

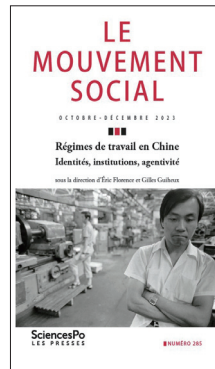
the post-Cultural Revolution and post-Mao eras, and observes a rich body of television documentaries seeking to redress, in the narrow margins of ideological freedom allowed in official channels, the harm inflicted on various groups of people in the past decades. Inevitably, this chapter closes with the six-part television documentary *River Elegy* (1988), which is widely considered a precursor to the historical and social debates leading to the Tiananmen movement, and is cited by some as an inspiration to the handful of early independent documentary filmmakers working in the 1990s and early 2000s.

The epilogue duly references the Chinese independent documentary film movement, yet another “revolutionary” practice that this time, and by contrast with previous productions, “no longer mediate[s] party-people relationships” (p. 250) since independent filmmakers act as individuals and not representatives of the state. With its compelling historical narrative and engagement with the political and social roles of documentary film, Ying Qian’s study will help students and scholars alike navigate the complex and varied body of factual images made in twentieth-century China.

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“Labour Regimes in China: Identity, Institutions and Agency.”

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This special issue of *Le Mouvement Social*, guest-edited by Éric Florence and Gilles Guiheux, contributes to the expanding body of literature on China’s labour regime, particularly given its publication during a pivotal moment in the country’s history as China faces a slowdown in economic growth and a decline in its working population. Alongside a rich diversity of materials and methodological approaches (surveys, ethnographic fieldworks, interviews, etc.), this issue provides timely, critical, and multidisciplinary insights into the sea-change of Chinese labour over seven decades.

The editorial by Florence and Guiheux effectively sets the stage for the subsequent contributions by providing a concise history of China’s labour regimes since 1949. It also identifies four primary themes serving as analytical lenses for China’s labour regimes in the following chapters: (1) categories for analysing China’s social history, (2) workers’ identity politics, (3) labour institutions, and (4) workers’ agency.

Following the editorial, Claude Chevalyere delves into the field of coercion within early modern Chinese history. Chevalyere critiques historians who have overly focused on the working masses as mere victims of “feudal” exploitation, while neglecting the significant influence of free market dynamics on their domination. By reexamining categories of “labour,” he challenges the uncritical transposition of archival sources by historians, which often leads to vague and quantifiable labour categories obscuring the real (capitalist) relations of production during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Notably, Chevalyere’s analysis of the so-called “Yongzheng emancipation of the ‘mean’ people” (*Yongzheng chu jian wei liang jiefang* 雍正除賤為良解放) in the eighteenth century provides insightful perspectives. This emancipation policy removed the registration of idle people and allowed individuals from certain low-status professions (e.g., musicians and entertainers), Tanka boat people (*dan hu* 蛋戶), and other “mean” people (*jianmin* 賤民) to register as commoners. These changes crucially redefined the status of hired labourers (*gugong* 僱工). Chevalyere’s analysis challenges the notion of a linear

progression of modes of production by highlighting the coexistence of feudal and capitalist modes of production in early modern China.

Chen Yang's chapter investigates the construction of workers' social identity during the Mao era through the study of Caoyang Village in Shanghai. Analysing the media representation of the first generation of residents in workers' housing estates, Chen explores residents' dual attachment to their work units and places of residence, which critically shaped their social identity within the community. His chapter highlights how physical and spatial environment interact to foster a sense of belonging and collective identity among the residents.

By examining the Brilliant Glass Factory in northern China, the chapter by Joel Andreas, Yao Amber Li, and Peiyao Li explores the evolution of China's corporatism, from post-revolutionary tripartite state corporatism (1949–1956) to socialist state corporatism (1957–1992), and then to capitalist-style state corporatism (1992–present). The initial phase resulted in the expropriation of capital; the second phase solidified the relationship between the state and labour; and the third one transformed the factory complex into profit-oriented corporations. Notably, the authors focus on the staff and workers' congresses (SWC), an institution that represents workers and channels their voices. They argue that during the first two iterations, the Chinese state actively incorporated workers into factory governance through the SWC. In contrast, in the current iteration, workers have become increasingly marginalised, highlighting a significant shift in the role and influence of labour within the corporate structure.

