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**INDUSTRIAL WORKERS AND CLASS FORMATION:
A STUDY OF CHINESE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS
IN NORTH CHINA, 1900-1937**

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Introduction

The nature of working class has been studied extensively, and attention in the literature has focussed on several different features. Some have studied the composition and internal structure.¹ Others have concentrated on the class conflict in the larger society.² Still others have emphasized the central role of class consciousness underlying the transformation of the Klasse an sich into Klasse fur sich.³ Yet still others have examined the character of alienated labor since the advent of industrialization.⁴ The study of working class formation can also be categorized by the stage of capitalism in which the study is made. While some have focussed on the working class in the early stages of capitalism,⁵ others have studied its character in the post-capitalist society.⁶

The present study will examine the Chinese working class at its beginning stage of formation. For practical consideration of availability of source materials, attention will be paid to the social conditions under which the Chinese workers formed themselves into organized groups and engaged in concerted action against the enemy class.

The classic analysis of the conditions under which the working class arose came from Marx. While he believed that an individual's position in the production process molded life experiences, he noted that social groups who merely occupied the same position in the economic structure of the society did not necessarily have the objective basis for the formation of a social class.

Thus he wrote of the mid-19th century French peasantry:

The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions, but... their mode of production isolates them from one another, instead of

bringing them into mutual intercourse ... In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants and the identity of interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not form a class.⁷

Unlike the peasants, however, the workers enjoyed a favorable social setting for the development of an organized and socially-conscious class. They were concentrated in the large industrial towns, and the conditions of factory production brought them together in ways that made them aware of their common interests.

While Marx's thesis sounds reasonable theoretically, some sociologists question it on grounds that it has neglected the social psychological factors that are involved in a crowded and competitive living and working condition. These sociologists argued that for people whose lives were in poverty and great tensions -- a case which was true for industrial workers during early industrialization -- living and working in close contact would produce friction and conflict rather than cohesion and cooperation. A sociologist summarized the argument as follows:

Speaking on this point Michels draws an apt comparison with the situation encountered in concentration camps during the War, where those confined for long periods of time become afflicted with a neurosis called "barbed wire sickness." Workers' barracks have never been known to be havens of concord, nor have shops and factories. Even where men work side by side, perhaps on the same contract, there is no guarantee that they will do so in a friendly and cooperative spirit. Proletarian solidarity, we repeat, is not to be inferred from the mere fact that proletarians live and work in crowded quarters. On the contrary, such living tends to expose individual peculiarities and make them irritating in the extreme.⁸

The debate over this issue, unfortunately, has not been examined empirically. The present study, therefore, examines the ecological

village with a small population engaged in agriculture, coal mining, and pottery manufacturing."¹¹

Industrialization gave rise to, among other things, a concentration of population. By the late 1920's, Tientsin had a population second only to Shanghai, with a population density as high as 50,741 persons per square mile.¹² Tangshan also provided an obvious example of rapid population growth. A police census taken in the autumn of 1926 showed that the Chinese population of the city was 47,623 persons, of which 2,534 persons (5.3%) were natives. The rest, (94.7%) being new immigrants.¹³

Ostensibly, the majority of the new settlers were workers and their families. The 1926 census of Tangshan referred to above showed that 80% of the working population were engaged in industrial enterprises, 12% in agricultural work and 8% in mercantile pursuits.¹⁴ Thus a visitor to the town was amazed by the congested number of workers in the streets:

Everytime I visited Tangshan, I always saw the poor miners. They wore wooden clogs and dirty rags. Their teeth were white in contrast with their coal-tainted faces. In crowds, they walked in the streets.¹⁵

In Tientsin, the situation was more or less the same:

The three big cotton mills -- Yu Yuan, Yu Ta and Pao Shing -- were all clustered near Siao Liu Chuan, where dormitories and rented houses stood like a forest. Several thousands of workers lived in rows of houses, which gave an appearance of a town in itself. Before and after working hours, the areas outside the factories and dormitories were jammed with people. The peddlers, whose bawlings shook one's ears, were doing good business there.¹⁶

The immediate problem for the rapid increase of population was the provision of dwellings for the workers. "The problem of housing of workers in China,"¹⁷ as it came to be used as a title for several

studies, kindled the interests of sympathizers and some social researchers but not the capitalists and labor contractors. In spite of the descriptions and statistics shown in these studies about the poor living conditions, working-class housing was continuously characterized by overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and lack of facilities of any kind.

