nanjing: Shiye bu zhongyang gongchang jianchachu, 1936), 29–37; SMA, q568-1-11.

[159] *Zhaoqi* 朝气 [Dynamism], 21 (1937): Cover IV.

exist to maintain productivity. As Huang Jinlin argues, this labour law designed for protecting workers, was totally counterproductive in protecting labourers.[160]

The 1931 Labour Law existed for only two years. In 1933, the CCP repealed it. However, the CCP's efforts to legislatively improve workers' conditions and promote the use of safety equipment in the areas under its control remained unabated. The lack of available information has made it difficult to gauge the effectiveness of these regulations, which were mostly issued during the period of the Anti-Japanese War and the Civil War. Nevertheless, one can truly say that some of these legislative efforts offered more political than practical advantages.[161] The party's rectification of the erstwhile labour movements in 1948 suggests that the regulations issued between the mid-1930s and the late 1940s by different party branches to promote the use of PPE in the workplace resembled the 1931 Labour Law in solely seeking to solicit support from labourers. On March 6, 1948, at the first Industry Meeting of the Jinchaji Border Region, Chen Baoyu, the director of the Central Hebei Federation of Trade Unions, criticized "the 'left' adventurism that had prevailed in the past few years." In particular, Chen noted that the labour protection law passed at the Workers' Congress in Central Hebei in October 1945 was "narrow and lopsided" because it placed excessive emphasis on the "immediate benefits" for workers but offered few specific instructions on enhancing industrial productivity and stimulating working efficiency. The "immediate interests" in Chen's discourse precisely referred to "a uniform or a mask," a sort of tangible benefit freely available to most workers.[162]

Available sources have not offered us a detailed account of how workers reacted to the 1945 labour protection policy dominated by what Chen called "left adventurism."

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[160] Huang, *Zhengti yu shenti*, 295–99.

[161] The major regulations were the Provisional Regulations on Labour Protection in Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region issued on March 12, 1946, the Provisional Regulations on Labour Protection in Si-Wan Border Region issued in May 1946, the Labour Protection Law for Public Factories in Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region issued in 1948, the Wartime Labour regulations of the Harbin Special City issued in 1948 March, and the Interim Measures for the Improvement of Machinery Safety in the city of Harbin issued on June 16, 1949. Sun, *Zhonguo jindai anquan shi,* 497–540.

[162] Chen Bolian 陈伯连, *Fazhan gongye de laodong zhengce yu shuishou zhengce* 发展工业的劳动政策与税收政策 [Labour policies and tax policies for industrial development] (Liaoyang: Liaonan shengwei xuanchuanbu, 1948), 14.

However, his criticism conveyed a message that "a mask or a suit" appeared to be strongly appealing to workers. This could provide us with insight into workers' perceptions of PPE at the time: they might hardly regard PPE simply as something to be used in the workplace to reduce the damage caused by unexpected workplace accidents or hazardous working environments, but rather as a perquisite of employment.

As the CCP took over an increasing number of heavy industries after late 1948 from the hands of the KMT, its attempts to improve working conditions became more than a means of soliciting support, but an urgent need with practical motives such as maintaining workers' enthusiasm. In January 1949, when Wang Shijie visited several cigarette factories and textile mills in Changzhi, Shanxi Province, he found that most workshops were full of dust and fibres. Therefore, he proposed that workers should be equipped with masks to avoid getting lung disease.[163] In 1949, the 10th Research Group of the Central Hebei Special Administration (*jizhong dishi zhuanshu yanjiu zu* 冀中第十专署研究组) published an article in *People's Daily* about how they resumed production in Langfang, stating that providing workers with masks, aprons, and goggles was one of the "necessary approaches to maintain workers' enthusiasm about production."[164]

These CCP officials stressed the importance of providing workers with PPE mostly for economic reasons. Compared with upgrading factory sanitary facilities and safeguarding devices, promoting the use of PPE was the most cost-effective approach to technically reduce the risks of occupational diseases in the workplace. As Wang Shijie stressed in particular in the above-mentioned report: "Making masks is very easy. It won't cost too much. Everybody can make it as long as there is a piece of gauze. If [factory employers] don't know how to do it, [factory employers] may reach out to hospitals and pharmacies [to ask how to do it]." One can also find a similar discourse in a *People's Daily* editorial commenting on the sanitary conditions in the woodworking workshop of the Machinery Factory of the China Textile: "In the woodworking workshop, wood chips were flying and floating. Workers' respiratory organs were

[163] Wang Shiji was born in 1916. From 1953 to 1978, Wang worked in the Hebei Provincial Health Department. *RMRB*, January 24, 1950, 3.

[164] *RMRB*, March 21, 1949, 2.

vulnerable to damage [in this environment]. Workers can avoid this damage if they are given masks. To furnish workers with masks, as everyone knows, is indeed an easy task."[165]

"I'll Quit If You Don't Give Me Gloves"

In late January 1950, Li Lisan (1899–1967), the minister of Labour of the People's Republic of China, visited the 1st and 3rd cotton mills of the China Textiles *(zhongfang* 中纺) along with several Soviet experts in Tianjin. One year earlier, the CCP had taken over all six cotton mills of the China Textiles in Tianjin. During the visit, Li was shocked by the poor working conditions in the workshops. After the inspection, Li Lisan reported what he saw in the workshops to Liu Shaoqi, Chen Yun, and Bo Yibo: "Two to three hundred workers get sick every day. The main reason is that the sanitary facilities were in extremely poor conditions."[166]

Li's faithful report came to the central authority's attention. On February 9, a joint inspection team formed by the representatives from the Central Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Textile Industry, and the Ministry of Health and the ACFTU arrived in Tianjin. Within one week, this inspection team inspected a dozen factories, including the factories affiliated to the China Textiles and other several private factories. During the inspection, workers from the China Textiles made seven major requests to the inspection team for the improvement of factory sanitary conditions, including requests to install heaters in the washrooms and to set up steamers for heating food. In addition, many

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[165] *RMRB*, March 3, 1950, 3.

[166] The Soviet experts who visited the China Textiles in Tianjin along with Li Lisan were likely the ones who came to the Tianjin Cadre School of the ACTFU in January 1950 as lecturers. According to Yan Mingfu's recollection, in December 1949, the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions sent three experts to Tianjin to deliver lectures on the history of labour movement and labour protection. The Tianjin Cadre School of the ACFTU was established in September 1949. It became the North China Staff Cadre School later. Li Lisan was the principal of this cadre school. See Yan Mingfu 阎明复, "Zai quanzong qijian wo jianzheng de ZhongSu guanxi" 在全总期间我见证的中苏关系 [The Sino-Soviet relations that I witnessed during my time at the ACFTU], Zhongguo gongchandang xinwen wang 中国共产党新闻网, May 30, 2011, http://cpc.people.com.cn/BIG5/218984/222139/14777078.html; Gongheguo riji bianwei hui 共和国日记编委会, ed., *Gongheguo riji (1950)* 共和国日记 (1950) [The diary of the PRC (1950)] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2017), 65.

workers in the factories of the China Textiles were suffering from respiratory diseases, tuberculosis, and bronchitis with colds. The main culprit of these diseases was, as the inspection team illustrated in the investigation report, the bad air quality in the workshops: "The workshops are poorly ventilated and stuffy. Cotton fibres are flying and lingering."[167] Thus, workers also request their employers to provide them with masks.[168]

The inspections of the China Textiles in 1950 kickstarted the improvement of factory sanitary conditions after the CCP came to power. On May 31, 1950, the Central Ministry of Labour issued the Provisional Regulations on Factory Hygiene, which is the first nation-level administrative regulation on improving sanitary conditions in China's industrial workplaces after 1949. In 1951, the First National Conference of Labour Protection adopted a formal regulation on factory hygiene. Both regulations explicitly stated that employers should provide suitable PPE such as goggles and masks to workers who might be exposed to dusty or toxic environments.

Evidence suggests that in the early years of the 1950s, many local labour departments and trade unions were very active in implementing these regulations. Some self-examinations about their past mistakes contributed by trade unions in around 1957 offer us an indication that many enterprise-level trade unions did place a high priority on the distribution of PPE. For example, in the second half of 1950, at the third workshop of the No. 443 State Factory, the labour protection committee members were "preoccupied with many trivial tasks such as allocating houses and distributing PPE."[169] Similar things took place in private factories. At the Tianjin Shunhe Vehicle Light Factory, the labour

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[167] Tianjin shi renmin zhengfu laodong ju 天津市人民政府劳动局, "Zhongfang gechang zhigong jibing diaocha qingkuang huibao" 中纺各厂职工疾病调查情况汇报 [Report on employees' diseases in each factory of the China Textiles], March 1, 1950, TMA, x0053-c-000181-012.

[168] *RMRB*, February 24, 1950, 2.

[169] Zong gonghui laobao bu 总工会劳保部, *Guoying 433 chang di san chejian laodong baohu gongzuo de jingyan* 国营 433 厂第三车间劳动保护工作的经验 [Experience from the third workshop of the state-run 433 Factory in labour protection work] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1956), 3.

protection committee members were "terribly busy with purchasing protective equipment and sending sick workers to the hospital."[170]

As the direct beneficiaries of the regulations, many workers showed unprecedented enthusiasm for obtaining PPE. Between 1950 and 1953, when the nationwide safety inspection campaign was in full swing, some local newspapers were filled with letters from workers complaining about their employers for not providing them with PPE. According to these newspaper accounts, workers were repeatedly demanding PPE from their employers. For example, in 1951, Tong Wengran, the director of the Tianjin Yongli Alkali Plant, refused workers' requests for gloves several times on the grounds that "they had not been equipped with gloves in the past decades, and they do not need them now."[171] In 1952, some workers in the Tianjin Textile Dyeing and Printing Factory were "repeatedly claiming goggles from the labour protection sections." Gao Yongxing, the head of the labour protection section, responded as follows: "Aren't your eyes still not broken?"[172] In some factories, workers even ordered their employers to provide them with PPE in a rather strong tone. In 1953, in the Beijing Juzifang Masonry Factory, some workers demanded gloves dozens of times. However, the factory leaders refused workers' requests because they were afraid of spending money. So then, a worker said to the factory director: "If you do not give me a pair of gloves I'll quit!"[173]

As I will show in the following sections, the enthusiasm of Chinese industrial labourers for having protective equipment persisted for years. But before proceeding to examine Chinese industrial labourers' experience of PPE in the Mao era, let us briefly review the accounts of receiving PPE after liberation offered by Fu Baoxian and Wang Jihao. Their statements that the use of PPE enhanced their social status might not reflect what they really thought at the time when they received those items because similar

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[170] Laobao bu 劳保部, "Shunhe chedeng chang jianli anquan weisheng zuzhi jigou de gongzuo zongjie" 顺和车灯厂建立安全卫生组织机构的工作总结 [Work summary of establishing safety and hygiene organizations in the Shunhe Vehicle Factory], December 17, 1954, TMA, x0044-y-000362-010.

[171] *TJRB*, August 16, 1951, 2.

[172] *TJRB*, February 22, 1953, 1.

[173] Beijing shi difang gongyeju bangongshi, "Juzifang zhuanwa chang zhongshi anquan shengchan," December 7, 1953, BMA, 016-001-00379-00010.

narratives were frequently adopted in the political propaganda throughout the Mao era. In the party's ideal, an exemplary Chinese worker should attach great importance to the use of PPE because this was a manifestation of having safe production awareness and a demonstration of living up to the party's loving care for the working class. Here, a portrayal of a model worker named Fang Fengchen in a 1958 feature article served as an explanation of this logic:

> Fang says: "The party has provided us with new raincoats. Aside from this, the party has also provided us with labour protection necessities covering from our heads to toes, such as shoe covers, aprons, gloves, coats, goggles, safety belts, safety ropes, safety helmets, this kind of safety equipment and that kind of safety equipment. We have all that is necessary! Who had seen these in the past miserable times?" He often takes a lead to use PPE. Let's see how he is using the safety rope. He is wrapping his waist with a safety rope and around his legs, and then stepping on it. Some workers thought it was too much trouble to use a safety rope. As long as he saw this, he would educate other workers without using safety ropes: "Do you know how many people died in the past without a safety rope? We can not fall short of the loving care of the party and our country!"[174]

In other words, for Wang and Fu, who spent their entire working lives in the Mao era and became leaders later, their memories might be highly influenced by Mao-era propaganda and rhetoric. PPE, in fact, occupied an even greater position in various propaganda and political rhetoric than the case of Fang indicates. In the following section, I will provide a case study of the wicker helmet (*liutiao mao* 柳条帽) to illustrate how safety equipment as a component of the ideal image of the Chinese working class was displayed in the CCP's propaganda discourse.

The Wicker Helmet, Workers' Crowns

Even though there were various types of PPE available to Chinese industrial labourers in the Mao era, none were as identifiable and distinctive as the wicker helmets on the heads of workers' representatives. Unlike the Bullard "Boiled Hard Hat," which

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[174] Wang Hu 王湖, "Ershi'er nian ru yiri: Ji Haerbin shuini chang kuangshan zuoye anquan shengchan laodong mofan Fang Shuchen" 二十二年如一日: 记哈尔滨水泥厂矿山作业安全生产劳动模范房树臣 [Twenty-two years as one day: A sketch of Fang Shuchen, a model worker of mining safety in the Harbin Cement Plant], *Jianzhu gongye cailiao* 建筑工业材料 2 (1958): 39.

was widely used for head protection for miners in America and other western countries, the wicker helmet exclusively existed in China and some other Asian countries rich in willow. Available sources suggest that the first mining company to provide labourers with wicker helmets was the Manchurian Coal Mining Co., which controlled the Fushun coal mines in 1934.[175] As the former possessor of the Fushun mines and the shareholder of the Manchuria Coal Mining Co., the South Manchuria Railway also held a patent for the wicker helmet. In 1941, it released this patent to other firms controlled by the Japanese force.[176] By the mid-1930s, China's leading mining companies such as the Zhongfu and Baojin Mining Company also provided their miners with wicker safety helmets.[177] On July 14, 1934, along with six other intellectual celebrities, Zheng Zhenduo and Bing Xin visited the Yongdingzhuang Mines run by the Jinbei Mining Bureau in Shanxi Province. As Zheng recorded in his note, each miner was equipped with a wicker hat and a safety lamp.[178] Bing Xin even experienced how the wicker hat functioned in protecting her head in the mine shaft:

> It rained again at 3 p.m. In the afternoon, the torrents cascaded down to the mountain and sounded like thunder. We had lunch at the mining bureau. It was almost 4 o'clock before we packed up and went down the shaft with the guide of a young foreman. We all put on a very thick blue cloth, a wicker hat, and rubber shoes. With magnesium lamps and sticks in our hands, we went down the shaft by a mining elevator. With our eyes open and by the faint light of lamps, we were walking with our back bent in the six-foot to eight-foot-wide round tunnel in single file. The roof of the tunnel was supported by very thick wooden pillars and the tunnel wall twinkled with black light. Wet and hot muddy water gathered on the ground. Dense and sultry steam flowed through the tunnel. Water kept

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[175] Wang Boguang 王渤光, "Fushun meikuang shiliao (san)" 抚顺煤矿史料 (三) [Selected historical materials on the Fushun mines (three)], *Fushun wenshi ziliao xuanji* 3 (June 1984): 211.

[176] As shown by a series of photographs taken between 1939 and 1945 by the North China Transportation Company, some miners in the Datong Mines and Tongshun Mines were equipped with wicker helmets. However, these photographs for propaganda purposes could only prove that only a tiny percentage of Chinese labourers in the Japanese-controlled firms or mines had access to safety equipment. In additions, these measures could never erase the fact that Chinese labourers suffered horrendous torture during the war. "Mantetsu tokkyo kaihō saru" 滿鐵特許解放さる [The release of patent owned by the Manchuria Railway Company], *Hatsumei no Manchū* 发明の满洲 5, vol. 8 (1941): 15.

[177] Zhongfu liang gongsi lianhe banshichu 中福两公司联合办事处, ed., *Zhongfu liang gongsi lianhe banshichu yewu baogao* 中福两公司联合办事处业务报告 [Joint office business report of the two companies of the Zhongfu] (Zhongfu liang gongsi banshichu, 1936), 49.

[178] Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎, *Xixing shujian* 西行书简 [Letters on the journey to the west] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1937), 59.

> dripping from the roof. As soon as we raised our heads a little, our heads would touch the roof. At this point, we realized the importance of wearing wicker helmets.[179]

This experience seemed very fresh and interesting to Bing Xin and her companions. As Zhuo Ru mentions in *The Biography of Bing Xin*, when everyone saw "professors Wu Wenzao, Gu Jiegang, and Zheng Zhenduo had become miners, we all felt very funny and looked at each other with a smile."[180] The wicker helmet, however, would not bring most ordinary workers the same novel and easy experience as it brought to Bing Xin. Because mining engineering technology and safety regulations were poorly developed in the early twentieth century, wicker helmets became the only equipment that miners could pin their life safety on apart from the Kiln God. A mining engineer blogging under the name Congshanruliu gave an account of some old miners' representations of their wicker helmets:

> Before liberation, miners cherished and valued wicker helmets most. Before starting to work in mines, many new miners would ask veteran miners to select a suitable helmet made of good material and sound workmanship for them. Miners might throw away their tools or other belongings, but never their helmets. When miners were transferred to other mines, they would usually keep their helmets with them. Even when these miners were too old to work, they would treasure their helmets very much.[181]

After 1949, miners were no longer the only workers who used wicker helmets for head protection. As Liu Baozhong illustrated in a mining safety textbook published in 1957: "The head protective equipment widely used by miners in China is the wicker helmet. The wicker helmet produced in the Fengfeng area is of the best quality. The standard of rating the sturdiness of a wicker helmet is: a wicker helmet can hold up an adult man without deformation. Now, many miners use wicker helmets because they are

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[179] Bing Xin 冰心, *Bing Xin youji* 冰心游记 [Travel notes by Bing Xin] (Beiping: Beixin shuju, 1935), 41–42.

[180] Zhuo Ru 卓如, *Bing Xin zhuan* 冰心传 [The biography of Bing Xin] (Shanghai: Shanghai yiwen chubanshe, 1990), 397.

[181] Congshan ruliu 从善如流, "Anquan mao" 安全帽 [Safety helmets], http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_47f8d2610100hvfi.html. Archived May 3, 2021.

cheap. Construction workers also use them."[182] In fact, before the introduction of plastic helmets in the late 1960s, wicker helmets were also the only option available to steelworkers and dock workers for head protection.

What made the wicker helmet the most distinctive PPE was, of course, not only its time-honoured history but also its integral relation to the CCP's ideal image of the Chinese working class. It is safe to say that during the Mao era, the wicker helmet almost became an emblem of Chinese industrial labourers, especially those heavy industrial labourers. In the early 1950s, portraits of model workers such as Ma Liuhai or Hao Jianxiu were a regular feature on the covers of many party-sponsored publications such as *People's Pictorial*. In these photographs, safety helmets or other equipment in most cases occupied a prominent position. There is no doubt that these official portrayals of model workers were far from what they really looked like in the workplace. As a writer named Sun Shaoshan writes in a novel written after the Cultural Revolution: "It was common to see female miners with wicker helmets on their heads in pictorials. In fact, who knew whether they really had worked in the mines? If you took a picture of those women digging coal underground, this picture would scare people to death!"[183]

[182] Liu Baozhong 刘宝忠, ed., *Kuangshan anquan fanghuo jishu ji jiuhu* 矿山安全防火技术及救护 [Mining safety and fire prevention and emergency assistance] (Beijing: Beijing kuangye xueyuan, 1957), 230.

[183] Jiao Zuyao 焦祖尧, *Guang de zhuiqiu* 光的追求 [The pursuit of light] (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1981), 195.

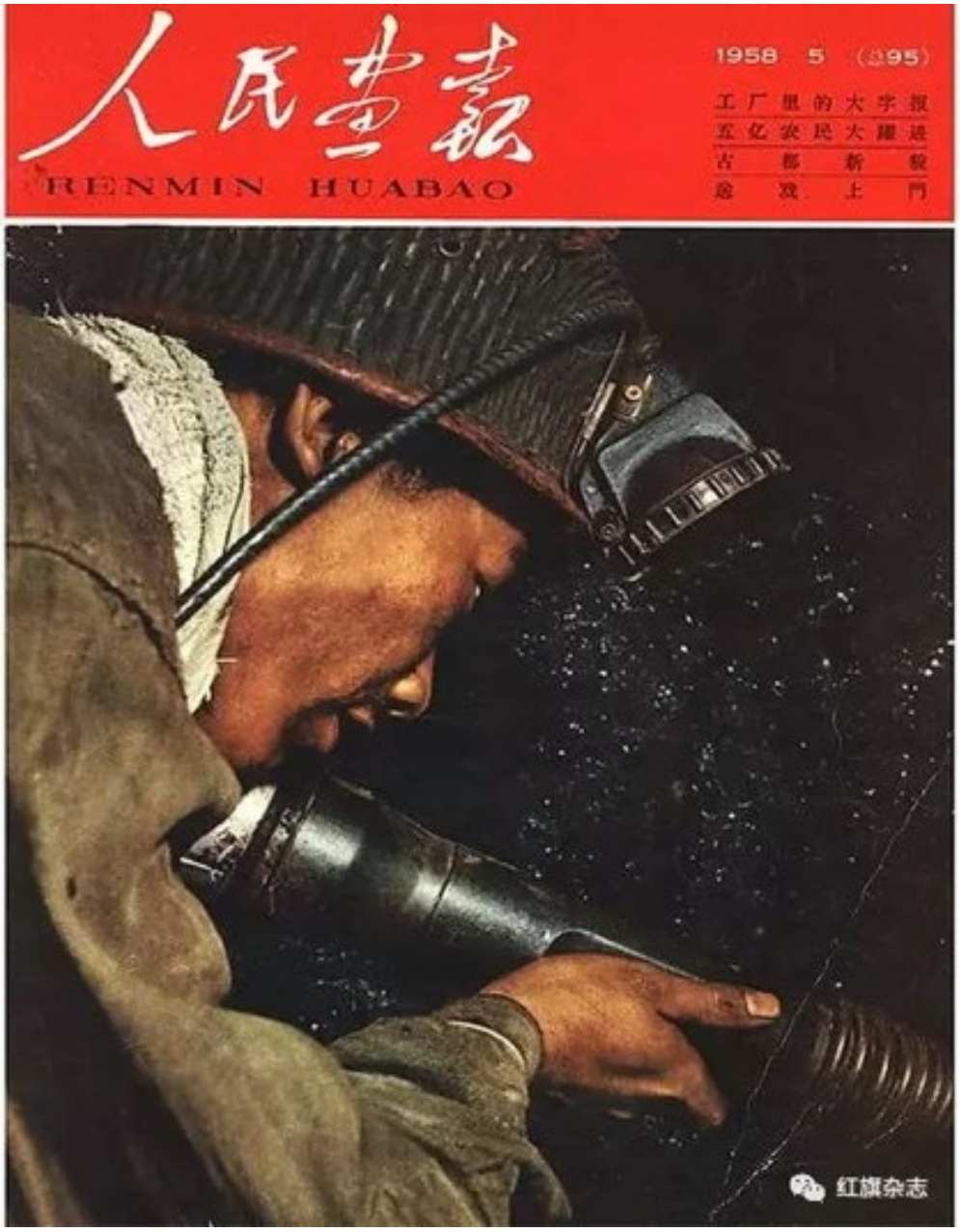

Figure 2. "Cover Page," *China Pictorial*, 95 (February 1958).

Wicker helmets are featured in many propaganda texts on workers' working lives prominently as well. For example, in a 1955 *People's Daily* article entitled "Embracing Life," the author Lu Hao portrays a young miner Xing Wanfu who exposed his fellow

workers for making a false report on output.[184] An excerpt from this article clearly illustrates how an awe-inspiring wicker helmet and mining uniform raised his morale and further made him feel proud to be a miner:

> Xing Wanfu was putting on the mining uniform of the Fuxin mines and a wicker helmet. The wicker helmet looked like a steel helmet. The mining light was emitting a white glow. As he walked by the glass window of the office, he slowed down and stopped for a moment. He looked at his attire in the mirror. It looked mighty and made him feel very proud.[185]

Similar narratives also excessively praised the style of the wicker helmet. In a 1960 poem entitled "The Songs of Miners," the miner poet Zhang Jianxun writes:

> The wicker hat on my head is better than all the emperor's crowns. I would never exchange it for the Crown Jewels of the Queen of England. If I had another life, I would wear this wicker crown again."[186]

The following case can further delineate the prominent position that wicker hats occupied in the lofty Chinse working-class image. On October 26, 1959, Beijing hosted a grand convention. More than 6,500 advanced producers from all over the country gathered in the newly inaugurated Great Hall of the People. The convention was called the first National Congress of Advanced Collectives and Advanced Producers of Socialist Construction in Industry, Transportation, Construction, Finance and Trade, commonly known as the National Gathering of Heroes and Heroines (*qunying hui* 群英会). On November 5, about 6,000 workers' representatives attended a banquet nominally convened by premier Zhou Enlai. Li Xiulan, an advanced productive labourer from the Xuchang Packing Factory, attended the banquet. As she recalled: "At 5:00 p.m., many representatives stepped into the venue with working uniforms, wicker helmets or aluminum helmets." In Liu's view, this was the reflection of the "spiritual features" of the working class as the master of the nation. In addition, a comment from a foreign

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[184] Lu Hao was born in 1920 and joined the CCP in 1937. He served as a reporter and the correspondent in Moscow for the *People's Daily*. He also served as the deputy secretary of the party committee and deputy chief editor of *Wenhui bao*.

[185] *RMRB*, November 2, 1955, 2.

[186] Zhang Jianxun 章建勋, "Meikuang gongren zhige" 煤矿工人之歌 [The song for coal miners], in *Da feiyue zhi ge* 大飞跃之歌 [The songs of the great leap], ed. *Yanhe* wenxue yuekan bianjibu 《延河》文学月刊编辑部 (Xi'an: Dongfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1960), 3.

journalist that was published in *Reference News* remained fresh in her mind: "In Western countries, it would be impossible for people who are not dressed in suits and tuxedos to enter such a splendid hall."[187]

Interestingly, as discussed earlier, during the period when Japanese forces occupied the major coal mines in Northern China from the late 1930s to the 1940s, wicker helmets were available to Chinese miners working for the Japanese. Even though the wicker helmet provided by the Japanese and the CCP were identical in style, as shown in the following so-called oral interviews, which were actually the products of the Socialist Education Movement in the 1960s and the practice known as "recalling the bitterness of the past so as to appreciate the sweetness of the present" (*yiku sitian* 忆苦思甜) in the early 1970s, there was a stark distinction between the descriptions of the wicker helmet provided by different sides. For example, in a 1964 oral interview, an old worker Wei Benhou, who was born in 1926, described his working experience in the Fangjiagui mines in the early 1940s:

> In the early morning of the next day, we were called up and went outside to stand in line. Each of us was given a wicker hat with a red Chinese character "*fang* 方" written on it. It was written so crookedly that it looked like a bloodstain.[188]

In 1971, an old worker Wang Futian described his feeling when he saw a wicker helmet for the first time in 1939 at the Kouquan Mines as follows:

> After about two hours, a supervisor brought a lot of wicker hats. They said that each man was given one. I was confused at that time. I asked what they were distributing. They told me it was a hat. I was wondering why Shanxi people do not wear cloth hats but wear this kind of hat?[189]

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[187] Li Xiulan 李秀兰, "Nanwang de wangshi" 难忘的往事 [An unforgettable past event], *Xuchang wenshi ziliao* 14 (n.d.): 21.

[188] Wei Benhou 魏本厚, "Kunan de ershi yi nian" 苦难的二十一年 [Twenty-one years of suffering], in *Lao kuanggong zuoguo de lu* 老矿工走过的路 [The road old miners have travelled], ed. Yu xuqi 喻绪祁 (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1964), 17.

[189] Wang Futian 王福田, "Yiku sitian bu wangben: Lao kuanggong Wang Futian gei geming shisheng jiang jiashi" 忆苦思甜不忘本: 老矿工王福田给革命师生讲家史 [Recalling the bitter and thinking of the sweet and do not forget the past's suffering: Old miner Wang Futian tells family history to revolutionary teachers and students], in *Chouhen man kuangshan: Datong meikuang gongren jiashi xuanbian* 仇恨满矿山: 大同

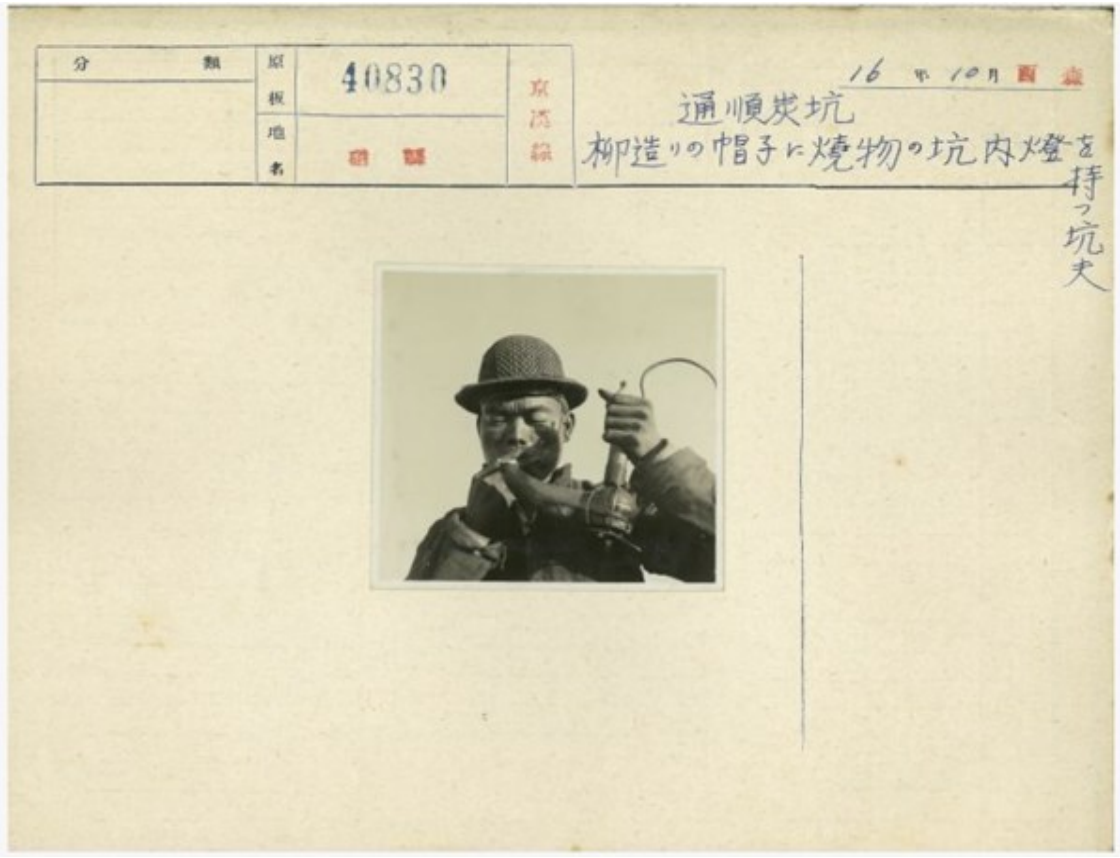

Figure 3. “A Miner with willow hat and pottery pit light in the Tongshun Coal Mine,” October 1941. Source: North China Railway Archive, 3806-040830-0. . http://codh.rois.ac.jp/north-china-railway/photograph/3806-040830-0.html

煤矿工人家史选编 [Mines are rife with hatred: Selected family histories of coal miners in Datong], ed. Shanxi sheng Datong kuangwu ju geming weiyuanhui *Kuanggong* jiashi bianxie zu 山西省大同矿务局革命委员会《矿工家史》编写组 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1971), 73–74.

Figure 4. "Manufacture of wicker hats in the Yongdingzhuang shaft of the Datong Coal Mines," June 1940. Source: North China Railway Archive, 3802-030445-1. http://codh.rois.ac.jp/north-china-railway/photograph/3802-030445-1.html

Looking back to Liu's account, it is evident that the wicker helmets those workers' representatives wore on that special occasion were more than mere protective equipment but an expression of the identity of the Chinese working class. In an article reviewing the revolutionary model opera *On the Docks* (*Haigang* 海港), writer Liu Jiang offers an account resembling Liu Xiulan's account: "In some major festivals, on the open-air stage in the 10,000-seat stadium, several thousand industrial workers in Shenyang with wicker helmets and white towels, were singing in unison: 'What an inexhaustible Shanghai port! Thousands of ships are busy going in and out. The stevedores lift ten thousand quintals of grain with their left hands and hold up a thousand

tons of steel with their right hands.'"[190] What these Shenyang workers were singing is the most emblematic aria sung by Gao Zhiyang, the leading figure of the opera *On the Docks*. The wicker helmets and white towels worn by Shenyang workers in real life were the most distinctive features of the dockworkers at the Shanghai port depicted in this model opera.

In short, PPE represented by wicker hats was bound up with the working-class image during the Mao era, symbolizing the lofty status available to the working class as claimed by the Party. Moreover, in this narrative, the workers cherish their PPE as a token of their appreciation for the Party's loving care. However, as the many examples that appear in the following section illustrate, workers' attitudes toward protective equipment were complex. Many workers were picky about protective equipment, reflecting their individual aesthetic sensibilities and preferences.

The Helmet is Ugly!

On October 9, 1965, a *Workers' Daily* article criticized Dai Jiufeng, a young worker from the construction engineering team of the Fuxin Mining Bureau, for not wearing his helmet in the workplace. After being scolded by an old worker called Master Zhang, Dai Jiufeng made a self-criticism to his colleagues: "In the past, I wore the safety helmet just for going through inspections. I found that the safety helmet is ugly and heavy. I am lacking in safety awareness. In the future, I will follow Master Zhang's words!"[191]

The year of 1965 was the last year that China's industry was developing in a comparatively normal order before the Cultural Revolution. However, as this *Workers' Daily* article suggests, there were many workers breaching safety regulations. Dai admitted that his unwillingness to wear safety helmets stemmed from the "lack of safety awareness," which was a platitude used by the officials in the Mao era and even in the

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[190] Liu Jialing 刘嘉陵, "Zhen shige zhuang buwan xie bujin de Shanghai gang" 真是个装不完卸不尽的上海港 [What an inexhaustible Shanghai port], *Renmin wenxue* 人民文学 12 (2000): 79–85.

[191] *GRRB*, October 9, 1965, 2.

post-Mao era to explain why workers did not follow safety regulations or rules. However, what really discouraged Dai from wearing the safety helmet was its "ugly style." What the wicker helmet looked like in the eyes of ordinary workers was far from those crown-like helmets that existed in the propaganda.

The case of Dai was not unique to the 1960s. There were a large number of factory inspection reports showing that workers had various reasons for their refusals to use PPE that symbolized the lofty social status of the Chinese working class and the loving care endowed by the party. Based on available sources, mostly factory inspection reports, newspaper reportage, and historical fiction, there were three major reasons that made workers feel reluctant to use PPE. In many cases, workers were far more attentive to the discomfort or unpleasantness brought about by wearing safety equipment than the potential hazards of not wearing it.

The first reason is discussed in the first chapter. Many workers, especially those veteran workers, usually had a cavalier attitude toward the risks they faced in the workplace. For this reason, they thought that the use of protective equipment was completely unnecessary. Moreover, a small percentage of them would show off their superior skills or boast their long records of service by purposely avoiding the use of protective equipment. As shown in the case of Lao Liu mentioned in the previous chapter, Lao Liu's adherence to the notion that "boldness of execution stems from great skill" (*yigao ren danda* 艺高人胆大) led him to never wear a safety belt and to view such an unprotected work style as a heroic behaviour. In a clapper talk composed by the Anhui Provincial Department of Construction in 1961, the author portrays another fictitious veteran worker Lao Wang rejecting the use of the safety helmet on the job:

Strange as it may seem	说来也奇怪
Lao Zhang never wears [a helmet]	老张硬不戴
He is bare-headed every day	天天光头顶

He leaves everything to chance	侥幸把活干
People try to advise Lao Zhang with well-intentioned words	人家好言来相劝
He responds with mocking words	他用冷语来回还
What do you know about this work?	这个活你懂啥
You are coming here to show off!	跑到这里瞎逞能
I have done it for decades without using a helmet	我干这活多少年，从来不带安全帽
Nothing bad has ever happened!	也没出过啥事情[192]

It is worth mentioning that those who deemed the use of protective equipment to be unnecessary were mostly male workers. They rejected the use of PPE not only for showing their top-notch working technique but sometimes also for showcasing their masculinity. One such episode is found in Li Cunbao's novel *Nineteen Graves in the Mountain*, published in 1985. The safety inspector, Chen Yu, put a helmet on the head of a vice squad leader, Wang Shizhong. However, Wang threw the helmet to the ground and said: "Who needs this?" The author then describes why he was reluctant to wear a helmet:

> The reason he did it is to both play an exemplary role of "being the last to enjoy" and to show his tough-guy spirit—as he often poses topless to display his well-developed muscles— It is a habit he's always had. According to the working

[192] Anhui sheng jianzhu ting laodong gongzi chu 安徽省建筑厅劳动工资处, ed., *Jianzhu anquan shengchan kuaiban* 建筑安全生产快板 [Construction safety clapper talks] (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 1961), 34–35. Of course, the avoidance of the use of protective equipment was not unique to old workers. For example, according to a 1952 document, a young worker Wang Ruxing at the Daming Steel Mill in Chongqing, often worked uninterruptedly for several hours without wearing goggles and masks. The official identified his behaviour as "show-off." Chongqing shi renmin zhengfu jiancha weiyuanhui bangongshi 重庆市人民政府监察委员会办公室, "Bixu zhongshi gaishan jianzhu gongren de laodong baohu tiaojian" 必须重视改善建筑工人的劳动保护条件 [We must pay attention to the improvement of labor protection conditions for construction workers], October 5, 1952, TMA, X0048-c-000985-020.

> regulation, he is required to wear a mask when digging tunnels. But he has never followed the regulation: "I am not a delicate lady, why should I wear it? It suffocates me!"[193]

The second reason for workers' reluctance to wear PPE was that some poorly designed or inferior equipment made workers uncomfortable. In the summer of 1955, the Tianjin Committee of China Machinery Unions performed inspections in dozens of factories in Tianjin. When the inspection team was in the Dengdian Brick and Tile factory, they found that there was no one wearing leather boots. When asked why, these workers said: "These boots are so heavy that they strain our feet! Besides, I haven't seen anyone smashing their feet since the beginning of this year." The inspectors also found that few machinery workers in the workshop were wearing goggles. These workers said: "We feel dizzy when wearing these shoddy goggles. Fishing out a defective goggle with only a frame and no lens, one worker said to an inspector: "These goggles are of terrible quality. The lens popped out of the frame before I used it. How am I supposed to use it?"[194]

Masks seemed to have encountered more resistance from workers than goggles and boots even though some CCP officials had promoted the use of masks before 1949. In 1958, *Labour Protection Bulletin* published an article criticizing some cadres for failing to enforce the requirement that workers should wear masks in the workplace. This article suggests that by 1958 it appeared to be very common for workers to work without masks.[195] For miners and tunnellers, who were exposed to hazardous dust, gases or vapours all day long, wearing masks was never a pleasant task. In a short story titled "Fervent Passion," writer Gong Rangxiong portrays a Youth League member Zhang Sufang, who was keenly caring about the health of railroad workers building the Baocheng Railroad in the mid-1950s. The following quarrel between Zhang Sufang and

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[193] Li Cunbao 李存葆, *Shanzhong na shijiu zuo fenying* 山中那十九座坟茔 [Nineteen graves in the mountain] (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 20.

[194] Zhongguo jixie gonghui Tianjin weiyuanhui 中国机械工会天津委员会, "Laobao gongzuo lianhe jiancha qingkuang zongjie" 劳保工作联合检查情况总结 [Summary of the joint inspection of labour insurance work], November 20, 1965, TMA, x0196-c-001415-041.

