

Chinese workers' history: passive minds docile bodies

Elly Leung and Donella Caspersz

Business School, University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia

Received 19 December 2018
Revised 25 April 2019
Accepted 25 April 2019

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to describe an exploratory study that has sought to understand how an institutionalised docility rather than resistance has been created in the minds of Chinese workers by the Chinese State. The study proposes that this docility has been crucial in enabling China to become a world leading economic powerhouse.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws on Foucault's concept of governmentality and uses the genealogical method to examine the historical events that have shaped the mentalities of today's Chinese workers. Original interviews ($n = 74$) with everyday workers across industries and locations illustrate this.

Findings – It was found that the utilisation of centuries-long Confucian hierarchical rules by successive regimes has created a cumulative effect that has maintained workers docility and their willingness to submit themselves to poor working conditions that – ultimately – benefit the Chinese State and business, though this is at their expense. This finding is in juxtaposition to current research that claim that their working conditions are fostering a rising consciousness and resistance among Chinese workers.

Originality/value – This paper provides a novel explanation for why Chinese workers accept their poor working conditions and thus critiques current perspectives about Chinese worker resistance.

Keywords History, Docility, Chinese worker activism, Power-knowledge

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Decades of economic reform have converted China from an internally focussed agrarian economy and society into an outward-looking export leader that has the world's largest workforce of approximately 769 million workers (*The World Bank, 2017*). It is argued (*Chan and Hui, 2016; Leung and Pun, 2009; Pun and Lu, 2010a*) that China's rapid economic expansion has been gained at the expense of workers, whose conditions are regarded by prominent scholars in Chinese labour studies as being amongst the most exploitative in modern history. In the wake of increased "mass incidents" ranging from 10,000 in 1994 to 87,000 in 2005 (*Leung and Pun, 2009, p. 553*), and much publicised documentation of worker resistance (*Pun and Lu, 2010a*), some (*Chan and Hui, 2016; Pun and Lu, 2010a*) claim that Chinese workers are exhibiting a "rising consciousness" that is generated from their poor working experiences. These exponents optimistically conclude that, given the size of the Chinese working class, their rising consciousness will not only challenge their prolonged abusive and exploitative working conditions but also State policies – and ultimately – the authority of the Chinese State.

In this paper, we critique this claim by re-interpreting the events of Chinese history to show how these have created self-government by Chinese workers that perpetuates passive minds and docile bodies. Informed by Foucault's concept of governmentality (*Foucault, 1997a, 1997b*), "docility" refers to a *techne* of government by the Chinese State that uses



direct forms of governance that draw on laws to subdue workers' overt resistance, while leveraging a powerful historical legacy to compound indirect governance that uses discourses maintained by workers themselves, and which – arguably – constrains their resistance activity more effectively. This is integrated with an analysis of interviews with everyday Chinese workers ($n = 74$) across industries in China. The research finds that in contrast to the claim that they are developing a “rising consciousness” that will eventuate in better working conditions, docility among Chinese workers has been maintained.

To provide this discussion, the paper firstly critiques the thesis in current research that argues that the prolonged exploitative working conditions endured by Chinese workers in fostering a “rising consciousness” alongside other studies that argue an alternative view of workers' resistant behaviours. Following a discussion about Foucault's (1980a) concept of governmentality and using the method of genealogy, we present our analysis of how thought has been created in Chinese workers. The paper subsequently presents the findings from interviews with Chinese workers that were conducted between 2011 and 2014 before concluding with discussing the implications of the research.

2. Studies on labour activism in China

The move to a socialist market economy, beginning with the 1978 economic reform programmes (Chen, 2000), altered China's development strategy from one based on self-sufficiency to one that actively engages in global markets (Lee, 2007). This transformation saw the conscription of millions of peasants as urban industrial and service workers and a dismantling of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Leung and Pun, 2009; Pun *et al.*, 2009). An effect of this was the layoff of millions of workers who were then pushed alongside the peasant workers into appalling conditions in the private sector (Mah, 2011, p. 30).

The *Labour Law* (1995) and the subsequent *Labour Contract Law* (2008) were enacted to regulate China's employment system under this new market economy (Friedman and Lee, 2010). Additionally, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) – the only legal trade union in China – was encouraged to defend workers' rights. However, both the legislative framework and the ACFTU failed to adequately protect workers (Friedman and Lee, 2010). Other laws, including the *Trade Union Laws* (1992 and 2001), *Assembly Law* (1989) and *Criminal Law* (1987) in particular, restricted the ACFTU's capacity to do this. Given the weak position of the ACFTU in regards to the weak enforcement of the *Labour Laws* (1995 and 2008), labour non-governmental organisations (or labour NGOs) have emerged since 1995 to offer free legal hotlines and consultation to provide workers with legal advice on resolving grievances, including back-pay and workplace injury compensations, and helping workers, at a fee, to prepare legal documents and file complaints with the local labour bureaus[1] (Chan, 2012a; Friedman and Lee, 2010). Nevertheless, the excessive burden on labour bureaus has undermined their capacity to redress workers' grievances through legal channels (Friedman and Lee, 2010), with a sharp increase in official labour disputes, from 520,000 cases in 2008 to 600,865 cases in 2014 (China Statistical Yearbook, 2015). It has been claimed (Chan, 2001; Chen, 2000; Pun, 2005) that the lack of genuine worker organisations and the failure of the Chinese state to prioritise labour protection have contributed to the rising trend of worker protests.