The housing problem was probably most severe in the mining center of Tangshan, as large numbers of workers were brought in within a short period of time. Moreover, the responsibility of accommodating the workers was shifted to the labor contractors who had to borrow money from the administrative staff of the mining company or local businessmen and landlords, for the purpose of building houses for the workers. As a result of lack of time and money, guo-huo, the boarding houses provided by the labor contractors, became one of the worst kinds of housing facilities for the workers.¹⁸

In the cities of North China, industrial areas and slums were closely intertwined. This pattern was most explicit in the case of Tientsin. When the city was opened up as a Treaty port, wharves, warehouses and packing factories first appeared along the waterfront,¹⁹ where the modern Chinese worker first concentrated. As manufacturing increased along the river course and railway lines in the southeastern outskirts of the city during and after the first World War, sheds near the railway station and mud huts along the banks of the canal began to appear.²⁰

Forms of Housing for Workers

In North China, families of the poor did not sleep in separate beds. Instead members of the whole family usually shared a kang (earthen bed). An American social scientist described a kang as

follows:

In many of the rooms, a large part of the floor space is occupied by a kang, or raised platform some fifteen inches high and six feet wide, which serves as a bed for all the members of the family. Its length depends on the size of the room. In many cases, it extends across the entire room. Of necessity, much of the daytime life and work is carried on upon the kang, as it occupies so large a part of the floor space. The top of the kang usually is covered with a reed mat. A flue ordinarily runs underneath it, so that it can be warmed in winter -- a tremendous help and comfort for people who must live through cold winters with little fuel, at best.²¹

With this general background, let us begin to discuss the different kinds of housing available to the workers.

Guo-huo, which we have mentioned earlier, was a house consisting of a long and extended kang. Typically, a guo-huo was of the size 6 x 21 square Chinese feet (equivalent to 2.2 x 7.5 sq. metres), yet usually 50 persons or so were housed in there.²² In Mentoukou Mines, laborers of different work shifts were placed in the same guo-huo. As a worker remembered, laborers slept in the kang side by side to one another. If one worker had to go out for excretion at night it would be difficult to find the space again when he returned.²³

Another kind of housing for workers was in the form of a dormitory. In the grain milling industry in Tientsin, for example, the kuan-tien (dormitory) ran like this:

It is composed of 15 mud rooms arranged in opposite rows, with a small courtyard in between. Each room, approximately 6 x 10 feet in size, may have to accommodate as many as five or six persons. It contains nothing else but a large kang or bed and sufficient space for a small cooking stove, while the open courtyard, with several wooden tubs, serves the toilet and other indispensable needs. The inmates in each room are in every case natives from the same hsien or district, and have as their leader, recommendor and guarantor, an old hand from the same district who is at the same time working in some retailing and milling shop.²⁴

Some large modern enterprises such as the Kailan Mining Administration in Tangshan, Chiu Ta Salt Refinery in Tangku, provided better kinds of dormitories but they were still far from being reasonable places to live. Often these dormitories were one-story buildings consisting of rooms full of double-decked beds. One room usually housed twelve or more men and "the best a worker could hope for was to have a lower bunk and a shelf on which to put his personal belongings."²⁵

Whatever the shortcomings of the dormitories, not all workers could enjoy such housing facilities. Flour Mills in Tientsin generally had dormitories only for skilled male workers, and Match factories in Peking and Tientsin only quartered the permanent force of men and boys.²⁶ In general, dormitories for women workers in North China were totally neglected.

Workers who were employed in the handicraft industries were also neglected. In the wool-weaving workshops in Peking, a loft was added at the top of the shop serving both as a store room as well as sleeping quarters for the apprentices.²⁷ In other workshops, "the workers laid their mattresses on the floor of the workshop at night time and in the morning rolled them up and stored them in some convenient corner."²⁸ A detailed description of the sleeping places for the workers in the handicraft industries was given in a study of the knitting establishments in Tientsin:

Most of the small establishments occupy only two rooms, which accommodate somewhere from five to ten persons. These rooms serve not only as workshops, but also as business office, storehouse, kitchen, dining hall and bedroom. In one of the many small establishments visited by the present writer, the wife of the owner manager, foremen and worker were sitting on the elevated ground, by the side of which were two or three apprentices, standing, knitting hoses or winding bundles of yarns into spools. This room, about eight feet square was filled with repulsive odor, and covered with muddy floor. A small window and a side door,

which were closed most of the time because of winter cold, served as the only outlet for ventilation. The elevated ground, by the way, was the bed for the manager and his wife. The other workers, chiefly apprentices, slept in the next room of the same size, which was also a workroom. By the side of the bed was the kitchen, composed of a small brick oven and a pan above it. In the middle of the room finished hoses and wound yarns are piled on a hanging board -- a miniature storehouse for the establishment. Outside these two workrooms, there is a small courtyard filled with dyed hoses exposed to the sunlight and air for drying. This picture of a small establishment is not exaggerated, but typical of many other establishments operating on a similar scale. In fact, such establishments are oftentimes concentrated in a few compounds in the poor districts of Tientsin, in cheap rent-paying quarters.²⁹