[195] Wen Yi 文毅, "Cong dai kouzhao de wenti tanqi" 从戴口罩的问题谈起 [Talking about wearing masks], *LDBHTX* 137 no. 12 (1958): 25.

the secretary of the party branch Wang Sirong excerpted from the story reflects workers' prevalent refusal to wear masks at that time:

> Wang: This cannot be solved at all. Leaders provide workers with masks because they are concerned about workers' health. However, workers don't like to wear masks. They feel that it is difficult to breathe!
>
> Zhang: So why do the leaders give masks to workers? Isn't it a practice of formalism? So, you're telling us these drill operators have to suffer illness?
>
> Wang: Don't make a fuss! Which drill operator does not have some problems with his lungs?[196]

This was by no means a sheer literary creation but a reflection on many facts prevalently found in China's industrial workplaces. A summary report released by the Tianjin Labour Bureau on October 1, 1950, stated that many enterprises "still do not pay attention to factory hygiene, and some workers, including the workers at the China Textiles, are not used to wearing masks."[197] Paradoxically, workers at the China Textiles were the ones who made the request to the joint inspection team about the need for masks in February 1950. At the 1957 Labour Protection Conference in Shanxi, Cao Pu mentioned that a lot of coal miners in Shanxi "were not used to wearing masks" because they felt suffocated when wearing them.[198] My miner informants in Taiyuan offered many similar accounts of their aversion to wearing masks in the mines. Yang Qingmin

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[196] Gong Rangxiong was the president of student council, College of Art and Literature, Sichuan University in the 1950s. Gong Rangxiong 龚让熊, "Huore de xin" 火热的心 [Fervent passion], in "*Erxiu*" *chujia: duanpian xiaoshuo ji* "二秀" 出嫁: 短篇小说集 [Short story collection: "Erxiu"'s marriage], ed. Zhongguo zuojia xiehui Chongqing fenhui 中国作家协会重庆分会 (Chongqing: Chongqing renmin chubanshe, 1956), 94.

[197] Tianjin shi renmin zhengfu laodong ju 天津市人民政府劳动局, "Gongchang anquan weisheng gongzuo zongjie" 工厂安全卫生工作总结 [Summary of factory safety and sanitation work], November 1950, TMA, x0053-c-000181-011.

[198] Cao Pu 曹普, "Shanxi sheng liangnian lai laodong baohu gongzuo qingkuang ji dahui zongjie baogao" 山西省两年来劳动保护工作情况及大会总结报告 [Labour protection works in Shanxi Province over the past two years and concluding report the conference], in *Shanxi sheng laodong baohu huiyi ziliao ji* 山西省劳动保护会议资料集 [Collected materials of the Shanxi provincial labour protection work conference] (Taiyuan, 1957), 16–17.

said: “Nobody wore them. We couldn’t breathe with masks. You will understand when you get into a mine shaft.”[199]

Aside from miners and drilling workers, textile workers hated masks as well. In 1955, the administrator of the No. 1 State Textile Mill in Wuhan issued a regulation prohibiting workers not wearing masks from entering workshops. To deal with this regulation, many workers entered the workshop with masks and then took them off afterwards. Some workers said: “I’ve never worn a mask and I have never gotten sick.” Many workers found that the masks provided by the factory trade union were so thick that they felt it was hard to breathe. To solve this problem, the factory union had to develop some thinner masks for the workers.[200]

It was not just textile workers who showed their hostilities toward wearing masks. According to the recollection of Feng Shangsong, a ceramic artist born in 1930, “a lot of potters in Jingdezhen threw dust-proof facilities and their masks aside (in the 1950s and 1960s).” One of their favourite sayings was: “It is okay to swallow some dust.” Like the textile workers in Wuhan, these potters had their masks hung around their necks when no one was inspecting on the spot and put them on as soon as someone came for inspections. As a result, these potters inhaled all the dust that had accumulated in their masks into their lungs.[201]

The last reason was that workers refused to use some equipment because they found it unsightly or because wearing some particular equipment would make them appear unsightly. Aside from the case of Deng Jiufeng mentioned at the beginning of this section, the fact that the American-style helmet left a lasting impression on Fu Baoxian

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[199] Interview 1.

[200] Guoying Wuhan mian fangzhi chang gonghui weiyuanhui 国营武汉棉纺织厂工会委员会 and Hubei sheng gonghui lianhe hui gongzuo zu 湖北省工会联合会工作组, *Women chang gonghui shi zenyang fahui zuoyong de* 我们厂工会是怎样发挥作用的 [This is how our factory unions worked] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1957), 38.

[201] Feng Shangsong was born in 1930 in Duchang, Jiangxi province, into a family with a long line of ceramics. He was the deputy director of the Jingdezhen Labor Bureau in the 1960s and the deputy manager of the Jingdezhen Ceramic Industry Company in the 1980s. Feng Shangsong 冯上松, “Taoci fangchen gongzuo huigu” 陶瓷防尘工作回顾 [Reflections on dust control in ceramic industry], *Jingdezhen wenshi ziliao* 13 (1997): 132.

also suggests that the aesthetic appeal of equipment could play an important role in workers' decision to use equipment or not. Of course, the safety helmet was not the only equipment workers found ugly. As mentioned by Cao Pu at the 1957 Shanxi Labour Protection Conference, some high-altitude operators felt awkward and disgraceful to have a "tail," which referred to the climbing harness. In 1957, the factory union of the Tianjin Xinxing Steel Mill set up a cooling room for helping workers prevent heat-related injuries. Unexpectedly, most workers were unwilling to stay in it. They said: "It looks like a birdcage. Why don't you send us to the zoo?"[202]

Workers who refused to use protective equipment for purely aesthetic reasons were mostly represented by female workers. In a poem titled "Twelve Girls" (*shi er ge guniang* 十二个姑娘) published in 1954, the author Shao Yanxiang (1933–2020) portrays how twelve young female textile workers, who took Hao Jianxiu as their role model, spend their days with much passion and energy. One line of the poem goes like this: "As soon as I step into the workshop, I have my braids rolled into my work cap. I fasten my cuffs and say: 'let's do it now!'"[203] The work cap in this poem refers to the soft cap designed for tying up the long hair of female workers to prevent them from entanglement accidents, a type of accident common among female workers. In Tianjin alone, at least three ad hoc safety inspections were triggered by hair entanglement accidents between the late 1950s and 1964.[204] In a safety exhibition held in Tianjin in 1965, the broken braid of Wu Meilan, a female worker who died in an entanglement

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[202] Zhong gongye gonghui 重工业工会, "Guanyu shang bannian laodong baohu xieyi shu qingkuang de diaocha baogao" 关于上半年劳动保护协议书情况的调查报告 [Investigative report on the signing of labour protection agreements in the first half of the year], October 19, 1957, TMA, x0045-y-000020-021.

[203] *RMRB*, June 17, 1954, 3.

[204] Between August and September 1956 alone, two female workers, Li Jingxian and Jiang Ruiying, had their braids entangled in machines at the Tianjin Battery Factory and the Xinhua Paper Factory, and nearly died. The Tianjin Municipal Labour Bureau issued a directive requesting factories to improve safety regulations for female workers. On March 16, 1959, Zhang Xiuchen, a female worker in the Tianjin Wire Drawing Factory, died in a hair entanglement accident. In the wake of this accident, the local labour department made an announcement to request factories to attach importance to such accidents. See Tianjin shi laodong ju 天津市劳动局, "guanyu yaoqiu ge gongchang qiye caiqu cuoshi fangzhi jiaoshang nüzi bianzi shigu de tongzhi" 关于要求各工厂企业采取措施防止绞伤女子辫子事故的通知 [Circular by the Tianjin Municipal Labour Bureau on the requirement of factories and enterprises to take measures to prevent entanglement accidents], October 23, 1956, TMA, x0196-y-000436-007.

accident on September 29, 1964, was also displayed to educate female workers about the importance of wearing safety hats.[205]

Nevertheless, in practice, many female workers hated their safety hats because they forced them to wrap their beloved long hair or braids and made themselves look very unsightly. In 1956, the directors of the 23rd Cotton Weaving Society and Carpet Manufacturing Society in Beijing's Chongwen District, forced all female workers to cut off their braids after an entanglement accident took place. Zhang Huajuan, a female worker, did not want her braids cut and said she would rather wear a hat. The director rejected her request and cut off her braids anyway.[206] In the Tianjin Yujin Steel Wire Factory, many workers simply put their hats on the back of their heads in order to leave their good-looking braids visible.[207] In the Shanghai Cable Factory, some female workers found that wearing a cap made them look like a granny. Thus, some of them liked to leave a few strands of hair swaying out of their caps.[208]

Furthermore, workers' aesthetic preference led them to demand the use of good-looking equipment as alternatives, especially those made of premium materials. In the eyes of many workers, the attractiveness of PPE was positively related to the preciousness of the raw materials used to make them. For example, in the Fushun No. 2 Oil Plant, some workers who already had goggles still wanted goggles with crystal lenses. They claimed that the goggles with glass lenses were so ugly that they did not like to wear them. Additionally, some loading workers and repairmen refused to receive cotton rubber shoes and demanded cotton canvas boots, and some welders wanted hats made of short-pile velour to replace their "ugly" dog skin hats.[209]

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[205] "Anquan jiaoyu zhanlan jieshuo ci" 安全教育展览解说词 [Commentary texts of safety exhibition], 1964, TMA, x0084-c-000984-001.

[206] "Qingkuang huibao (927)" 情况汇报 (927) [Qingkuang huibao (927)], August 31, 1956, BMA, 002-008-00246-00098.

[207] *TJRB*, June 2, 1952, 2.

[208] *XMWB*, January 30, 1960, 2.

[209] Du Mingde 杜明德, "Fushun shiyou erchang fadong qunzhong zhengdun fanghu yongpin de jingyan" 抚顺石油二厂发动群众整顿防护用品的经验 [The Fushun Oil No. 2 Plant's experience in rectifying the distribution of protective equipment by launching the masses], *LDBHTX* 130 no. 5 (1958): 7.

A more illustrative case comes from a film entitled *A Safety Belt* (*Yifu baoxian dai* 一副保险带) adapted from the *Huai* opera in 1974. Set in the Qinfeng brigade, a fictional production brigade based on the Liziyuan Brigade of the Taopu Commune in Shanghai, this forty-minute film tells a story of how a scrupulous brigade accountant Hong Ying refuses electrician Xiao Yang's request for reimbursement for a leather safety belt and finally exposes Qiu Jincai, a brigade accountant who harbours a grudge against the brigade leaders for being dismissed from his job, for stealing collective property. In the second scene of this film, Qiu Jincai and Xiao Yang make their appearances. At the instigation of Qiu, Xiao Yang purchases a new leather safety belt worth fifty *yuan* without authorization and brings it to Hong Ying for reimbursement. Interestingly, the reason Xiao Yang wants a new safety belt is because she thinks the old one made of hemp rope is too earthy (*tuqi* 土气). In the third scene, when Xiao Yang grabs the leather safety belt from the rear rack of her bicycle, her first sentence to Hong Ying is: "Isn't it good-looking? It's waxed!" When Hongying rejects Xiao Yang's request for reimbursement, Xiao Yang feels very upset and complains: "[In] a new socialist countryside, a small electrician uses a hemp rope! It is so absurd!" In the original opera script, there is also a soliloquy describing how much this good-looking safety belt delights Xiao Yang's eyes:

What a first-class safety belt,	保险带一副是头等品,
The metal button is shining.	钢砸作纽亮啊亮晶晶.
It is flexible with a lightweight buckle,	搭扣灵活又轻便,
Everything is to my liking.	像像样样称我心. [210]

[210] Shanghai shi Jiading yeyu chuangzuo zu 上海市嘉定业余创作组 and Shanghai shi renmin huaiju tuan chuangzuo zu 上海市人民淮剧团创作组. eds., *Yi fu baoxian dai* 一副保险带 [A safety belt] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975), 3.

Figure 5. At seven minutes and forty-three seconds of the film *A Safety Belt* (1974). Xiao Yang says to Hong Ying: “This is beautiful, isn’t it? It is waxed!”

Figure 6. At nine minutes and thirty-nine seconds of the film. After Hong Ying rejects Xiao Yang’s request for reimbursement, Xiao Yang gets upset and yells at Hong Ying: “A little electrician uses a hemp rope! It is so absurd. It is so face-losing!”

It is worth mentioning that the temporal and geographical context of the film story was somewhat different from that of the cases discussed above. However, it is safe to say that workers' enthusiasm for protective equipment made of luxury materials existed as early as the 1950s. This was in part a representation of what Karl Gerth calls "consumerism" that existed in socialist China.[211]

Workers' attitudes toward protective equipment, however, were more than the pursuit of the "easy-to-use" and aesthetically pleasing. As I will show in the next section, there were also many workers who were never picky about PPE. However, this does not mean that these workers were willing to follow safety rules and use PPE in their workplaces. Rather, they diverted protective equipment such as boots, gloves, and facial masks for private use. China's labour authorities labelled such behaviour as "feathering one's nest at public expense." This was, however, a reflection of Maoist China's shortage of daily necessities.

Welfare or Necessities?

> In the winter of 1962, I went home on leave. When I returned, I sold a set of like-new work uniforms in Linxiang because I did not have sufficient travelling expenses. I got fifteen yuan. I sold the labour protection necessity issued by the state for money. The above facts show that it was a serious crime of speculation and disguised theft of public property.
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> When I went home to visit my relatives in 1969, I took home a raincoat and a pair of hiking boots, which were issued by the state. The above facts were a manifestation of "make what is publicly owned privately owned." This was a tendency toward the capitalist road and bourgeois reactionary thinking.[212]

These "criminal facts" come from a confession written by an unnamed "hatless rightist" (*zhaimao youpai* 摘帽右派) during the "One Strike, Three Antis" (*yida sanfan* 一打三反) in 1970 after he was once again uncovered by the revolutionary masses. In his

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[211] Karl Gerth, *Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 126–27.

[212] Tuo Huangzhe 拓荒者, "Xx shi: yi zhaimao youpai wei shiying wenge shengcun de renzui shu (2)" Xx 市: 一摘帽右派为适应文革生存的认罪书（中）[Xx city: An uncapped rightist's confession of guilt to survive in the Cultural Revolution (2)], *Minjian lishi* 民间历史 (blog), accessed May 21, 2021, http://mjlsh.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/book.aspx?cid=6&tid=175&pid=2331.

29-page confession, the author lists more than thirty crimes of "corruption and theft." The act of "converting the public into the private" (*huagong weisi* 化公为私) was often the target of crackdowns during the Mao era when a political campaign against corruption and waste began. Taking protective equipment out of the workplace for private use, however, was an experience shared by the vast majority of Chinese workers living in the Mao era.

During the First Five-Year Plan, the rapid development of industry brought not only the expansion of the workforce but also an increase in demand for protective equipment. In 1956, the State Council adopted the Factory Safety and Health Regulation, of which Section 10 specified the types of protective equipment to be issued in factories and mines and the scope of provisions in detail. Furthermore, local labour departments in many regions, including Northeast China, Hubei, Hunan, Zhejiang, and Jiangxi, started establishing supply chains for PPE in tandem with local commerce departments by around 1951. By the mid-1950s, local general goods stores (*baihuo shangdian*) had set up special counters to sell PPE to enterprises. By the early 1960s, in some regions of intensively developed industries with high demand for protective equipment, specialty stores had been set up to supply orders from enterprises and mines.[213]

However, in the mid-1950s workers' excessive claiming for PPE began to go beyond what the top authority deemed permissible. According to a 1958 report issued by the Ministry of Labour, some workers claimed five sets of working uniforms in a single year. Electricians who had already been equipped with insulating shoes still claimed sneakers.[214] In the Chongqing Iron and Steel Mill, a considerable number of workers

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[213] Wang Shaocheng 王韶程, ed., *Shenyang shangye zhi: fangzhipin ye* 沈阳商业志: 纺织品业 [Shenyang commerce gazetteer: Textile products gazetteer] (Shenyang: Shenyang shangye guanli ju, 1990), 9.

[214] Tianjin shi gonghui lianhe hui 天津市工会联合会, "Renzhen guanche quanguo gonghui di erci laodong baohu gongzuo huiyi jingshen, jin yibu jiaqiang qunzhong laodong baohu gongzuo" 认真贯彻全国工会第二次劳动保护工作会议精神, 进一步加强群众劳动保护工作 [Conscientiously implement the gist of the second national labour protection conference of trade unions and further strengthen the mass labour protection work], December 1957, TMA, x0044-y-000375-0014.

were equipped with "state property (protective equipment) to their teeth."[215] In the Tianjin Papermaking Plant in 1958, some workers reported that the distribution of protective equipment was too generous. The factory leaders almost provided everything—hats, clothes, rubber boots, and many other accessories. Some workers even made a big mosquito net with several uniforms.[216]

In addition, there were a lot of workers who claimed protective equipment in excess of quotas or under false pretences. At the Baotou Steel Company, 120 concrete mixer operators took a total of 180 pairs of leather boots. During the Spring Festival holiday of 1957, three workers from the engineering team of the Henan Grain Department had the following conversation at the train station (maybe Zhengzhou Railway Station). One worker said to the other: "I took two extra pairs of gloves today." The other one responded: "I got four extra pairs of gloves today." A worker next to him heard and said regretfully: "How come I forgot to get a few more too?" Some workers even threatened their leaders in this way: "If you don't give me gloves, you need to bear all the consequences."[217] Zhang Jingui, a tiler from the Baotou Steel and Iron Plant, reported in 1958: "As long as we asked, the factory leaders would meet our demands. When the old ones were broken, they would give us new. When people 'from the bottom' made trouble, he would give us as well. He never considered the actual demand."[218]

Among all types of safety equipment claimed by workers under false pretences, masks and gloves were the most popular ones, as they were regarded as the ideal

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[215] Xudong 旭东 and Yuxin 俞新, "Zai zhengdun fanghu yongpin gongzuo zhong zhide zhuyi de wenti" 在整顿防护用品工作中值得注意的问题 [Noteworthy issues in the work of rectifying the distribution of protective equipment], *LDBHTX* 128, no. 3 (February 1958): 11.

[216] "Tianjin zaozhi zongchang laodong fanghu yongpin fafang guanli zhidu de jianli qingkuang" 天津造纸总厂劳动防护用品发放管理制度建立情况 [Establishment of the management system the distribution of PPE in the Tianjin Paper General Factory], October 21, 1961, TMA, x0084-c-000710-002.

[217] Li Zhiqiang 李志强, "Henan sheng laodong ting zhaokai zhengdun pingheng fanghu yongpin zuotanhui" 河南省劳动厅召开整顿平衡防护用品座谈会 [The Henan Provincial Department of Labour held a forum to rectify the distribution of protective equipment], *LDBHTX* 128, no. 3 (February 1958): 14.

[218] "Baogang yi gongsi zhaokai zhigong daibiao dahui taolun he jiejue le fanghu yongpin bu heli de wenti" 包钢一公司召开职工代表大会讨论和解决了防护用品不合理的问题 [The first branch of the Baotou Steel Company held a staff representative assembly to discuss and solve the problem of unreasonable distribution of protective equipment], *LDBHTX* 128 no. 3 (February 1958): 12.

materials for making daily necessities. According to a 1958 report made by Wang Wenlu, a worker at the Baotou Iron and Steel Mill, a tiler named Liu Hai had hoarded 36 pairs of gloves. He made sweaters from these gloves.[219] A worker in the No. 3 Henan Textile Construction Company had hoarded many masks and made them into a mosquito net for his children. In the Kaifeng Yarn Factory, some workers made masks into diapers for their children's use. In the Sanmenxia Engineering Bureau, some workers made pillows out of protective gloves. According to a 1957 article published in *Labour Protection Bulletin*, in the Xiangxi coal mines, some leaders found that most workers took their masks home, but "not many wore them in the workplaces."[220]

Similar cases were too many to list here. On October 14, 1957, the State Council promulgated the Circular on the Rectification of the Distribution of Protective Equipment, asking local industrial departments and enterprises to rectify the distribution of protective equipment under the principle of "meeting the necessary and reducing the unnecessary."[221] In late 1957, many enterprises began to restrict the distribution of protective equipment in their enterprises under this regulation. This triggered a lot of discontent among workers. When the Rectification Campaign spread to enterprises, especially when its focus shifted to opposing waste and conservatism (*fanbaoshou fan langfei* 反浪费反保守) in March 1958, most of the above cases were brought into light by workers as evidence of wasting state properties in enterprise rectification debates.[222]

The excessive demand for protective equipment revealed a discrepancy in the understanding of protective equipment between workers and the authorities. Ordinary workers considered that protective equipment was part of socialist welfare. However, the party insisted that protective equipment did not fall under the category of welfare. In

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[219] "Baogang yi gongsi zhaokai zhigong daibiao dahui taolun he jiejue le fanghu yongpin bu heli de wenti," 13.

[220] Wei Fatang 魏法堂, Yang Maoshan 杨茂山, and Zuo Jun 左军, "Heli shiyong fanghu pin" 合理使用防护品 [Proper use of protective equipment], *LDBHTX* 125, no. 24 (December 1957): 21.

[221] Liaoning sheng difang zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 辽宁省地方志编纂委员会. ed., *Liaoning sheng zhi: laodong zhi* 辽宁省志: 劳动志 [Liaoning gazetteer: Labour gazetteer] (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 2004), 314.

[222] Andreas, *Disenfranchised*, 49.

addition, the party argued that it was mainly those "new workers" who had not experienced hardship before liberation who had an excessive demand for protective equipment. To deal with this problem, the party pinned high hopes on old workers again. In many enterprises, old workers were organized to educate those younger workers with their experience of working in unprotected conditions before liberation, so that they would appreciate the opportunity to have access to safety equipment in the new society. Interestingly, as discussed in the previous chapter, in many cases old workers played an awkward role in educating young workers. For example, in a debate on curtailing the distribution of protective equipment at the Chongqing Tongyong Machine Factory in 1958, many workers said they were prone to accidents without working clothes. Bai Suiliang, a veteran worker, said to these young workers: "I didn't have any protective uniforms in the past, and I have never encountered an accident."[223] In this context, workers were persuaded to give up their demand for new equipment based on an argument reflecting "lack of safety awareness."

The practice of "the use of public goods for private gain" by taking protective equipment out of workplaces existed almost throughout the entire Mao era. In the wake of the Great Leap Forward, the CCP once again tightened control over the supply and distribution of PPE because of the poor cotton harvest in 1960 and the black-market trade. Cracking down on the illegal sale of workers' protective equipment, especially gloves and masks, became one of the priorities for labour departments in the early 1960s. During the same time, local governments in major industrial cities began setting up recycling stations for the recovery and repair of PPE for second use. However, the party's attempts to control the proper use of PPE were not able to hinder ordinary workers from carrying protective equipment home. Making sweaters out of string knit gloves became a necessary skill for many female workers or the wives of male workers in the 1960s and 1970s. During a period when materials were scarce and difficult for most people to freely obtain, turning these free-to-use protective equipment into household necessities was undoubtedly a survival strategy for many ordinary workers. Li Chunlin, who was born in

[223] Chen Changfu 陈昶夫, "Chongqing tongyong jiqi chang kaizhan fanghu yongpin wenti de bianlun" 重庆通用机器厂开展防护用品的辩论 [Debate on protective equipment at the Chongqing Tongyong Machinery Factory], *LDBHTX* 128, no. 3 (January 1958): 12.

1960 and worked as a journalist for *Guangming Daily*, recalled: "When I was young my family was poor. My classmates wore sweaters in late autumn, and I could only wear several unlined garments. In this condition, my mother saved up her labour protection gloves, unravelled them into wool threads, dyed them, and then had them knit into colourful sweaters."[224] Ma Weidu also offered a blog account in 2015 as follows: "It was a luxury for Chinese people at that time to buy wool and to knit sweaters. Some poor families knit sweaters with used gloves. In factories, white gloves were generally distributed as *laobao*, one pair per month. Some female workers hoarded their gloves, unravelled and washed them, then knit them into sweaters. Some would dye their glove-made sweaters in their favourite colours. This was the way they lived a hard life as a sweet life."[225]

Epilogue

In 1980, a surveyor named Wang Dewang from the Shanxi Survey and Mapping Bureau sent a letter to *People's Daily* expressing his complaints about the protective equipment provided by his work unit: "The work cap and jacket are dark and dull. I need to process the pants before I wear them. The fur boots are heavy and stiff, dull, and stuffy." After presenting his comments on PPE, Wang continued in his letter: "The labour protection necessities should be made to adapt to our actual working conditions."[226] Three years later, a worker named Li Xiaoying from the Jilin Province Substation Company sent a similar letter to *People's Daily*, stating that the working clothes for Chinese workers were in urgent need of reform in terms of style: "The work clothes in China are made of "labour cloth" (denim). They are very thick, with few collars. This style has remained the same for decades. Recently, a leading comrade of the central government mentioned that the style of clothes needs reform. Therefore, workers often discuss together that it is also necessary to reform our working uniforms. The reform, as

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[224] Li Chunlin 李春林, *Shusheng yijiu* 书声依旧 [Book sounds remain] (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban, 1997), 57.

[225] Ma Weidu 马未都, "Zhi maoyi" 织毛衣 [Knitting a sweater], http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5054769e0102vvoj.html?tj=1. Archived April 2, 2021.

[226] *RMRB*, September 4, 1980, 4.

far as I am concerned, should accord to the principle of being Protective, Beautiful, Decent, Economical, and Practical. The desire to look attractive is universal. In addition, reforming the style of work clothes can also improve the physical and mental health of workers and will be beneficial to production and construction."[227] One year after, Gao Kunrong, the director of the Textile Bureau of the Ministry of Commerce, responded to Li's letter in *People's Daily*. Gao said: "The reform of working clothes started in late 1982. The reform was based on the principles of "Protective, Attractive, and Decent." In the letter, Gao also said that by May Day of 1984, Chinese workers were expected to wear more attractive work clothes and to use more well-designed PPE.[228]

In the early 1980s, the active reform initiated by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Commerce regarding the style of PPE not only attested to the widespread existence of Chinese workers' preferences for the use of PPE in the Mao era that I analyzed in this chapter but also meant that their preferences for PPE, especially the aesthetic preferences, began to be unleashed and approved by the top authorities after the demise of the Mao era. After 1984, many enterprises started to take ownership of their own procurement of PPE. However, this did not mean that workers were letting their PPE serve their proper purpose. Many enterprises provided workers with expensive fashions and even some household appliances such as electric fans or electric blankets in the name of distributing PPE. In 1989, Xu Rizheng identified this phenomenon as "the fashioning of labour protection necessities" with the aim of pocketing public funds in disguised form.[229] In the post-Mao era, even fewer workers valued their PPE. The sale and trading of PPE were increasingly blatant in the 1980s. For example, in 1987, a PPE trading market emerged in the Hongkou district of Shanghai, where workers traded PPE to make some extra cash.[230] In the family dormitory area of the Wuhan Iron and Steel Company, open exchange of PPE by workers' families had become a norm by the late 1980s.[231]

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[227] *RMRB*, September 14, 1983, 8.

[228] *RMRB*, April 28, 1984, 5.

[229] *RMRB*, April 9, 1989, 8.

[230] *RMRB*, May 27, 1987, 5.

[231] *RMRB*, March 11, 1989, 6.

It must be acknowledged that not all workers in Maoist China, in their treatment of PPE, were far from the image portrayed by the party. For some workers, the moment they began to recognize the decline of their status was when they found that their work unit stopped providing them with PPE and other labour protection necessities in the 1980s. As an old worker in the Nanjing Textile Machinery Factory said after the enterprise where he had spent his entire life was contracted out: "In the past, even if the factory was at the edge of bankruptcy, our leader still provided us with anti-cracking oil and face cream. This shows that only the old leaders have our workers in their heart!"[232]

[232] *RMRB*, March 3, 1988, 2.

Chapter 3. "We Want Sweet Soda, Not Salt Soda": Salt Soda and Heatstroke Prevention

The spring wind blows and the red flag flutters
The bell of steel tapping sounds clear
Today in the sunshine we hold up this cup of water
Our hands are trembling with excitement
Take a sip and enjoy the taste
The aroma seeps into our hearts and the sweetness fills our lungs
Taking up the heavy burden with our steps
We will never feel weary
Ah, I dare to say
This is not an ordinary jug of water
Taste a sip! how sweet it is!
Swallow it then you will love our new socialist society even more

—Li Songtao, "Ah, This Mug of Water!" December 1965.

In 1965, writer Li Songtao wrote this poem entitled "Ah, This Jug of Water" in his hometown Fushun, which was famous for the steel industry in the Mao era. As the author explains in the poetry preface, "the jug of water" refers to salt soda (*yan qishui* 盐汽水), a type of drink which is "both sweet and salty" and "exclusively supplied to steelworkers exposed to high temperatures."[233] Since the early 1950s, because of the rapid growth of the steel industry and the frequent occurrence of extreme weather, heat stress had gradually become one of the most common and serious occupational hazards that damaged the health and productivity of Chinese workers, especially those workers exposed to extreme heat in steel and textile workshops. Accordingly, heatstroke prevention and cooling down workplace temperatures became one of the most principal tasks of the party's labour protection works. In the summer of 1952, the Tianjin Steel Mill pioneered the use of salt soda as a therapeutic method to relieve steelworkers' heat-related illnesses. In the following decades, as China's labour and industrial departments routinized the campaign of "Heatstroke Prevention and Cooling-down" (*fangshu jiangwen* 防暑降温), salt soda received widespread use in various types of industrial

[233] Li Songtao 李松涛, "O, zhe bei shui" 噢, 这杯水 [Ah, this jug of water], in *Shi de jiaoyin* 诗的脚印 [Footprints of poems], by Li Songtao 李松涛 (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1981), 96–97.

workplaces, especially in steelworks and construction sites. During the Mao era, providing workers with salt soda in the workplace was almost synonymous with the party's initiatives of heatstroke prevention.

Even though salt soda was an all-too-familiar item to many Chinese workers living in the Mao era, few people outside of China know much about this curious drink. Aside from Yao Liang's doctoral dissertation focusing on soft drinks in modern China, no scholarly works devote any chapters to the history of this drink. In her dissertation, Yao examines how salt soda appeared as an alternative to Coca-Cola in China after 1949 and how Shanghai's labour authorities promoted salt soda as a type of socialist welfare and portrayed the provision of salt soda as a representation of its loving care for the Chinese working class.[234] I acknowledge that Yao makes a qualified point, but the author merely states the obvious, which is evident in Li Songtao's poem and many other official narratives. In addition, there are some mistakes in historical facts in Yao's dissertation. For example, Yao mentions that salt soda was first invented by the Shanghai Aquarius Mineral Factory in 1956.[235] This is a fatal mistake about the history of salt soda and the party's labour protection policies.

This chapter will revisit the history of salt soda and focus on the interplay between workers' individual taste preferences and the production of salt soda. Since 1953, many local labour departments and factories had intensively promoted the use of salt soda as a remedy to alleviate workers' suffering from heatstroke and an energy booster for enhancing workers' productivity. But many salt soda manufacturers were not or incapable of taking workers' taste preferences into their consideration. The poor flavour of salt soda did not appeal to many workers. As a result, many workers refused to drink salt soda, defeating the party's original purpose of providing it. Since the mid-1950s, some manufacturers of salt soda had begun to adjust the formula imported from

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[234] Liang Yao, "Consuming Science: A History of Soft Drinks in Modern China" (PhD diss., Georgia Institute of Technology, 2015), 239–60.

[235] Yao states in her dissertation: "Considering the medical theory as well as the challenging food situation, Aquarius Mineral Water Company, the only joint state-private owned soft drink company left in Shanghai at that time, creatively and independently developed a new product—salty soda, known as *yanqishui*—to meet the demand." Yao, "Consuming Science: A History of Soft Drinks in Modern China," 244.

the Soviet Union to accommodate workers' taste preferences. This led to workers' increased acceptance of salt soda. However, many workers were not consuming it with the appreciation of the purposes envisioned by the party when it was first developed. This changed salt soda from a remedy with medicinal effects to a simple appetizing drink.

The Use of Salt Soda in the 1950s

The Introduction of Salt Soda in the Early 1950s

At the end of June 1952, an ad hoc safety inspection was conducted in the Tianjin Steel Mill. During the inspection, a problem reported by some workers drew much attention from the factory administrators. These workers were furnace workers, saying that after taking a shower following a day's work, "they always felt drained, dizzy, and sometimes got cramps in their legs."[236]

What these workers described were the characteristic symptoms of heat stress, which plagued numerous Chinese steelworkers and textile workers in the early 1950s. During the same period, in the workplaces of light and heavy industries in many cities outside of Tianjin, it was commonplace for workers to endure such symptoms in their workshops. In the summer of 1952, the temperature in the rolling shop of the Shanghai Steel Mill No. 3 was always "as high as 180 degrees Fahrenheit." In the areas around hot rolling mills, the temperatures were around 120 degrees. Workers said they could not stand in their positions for more than ten minutes. A doggerel composed by some steelworkers read like this: "We have red-hot steel in the front and burning furnaces behind. The roof over my head is hot. The floor underfoot is scorching!" In addition, most of them had an aversion to food and felt sluggish. In a single day alone, out of a total of twenty-two workers on one shift in the cold-rolling processing group at the rolling mill, nineteen workers had aversions to food and drink because of heatstroke.[237] In November 1952, workers at the Taiyuan Steel Mill sent a letter to the *People's Daily* complaining that the temperature in the steel plant was around 120 degrees all year round

[236] *GRRB*, June 14, 1953, CCRCA.

[237] *NBCK* 187 (August 16, 1952): 190–91.

and that many workers had reached the point of finding it "unbearable."[238] In the Yuxiang Yarn Factory in Changsha, the temperatures in the workshops were always around 108 degrees in summer. Many workers were sick from heat exhaustion, and as many as ten percent of them took leave.[239] Similar things also took place in northern China. In the Jibei Yarn Factory in Hebei, the temperatures in the workshops were as high as 102 degrees. As a result, "workers fainted one after another."[240]

It bears noting that these reports on the high temperatures and extreme heat in China's industrial workplaces predominantly appeared in 1952. This was because high temperatures which contributed significantly to extremely high absentee rates became an obstacle to the implementation of the "Increasing Production and Practicing Economy" (*zengchan jieyue* 增产节约) campaign initiated by the CCP in November 1951. Therefore, reducing the risk of heat stress among workers became an urgent task for many local labour departments and enterprises in 1952. It was in this context that the Tianjin Steel Mill launched the safety inspection. The aim was to reduce the high absentee rates in May and June resulting from frequent accidents, overtime work, and heat-related illness, thus ensuring the "Increasing Production and Practicing Economy."[241]

For these reasons, the factory leaders of the Tianjin Steel Mill took the complaints submitted by the furnace workers very seriously. They knew that the workers' long-time exposure to the heat radiation emitted by the 1,000-degree furnace caused their symptoms. Thus, the leaders asked the safety engineering section to install asbestos insulation boards and shower rooms in the workshop. These measures were successful in lowering the temperature in the workshop. Unexpectedly, these furnace workers still felt very weak and reached out to the factory infirmary. A doctor diagnosed them as catching

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[238] *RMRB*, November 11, 1952, 6.

[239] *NBCK* 198 (August 29, 1952): 405.

[240] *NBCK* 208 (September 10, 1952): 161.

[241] *TJRB*, August 10, 1952, 2.

a “cold” (*zhaoliang* 着凉) and prescribed various medications for them. Nevertheless, their symptoms remained unrelieved.

As everyone was baffled, an old worker named Li Hongyan told Zhou Tingxi, the deputy head of the safety engineering section, that he had started drinking salt water to prevent heat stroke many years ago. Meanwhile, another staff of the safety engineering section found the following statement in a Soviet textbook on labour hygiene: “Steelworkers sweat a lot per day and excrete about 20–30 grams of sodium at the same time. If the lost sodium is replenished, workers’ symptoms of heat stress will disappear.” Inspired by both statements, the leaders of the Tianjin Steel Mill in June 1952 decided to provide furnace workers with 100cc of salt water per day as a remedy for heat stress.

As expected, many workers’ symptoms disappeared after drinking salt water. However, this measure did not last too long before running into another thorny problem. Many workers complained that the salt water was so unpalatable that they found it hard to swallow. To solve this problem, Zhou Tingxi first entrusted a factory in Tianjin with making salt tablets. But soon everyone felt that this solution was not feasible. Because when the vice director Yang Cuifang swallowed a salt tablet, he suddenly felt his stomach churning. Several other colleagues who tried the salt tablets also said that they could not bear the fizzy bubbles in their mouths.

In the end, after consulting more Soviet literature on heatstroke prevention, Zhou Tingxi and his colleague Ni Shiquan came up with a solution: to mix table salt with tartaric acid, baking soda, and saccharin into salt soda effervescent tablets. In August 1952, the Tianjin Steel Mill commissioned a pharmaceutical factory in Tianjin to produce 200,000 salt soda effervescent tablets and stipulated that a worker should take four tablets four times per day. According to a *Tianjin Daily* article, the salt soda tablet was well received by steelworkers in Tianjin.[242]

This was how the salt soda tablet, the prototype of the salt soda water widely distributed in China’s high-temperature workshops in the following decades. In the same

[242] *TJRB*, August 10, 1952, 2.

year of the advent of the salt soda tablet, Gu Rusong, a physician from the factory hospital of the Tianjin Steel Mill, published an article in *World of Chemistry*, introducing the formula for the salt soda tablet in November 1952.[243] However, it did not arouse much attention at the time. It was in the summer of 1953, when heat waves hit China's major industrial regions such as Shanghai, Tianjin, Hebei, and Shanxi, that the salt soda tablet began to be known to more factories.

The Spreading Use of Salt Soda in the Campaign of Preventing Heatstroke and Cooling-Down (fangshu jiangwen yundong 防暑降温运动*)*

In the summer of 1953, China's many regions experienced unusual heat waves. As Zhou Enlai's doctor Zhang Zuoliang recalled, "The summer of 1953 in Shanghai was terribly hot. There was no wind or rain."[244] This heatwave also impressed Yuan Xuefen, one of the most renowned *yue* opera masters who was working on the film *The Love Eternal* (*Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* 梁山伯与祝英台) in Shanghai in 1953: "In the summer of 1953, it was 38 degrees for many days. We played under many stage lights for more than ten hours a day, and our faces were swollen after we finished the performance."[245]

The hot summer of 1953 seemed even more difficult for workers in Shanghai and throughout the country. Reports on workers' suffering from heat stress in their workplaces dominated the pages of both *Internal Reference* and *People's Daily*. Since early June, the temperatures in the workshops at the Shanghai Steel Mill "had always been between 130 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit." On the 17th and 18th, seven workers fainted in the cold casting, tinplate and rolling shops of the Xinhu Steel Mill. On the 19th, eleven workers took leave because they could not stand the extreme heat. Since July 1953, many areas in North China had also been hit by a heatwave.[246] As a 1953 *People's*

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[243] "Huagong xiaoxi" 化工消息 [News of chemical industry], *Huaxue shijie* 化学世界 7, no. 11 (November 1952): 32.

[244] Zhang Zuoliang 张佐良, *Zhou Enlai de zuihou shinian* 周恩来的最后十年 [The last decade of Zhou Enlai's life] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1997), 9.

[245] Li Yiming 李一鸣, "Zhongguo caise dianying de shuge diyi" 中国彩色电影的数个第一 [Several firsts in the history of Chinese colour films], *Dazhong dianying* 大众电影, no. 22 (November 2005): 55.

[246] *NBCK*, 146 (June 27, 1953): 462.