In their chapter, Siqi Luo and Chris King-Chi Chan employ two distinct models to analyse the reform of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) from 1949 to the present: the "servicing model" and the "organising model." The servicing model emphasises individual casework, wherein union staff or representatives dedicate significant time to providing personalised advice to members regarding specific issues. In contrast, the organising model promotes self-organisation among members, focusing on rebuilding local union branches and fostering networks and alliances with community groups. Luo and Chan argue that during the Hu-Wen era, ACFTU adopted a "post-socialist organising model" to address labour disputes in coastal industrial cities and allow for direct union elections and workplace collective bargaining. However, under Xi Jinping's leadership, there has been a marked shift back to a "socialist servicing model," characterised by a decreased tolerance for labour NGO activism and a repression of workers' collective actions. This transition underscores a significant change in the state's approach to labour organisation and the role of trade unions within the broader sociopolitical landscape.

Kailing Xie and Ying Huang's chapter explores how Confucian ethics perpetuate a hierarchical, heteronormative gender order, thereby subordinating China's middle-class women within the feminised profession of teaching. By examining the intersectionality of class and gender, the chapter delves into how female teachers navigate their career and marital choices, and their struggles to achieve work-life balance and gender equality in the workplace. Gilles Guiheux's chapter on Chinese workers' online videos offers a valuable self-ethnography through the lens of one vlogger, Daxiong, a garment worker who has posted 570 videos over a three-year period and amassed 14,000 subscribers on a Chinese short-video

platform. Guiheux provides rich insights into migrant workers' work and everyday lives, physical and psychological well-being, and social networks in the age of vlogging, demonstrating a novel method for capturing the lives of migrant workers, extending beyond traditional mediums such as private letters, poetry, songs, dance, and drama.

As China's platform economy evolves rapidly, new exploitative labour regimes, relying on technical and organisational controls, have also emerged. Chloé Froissart and Ke Huang's chapter provides an examination of couriers' resistance to these new regimes. The chapter documents how couriers leveraged social media platforms such as WeChat to organise protests and strikes, build alliances, and foster atomised yet coordinated behind-the-scenes mobilisation against delivery platforms. The authors contend that despite the significant challenges of enacting concrete changes in government policy and national law through information dissemination and online organising within the network society, changes of corporate policy are more attainable.

The final chapter of the special issue examines the politics of visibility in public spaces. Focusing on a grassroots workers' organisation, Workers' Home, located in Picun Village on the outskirts of Beijing, Éric Florence explores how the organisation adapts to the evolving political environment while maintaining a certain scale and visibility of its actions. He discovers that the grassroots organisation must strike a delicate balance between upholding workers' dignity and social justice through various cultural forms and signalling to the government that their projects remain carefully engineered within the Party-state's authorised sphere.

Overall, this special issue is a welcoming addition to the literature on Chinese labour regimes. Readers with an interest in Chinese labour history, labour politics, and the platform economy will find it useful. Given the increasingly challenging research environment in China due to heightened political control, this issue offers an updated account of the current situation of Chinese workers and demonstrates innovative methodological approaches. By utilising social media and online videos on vlogging platforms, researchers can gather rich data for analysing workers' lives. Chevalleyre's chapter on workers' categories invites historians and social scientists, particularly those conducting quantitative analysis, to reconsider the validity of their use of workers' categories in official and reputable data sources, especially in the context of countries where a significant portion of the working population is engaged in the informal economy. Conceptually, the multidisciplinary insights provided in this issue expand our understanding of the scope of the concept of "labour agency." This concept extends beyond material production in the labour process and encompasses not only protests and strikes in the workplace but also workers' symbolic and cultural production in their everyday lives, both online and offline.