What has been described so far is housing facilities for workers who were either single, or did not bring their families with them to the city. To a large extent family housing was neglected. The Chiu Ta Salt Refinery in Tangku, for example, had relatively better dormitories than other factories for individual workers but did not provide family dwellings until the housing problem for married workers loomed large.³⁰ In Tientsin, cotton mills usually brought houses around the factories and then rented out to workers for a reasonable rate. The number of these houses, however, were too small to meet the needs of workers.³¹

Rented family houses were generally run down. In his short story entitled "Liu's Court," Lao She, the famous novelist in China during the thirties, gave a glimpse of the kind of house most poor families in Peking lived:

My son and I and the Wangs are reckoned old tenants; we have lived in the Court for over a year. We have thought of moving many times, but our room does not leak much when it rains and that's something, isn't it? Of course, there are houses that do not leak but they are not for poor people like us.³²

Being unable to afford the rent, a large number of workers were driven to seek whatever shelter they could find. This consisted of shelter

in mat sheds or squatters of mud and straw which the workers built for themselves on empty lots and river banks.³³

The Housing Problems

Common to all kinds of workers' lodging quarters was the problem of overcrowding. For many of the workers, kitchen and bedroom were all in the same room.³⁴ This made living very uncomfortable, especially for those with a family. Thus wrote a sociologist in Peking:

The house the Chinese working family occupies has none of its traditional functions, for rest and comfort, for the enjoyment of privacy, for family gatherings of the intimate communion of friends, it has none of these things but a place for sleep and there is often not sufficient space or accommodation even for that.³⁵

Table 1 below tries to summarize the overcrowded condition by some concrete figures.

TABLE 1

Housing Conditions in North China³⁶

Locality	Average no. of rooms per family	Average no. of persons per room
Peking handicraft workers and collies ^a	1.04	4.16
Tientsin handicraft workers ^b	1.25	3.36
Tangku factory workers ^c	1.72	2.67
Peking skilled workers ^d	1.56	2.49

Besides overcrowding, another housing problem was the poor sanitary condition. Guo-huo was nicknamed huz-tzu-fang meaning the place where the beggars lived.³⁷ Indeed when people talked about the workers' housing, they tended to think in terms like filthiness, stink and stench, for example:

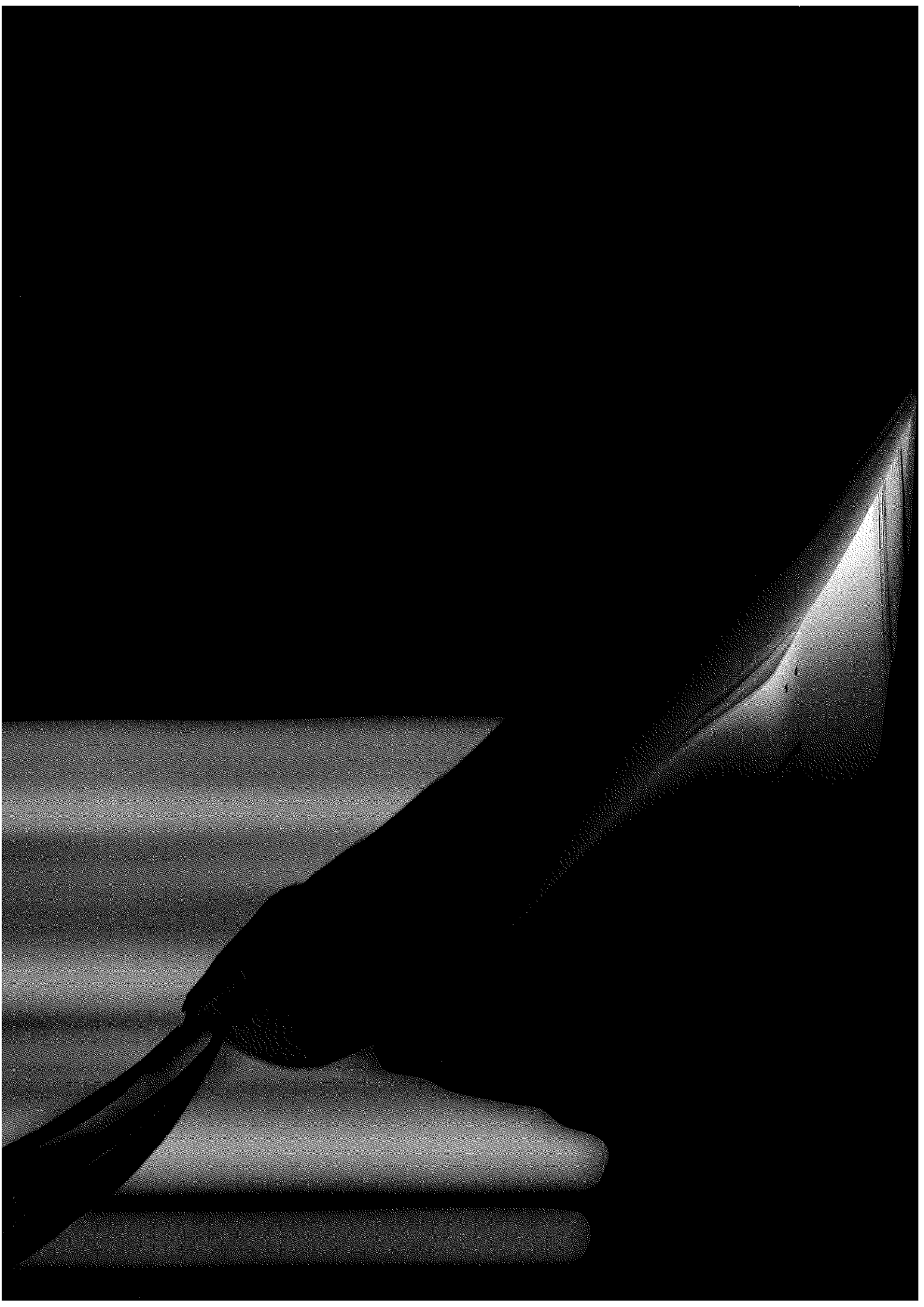
Workers' dormitory is not less filthy than pigsty. ... The house is filled with five odors which came from five sources: alcohol, shit, fetid feet, stinking armpits and urine.³⁸

But what bothered the workers most were the lice, which sucked blood from the human body and was harmful for health. There were too many of the lice in the house and the neighborhood that exterminating them was almost impossible. Greatly annoyed by them, the workers could not sleep well and therefore, some preferred to stay out or sleep on the street or outside the railway station at night.³⁹

In short, working class housing in North China was poor and not adequate. It only helped to increase the feeling of rootlessness of the workers, particularly those newly immigrated to the city. It was not surprising to see the high turnover rate of workers in factories and mines.

At the Kailan Mines, it is said, before the company build houses for the workers, the labor turnover was tremendous. When workers were needed they were easily recruited from Shantung, but at the Chinese New Year they returned home and remained through the busy farming season. Such great numbers migrated back and forth that the monthly output of the mines would be reduced, at times, by more than 30 per cent.⁴⁰

But most workers could not have a choice about leaving. What were the consequences of housing on those who stayed? In the following discussion, we will document the various ways the working class housing brought to bear on the disruption of workers' organized life.



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Living in the Dormitory

From May to July, 1926, the Social Research Department at Peking conducted an intensive study of the Chiu Ta factory workers in Tangku. The data of this study were obtained from participant observation and personal interviews, in addition to the records of the factory. The report of the study was published as a book in which a chapter was written on life in the dormitory.

As the researcher observed, there were sets of regulations in the dormitory. On the top of the rules,

The dormitories rooms are inspected by the authorities once in the morning for cleanliness and once in the evening in order to see whether all have turned in and are well-behaving. For the management of the dormitory, there are elected among the workers in each room two men whose duties are to supervise the conduct of their room mates, enforce the rules regarding discipline and cleanliness and report things of consequence to the managerial department. Each one in the room is, in turn, responsible for one day to clean it.