Daily article described: "Since July 7, the climate in north China has suddenly turned hot, with temperatures in many factory workshops exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Many factories and construction sites in Tianjin, Beijing, Hebei and Shanxi have seen a steady stream of workers succumbing to heatstroke over the past few days. For example, the construction site of Tangshan Huaxin Textile Mill was shut down for two hours in the afternoon of the 8th. At the Tianjin Steelwork, its daily production tasks had not been completed since the 7th.[247]

After witnessing the tremendous impact brought about by the heat waves in the summer of 1953, in early 1954 the CCP's labour and industrial departments launched a precautionary campaign known as "Heatstroke Prevention and Cooling-Down" (*fangshu jiangwen* 防暑降温) to cope with the upcoming summer heat. This was the first state-initiated "beat the heat" campaign in twentieth-century China with workers as its beneficiaries.[248] In March 1954, the Ministry of Heavy Industry issued the "Notice on

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[247] *RMRB*, July 23, 1953, 2.

[248] Before the term *fangshu jiangwen* entered the party's lexicon, in China's port cities such as Shanghai or Guangzhou there had been no lack of initiatives of beating the summer heat organized by local authorities and charitable societies to provide relief to workers and maintain public health. For example, during the 1930s, in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, there were charitable institutions that set up cooling stations known as "Bestowing Tea Pavilions" (*shicha ting* 施茶亭) on the streets for outdoor manual labourers such as rickshaw pullers to stay cool and replenish their fluid losses. In July 1936, when a heatwave hit Shanghai, the Bureau of Health of the Shanghai Municipal Council issued an official guide to the general public, suggesting that citizens should take some preventive measures such as drinking light salt water and wearing sunglasses. Unlike these initiatives that targeted the general public, however, the CCP prioritized the prevention of labourers in the *fangshu jiangwen* campaign. In addition, in the Chinese language context, heatstroke prevention (*fangshu* 防暑) and cooling down (j*iangwen* 降温) are terms that refer to two distinct heat-related illnesses: sunstroke (*rishe bing* 日射病) and heatstroke (*reshe bing* 热射病). Even though these two illnesses, which are commonly known as a single term "heatstroke" (*zhongshu* 中暑) according to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), share similar symptoms and treatment methods, their pathogenesis are not identical. Ding Fubao (1874–1952), the crucial adopter of scientific medicine in modern China, already told the difference between these two illnesses as early as the early 1920s: "In the summer, if a person walks a long distance without drinking water, he or she may get a fatal stroke. This is the condition of sunstroke. Heatstroke is a disease that occurs in people working near a furnace in the summer. Its symptoms and treatment methods are the same as those of sunstroke." As shown in Ding's explanation, the fusing of these two medical concepts in socialist China signaled the transformation of the initiative of "beat the heat" from a project of maintaining public health to a political movement with maximizing industrial productivity as its goal. Li Zhuoyun 李卓云, "Jiu Shanghai de shicha yu shiyao" 旧上海的施茶与施药 [Tea-bestowing and medicine-bestowing in old Shanghai], *Shiji* 世纪, no. 2 (March 2000): 54; *Dagongbao* 大公报, July 23, 1936, 4; July 23, 1936, 4; Huang Shiliang 黄世亮 and Lei Erqing 雷二庆, "'Reshe bing' ciyuan kao" "热射病" 词源考 [A study of the etymology of "heatstroke"], *Junshi yixue* 军事医学 42, no. 6 (June 2018): 451.

Preventing Heatstroke," which required that factories and mines in south central, southwest and north China should immediately strengthen the supervision and inspection of anti-stroke tasks.[249] On April 10, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Health, and the ACFTU issued a joint notice requiring that "[the administrators of] factories and mines should improve ventilation in factory floors and underground mines and keep them cool, as well as provide workers with adequate refreshing drinks."[250]

In this context, the salt soda tablet became known to more factories across the country. In June 1953, *Workers' Daily* introduced how the Tianjin Steel Mill used salt soda to alleviate workers' suffering from heat stress. One month later, the Ministry of Heavy Industry issued an instruction emphasizing the importance of providing steelworkers with salt soda.[251] As a result, many factories and mines across the country began to write to the Tianjin Steel Mill to consult about the detailed formula and production method. Upon request, Gu Rusong released the formula for the salt soda tablet in an article published in *Intermediate Medical Journal,* a leading journal in medical science in China in late 1953.[252] In the summer of 1954, when the party for the first time launched the heatstroke prevention campaign, an upgraded formula for salt soda devised by the Beijing Epidemic Prevention Station appeared in *Labour*, the official journal

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[249] Benkan laodong baohu bianji xiaozu 本刊劳动保护编辑小组, "Xunsu zuohao fangshu jiangwen gongzuo" 迅速做好防暑降温工作 [Doing a good job in preventing heatstroke immediately], *Laodong*, no. 6 (June 1954): 19.

[250] Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jianzhu gongcheng bu shengchan ju 中华人民共和国建筑工程部生产局, "Weisheng bu, laodong bu, quanguo zhonggonghui guanyu zuohao xiaqiu ji changkuang gongdi jiaotong qiye de anquan weisheng gongzuo lianhe tongzhi" 卫生部劳动部全国总工会关于做好夏秋季厂矿工地交通企业的安全卫生工作联合通知 [Joint circular by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and the ACFTU on safety and health works in factories, mines, construction sites, and traffic enterprises in summer and autumn], in *Jianzhu anzhuang gongcheng anquan jishu laodong baohu ziliao huibian* 建筑安装工程安全技术劳动保护资料汇编 [Collected materials on safety and technical labour protection information in construction and installation engineering] (Beijing: Jianzhu gongcheng chubanshe, 1956), 141–42.

[251] *GRRB*, August 14, 1953,

[252] Gu Rusong 顾汝松, "Yan qishui pian" 盐汽水片 [Salt soda tablet], in *Zhongguo gongye cankao ziliao huibian* 中国工业参考资料汇编 [Collected reference materials on Chinese industries], ed. Renmin ribao tushu ziliao zu 人民日报图书资料组 and Gongren ribao ziliao zu 工人日报资料组 (Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe, 1953), 32; Gu Rusong 顾汝松, "Tan gaowen yong yan qishui pian" 谈高温用盐汽水片 [Salt soda tablets used for dealing with high temperatures], *Zhongji yikan* 中级医刊, no. 10 (October 1953): 32–33.

sponsored by the Ministry of Labour.[253] Unlike the salt soda tablet invented in 1952, which needed to be dissolved in water before being used, the salt soda water developed by the Beijing Epidemic Prevention Station in 1954 was a ready-to-use liquid drink.

In 1956, the state council promulgated the Three Major Regulations (*sanda guicheng* 三大规程), specifying that "high-temperature workers," including workers engaging in making iron and steel, rolling steel, treating with heat, making glass and bricks, were eligible to use salt soda. This marked that salt soda became an officially designated remedy for heat-related illness among Chinese labourers exposed to high temperatures. When many enterprises were unable to purchase necessary cooling-down equipment in limited time when a historic heatwave swept through the Yangtze River Basin in the summer of 1956, salt soda received more endorsements from labour officials because of its low cost and great effect.[254] As China's steel industry and steel workforce dramatically expanded during the Great Leap Forward, many industrial workplaces,

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[253] Zhao Wanxiang 赵万祥 and Xu Guangbin 许广彬, "Qingliang yinliao yan qishui" 清凉饮料盐汽水 [Salt soda, a refreshing drink], *Laodong*, no. 6 (June 1954): 20.

[254] On July 20, the State Council issued a directive requiring that "people's committees of provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the central government, and the ministries of industries" should immediately take action against the "hundred-year" heatwave. Because of the lack of decision-making power and the cumbersome administrative approval process for funding, many enterprises were unable to purchase necessary cooling-down equipment in limited time. In an open letter published in *People's Daily* in 1956, the administrators of the Wuhan Metallurgical Chemical Company confessed as follows: "[We] failed to take precautions so that we had to rush into the cooling-down project [as the summer heat was coming]. The facilities and equipment for heat protection were not in place. Also, [we] have not worked out any viable measures for shielding the asphalt workers from heat sources. In a 1957 summary report, Di Zuozhi (1914–1993), then deputy director of the Beijing Labour Protection Institute, noted that the ad hoc cooling-down campaign in 1956 uncovered many problems in labour protection work, such as "lack of technical solutions, inefficient use of equipment, and serious waste [in funds]." For this reason, China's labour authorities emphasized that factories should adopt cost-effective methods instead of tech-centric measures to practice the party's campaign of heatstroke prevention. In this context, some China's labour official began to spare no efforts to promote the use of salt soda. For example, as Deng Xiudong, then director of the Labour Protection Department of the Shanghai Labour Bureau, said in a 1957 article reflecting on the 1956 heatstroke prevention campaign: "Providing workers exposed to high temperatures with salt refreshing drinks would not cost too much. Therefore, 'Spending Less but Having Greater Effect' (*huaqian shao xiaoguo da* 花钱少效果大) is feasible." *RMRB*, August 25, 1956, 2; Di Zuozhi 邸作之, "Fangshu jiangwen gongzuo bixu jishi zuohao" 防暑降温工作必须及时做好 [Heat prevention and cooling-down must be done in a timely manner], *Laodong*, no. 11 (November 1957): 9; Deng Xiudong 邓秀栋, "Zhengque duidai qingliang yinliao" 正确对待清凉饮料 [Ensuring a proper treatment of refreshing drinks], *Laodong*, no. 14 (July 1957): 21.

especially steel workshops witness an unprecedented surge in the consumption of salt soda.[255]

The Production and Consumption of Salt Soda

In the 1950s, there were mainly two ways for local enterprises to obtain salt soda. In China's major industrialized cities with a foundation in the food industry, local food and drink manufacturers, especially those established before 1949, were commissioned by local industrial and labour departments to produce salt soda and supply the order from local enterprises. For example, the Shanghai Aquarius Company, which was the largest manufacturer of Coca-Cola in mainland China before 1949, was entrusted with supplying various refreshing drinks including salt soda to most factories in Shanghai until 1957.[256]

Not all factories could obtain salt soda from local manufacturers. In the 1950s, soda manufacturers were only available in a few cities such as Shanghai, Tianjin, and Shenyang. In addition, many enterprises found that purchasing salt soda was far more costly than self-producing while some local manufacturers did not see salt soda as a profitable product in comparison with other popular beverages.[257] For these reasons, after

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[255] As demonstrated by some available sources, in major industrial cities such as Shanghai and Shenyang, the production of salt soda doubled to various degrees in 1959 compared to previous years. In 1959, the Shenyang Bawangsi Company doubled its salt soda production compared to 1958. In 1959, in addition to producing large barrels of salt soda, the soda factory in the Wuhan Steel Mill also increased the production of large bottles of soda by 1,165 bottles. In the following year, the factory purchased two bottled soda production lines and refrigeration equipment from Shanghai and the Wuhan Meat Packer and achieved a production capacity of 46,080 bottles per shift. In May 1959, the Shanghai Aquarius Company planned to produce 1.5 million dozen of salt soda "for the steel warriors to beat the heat in the upcoming summer." In the same year, the Shanghai No.3 Iron and Steel Mill upgraded the equipment, achieving an average daily production capacity of 42 tons of salt soda. In February 1960, the Aquarius requested the local government of Shanghai to expand the factory by setting up two production lines dedicated to producing salt soda, with a maximum daily output of 3,600 dozen. Xiao Jiang 晓江, "Bawangsi qishui" 八王寺汽水 [Bawangsi soda], in *Zhongguo minjian shipin* 中国民间食品 [China's popular food] (Beijing: Qing gongyue chubanshe, 1961), 128; Sun Yizhang, *Wugang zhi,* 141. *XMWB*, May 24, 1959, 5; "Daiguan Zhenegguanghe qishui gongsi guanyu qing xun ci pizhun kuojian qishui chejian de han" 代管正广和汽水厂关于请迅赐批准扩建盐汽水车间的函 [Letter from managed Zhengguanghe factory requesting prompt approval for the expansion of the salt soda workshop], January 21, 1960, SMA, B257-1-1970-24.

[256] For more on the transformation of the Aquarius company after 1949, see Yao, "Consuming Science," 232–39; Shen Zhi 沈智, ed., *Shanghai laodong zhi* 上海劳动志 [Shanghai labour gazetteer], vol. 6 (Shanghai: Shanghai shekeyuan chubanshe, 1996), 428.

[257] For example, the Shanghai Aquarius soda factory submitted two requests for tax reduction to the Bureau of Industry and Commerce of Shanghai in 1956 and 1957 respectively: "Our factory has successfully

the mid-1950s, many local factories stopped purchasing soda from local suppliers and began to achieve self-sufficiency in salt soda. In large steel plants such as the Shanghai Steel Mill and the Wuhan Iron and Steel Mill, there were specialized workshops established after around 1956 to produce their own salt soda. In general, the soda production shop in each factory contained a supply center known as the "soda station" (*qishui zhan* 汽水站). In small factories without soda production shops, soda stations would handle both the production and distribution of salt soda. The original purpose for this was to avoid salt soda from being contaminated and allow workers to temporarily escape from the forefront of production, thus making drinking salt soda itself a form of resting.[258]

Of course, workers did not necessarily have to drink salt soda (or other refreshing drinks) in soda stations but would instead drink them in their production areas to replenish energy instantly. In some cases, factory leaders would organize administrative staff to deliver salt soda to workers in the workshop. This was a typical way to inspire workers' morale. For example, on July 12, 1956, the leaders of the Shanghai Melting Factory stepped into the workshop with gifts and greetings. According to news reports, the leader personally poured a jug of salt soda while some female administrative staff

developed salt soda for workers in high-temperature workshops and we will produce salt soda in bulk. We estimate that the cost per dozen will be 1.0569 *yuan*. Considering that salt soda is intended for workers exposed to high temperatures in their workplaces and is not for market sale, and that its production season has a short duration, running only from June to September, we would appreciate it if we could get a tax exemption." This was an attempt to expand the sales of salt soda. In 1962, the "withdraw currency from circulation" policy led to an increase in the price of salt soda produced by the Aquarius factory. As a result, this led to discontent among other manufacturers. Three years later, the Aquarius factory again requested a tax reduction in an attempt to expand sales. See Shanghai shi diyi qing gongye ju 上海市第一轻工业局, "Guanyu qing mianzheng qishui ping ji yan qishui huowu shui de han" 关于请免征汽水瓶及盐汽水货物税的函 [Letter on the request for exemption of excises of soda bottles and salt soda], June 20, 1956, SMA, B5-2-120-82; Shanghai shi shuiwu ju 上海市税务局, "Daiguan Zhengguanghe qishui gongsi guanyu qingqiu jiangdi yan qishui shuilü de baogao" 代管正广和气水公司关于请求降低盐汽水税率的报告 [Report on the request to reduce the tax rate on salt soda by the concessionaire Zhengguanghe company], January 27, 1965, SMA, B189-2-833-11.

[258] In 1954, the Daye Steel Mill set up a resting room with water curtains for workers to enjoy the cool while having salt soda. In 1954, in the Fushun Aluminum Plant, the soda station was specially set in the workers' resting room. Gangtie ju anquan weisheng chu laodong weisheng ke 钢铁局安全卫生处劳动卫生科, "1954 nian fangshu jingyan jieshao" 1954 年防暑降温工作经验介绍 [Introduction to the experience of heat prevention in 1954], *Gangtie* 钢铁, no. 5 (May 1955): 35; Fushun lüchang zhi bianweihui 抚顺铝厂志编委会, ed., *Fushun lüchang zhi* 抚顺铝厂志 [The Fushun Aluminum Factory gazetteer] (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1988), 137.

handed cold wet towels to the steelworkers.[259] During the "hottest days" in the summer of 1957, the party secretary and administrators of the Chongqing Iron and Steel Mill No. 3 "took command in person" (*qinzi guashuai* 亲自挂帅), organizing a production service team in charge of delivering salt soda to workers in high-temperature workshops.[260] The delivery of salt soda—from factory leaders' hands to workers' hands—embodied the party's loving care for the working class, offering more propaganda than practical advantages.

Salt Soda in State Propaganda

By the first decade of the PRC, salt soda had almost become the most iconic item of the party's heatstroke prevention and cooling-down policies. The portrayal of workers' consumption of salt soda abounded in various types of propaganda narratives about China's industrial workers and the party's labour protection policies. In these narratives, the advent of salt soda brought Chinese workers' decades-long suffering of heat-related diseases to the end, bringing them ease and physical pleasure in the summer heat and inexhaustible energy in their workplaces. As demonstrated in the following photographs taken by Xinhua News Agency correspondents reporting the heatstroke prevention movement, workers were able to leisurely enjoy salt soda at soda stations. These close-up shots intentionally featured the workers' expressions of enjoyment and relaxation after drinking salt soda. This is not my subjective analysis. The creator of "News Briefing" (*xinwen jianbao* 新闻简报) No. 47 of 1956, which featured the production of salt soda, emphasized that it was highly necessary to avoid directly showing the "modern, automated soda-making machines" and to spotlight their facial expressions: "How comfortable it is for people who work in hot weather or in high-temperature workshops to

[259] *XMWB*, June 13, 1956, 1.

[260] Chongqing shi laodong ju 重庆市劳动局, "Huolu cheng li fu gaowen: Chongqing shi shi nian lai de fangshu jiangwen gongzuo" 火炉城里伏高温: 重庆市十年来的防暑降温工作 [Beating the heat in the 'furnace' city: a decade of heatstroke prevention and cooling-down in Chongqing], *Laodong*, no. 20 (October 1959): 24.

drink a bottle of cool soda after a day's work!"[261] These camera languages indicated that the party wished to see workers would enjoy drinking salt soda and benefit from its therapeutic effect.

Figure 7. Zhu Ying, "Providing high-temperature workers with salt soda," Xinhua News Agency, June 27, 1956, 8760953.

[261] Wang Yonghong 王永宏, "Lun jinian lai de xinwen pian" 论几年来的新闻片 [Newsreels in the recent years], in Xinwen jilu dianying chuangzuo wenti 新闻纪录电影创作问题 [Issues regarding news documentary film creation], ed. Zhongyang xinwen jilu dianying zhipian chang 中央新闻纪录电影制片厂 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1958), 83.

Figure 8. Bi Pinfu, "Working conditions in the state-run Shanghai Smeltery have been improved," Xinhua News Agency, July 4, 1956, 8766902.

A deeper analysis of the depiction of workers' consumption of salt soda during the Great Leap showed that the party expected more—workers should not simply treat salt soda as a remedy for heatstroke but as an energy booster which sustained their soaring enthusiasm for building steel industry and further enabled them to work long hours to achieve higher production output. In a 1958 short story entitled "On the Honeymoon," the author Xiang Da depicts a steelworker drinking salt soda while working. As described in the following text, drinking salt soda became a way for a steelworker to sustain himself during prolonged work:

> The machinist, master Zhang, came out of the manhole of the first furnace. His clothes were drenched with sweat.
>
> "Water!" he shouted.
>
> The apprentice next to him opened a bottle of salt soda and passed it over. With one hand the mechanist pulled back his protective facial mask, with the other he

> put the mouth of the bottle to his mouth and swallowed the soda together with the mineral dust on the side of his mouth with gurgling sounds.[262]

Another example is Cui Chengwu's feature on Chen Xiaofa, the chief of the blast furnace workshop at the Anshan Steel Mill No. 1, in a piece of reportage entitled "Steel Hero." As the following excerpt shows, after having a bottle of salt soda, the leading figure Chen Xiaofa successfully defuses a potential danger in the baghouse:

> Not long after Chen Xiaofa entered the baghouse, his hands were covered with burns. He closed his eyes and held fast until he was exhausted, then he gave the air shovel to someone else. And after a few minutes, when he had a few sips of salt soda and a few pieces of ice, he rushed out again to change others out. In this way, the two or three-foot pile of slag was finally unblocked, the gas pipe was plugged in the right position again, and the meter's hand was back at 1,300 degrees.[263]

The following three texts, considered together, can further support my analysis. They display a pattern that implies a logic that workers needed more salt soda to maintain their physical ability to achieve a higher output of steel. The logic went like this: the salt soda a worker drinks is equivalent to the sweat they lose. Then, the more a worker sweats, the more steel they produce. So, if workers have more salt soda, more steel will be produced. In a short story entitled "A44 Catalyst," which portrays how a group of acid workers held their positions in the hot summer of 1959, the author Xiang Da equates salt soda with workers' sweat:

> The sun was glaring down fiercely in late June. Even though the rooftop was covered by asbestos tiles and rags, it was still terribly hot under the shed. Large quantities of salt soda were constantly carried into the factory, and then they all turned into workers' sweat on the ground.[264]

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[262] Xiang Da 向大, "Zai miyue zhong" 在蜜月中 [In the honeymoon], in *Zai feiyue de shidai li* 在飞跃的时代里 [During the time of great leap], ed. Zhongguo zuojia xiehui Jiangsu chouwei hui 中国作家协会江苏筹委会 (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1958), 52.

[263] Cui Chengwu 崔诚伍, *Liangang yingxiong* 炼钢英雄 [Steel hero] (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1960), 202.

[264] Xiang Da 向大, "A44 hao jiechu ji" A44 号接触剂 [A44 catalyst], in *Xinmiao* 新苗 [The seeding] (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1959), 60.

While in the following text excerpted from Sun Zongqin's short story "Two Streams of Steel Running Together," one can see the positive correlation between sweating and the output of steel production:

> "Little Rocket" (the nickname of a young steelworker) was wiping off sweat while gulping down salt soda. Covered with beads of sweat, his face looked like a dewy small tree. As long as he touched his face, the beads would fall off. The party secretary came over and patted him, saying, "Aren't you tired, young man? See, your clothes are soaked."
>
> "It's nothing! The more I sweat, the more the steel water flows. You are sweating a lot too!"[265]

In the summer of 1960, a steelworker named Yang Xinfu visited Shanghai Iron and Steel Mill No. 3 with a delegation of Shanghai workers. One can see how the relationship between drinking salt soda, sweating, and the increase in the output of steel was addressed in a dialogue between Yang and a steelworker:

> At that time, there was a worker drinking salt soda. He drank three bowls in one breath. I was so stunned that I ran up to him and asked, "Comrade, how much salt soda do you drink every day?
>
> "Eight kilos." The worker said.
>
> I couldn't say anything for a long time. They had to drink eight kilograms of salt soda every day. Can you imagine how much sweat this steelworker shed every day? A ton of steel is made from a drop of sweat![266]

The above narratives were the product of the Great Leap propaganda. Nevertheless, they were mostly recorded in the reportages or feature articles created by so-called worker-writers or correspondents at the request of local propaganda organs based on their investigations during the "Make Steel in a Big Way" (*dalian gangtie* 大炼钢铁) campaign. Therefore, even if these portrayals might seem exaggerated, they could still offer clues about the actual conditions of Chinese labourers during the Great Leap. Just as Stefan R. Landsberger argues, "One of the essential aspects of propaganda is that

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[265] Sun Zongqin 孙宗勤, "Liang wang gangshui qi benliu" 两汪钢水齐奔流 [Two streams of steel are running together], in *Shanxi duanpian xiaoshuo xuan 1949–1959* 山西短篇小说选 1949–1959 [Selected short stories by Shanxi writers, 1949–1959] (Shanxi: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1959), 377–78.

[266] *XMWB*, July 25, 1960, 5.

it should reflect reality, while at the same time providing an optimistic outlook of what lies ahead."[267]

In short, these propaganda narratives involving salt soda all highlighted that workers ought to enjoy drinking salt soda and understood the purpose of drinking it—to protect them from the risk of heatstroke and maximize their working productivity. However, workers' reactions to salt soda documented in reports from factory administrators and medical experts showed that salt soda meant something different to them. As I will show in the next section, not too many workers enjoyed salt soda because they disliked its salty and bitter taste and showed less concern for its therapeutic effect. In other words, workers did not consider salt soda as a remedy but an ordinary drink.

"It is Too Salty!"

On July 15, 1958, premier Zhou Enlai paid a visit to the Shanghai Iron and Steel Mill No. 2. On his third day of visiting, he spent some time working with workers. When Zhou took a break, a steelworker handed Zhou Enlai a bottle of pale-yellow liquid. When Zhou learned that this soda was specially prepared for him, he replaced the soda in his hand with the salt soda that workers drank, and said, "We are all workers. Why can't I drink what you drink? I am not allowed to enjoy special treatment."[268]

Based on available sources, we do not know what the yellowish soda tasted like. But considering the scenario, it is not difficult to surmise that what made the factory leader prepare a bottle of special soda for Premier Zhou was that the light-coloured salt soda was not tasty or not sanitary. Why do I make this surmise? Since 1953, complaints about the poor taste of salt soda had abounded among workers. As early as 1954, a research article published in the *Bulletin of Pharmacy* reported that the salt soda

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[267] Stefan R. Landsberger, "Great Leap Forward (1958-1961)," Chineseposters.net, accessed August 21, 2021, https://chineseposters.net/themes/great-leap-forward.

[268] Xie Bingsuo 谢炳锁 and Xie Youliang 谢有良, "Zhou zongli zai shanggang yi chang" 周总理在上钢一厂 [Premier Zhou in the Shanghai No. 1 Steel Mill], in *Women yongyuan huainian Zhou zongli* 我们永远怀念周总理 [We will always remember premier Zhou], ed. Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1977), 23.

developed by a factory in Beijing "tasted bitter and undrinkable, and workers did not like it at all."[269] In 1955, Ren Xingjin, a physician at Shanghai No. 5 People's Hospital, came to the Shanghai Mining Machinery Factory for investigation. Many workers reported to him that the salt soda tasted terrible. It was not until the factory offered ordinary refreshing drinks at Ren's suggestion that workers were satisfied.[270] In May 1958, Fan Guangxin, a worker from the Changchun Automobile Factory, attended a seminar at the Shanghai Automobile Assembly Factory. In his report, he inadvertently remarked that workers at the factory in Shanghai disliked the salt soda devoid of fizz.[271] On September 13, 1956, Chen Xianzhou, then chairman of the Science Popularization Association of Liaoning, delivered a keynote speech in Shenyang, stating that a lot of workers in Shenyang's high-temperature workshops were reluctant to drink salt soda because they "could not stand the salty flavour and wanted sweet soda instead."[272] In 1958, at the Changchun Mechanical and Electrical Product Plant No. 1, many workers claimed that the salt soda tasted bitter and tart and poured whole cans of soda onto the ground.[273] On the morning of July 28, 1958, Liu Shaoqi paid a visit to the Shijingshan Iron and Steel Mill. After greeting workers in the coking workshop, Liu asked several workers, "Do you feel hot there?" "It is okay in the morning. But it is very hot in the afternoon," some workers replied. "Do you have any refreshing drinks?" Liu then asked. "We have salt

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[269] Cui Cong 崔琮, "Jieshao jizhong zhong gongye changkuang changyong yaoji" 介绍几种重工业厂矿常用药剂 [Introducing several common medicines used in heavy industries], *Yaoxue tongbao* 药学通报 2, no. 2 (February 1954): 61.

[270] *Wenhui bao*, December 26, 1955, 4.

[271] Fan Guangxin 范广信, "Wo zai Shanghai yudao le Changchun qiche chang gongren" 我在上海遇到了长春汽车厂工人 [I met Changchun Automobile Factory workers in Shanghai], in *Xingfu de rizi* 幸福的日子 [A happy life], ed. Jin Yi 靳以 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1959), 36.

[272] Chen Xianzhou 陈先舟, "Jiji kaizhan kexue jishu puji gongzuo wei jianshe shehui zhuyi he xiang kexue jinjun er fendou" 积极开展科学技术普及工作为建设社会主义和向科学进军而奋斗 [Actively promote the popularization of science and technology and strive to build socialism and develop science and technology], in *Shenyang kexie zhi* 沈阳科协志 [The Shenyang Association of Science and Technology gazetteer], ed. Du Shuncheng 杜顺成, vol. 1 (Shenyang: Shenyang shi kexie zhi bianwei hui, 1987), 239.

[273] Zhang Zanxin 张赞新, *Zhonggong Changchun dangshi renwu zhuan* 中共长春党史人物传记 [Biography of the figures in the history of the CCP in Changchun], vol. 10 (Changchun: Changchun chubanshe, 1998), 352.

soda to drink." Hearing this, Liu Shaoqi tasted a sip of the salt soda, then said: "It's too salty! I think it's better to add some sugar!"[274]

These cases were just the tip of the iceberg. Workers' reluctance to drink salt soda was at odds with the official expectations of workers' reaction to salt soda. When the Beijing No. 501 Factory for the first time introduced the formula for salt soda in 1954, it claimed that workers loved the taste of salt soda very much: "The salt soda tastes fragrant and sweet! It is beneficial to our health! After drinking this, we feel revitalized. The quantity and quality of production will be improved! The general line of socialist construction is shining with great brilliance!"[275] Of course, the second half of the statement suggested that workers' description of the taste of salt soda was a propaganda-filled brag. It represented what legitimate food should taste like in the eyes of the top authority. In socialist China, the description of food taste was strongly subject to its legitimacy and this logic was particularly articulated in the campaign to eliminate high-end cafeterias in the early years of the PRC. The official pen portrayed Shanghai's cafés, an epitome of Shanghai's consumer culture, as breeding grounds for many social problems. Accordingly, it stigmatized the taste of coffee as bitter "medicine" in many accounts.[276] During the Great Leap Famine, the substitute foods promoted by the CCP were not only marketed as nutritious but were also touted as delicious.[277]

What made workers feel bad about salt soda? Considering the most common way that salt soda was produced in soda stations in the 1950s and 1960s, it seems clear why these workers claimed that salt soda tasted bitter, salty, and fizzless. In the Mao era, most staff hired at soda stations were members of those permanent workers' households, commonly known as dependent workers (*jiashu gong* 家属工). Also, they were given the

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[274] Zhao Yaohua 赵耀华, "Liu Shaoqi shicha shigang jiaohua chang" 刘少奇视察石钢焦化厂 [Liu Shaoqi inspected the coking factory of the Shijingshan Iron and Steel Mill], in *Beijing wenshi ziliao jingxuan (Shijingshan juan)* 北京文史资料精选 (石景山卷) [Selected Beijing literary and historical materials (Shijingshan)], ed. He Zhuoxin 何卓新 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2006), 311.

[275] Zhao and Xu, "Qingliang yinliao yan qishui," 20.

[276] *XMWB*, July 31, 1950, 4.

[277] Gao Hua, "Food Augmentation Methods and Food Substitutes during the Great Famine," in *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine*, ed. Felix Wemheuer and Kimberley Ens Manning (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 171–96.

title “collective workers” in the official documents that mentioned them.[278] In the great majority of factories during Maoist China, dependent workers without any professional training produced salt soda in a rudimentary way. Let us look at the production process of salt soda in the Jiamusi Power Plant in the early 1950s: workers first dissolved table salt in water, then added soda powder and sugar and finished it by mixing all the ingredients with sticks.[279] Even in the 1960s, the production process was not much improved in many factories. The Shenyang Power Station’s administrative section organized dependent workers every summer in the 1960s to produce salt soda by hand. The staff at the soda station placed several large empty water vats in the machine room to collect distilled water generated by the machines. Then, they dissolved table salt in these vats full of hot distilled water. As the temperature of the solution in the vats was lowered, the so-called salt soda was ready to serve.[280] Even in some large steel enterprises such as the Wuhan Steel Mill, the only mechanized equipment available for processing salt soda was foot-

[278] For example, of the twenty-six workers at the soda station in the Shenyang High Pressure Switching Plant, twenty-two were collective workers. Only three of the fifty-eight employees at the soda station in the No. 53 Liaoning Military Factory were permanent workers and the others were collective workers. In early 1958, the Xiangtan Iron and Steel Mill recruited more than 720 workers’ families to serve in the canteen, nursery and soda station. At the soda station in the Xilin Steel Mill in Heilongjiang, all the staff were dependent workers except for the director who was a permanent worker. In most of China’s enterprises, staff at soda stations had almost no work to do in spring and winter in general. For example, the staff at the soda station in the Qiqihar No. 2 Machine Tool Factory were mostly “busy for half a year and then off for half a year” until the 1970s. In some soda stations, workers were dismissed in the off-season and organized to work in other departments. Lu Rongxin 鲁荣欣, *Shenyang gaoya kaiguan chang chang zhi, 1937–1985* 沈阳高压开关厂厂志, 1937–1985 [The Shenyang High Voltage Switchgear Factory gazetteer, 1937–1985] (Shenyang: Shenyang dijiu yinshua chang, 1986), 387; Du Jishi 都基石, *Wu san gongchang zhi* 五三工厂志 [The 53 Factory gazetteer], vol. 1 (Shenyang: Wusan gongchang changzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 1986), 333; Zhou Chongying 周崇英, *Xiangtan gangtie chang zhi* 湘潭钢铁厂志 [The Xiangtan Steel Mill gazetteer], vol. 2 (Xiangtan: Changzhi bianzuan bangongshi, 1983), 740; Jiang Qingchen 姜庆臣, *Heilongjiang xilin gangtiechang zhi* 黑龙江西林钢铁厂志 [The Heilongjiang Xilin Steel Mill gazetteer] (Xilin: Xilin gangtie chang zhi bangongshi, 1986), 251.

[279] See Fei Jianhua 费建华, ed., *Jiamusi fadianchang zhi* 佳木斯发电厂志 [The Jiamusi Power Plant gazetteer], vol. 1 (Harbin: Shuili dianli chubanshe, 1988), 182

[280] Chen Fenglin 陈奉林, ed., *Liaoning fadianchang zhi* 辽宁发电厂志 [The Liaoning Power Plant gazetteer], vol. 1 (Shenyang: Liaoning fadianchang zhi bianwei hui, 1989), 331.

operated machines.[281] It was not until the 1960s that mechanized production became available to industries other than the steel industry.[282]

It is worth noting that by the early 1950s, the ACTFU had introduced the standard for manufacturing salt soda developed by Soviet medical experts in the 1930s and made them available to many factories. According to the Soviet standard, salt soda must be produced by workers with health certificates and fully saturated with carbon dioxide with specialized equipment. The salt soda must be prepared in containers that are chemically non-reactive with soda water and placed in rest areas or resting rooms far from heat sources. In addition, factory inspectors should regularly check the salt soda to make sure it remains drinkable. Obviously, the production and consumption of salt soda in most factories were far below this standard. As a result, these handmade products were of relatively poor quality. The salt soda prepared in some factories was even toxic, leading to fatal accidents. According to a 1955 document, in Shanghai, there had been many workers poisoned by salt soda served in iron pails since February 1955.[283] In 1956, at a construction site in Hangzhou, two workers successively got zinc poisoning after drinking poisonous salt soda.[284] In the same year, three workers in the woodworking

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[281] Sun Yizhang 孙贻章, *Wugang zhi* 武钢志 [The Wuhan Steel Mill gazetteer] (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 1988), 141.

[282] For example, the Wuhan No. 2 Textile Cotton Spinning Mill enlarged its soda station into a beverage workshop in 1967. In the summer of 1966, Shanghai Oil Refinery applied to the Industrial Bureau for permission to build its own soda factory.

[283] Shanghai shi dier zhong gongye ju 上海市第二重工业局, "Guanyu zhuanfa Shanghai shi weisheng ju guanyu fangzhi huaxue fanying yinqi zhongdu shigu, ge gongchang gongying yan qishui qiwu shiyong jinshu rongqi de han yiji niding Shanghai shi shiwu zhongdu diaocha baogao shixing banfa deng liangjian xi ji zunzhao banli de tongzhi"关于转发上海市卫生局关于防止化学反应引起中毒事故，各工厂供应盐汽水器物使用金属容器的函以及拟定上海市食物中毒调查报告试行办法等两件希即遵照办理的通知 [Circular on the forwarding of the letter of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Health on the prevention of poisoning accidents caused by chemical reactions and the use of metal containers for serving salt soda in factories as well as the preparation of the trial measures for the investigation report of food poisoning in Shanghai], September 2, 1955, SMA, B76-3-19-35.

[284] Zhou Zhongheng 周仲衡 and Zhu Xuehuan 朱学焕, "Shiyong qingliang yinliao zhi xin zhongdu diaocha baogao 使用清凉饮料至锌中毒调查报告 [Investigation on zinc poisoning after drinking refreshing drinks], *Zhongji yikan*, no. 9 (September 1957): 44–45.

workshop at the Beijing Internal Combustion Engine Power Plant were poisoned after drinking homemade salt soda. A worker named Hou Yongfu even died.[285]

Nevertheless, the crude production method might not be the only factor contributing to the workers' aversion to salt soda. It is arbitrary to say salt soda in the Mao era was unpalatable based on the one-sided accounts from workers. Each person has unique taste preferences. What most of the workers could not stand was the "salty and bitter" flavour of salt soda. But for Wang Hebin, Mao Zedong's personal doctor in the 1950s, the absence of "sweet" was precisely the advantage of salt soda in comparison to other ordinary sweet soft drinks. On February 19, 1953, Wang tried salt soda during Mao's visit to the Daye Steel Mill.[286] After "taking two sips," Wang felt that this drink tasted really nice, but it was not fizzy: "It tasted like ordinary soda, yet it did not have the awfully sweet taste from ordinary soda either."[287] By quoting this story, I wish to emphasize that workers' taste experience of salt soda might be considerably subjective. It was not only subject to personal genetic inherited preference but, more importantly, to what is called "acquired taste," which means things people gradually learn to like.[288] In other words, from the perspective of certain workers, the right taste of soda should not be salty, but sweet. When the salt soda tablet was first introduced in the Tianjin Steel Mill in 1952, some workers said: "[We] take four tablets into a mug and fill it with water. The water then bubbles and fizzes. It looks like soda water. The flavour is also similar to [the popular] soda, sour and sweet, but also a little salty. We all love to drink it."[289] As shown

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[285] Ren Jinsheng 任金生, *Bei nei zhi* 北内志 [The Beijing Internal Combustion Engine Power Plant gazetteer] (Beijing: Zhongguo kexue jishu chubanshe, 1997), 42.

[286] On February 19, 1953, during his visit to Wuhan, Mao Zedong paid a surprise visit to the Huazhong Iron and Steel Company in Huangshi, Hubei Province. At 6:15 p.m., in the guest room of the Huazhong Company, Mao met the party secretary Gao Yunsheng (1910–1966). See Zhonggong Huangshi shi dangshi bangongshi 中共黄石市党史办公室, ed., *Huangshi huihuang wushi nian* 黄石辉煌五十年 [Glorious fifty years of Huangshi] (Beijing: Gaige chubanshe, 1999), 656.

[287] Wang Hebin 王鹤滨, *Zai weiren shenbian de rizi: Mao zhuxi de baojian yisheng jian shenghuo mishu de huiyi* 在伟人身边的日子: 毛主席的保健医生兼生活秘书的回忆 [Days at the great man's side: memories of Chairman Mao's health physician and life secretary] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2003), 360.

[288] Sarah T. Peterson, *Acquired Taste: The French Origins of Modern Cooking* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

[289] *TJRB*, August 10, 1952, 2.

in this narrative, the factor that contributed to the workers' liking for this salt soda solution was its resemblance to popular soda drinks in taste and texture: sweet, sour, and fizzing. Also, the demand for sweet soda from workers in Shenyang in 1958 implied that the "acquired taste" had a great impact on their preferences in drinks. This logic was particularly pronounced for those who had tasted other soft drinks before 1949. Han Shangyi (1917–1998), a well-known film composer, recalled that like other workers at that time, he never enjoyed the "salty and bitter" flavour of salt soda and that he always passed it off to other people. What he really liked was the "Dutch Water" (*helan shui* 荷兰水) produced by Aquarius as well as imported soft drinks such as Coke in the 1930s.[290] In short, salt soda was not necessarily unpalatable, but many workers were just not used to the salty taste of salt soda.

As early as 1953, some local industrial and labour departments received some reports on workers' resistance to salt soda and sought to urge workers to drink salt soda by educating them about the benefits and political significance of drinking salt soda. As stated in a 1953 directive from the Ministry of Heavy Industry: "Workers do not like salt soda and prefer sweet soda. [Local enterprises] should educate their workers about the significance of drinking salt soda and let workers understand that only drinking water with salt can protect their health.[291] Another directive issued by the First Ministry of Machine Building on June 2, 1955, also stressed that factory administrators should tell their workers the significance of using salt soda, explaining that "salt soda represents the meticulous care of the party and the government for the working-class brotherhood," and requiring workers to "never refuse to drink salt soda on the ground that it tastes gross."[292]

However, ideological education did not greatly affect workers' motivation to drink salt soda. In the 1958 report mentioned above, Chen Xianzhou also noted that some

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[290] Han Shangyi 韩尚义, *Dai xianwei de tang* 带咸味的糖 [Salty candy] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), 6–7.

[291] *GRRB*, August 14, 1953,

[292] "Diyi jixie gongye bu guanyu yufang xiaji gaowen de zhishi" 第一机械工业部关于预防夏季高温的指示 [Instruction by the First Ministry of Machinery Industry on the prevention of summer heat], *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guowuyuan gongbao* 中华人民共和国国务院公报 [Communique of the State Council of the People's Republic of China], no. 9 (1955): 339–41.

workers complained that the effort to persuade workers into drinking salt soda was an action of "faraway water does not quench nearby fire" (*yuanshui jiubu liao jinhuo* 远水救不了近火).[293] In this context, some manufacturers began to improve the recipe for salt soda in the second half of the 1950s. In 1956, the Shenyang Brewery developed a "health soda" flavoured with sugar and spices. It was reported that workers in high-temperature workshops enjoyed this soda."[294] According to *Xinmin Evening News*, the salt soda newly developed by the Shanghai Aquarius Factory in 1956 had a flavour of "pepper lemon" and was well received by workers. In the same year, the salt soda produced by the Beijing branch of the Aquarius factory "did not taste salty but had a mint flavour."[295] In 1960, experts from Tianjin Medical College brought their newly developed "sugar-coated slow-release tablets" to the National Exchange on the Experience of Heatstroke Prevention and Cooling-Down. These experts claimed that this invention was a good alternative for the "salty and sweet" salt soda.[296]

Some evidence suggests that in many more factories, workers were furnished with various types of cold drinks and food. Many of them looked delicious but did not serve the function of replenishing electrolytes. As a 1957 article published in *Labour* stated, some enterprises in Chongqing provided their workers with unlimited "salt soda, beef soup, plum syrup and other drinks."[297] In the article mentioned above, Deng Xiudong

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[293] Chen, "Jiji kaizhan kexue jishu puji gongzuo wei jianshe shehui zhuyi he xiang kexue jinjun er fendou," 239–40.

[294] "Shenyang niangjiu chang zengchan baojian qishui" 沈阳酿酒厂增产保健汽水 [Production of health soda increased at the Shenyang Brewery], Xinhua News Agency, July 11, 1956, 390762.

[295] "Zai women zuguo de shoudu Beijing" 在我们祖国的首都北京 [In Beijing, the capital of our motherland], in *Xinhuashe xinwen gao* 新华社新闻稿 [Press releases of the Xinhua News Agency], 2228 (July 13, 1956), 2.

[296] Tianjin shi gonggong weisheng ju laodong weisheng yanjiu shi 天津市卫生局公共卫生研究室, "Tangyi huanrong yanpian: yizhong xin de bu yan banfa de kianyi" 糖衣缓溶盐片: 一种新的补盐办法的建议 [Slow dissolving sugar-coated tablets: a new salt supplement method], in *Quanguo laodong weisheng he zhiyebing xueshu huiyi ziliao huibian* 全国劳动卫生和职业病学术会议资料汇编 [Collected materials on the national academic conference on labour health and occupational diseases], ed. Weisheng bu weisheng fangyi si 卫生部卫生防疫司 and Zhonghua yixue hui 中华医学会 (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1960), 469.

[297] "Xunsu zhuoshou jiaqiang fangshu jiangwen gongzuo, yiding yaoba jinnian de fangshu jiangwen gongzuo zuohao" 迅速着手加强防暑降温工作，一定要把今年的防暑降温工作做好 [We must quickly strengthen the work of heat prevention and do a good job this year], *Laodong*, no. 6 (April 1957): 11.

also noted: “Some factories in Shanghai even provided workers with salt soda, lemonade, mint water, nutrition soup, lime soup, green bean water, juice, milk, lollipop, etc. Most of these drinks were not for replenishing bodily fluids and sodium. These factories were concocting various excuses to cater to the taste preference of workers.”[298]

In addition to improving salt soda’s flavour, another effort made by local industrial departments and medical authorities to make salt soda acceptable to workers was to adjust the salt content, which was the most critical factor affecting how salty a salt soda tasted. As shown earlier, the recipes for salt soda used in most Chinese enterprises in the 1950s were consistent with the Soviet standard, with salt content set at about 0.5 percent. For example, in the recipe released by the Bureau of Steel Industry in 1954, the salt content was set at 0.5 percent according to the Soviet standard. In the same year, the Bureau of Steel Industry promoted the use of this recipe in the major steel plants in Tangshan, Tianjin, Daye, Taiyuan, and some other industrial regions.[299] By 1957, the Daye Steel Mill developed a new recipe and released it at the Provincial Exchange on the Experience of Heatstroke Prevention and Cooling-Down: the salt soda should contain 0.3 percent of salt and 1 percent of sugar. The Daye Steel Mill claimed that the upgraded salt soda had a better taste.[300]

My purpose here is not to discuss the chemical principle for preparing salt soda, nor to point out which salt soda concentrations might offer the most ideal taste. What I would like to emphasize, instead, is that salt, which serves as the key functional ingredient in salt soda for treating heat-related illnesses, contributes significantly to its salty flavour also. This is to say, adjusting the salt content of salt soda to fine-tune the taste will obviously affect its therapeutic properties. Then, one should ask a question: Did the adjustment of the salt content of the salt soda have a decisive effect on its protective

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[298] Deng Xiudong, “Zhengque duidai qingliang yinliao,” 21.

[299] Gangtie ju anquan weisheng chu laodong weisheng ke, “1954 nian fangshu jingyan jieshao,” 35.

[300] Quanguo laodong baohu zhanlan guan 全国劳动保护展览馆, *Gongye weisheng ziliao huibian* 工业卫生资料汇编 [Collected materials on industrial hygiene] (Beijing, 1957), 114.

effect? In other words, how much alleviation of heat-related illnesses could salt soda really provide to workers?

Medical experts offered answers to this question in the late 1950s. In 1953, the Department of Public Health was established at Shanghai First Medical College. Gu Xueji, who received his master's degree in public health from Harvard University in 1947, was appointed head of the department's faculty.[301] During the mid-1950s, he organized a team and conducted several research projects on labour hygiene, including a research topic on water-salt metabolism of steelworkers. In 1958, Gu successively published three research articles on "high-temperature drinks" (*gaowen yinliao* 高温饮料) and questioned the effectiveness of salt soda.[302]

In his studies, Gu first pointed out that salt intake in China was higher than in most western countries because of China's dietary habits. This meant that the Soviet standard did not apply to China's actual conditions. In particular, Gu argued that the previous calculation for estimation of salt intake and water-salt metabolism was questionable and that most workers did not necessarily need to maintain daily sodium intake by using salt soda. In May 1958, Gu published a short article in *Wenhui bao*, stating that most Chinese workers were able to get sufficient salt from daily meals without supplementing salt soda. In addition, Gu argued that providing workers with salt soda was by no means cost-effective: "The cost of salt soda is disproportionate to the

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[301] Lu Xijia 卢锡嘉, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai kexuejia zhuanji* 中国现代科学家传记 [Biographies of modern Chinese scientists], vol. 3 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1993), 635–43.

[302] Gu Xueji 顾学箕 and Zheng Yansen 郑衍森, "Gaowen zuoye gongren chuhan liang ji xu yan liang yiban guancha (guanwen zuoye gongren yinliao wenti yanjiu zhi er)" 高温作业工人出汗量及需盐量一般观察 (高温作业工人饮料问题研究之二) [A general survey on the sweat output and salt requirement of men working in hot environments (research on drinks for workers in hot environment, part 2)], *Shanghai diyi yixueyuan xuebao* 上海第一医学院学报, no. 1 (March 1958): 63–69; Gu Xueji 顾学箕 and Zheng Yansen 郑衍森, "Gaowen zuoye gongren chuhan liang ji xu yan liang yiban guancha (guanwen zuoye gongren yinliao wenti yanjiu zhi er)" 高温作业工人出汗量及需盐量一般观察 (高温作业工人饮料问题研究之二) [A general survey on the sweat output and salt requirement of men working in hot environments (research on drinks for Men working in hot environment, Part 2)], *Shanghai Diyi Yixueyuan Xuebao*, no. 1 (March 1958): 63–69; Gu Xueji 顾学箕 and Zheng Yansen 郑衍森, "Guanyu niaolü huawu hanliang de shengli dixianzhi wenti (gaowen zuoye gongren yinliao wenti yanjiu zhisan)" 关于尿氯化物含量的生理低限值问题 (高温作业工人饮料问题研究之三) [Concerning the minimal physiological limit of urine chloride content (research on drinks for men working in hot environments, part 3)], *Shanghai diyi yixueyuan xuebao*, no. 4 (August 1958): 313–20.

benefits workers actually receive." Gu also stressed that "adding a lot of seasonings to salt soda to cover up the salty taste is not healthy, but wasteful. If additional salt is essential, serving salted duck eggs or salted soy milk is a more effective way than salt soda."[303]

In short, Gu demonstrated that providing workers with salt soda was not the most ideal solution to heat stress among workers in high temperatures. The addition of large amounts of flavouring essence to cover the salty taste was even more detrimental to workers' health. Gu's 1958 studies overturned the conclusions proposed by local labour and medical departments in Anshan, Wuhan and even the Central Institute of Health before 1958. More importantly, Gu stressed that the fundamental solution to heatstroke prevention was still to shield workers from heat sources, and that "providing workers with drinks is only the supplementary measure rather than the only measure." Since the advent of Gu's research papers in 1958, an increasing number of studies have cast doubt on the curative effect of salt soda. For example, a study conducted by the Wuhan Railway Central Epidemic Prevention Station in 1959 proved that green tea containing one-thousandth of salt was far more economical and effective than salt soda. Nowadays, medical experts have reached a consensus that the previous view of giving workers as much salt as possible was a mistake.[304]

So, was salt soda a beverage or a medicine? The answer seems very clear. The feedback from workers indicates that workers were more susceptible to the taste of salt soda than its effect. In other words, in the eyes of workers, salt soda just appeared as an ordinary beverage. The producers' continuous improvement in the taste of salt soda to satisfy the workers' palate accordingly deviated salt soda from its designed function of protecting workers.

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[303] *Wenhui bao*, October 4, 1958, 4.

[304] Zheng Pengran 郑鹏然 and Zhou Shunan 周树南, *Shipin weisheng quanshu* 食品卫生全书 [Comprehensive book of food hygiene] (Beijing: Hongqi chubanshe, 1996), 85.

Epilogue

In 1975, an article entitled "Why More Salt Soda Should Be Produced" appeared in *Wenhui bao*, stating in the voice of a worker at the Aquarius factory: Salt soda was not as profitable as other drinks, but the production of salt soda could not be reduced. On the one hand, the supply of salt soda symbolized the party's loving care for the working class, and on the other hand, the production of salt soda was of great significance to the promotion of steel production.[305] As noted in this article, salt soda remained an important part of the party's labour protection policies until the last few years of the Mao era. Regrettably, even though more than two decades had passed since the Tianjin Steel Mill first introduced the salt soda tablet, many workers in China's large steel plants such as the Anshan Steel Mill and the Wuhan Steel Mill could still hardly enjoy high-quality soda. The qualified rate of the salt soda produced at the soda station in the Anshan Steelwork in 1979 was only 50.9 percent. It was not until 1985 that the rate reached over 90 percent.[306] According to a factory gazetteer, in the Wuhan Steelwork, by the end of the Cultural Revolution, it had been very common for workers to dump their salt soda[307]

In the 1980s, salt soda began to go out of use in China's industrial workplaces. Instead, many factories provided workers with "labour protection tea" or ice pops in the hot summer and a small number of factories simply replaced salt soda with a "cooling-down allowance" (*fangshu jiangwen fei* 防暑降温费). Even in those factories where salt soda was still available, workers still showed little interest in it. According to a 1987 *Xinmin Evening News* article, workers at the Shanghai Cotton Factory No. 25 often spilled buckets of salt soda all over the road or poured it into the gutter: "When the sun shone, the stench was overwhelming."[308]

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[305] *Wenhui bao*, August 6, 1975, 3.

[306] Long Chunman 龙春满, *Angang keji zhi* 鞍钢科技志 [The Anshan Steel Mill technology gazetteer] (Shenyang: Liaoning keji chubanshe, 1991), 251.

[307] Liu Chuanzhou 刘传洲, *Wuhan gangtie gongsi jixie zongchang zhi 1954–1982* 武汉钢铁公司机械总厂志 1954–1982 [The Wuhan Iron and Steel Company general machinery work gazetteer: 1954–1982 (Hanshan: Hanshan xian yinshua chang, 1984), 331.

[308] *XMWB*, August 15, 1987, 6.

Even though many workers did not appreciate the salt soda, many ordinary people cherished it very much during the Mao era. Like any labour protection necessity, salt soda became available to ordinary people aside from workers in China's major industrial cities after the late 1950s. Shen Jianqiang, a Shanghainese swimmer born in 1964, once recalled that his mother who worked in a textile factory often brought home salt soda sneakily. Shen said: "this drink was a 'rare luxury' in my childhood."[309] Pianist Kong Xiangdong had a similar memory. His mother, who was a coal shoveler, often took salt soda from the factory to home. Whenever Kong was asleep, his mother would place the salt soda without disturbing him by his bedside. Kong said: "The salt soda, at that time, was very rare."[310] In 1960s Shanghai, access to salt soda became a symbol of privilege. "Salt soda became popular quickly once it was on the market in the late 1960s," said Wu Xiaoming, a Shanghai resident. "Syrup, the raw material used to make salt soda and syrup of plum, became a highly sought-after commodity and the best food to serve to guests. Those who had extra syrup to give away were also recognized as having superior connections."[311] Nevertheless, this did not mean these people really enjoyed the taste of salt soda. As we discussed in the previous chapter, the shortage of daily materials during the Mao era caused these ordinary people to crave salt soda. Just as Han Shangyi said, after he was labelled as a "cow devil or snake god" during the Cultural Revolution, there was no more soda to drink. At that time, he started hankering for salt soda, even though it tasted really "bitter and salty."[312]

Salt soda, which faded into obscurity after the end of the Mao era, has been reintroduced into people's daily lives in recent years. Around 2000, the Aquarius company revived the salt soda and made it become a hot-selling good in the market. The

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[309] Shen Jianqiang 沈坚强, "Nanwang Jing'an shikumen" 难忘静安石库门 [Unforgettable shikumen in Jing'an], in *Jing'an wenshi,* ed. Zhengxie Shanghai Jing'an wenshi haiwai xuanji bianwei hui 政协上海静安文史海外选辑编委会, vol. 11 (Shanghai: Shanghai waiguo yu daxue, 1998), 85.

[310] Kong Xiangdong 孔祥东, "Gudian yinyue de panni zhe" 古典音乐的叛逆者 [The rebel of classical music], in *Rang weilai jizhu jintian (shang): Yanglan fangtan lu liu zhounian teji* 让未来记住今天 (上): 杨澜访谈录六周年特辑 [Let tomorrow remember today (1): Special for the sixth anniversary of Yang Lan's interviews], by Yang Lan 杨澜 (Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 2006), 73–74.

[311] *XMWB*, May 24, 1999, 21.

[312] Han, "Salt soda," 6–7.

salt soda originated from the Wuhan Steelwork, was given the trade name "Salty Buddy" (咸伙计) and became popular in Hubei again. However, these salt sodas now are simply a regular pop drink with the nominal name "salt soda." Even though they contain a small amount of salt, they have a similar taste to ordinary beverages. The comeback of salt soda in the new millennium reflects what Mark Swislocki calls "culinary nostalgia"— some people recognize drinking salt soda in the Mao era as a part of their life experiences.[313] But this nostalgia was strongly rooted in their memories of the taste of salt soda rather than the function it served. As an ordinary Shanghai resident Long Gang said: "Even though the living conditions now are many times better than in the past, the 'taste' of Auntie Wang's salt soda is still there, and this 'taste' will never diminish with the passage of time."[314]

[313] Mark Swislocki, *Culinary Nostalgia: Regional Food Culture and the Urban Experience in Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 176–218.

[314] Long Gang 龙钢, "Na xie nian women he guo de yan qishui" 那些年我们喝过的盐汽水 [The salt soda that we drunk in those days], *XMWB*, August 9, 2020, http://newsxmwb.xinmin.cn/yedu/2020/08/09/31783130.html.

Chapter 4. Eat Well, Sleep Well, and Play Well! Workers' Recuperation in Sanatoriums

> The second thing to say is that sanatoriums—workers' sanatoriums or cadres' sanatoriums—have been established alongside all three lakes. There is a workers' sanatorium at Cuizhou beside Xuanwu Lake. I can't exactly tell how many sanatoriums have been built alongside West Lake and Taihu Lake. I only visited the Zhongdushan workers' sanatorium beside Taihu Lake. In the old days, how could those sweat-drenched manual labourers be eligible to recuperate in a sanatorium? When they got sick, they had to clench their teeth and work to exhaustion until saying goodbye to their careers and their lives. As for recuperation, that is something you would never dream of. Recuperation means putting your work down and staying off. If you do so, wouldn't you be left with nothing to eat? It is only in this era, when our people became masters, that the party cares for their partners who create all kinds of wealth and asks them to recuperate in sanatoriums located in places with good scenery and suitable climate. In the past, there was a verse going like this, "Most of the famous mountains have been occupied by Buddhist monks." Now we can use the meaning of this verse for another purpose. Even though this has not been done yet, it will certainly be done in the future— sanatoriums will occupy all the places with good scenery and benign climate. There is certainly a doubt whether monks should occupy famous mountains. The sanatoriums, without any doubt, should take up all good locations.
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> —Ye Shengtao, "Touring Three Lakes," 1954

In 1954, after revisiting the Xuanwu Lake in Nanjing, Taihu Lake in Wuxi, and West Lake in Hangzhou, the notable writer Ye Shengtao (1894–1988), who was sixty years old at the time, wrote these reflections in his travel note entitled "Touring Three Lakes" (*youle sange hu* 游了三个湖). As a native of the Delta Region, Ye writes that he "has long been familiar with these lakes, especially West Lake." Nevertheless, this tour still refreshed his impression. "The silted lakes have been dredged; the lakeside environment has been improved." Ye writes, "most importantly, Chinese labouring people are able to enjoy a period of repose in a sanatorium located in such a scenic retreat."[315]

[315] Ye Shengtao 叶圣陶, "Youle sange hu" 游了三个湖 [Touring three lakes], in *Si Ye ji* 四叶集 [Selected works of Ye Shengtao, Ye Zhicheng, Ye Zhimei, and Ye Zhishan], ed. Shang Jinlin 商金林 (Guilin: Lijiang chubanshe, 1989), 264.

The sanatorium Ye Shengtao visited was neither those recreational facilities in China's summer resorts established by missionaries or foreign merchants in the late nineteenth century nor those healthcare facilities for the treatment of tuberculosis and leprosy that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century.[316] It was a workers' sanatorium (*gongren liaoyangyuan* 工人疗养院), one of the most innovative contributions of Soviet socialism. As Diane P. Koenker argues in her study of the Soviet vacationing system, "But work took its toll on the human organism, and along with

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[316] In China, the first modern sanatorium did not appear until the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1867, the China Inland Mission set up a small sanatorium in Chefoo (Yantai) for sick missionaries and later developed it into the well-known Chefoo School. Originally designed as a therapeutic facility that could accommodate up to twenty patients, this sanatorium soon became a vacation destination many western dwellers had a deep longing for. As stated in a letter to *The North China Daily News* written by an Englishman Charles Stanley Sturdon in 1869: "Isolated as Shanghai is, wealthy residents have preferred making journeys to Chefoo and Nagasaki, in preference to raising a costly building on some adjacent islands or mountain." In the same letter, he proposed a public sanatorium in the Zhoushan archipelago so that many people with limited income would "no longer be prevented from leaving Shanghai" and be enabled to make repeated visits in a "sea-side watering place with cooling retreats." As the number of western visitors rapidly grew in China's treaty ports, especially in Shanghai and other areas in the Yangtze River Delta, voices calling for locating new sanatoriums near Shanghai never abated in the years following the establishment of the Chefoo Sanatorium. From Mount Putuo to the Hangzhou Bay, places with a cool climate, either by the sea or surrounded by forests, were considered ideal locations for new sanatoriums. The strong desire of these westerners for sanatoriums stemmed from their inabilities to cope with the summer heat in China's crowded cities and villages, where poor sanitary conditions in urban areas during summer made these expatriates extremely vulnerable to deadly infectious diseases such as cholera and malaria. In addition, homesickness drove those missionaries and merchants in the alien land to flee the Chinese world. They were keen to search for a secluded place to live with people of their own ethnic stock. By the turn of the twentieth century, the so-called four major summer retreats—Beidaihe, Guling, Moganshan, and Jigongshan— had already taken shape. In these places, both public sanatoriums and private rest homes had flourished. In early 1900s, sanatoriums for tuberculosis (TB) patients started to proliferate. In 1909, N.C. Hopkins, a missionary physician from The Methodist Episcopal Church, set up China's first TB sanatorium in the western outskirts of Beijing. During the same period, Leila Louise Berkin established the Medical Mission General Hospital in Guling, Lushan. By the 1920s, Guling had enjoyed fame for its TB sanatoriums at home and abroad. During the same period, Chinese TB patients began to have access to these medical facilities. By the 1930s, there had been already a considerable number of sanatoriums for both the treatment of TB and rest in China. Except for missionaries, merchants, and socialites from China and abroad, ordinary Chinese were still unable to afford a sanatorium stay, let alone the vast number of ordinary labourers. See *The North China Daily News*, April 2, 1867, 2759; March 25, 1869, 003; March 25, 1869, 003; August 6, 1874, 127; August 5, 1874, 123; July 26, 1878, 591; August 23, 1879, 187; Pearl S. Buck, *My Several Worlds: A Personal Record* (New York: Pocket Books, 1954), 110; Lü Xiaoling 吕晓玲, *Jindai zhongguo bishu dujia lüyou yan*jiu 近代中国避暑度假旅游研究 [Study on summer vacation tourism in China from 1895 to 1937] (Hefei: Hefei gongye daxue chubanshe, 2013), 28–31; He Ling 何玲, "Xiyi chuanru zhongguo: Jiehebing anli yanjiu (1900–1967)" 西医传入中国: 结核病案例研究 [The introduction of western medicine to China: a case study of TB (1900–1967)] (PhD diss., Shanghai jiaotong daxue, 2011), 58–68; Qu Yandan, "The History of Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Modern China: A Focus on Kuling Medical Mission General Hospital and Tuberculosis Sanatorium," *Comparative Studies of Greater China* 1, no. 1 (December 2019): 1–25; Song Zuanyou 宋钻友, Zhang Xiuli 张秀莉, and Zhang Sheng 张生, *Shanghai gongren shenghuo yanjiu (1843–1949)* 上海工人生活研究 [Study of the daily lives of Shanghai workers (1843–1949] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2011), 102–3.

creating the necessary conditions for productive labour, a socialist system would also include productive rest as an integral element of its economy."[317] Because of this, the socialist state developed workers' sanatoriums with a utilitarian purpose of maximizing workers' productivities. As the Soviet Union's protégé, the CCP started to develop its sanatorium system in late 1949. By 1954, China's labour unions, industrial departments, and thousands of enterprises had jointly established a vast sanatorium network, consisting of approximately 335 sanatoriums with 41,353 beds sponsored by labour unions of all levels and 3,337 both factory- and department-run rest homes.[318]

This chapter examines the development of China's sanatorium network in the 1950s with a focus on the daily lives of recuperating workers. By drawing on available sources, mostly official reports, and medical journal articles dealing with the management of sanatoriums, as well as newspaper accounts of the achievements of workers' recuperation project, I reveal the discrepancy between the party's ideals of how workers spent their time in sanatoriums and how workers reacted to sanatorium discipline and schedules. According to Tricia Starks, Soviet sanatoriums served two functions. First, they provided "an antidote to the intensity of socialist forms of production such as shock work and socialist competition." Second, they provided education and supervision in addition to medical treatment.[319] This description applies to China's sanatorium system. In the early 1950s, China's sanatorium organizers offered workers, mostly what the party defined as model workers and advanced workers, generous material benefits and cutting-edge medical treatments as rewards for their contributions and expected workers to reciprocate the benefits with hard work after their recovery. In addition, sanatorium organizers expected recuperating workers to conscientiously observe discipline and be willing to participate in recreational activities

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[317] Diane Koenker, *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 12.

[318] Zhonghua quanguo zong gonghui 中华全国总工会, *Zhongguo gonghui baike quanshu* 中国工会百科全书 [Encyclopedia of trade unions in China], vol. 2 (Beijing: Jingji guanli chubanshe, 1998), 1314.

[319] Tricia Starks, *The Body Soviet: Propa*

ganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 38.

with educational purposes through which they could raise their political awareness and technical skills.

However, the abundant material benefits available in many sanatoriums promoted workers' individual autonomy. Many workers ignored the disciplines and refused to accept medical treatments or participate in activities that the organizers considered conducive to workers' health recovery. Rather, they only enjoyed and selected sanatorium services that best benefited themselves and showed a special preference for feasting at the dinner table. As a response to workers' ravenous appetite for food, many sanatorium organizers began to enrich the menu and to consider weight gain as the only measure for the success of workers' recuperation. This did not help workers recover from their illness or pain and was even counterproductive to their recovery. Even though many sanatoriums began to prioritize educational activities over food therapy and recreational activities in the 1950s, workers still adhered to their own ways to spend their time in sanatoriums sleeping and eating. From the official perspective, workers' disobedient behaviours were attributed to poor management by sanatorium organizers or workers' undisciplined lifestyles. But it was as much a reflection of the lack of access to adequate amounts of nutrition for ordinary people in the early days of the Mao era.

Workers' Paradise

In October 1949, some farmers dwelling in the Qilingzi Village, Anshan, suddenly discovered that the former Fengtian Provincial Nursing Hospital was being erected again from the ruins beside the hot spring. These farmers heard that this place would become a sanatorium for workers from Northeast China.

"Is this true?" These farmers seemed to be less than convinced. They were under the impression that only people with the military rank of Japanese commander or above were qualified to live in this place during the Manchukuo period. Their doubts were not dispelled until a month later, when a group of people in dark work uniforms arrived in the village on November 29. In this whitewashed building, later known as the First Northeast Workers' Sanatorium (*Dongbei diyi gongren liaoyang yuan* 东北第一工人疗养院) or

the Qianshan Sanatorium, these workers were treated with soothing hot springs, hearty food, and various engaging recreational activities. Gao Guizhen, an 18-year-old repairwoman from the Fushun Shengli Coal Mines, wrote a poem to praise her vacation in the sanatorium. It bears noting that in this poem the utilitarian motive behind the socialist leisure was clearly articulated:

> Here is the peerless hot spring in the Northeast, where our workers gather to recuperate and rest. Relax your joint pains, nerves, and stomach pains by soaking in a hot spring. Workers' health is protected, and with prolonged lives, we become more productive. Do not forget the source of our happiness, the Communist Party is the saviour of the people![320]

In the first half of 1950, there were around 650 workers who spent a medical recovery period like Gao Guifen in approximately twenty-four sanatoriums beside sunshine beaches, hot springs or embraced by mountain views for the first time in their lives.[321] In May 1950, one month after the CCP carried out its first labour insurance program in state-owned enterprises in seven major industries in Northeast China, the Northeast Trade Union Council (*dongbei zhigong zonghu* 东北职工总会) set out to plan three sanatoriums in Northeast China.[322] The decade following the arrival of the first two hundred workers in the Qianshan sanatorium in October 1950 saw a proliferation of the sanatorium network in China.[323] According to statistics by the ACTFU and some other local labour unions, by the end of 1954, there were more than six hundred sanatoriums with more than 40,000 bed-capacity nationwide. According to a *Peking Review* article, by 1959, of 390,000 medical institutions, 2,500 were "sanatoria with 74,000 beds run by trade unions or industrial and mining enterprises."[324] In 1961, the number of workers'

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[320] The account of how the sanatorium was built was based on a *Workers' Daily* feature written by Lai Lu. Lai Lu 赖鲁, "Dongbei diyi gongren liaoyang yuan fangwen ji" 东北第一工人疗养院访问记 [Visit to the First Northeast Workers' Sanatorium], *Xinhua yuebao* 新华月报 2, no. 1–6 (1950): 317–19.

[321] Xia Boguang 夏波光, "Dansheng zai jiefang zhanzheng zhong de laodong baoxian zhidu" 诞生在解放战争中的劳动保险制度 [The labour insurance program developed during the Civil War], September 30, 2011, https://zgylbx.com/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=6&id=14946.

[322] Nara Dillon, *Radical Inequalities: China's Revolutionary Welfare State in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 125.

[323] *RMRB*, August 26, 1949, 2.

[324] Hsien-wen Kuo, "Labour Insurance in China," *Peking Review*, no. 18 (May 4, 1962): 9.

sanatoriums reached a peak. There were 6,363 sanatoriums and rest homes with 113,000 beds in total available to Chinese labouring people.[325]

This sanatorium network consisted of two main types of health facilities based on their sponsors and size. The first type was those large sanatoriums sponsored by regional-level trade unions and industrial-level unions, as well as local government authorities. Located in China's most prominent famous beauty spots and resorts: Lushan Mountain in Jiangxi, the West Lake in Hangzhou, Zhanshan in Qingdao, Beidaihe in Hebei, Moganshan in Zhejiang, and Taihu Lake in Jiangsu, these sanatoriums typically had a capacity of hundreds to thousands of beds and received workers taking full-time remedial rest. The second type was rest homes, also known as "part-time sanatorium" (*yeyu liangyangyuan* 业余疗养院). These facilities, which were mostly run by factories and mines, could typically accommodate dozens to hundreds of their employees for recuperation without releasing them from their positions (*bu tuochan liaoyang* 不脱产疗养). For those small factories unable to afford sanatoriums or rest homes, "nutrition canteens" (*yingyang shitang* 营养食堂) that provided workers in frail health with nutritious diets became an alternative to sanatoriums. The course of recuperation for workers in rest homes was relatively shorter than those in sanatoriums. Some factory-run sanatoriums not only accommodated their employees, but also accepted and treated workers transferred from other factories, except those who were seriously ill or contracted infectious diseases. The establishment of part-time sanatoriums reduced pressure on large hospitals in China's major cities. According to a 1951 statistic conducted by the Northeast Workers' Rest Home, in Changchun, the number of outpatients in the hospitals decreased by twenty percent after the rest home was established.[326]

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[325] Deng Tietao 邓铁涛, *Zhongguo yangsheng shi* 中国养生史 [A history of health cultivation in China] (Nanning: Guangxi kexue jishu chubanshe, 2018), 701.

[326] Zhongguo meikuang gonghui huabei choubei weiyuanhui 中国煤矿工会华北筹备委员会, "Dongbei qu gongren yeyu liaoyang suo gongzuo baogao zhaiyao" 东北区工人业余疗养所工作报告摘要 [Summary of the report on the work of the Northeast Workers' Part-time Sanatorium], July 1, 1951, SPA, c098-0011-0011-0011.

Among the more than six thousand that were established during the 1950s, there were still some sanatoriums for workers with TB, such as the Lushan Post and Telecommunications Workers' Sanatorium. As a deeply internalized national stigma, TB was an infectious disease that CCP sought to eradicate urgently in order to erase the backward image of the Chinese after it came to power.[327] Before the effective treatment for TB was put into use in the late 1950s, however, local governments and medical authorities had to continue to adopt sanatorium treatment to deal with TB in China. In principle, patients in TB sanatoriums and factory-run part-time sanatoriums did not admit each other.

Akin to the Soviet regime, which first converted nationalized properties of the aristocracy and merchant princes to workers' rest homes, the CCP authorities occupied and used many vacationing facilities owned by what the party identified as "western imperialists, capitalists, and counter-revolutionaries."[328] Converting these ready-made resort facilities that used to belong to the targets of the Communist revolution was not only a pragmatic choice but also a strategy to visualize the victory of the revolution and the improved status of the Chinese working class. The following text excerpted from a 1952 *Fujian Daily* article introducing the newly established sanatorium in Moganshan articulated this message even more clearly:

> There are six western-style buildings located in the Moganshan Sanatorium, which used to be a place where the bureaucratic bourgeoisie indulged themselves in sensual pleasures after exploiting labouring people's sweat and blood. Some of these buildings belonged to the big rogue and traitor Du Yuesheng and Zhang Xiaolin. There were sports grounds and swimming pools inside. But today, this

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[327] Liu Shaohua 刘绍华, *Mafeng yisheng yu jubian zhongguo: hou diguo shiyan xia de jibing yinyu yu fangyi lishi* 麻风医生与巨变: 中国后帝国实验下的疾病隐喻与防疫历史 [Leprosy doctors in China's postimperial experimentation: Metaphors of a disease and its control] (Taipei: Weicheng chubanshe, 2019), 74–75.

[328] Almost all newspaper accounts of the establishment of new workers' sanatoriums noted the history of the facilities the local governments and trade unions converted. For example, the sanatorium buildings in Benxi were the former villas established by Japanese during the Manchukuo era; The Seaside Sanatorium in Qingdao was located in a place where "imperialists and reactionary ringleaders used to take refuge;" The Workers' sanatoriums in Lushan served as a summer resort for the Four Great Families in the past; and the Zhanshan sanatorium in Qingdao was a "treacherous ground" (*shifei chang* 是非场) occupied by "foreign invaders" before liberation. *Dagongbao*, April 23, 1953, 2; *Wenhui bao*, April 29, 1954, 4.

> place created by the hands of labouring people has been handed back to the working class.[329]

In addition to taking over existing facilities, many local authorities built their own sanatoriums, such as the Taihu Workers' Sanatorium that Ye Shengtao visited. After receiving the instruction from Premier Zhou Enlai, the East China Office of the ACFTU and the Southern Jiangsu Federation of Trade Unions jointly chose the Zhongdushan island in the Taihu Turtle-Head Peninsula as the site for this sanatorium. Shen Yuankai and Xu Keqin, two Chinese architects who graduated from the South Jiangsu Technical College, were commissioned to design the sanatorium buildings. In 1954, a three-story main building with a green palace-style roof was erected on the hilltop of the Zhongdushan island.[330] The architect named the main building "*yanbo zhishuang,*" which means "misty ripples bringing brisk air." In 1710, the Kangxi Emperor (1661–1722), who was in the Mountain Resort (*bishu shanzhuang* 避暑山庄) in Chengde, used these four Chinese characters to extol the chamber where he enjoyed a cool breeze in hot summer.[331] The implication of borrowing the name of Kangxi's favourite palace to name a rest home for workers could not be more obvious: the summer resort that used to serve the "feudal emperor" began to serve what Ye called "sweat-drenched manual labourers" in the new era.

Many sanatoriums provided workers with the best material conditions they could offer in the 1950s. Typically, sanatorium buildings were surrounded by gardens planted with various flowers. Wards in sanatoriums, especially in those large sanatoriums, were well decorated. A 1953 *Workers' Daily* article illustrated the decorations in the ward in the Northeast Workers' Sanatorium:

> A room accommodates three people. The interior is beautifully whitewashed. Sunlight shines in through the big glass windows. On the shiny floor, there is a writing desk with a thermos, a teapot, a tea bowl, a mirror, and a vase filled with flowers. At the head of the single bed, which was covered with thick snow-white

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[329] Du Yuesheng and Zhang Xiaolin, along with Huang Jinrong, were the three most notable "ringleaders" of Shanghai Green Gang before 1949. *Fujian ribao* 福建日报 [Fujian daily], August 31, 1952.

[330] *Jiangnan wanbao* 江南晚报 [Jiangnan evening news], May 8, 2020, A05.

[331] Philippe Forêt, *Mapping Chengde: The Qing Landscape Enterprise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 43.

bedding, there was also a bedside table. The recuperating workers felt very comfortable sleeping in such a neat room and were able to fall asleep quickly at night.[332]

Snow white beddings, spring beds, and delicate vases filled with fresh flowers were the integral items of the sanatorium ward décor. This was directly copied from the design of Soviet sanatorium rooms, which aimed to keep patients' spirits up.[333] Several sanatoriums in Shanxi were even decorated with marble tiles and woollen carpets. The marble tiles in the Shanxi Provincial Union Sanatorium were so smoothly polished that some recuperating workers slipped and got injured.[334] Even in small sanatoriums such as the workers' sanatorium in Changzhi, each patient could exclusively use a wooden bed covered with sheets, mattresses, and pillows, and received a covered teapot and a mask.[335] For workers living before 1949, these benefits were almost unattainable for them. The best rehabilitation equipment their factories could probably provide was just a bed without bedding.[336]

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[332] *GRRB*, February 1, 1953,

[333] Zhonghua quanguo zong gonghui laobao bu 中华全国总工会劳保部, *Zenyang juban liaoyang suo he yeyu liangyang suo* 怎样举办疗养所和业余疗养所 [How to run sanatoriums and rest homes] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1952), 39–41.

[334] Shanxi sheng gonghui lianhe hui 山西省工会联合会, "Liaoyangyuan dalou cong zhuguan chufa, jiang louban moguang rujing yishi de han" 疗养院大楼从主观出发, 将楼板磨光如镜一事的函 [Letter on the matter of polishing the floor of the sanatorium building like a mirror from a subjective point of view], October 16, 1959, SPA, c098-0012-0125-0051.

[335] Shanxi sheng Changzhi gongren liaoyangyuan 山西省长治工人疗养院, "Changzhi gongren liaoyangyuan gongzuo zongjie" 长治工人疗养院工作总结 [Work summary of the Shanxi Changzhi Workers' Sanatorium], n. d., SPA, c098-0001-0064-0009.

[336] It was not until the late 1920s when the Nationalist government began to put the labour issue on its state agenda, that a limited number of hospitals and nursing homes that accommodated ordinary labourers were established in China's industrial cities such as Shanghai or Wuxi. With a charitable mission, these facilities provided both outpatient and inpatient care to factory workers. In 1930, the Ministry of Health of the Nationalist Government established a labour sanatorium in Wuxi. Based on available sources, this institution was almost identical to other labour hospitals established during the same period. Nevertheless, this can still be seen as the starting point of the government-sponsored program of workers' recuperation in modern China. Compared to government-sponsored workers' sanatoriums, factory-run nursing homes for injured and sick workers seemed to be more prevalent. In the 1930s, there were some large enterprises, such as the Hunan Textile Factory No.1 and the Xishan Coal Mines, that set up their own nursing homes as auxiliaries of factory hospitals. The medical conditions in these nursing homes were mostly poor. A log of the nursing home at the Xishan Coal Mines offers us a glimpse of what the patients' lives were like in 1947. Bed rest and food therapy were the only methods of recovery available for those sick worker patients. Beds were wooden with hard boards without bedding or mattresses, bringing "unbearable" pain to the

Figure 9. This photograph was taken on May 12, 1954. It shows the inside of a ward at the First Workers' Sanatorium of Northeast China. Interestingly, there was a wall calendar printed with a fashionably dressed woman in Republican-style attire next to a picture of Mao Zedong within a wall calendar on the wall behind this male patient. Source: Kongfz, https://mbook.kongfz.com/235066/1802382994/.