Cleanliness is classified by the factory authorities into five grades and after the daily inspection, each room is marked with a certain grade. At the end of every month, reward both in money and in kind are given to members of those rooms which have received high grading, while fines are imposed on those who fail to observe the rules of order and cleanliness.⁴¹

While rules and discipline for the management were meant to keep the dormitory clean and in order, they constituted a new environment for the workers replacing their former intimate family life. In this new environment, "often twelve or fifteen had to share a room, had to rise and go to bed at fixed times, and enjoyed no personal comfort whatsoever."⁴²

Not surprisingly, the dormitory occasionally became an arena of conflict between the workers and the management. The most interesting incident that ever occurred in the Chiu Ta Factory dormitory was the

bedpan event. In the rural village in China, there were no private toilets in the house, but many families used to keep a bedpan underneath the bed for convenience at night. When the Chiu Ta workers moved in to the dormitory, many brought with them a bedpan. This was, however, not agreeable with the management, who attributed the stench in the dormitory to the use of bedpans. Without the consent of the workers, the management came in one night to take all the bedpans out and broke them while the workers were not in. When the workers knew about that, they were very angry and demanded that the bedpans be returned. Although the incident did not break out into a riot, it took the management a long time to disperse the crowd of angry workers.⁴³

The disagreement between the workers and management on the dormitory regulations and discipline gave rise to numerous instances of misunderstanding and conflict. From the perspective of the management, the workers were uneducated and uncultured. As a factory owner once remarked:

In the factory we have nice clean dormitories with a cafeteria and bathroom. But they (the workers) preferred to live elsewhere other than the dormitory, such as in the earthen house without a bathroom. Living in the dormitory, though at low rent or free of charge, required them to keep clean and live according to normal schedule. They preferred to live in other places so that they can spit, gamble, hang around with gangs and go to visit brothels. ... Thus a swine should be put in a sty, otherwise it would not rest in comfort.⁴⁴

From the perspective of the worker, however, the dormitory was no substitute at all for their homes. First, the standardization and routinization of human life implied the loss of individual autonomy. But more importantly, the members in the dormitory were constantly in flux and therefore were not closely related to one another. To make dormitory life more bearable, we found that Chiu Ta workers tended to

cling closer together with other workers who were also their fellow villagers, relatives or kinsmen.⁴⁵

Marriage and Family of the Workers

Marriage in the traditional Chinese society was an important event to the family. Sidney Gamble found that most people in Peking spent 4 to 5 months' family income on the wedding ceremony.⁴⁶ Besides, there was an informal norm on the age of marriage. People who did not get married at a certain range of age were regarded as problematic and would have difficulty making a good match. Unfortunately, Chinese workers who consisted mainly of young people,⁴⁷ were the major category of people who were often unable to meet this social expectation.

There were many consistent findings in support of this observation. H.D. Fong, a Chinese economist, found in many of his studies on the industry in Tientsin that most workers' marriages were delayed after the marriagable age. In the grain milling industry, for example, he found that:

In respect of age distribution, 67 of the 83 mill hands, or four fifths, were between 21 and 45, and 37 or four tenths, between 26 and 35, as the heavy work involved demanded workers at the prime of their life. In respect of marital status, the significant fact to be noted was the inability of the majority to marry. Of the 83 hands studied, 79 were above 20 years of age. Among these 79 only 42, or 55% were married.⁴⁸

Among the hosiery knitting workers, Fong observed that:

With regard to marital status, it may be noted that taking 20 as the marriagable age for workers - only 34 out of 101 marriagable workers, or 33%, have married, the rest of the 67 workers being single.⁴⁹

Among the rayon and cotton weavers, Fong also reported:

With regard to marital status, it may be noted that taking 20 as the marriagable age for workers - only 61% have married, the rest of the 102 workers being single.⁵⁰

Another feature about the working class family was its smaller size than the average Chinese family.⁵¹ This was the case not because the poor family had a lower birth rate, but rather, as suggested by a study of the livelihood of 48 working class families in Peking during 1926 to 1927, (see Table 2)⁵² the poor family was rarely composed of members other than the couple themselves and their children.

TABLE 2

Member Relationship of 48 Families in Peking

Member Relationship	Number	Percent
Heads of families (the workers)	47	21.4
Wives	47	21.4
Sons	60	27.2
Daughters	46	20.9
Mothers	5	2.3
Brothers	2	0.9
Sisters	3	1.4
Daughter-in-law	1	0.5
Grand daughter	1	0.5
Nephews (brother's sons)	2	0.9
Nephew (sister's son)	1	0.5
Niece (sister's daughter)	1	0.5
Grandson (daughter's son)	1	0.5
Cousin (aunt's son)	1	0.5
Wife's sister	1	0.5
Son's betrothed	1	0.5
Total	220	100.0

This constitution of the working class family, which essentially consisted of the husband, the wife and their children, appeared to conform to the nuclear type of family. It was quite different from the typical Chinese family, which usually included more members than the married couple and their offspring. The number of the collateral lines of relatives included in the typical Chinese family usually varied in proportion to the wealth of the family. It was therefore not surprising to find the working class families were numerically small (see Table 3).⁵³