Not all workers, however, had access to these comfortable facilities. As many local labour departments and trade unions stipulated, workers with chronic illnesses or over 45-year-old, as well as labour models, were granted priority admission to

bedridden workers. Song, Zhang, and Zhang, *Shanghai gongren shenghuo yanjiu (1843–1949),* 102–3; *Xinwenbao* 新闻报 [News], April 29, 1930, 6; Hunan sheng zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 湖南省志编纂委员会, *Hunan sheng zhi* 湖南省志 [Hunan gazetteer], vol. 1 (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1959), 724; Xibei shiye gongsi 西北实业公司, "Xishan meikuang gonghui guanyu ju gongren lai hui te yiyuan chuangpu que dianru deng qingkuangxi changfang zishe pubian de han"西山煤矿工会关于据工人来会特医院床铺缺垫褥等情况希厂方自设铺垫的函 [The letter by the Xishan Coal Mine Unions to respond to workers' report on the lacking of beddings in the hospital and to request that the factory should prepare beddings], July 1, 1947, SPA, b32-2-25.

sanatoriums.[337] In practice, however, most beds in sanatoriums were reserved for model workers, advanced workers, and activists who had outstanding performances in political movements. Even though many model workers were not sick, they were still sent to sanatoriums by ballot election. As a result, sanatoriums won a nickname among workers: the exhibition hall for model workers."[338] In 1957, Li Haipeng, a worker from the Changxindian Locomotive Repair Factory, said publicly, "When a worker stays at the sanitarium, the factory administration and the trade union had to subsidize several dozen *yuan*. It was always those same people going to stay at sanatoriums, we never enjoyed it."[339] In addition, according to many labour insurance regulations (*laobao tiaoli* 劳保条例) in the 1950s, the lion share of a worker's expense in sanatoriums was covered by labour insurance. However, as many scholars, such as Andrew Walder and Nara Dillon, have already noticed, only those permanent workers in state enterprises and government employees were entitled to labour insurance. Therefore, the vast majority of Chinese labourers were excluded.[340] Some employers of private enterprises in Tianjin also complained: "Our staff have no right to enjoy a sanatorium stay."[341]

The uneven distribution of entry to sanatoriums signalled the bifurcation among the Chinese working class. In late 1950, after arriving at the First Workers' Sanatorium of Northeast China, a worker named Meng Yi from Jixi, North Manchuria, could not help

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[337] The regulation of the admission to workers' sanatoriums or nutrition canteens in different places were virtually the same. For example, in 1952, the Tianjin Finance and Trade Union stipulated that veteran workers over the age of 45, frail workers, and model workers were given priority for admission to the nutrition canteen. In principle, no more than two per cent of the total number of workers had access to the canteen. This proportion should not exceed a maximum of five per cent. The admission must be nominated by the trade union, certified by the medical office, and approved by the Labour Insurance Committee according to the medical examinations. Jinrong maoyi gonghui labao bu 金融贸易工会劳保部, "Jianli yingyang shitang de yijian" 建立营养食堂的意见 [Opinions on establishing nutrition canteens], October 22, 1952, TMA, x0045-y-000151-001.

[338] Zhongguo meikuang gonghui huabei choubei weiyuanhui, "Dongbei qu gongren yeyu liaoyang suo gongzuo baogao zhaiyao," July 1, 1951, SPA, c098-0011-0011-0011.

[339] "Zenyang renshi he jiejue shenghuo fuli wenti" 怎样认识和解决生活和福利问题 [How to solve the problem of lives and welfare], *LDBHTX*, no. 21 (November 12, 1957): 12.

[340] Nara Dillon, *Radical Inequalities*, 1.

[341] Tianjin shi zong gonghui laobao bu 天津市总工会劳保部, "Guanyu shi zong gonghui gongren liaoyang yuan qingkuang de baogao" 关于市总工会工人疗养院情况的报告 [Report on the situation of the workers' sanatorium of the Municipal Federation of Trade Unions], December 1953, TMA, x0084-c-000209-014.

but sigh that he felt as if he had "won the number one scholarship in the Qing Dynasty!"[342] For an ordinary person, passing the imperial examination meant that he was accepted as a member of the ruling class. By this logic, one could say that this analogy was an expression of this foundry workers' mentality of being superior to other ordinary workers. An article posted by a rebel worker during the Cultural Revolution could also attest to this fact: "Many sanatoriums played an important role in creating special classes. They incited the labouring people to pursue individual material benefits by promising them sofas, spring beds, TV sets, and even high-class billiards. Workers who came there could not only enjoy sightseeing tours but also boating and fishing."[343] While those who did not gain admission to sanatoriums on many occasions acted as foils to those ready-to-recuperate workers. In 1953, Ma Bayi and other three labour models from the Guangzhou Transport Union boarded a train to the Beidaihe Workers' Sanatorium. At the train station, the Union organized more than one hundred transporting workers to perform waist drum dance and *yangge* (秧歌) at the farewell ceremony. The waist drum dance and *yangge,* two folk arts that the party began popularizing in the Yan'an era "in effective propaganda campaigns among largely illiterate peasants of rural China," as Hung Chang-tai argues, were closely associated with its revolutionary ideology and were almost synonymous with liberation."[344] Ironically, in this scenario, only Ma Bayi and his three companions could truly enjoy the benefits of liberation, rather than the workers who performed what Hung argues "the dance of liberation" so vigorously.[345]

Sanatorium Services

In the 1950s, China's sanatorium organizers developed a detailed program that provided three major services: medical treatment, recreation, and education. The health care services available in most sanatoriums were related to the treatment of the following

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[342] Lai, "Dongbei diyi gongren liaoyangyuan fangwen ji," 317–19.

[343] Wei Dong 卫东, "Suqing laodong baoxian zhong de xiuzheng zhuyi" 肃清劳动保险中的修正主义 [Purging revisionism in labour insurance work], *Laodong zhanxian* 劳动战线, vol. 3 (July 13, 1967): 3.

[344] See Chang-tai Hung, *Mao's New World: Political Culture in the Early People's Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 75–77.

[345] See Chang-tai Hung, *Mao's New World,* 77.

diseases: chronic bronchitis, rheumatic arthritis, dystrophy, chronic gastroenteritis, and neurotic disorders, which were the most common occupational diseases among Chinese industrial labourers in mines and enterprises.[346] In the 1950s, many sanatorium treatments were known for their innovative and cutting-edge nature. For example, in the First Workers' Sanatorium of Tianjin, patients were able to receive more than fifteen therapies believed to be beneficial to the recovery of workers during the first half of the 1950s. Most of them—tissue therapy, potato therapy, hemolytic therapy, hydrarthrosis, ginger therapy, urine therapy—were all the so-called Soviet cutting-edge medical achievements at the time.[347] Even though many of these therapies have now been proven to be absurd based on the latest medical discoveries, many of them were still used in the 1960s.

It is worth mentioning that in the early 1950s medical personnel occupied an important position in the administration of sanatoriums. The head of a sanatorium,

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[346] "Jiaqiang sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo, chongfen fahui gongzuo renyuan de jiji xing, tigao liaoxiao, Shanghai shipin gongye gongren liaoyang suo de gongzuo zongjie" 加强思想政治工作, 充分发挥工作人员的积极性, 提高疗效, 上海食品工业工人疗养所的工作总结 [Strengthen ideological and political work, give full play to the enthusiasm of the staff, improve the effectiveness of treatment: summary of the work in the Shanghai Food Industry Workers' Part-time Sanatorium], August 27, 1963, SMA, c1-2-4296-58; Tianjin shi gonghui lianhe hui laobao bu 天津市工会联合会劳保部, "Tianjin diyi gongren liaoyang yuan si nian gongzuo zongjie" 天津第一工人疗养院四年工作总结 [Work summary of the Tianjin First Workers' Sanatorium in the past four years], June 1, 1955, TMA, x0044-y-000368-004; Zhongguo dizhi gonghui quanguo weiyuanhui laobao bu 中国地质工会全国委员会劳保部 and Zhonghua renmin gongheguo dizhi bu laobao fuli si 中华人民共和国地质部劳保福利司, "Liaojie manxing bingren shihe ru Beidaihe dizhi gongren liaoyangyuan de shuzi he lianhe tongzhi" 了解慢性病人适合入北戴河地质工人疗养院的数字和联合通知 [Collection of the figures of chronic patients suitable for admission to the Beidaihe Geo-workers Sanatorium and joint notification], July 13, 1957, TMA, c098-0010-0016-0015.

[347] The most typical case was the widespread use of tissue therapy invented by Vladimir Filatov in China's sanatoriums. In Liz P. Y. Chee's study, the author gives an introduction of tissue therapy as follows: "Tissue therapy, or sometimes histotherapy (known in Chinese as *zuzhi liaofa*), was the transplantation of tissues derived from humans (including placentas and corpses), animals, or plants (strictly speaking, the leaves of aloe vera) underneath the human skin. The idea was to graft the living tissue of plant or animal directly onto the affected area. Filatov had invented it to treat patients with corneal diseases, but soon claimed its effectiveness for organs and parts of the body other than the eyes. He called the concept "biogenic stimulation," and it was promoted, by his Filatov Institute, as effective for many chronic diseases. Filatov's political connections were such that tissue therapy spread widely in the Soviet Union, and its success was approaching orthodoxy by the time of the Chinese Revolution." On March 1, 1951, the Ministry of Health issued an instruction to promote tissue therapy in "small and medium-sized hospital outpatient departments as well as sanatoriums." Potato therapy refers to a therapy of having patients to drink potato juice. In the early twentieth century, some western physicians began to advocate the therapeutic value of the potato juice. See Liz P. Y. Chee, *Mao's Bestiary: Medicinal Animals and Modern China*, Experimental Futures (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 65; Howard C. Heaton, *The Therapeutic Value of the Potato* (London: Bailliere, Tindall & Cox, 1914); *RMRB*, March 6, 1951, 3.

typically, was a physician rather than a party cadre, who was responsible for supervising medical treatment and administrative affairs (of course, many of them later became party cadres). An example was the appointment of Feng Yingzhen as the director of the First Workers' Sanatorium of Tianjin when it was established in 1951. Having graduated from the Beiyang Medical College and obtained a Medical Doctor degree in Japan in the 1930s, Feng's life experience before 1949 did not have too much connection with the CCP's revolution.[348] In addition, the health examination certificate of the Xingcheng Railway Workers' Sanatorium and the other two sanatorium admission forms that I collected indicated that physicians still played a considerable role in approving workers' admission—at least it appeared so on paper.[349]

[348] Zhang Hongzhu 张宏铸, ed., *Tianjin tong zhi: weisheng zhi* 天津通志: 卫生志 [Tianjin gazetteer: Hygiene gazetteer] (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1999), 482–83.

[349] Zhonghua quanguo zong gonghui laobao bu, *Zenyang juban liaoyang suo he yeyu liangyang suo*, 8.

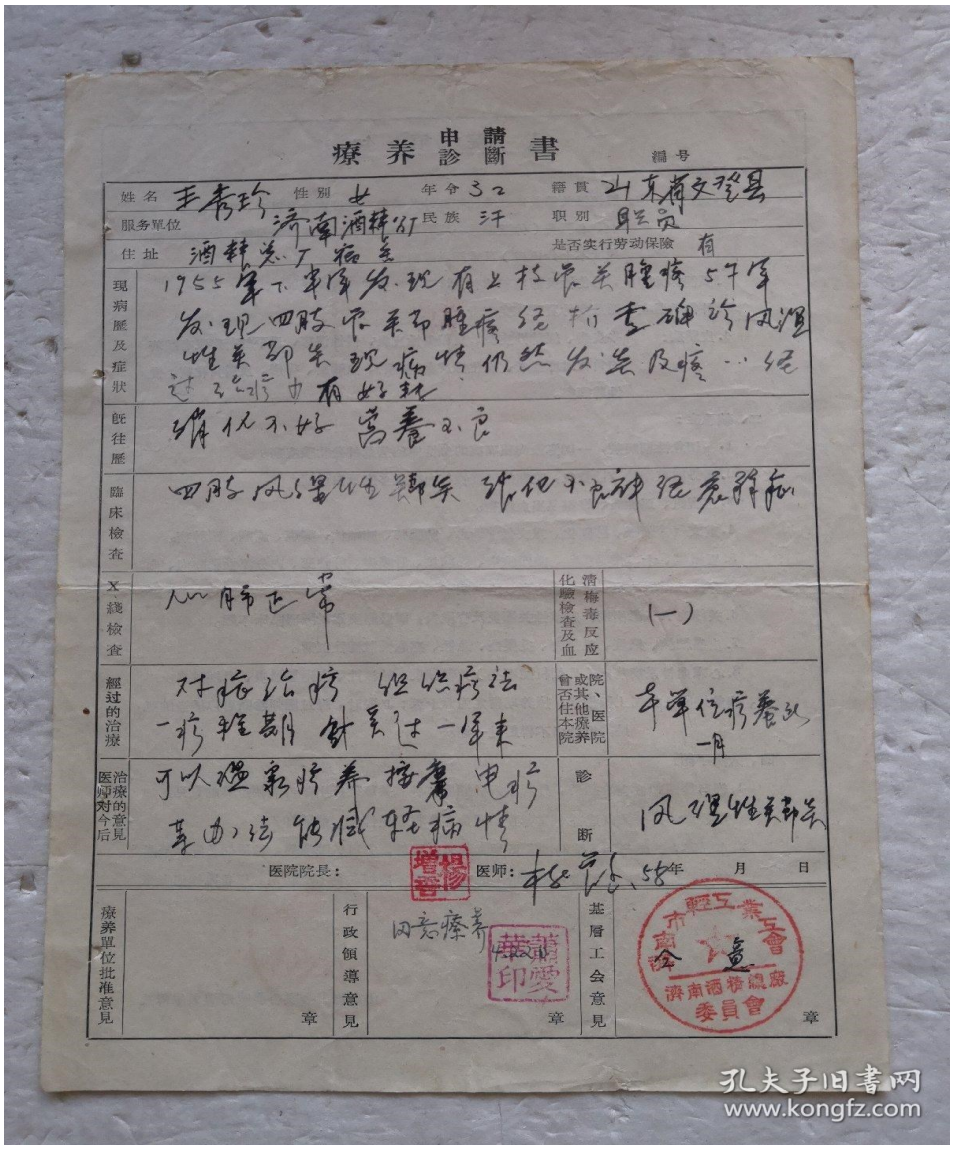

Figure 10. “Diagnostic letter for recuperation application.” This form informs us of a typical sanatorium admission procedure. Wang Xiuzhen, a female worker from the Jinan Alcohol Factory was admitted to a sanatorium (name not specified) in 1958. As this form shows, this worker who suffered from rheumatoid arthritis underwent a detailed physical examination and an x-ray before her admission. In the sanatorium, she received tissue therapy, spa therapy and other treatments. The stamps from the hospital doctor, the director, the administrator, and the grassroot-level trade unions indicate that medical personnel’s diagnosis of recuperating workers was taken into consideration in the procedures for approving workers’ applications. Source: Kongfz, https://book.kongfz.com/12979/2612756091/.

Not all sanatoriums, however, followed a rigorous medical regime. As previously noted, workers entitled to sanatoriums were mostly advanced workers or labour models who were not suffering any serious illness. The workers' sanatorium movement, driven by the party's utilitarian ideals, was fundamentally devised to reenergize workers and encourage them to work harder through rewards of rest and vacation. Because of this, many sanatorium organizers allocated the bulk of the patients' time to rest and recreation. The recreational activities arranged in sanatoriums varied from place to place, depending primarily on the surrounding environment. A set of photographs by *Workers' Daily* illustrates that workers had much fun in attending outdoor activities such as mountain climbing, sea bathing, boating, fishing, and group games.[350] These activities were considered to be appropriate activities by medical personnel for accelerating physical health recovery. For workers who came from inland areas and had never seen the sea before, sea bathing was the most attractive activity. Table tennis, poker and carrom became the most popular indoor activities among patients. Many sanatoriums' public areas were equipped with radios for broadcasting news, Peking opera, or revolutionary songs.[351] In the summer of 1953, the Tianjin People's Broadcasting Station set up a branch in Beidaihe.[352] Accompanied by master Ma Sanli's *xiangsheng*, Liu Suihong's *ping* opera, and Li Runjie's clapper talk on the radio, workers in Beidaihe, especially those who found playing chess boring or climbing mountains too tiring, spent one vacation and another.[353]

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[350] "Jianguo chuqi de laomo zheyang xiuyang: liushi duo nian hou tamen 'wan' chule xin fengshang" 建国初期的劳模这样休养: 60 多年后他们'玩'出了新风尚 [This was how labour models recuperated in the early days of the PRC: They created a new fashion], *Zhong gong wang* 中工网, July 21, 2017, http://www.workercn.cn/762/201707/21/170721193241981.shtml.

[351] Liu Meng 流萌, "Qingzhou nengzai jiduo you (shang)" 轻舟能载几多忧 (上) [How much sorrow can a skiff load? (1)], *Siren shi* 私人史 (Wechat blog), August 4, 2020, https://freewechat.com/a/MzUyMDkyNzAyMQ==/2247487070/1.

[352] Chen Guowei 陈国卫, ed., *Lüyou shengdi Beidaihe* 旅游胜地北戴河 [Beidaihe, a tourist attraction] (Beijing: Zhongguo linye chubanshe, 1996), 131.

[353] Liu Lianqun 刘连群, *Ma Sanli biezhuan* 马三立别传 [Anecdotal biography of Ma Sanli] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2011), 191; Tianjin shi zong gonghui laobao bu 天津市总工会劳保部, "Tianjin shi zong gonghui Beidaihe Haibin qu laomo xiuyang suo shiban eryue lai chubu zongjie zhaiyao" 天津市总工会北戴河海滨区劳模休养所试办二月来初步总结摘要 [Preliminary summary of the two-month trial run of the Beidaihe Haibin Area Model Workers Nursing Home of the Tianjin Federation of Trade Unions], July 13, 1951, TMA, x0044-y-000351-018.

The sanatorium life required a rigorous routine, which had been considered essential to the treatment of TB patients since the birth of the TB sanatorium. Each sanatorium adopted its own routine. The basic structure, however, remained the same. Let us see the daily routine set by the Beidaihe Workers' Sanatorium established by the Tianjin Federation of Trade Union (TFTU): Patients should get up at 5:30 a.m. for a walk and have breakfast at 7:00 a.m. After two hours of free activities, they spend an hour reading newspapers and studying. A lunch break lasted one hour from 12 to 1 p.m. followed by a two-hour nap. Starting at five o'clock afternoon, the sanatorium organizers would organize a tea break for patients to exchange their production experiences. Six o'clock was dinner time. After finishing their dinners, patients had two hours for free activities. Lights were switched out at 9:30 p.m.

Morning		Afternoon	
5:00	Temperatures and sphygmoscopy (examination of the pulse) to be taken in bed	5:00	Enter the nursing home, wash hands and faces, change clothes
5:30–6:00	Rise, wash face, brush teeth	5:30–6:00	bedding, temperature measurement
6:00–7:00	Exercise, go for walk, and read newspapers	6:00–6:30	Dinner
7:00	Breakfast	6:30–8:30	Free activities
7:30	Go to work	9:00	Bath

		9:30	Lights out
Remarks	1. During bed rest time workers need to stay in bed and remain completely motionless. Workers are not allowed to read books and newspapers, chat, make noise, and walk. 2. "Exercise" refers to People's Health Calisthenics. But section 11 "Jumping exercise" should be removed.		

Table 1. The way recuperating workers spent their time in nursing homes was also strictly regulated. This was the daily routine set by the Northeast China Workers' Part-time Nursing Home, which was popularized by the ACTFU in 1952 as a model. Compared to most daily routines adopted in Soviet sanatoriums, patients in China's sanatoriums and nursing homes had a much simpler night life.[354]

As these daily routines show, in addition to receiving medical treatment, having bed rest, attending recreational activities, and dining, workers were also expected to read newspapers, attend seminars, and participate in various study groups. As Tricia Starks argues, the sanatorium network in the Soviet Union did not only provide treatment but also supervision and education.[355] China's sanatoriums followed the same pattern. To be more specific, from the party's perspective sanatoriums were not only used to mend the "human motor" but also as a training institute where workers could be nurtured with the good habits and character that the party deemed an ideal worker should possess. Newspaper and book reading became the most common cultural activities. In addition, many sanatorium organizers organized debates and informal discussions for recuperating workers. Political and current events, personal hygiene knowledge, and healthy lifestyles were the most common topics. Some sanatoriums also held production experience exchange sessions for workers regularly. The party expected that workers would bring back the advanced production experience from model workers to their workplaces, while at the same time using the knowledge imparted by sanatorium physicians, such as hygiene knowledge and a healthy diet, to benefit their families in daily lives. These

[354] Zhonghua quanguo zong gonghui laobao bu, *Zenyang juban liaoyang suo he yeyu liangyang suo*, 28.

[355] Starks, *The Body Soviet*, 53.

expectations were evident in how the official newspapers portrayed those outstanding recuperating workers. For example, in a farewell meeting for seven workers leaving for Qingdao, Song Shupan, a worker from the Northwest Textile Mill, promised that he would "complete the recuperation as a political mission" and made a statement that he would "spread their own working experience and bring others' working experience back after leaving the sanatorium."[356] In addition, recuperating workers could often earn accolades for developing new production techniques or benefiting their families with the knowledge of hygiene and nutrition they had learnt in sanatoriums. In a 1951 report on the sanatorium work of Northeast China, miner Liu Qinghe at the Xinqiu mines in Fuxin and railroad worker Zhuan Nuchen were highly praised for "improving flat nose pliers during his stay in the sanatorium" and nourishing his baby, who had a "red and chubby face" with the sanatorium recipe, respectively.[357]

From the mid-1950s onwards, many sanatoriums began to strengthen their management and emphasize the significance of organizing activities with educational purposes. According to many reports from local labour unions, workers' disobedience to sanatorium disciplines and engagement in "hedonistic behaviours" contributed to this adjustment. So, what were those hedonistic and unruly behaviours in the eyes of the party? In the following section, I will examine how workers spent their time during their stay in sanatoriums. But before doing this, let us see what an ideal recuperating worker should be like in the party's vision.

What is Recuperation? It is Food and Bed!

> The sanatorium life had begun. For Zhang Peiliang, however, it was also the commencement of the new life of a battle. The sanatorium life is arranged in this way. In addition to daily diagnosis, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday was spent on mountain trips with sea views and strolling along the sea, and on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays were spent on dance parties and Sundays on movies and spa. The sanatorium life was so pleasant and comfortable, but Zhang Peiliang often kept his mind on his factory, as if he had never left it for a single

[356] *Qunzhong ribao* 群众日报 [The masses' daily], August 14, 1952, CCRCA.

[357] Zhongguo meikuang gonghui huabei choubei weiyuanhui, "Dongbei qu gongren yeyu liaoyang suo gongzuo baogao zhaiyao," July 1, 1951, SPA, c098-0011-0011-0011.

> minute. He liked to spend time studying metalwork techniques. But he was also very observant of the daily schedule. There are many activities available in the sanatorium: mountain climbing, sightseeing, dance parties, and watching movies. He was never absent from any activities.[358]

In 1955, writer Ye Tao wrote a short story entitled *The Story of Beidaihe*.[359] In this story, the author portrays an advanced steel worker Zhang Peiliang, who was sent to Beidaihe for recuperation because he had been burned by steel slag on his left arm in the early 1950s. In order to return to his work as soon as possible, Zhang Peiliang put on an extra overcoat during the medical check-up to make himself heavier so that he could meet the sanatorium discharge requirement. But his trick did not succeed in fooling the doctor. After staying in the sanatorium for two months, Zhang returned to work with the new steelmaking technology he developed during his stay in the sanatorium.

The story informs us of many details of what recuperating workers' lives were like in a sanatorium in the 1950s, such as how workers' time was regulated and arranged and the utilitarian motive behind sanatorium organizers. More importantly, the above-mentioned passage represents the characteristics of someone whom the Party expected all recuperating workers would become. In other words, in the party's ideal, a good recuperating worker should behave like Zhang Peiliang, who was able to stick to the sanatorium discipline, willing to participate in all the activities, and would pay back the party's care by being anxious to return to work. That workers should consciously observe discipline and be willing to participate in all the rehabilitation and educational activities prepared for them was also, from the official perspective, the precondition for making all the sanatorium services effective properly.

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[358] Ye Tao 叶淘, *Beidaihe de gushi* 北戴河的故事 [The story in Beidaihe] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1956), 18.

[359] Beginning his career as an editor in the CCP sponsored newspaper organ in 1948, Ye later became a professional writer and poet after 1949 and served as an editor in *Tangshan Labour Daily*, the official organ of the Tangshan municipal Communist Party committee. Starting from 1950, Ye had contributed a series of literary works featuring Chinese workers and industrial production. The Story of Beidaihe was Ye's last literary creation before he was labelled as a rightist in 1957. Tangshan shi wenxue yishu jie lianhe hui 唐山市文学艺术界联合会, *Tangshan wenlian liushi nian* 唐山文联六十年 [Sixty years of the Tangshan Federation of Literature and Art] (Tangshan, 2010), 245.

Unfortunately, many recuperating workers did not possess the same progressive awareness as Zhang Peiliang. In the Lushan Post and Telecommunications Sanatorium, some recuperating workers fed up with the daily routine described their discharge as "liberation" and immediately began to indulge in smoking and drinking following their discharge.[360] As mentioned in a 1953 sanatorium work report by the local union of Shanxi, some recuperating workers often sneaked out of the sanatorium to hang out.[361]

One of the most common reasons contributing to breaching daily routines was dating. A report by the Tianjin Textile Workers' Sanatorium in 1955 stated that before 1955, many young recuperating workers fell in love with each other so that they could hardly observe the sanatorium rule. Some couples often went out to watch movies and wandered around under the pretense of seeing a doctor until very late. Zhang Guizhen, a young female textile worker, dated three boyfriends during her stay in the Tianjin Textile Workers' Sanatorium. She often went out of the sanatorium without authorization. After returning from her dates, she was confined to bed for three to four days with a fever and vomiting blood. Nevertheless, Zhang still felt proud of this and said to some physicians: "I will continue to date new friends when I feel better."[362]

In addition to the violation of sanatorium routines, some other behaviours left the sanatorium organizers head-scratching. In the Northeast Workers' Rest Home, some elder workers, who were smug about their achievements, often requested single rooms. If their demands were not met, they would kick up a big stink and act out.[363] Brawls between

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[360] Zhongguo youdian Lushan liaoyang yuan 中国邮电工会庐山疗养院, "Tamen weishenme di erci zhuyuan" 他们为什么第二次住院 [Why were they hospitalized again?], *Fanglao tongxun* 防痨通讯, no. 4 (April 1956): 8–9.

[361] Shanxi sheng Changzhi gongren liaoyangyuan, "Changzhi gongren liaoyangyuan gongzuo zongjie," n.d., SPA, c098-0001-0064-0009.

[362] Fangzhi gonghui 纺织工会, "Tianjin fangzhi gongren diyi liaoyangyuan diyi jidu gongzuo baogao" 天津纺织工人第一疗养院第一季度工作报告 [First-quarter work report of the Tianjin First Textile Workers' Sanatorium], May 1955, TMA, x0045-c-000049-001; Fangzhi gonghui 纺织工会, "Tianjin fangzhi gongren diyi liaoyangyuan disi jidu xingzheng gongzuo jihua" 天津纺织工人第一疗养院第四季度行政工作计划 [Administrative work plan for the fourth quarter of the Tianjin First Textile Workers' Sanatorium], November 2, 1955, TMA, x0045-c-000049-009; Fangzhi gonghui 纺织工会, "Di er jidu gongzuo baogao" 第二季度工作报告 [Work report of the second quarter], July 9, 1955, TMA, x0045-c-000049-011.

[363] Zhongguo meikuang gonghui huabei choubei weiyuanhui, "Dongbei qu gongren yeyu liaoyang suo gongzuo baogao zhaiyao," July 1, 1951, SPA, c098-0011-0011-0011.

recuperating workers were also commonplace. According to a 1955 report, in the Lushan Post and Telecommunications Workers' Sanatorium, "workers often fought over something trivial."[364] Even worse, some recuperating workers in the First Textile Workers' Sanatorium of Tianjin spat on the floor all the time and made fun of nurses by giving them nicknames. Some of them even beat up nurses and physicians or committed theft. There were also many "squatters," who "treated the sanatorium as a nursing home or a guest house and stayed for four or five years, and some even got married and had children in the sanatorium."[365]

Not all workers were reluctant to receive what was deemed advanced treatments. Wang Mingfu, a hepatitis patient, was not convinced by the Soviet medicine so he went to see a renowned TCM doctor when he was granted leave.[366] Many physicians had to deal with all sorts of what the sanatorium organizers described as "bizarre" requests for medication from recuperating workers: some workers were desperate for drugs while others only took rare and precious drugs. In Tianjin, some refused to take the medicine without an "instant curative effect." It was not until the sanatorium physicians intensified a "thought mobilization" and changed the "colour, taste, and shape" of the medicine that workers' refusal to take drugs began to abate.[367]

Among various activities, book reading and attending lectures seemed to be the least appealing ones to workers. A sanatorium in Northeast China purchased a complete set of Marxist-Leninist literature for workers. But no one read them at all. In the end, these books were laid aside in the reading room.[368] The recuperating workers in the

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[364] Zhongguo youdian Lushan liaoyang yuan 中国邮电工会庐山疗养院, "Liaoyang yuan de zuzhi jiaoyu gongzuo" 疗养员的组织教育工作 [Works on organizing and educating recuperating workers], *Fanglao tongxun*, no. 2 (February 1955): 15–16.

[365] Zhang Kan 张侃, "Cong quanguo diyi qi liaoyang yuan ganbu jinxiu ban tanqi" 从全国第一期疗养院干部进修班谈起 [Talking about the first national training course for sanatorium cadres], *Fanglao tongxun*, no. 4 (April 1957): 18.

[366] Tianjin shi gonghui lianhe hui laobao bu, "Tianjin diyi gongren liaoyang yuan si nian gongzuo zongjie," June 1, 1955, TMA, x0044-y-000368-004.

[367] Tianjin shi gonghui lianhe hui laobao bu, "Tianjin diyi gongren liaoyang yuan si nian gongzuo zongjie," June 1, 1955, TMA, x0044-y-000368-004.

[368] Zhongguo meikuang gonghui huabei choubei weiyuanhui, "Dongbei qu gongren yeyu liaoyang suo gongzuo baogao zhaiyao," July 1, 1951, SPA, c098-0011-0011-0011.

sanatorium run by the Tianjin Federation Trade Union were very disinterested in the lectures on the knowledge of recovery and a healthy lifestyle. Some even complained: "We came here for rest, not for work!" Under the pressure from these workers, the administrators adjusted the course to half of the original workload.[369]

But not all sanatorium services were poorly received by recuperating workers. The dining table was the place where many recuperating workers found the greatest pleasure. In most cases, sanatoriums included three or more mealtimes in their daily routine, as demonstrated in the previous daily routines. The food service was not just to satisfy workers' hunger. Instead, deriving ample nourishment from rich food was an integral part of the treatment. As the Soviet sanatorium organizers claimed: "The intake of food should be considered a medical procedure on which depends the success of the cure."[370] China's sanatorium organizers introduced this theory and carried it forward. In specific, given the relatively weak economic conditions and healthcare level in 1950s China, not all factories or local government authorities could afford to establish sanatoriums or rest homes. Even in those established sanatoriums, not all workers were able to receive attentive medical care. It was in this context that the importance of dietary therapy came to the fore and became the most universal and prevailing treatment method available to recuperating workers. The following instruction issued by the local trade unions in Tianjin implied that providing nutritious food was the most basic condition for sustaining the sanatorium network: "For those [factories] that are incapable of running a part-time sanatorium, a nutrition canteen would be an alternative. If those [factories] could not afford a nutrition canteen, they can at least set up a milk station."[371] The China Textile Union Shanghai Committee issued a similar instruction in late 1952: "Last October, we tentatively began operating rest homes in the cotton mill sector, and thirty have been in use by this year. Factories that were not able to afford rest homes may run

[369] Tianjin shi zong gonghui laobao bu, "Guanyu shi zong gonghui gongren liaoyang yuan qingkuang de baogao," December 1953, TMA, x0084-c-000209-014.

[370] Koenker, *Club Red*, 42.

[371] Tianjin shi zong gonghui laobao bu, "Tianjin shi zong gonghui Beidaihe haibin qu laomo xiuyang suo shiban eryue lai chubu zongjie zhaiyao," July 13, 1951, TMA, x0044-y-000351-018.

nutrition canteens without providing accommodation. Currently, there are eleven factory-run nutrition canteens in operation."[372]

Sanatoriums or nutrition canteens typically served richer daily meals than common factory canteens. For example, the nutrition canteen run by the Northeast Textile Factory served workers meals that cost one to two times higher than the common standard.[373] In the Beidaihe Sanatorium set by the TFTU, every recuperating worker was fixed with a six-pound of rice quota per day. Rice and noodles were the staple food, while vegetables, eggs, beef, pork, pig liver, and chicken were prepared regularly as non-staple food. The breakfast contained rice and baked buns with pickled vegetables. The lunch menu typically consisted of one stable food (rice) and four dishes (two meat and two vegetables) and one soup. The dinner menu included steamed buns, four dishes, and mung beans cottage. In addition to these, workers can also eat noodles with gravy and meat twice a week.[374] The First Workers' Sanatorium of Northeast China provided workers with three meals combining both meat and vegetables with a total caloric value of more than 3,000 calories per day, which exceeded the maximum daily intake of 2,400 calories per person estimated by the sanatorium physician Liu Zhenshan.[375]

Abundant meals caused recuperating workers to gain weight. In 1952, Dai Datian, a worker from the Qingdao Textile Mill, ran into a recuperating worker Liu Deshui in the factory-run rest home. Soon after chatting with him, Dai noticed that Liu Deshui had grown a chubby cheek. Then, they had the following conversation:

> Dai: Master Liu, how much fatter have you become than before?
>
> Liu: We eat, wake up and sleep very regularly. Dr. Sun came to do a ward round and check my physical condition every couple of days. I weighed 140 pounds when I first came into the nursing home and now I weigh 144 pounds. That's a

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[372] Zhongguo fangzhi gonghui Shanghai shi weiyuanhui laodong baoxian bu 中国纺织工会上海市委员会劳动保险部, "Zhigong yeyu xiuyang suo yiji yingyang shitang gongzuo zongjie" 职工业余休养所及营养食堂工作总结 [Work summary of workers' part-time nursing home and nutrition canteen], December 26, 1952, SMA, c16-2-47-18.

[373] Zhonghua quanguo zong gonghui laobao bu, *Zenyang juban liaoyang suo he yeyu liangyang suo*, 34.

[374] Tianjin shi zong gonghui laobao bu, "Tianjin shi zong gonghui Beidaihe Haibin qu laomo xiuyang suo shiban eryue lai chubu zongjie zhaiyao," July 13, 1951, TMA, x0044-y-000351-018.

[375] Lai, "Dongbei diyi gongren liaoyangyuan fangwen ji," 317–19.

gain of over four pounds in just one week. Every one of my comrades has gained weight.[376]

The story of Liu Deshui's weight gain was not a fabrication, nor was it an isolated case that existed in newspapers in the early 1950s. Zhu Dabao, a female worker in Shanghai, weighed only 81 *jin* when she first came to the Shanghai Workers' Sanatorium. After a month, she was fed with a "red and chubby face" and gained ten pounds in weight. She said: "I had four meals each day. None of them were the same. The breakfast consisted of eggs, milk, soya milk, and cookies."[377] After spending two months in the Sixth Petroleum Plant Sanatorium of Northeast China, a male worker named Zhang Longhai gained 19 *jin* in weight. He was able to choose more than eight different types of staple food everyday day, with a menu that included fried fish, braised pork, pan-fried pork liver, soy sauce meat with spinach, and beef stew with carrots.[378] The Taiyuan Workers' First Sanatorium located in the scenic spot *Jin* Temple (晋祠), offered a menu of more than 200 kinds of dishes, thirty to forty kinds of desserts and twenty kinds of staple food (rice and noodles) for workers. According to a *Wenhui bao* article, 559 workers left the santorium with an average weight gain of five *jin*.[379] Feng Kuiyuan, a worker at the Jinan Chemical Plant in Shandong, went to the Taihu Sanatorium in 1953 for recuperating. He ate five meals a day, and his diet also included milk and fruit, Taihu peaches and Jinan apples. Within four weeks of recuperation, Feng's weight increased by twelve and a half *jin*.[380] Workers who dined in nutritional canteens also widely experienced weight gain. In the Shanghai Textile Union Rest Home, 84 percent of the workers gained more than 3 *jin* in three months, and the most outstanding gain was made by Huang Keying, a female worker from the National Cotton Factory No. 10, who gained 16 *jin*. While some other textile workers subscribed to the nutrition canteens run by the textile union experienced an average weight gain of 2 *jin*.[381]

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[376] *Qingdao ribao,* August 13, 1952, 2.

[377] *GRRB*, December 17, 1952, 2.

[378] *GRRB*, February 1, 1953, 2.

[379] *Wenhui bao*, May 15, 1954, 2.

[380] *Wenhui bao*, September 4, 1953, 3.

[381] Zhongguo fangzhi gonghui Shanghai shi weiyuanhui laodong baoxian bu, "Zhigong yeyu xiuyang suo yiji yingyang shitang gongzuo zongjie," December 26, 1952, SMA, c16-2-47-18.

During a three-month recuperation, 123 workers from Tianjin People's Printing Factory who dined in the nutrition canteen gained an average of 12 *jin* in weight.[382] The following table shows the weight gain of recuperating workers during their stay in the Tianjin Federation Trade Union Sanatorium as of October 30, 1951.[383]

	Workers number	Recuperating Length (Days)	Average weight gain (Kilogram)	Maximum Weight Gain (Kilogram)
The Labour Model Rest Homes	473	15	1.86	6.8
The Workers' Sanatorium	118	90	3.11	8.2
The Textile Workers' Sanatoriums	115	30	1.01	4
Nutrition Canteens	807	30	1.01	4
Rest homes	5	30	1.84	10.5

Table 2. Weight gain of recuperating workers during their stay in the Tianjin Federation Trade Union Sanatorium in 1952.

Similar cases, which were documented in almost every newspaper account or work summary on sanatorium work, defy enumeration. The reason why sanatorium organizers kept track of and reported on workers' weight gain is not difficult to tell. At the turn of the twentieth century, physicians discovered that unexplained weight loss, cough, and loss of energy were the most characteristic symptoms of TB. For this reason, physicians developed diet therapy to boost TB patients' strength and monitored their weight daily. This treatment had remained one of the most important focuses of TB

[382] Tianjin shi jinrong maoyi gonghui 天津市金融贸易工会, "Tianjin renmin yinshua chang de yingyang shitang" 天津人民印刷厂的营养食堂 [The nutrition canteen in the Tianjin Printing Factory], January 7, 1953, TMA, x0045-y-000151-017.

[383] Tianjin shi zong gonghui laobao bu 天津市总工会劳保部, "1951 nian laodong baoxian gongzuo zongjie" 1951 年劳动保险工作总结 [Summary of labour insurance work of 1951], December 10, 1951, TMA, x0044-y-000353-001.

sanatorium regimens since the early twentieth century.[384] Apparently, China's sanatorium organizers continued to use this therapeutic method in the 1950s. Weight gain became the most important, and almost the only measure for the success of workers' recovery. As the Beidaihe Workers' Sanatorium of TFTU proclaimed in a 1953 advertisement published in *Tianjin Daily*: "We must do a good job in serving meals so that workers can eat well and gain weight."[385] If recuperating workers lost weight, the sanatorium organizers would make a detailed self-examination. Among the first group of twenty workers enrolled in the TFTU Beidaihe Sanatorium in 1951, two of them lost five pounds after a fifteen-day stay. The sanatorium organizers took it very seriously and made a detailed analysis: "These model workers entered the sanatorium in May. The cool climate of the place (Beidaihe) in the morning and evening caused some of the weak comrades to catch colds and flu so that they got weight loss."[386]

Of course, these sumptuous meals were not given to the workers for free. Once the weight of workers reached the standard, they had to leave sanatoriums and return to work. This was why Zhang Peiliang, who could not wait to return to work, wears an extra coat when he is weighed in the story. Also, a work report by the Lushan Post and Telecommunication Workers' Union mentioned that a worker, who left the Lushan Post and Telecommunication Sanatorium after his weight reached the standard, was asked to "do two people's tasks by himself" by his leader because the leader saw he became fat with a ruddy complexion. As a result, the worker was readmitted to the sanatorium for rehabilitation again. These stories once again show the utilitarian motive of the workers' recuperation project.

But for many recuperating workers, food therapy seemed simply a way to satisfy their food cravings. Workers in the rest home run by the Beiyang Yarn Factory in Tianjin

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[384] Tim Trivett, "Famous Places: The Manitoba Sanatorium, Ninette," *Manitoba History*, no. 7 (Spring 1984), http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/07/sanatorium.shtml; Laura Rice, "Let's Eat: The Trudeau Sanitorium Diet," Adirondack Almanack, July 20, 2010, https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2010/07/lets-eat-the-trudeau-sanitorium-diet.html#comments.

[385] *TJRB*, May 15, 1953, 2.

[386] Tianjin shi zong gonghui laobao bu, "Tianjin shi zong gonghui Beidaihe Haibin qu laomo xiuyang suo shiban eryue lai chubu zongjie zhaiyao," July 13, 1951, TMA, x0044-y-000351-018.

were nourished with "chicken, duck, fish, pork" every meal. Some workers said rejoicingly: "We have achieved socialism!"[387] The Northeast China's Workers' Part-time Sanatorium gave a special emphasis on "diet therapy" and deemed that the sanatorium life consisted of "*jianchao pengzha*" (煎炒烹炸, pan-fry, stir-fry, boil, and deep-fry) only and solely. Being convinced that "the rare and tasty food was good [nutritious] food," the organizer actually turned the sanatorium into a facility for "diet improvement" and even introduced a multiple shifts system, which resulted in an endless stream of workers coming to eat. From 5 a.m. to midnight, the sanatorium served as many as thirteen or fourteen meals.[388] In the Fujiatan Coal Miners' Sanatorium in Taiyuan, "having good meals in rotation" became a common practice among recuperating miners. Some young miners drank milk so much that they got nosebleeds.[389] In a 1957 report, the North China Coal Mine Union Committee stated that some leaders were lacking in nutrition knowledge and excessively accommodated the needs of recuperating workers. "They gave whatever they asked for. Some workers ate too much so that they had diarrhea and felt very sick."[390] When some recuperating workers in the Changzhi workers' sanatorium found that they failed to gain weight, they asked for leave ahead of the schedule.[391]

Most of these cases are selected from the summary reports from local trade unions and party committees for overcoming the shortcomings in sanatorium management. Lax management, according to the official view, was to blame for workers' unruly behaviour and indulgence in material benefits. In addition, they also claimed that sanatorium organizers' accommodation of workers' appetites deprived sanatoriums of the function they were meant to fulfill. But sanatorium organizers made these efforts for good reasons.

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[387] Tianjin shi zong gonghui laobao bu, "1951 nian laodong baoxian gongzuo zongjie," December 10, 1951, TMA, x0044-y-000353-001.

[388] Zhongguo meikuang gonghui huabei choubei weiyuanhui, "Dongbei qu gongren yeyu liaoyang suo gongzuo baogao zhaiyao," July 1, 1951, SPA, c098-0011-0011-0011.

[389] Zhongguo meikuang gonghui Fujiatan weiyuanhui 中国煤矿工会富家滩委员会, "Guanyu xiuyangsuo gai liaoyangsuo de jihua" 关于休养所改疗养所的计划 [Plan to transform the nursing home to a sanatorium], July 1, 1955, SPA, c098-0011-0121-0017.

[390] Zhongguo meikuang gonghui huabei choubei weiyuanhui, "Dongbei qu gongren yeyu liaoyang suo gongzuo baogao zhaiyao," July 1, 1951, SPA, c098-0011-0011-0011.

[391] Shanxi sheng Changzhi gongren liaoyang yuan, "Changzhi gongren liaoyangyuan gongzuo zongjie," n.d., SPA, c098-0001-0064-0009.

Putting aside some extreme cases, such as the side effects of an oversupply of milk on some young workers, and the excessive pickiness of workers about food quality, their efforts to enrich dining menu for workers was a result of their positive intentions to benefit their residents and facilitate workers' recovery.[392] That workers were preoccupied with having fun and enjoying the abundance of food was also normal human behaviour in the early 1950s because most of them had endured hardship, poverty, and malnutrition before 1949. Workers just chose the most beneficial ones of the many services available in sanatoriums, as reflected in a piece of popular doggerel created in the 1960s by some Heilongjiang recuperating workers:

疗养疗养，吃完一躺	What is recuperation? It is food and bed.

[392] Some evidence suggests that some workers had a voracious appetite for quantity of food and were very picky about the quality of food. Here are the "extreme cases" I collected from the Tianjin Municipal Achieve. In the Tianjin No. 3 Textile Mill, a menu including round flat cakes and steamed twisted rolls, as well as all kinds of stir-fried dishes, could hardly satisfy workers. Some workers were even fussy about premium seafood. Those who disliked prawns yelled: "Why prawns again? The cooks and prawn sellers must be family!" Those who disliked yellow croaker murmured: "Is there anything wrong with eating something else? Must we eat yellow croaker again?" When some other workers saw that the dishes were not mouth-watering enough, they turned around and left. Some workers tore up their food coupons while swearing under their breaths, while others were willing to take a seat and whisk a few mouthfuls of rice with chopsticks. A shown in a 1955 report on the issue of food waste, workers from the factories and sanatoriums affiliated to the Textile Union of Tianjin treated food as follows: "Our staff often found overbaked buns in the oven and couldn't find the people who put them there. So, we had to throw them away. Rancid steamed buns and moldy snacks were often found in dormitories. When eating noodles, workers spilled them all over the floor. Some even dumped them discreetly if they didn't want to eat them. No one cared if steamed buns fell on the ground. No one ate them even if these buns were picked up. Many workers only ate specific parts of vegetables: some did not eat the outer leaf of cabbage, fatty meat, and pork skin. Some recuperating workers wasted rice when they could not finish. Some only ate either dumpling wrappers or filling. Some only ate steamed buns without the outer layer. A few workers even flipped their bowls upside-down when they felt the dishes were not tasty." Zhongguo fangzhi gonghui Tianjin shi weiyuanhui laobao bu 中国纺织工会天津市委员会劳保部, "Tianjin mianfang ge chang huoshi zhuanye jingyan jiaoliu hui baogao" 天津棉纺各厂伙食专业经验交流会报告 [Report on the Tianjin textile sector catering experience communication conference], July 24, 1953, TMA, x0045-y-000099-011; Tianjin fangzhi gonghui Tianjin shi weiyuanhui laobao bu 中国纺织工会天津市委员会劳保部, "Tianjin Guomian san chang huoshi gaige gongzuo baogao" 天津国棉三厂伙食改革工作报告 [Work report on the improvement of the meal work in the Tianjin No. 3 National Cotton Factory], July 30, 1953, TMA, x0044-y-000099-012; Fangzhi gonghui 纺织工会, "Guanyu kaizhan jieyue liangshi de gongzuo baogao" 关于开展节约粮食的工作报告 [Work report on saving grains], April 18, 1955, TMA, x0045-c-000049-008.

闲着没事，胡思乱想	There is nothing I love doing more than daydreaming.[393]

What is a Sanatorium?

What did exactly a sanatorium exist for? The above analyses have offered us the answer. From the official perspective, workers' sanatoriums were more than just welfare or health facilities that simply provided medical treatment and rest. Rather, as the head of the Lushan Sanatorium stated, a sanatorium "should be, first of all, a concrete manifestation of the Communist cause, the most vivid and concrete tool for education on Communism for workers. If we do not treat a sanatorium as a tool, the purpose for developing sanatoriums is defeated."[394] While in 1953, Hong Kong's Anti-Communist newspaper *The Free Man News* (*Ziyouren bao* 自由人报) interpreted the propaganda about the development of workers' sanatoriums as the CCP's tactic "to deal with the possibly impending unrest in the socialist camp after Joseph Stalin's death."[395] In addition, the article stated that: "Recuperation is a very attractive term. But it would be more apt to say 'brainwashing' rather than recuperation. The so-called recuperation is nothing more than 'putting a piece of scrap iron back to the furnace to refine.'"[396] Leaving aside whether this interpretation was reasonable or not, the above discussions still show that the analogy between workers' sanatoriums in China and steel mills for "melting down scrap iron" drawn by the article was basically justified.

Since 1954, when ACFTU and the Ministry of Labour held the Conference on the Sanatorium Work in Qingdao, China's sanatorium organizers had begun to strengthen the management. For example, the Lushan Workers' Sanatorium in Lushan introduced a so-called "democratic management system" in 1954. This system consisted of several items

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[393] An Xinmin 安新民, *Heilongjiang sheng zhi: gonghui zhi* 黑龙江省志: 工会志 [Helongjiang gazetteer: Trade unions gazetteer] (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1999), 388.

[394] Zhongguo youdian Lushan liaoyang yuan, "Liaoyang yuan de zuzhi jiaoyu gongzuo," 15–16.

[395] *Ziyourenbao* 自由人报 [The free man news], August 13, 1953, CCRCA.

[396] *Ziyourenbao*, August 13, 1953, CCRCA.

related to workers' ideological education. In particular, the party and youth league members among recuperating workers were commissioned to organize political study groups for correcting the so-called "bad thoughts" and "bad practices" among recuperating workers who treated the sanatorium as a place for fun and free meals, as well as to make the workers understand "the future of the country and the individual" by raising their class consciousness. Recuperating workers were required to attend at least one hour of study per day, and the content of the study mainly included current affairs and politics, experience in health care and general knowledge of hygiene. The main purpose of political education was to induce workers to embrace the socialist system with enthusiasm through their personal experience of sanatorium life and to understand the discrepancy between the old and new society.[397]

It is worth mentioning that the introduction of Pavlovian theory in the 1950s provided a theoretical basis for the change in the sanatorium management system.[398] After Pavlov's doctrine was introduced to China in the 1950s, the CCP blended it with Western medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), as well as Mao's dialectical materialism and further create a medical theory. Ideological education based on this hybrid medical theory was packaged as a remedy to facilitate workers' recovery. As a 1959 report stated, the sanatorium administrators of the First Workers' Sanatorium of Beijing had never "cared about recuperating workers' lives and thinking" and left them to their own devices before 1956. Informed by the so-called Pavlovian theories, the medical personnel of the sanatorium began in 1956 to emphasize that "the burden of bad thinking will weaken the will of the mind and reduce the body's physical resistance." Therefore,

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[397] Zhongguo youdian gonghui Lushan liaoyang yuan, "Liaoyang yuan de zuzhi jiaoyu gongzuo," 16.

[398] Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (1849–1936) was a Russian physiologist. In 1904, he was awarded the Nobel Prize "in recognition of his work on the physiology of digestion, through which knowledge on vital aspects of the subject has been transformed and enlarged." Pavlov's contributions to physiology and neuroscience were best known for his work on temperament, conditioning, and involuntary reflex actions. In the 1950s, "Learning Pavlovian Theories" (学习巴甫洛夫学说) became the most influential movement in China's scientific and medical field. As Gao Xi argues, "In China, Pavlovian theory was used to re-shape the domestic political scene of the proletariat triumph against the bourgeois and to promote socialist science against bourgeois pseudo-science." China's medical institutions and academies began in 1953 to promote the movement of learning from Pavlov. Gao Xi, "Learning from the Soviet Union: Pavlovian Influence on Chinese Medicine, 1950s," in *Public Health and National Reconstruction in Post-War Asia: International Influences, Local Transformations*, ed. Bu Liping and Yip Ka-che (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 72–81.

the sanatorium claimed that it was necessary to allow workers to enjoy a comfortable and peaceful recuperation by "minimizing the burden of bad thoughts on the recuperating workers through strengthening political and ideological education" and "inspiring workers with the glorious future of the motherland and aim lofty ideals against individualism."[399] In 1956, the sanatorium set up a study committee to organize a six-hours of weekly study of political theory, the party of the CCP and the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), political economy, Chinese literature, and phonetics for worker patients. In 1959, this sanatorium adopted a slogan that articulated the educational function of China's sanatoriums: "Sanatoriums are both schools and factories."[400]

Was the increased effort in managing sanatorium lives effective? To be sure, the Pavlovian theories and the "democratic management" did not much contribute to the recovery of workers' physical conditions.[401] After China split from the Soviet Union in the late 1950s, the Pavlovian theory of "protective inhabitation" was no longer the golden rule of medical treatment in China.[402] In the 1960s and after the Cultural Revolution, TCM and *qigong* therapy became widespread in sanatoriums, gradually replacing the so-called "advanced therapies" adopted during the early 1950s.[403] Meanwhile, ideological education played an increasingly important role in the management of sanatoriums. As a 1972 document stated, "it was highly necessary to convert workers' sanatoriums into workshops for promoting Marxian-Leninist and Mao Zedong Thought and training

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[399] Beijing diyi gongren liaoyang yuan 北京第一工人疗养院, "Ji shi yiyuan you shi xuxiao ye shi gongchang" 既是医院又是学校也是工厂 [It is a hospital, a school, and a factory], *Fanglao tongxun* 防痨通讯, no. 1 (January 1959): 13.

[400] Beijing diyi gongren liaoyang yuan, "Ji shi yiyuan you shi xuxiao ye shi gongchang," 13.

[401] Almost all the historical witnesses interviewed by Liu Shaohua claimed that the adoption of the Pavlovian doctrine in guiding the treatment of leprosy in the 1950s was absurd. Liu, *Mafeng yisheng yu jubian zhongguo*, 115.

[402] Protective inhibition refers to a mechanism of decreases in arousal driven by a mechanism of the nervous system to protect itself against an overload of stimulation. In 1955, Pavlov and his colleagues discovered this mechanism. Mattie Tops et al., "Protective Inhibition of Self-Regulation and Motivation: Extending a Classic Pavlovian Principle to Social and Personality Functioning," in *Handbook of Biobehavioral Approaches to Self-Regulation* (New York: Springer New York, 2014), 69–85.

[403] David A. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 37–39.

progressive workers. Based on available sources, the increasingly rigorous management did not prevent workers from sticking to their ways of practicing what the party and labour authorities called undisciplined manners. In 1965, the office of the CCP Shanghai Committee received a letter describing how some recuperating workers spent their lives in the Jing'an Cotton Spinning Factory Sanatorium where "bourgeois thought prevailed":

> One worker in room 209 brought a six-tube radio from home and listened to "enemy stations." In addition, this worker often listened to yellow songs together with eighteen other workers. They said, "This type of music has a beautiful melody and makes us feel relaxed and happy." Two other recuperating workers also regularly danced "scandalously." Another sanatorium worker, whose nickname was "Young Bluebloods" (*xiaokai* 小开), often told people about his experiences with prostitutes before liberation. In addition, male and female patients often openly molested each other.[404]

In response, Xu Xianting, deputy secretary of the party committee of the Jing'an Cotton Spinning Factory, said, "In the past, we established a study system. We often organized the recuperating workers to read newspapers, and often set up study groups for workers to criticize each other. But after the socialist education campaign, we thought that workers' political consciousness had improved. Thus, the party committee no longer cared about the management of sanatorium life and this problem arose."[405]

Conclusion

As I have shown in this chapter, recuperating workers' unruly and undisciplined behaviours in sanatoriums always gave their administrators a headache because it was far from the image they wished to project. In the party's ideal, a model recuperating worker should possess the same qualifications as the fictional model worker Zhang Peiliang: hard-working, intelligent, selfless in sharing working skills, and obedient to discipline. It is apparent that workers failed to live up to the expectations of those sanatorium organizers from the official perspective. However, one must acknowledge that the

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[404] Yao Changlin 姚昌麟, Teng Shizhen 滕世贞, and Wang Henglin 王恒林, "Yige zichan jieji sixiang fanlan de gongren liaoyangsuo" 一个资产阶级思想泛滥的工人疗养所 [A workers' sanatorium rife with bourgeois thoughts], *Dangde gongzuo*, no. 50 (December 12, 1965): 24.

[405] Yao, Teng, and Wang, "Yige zichan jieji sixiang fanlan de gongren liaoyangsuo," 24.

sanatorium was not a place solely for ideological reform after all and workers who had access to sanatoriums were not those left-wing intellectuals who entered the house of correction (*jiaozheng yuan* 矫正院) established by the right-wing nationalist authorities. A worker from Shanxi once said gratefully: "In the past, I used to stay in a house of correction, but now I am living in a sanatorium."[406] This statement that compared two types of facilities that shared similar disciplinary functions but differed in the material benefits provided suggests that workers could only see the tangible material benefits available in these facilities but were blind to their edifying functions. To put in simple words, workers came to sanatoriums for rest, not education. The base human desire of the Chinese working class, especially the desire for satisfying their hunger, naturally released itself when being nourished with munificent material benefits. The attitude toward workers' actual behaviours of sanatorium organizers, however, shows that when the means designed to achieve the utilitarian motives of establishing sanatoriums became an obstacle to their realization, the value of these means would not be officially recognized, even though they were truly beneficial to workers. On the other hand, other than nourishing workers with good meals or adequate rest, which proved particularly appealing to them within a very short period in the early 1950s, the other services available in sanatoriums helped little in mending workers' sick bodies because they did not really fit workers' need.

It is worth mentioning that the story told in this chapter focuses on a small proportion of all Chinese workers in the early 1950s. In the next chapter, I will continue the approach I adopt in this chapter to examine a long-term campaign against industrial fatigue launched by the party in the 1950s and 1960s. The investigation of how most Chinese workers reacted to the methods to battle fatigue prescribed by the party will be further elaborated based on my discovery in this chapter, which is that workers' own lifestyle was not something prescribed solely by the party.

[406] Zhongguo meikuang gonghui huabei choubei weiyuanhui, "Dongbei qu gongren yeyu liaoyang suo gongzuo baogao zhaiyao," July 1, 1951, SPA, c098-0011-0011-0011.

Chapter 5. To Strike a Balance between Work and Rest: Battling Fatigue for Workers

Since February 1956, miners in the Taixin mines of the Liaoyuan Mining Bureau had been working more than eight hours per day for three months. Most miners got less than eight hours of sleep a day. For those who lived far from the shaft, they could only sleep for two or three hours a day at most. Some exhausted mines sent a complaint to the mine director: "The 'three-eight rule' has become a 'two-six rule.' We are an oil light burning without being fueled."[407]

The "three-eight rule" (*sanba zhi* 三八制) in the miners' grumbles referred to the eight-hour workday. Since Robert Owen coined the slogan "eight-hour labour, eight-hour recreation, and eight-hour rest" in 1817, the eight-hour workday had become one of the principal demands in the labour movements in Europe, Australia and the U.S. in the nineteenth century, and had also become the universal demand of the international labour movement with the upswing in the economy and the rise of a new and more militant working class in Germany and France after 1895.[408] In China, communist labour activists and social reformists began in the early 1920s to campaign for an eight-hour day.[409] On the CCP's side, the movement nominally received a significant boost on the eve of the founding of the PRC. The eight-hour workday was written in the 1949 Common Program and thus became a constitutional right for the Chinese working class.[410] In the 1950s, the state council and labour departments issued several directives to promote the eight-hour workday in industrial and commercial sectors.[411] The "three-eight rule" dividing a day

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[407] *NBCK*, May 5, 1956 (99): 40.

[408] Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*, 210.

[409] For more information about how China's social reformist, communist labour activists, and sociologists campaigned for the eight-hour workday in pre-1949 China, see Yan Ming 阎明, *Yimen xueke yu yige shidai: shehui xue zai Zhongguo* 一门学科与一个时代: 社会学在中国 [A discipline and an era: sociology in China] (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2003), 207–12.

[410] See Article 12, *The Common Program and Other Documents of the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference*, 12.

[411] On July 25, 1952, the Central People's Government Council adopted the "Decision on Labour and Employment Issues," emphasizing that local labour departments and industrial sectors should

into three equal parts was established in many industrial workplaces, especially in mines and construction sites.

However, as the miners' dismal grievances suggest, the eight-hour workday was essentially a mirage. The sarcastic phrase "two-six rule" coined by these miners reveals a miserable truth that they had to work at least twelve hours a day. Such experience was not unique to these miners but a nightmare that had plagued many of China's industrial labourers since the second half of 1950. Owing to the clash between inadequate productive capacities, which were mainly caused by labour shortages, poor production technologies, and low wages for workers, and the overly ambitious production targets driven by the party's urgent need to revive and develop the economy, overtime became inevitable in both state enterprises and private factories in the 1950s, especially during production competitions repeatedly launched in the 1950s. Many enterprise leaders, as Jackie Sheehan notes in her study of workers' protests in post-1949 China, were using overtime as "their main method of fulfilling and over-fulling production quotas."[412] During the Great Leap Forward, overtime reached a feverish peak. "In the short run, factories could meet demands for vastly increased output only by speeding up existing operations," as Andrew Walder argues, "this could be accomplished by altering or abandoning procedures designed to ensure product quality, worker safety, or the maintenance of capital equipment; by mandating involuntary overtime work; or by hiring large numbers of new workers."[413] In addition, tedious long meetings and political study sessions took away workers' rest time and prolonged their working hours in disguised ways. These factors led to extreme fatigue among workers throughout the 1950s.

As the analogy between the miners and oil lamps showed, fatigue damaged workers' morale and health, and therefore hampered production efficiencies. For this

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systematically establish a nine- to ten-hour workday, and requiring that all large state and private industrial, mining and transportation enterprises should implement the eight-hour workday as far as possible. In 1956, the State Council introduced a stricter eight-hour workday in various industries such as the construction industry. See Wang Ruifang 王瑞芳, "Xin Zhongguo chengli chuqi de gongshi zhidu" 新中国成立初期的工时制度 [Person-hour in the early years of the PRC], *Dangdai Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 当代中国史研究 [Contemporary Chinese history studies] 21, no. 5 (September 2014): 89–98.

[412] Sheehan, *Chinese Workers,* 57.

[413] Walder, *China under Mao*, 174.

reason, battling fatigue occupied an important position in the party's labour protection initiatives. This chapter explores the history of industrial fatigue, a type of fatigue mostly caused by the long workday in industry, in the first dozen years of the Mao era. I begin this chapter with an investigation of Zhao Zhankui, one of the earliest model workers praised by the party in the early 1940s, to show how the image of a tireless worker rose to prominence in the party's discourse. Then I proceed to show how fatigue became a prevalent and serious problem that threatened industrial productivity by examining workers' struggles against fatigue after the party came to national power. Beginning in the second half of 1950, China's labour authorities, unions, and some enterprise leaders sought to introduce various measures to deal with industrial fatigue. Among the measures, the one that received the most vigorous encouragement from the party was to engage workers in wholesome activities circumscribed by the party, such as physical exercises. In 1960, the party launched a nationwide movement with the banner of striking a proper balance between work and rest (*laoyi jiehe* 劳逸结合) to handle the aftermath of the Great Leap Famine. Thus, getting workers to rest, including eight hours of nightly sleep and daily leisure activities, was a priority for China's labour authorities.

Workers had their ways to rest based on their own perceptions of fatigue. Many of them who suffered from overtime in the 1950s still yearned for rest. Even though some energetic workers were actively throwing themselves into physical exercise, there were still many workers who had a variety of reasons to avoid exercising. In the early 1960s, many workers did not meekly follow the party's orders that confined them to their beds at night. Instead, they preferred to spend their evening hours doing their own business: chatting aimlessly, reading novels, and playing poker. The responses of China's industrial workers to the state's efforts to battle industrial fatigue demonstrate that workers' lifestyles were not something constructed by the party, but rather shaped by their own unique lifestyle and their perception of fatigue.

A Worker without Fatigue

On May 5, 1942, the General Federation of Trade Unions of Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region held a cadre conference in Yan'an. This four-day conference adopted a

new labour law which stipulated that most factories in the border region should establish a ten-hour workday. Since 1937, the length of the legal workday for factory workers in the border region had been eight hours. On June 16, Di Dejian, the union director of the Yan'an Agricultural Tools Factory, had a heated confrontation during a meeting with the factory administrators about revising the hours of the workday: "The ten-hour workday enslaves our workers. You are having them working like 'cows and horses.'" Di left halfway through the meeting. After that, Di told many workers: "The Communist Party is getting worse day by day. They have prolonged the workday. They are now exploiting workers and sucking our blood."[414]

Under Di's instigation, strikes and disturbances occurred in the factory and spread rapidly. The incident aroused great attention from the CCP Central Committee and the border region government. Deng Fa (1906–1946), then the head of the CCP Central Labour Movement Committee, dispatched the committee member Li Jiebo to the factory to handle the strike in tandem with Zhang Ping (1915–1993). According to Zhang Ping's recollection, it took them a total of forty-eight days to quell the disturbance. On July 17, Di Dejian was sent to the military justice department for punishment. During the forty-eight days, Zhang and Li discovered a casting worker and furnace worker named Zhao Zhankui. Because of his refusal to join the disturbance, Zhao quickly became a model worker in the eyes of the party officials. When Zhao Zhankui's deed reached the ears of Mao Zedong, Mao hailed: "Zhao Zhankui is China's Stakhanov!"[415]

Since November 1942, a movement in the name of Zhao Zhankui had spread at the behest of Mao Zedong. Newspaper articles praising Zhao Zhankui had sprung up in the *Liberation Daily*, the mouthpiece of the border region government. Mu Qing (1921–2003), then editor of the *Liberation Daily,* contributed the first feature article on Zhao

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[414] Shaanxi sheng zong gonghui gongren yundong yanjiu shi 陕西省总工会工人运动研究室, "Kangzhan yilai bianqu gongyun zongjie cailiao" 抗战以来边区工运总结材料 [Concluding materials on the labour movements in the border region since the since the Sino-Japanese War], in *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu gongren yundong shiliao xuanbian* 陕甘宁边区工人运动史料选编 [Selected historical materials on the labour movements in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region], vol. 2 (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1988), 482.

[415] Yao Qirong 姚启荣, *Zhongguo laomo shi* 中国劳模史 [History of model workers in China] (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 2020), 59.

Zhankui on September 7. In this article entitled "People are Talking about Zhao Zhankui," Mu Qing writes: "Zhao Zhankui qualified as a model worker and a good Communist because of his painstaking working style and habits, his responsibility and patience for his job, and his ability to unite people."[416] In the following months, Mu Qing and some other journalists in the pay of the party published a series of newspaper articles that repeatedly praised Zhao's good deeds. One thing these news articles had in common was their focus on Zhao's willingness to work overtime and his apparent tirelessness. As written in a *Liberation Daily* article on September 8, 1942, Zhao Zhankui "was the first to get up—before the alarm went off—and was the last to leave the factory. Before leaving the factory, he always put the tools back. Even after working for twelve hours, he refused to take a break and did not ask for additional wages."[417] In another article entitled "Comrade Zhao Zhankui," the author Zhang Tiefu and Mu Qing tell a similar story that Zhao "often started working in the early morning and worked a whole day without having a noon break."[418] As written in a 1944 article entitled "The Model Worker Zhao Zhankui," working extra hours even rejuvenated Zhao Zhaokui:

> Iron melting is such a hard job! Especially during the summertime, [Zhao Zhankui has to] stand next to the furnace of more than a thousand degrees and under the fiercely glaring sun in a cotton coat (as a substitute for an asbestos coat). Sweat keeps dripping down. Even at mealtime, Zhao does not stop working. Other people are doing jobs while having meals. Comrade Zhao Zhankui, however, is too busy to have a meal because he does not want to cause a delay. He often works for more than twelve hours without a pause. Even though he was more than forty years old, when he worked, he became young! He is always so pleasant and calm. His oval face, with a lot of laughter lines, faces the iron furnace. The sparks dazzle, and in a moment turn into plowshares and rims. This is the fruit of victory! This makes him forget his fatigue. He never uttered a word of suffering![419]

Considering that the immediate cause of the Zhao Zhankui movement was workers' resistance to the ten-hour workday, one can argue that the party's extolling of Zhao's willingness to work more than ten hours a day was intended to encourage more

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[416] *JFRB*, September 2, 1942, 2.

[417] *JFRB*, September 8, 1942, 2.

[418] *JFRB*, September 13, 1942, 4.

[419] *JFRB*, March 26, 1944, 4.

factory workers to accept the new labour disciplines including longer workdays. But as many scholars have shown, the Zhao Zhankui movement was far beyond a short-term movement aimed at consolidating working regulations in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region but marked the establishment of a brand new "labour ethic" that required workers to work with revolutionary aspirations instead of for personal gains.[420] The image of Zhao Zhankui—a subservient and industrious worker—was starkly distinct from the image of industrial labourers adept at leading strikes, which was promoted by the party in the 1920s. Such subservient and industrious characteristics were extraordinarily embodied in Zhao's endurance of working extra hours without showing fatigue.

Interestingly, images of workers like Zhao Zhankui were seldom seen in discourses other than those produced by the CCP during the same era. By the early twentieth century, physiologists in Europe and the U.S. had discovered industrial fatigue and shattered the theological belief that body fatigue was the result of the "sin of idleness" prevalent before the late nineteenth century.[421] In the 1930s, the knowledge of industrial fatigue was introduced into China and became well-received among many national industrialists and medical experts.[422] Even without consulting the studies of industrial fatigue, Chinese people would hardly believe that a worker could work more than twelve hours tirelessly. As Pi Kuo-Li argues in his most recent study, Chinese people had been "suffused with the fear of weakness and fatigue" since the late Qing Dynasty.[423] In addition, commending model workers was not exclusive to the CCP but also found favour with some enterprises controlled by the KMT in pre-1949 China. For

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[420] You Zhenglin 游正林, "Geming de laodong lunli de xingqi: yi Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu 'Zhao Zhankui yundong' wei kaocha de zhognxin" 革命的劳动伦理的兴起: 以陕甘宁边区 "赵占魁运动" 为中心的考察 [The rise of the revolutionary work ethic: investigation of the "Zhao Zhankui movement" in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region], *Shehui* 社会 37, no. 5 (2017): 105–38.

[421] Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 19–44; Emily K. Abel, *Sick and Tired: An Intimate History of Fatigue* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 34–38.

[422] For example, see Lin Handa 林汉达, "Xuanliang cigu: pilao de yanjiu" 悬梁刺股: 疲劳的研究 [Grind away at one's studies: the study of fatigue], *Shijie zazhi jinghua* 世界杂志精华, no. 3 (1940): 242–47.

[423] Pi Kuo-Li 皮国立, *Xuruo shi: jindai huaren zhongxi yixue de qingyu quanshi yu yaopin wenhua (1919–1949)* 虚弱史: 近代华人中西医学的情欲诠释与药品文化 (1912–1949) [A history of weakness: Erotic interpretation and drug culture in modern Chinese medicine (1912–1949)] (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 2019), 22–44.

example, the Northwestern Industrial Company (*xibei shiye gongsi* 西北实业公司) run by Yan Xishan held several appraisals of model workers in 1946. Typically, these model workers, commonly known as "labour heroes," were lionized for their precautions against industrial accidents or contributions to improving labour efficiencies instead of working extra hours voluntarily. Based on available sources, the only labour hero whose achievements dealt with working hours was a 42-year-old printer named Li Qingxiang from the Northwest Printing Factory. He was selected as a labour hero for his ability to check 8,000 words in nine hours, which was one-third more than other workers.[424]

All these examples mentioned above suggest that the image of a body without fatigue like Zhao Zhankui was the CCP's exclusive utopian ideal, which was not compatible with both the mainstream scientific understanding and prevalent perception of human fatigue in the first half of the twentieth century in China. Nevertheless, until the early 1950s, the image of workers willing to work overtime and capable of overcoming fatigue continued to receive enthusiastic reverence from the CCP. For example, in 1951 writer Ye Tao published a feature story in *People's Daily* portraying Zhao Naibin, a worker from the Tangshan Steel Mill who often worked more than twelve hours. In Ye's depiction, Zhao "worked tenaciously in front of the Bessemer furnace, sleeping less than four hours a day on average. Seven times he worked thirty hours without a pause. On two occasions, he worked more than fifty hours without having a break."[425]

The portrayal of workers without fatigue, however, did not last very long after the CCP came to power. As I will show in the following sections, after the eight-hour workday became a constitutional right for China's labourers, some people argued that praising a worker willing to work overtime ran contrary to the party's promise that workers only needed to work eight hours and the principle of labour protection. Nonetheless, the eight-hour day was itself an empty promise. The extremely widespread overtime in enterprises and mines in the 1950s swamped workers into severe industrial fatigue, which was disastrous to economic construction and industrialization. Industrial

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[424] "Laodong yingxiong texie" 劳动英雄特写 [Feature articles on labour heroes], *Xibei shiye zhoukan* 西北实业周刊, no. 19 (1946): 4.

[425] *RMRB*, September 24, 1950, 6.

fatigue began to preoccupy China's labour officials and union leaders in 1950. Voices against voluntary overtime became abundant. But before we proceed to investigate how China's labour departments and unions coped with the problem caused by fatigue, let us take a look at how fatigue damaged workers' physical and mental health.

When Fatigue Became a Problem

No one could display vigour after working more than twelve hours without a pause like Zhao Zhankui. Excessive overtime, extra shifts, and endless meetings exhausted workers. Since the early 1950s, accounts of workers' miserable experience of fatigue—physical pain and muscle aches, vomiting blood, miscarriages, neurosis, and even hysteria—had been rife in both internal and open publications. Even though the cases listed below may only consist of a small fraction of all cases, they are enough to represent workers' suffering brought about by overwork in the first several years of the Mao era.

According to a 1951 report by the Department of Labour Protection of the Northeast Federal Trade Union, after working more than twelve hours a day for several weeks, workers from the No. 2 Branch of the Cloth Shoes Factory in Harbin complained in 1951: "My two shoulders are aching all over from a day's work. Even a whole night's sleep won't help."[426] At the No. 101 Factory in Chongqing, more than 6,000 (this might be a typo in *Neibu cankao*) workers were so exhausted that they vomited blood in 1953.[427] In the six workshops of Xiangtan Electric Factory, overtime totalled more than 19,000 hours in October 1953. This number was five times the number in August. The casting workers worked more than nine hours a day. As a result, six young worker activists vomited blood one after another.[428] According to a 1955 statistic, the cumulative amount of authorized overtime alone had reached 389,429 hours in 12 factories in

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[426] *Dangde gongzuo* 党的工作 [The party's work], March 7, 1951(84): 13. This publication was the official periodical of the CCP Northeast Bureau in the early 1950s and mainly published confidential and inner-party investigative reports. This publication was only available to cadres and officers above the county level and regimental level.

[427] *NBCK*, January 3, 1953, (2): 43.

[428] *NBCK*, November 16, 1953, (268): 221.

Shenyang since 1954. "Even mules and horses are allowed to rest," said Liu Yaozong, a worker at the Huanggutun Rolling Machine Repair Plant: "We work all day and night. I may as well just die."[429] Li Xizeng, a worker at the Shenyang No. 2 Machine Tool Factory, said: "I'm dizzy all day long, but I have to push through."[430] In early 1956, four workers in a casting plant in Jing'an District were so overworked that they fainted on the job. Two workers in the Shunshang shipyard vomited blood from exhaustion. According to an investigation by the Beijing Federation of Trade Unions, because of poor labour conditions and overtime, from mid-June to July 13, 1956, thirty-two workers at the Zhoukoudian Lime Factory successively contracted hysteria with symptoms such as stuttering, abnormal speech patterns, spasm, essential tremor, violence propensity, and sobbing.[431] According to the report by the party group of the Ministry of Labour published on April 18, 1956, overtime and accidents had been "extremely widespread and severe" in most factories and mines. To illustrate the extent to which overtime work was hazardous to workers' health, the party group of the Ministry of Labour mentioned the sufferings of workers at the Harbin Limber Factory in the report: "They always worked for more than ten or even thirty hours. They were even napping while walking and eating."[432]

Female workers were particularly vulnerable to excessive overtime. Between February and October 1952, overtime led to 79 miscarriages among 5,000 female workers at the Northwest Public-Private Partnership Cotton Mill.[433] According to a 1955 investigation, long hours of standing led to trichomoniasis and uterine displacement among the majority of female workers in five yarn mills in Wuhan. In the Yuhua Yarn Mill alone, for instance, 19.8 percent of the female workers suffered from trichomoniasis

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[429] *NBCK*, November 13, 1955 (205): 92.

[430] *NBCK*, November 13, 1955, (205): 93.

[431] *NBCK*, July 30, 1956 (609): 1946.

[432] Laodong bu dangzu 劳动部党组, "Guanyu zuijin shangwang shigu he jiaban jiadian de yanzhong qingkuang ji yijian de baogao" 关于最近伤亡事故和加班加点的的严重情况及意见的报告 [Report on the recent accidental injuries and fatalities and serious overtime as well as comments thereof], in *Zhonggong zhongyang wenjian xuanji* (October 1949–May 1966) 中共中央文件选集 (1949 年 10 月–1966 年 5 月) [The selected documents from the CCP Central Committee], vol. 23 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2013), 127–33.

[433] *NBCK*, January 24, 1953 (19): 406

and 30 percent from uterine disease. Miscarriages occurred frequently.[434] Between June and December 1954, there were six workers at Changzhou Minfeng Yarn Mill who suffered miscarriages because of overwork. In the construction company of the Wuhan Steelwork, workers often had to work more than twelve hours a day, and pregnant women had no respite. As a result, many female workers fainted and miscarried.[435] In the second quarter of 1956, in all sixteen silk-reeling factories in Zhejiang Province, many female workers were so busy that they did not even have time to "drink water and wipe sweat." Because of the long hours of standing work, more than 80 percent of the female workers at the First Reeling Factory in Hangzhou had gynecological disorders. There were also many reeling workers reporting that they had suffered from "fatigue diseases" with symptoms of "sleeplessness, inability to eat, lack of energy."[436]

To keep workers in their positions, some enterprise leaders even used energy boosters. According to the 1951 report by the Northeast Bureau mentioned above, the factory director of the Heilongjiang Jianye Rubber Shoe Factory asked workers to spray cold water on each other's faces, chew ice, and slap each other. The leaders even took a lead to perform an "evil spirit dance" (*tiao dashen* 跳大神) in the workshop to keep workers awake. These methods exacerbated workers' experience of suffering from fatigue. In the female dormitory, "aiyah, aiyah, aiyah" were heard one after another from the exhausted workers. As recorded in a 1956 report, some truck drivers at the Shandong Provincial Transportation Department had to apply essential balm (*qingliang you* 清凉油) to avoid falling asleep at the wheel.[437] In some extreme cases, enterprise leaders even came up with an idea of startling workers by "dressing up as a ghost" to give night shift workers a jolt. On the night of May 28, 1956, Yao Guoyong, the workshop propaganda clerk of the second spinning workshop of the Tangshan Huaxin Textile Mill, sneaked into the workshop with a red and green striped "witch hat" and "ghost-like" make-up. Suddenly, he yelled out and slapped the shoulder of a female worker named Li Chunhua.

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[434] *NBCK*, March 22, 1956 (112): 297.

[435] *NBCK*, October 12, 1956 (2018): 953.

[436] *NBCK*, July 30, 1956 (1946): 608.

[437] *NBCK*, October 31, 1956, (2039): 1551.

This sudden move left Li Chunhua dazed and dumbfounded, shocking her into silence for months. Until July, she had not been cured. Even though a *Hebei Daily* article described this event as an "incredible story," such a case was not unique during the 1950s (and even throughout the Mao era). According to Jiang Songling, a union representative at the No. 9 National Textile Factory in Shanghai, some workers proposed to have someone startle night shift workers by wearing a "big-head baby" headgear in 1956.[438]

Attending endless meetings was no less exhausting for workers than working overtime. According to several reports by local trade unions published in *Internal Reference*, during a period in 1952, there was not a single day without meetings at the Xi'an Cotton Mill. Some pregnant attendees miscarried after sitting for three to four hours without moving.[439] At the Datong mine, meetings and daily routines occupied about fourteen hours of workers' daily time. In addition, many miners spent more than three hours commuting between the workplace and their residences. As a result, more than half of the miners had to sleep in the shaft.[440] In the second half of 1952, the administrators of the Huainan Mining Bureau compelled miners to attend political studies and meetings, which always lasted more than three hours. Some miners complained: "Endless meetings have tied us up!"[441] In 1956, Liu Binyan, the prominent journalist and writer who "became an outspoken critic of the Mao and Deng regimes," published a reportage titled "The Inside News of the Newspaper."[442] A passage from the reportage vividly shows how endless meetings leave workers in the throes of extreme fatigue:

> The workers lived very far from the mine. They had to get up at two o'clock in the morning and walk more than ten miles [to the workplace]. When they arrived at the mine, they had to attend a meeting. When they went down the shaft, there was another meeting. They started working at six o'clock and worked until three o'clock in the afternoon. From the working face to the shaft entrance, workers had to walk several miles. This is exhausting enough, right? This is not enough. Workers were not allowed to go home before attending another meeting.