TABLE 3

Size and Member Relationship of 48 Families

No. of Persons in family	No. of families	per cent
3	9	18.7
4	16	33.4
5	12	25.0
6	9	18.7
7	1	2.1
8	1	2.1
Total	48	100.0

Another factor which did not encourage a large working class family was the housing condition. In Peking, for example, a middle class family usually occupied an entire house which was built in four rows encircling an entire house which was built in four rows encircling a courtyard.⁵⁴ Poor families, however, "can afford only one or two rooms, so several families live in the same courtyard."⁵⁵ That was why a poor family's neighborhood was called a mixed

courtyard. With the living accommodation reduced to one or two rooms, it was difficult to have an extended family living together.

Family life of many of the working class people took place in the mixed courtyard. Lao She's famous novel *Lo-to Hsiang-tzu* has a long description of life there:

There was simply no human sound at all in the mixed courtyard when June came. The children went out very early clutching their broken baskets to collect whatever they could...

After all the children had gone out, and all the men were gone too, the women would sit in their rooms with their backs bare but none of them dared go outside. Not because of the way they looked, but because the ground in the courtyard was already hot enough to burn their feet.

Finally, when the sun was fast setting, the men and children came back in a continual stream. By this time there was shade from the wall and a little cool breeze in the courtyard. The hot air stored up in the rooms all day made them like the inside of a steamer basket. Everybody sat in the courtyard waiting for the women to get the cooking done. The courtyard was quite crowded then; it was just like a marketplace but one without merchandise. They had all been through one day's worth of heat and they were red-eyed and ill-tempered. Their bellies were empty again and their faces even more anxious and pale. Let one word be spoken out of line and some of them wanted to beat the children, others wanted to beat their wives, and if they couldn't be beaten, at least they could be cursed at furiously. This sort of ruckus continued until everyone had eaten.⁵⁶

At home, both women and children often served as scapegoats of the frustration which the men felt from conditions outside the family. Just like "the hot air stored up in the rooms all day", the workers just returned from work to home were mostly red-eyed and ill-tempered. While it is commonly known that, in China, parents very often severely beat their children, not too much attention has been paid to wife-beating in the Chinese working class family. But Lao She, a keen observer of the lower class people in Peking, saw it occurring frequently in the mixed courtyard. "It seems to be the general belief that a man should beat his wife,"⁵⁷ he wrote in another short story,

Liu's Court. But no matter which subordinate member of the family was beaten up, the wife or the children served as scapegoats of men's frustrations.

In the passage of the mixed courtyard cited above, Lao She also observed that most women stayed at home. But this did not mean they did not work. Unlike Shanghai, most women in North China could not find employment in the factories, so they worked as external labor at home. A survey of five-hundred handicraft families in Peking during 1962 found that more women were actually employed than men if handicraft work carried on at home was included under employment:

We find that fully 1,639 persons were gainfully employed. Of this number, 783 were male and 856 female; 198 of the former and 803 of the latter were pursuing handicraft work. It is indeed a noteworthy fact that there should have been so many female handicraft workers as compared with the males. Handicraft workers carried on at home is essentially a women's occupation. In a town like Peking, women folks cannot find industrial pursuits outside home even if they were willing, while their poor living conditions compel them to seek some kind of employment in order to earn money to support themselves or at least to supplement their insufficient family income.⁵⁸

Women in the working class family of North China did not only provide emotional release of tension and help to supplement insufficient family income. When the family could not make ends meet, it was they who "held back their tears and tried to smooth things over."⁵⁹

Children of the working class family usually could enjoy only a short childhood. The majority never went to school⁶⁰ and the training of work discipline started early in life. In North China, the average age of apprentices was eleven or twelve years old.⁶¹ But before they went to the shops many of them had been assisting their mothers who were employed at home. Or they "went out very early in the morning clutching their broken baskets to collect whatever they could."⁶²

Usually they found themselves gathering around the railway stations or the wharves where they might pick up some coal balls or whatever they found useful.⁶³

Thus every member in the family -- women, children and men -- contributed a part of the household income to make ends meet. The inadequacy of the working class income forced a decline in the peripheral membership of the Chinese family and left the nuclear members more related and interdependent. Although family relations were not always smooth and relaxed, the family remained the basic organization which sustained and provided some security in the great vicissitudes of life. Thus, when a hundred rickshaw pullers in Peking were surveyed in 1930 about their attitude toward their families, the majority (seventy-seven) answered they loved their families but more (eighty-nine) said they preferred small families to an extended one.⁶⁴