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[438] *RMRB*, August 12, 1956, 2.

[439] *NBCK*, August 18, 1956 (1963): 320

[440] *NBCK*, November 26, 1952 (262): 312.

[441] *NBCK*, December 27, 1952 (284): 390.

[442] William Theodore De Bary, Richard John Lufrano, and Wing-tsit Chan, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd. ed, Introduction to Asian Civilizations (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 464.

> Meetings often lasted until six or seven o'clock in the evening. Then they walked ten more miles home. It was after nine o'clock then. Some workers said: "We have endured sleeping only four hours a day for several years. We have been so tired." Many people were sleeping during meetings. Some people fell asleep while they were smoking. The burning cigarette fell on their cotton pants, burning through the cloth and cotton. They did not even feel that. They did not wake up until the cigarette burned their skin and flesh.
>
> …
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> Since 1952, workers have been complaining that attending these meetings was more exhausting than working. They would rather work extra hours than endure this hardship. They had to "squeeze out words" and make a speech. Everybody was compelled to say something.[443]

Workers who became ill from overwork often did not receive prompt medical attention. In many factories, fatigue could not be classified as a specific illness until the mid-1950s. (Of course, this might have been an excuse for many scoundrel factory administrators to compel workers to undertake overwork). This situation was reflected in an article entitled "Fatigue Leave (*pilao jia* 疲劳假)" published by Hu Bicheng in 1957:

> The loading workers in the Shanghai port were working too hard. They were always overworked and exhausted. Humans are not machines. Sometimes, they had to work extra hours to accomplish urgent tasks. Helplessly, they were not only carrying goods from morning to evening amidst the chant of "he-yo, he-yo" but also had to continue to work all night long. Their backs hurt, their fingers were numb, and they could not even hold the chopsticks while dining. For this reason, they had to ask for leave. What kind of leave did they ask for? This physical exhaustion looked like illness but was not, like injuries but was not. Doctors did not permit them to take leave. They were not entitled to labour insurance, either. Faced with this fact, administrators had to acquiesce to such requests and allow workers to conserve their strength for tomorrow's tasks. Workers called this a "fatigue leave." Now, this has become an unwritten rule.[444]

All these cases show industrial fatigue caused by overtime had become a severe and widespread issue in the industrial sphere by 1957.[445] The purpose of compelling

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[443] Liu Binyan 刘宾雁, "Benbao neibu xiaoxi" 本报内部消息 [The inside story of this newspaper], *Renmin wenxue*, no. 6 (June 1956): 14.

[444] Hu Bicheng 胡壁城, "Pilao jia" 疲劳假 [Fatigue leave], *Laodong*, no. 2 (February 1957): 8.

[445] Because of the paucity of available sources, I am not able to delineate how precisely the amount of overtime changed in China's major industrial workplaces between 1950 and 1957. However, based on

workers to work extra hours was to fulfill high production targets. However, it turned out that this method was totally counterproductive. Of equal importance to these descriptions of workers' suffering was the fact that these cases were documented in the reports sent by China's labour officials and unions to the party's high-level leadership. In almost all reports focusing on overtime, the statistics on extra hours were always accompanied by a string of numbers indicating declines in attendance rates and production outputs. In other words, local unions and labour departments produced these reports not simply to show their sympathy for exhausted workers but to remind top CCP leadership that industrial fatigue had become an obvious impediment to production. This was one of the most significant reasons that voices against overtime were allowed to exist not only in internal publications like *Internal Reference* but also in many open publications like *People's Daily.* In addition to sending these reports to the top authorities, China's labour officials and trade unions at all levels were consistently pursuing practical measures to cope with industrial fatigue, whether out of their empathy toward workers' suffering or the practical consideration to improve productivity.

Battling Fatigue

What did China's labour authorities, trade unions, and some enterprise leaders do to battle industrial fatigue? The most fundamental way to control industrial fatigue was the reduction of working hours. China's labour authorities did not turn a blind eye to this method. In 1951 and 1955, the Ministry of Labour separately issued two administrative decrees to prohibit overtime in enterprises and mines.[446] Unfortunately, these administrative decrees, like many other regulations on workplace safety and health, only existed on paper. Chronic overtime led to a vicious cycle in Mao's China: To meet excessively high production quotas, enterprise leaders had no choice but to tacitly

available sources, it is safe to say that the amount of overtime was on upward trend. See Zhu Hanguo 朱汉国, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo shehui shi* 当代中国社会史 [The social history of contemporary China], vol. 5 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2019), 1901–6.

[446] On November 15, 1951, the Ministry of Labour drafted the "The Methods to Restrict Overtime in Enterprises and Mines." During the second national labour protection conference held in December 1952, this regulation was approved. Based on this regulation, the State Council promulgated the "The Provisional Regulation on the Restriction of Overtime in both Public and Private Enterprises" in August 1955. See Zhu, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo shehui shi,* 1901–6.

consent to overtime, which deteriorated workers' health conditions and further caused declines in attendance rates and production efficiency. As a result, the burden of completing production tasks became more intense, prompting many factory leaders to revert to overtime as a last resort to meet production quotas. This vicious circle meant the effort to battle fatigue through directly restricting overtime had constantly remained unfulfilled.

In addition to administrative intervention, the reduction in working hours could also be achieved by improving work efficiency per unit of time. Since the CCP launched the production competition to support Korean War efforts in the second half of 1950, a large number of new model workers emerged from among China's industrial labourers. Starkly distinct from those "industrious and subservient" workers like Zhao Zhankui, many of these model workers had made contributions to technical innovations that would enhance work efficiency. At the enterprise level, many labour departments and unions began to encourage workers to "find knacks," which included inventing new tools, improving operation techniques and optimizing workflow. While the original purpose of this initiative was to enable workers to achieve greater outputs in production competitions, some evidence suggests that some labour officials saw "finding knacks" as a way to battle fatigue. In 1951, the Ministry of Light Industry and the Textile Union started to vigorously promote the "Hao Jianxiu work method" (*Hao Jianxiu gongzuo fa* 郝建秀工作法) in China's textile enterprises.[447] According to an investigation by the Textile Union in 1951, after exercising the "Hao Jianxiu work method," workers in the spinning workshop of the sixth cotton textile factory in Qingdao "felt less fatigued" because this method "saved 25 percent of the time in walking circuit and gained 35 percent efficiency in the spinning machines' maintenance."[448]

Based on the available sources, it is difficult to make a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the "knacks" in reducing working hours and alleviating workers'

[447] For detailed information about China's labour models in the 1950s, see Yu Miin-ling, "'Labor is Glorious': Model Laborers in the PRC," in *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949–Present*, by Thomas P Bernstein and Hua-Yu Li (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 231–58.

[448] Chen Shaomin 陈少敏, *Dali tuiguang Hao Jianxiu gongzuo fa* 大力推广郝建秀工作法 [Vigorously promote the Hao Jianxiu work method] (Beijing: Laodong chubanshe, 1951), 5.

fatigue. What appeared certain, however, was that many knacks or advanced work methods, such as the Hao Jianxiu work method, were basically the product of propaganda and did little in enhancing work efficiency.[449] In addition, many local labour authorities promoted the so-called advanced work methods in a campaign-style manner, which in turn took away much of workers' rest time.[450] Most importantly, many workers would rather work overtime and endure physical fatigue than adopt those officially endorsed advanced work methods. In 1953, Luo Liyun (1915–2015) published an article in *People's Literature*, criticizing that many authors were adopting a homogeneous and stereotypical narrative framework in their depictions of workers. In this article, Luo mentions a popular "writing formula" containing seven steps. The third step— "factory union leaders succeed in persuading young workers who offer to undertake overtime to accept new work methods"—implied that workers' reluctance to accept advanced work methods seemed to be common in reality at that time.[451] This message could also be detected in an official portrayal of Wang Chonglun (1927–2002), a worker from the Anshan Steel Mill. Because of his invention of the "universal tool padding" (*wanneng gongju tai* 万能工具胎), which immensely enhanced work efficiency, Wang was elected as a model worker with an honourable title "The Man Ahead of Time" (*zouzai shijian qianmian de ren* 走在时间前面的人) in 1954.[452] In a 1955 *pingtan* script featuring Wang

[449] According to Yu Miin-ling's study, the Hao Jianxiu work method had nothing special in terms of technical innovation. Even Hao Jianxiu herself did not realize that those advanced experiences summarized by the All-China Textile Trade Union, especially the most signature "Z-shaped" walk circuit, was an innovative discovery. The "Z-shaped" walk circuit refers to a zigzag walk route in the textile workshop. The labour officials claimed that walking in Hao Jianxiu's "Z-shape" circuit could minimize roller waste. See Yu Miin-ling, "'Labor Is Glorious': Model Laborers in the PRC," 239. For more on the difficulty in the promotion of the Hao Jianxiu working method, see *NBCK*, October 15, 1952 (235): 169–71.

[450] Workers' recuperation mentioned in the previous chapter can be considered as a unique combination of "rest" and "energy boosters" to combat fatigue. However, as I point out, only a particular group of workers, such as model workers and advanced producers, had access to sanatoriums. In some cases, a worker's leisurely holiday in a sanatorium was built on thousands of workers working overtime: when model worker Hao Jianxiu stayed in the Zhanshan Workers Sanatorium in Qingdao in 1951, many female workers in textile mills across the country were working overtime to practice the Hao Jianxiu Work Method.

[451] Luo Liyun 罗立韵, "Fandui ba gongren shenghuo taozai gongshi li" 反对把工人生活套在公式里 [Against the homogenized depiction of workers' lives], *Renmin wenxue*, no. 6 (June 1953): 108.

[452] Yu Miin-ling, "'Labor is Glorious': Model Laborers in the PRC," 245.

Chonglun performed by master Tang Gengliang (1921–2009), a plot illustrates how Wang Chonglun's colleagues refuse to use the new tools invented by Wang:

> Wang Chonglun gave the tools to other workers to use. But some workers were reluctant to use them, saying, "we did not develop these tools by ourselves, so it's a shame to use other people's inventions. We have many hands. So we would rather work overtime than use the tools invented by others." The union took a look at the tools and said, "This is so unbelievable. To ensure the completion of the task, why not use the tools invented by Wang Chonglun?"[453]

Literary depictions reflected realities on factory floors. "Sometimes they (common workers) would sabotage model labourers' work and the tension between them was strong," as Yu Miin-ling argues: "Some workers resisted participating in such production campaigns for fear that the records set by the model workers would force them to work overtime and raise production norms."[454] Andrew Walder also argues that there was a "politically salient social-structural cleavage" in the communist factory marked by "general resentment and open antagonism toward activists."[455] The arguments can help us understand that workers' envious mindset toward model workers resulted in their refusal to use work methods or tools that would enhance their working efficiency and eventually made them more susceptible to extra hours and industrial fatigue. This is not to say that these workers voluntarily asked for the fatigue brought about by extra hours. Rather, it was the distinct labour relation in the socialist workplace that hampered the employment of model workers' methods of curtailing working hours.

Given that the efforts to prevent industrial fatigue by reducing working hours were beset with built-in difficulties, China's labour authorities adopted a second-best approach including some remedial measures to help workers recover from fatigue. By the 1950s, there had been three major available measures that were scientifically proved to be

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[453] Tang Gengliang 唐耿良 and Wang Youmei 王友枚, *Wang Chonglun* 王崇伦 [Wang Chonglun] (Shanghai: Wenhua shenghuo chubanshe, 1955), 17.

[454] Yu Miin-ling, "'Labor is Glorious': Model Laborers in the PRC," 244.

[455] Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism*, 166.

effective in battling fatigue: rest, energy boosters, and wholesome activities.[456] The use of energy boosters was favoured by some enterprise leaders. However, as shown by the cases of Heilongjiang and Shanghai workers, this measure exacerbated workers' fatigue instead of easing it. For labour authorities and trade unions, "rest" and "wholesome activities" were of utmost importance in combating fatigue.[457]

Rest

Rest, without any doubt, was the most fundamental way to deal with industrial fatigue. In the 1950s, at least, this was a common understanding among China's medical experts.[458] However, affording workers adequate rest was still predicated on reducing working hours. In this context, some local labour unions were paying attention to workers' sleep quality. In the wake of the ACFTU's inspection in Tianjin in 1950, the Qingdao Textile Union began to organize workers' families to assemble night-shift workers' children in a separate dormitory to keep these children from disturbing workers' rest during the night.[459] In 1954, Tan Guirong, a worker's family member at the Dalian Steel Mill, organized a work team consisting of workers' families to watch over their children lest children's crying would disturb workers' sleep at night.[460] Between 1953 and 1955, the leaders of the Shanghai Railway Bureau mobilized workers' families to

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[456] Physiologists' research on human fatigue in the industrial emerged late nineteenth-century Europe. In the early twentieth century, industrial fatigue, as Emily Abel describes in her latest study of the history of human fatigue, "preoccupied U.S. social reformers in the Progressive Era, many of whom campaigned for more frequent breaks and shorter working hours for laborers." The three methods were what physiologists, physicians, and social reformers had discovered since the late nineteenth century. See Abel, *Sick and Tired*, 61–89.

[457] Laodong bu laodong baohu ju 劳动部劳动保护局, *Anquan shengchan jianghua* 安全生产讲话 [Comments on safe production] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1959), 57–59.

[458] For example, a physician named Tong Jinpei at the Shanghai Public Health Bureau published a book entitled *Industrial Hygiene* in 1951. In this book, Tong explains the detrimental effects of fatigue on working efficiency and states that enough rest, especially eight-hour sleep was essential to get rid of fatigue and further increase labour performance. In 1952, at the height of the patriotic campaign to increase production, Gong Yueping, the vice president of the Tianjin Health Experiment Institute, published an article in *Tianjin Daily* emphasizing the importance of industrial hygiene. In this article, Gong stresses that "sleep and rest are the most effective way to help workers recover from fatigue." Tong Jinpei 仝锦陪, *Gongye weisheng xue* 工业卫生学 [Industrial hygiene] (Shanghai: Shanghai guangxie shuju,1952), 15–20; *TJRB*, July 16, 1952, 2.

[459] *RMRB*, July 29, 1950, 2.

[460] Liu Gongcheng 刘功成, *Dalian shi gonghui zhi: 1923–1990* 大连市工会志: 1923–1990 [Dalian Municipal Trade Unions gazetteer: 1923–1990] (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1993), 447.

catch bedbugs in railway workers' dormitories so as to create a good sleeping environment for workers. Some families also organized night inspection teams to monitor noise in the dormitory area.[461] Of course, not all enterprises were equipped to take such measures. Even as late as the 1960s, workers' living conditions were still extremely poor in China's many enterprises. As I will discuss in the following sections, it was not until the party initiated the movement to "balance work and rest" in 1960 that getting workers enough sleep and improving workers' sleep quality became a regular task for most local and factory-level unions.

Wholesome Activities

Compared to the method of improving workers' sleep quality, China's labour authorities and unions were more actively investing in wholesome activities, which occupied an unusual place in the CCP's revolutionary discourse and practice throughout the twentieth century. "Recreation takes up one-third of our daily lifetime, and it is the most important eight hours," said Li Dazhao (1889–1927) in 1922, "Recreation can soothe the tiredness of work, avoid the vices of depravity, and restore the physical health and the prosperity of the spirit. We should ask employers for all kinds of proper recreational facilities in the places where workers gather."[462]

It was not just early Chinese communists such as Li Dazhao who held this view at that time. Rather, allowing workers to engage in recreational activities during their free time was a consensus of many progressive social reformers and factory employers from different continents in the first half of the twentieth century. In comparison to progressive social reformers and national industrialists in China, the CCP was promoting workers' recreational activities as a strong interventionist and controller.[463] As early as the 1940s,

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[461] *Shanghai funü zhi* bianzuan weiyuanhui 《上海妇女志》编纂委员会, *Shanghai funü zhi* 上海妇女志 [Gazetteer of women in Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue yuan chubanshe, 2000), 144.

[462] Li Dazhao 李大钊, "Wuyi jinianri yu xianzai zhongguo laodongjie de yiyi" 五一纪念日于现在中国劳动界的意义 [The significance of celebrating May Day on today's labourers], *Chenbao* 晨报, May 1, 1922, Supplement edition.

[463] For more information about how nationalist labour officials explained the significance of the use of leisure time in battling industrial fatigue, see Tang Jianfei 唐健飞, "Gongren dang zenyang liyong xiuxian?" 工人当怎样利用休闲? [How should workers spend their leisure time?], *Boyin jiaoyu yuekan* 播音教育月刊, no. 1 (1936): 133–36.

the CCP put forward a slogan in the factories in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region: "Eliminate Fatigue, Enliven Lives." Being officially recognized by the party as helpful in eliminating fatigue, ball games, opera, and chess and card games became the most popular recreational activities among workers.[464] After launching the Yan'an Rectification in 1942, the CCP began to claim that the purpose of organizing recreational activities was "not simply to eliminate fatigue and enliven life" and further replaced the activities well received by workers with what they deemed fatigue-relieving activities with some educational purposes."[465] Thus, workers' craze for ball games began to cool down under compulsion. The *ping* opera, which had flourished tremendously in the factories, was described by the Border Region Union as something "puzzling and spreading the toxins of feudal superstition," and was substituted by the *Yangge* dance and some other activities thereafter.[466]

In the two or three years following the party's takeover of China's major industrial cities, the party continued holding its ambiguous attitude developed during the Shaan-Gan-Ning era toward recreational activities and had a more powerful interpretation of what activities counted as "wholesome" and "recreational." On the one hand, the party encouraged urban workers to continue to engage in recreational activities, such as

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[464] In 1940, after visiting several printing factories in the border region and having a chat with Zhu Zhicheng, a member from the union of the Border Region, a journalist named Xia Jiang wrote the following passage: "Factory workers enjoyed ample recreation and sports opportunities. The factories provided workers with musical instruments and sporting equipment. After work, workers can engage in sports, just as students do. Lively sporting events and evening parties are often held in factories to help workers recover from fatigue. Xia Jiang 夏江, "Jinbu zhong de Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu gongren" 进步中的陕甘宁边区工人 [Workers in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region are progressing], in *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu gongren yundong shiliao xuanbian* 陕甘宁边区工人运动史料选编 [Selected historical materials on labour movement in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region], ed. Shannxi sheng zong gonghui gongyun shi yanjiu shi 陕西省总工会工运史研究室, vol. 1 (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1988), 435–38; Yu Wen 郁文, "Bianqu gongren zhandou de yiyue" 边区工人战斗的一月 [A month of battle of workers in the border region], *Xin Zhonghuabao* 新中华报, May 23, 1940, 2.

[465] "Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu gongying gongchang de zhigong jiaoyu wenti" 陕甘宁边区工厂的职工教育问题 [Education of workers in public-owned factories in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region], in *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu gongren yundong shiliao xuanbian*, vol. 2, 513–23.

[466] A 1945 report stated: "[Before 1942] there were some factories spending millions of bucks on costume trunks [for *ping* opera] … Many workers were indulging in ball games and holding up their working progress." See Shannxi sheng zong gonghui gongyun shi yanjiu shi, ed., "Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu gongying gongchang de zhigong jiaoyu wenti," 513–23; For more discussions on the political culture in Yan'an, see Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 262–70.

dancing and going to the theatre, and claimed that these activities were very helpful in relieving workers' fatigue. On the other hand, the party began to circumscribe the recreation activities. To be more specific, the party sought to guide workers to perform the activities in officially sanctioned spaces such as workers' cultural palaces or clubs and require that workers should be restrained in doing recreational activities. In 1953, a 22-year-old female worker named Wang Xiuzhen from the Tianjin Hengda Tobacco Factory published her self-criticism in *Tianjin Daily*. "I am a theatre-goer and often asked for leave to enjoy opera. I often told opera stories to my workmates on the shift," wrote Wang Xiuzhen in this open letter, "because of my frequent visit to the theatre, in the past six months I only reached production targets once. Here I am writing this letter to acknowledge my mistake for my act of breaking production discipline."[467] Between April and June 1953, *Tianjin Daily* published many letters from ordinary workers or cadres from various factories or governmental departments in Tianjin expressing their views on Wang Xiuzhen's case. In an article entitled "Adopt a Correct Attitude toward Recreational Activities," an official named Wang Mian from the Department of Culture and Education of the Tianjin Federation of Trade Union writes:

> The purpose of doing recreational activities is to help workers recover from fatigue, enliven workers' lives, and activate workers' enthusiasm for working. What's wrong with having fun when workers' living standard has improved after liberation? But having fun must be based on the principle of being proper, restrained, and beneficial. In other words, we have to work as if we are battling. And then through proper recreational activities, we can have a "cultural-style rest" (*wenhua shi de xiuxi* 文化式的休息). If we play too much but leave work aside, we are doing something wrong.[468]

The "cultural-style rest" mentioned by Wang Mian was a common expression of cultural rest (*wenhua xiuxi* 文化休息). As Shi Yifan describes, cultural rest originated

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[467] Wang Xiuzhen 王秀珍, "Wo weishenme jingchang weifan ladong jilü" 我为什么经常违反劳动纪律 [Why did I often violate labour discipline?], in *Gonggu women de laodong jilü: Wang Xiuzhen sixiang taolun xuanji* 巩固我们的劳动纪律: 王秀珍思想讨论选辑 [Strengthening our labour discipline: A selection of discussions on Wang Xiuzhen's thoughts], ed. Tianjin shi zong gonghui wenjiao bu 天津市总工会文教部 (Tianjin: Tianjin tongsu chubanshe, 1953), 1.

[468] Wang Mian 王勉, Zhang Hongchun 张洪春, and Dong Baozhen 董宝珍, "Zhengque duidai wenyu huodong" 应该正确对待文娱活动 [We should adopt a correct attitude toward recreational activities], in *Gonggu women de laodong jilü,* 33–34.

from "the Soviet term for state-sponsored leisure activities" organized in various cultural and leisure facilities such as parks, clubs, cinemas, dance halls, libraries, and leisure parks, as a way to offer "the labouring masses relaxation and education at the same time."[469] It was another original contribution of Soviet socialism and had a similar function to the annual vacation system. In the process of the CCP's introduction and implementation of cultural rest in the 1950s, they emphasized the principle that leisure activities should be collectively organized.[470] Thus, in many official publications focusing on workers' lifestyle in the 1950s, one can find many narratives sharing a similar view: workers should engage in recreational activities as permitted by the party in an organized and restrained manner in officially permitted locations, such as workers' clubs and cultural palaces.[471] Only by following these principles the party's materials insisted could leisure activities play their roles in eliminating workers' fatigue.

In 1954, the Ministry of Labour, ACFTU, and the State Physical Culture and Sports Commission (SPCSC) jointly launched the largest and most wide-ranging project with an explicit goal of battling fatigue since 1949: the Workers' Sports Movement. Workers' sports (*zhigong tiyu* 职工体育), according to Lu Xiaoning, occupied a particularly important position in the National Physical Culture Movement (*xin tiyu yundong* 新体育运动). It literally refers to "physical exercises and sports targeted at all employees at work units."[472] At the opening ceremony of the first workers' sports meeting in 1954, Lai Ruoyu, Chairman of the ACTFU, stated that workers' sports were

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[469] Yifan Shi, "Leisure, Lifestyle, and Youth Subcultures in China, 1949–1987" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2021), 35.

[470] Shi, "Leisure, Lifestyle, and Youth Subcultures in China, 1949–1987," 36.

[471] For example, see Chen Dong 陈东, "Wenyu huodong shi wei le shenme" 文娱活动是为了什么 [What is the purpose of doing recreational activities?], in *Youyi de mianli: Zhongguo qingnian bao "siixiang erritan" xuanji* 友谊的勉励: 中国青年报 "思想二日谈" 选集 [The encouragement of friendship: Selection from the column "Two-day Reflection" of the *China Youth Daily*] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1955), 54–55.

[472] The term "*xin tiyu*" 新体育 [The new physical culture movement] refers to a national movement initiated by the CCP in 1950 to advocate popular physical culture, education, and sports. It focused on improving people's material and culture lives, as well as developing economic development. As Lu Xiaoning argues: "Together they spelled out the promise of tiyu's role in moulding the all-around individual for socialist society and distinguished the physical culture in new China from its counterpart in the Republic era, the allegedly old, target-oriented elite sports and physical culture. Xiaoning Lu, *Moulding the Socialist Subject: Cinema and Chinese Modernity (1949–1966)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 36–37; 41.

an integral part of the party's labour protection policy and were of great benefit in solving the problem of workers' fatigue.[473] Based on a 1955 guideline issued by ACFTU, organizing workers to participate in regular physical exercises (especially radio callisthenics), developing track and field sports and ball games, organizing sports teams and exercise groups, and establishing grassroots-level sports clubs in industrial enterprises were the major tasks of workers' sports.[474] According to Liu Zijiu (1901–1988), then vice director of the Minister of Labour, in sixteen cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang and the railroad system, the number of workers who regularly participated in physical exercises was 1169,554 as of 1955. Among them, 7,456,677 workers regularly participated in radio callisthenics.[475] As illustrated by other 1955 statistics from SPCSC, by 1955 there had been more than 200,000 worker participants in radio callisthenics in a total of 471 factories and mines in Shanghai and Beijing. In nine cities, 2,661 workers' ball-game teams (76,534 workers), including 1,420 volleyball teams and 224 soccer teams, had been organized. In Benxi Iron Sulfide Plant, after the promotion of physical exercises, the number of workers suffering from bronchitis, neurasthenia, and gastroenteritis decreased from 109 in January to 90 in March, then to 48 in April, and then to 41 in May. According to a meeting report by the National Sports

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[473] As Mao Qihua, the vice minister of the Ministry of Labour, said at the first national workers' sports work conference in 1954: "In the past, Chairman Mao instructed us that we ought to pay attention to workers' safety and health while increasing production and practicing economy. The department of labour protection of the Ministry of labour formulated a principle of safe production. To achieve this goal [of safe production], our country allocated a large sum of money for improving labour conditions. Improving labour conditions is necessary, but it is not enough. It is useful to promote physical exercises [among workers]. Doing physical labour can only exercise partially. Only by doing physical exercises can workers' bodies fully be exercised. Fatigue after doing physical work can be recovered by rest but doing physical exercises can accelerate the recovery." He also said on the same occasion: "There were workers' soccer teams during the KMT era. But most of the players were hired to play. For many workers in the past, they smoked opium when they felt tired. A few of them did exercises but solely for the championship. Today, our workers take part in exercises for better performance in work, improving health level and strengthening the unity of the working class. Tiwei 体委, "Mao Qihua tongzhi zai quanguo diyi ci zhigong tigong hui shang de jianghua" 毛齐华同志在全国第一次职工体工会上的讲话 [Comrade Mao Qihua's speech at the First National Workers' Sports Work Conference], November 1954, TMA, x0171-y-000014-005.

[474] Xiaoning Lu, *Moulding the Socialist Subject,* 41.

[475] Liu Zijiu 刘子久, "Jiaqiang zhigong tiyu de lingdao, zengjin zhigong de jiankang" 加强职工体育的领导，增进职工的健康 [Strengthening the leadership of workers' sports, improving the health of workers], in *Jiji kaizhan zhigong tiyu huodong* 积极开展职工体育活动 [Active promoting workers' sports] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1955), 15–16.

Committee, many workers said: "We often felt drained in the past. But after doing physical exercises, we now feel lively and energized at work."[476]

Among all the events listed in workers' sports, ball games remained the most popular one.[477] Many energetic workers loved to play ball games, but not for relieving their fatigue. For example, some workers from the Changsha Jianxiang often played basketball up to the last minute before they started work. As a result, they were too out of breath to finish their tasks.[478] In the Lüda Vehicle Factory, out of more than six hundred workers who regularly participated in sports, 120 workers hogged the basketball court and often scuffled with each other. Similar things took place in Shenyang. On the basketball court of the Shenyang Textile Machinery Factory, it was common to see disputes between workers playing ball games. In some serious cases, some workers were beaten to a pulp.[479] All these behaviours, from the official perspective, went against the original purpose of developing workers' sports.

Compared to the workers obsessed with ball games, factory leaders who were indifferent to developing workers' sports and workers who flinched from doing exercises made China's labour officials scratch their heads even more. "The development of workers' sports faced some difficulties," stated Liu Zijiu in 1955, "Some enterprise leaders, as well as workers, believed that doing daily jobs itself is equal to doing physical exercises and that doing physical exercises will only make them more exhausted. Some people were also convinced that people do physical exercises just for fun." What Liu stressed was that many enterprise leaders had an incorrect understanding of the significance of developing workers' sports. In reality, however, many workers stayed

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[476] Tiwei 体委, "Di yici zhigong tiyu gongzuo huiyi de huibao" 第一次职工体育工作会议的汇报 [Report on the First Workers' Sports Work Conference], 1955, TMA, x0171-y-000014-013.

[477] Xiong Xiaozheng 熊晓正, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo tiyu shi: 1949–1998* 中华人民共和国体育史: 1949–1998 [The history of sports in the PRC: 1949–1998], vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1999), 627.

[478] Zhongyang tiwei qunzhong tiyu zhidao si 中央体委群众体育指导司, "Changkuang tiyu gongzuo zonghe cankao" 厂矿体育工作综合参考 [Comprehensive reference for sports work in factories and mines], October 27, 1954, TMA, x0171-y-000014-010.

[479] Zhongyang tiwei qunzhong tiyu zhidao si, "Changkuang tiyu gongzuo zonghe cankao," October 27, 1954, TMA, x0171-y-000014-010.

away from such organized physical activities, even though they could offer various benefits. In 1957, when the party encouraged "airing views" (*daming defang* 大鸣大放), as Joel Andreas argues, to strengthen the party by "subjecting it to open criticism from below," Zhang Dingguo, a worker from the Nanjing Yongli Factory, published a satirical limerick entitled "The Light in the Court" in *New Sports*.[480] The gist of this doggerel was to satirize the factory leaders' wasteful investment in sports facilities, but it also shows that doing physical exercise, such as playing basketball, was not popular among workers in some factories:

> The basketball stadium in our factory is beautiful!
> The basketball hoop is painted brightly, and there are many beautiful stands around.
> The sun has just set, and the court is bright.
> The court is surrounded by glowing lights, and the light is as bright as sunlight.
> You may think that the factory team is training, or a famous team is visiting us from afar.
> You are completely wrong. There is no one in the stands.
> There are only four or five people in the stadium, running back and forth to grab the ball.
> It is late at night and people are already dreaming.
> The twelve large light bulbs are still warming the empty stadium.[481]

Many workers disliked doing radio callisthenics as well. In many articles introducing the benefits of doing callisthenics, China labour officials or medical experts always listed many cases of elderly workers who rejuvenated themselves by doing radio callisthenics.[482] Nevertheless, one detail should not be overlooked: these elderly workers accepted doing exercises only after repeated persuasion by their leaders. For example, Cao Zhicheng, an elderly worker at the Tianjin Textile Machinery Factory, suffered from rheumatoid arthritis in his left arm and was initially resistant to doing radio callisthenics.

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[480] Joel Andreas, *Disenfranchised: The Rise and Fall of Industrial Citizenship in China*, 49.

[481] Zhang Dingguo 张定国, "Qiuchang de dengguang" 球场的灯光 [Lamplight in the stadium], *Xin tiyu* 新体育, no. 7 (April 6, 1957): 21.

[482] 程明升 Cheng Mingsheng, "Zuocao neng xiaochu pilao" 做操能消除疲劳 [Doing callisthenics can eliminate fatigue], *Xin tiyu*, no. 9 (May 6, 1957): 20.

It was only after repeated persuasion by the factory leaders and union cadres that Cao "grudgingly accepted" doing radio callisthenics.[483]

Female workers also had their unique excuses for not doing exercises. In July 1954, the Sports Committee introduced the second set of radio callisthenics. Many moves of this radio callisthenics designed with the assistance of Soviet experts—bending-over, kicking legs, and squatting—made many female workers particularly bashful. When doing the radio callisthenics, these female workers often blushed with shame, murmured, and laughed. To avoid doing the callisthenics, some workers feigned that they were sick in bed, and some others said they had to leave to breastfeed their children.[484]

The causes of workers' refusal to do exercises went far beyond modesty. In 1956, a Shanghai worker named Wei Juntao wrote a satirical crosstalk dialogue piece entitled "Work-break Callisthenics." This dialogue expressed that workers' reluctance to participate in physical exercises was not only common in factories but also for a variety of reasons (*A*= *dougende* 逗哏的 [Funny Man]; *B*= *penggende* 捧哏的 [Straight Man]):

> *A*: These patients were usually all right. But when they heard the broadcast music of the radio callisthenics, they instinctively...
> *B*: They instinctively want to do exercise.
> *A*: How could it be? When they heard the music, they all suddenly felt sick.
> *B*: This is so strange! There are no healthy people in your work unit. So, aren't there any young workers?
> *A*: How come there are no young workers? There were many, but none of them were doing callisthenics.
> *B*: Did they have any excuses?
> *A*: Of course, they do. They said: "*Hai*! The moves of the exercise are under our belts. It doesn't make a difference without doing it. It is not as interesting as playing poker and playing the *huqin.*
> *B*: This should not happen!
> *A*: This indeed happened! Can you tell me what to do?
> *B*: So, let old workers do it!

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[483] Jiang Guangnai 蒋光鼐, "Fadong zhigong qunzhong zijue di canyu tiyu yundong" 发动职工群众自觉地参与体育运动 [Mobilize workers to participate in sports on their own initiative], in *Jiji kaizhan zhigong tiyu yundong* 积极开展职工体育运动 [To actively develop workers' sports] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1955), 31–32.

[484] Chen Yu 陈煜, *Zhongguo shenghuo jiyi: jianguo 65 zhounian minsheng wangshi* 中国生活记忆: 建国65周年民生往事 [Memories of lives in China: people's livelihood in the past 65 years] (Beijing: Qing gongye chubanshe, 2014), 37.

A: Old workers? They did not do it even more.
B: Are they old?
A: They said they had crispy bones. Their bones would break [if doing exercise].
B: Radio callisthenics are not martial arts.
A: You are right. But they had their excuse: "This is 'lads' games. We are codgers, why should we follow that "one-two-three-four, two-two-three-four?"
B: This doesn't make sense!
A: Anyway, they always had their excuses. For example, the fat ones did not do callisthenics as well.
B: Were they afraid to become thinner?
A: They were afraid they were too fat to do the "kicking" move and the "bend-over" move.
B: What about those who are skinny?
A: They did not do either.
B: Were they afraid that the wind would blow them over?
A: No. They were afraid that their bodies would appear too ugly.
B: What's so "ugly" about this?
A: They said their bodies looked like "pork ribs" when their clothes were off.
B: They don't necessarily need to take off their clothes, didn't they?
A: They always had an excuse.[485]

In the rest of this *xiangsheng* piece, *A* lists many other excuses given by workers for not doing the callisthenics: spring fever, summer hot, winter cold, and their refusal to wear the heavy cotton-padded overcoat in winter. Given the fact that the article was published in *New Sports*, the most influential sports journal in China after 1949, it could be safe to say that such stories were common experiences among many of China's industrial labourers and even some factory leaders in the 1950s (even until now).[486] In short, as the author noted, workers always had their own reasons for refusing to do exercises. And many of them still embarked on their own way to regain their energy during their rest time. According to a 1954 report by SPCSC, in the Guangzhou Nanyang Tobacco Factory, workers always "stuff themselves with food" every Saturday.[487] Workers in the Changsha machine tool factory played poker all night long. And many workers, especially miners, still relied on smoking and drinking to eliminate

[485] Wei Juntao 韦俊涛, "Gongjian cao" 工间操 [Work-break radio callisthenics], *Xin tiyu*, no. 23 (December 6, 1956): 32–33. Many thanks to Tao Le for sharing these important sources with me.

[486] Lu Xiaoning, "Promote Physical Culture and Sport, Improve the People's Constitution," in *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution*, ed. Wang Ban (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 179.

[487] Zhongyang tiwei qunzhong tiyu zhidao si, "Changkuang tiyu gongzuo zonghe cankao," October 27, 1954, TMA, x0171-y-000014-010.

exhaustion.[488] Such behaviours, as I will show in the next section, grew more widespread after the party launched the nationwide movement to balance rest and work.

"To Strike a Proper Balance between Work and Rest"

On October 31, 1958, Mao Zedong's special train stopped at Xinxiang Railway Station in Henan Province. In the night, ten party cadres from the Xinxiang Local Committee boarded Mao's train office to report to Mao. When hearing from Geng Qichang, secretary of the Xinxiang local party committee, that the local masses were zealous in producing steel, Mao Zedong gave the following passage to the participants as a response:

> Comrade, this won't do! Working around the clock will kill people. We must practice *laoyi jiehe* [strike a balance between work and rest.] You are currently in a state of frenzy. How can you not sleep? It is a matter of great importance to let people sleep. You must do some research on people's sleep. For example, when the task is urgent, should the crowd be allowed to sleep for half an hour on the spot? Adults need eight-hour sleep per day. If they only get seven hours of sleep, they will not complete the tasks. When tasks are not urgent, [we must] allow them to sleep seven hours, plus an hour on-the-spot sleep. This is a task and a "mandatory order." Eating and sleeping are two important issues. Only by balancing work and rest can work efficiency be enhanced. I put it in this way. Do you agree or not?[489]

Laoyi jiehe (to strike a balance between work and rest), a four-character phrase that is all too familiar today, was Mao's semi-original contribution to Chinese vocabulary—the Chinese characters *lao* 劳 and *yi* 逸 came from several ancient allusions indicating a moral evaluation of idleness and labour in ancient China and *jiehe* [to strike a proper balance] came from Mao himself. In 1958, Mao mentioned this phrase on several

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[488] "Some young workers have taken up the habit of smoking and drinking, which are pernicious habits. Some comrades do not have a clear understanding about this, saying that smoking is good for restoring strength and relieving fatigue. Some comrades also say that drinking can refresh themselves and keep them warm. This is utterly groundless." See Zhong Ping 钟平, *Tantan wenming jiankang de shenghuo* 谈谈文明健康的生活 [Talk about civilized and healthy lifestyle] (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1958), 63–66.

[489] Huang Yukang 黄禹康, "Weiren diaoyan liu fengfan: Mao Zedong zai zhuanlie shang zhaokai Yubei diqu fuzeren zuotan hui" 伟人调研留风范: 毛泽东在专列上召开豫北地区负责人座谈会 [The great man's demeanor during his field investigation: Mao Zedong held a forum for the head of the northern Henan on a special train], February 5, 2013, http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n/2013/0205/c85037-20441106-2.html.

occasions. At the Hankou Conference in April 1958, Mao likened the upcoming Great Leap to a long-term campaign consisting of many independent battles and stressed that the key to winning a campaign was "to give people a few days of rest after finishing each battle."[490] In the afternoon of November 14, when Mao arrived in Xiaogan and heard that there were female labourers who had worked at night and felt very exhausted during the day, Mao once again emphasized the necessity of practicing *laoyi jiehe*.[491]

Even though China's medical experts and labour officials had repeatedly advocated since the early 1950s that factory leaders should afford workers at least eight hours of sleep a day, it was not until Mao Zedong proposed this four-character principle in 1958 that rest became a fundamental issue in the ruling party's labour protection policy. During the period of Mao's rectifying "left" between 1958 and July 1959, there was a temporary boom in the voice calling for practicing *laoyi jiehe*.[492] Then after the Great Leap mania began to cool down in the first half of 1960, Mao's proposal dominated the state's agenda. On May 15, 1960, the CCP Central Committee issued the directive "To Continue the Great Leap, We Have to Strike a Proper Balance between Work and Rest," requiring that "all the factories, mines, stores, schools, administrative institutions, educational and service facilities must practice an 'eight-hour sleep and four-hour rest' regulation." Following this directive, articles explaining the necessity of *laoyi jiehe*

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[490] *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui*, vol. 4, 64.