Courtyard Neighborhoods

Lao She in the Liu's Court described the nature of a courtyard neighborhood as seen through the eyes of working class people as follows:

There are over twenty rooms besides ours in the court. How many families in all lived there, I don't know. Most of them rent only one room and they move in one day and are gone the next. I can't keep track of them all. When you want to be friendly, you greet the neighbors with a "Have you had your dinner?" and no one takes offense if you don't want to say anything. Every one is busy from morning till night so that he may fee his mouth and there is little time for idle gossip or passing the time of day. Of course, there are those who like to talk but a full stomach is necessary to put you in a conversational mood.⁶⁵

... You have to be careful walking through a yard if you do not want to step on someone and there are bound to be words if you do. Everyone carries a bellyful of grudges with him and all welcome an opportunity for a quarrel.⁶⁶

In sum, the mixed courtyard was generally characterized by a rather weak sense of community among the families who shared the same neighborhood. The reasons suggested in the passages were: (i) poor people tended to move around a great deal and the stability of residence was low; (ii) everyone was busy struggling for survival, leaving no time nor energy to cultivate relations of taste that went beyond satisfying basic human needs. In what follows, we will look more closely at the nature of the cohesion the working class neighborhood by examining systematically the methods used by the workers to solve some of their persistent problems with livelihood.

The first problem concerned poverty. In almost all of the surveys done in North China relating to working-class families during the 1920's and 1930's, there were always some sizeable number of families whose incomes were in deficit. In general, "many of these families were able to make ends meet in ordinary times but they would incur deficit under special circumstances when marriage or death occurs in the family."⁶⁷ In case of these special circumstances would the neighbors be relied upon as a source of help? It seemed not. As the sources of loans indicated, workers usually turned to borrow money from relatives, fellow villagers or friends, if not from some credit unions.⁶⁸

Another problem concerned finding a job. As we have mentioned in Chapter 1, getting a job in both modern and handicraft factories usually required personal introduction. Of the 280 cotton weavers in Tientsin, 287 were introduced by friends, fellow natives, relatives, co-apprentices and family members, only 2 were introduced by neighbors.⁶⁹ Thus again, neighbors were not the main sources of help.

Another problem concerned rent. Individuals expressed their anger with high rents, "but the rage always ends in a helpless

gesture, not an action."⁷⁰ In the Liu's Court, Lao She wrote, "No one can help cursing the landlord, charging a dollar and a half a month for a room no bigger than a doghouse."⁷¹ But when the residents finally could not pay the rent, they resorted to either talking the landlord into letting the rent go into arrears, or they moved out.

In general, the mass housing for the working class could be said to be like mass hospitalization⁷² where workers and their families met all of human miseries in mass array. Residents moved in and out a great deal but the stories of each family's vicissitudes were recurrent. So it would be not right to say there was no esprit de corps in the working class neighborhood at all. At the same time, a large number of researchers and studies have suggested "that poverty generates a high degree of worry which detracts from any consideration of long-term solutions to problems. A worried person becomes a self-centered individual, and everything outside his immediate and urgent needs is of little relevance."⁷³ Eventually, if we looked for the sense of community feeling in the poor's neighborhood, it usually appeared in the form as manifested in the following case:

Beat her! Beat her to death! Beat her! Old Wang shouted, stamping and kicking up dust. ... Everyone in the court came out to see the fun. None of the men tried to put in a word for the poor girl, and naturally none of the women dared to utter a word. Men like to see other people's wives get a beating; it puts fear into their own wives.⁷⁴

Social Problems in the Slum

In the degraded housing conditions of the slums, we also found the workers often engaged in some demoralized conduct such as over-indulgence in intoxicating liquors, sexual immorality and gambling. In this section, we will look at these behaviors and try to see what they meant to the workers who committed these behaviors.

Brothels which catered to working class people appeared pervasively in every major industrial center in North China and were usually located in the residential areas. The most well-known ones were the Old Mother Hall⁷⁵ and Lo Ma Wu,⁷⁶ both in Tientsin, and the one in the southern part of the South City of Peking.⁷⁷ Reporting on the ever increasing abduction of women and girls in the mining town of Tangshan, a newspaper reporter wrote, "In Tangshan, workers were plentiful but brothels were more plentiful."⁷⁸ In these lower-class brothels, prostitutes were older (usually between 20 and 30 years old) and probably came from working class families as they were "dressed in ordinary Chinese clothes made from cheap Chinese blue cotton cloth."⁷⁹

Veneral diseases were increasingly widespread among the working class people. A survey of 4,000 men in Peking made by a medical doctor found the following distributions of such diseases: 15% servants; 15% industrial workers; 11% shopkeepers; 10% farmers; 8% coolies and 7% laborers.⁸⁰

Gambling houses in the mining towns were widespread. Many workers were forced to work two shifts after they lost their wages in gambling.⁸¹ A survey of modern industries in Tientsin revealed that some workers regularly gambled throughout the night and therefore did not have enough sleep when going to work.⁸²

What we have described above are quite consistent with the observation made by Li Ta Chao, one of the founding fathers of the Chinese Communist Party, on the coal miners of Tangshan:

They had a bad habit; trying to finish off two-week's work within one week. For one week, they worked day and night, no sleep, no rest and no bath. For another week, they get drunk, visit brothels and go gamble. Lack of education, they know no better way of recreation other than those which give hedonistic satisfaction.⁸³

Because of these demoralized behaviors, the management and the factory proprietors often accused the workers of being ignorant, stupid and uneducated.⁸⁴ According to the factory proprietors, it was the workers' own fault in doing those behaviors. But from our reading, many workers were not unaware of the undesirable effects of these behaviors, although many also found themselves committing the same bad habits again and again.⁸⁵ Indeed many felt regrets after they had committed those behaviors. It thus appeared that these behaviors were an expression of the feeling of alienation than ignorance. The workers, who were condemned to a life time of unremitting labor and poverty, felt that life was meaningless and without hope of improvement. Gambling, prostitutes and alcohol offered immediate pleasure and an escape from the harsh reality of daily existence.

Of course, not all workers alike were prone to such demoralized behaviors. Our analysis should also seek to understand why some workers frequently indulged in these behaviors while others were totally abstaining from them. This question led us to probe into the feelings of the workers:

Now everyone called me a good-for-nothing gambler. For over ten years, I have not heard from my family. My native village has been messed up by wars and floods. My wife has either fled from me or died. No one would ask me for remittance any more. There must be a purpose for which I need and save money.⁸⁶

The feeling expressed by this worker was hopelessness, fatalism, despair and alienation. They were mainly a consequence in this case, of the family disintegration which was shown in the breakdown of the responsibility of sending home part of his earnings. In many studies of the workers, we found that family remittances were the most important item which consumed their surplus.⁸⁷ It represented the

continuity of family responsibility and a tie to basic social organization. When the ties and responsibilities connected to this basic social organization were broken for the Chinese workers, so was the social and self control.

To what extent was this case study typical of other workers in North China is not known. But the reduction of social control on those workers who lived away from home seemed to be important in explaining the workers' pursuit of hedonistic pleasure. Thus the following observation by a Chinese economist on the carpet workers in Tientsin:

The fact that the carpet workers live inside the work-shops and factories and have their homes outside the confines of Tientsin is a factor responsible for the frequent visits to the low-class whorehouses in the vicinity of the new San-Pa-Kwan. The latter is also a centre for cheap pleasures, such as tale-telling, magic performances, native theatres, tea houses and restaurants; it is a centre for small peddlers as well. ... At any rate, great as is the temptation for pleasure seeking on account of the highly monotonous life among the carpet workers. Small earnings and heavy responsibility for family support do not allow them to go beyond their pecuniary limits.⁸⁸

Conclusion

In the paper, we have found that the alienated working environment the workers encountered was accompanied by a living condition which led to, among other things, disruption of family life. The provision of housing in the form of dormitories for individual workers split up families. Also hard on the unity of family life were (1) the frustrations which the workers brought home and expressed to their wives and children, often in the form of domestic violence; and (2) the inadequacy of family income to support the extended family members.

Nuclear families, however, remained for many workers the basic social unit which they could cling to for security, emotional support and financial interdependence. It was, in the sociological sense, the "small group" that survived the destructive social forces of industrialization. Thus, social disintegration during the process of social change does not result in a lack of social organization, because "through every social disintegration, small groups have survived."⁸⁹

In the study of working-class living conditions, we first hypothesized that the fact of living in close contact with fellow-workers and their families would give more opportunities for the workers to communicate their grievances and strengthen the ties of personal relationship which would lead to stronger feelings of belonging together, and a greater class solidarity. But our study of the working-class neighborhoods does not support this hypothesis. Instead, poverty conditions seem to lead to a greater concern with self-centered, immediate and urgent needs, at the expense of developing a shared feeling of community.

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