[491] Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi 中共中央文献研究室, "'Mao Zedong nianpu (1949—1976)' xuanzai zhisan: di yi ci Zhengzhou huiyi zhi Lushan huiyi qianqi jiu 'zuo' de nuli"《毛泽东年谱(1949–1976)》选载之三: 第一次郑州会议至庐山会议前期 纠"左"的努力 [*Mao Zedong's Chronicle (1949-1976):* The efforts to rectify the 'left' during the period between the first Zhengzhou conference and the early stage of the Lushan Conference], *Zhongguo gongchandang xinwen wang* 中国共产党新闻网, April 12, 2013, http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n/2013/0412/c85037-21110840-2.html.

[492] On December 10, 1958, *People's Daily* published an article entitled "Combining Working Hard and Working Ingeniously," criticizing some comrades for their incorrect understanding that "completing tasks and rest were mutually contradictory." In January 1959, an editorial entitled "The Harder the Battle Is, the More We Must Balance Work and Rest" appeared in *Labour*, the mouthpiece of the Ministry of Labour, reiterating the significance of combining work and rest in promoting the Great Leap. In April 1959, the Tianjin People's Publishing House published a collection of articles written by twenty-one senior party cadres, such as Xie Juezai and Jiang Tao, between late 1958 and early 1959. Being clearly critical about the Great Leap Forward, some of the articles focused on explaining the necessity of practicing *laoyi jiehe.* Tianjin renmin chubanshe 天津人民出版社, ed., *Leng yu re: sixiang zatan* 冷与热: 思想杂谈 [Cold and hot: A miscellany of ideas] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1959); Shu Ze 树则, "Laodong yu xiuxi" 劳动与休息 [Work and rest], *Hongqi* 红旗 15 (January 1959): 36–37; *RMRB*, December 10, 1958, 2.

sprang up in various official mouthpieces, such as *Guangming Daily*, *Labour*, and *Chinese Workers*. The structure, arguments, and narrative styles of these articles were very similar. Drawing on Mao's concept of "Unity of Opposites," the authors of these articles were striving in describing *laoyi jiehe* as a scientific decision that had a great effect on increasing productivity, and skillfully portrayed the policy as an embodiment of the party's care for the masses.[493]

According to many recollections of historical witnesses, the purpose of implementing *laoyi jiehe* was not as pleasant as the party claimed. Rather, it was nothing but a remedial measure for the excessive fatigue imposed on people from all walks of life during the Great Leap Forward and the last resort in response to the disastrous aftermath of the Great Leap Famine. In the industrial sphere, *laoyi jiehe* became the new focus of the party's labour protection efforts to combat industrial fatigue.[494] In the first several years of the 1960s, there were various measures adopted by many factory leaders to prevent workers from spending too much time on trivial affairs, such as cutting the number of meetings, optimizing PPE distribution procedures, delivering hot meals directly to the workplace, and to curtail workers' commute by accommodating workers in dormitories close to the workplace.[495]

Alongside these measures mentioned above, what remained the priorities for enterprise leaders to practice *laoyi jiehe* were to enable workers to get eight hours of sleep and regulate workers' activities in their free time. Many factories spared no efforts in removing all the factors that might disturb workers' eight hours of sleep. Some factory unions began to organize workers' families to watch over their crying children, as some

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[493] For example, See Fang Wei 方维, "Lüetan laoyi jiehe" 略谈劳逸结合 [A brief discussion on the principle of balancing work and rest], Guangming ribao 光明日报 [Guangming daily], June 27, 1960, 2; Li Fengshan 李峰山, "Lun laoyi jiehe" 论劳逸结合 [A discussion on the principle of balancing work and rest], *Guangming ribao*, August 8, 1960, 2.

[494] "Laodong bu dangzu, quanguo zonggonghui dangzu guanyu laodong baohu gongzuo de baogao" 劳动部党组全国总工会党组关于劳动保护工作的报告 [The party member groups of the Ministry of Labour and the ACFTU's report on labour protection work], *Beijing gongzuo* 北京工作 345 (June 25, 1960): 5.

[495] "Laoyi jiehe banfa duo, shengchan shenghuo qixiang xin" 劳逸结合办法多, 生产生活气象新 [There are many ways to balance work and rest, and the production life has a new atmosphere], *Laodong*, no. 3 (March 1961): 18–22.

of them had done in the 1950s.[496] In the CCP's First Tractor Factory, the radio station ceased to broadcast in the dormitory area. Inside the dormitories, yelling, singing, and dancing were strictly prohibited.[497] Staggered rest schedules of workers on different shifts became the most common measure to avoid workers disturbing each other. As a 1961 newspaper article shows, after the Shanghai Huatong Switch Factory introduced a new schedule that staggered the rest time of night shift workers and day shift workers, many workers said delightfully: "Now we can enjoy an eight-hour sleep without any disturbance."[498] In the meantime, many factory unions reaffirmed that workers should do some light recreational activities during their free time, such as playing chess, reading, and singing. In a few factories, workers were allowed to do some physical activities like playing basketball.

The party's initiative to support workers' rest in the 1960s was not indicative of its abdication from the role of a robust controller over workers' recreational lives that had developed since the 1950s. As Wang Shaoguang argues, after the implementation of *laoyi jiehe*, "the state had no intention of giving up its control over time."[499] Shi Yifan's recent study attests to this argument: "Through the 'balancing work and rest' policy, dormitories became a space in which leaders in schools and factories could intervene when they wished to do so."[500] "Is affording workers enough rest equal to the balance between work and rest? Not really," said Kong Sang in a 1961 *People's Daily* editorial: "Workers must not only rest and recover from fatigue, but also spend their free time learning new skills and acquiring knowledge."[501] As this statement indicates, whether it was rest or recreational activities, they still had to proceed within the framework set by the party. A

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[496] *XMWB*, June 15, 1965, 4

[497] Zhonggong diyi tuolaji chang weiyuanhui 中共第一拖拉机厂委员会, "Zhonggong diyi tuolaji zhizao chang laoyi jiehe fangan" 中共第一拖拉机制造厂劳逸结合方案 [Plan for practicing "striking a balance between work and rest" in the CCP's First Tractor Manufacturing Plant], *Tuolaji changbao* 拖拉机厂报, November 11, 1960, http://221.13.137.120:8091/cn/article/view.html?id=7358.

[498] *Shanghai qingnian bao* 上海青年报 [The Shanghai youth newspaper], July 29, 1961, 2.

[499] Wang Shaoguang, "The Politics of Private Time: Changing Leisure Patterns in Urban China," in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China*, ed. Deborah Davis (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Cambridge University Press, 1995), 153.

[500] Shi, "Leisure, Lifestyle, and Youth Subcultures in China, 1949–1987," 156.

[501] *RMRB*, January 19, 1961, 3.

1961 news article featuring young workers at the Shanghai Machine Tool Factory presented how the party's ideal *laoyi jiehe* was practiced:

> In the early morning, the sun was rising and calling the young workers in the dormitory to wake up. Wang Zhenxuan was the earliest riser and was always the first to go to the tree-lined road to play Taijiquan. "To keep up with the leap forward in production, we need to be in good health," said Wang.
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> …
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> While Wang Zhenxuan was playing taijiquan by himself, the rest of the young workers in the dormitory were running to the playground close to the neighbouring dormitory for physical exercises. Yang Longbao, a young clamp worker, was holding his hands on parallel bars and asked the controller Xie Fanxu for advice: "How do you perform that side-steering movement?" After giving a few instructions, Xie Fanxiu quickly took the basketball and went to play with Tang Zhiyin, Xu Lixi and Ren Rongsheng. They left the sports ground in high spirits. Everyone was exercising in their favourite sports: climbing ropes, playing volleyball, lifting weights
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> …
>
> During the day, the dormitory was quiet. The quiet means that the residents of the dormitory were fighting feverishly on their positions. This also means that when they returned from work, another joyful spare time would come
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> …
>
> Darkness settled in. The court of the technical school next to the dormitory was an expanse of whiteness. The exciting basketball game attracted some of the young workers in the dormitory. In the dormitory, lively activities were going on: reading books, singing, writing letters… Under the lamp, a chessboard was set up on a small table. Not only Xie Fanxiu and Xu Lixi were engaged in a battle of wits, but other workers watching the game next to them were also helping them with their ideas and constantly making joyful noises……It was time to turn off the lights. Before going to bed, some young workers were practicing push-ups in front of their beds. After a day of work, the pleasant recreational activities and physical activities were enough to offer them a good sleep for a new battle in production tomorrow.[502]

In addition to emphasizing that activities such as physical exercises, chess and reading were officially permitted as helpful in relieving fatigue, the description in this coverage conveyed a message that workers must adhere to a strict schedule that specified

[502] *XMWB*, December 18, 1960, 3

the time to sleep and the time to relax. Put simply, workers ought to sleep during the officially prescribed period when they were in bed, not when they truly felt tired. Only in this way could workers regain their energy to win the "new battle" in production.

This was how *laoyi jiehe* proceeded on paper. How did workers practice *laoyi jiehe* in reality? In 1961, a writer with the pseudonym Yi Huo published an article in the *Xinmin Evening News*, describing the changes in everyday lives in Shanghai that had taken place since the beginning of 1961:

> Recently, the streets have been crowded. It is said that there are a lot of people strolling the streets. Now, our lives are stable. Work and rest are balanced. The spring scenery is tempting. Workers strolling the streets in their leisure time is not something that can be criticized. Strolling the streets while going on a sightseeing tour around the city, purchasing some daily necessities, breathing fresh air, and stretching bodies, are nice activities that would broaden people's knowledge and improve both body and mental health. Having multi-benefits, this (strolling the street) amounts to a hygienic lifestyle. Nevertheless, people still need to know "how far to go." If people indulge themselves in strolling the street, it would not be worthwhile…
>
> There are many ways to combine work and rest. Some people would set their minds on spending their leisure time while some people would just kill time aimlessly…People with aspirations would not arrange their time like this. Their whereabouts are libraries, cultural palaces, stadiums, etc. Many of them set their minds on organizing, creating, and arranging various useful and colourful activities, such as reading, drawing, studying current affairs, studying science and technology intensively, talking, discussing, and so on…[503]

As demonstrated by this newspaper account, people were not spending their free time on what the party deemed meaningful and beneficial activities. This was especially true for workers. "The implementation of *laoyi jiehe* caused many new problems in many factories in Beijing," as a 1961 report by the Beijing Municipal Committee stated, "we advocated *laoyi jiehe* to keep workers from being overly fatigued. But such things have happened: many workers were strolling the street and dining in restaurants after work. They queued up in whatever lines they saw and snapped up whatever they could afford.

[503] *XMWB*, April 2, 1961, 1

Some workers waited in line all night long without sleeping. Wangfujing Avenue and Qianmen Avenue were often crowded.

Similar things took place in Tianjin. According to a statistic from *Tianjin Daily*, among all workers in the Tianjin Printing and Dyeing factory, 15.2 percent were hanging around after work, 13.1 percent were shopping around, 17.1 percent were busy with household chores, and more than 40 percent were just chatting idly. In the Tianjin Cotton Spinning Factory, more than 30 out of 50 workers in a working group often visited the theatre and spent more than three hours there. Many workers often spent their leisure time chewing the fat. As a 1962 internal report described: "In the Tianjin No. 4 Cotton Spinning Factory, many male workers were performing like storytellers. They each performed a piece, such as 'Three Knights and Three Swordsmen' (*san xia jian* 三侠剑) and 'Dou Er Dun' (*dou er dun* 窦尔敦)." According to the same report, in one dormitory of the First Internal Combustion Engine Factory in Hexi District, Tianjin, there were sixteen workers. As soon as they got off work, they went to restaurants or purchased daily goods instead of studying or having rest.[504]

Workers in many factories in Shannxi spent their rest hours in the same way as workers in Tianjin and Beijing. "A few work units did well [in combining work and rest]. Workers had more leisure time. But they did not spend their leisure time learning," as reported by the party group of the general union of Shannxi Province on December 16, 1960, "some workers hung around or visited the theatre until midnight. Some others went on a shopping spree or indulged in reading novels all night long."[505] On January 2, 1961, Wang Juli, a worker at the Xi'an High-Pressure Solenoid Valve Factory, took his apprentices to watch a movie while he was at work. When the supervisor asked him

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[504] The title of the story mentioned in the *NBCK* article was originally *Hou Er Dun* (Hou er dun 厚二敦). It was most likely a typo. *NBCK*, January 4, 1961, 3158, 11–12.

[505] Zhonggong Shannxi shengwei 中共陕西省委, "Shannxi shengwei pizhuan gonghui dangzu guanyu dangqian gongkuang qiye laoyi jiehe qingkuang de baogao" 陕西省委批转工会党组关于当前工矿企业劳逸结合情况的报告 [Directive by the Shaanxi Provincial Committee on approving the report of the party group of trade unions on the current situation of practicing balancing work and rest in industrial and mining enterprises], in *Zhonggong Shannxi sheng wenjian xuanbian, 1950–1961 (jingji jianshe pian)* 中共陕西省委文件选编 (经济建设篇) [Selected documents of the CCP Shaanxi Provincial Committee (The collection of economic construction)], ed. Shannxi sheng dangan guan 陕西省档案馆, (2002), 430.

where they were going, Wang answered: "Didn't you tell me to balance work and rest?'[506] Unlike these workers, some workers chose to stay on their beds all day long, saying: "*laoyi jiehe* and sleeping are the same thing, aren't they?"[507]

Nor would workers spend the precious night hours on their beds. In 1962, a worker sent a letter to *Workers' Daily*, complaining about his experiences of being deprived of sleep at night:

> Our shift ends at midnight. To prevent day workers and night workers from disturbing each other, the factory [administrator] put all the night workers on the first floor. This intent was good. However, a few comrades next door were reluctant to go to the bed at night. They were always in and out, laughing, frolicking, and even singing endlessly. They made me sleepless! I was trying to reason with them but they said they had the freedom to plan their night hours. Sleep deprivation! We feel listless in the daytime! We were unable to concentrate on work! This is annoying.[508]

The noise that caused some workers who were desperate to sleep to have trouble sleeping did not come from those workers who spent night hours reading novels, but

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[506] *NBCK*, February 10, 1961, 3175, 4–5. It would be somewhat arbitrary to claim that all workers' behaviours that run counter to what the party envisaged in *laoyi jiehe* were their own way to battle fatigue. After Chen Yun issued the policy of "recovering banknotes from circulation" (*huilong huobi* 回笼货币), there was an unlimited supply of high-price food in China's major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin. In this context, workers or citizens frequented restaurants during their free time in the early 1960s for many reasons. Some citizens visited restaurants for satisfying a food craving because some of them had not tasted some certain type of dishes (such as western cuisine in Shanghai) for a long time. Some other workers' food consumption behaviours in the early 1960s attributed to their uncertainty about the future. They were not sure if they were able to spend money when another political movement arrived sometime in the future. For example, as stated in the 1961 report mentioned above, there was a popular saying among Tianjin workers: "It is useless to keep money. It is highly necessary to spending money on food and drinks." Thus, they did not care about how much they spent on food and other commodities. For example, as mentioned in this report, two workers named Zhang Jianhua and Zhang Baoqing from the Tianjin First Internal Combustion Engine Factory often treated each other. The first time Zhang Jianhua invited Zhang Baoqing to a dinner that cost fifteen yuan. Zhang Baoqing returned the invitation and spent twenty yuan. Then Zhang Baoqing spent eighty yuan on a coat and Zhang Jianhua spend ninety yuan on a coat. These were really huge expenses in the early 1960s. Such behaviours are currently known as "Revenge Spending," a term introduced by sociologists and economists to characterize "the incremental increase in consumer spending after an unprecedented adverse economic event. Revenge spending is the "urge to spend money to make up for lost time. *NBCK*, January 4, 1961, 3158, 11–12; Corporate Finance Institute Team, "What Is Revenge Spending?" CFI, accessed April 24, 2022, https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/economics/revenge-spending/

[507] Zhonggong Shannxi shengwei, "Shannxi shengwei pizhuan gonghui dangzu guanyu dangqian gongkuang qiye laoyi jiehe qingkuang de baogao," 430.

[508] *GRRB*, July 14, 1962, 4.

mostly from those night owls lost in playing poker. From around 1964 onwards, playing poker came to fashion in urban and rural areas among workers, staff, and cadres. The night was usually the best time for poker fiends to enjoy playing poker.[509] These workers who did not like to sleep but were immersed in the card game often made loud noises at the height of their enthusiasm, bringing other workers unbearable disturbance. A person named Ge Wei sent a letter to the *Xinmin Evening News* in 1965, saying: "Because of the hot weather, I slept very late and had trouble falling asleep. When I woke up, I could hear the noise from my neighbours who were still playing poker on the patio with three or four friends. Since the arrival of summer, their enthusiasm for playing poker has grown, with the ending time gradually extending from 11 p.m. to midnight. They said they could not fall asleep anyway, so they might as well play poker. They get so excited playing they forget to go to bed."[510]

We know all the stories of how workers practice *laoyi jiehe* from official reports or newspaper articles. This means that during the years when *laoyi jiehe* remained the most important issue on the state's agenda in the early 1960s, the party and China's labour authorities never abandoned their efforts to steer workers' way to take rest into the track set by themselves. As a writer named Shi Ling wrote in a 1964 *Yangcheng Evening*

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[509] Some evidence suggests that playing poker became the most common recreational activity for workers, employees, citizens, and officials to kill time in the 1960s. The poker freaks mentioned in the following examples might not necessarily be workers, but by reading these cases I assume that similar situations were supposed to be common in workers' dormitories. In the evening of early January 1965, Gu Zhongci, a cadre of the Propaganda Department of Huangpu District, witnessed such an event in Yangjiadu, Zhangjiabang, Pudong District, Shanghai: "In the distance, there was an earthen house with six big characters 'The Command of Aiming High' (争上游指挥部, Aiming High is a type of card games). Yelling was coming from the house. I looked inside and saw six men in their thirties sitting around a square table, cheerfully playing poker. Some of the men had circles painted on their faces. They really looked like the old-style facial makeups for opera." When Gu found the local branch secretary to inquire about the detailed situation, he got this reply: "It is lunch time. You are not seeing too many [card game gatherings]. In the evening or afternoon, there were many more gatherings like this." During the Four Cleanups Campaign, many work team members often played poker when they had nothing else to do. On September 2, 1964, Chen Bosheng and Zhang Xuesong, members of the work team at the Shanghai Yaohua Glass Factory, played poker late into the late night. "The noise of thumping the table-board, yelling, and flinging cards woke up some female workers next door. A female worker came to make a noise complaint. But these two people did not cease playing. They brought their cards into the dormitory and carried on. See Lu Jinhan 路晋汉, "Wei shenme da puke zhemo youjin?" 为什么打扑克这么有劲？ [Why did they play poker with so much vigour?], *Dang de gongzuo*, no. 37 (September 1964): 16; Gu Zhongci 顾忠慈 and Xue Guangyu 薛光裕, "'Xiangqi mi' yu 'puke feng'" "象棋迷" 与 "扑克风" ["Chess buffs" and "poker wind"], *Dang de gongzuo*, no. 5–6 (January 1965): 24.

[510] *XMWB*, July 6, 1965, 3

News article: "We should not think that rest is a simple issue. Some workers did nothing after work but lay idly in bed. Certainly, this is not a good way. Having a 'poker battle' is certainly not a good idea either. The best way is to participate in the recreational and sports activities beneficial to our bodies and mind."[511]

The party's attempt to strike a balance between workers' work and rest failed to last long. In 1964, Mao launched a movement with the banner headline "In industry, learn from Daqing." During this movement, the party lionized Wang Jinxi (1923–1970), an oil worker from the Daqing oilfield in Heilongjiang. Because of his act of plunging into the well to stir the mud with his body regardless of his leg injuries, Wang won the honourable title of "Iron Man" and later became one of the most well-known model workers in the CCP's propaganda. In many official narratives published since the 1960s, Wang has been depicted as a man who was full of energy and strength and could work for more than a few dozen hours at a stretch. The image of the iron man echoed the portrayal of Zhao Zhankui as well as many "tireless workers" fostered in the Great Leap propaganda, signalling that the utopia of a human body without fatigue once again dominated the party's discourse of what was the ideal image of an outstanding industrial worker.

After 1964, in many grassroots-level work units, overtime and endless meetings made a comeback and filled the schedules of a lot of workers. Organized leisure activities designed to help workers get rid of fatigue backfired, gradually becoming compulsory in many factories. For example, according to a 1965 report, many factories in Hebei held meetings six or seven times a week. Each one lasted from one and a half to two hours. Seven of the work units being investigated in Shijiazhuang held meetings six times a week. The duration of each meeting was normally one to two hours at a time, and in some cases, three hours. Many workers had to be staying at their factories for twelve to thirteen hours a day. On Sundays, these factories arranged many collective activities,

[511] *Yangcheng wanbao* 羊城晚报 [Yangcheng evening newspaper], June 21, 1964, 2.

such as visiting museums, swimming, choral singing, or having a clean-up.[512] Similar cases also took place in some factories in Tianjin and Beijing, appearing in the *Internal Reference* in 1964.[513] In the *Party's Work*, the internal publication of the Shanghai Municipal Party Office, there were four columns on overtime opened in the year 1965 alone.[514]

Conclusion

During the period this chapter is focusing on—between the late 1950s and the eve of the Cultural Revolution—organizing workers to engage in what the party considered to be beneficial leisure activities and physical exercises, with the acknowledgment that the solution to overtime fell into a vicious circle in the Mao era, was the only available long-term approach used by China's labour authorities to battle industrial fatigue. Shi Yifan describes the process of the implementation of such an approach as the "politicization, collectivization, and institutionalization of leisure."[515] In terms of the issue of battling industrial fatigue, this approach overall had little success. As most workers' reactions to the party's anti-fatigue policies presented in this chapter, the methods that the party claimed to be effective were not what workers preferred. For workers who were exhausted from working more than twelve hours a day, physical exercise could only exacerbate their fatigue. For those energetic young workers, it was difficult to keep them in bed for the night. In other words, the party assumed a schedule of when workers should be subject to fatigue and when they should recover from it. Workers' perception, however, by no means adhered to the prescribed schedule. As Jacques Rancière depicts in *The Night of Labour*, the activities nineteenth-century French workers conducted at night show that their tastes and ideas were not something simply constructed by those cultural

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[512] "Shijiazhuang Handan yixie qiye zai anquan shengchan he laoyi jiehe fangmian rengyou bushao wenti" 石家庄邯郸一些企业在安全生产和劳逸结合方面仍然有不少问题 [Some enterprises in Shijiazhuang and Handan still had many problems in practicing balancing work and rest and safe production], HPA, August 28, 1965, 932-2-367. Thanks professor Jeremy Brown for sharing these documents with me.

[513] *NBCK*, April 3, 1964 (3607): 1–6.

[514] *Dang de gongzuo*, no. 27 (July 14, 1963): 16; no. 26 (June 28, 1965): 16; no. 28 (July 14, 1965): 1–3; no. 30 (July 27, 1965): 1–7.

[515] Shi, "Leisure, Lifestyle, and Youth Subcultures in China, 1949–1987," 21.

elites such as Victor Hugo.[516] Likewise, far from being what the party envisaged, Chinese workers' choices in balancing rest and work were determined by their own understanding of freedom and life. The fundamental solution to the problem of fatigue remained the reduction of working hours. This solution, however, only became imaginable to party officials in the aftermath of the famine emergency and was a temporary means of crisis relief. When the crisis was averted and the pursuit of profits became the priority, party official would cast away the issue of the eight-hour workday.

It is worth mentioning that there were also many multiple counterreactions to the anti-fatigue policies among workers with different body clocks and habits. Complaints from some workers about their colleagues playing cards all night long disturbing their night dreams in the 1960s imply that the perception of fatigue differed markedly between those night owls and morning persons. Variations in physical capabilities and personalities (for example, those introverted women who were reluctant to do radio callisthenics) among workers of different genders, ages, and even body shapes would also decisively determine their level of engagement in sports.

On February 2, 1966, an article entitled "Be a Good Promoter of Calmness" appeared in *People's Daily*, again calling for China's enterprises to practice combining work and rest in production. This was the last time the party sought to reinforce labour protection policies in the 1960s. Several months later, the advent of the Cultural Revolution brought China's labour protection works to a standstill. In the early 1970s, as I will discuss in the conclusion, the party began to restore the labour protection network. The late 1970s witnessed a trend where labour protection initiatives were moving toward a technology-oriented path. In this context, Chinese labour officials and technicians began to recognize the important role of workers' personalities and physiologies in work safety and health.

[516] Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 13–14.

Conclusion

Only several months after the publication of the *People's Daily* editorial that again emphasized the significance of balancing work and rest in industrial production in 1966, the arrival of the Cultural Revolution brought labour protection works along with many other governmental routines to a standstill. Mao's ardent followers labelled labour protection as a "bourgeois philosophy of survival" (*zichan jieji de huoming zhexue* 资产阶级的活命哲学). At the enterprise level, many rebel workers labelled labour protection regulations re-established and developed after the Great Leap Forward, such as the provision of PPE and safety inspection and supervision, as the "Revisionist Black Goods" (*xiuzi heihuo* 修字黑货) and obstacles to Mao's policies of freeing workers from "controlling, restricting and repressing" (*guan ka ya* 管卡压).[517] Labour officials who introduced and established these policies and regulations were knocked down and some of them were transferred to Cadre Schools after 1968.

The abolishment of labour protection policies created a chaotic situation in workplace safety and health, especially after industrial production began to recover in 1969. On December 11, 1970, the CCP Central Committee issued a directive on strengthening the implementation of safe production. However, like all similar directives issued previously, this directive issued in Mao's name had little effect in reducing accident rates and deteriorating working conditions. By 1972, accident rates in China's industrial enterprises and mines had reached another peak.[518] As a response, the party began to restore the labour protection network.

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[517] Laodong bu lianhe zaofantuan *jing fengyu* zhandou dui 劳动部联合造反团《经风雨》战斗队, "Kan laodong baohu zhong de xiuzi heihuo" 看劳动保护中的修字黑货 [Revisionism and black goods in labour protection work], *Laodong zhanxian*, no. 4 (August 3, 1967): 3; Yi Bing 一兵, "'Jiandu jiancha' shi laodong baohu gongzuo zhong de xiuzheng zhuyi heihuo" "监督检查" 是劳动保护工作中的修正主义黑货 [Supervisions and inspections are the revisionist black goods in labour protection works], *Laodong zhanxian*, no. 8 (September 17, 1967): 1.

[518] In 1970, 1971 and 1972, the national death tolls caused by industrial accidents in enterprises at county level and above were 2.85, 4.24 and 4.31 times higher than in 1965 respectively. Dangdai Zhongguo congshu bianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo de laodong baohu*, 23.

This year, six labour officials and technicians were released from the May Seventh Cadre School of the Ministry of Labour to the Beijing Labour Protection institute and tasked with addressing the rising accident rate in Beijing's factories and mines.[519] According to Yu Song, one of the six cadres mentioned above, during their investigation visits to some affiliated work units of the Beijing Bureau of Industrial Technology and the Shougang Steel Company, they found that many factory leaders needed professional guidance and instructions for improving safety and health conditions. Thus, Yu Song and her colleagues decided to resume the publication of the journal *Labour Protection Bulletin*, which was forced to stop publication in 1966. Through their efforts, the Beijing Municipal Committee approved the application for the re-publication of the *Labour Protection Bulletin*. In October 1972, a brand-new journal entitled *Labour Protection* (*laodong baohu* 劳动保护) appeared on the desks of many factory leaders in Beijing as the successor of the *Labour Protection Bulletin.*[520]

The title of the journal was not the only thing that had changed. Articles published in the new journal in the last few years of the Mao era that focused on safety engineering outweighed the number of articles describing experiences in safety work, which had dominated the pages of the old journal. According to the recollection of Yu Song, the chief editor of the journal, the niche they gave the new journal was a publication "aimed at promoting safety and health technologies." Those articles closely related to Mao's remarks on workers' safety and health were also something that Yu Song and other editors added to the journal intentionally in order to keep it alive in the political atmosphere during the Cultural Revolution. The change in the style of the new journal indicated an attempt by China's labour officials and technicians to shift the guiding principle of labour protection works from "mass-based" to a technology-oriented path.

This speculation was soon confirmed. In 1978, the Ministry of Labour issued a directive calling for strengthening the scientific research of labour protection in response

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[519] Ning Bingwen 宁丙文, "'Wenhua da geming' zhong jiannan fukan" "文化大革命"中艰难复刊 [Difficult resumption of publication in the Cultural Revolution], August 2, 2013, http://www.esafety.cn/Item/86816.aspx.

[520] Ning, "'Wenhua da geming' zhong jiannan fukan," http://www.esafety.cn/Item/86816.aspx.

to the historic slogan "marching toward scientific modernization" raised at the National Science Conference.[521] This "scientific turn" in labour protection works was evident in how labour officials analyzed accident causes in many reports and articles in the post-Mao era. For example, an author named Chun Xiao published an article introducing the experience of the Maanshan Steel Company in improving work safety in 1980. Veering from the old tone attributing accidents to enterprises leaders' disregard of mass-based safe production or health principles in the Mao era, this article stated: "There were many reasons that caused frequent accidents [in the No. 2 workshop] The most important one, without any doubt, was the ignorance of scientific knowledge."[522] A similar statement was also found in an article reviewing the closing speech of Gao Wenyang, minister of coal mines, at the national mining conference in 1982: "The causes for the frequency of accidents can be summed up in one sentence: 'safety works are not grounded on the scientific knowledge.'"[523]

In this trend, the study of how workers' physiologies contributed to industrial accidents became a new focus for many scientists and labour officials. In a 1983 article introducing the term "process safety incidents" (*gongyi xing shigu* 工艺性事故), the author Zeng Yuefeng listed nine physical and physiological factors predisposing workers to cause accidents.[524] The most representative figure who promoted the study of workers' individualities in the workplace was Liu Qian, a technician from the Beijing Institute of Labour Protection who later won the title "the founder of safety science in China." Since the mid-1980s, Liu Qian had begun to propose replacing the term "labour protection" with the concept "safety science" (*anquan kexue* 安全科学). In the early 1990s, Liu

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[521] "Ba laodong baohu keyan gongzuo gao shangqu" 把劳动保护科研工作搞上去 [Improve the scientific research of labour protection], *Laodong baohu*, no. 6 (June 1977): 6–7.

[522] Chun Xiao 春晓, "Kexue yu anquan shengchan" 科学与安全生产 [Science and safe production], *Laodong baohu*, no. 11 (November 1980): 2.

[523] Ben kan pinglun yuan 本刊评论员, "Ba meikuang anquan jianli zai xiandai kexue jichu shang" 把煤矿安全建立在现代科学基础上 [Grounding coal mine safety in modern science], *Meitan jingji yanjiu*, no. 3 (April 1983): 9–10.

[524] Zeng Yuefeng 曾月丰, "Gongyi xing shigu de shengli xinli fenxi" 工艺性事故的生理心理分析 [Physical and psychological analysis of process safety incidents], *Yejin anquan* 冶金安全, no. 3 (April 1983): 11–15.

successfully established a professional discipline titled safety science in many research institutes and colleges. In a 1988 article, adapting Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" theory, Liu articulated the importance of "safety needs" in facilitating people's understanding of safety science. Liu's view in the 1980s further received endorsement from Qian Xuesen, the father of China's space program. In a letter to Liu Qian, Qian wrote: "I think the concept of labour protection can be divided into two major aspects. First, the operation of equipment should be systematically safe. For example, no explosion, no fire, etc... Second, how to enable production equipment and personnel to achieve efficient production. This issue is closely linked to human [behaviour] and involves human psychology and physiology."[525]

Liu and other scientists' views, of course, were not unprecedented contributions but based on previous wisdom. As early as the 1930s, China's industrialists translated and introduced psychologist Karl Marbe's study of the "psychology of accidents" and Rex Hersey's research on the relationship between "workers' emotions and accidents."[526] In 1957, Cao Richang, China's most prominent psychologist and the "pioneer advocate for applied dialectical materialism to psychological research," published an article introducing the study of labour psychology in DDR Germany.[527] In this article, Cao mentioned that medical experts and psychologists in DDR were actively engaged in the research of the role of workers' personalities in the prevention of workplace accidents. Further, Cao explained: "[According to the statistics in DDR Germany], accidents due to

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[525] Liu Qian 刘潜, Yuan Hualin 袁化林, and Yu Heyong 虞和泳, "Qian xuesen kexue sixiang dui chuangjian fazhan anquan kexue xueke de yingxiang" 钱学森科学思想对创建发展安全科学学科的影响 [The influence of Qian Xuesen's scientific thought on the establishment and development of the discipline of safety science], in *Qian Xuesen kexue gongxian ji xueshu sixiang yantao hui lunwen ji* 钱学森科学贡献暨学术思想研讨会论文集 [Collected papers of the symposium on Qian Xuesen's scientific contributions and academic thoughts] (Beijing: Zhongguo kexue jishu chubanshe, 2001), 416.

[526] Both studies argued that workers' psychological and emotional factors played important roles in accident prevention and the improvement of industrial relations. In addition, editors of *Industrial Safety* emphasized the importance of detecting both workers' "accident proneness" and "chronic accident prone" mentioned in these two studies. "Shubao jieshao: *zaihai xinli xue*" 书报介绍: 灾害心理学 [Book introduction: *The Psychology of Accidents*], *Gongye anquan* 3, no. 5 (October 1935): 682; "Shubao jieshao: qingxu yu zaihai" 书报介绍: 情绪与灾害 [Book introduction: *Emotions and Accidents*], *Gongye anquan* 3, no. 5 (October 1935): 680–82.

[527] Baoyuan Zhang, "Richang Cao: Pioneer Advocate of Dialectical Materialism Applied to Psychological Research," *Protein & Cell* 11, no. 5 (May 2020): 309–10.

technical troubles and equipment breakdowns accounted for three tenths [of all the investigated cases]. Seven-tenths [of all the investigated accidents] are due to human reasons, which can also be described as personality reasons. Among miners and transportation workers, the proportion is even higher, at eight out of ten. If we analyze these cases further, [we can say that] the technical reasons still include many psychological factors."[528] In addition, Cao noted that meeting workers' appetites for food was also a contributing factor to reducing accident rates: "I heard that when a steel mill [in DDR Germany] stopped selling beer, there was a significant increase in the accident rate." Two years after the publication of this article, Cao reiterated his point that most accidents due to negligence or the violation of safety regulations involved human factors in an article entitled "Labour Psychology in China."[529]

Leaving aside the different educational backgrounds of Liu and Cao, one can see that Liu's and other scientists' views resonated with Cao Richang's between a gulf of time. This could also be seen as a further reinforcement of my observation in this dissertation from a distance. The solutions that Cao, Li, and other scientists advocated in the 1950s and 1980s to resolve the problems caused by workplace hazards that we have documented in this dissertation—to explore and delineate the diverse psychologies, emotions, or personalities of workers—were precisely what most of the party's officials ignored in the Mao era. Even though some local labour officials detected workers' varying attitudes stemming from generational and gender divides toward labour protection policies and wrote these factors in the reports (this is why we know that), in general, most people had to follow the party's powerful discourse in which "flesh and blood" Chinese workers with different personalities were idealized and homogenized as an advanced proletariat with numerous merits and advantages.

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[528] Chen Li 陈立 and Cao Richang 曹日昌, "Deyizhi minzhu gongheguo de laodong xinli xue" 德意志民主共和国的劳动心理学 [Labour psychology in DDR Germany], *Xinli xuebao* 心理学报 1, no. 2 (December 1957): 110.

[529] Cao Richang 曹日昌 and Li Jiazhi 李家治, "Zhongguo laodong xinlixue gaikuang" 中国劳动心理学概况 [A general review on labour psychology in China], *Xinli xuebao*, no. 4 (June 1959): 208.

I liken industrial relations in Maoist China shown in the case of labour protection to a type of parental relationship. For historians who seem to have an innate hostility to Maoist China, a single piece of sources about the prevalence of silicosis among Nanjing workers in 1956 can be taken as hard evidence proving that China's liberation was a tragedy.[530] However, it is unconvincing and irresponsible to outline the implementation of these regulations in most China's industrial workplaces simply based on one or two reports without any further investigations. This is the methodology employed by what Aminda Smith calls "bad PRC history," which accepts "teleological interpretation of the past" and "abets conservative and regressive politics by attempting to erase any positive aspects of the socialist project, by pretending it was irrational, and by demonizing, *reductio ad Maoum*, anyone who disagrees."[531] There are insufficient reasons to believe that the party was always deliberately exploiting workers, just as one can hardly imagine that parents have an innate inclination to abuse their children. On the contrary, I argue that the party saw workers as perfect children and was unstinting in its efforts, with a patriarchal mentality, to render adequate care to their children. But the care never makes their children feel comfortable because their parents never understand that their children were not as perfect as they imagined.

It is noteworthy that Liu Qian's proposition that the term labour protection should be replaced with safety science also indicated another shift in industrial relations in China since the 1980s. From the perspective of Liu and his colleagues, the concept of labour protection was not scientific because "it bears a distinctive class character and belongs to a type of social welfare services." Liu's advocacy of developing safety science as the alternative to labour protection was unacceptable to some senior party labour officials who had been actively participating in the design and practice of labour protection policies throughout the Mao era. In 1988, Jiang Tao, then director of the labour protection department of the Ministry of Labour in the 1950s and a consultant of the Labour Protection Association in the 1980s, successively published eight articles

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[530] Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution, 1945–1957* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 268.

[531] Aminda Smith, "Foreword: The Maoism of PRC History," *Positions: Asia Critique* 29, no. 4 (November 1, 2021): 660.

criticizing Liu Qian. According to Jiang Tao, Liu's concept of safety science was undoubtedly a complete rejection of the fruits of Mao-era labour protection. Jiang argued against Liu for good reasons. It is apparent from the above discussion that the safety science that Liu vigorously promoted in the 1980s was highly confined to one issue: the handling of workplace accidents. The other components of the CCP's labour protection policies examined in this dissertation—the measures against fatigue, use of PPE, and health recovery services—were excluded from the scope of safety science. Even though the CCP did not eventually approve the proposition by Liu Qian and continued to use the term "labour protection," the content of labour protection after the Mao era indeed was moving in the direction set by Liu Qian. Today, many workers still suffer from heat stroke in the hot summer without access to a bottle of salt water or a refreshing drink.[532] Worker sanatoriums have been either abandoned or privatized into hotels or resorts. For many Chinese workers in the post-Mao era, especially those "rustbelt workers" documented in Ching Kwan Lee's study, these tangible benefits were exactly a testament to the party's pledge to the Chinese working class and one of the sources of their deep nostalgia for their status during the Mao era.[533]

[532] A survey by the Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions shows that of 2,413 workers, 43 percent were provided with high temperature allowances and only 21 percent were provided with cooling-down drinks such as mung bean soup and salt soda. Zhou Rui 周蕊, Lin Liangyan 林良彦, and Zhang Yicong 张一璁, "Bufen laodong zhe 'renqi tunsheng:' Ni de gaowen jintie hai zhishi yiping yanqishui ma?" 部分劳动者"忍气吞声": 你的高温津贴还只是一瓶盐汽水吗? [Some labourers are "swallowing their prides": Is your high-temperature allowance still only a bottle of salt soda?], *Jiuye yu baozhang* 就业与保障, no. 8 (August 2016): 44–45.

[533] Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 140–53.

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