Using a Marxist class perspective, studies subsequently claim that the increasing number of worker protests exhibited a “rising consciousness” (Chan, 2010; Chan and Hui, 2016; Chan and Selden, 2016; Chan and Pun, 2009) of collective class interests (or common interests) among workers. It was suggested that workers' experiences with prolonged poor working conditions were the main ingredient that fostered class formation and action against capitalist exploitation. For example, SOE workers who were once considered to be

the “masters of the state” and who enjoyed an elevated social status and a high level of job security and welfare (described as the “iron rice bowl”) – suffered reduced income and unemployment as a result of the reforms (Chen, 2006). Scholars (Chen, 2003; Lee, 2000; Lee, 2007; Lee and Friedman, 2009; Walder, 1991) suggest that these changes aroused their class consciousness and sowed the seeds of the formation of the working class, which led to their first act of revolt in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests against their poor working conditions. In the private sector, peasant workers were reportedly faced with exploitative conditions including low wages, irregular or back payments, long working hours and restrictions on toilet breaks since 1990s (Chan, 2001; Chan and Pun, 2009; Pun, 2005). Scholars (Pun *et al.*, 2009; Pun and Lu, 2010b; Chan and Hui, 2016) claim that the internalised anger, pain and frustration among peasant workers due to decades of brutal work-based experiences were crucial towards stimulating the class consciousness to organise independent Chinese labour movements to improve their conditions for themselves.

Despite the view that an increased volume of protest actions represented a new stage in worker consciousness, alternative studies argue that Chinese workers retained a level of submissiveness that constrained their capacity to develop a class consciousness and rise up against their exploitative conditions. For example, Lee (1999, pp. 45-68) claims that disorganised despotism (or diverse market despotism) had produced labour subordination and collective inaction through the dismissal and recruitment of workers from a fragmented, disposable labour market. Therefore, worker protests only occurred when the arbitration procedure failed to protect their legal rights, while their solidarity only peaked at the point of “collective exit from the factory, occasioned by plant closure or relocation” (2007, p. 175). Others (Chan and Siu, 2012; Hess, 2013) have noted that the absence of collective rights to organise independent unions and the lack of knowledge about trade unionism led to the workers’ disunity, which consequently destabilised their protest actions. Despite these factors, workers were found to control and censor their own actions (Chen, 2016a). For instance, the wages that workers demanded in their protests were “lower than the amount they are legally entitled to” (Franceschini *et al.*, 2016, p. 440), and therefore, their actions “can be easily defused by a government promise of a couple of yuan as compensation” (Chen, 2016b, p. 4). It has been argued that various outbreaks of protest actions were triggered by workers’ desperation to defend their “rights to subsistence” (Chen, 2006). Therefore, the protest demands by workers were generally focused on maintaining their previous employment conditions, which included restoring their reduced overtime and previous wage levels (Chan, 2011). In addition to their confused understanding of the integral relationship between wages, work hours and the demands that were needed to improve their overall conditions, workers’ absorption of free market values had also directed them to believe that their brutal conditions were both acceptable and inevitable, dissuading them from engaging in collective action (Blecher, 2002) or speaking up for themselves and others (Cooke *et al.*, 2016). Their silence was arguably grounded in their perceptions on the imbalance of power between themselves and the managerial class (Cooke *et al.*, 2016). Without being legally sanctioned, workers submitted themselves voluntarily to the hierarchy of the authorities by enduring the workplace conditions with their hard work and low expectations in today’s China (Siu, 2017; Perry, 2009).

Rather than class consciousness, this latter body of literature instead illustrates a degree of docility among workers, indicating that they tended to subordinate their own interests to the workplace authorities, and hence to the Chinese state. This in turn suggested that the state had exercised a powerful influence on workers’ consciousness that further constrained their ability to develop a class consciousness to struggle against their exploitative conditions as in the ways the proponents of Marxism expected. To address the gaps in the

current scholarly literature, this paper draws on Foucault's governmentality thesis to explore how the Chinese state retains historical knowledge as a tool to maintain workers' docility by manipulating their mentalities in order to construct a docile labour force.

3. Foucault's concept of governmentality

"Governmentality" refers to the *how* of governing: how we govern, how we are governed, the relation between the government of the state and the government of ourselves and others (Foucault, 1980a). In other words, the particular *mentalities of government* that have emerged in particular societies (Dean, 2010, p. 2), and by which "knowledge" becomes "truth" or how we know an event or even people as "truth". Our acceptance of this "truth" subsequently constitutes our social status (positions or identities) and behaviours (or practices) for ourselves.

The concept of power-knowledge (Foucault and Rabinow, 1991) is crucial to the development of governmentality. This describes how we come to know the "rules of right" or the *pouvoir-savoir* (discourse or truth) that shape, form and hence constitute our social identities. That is, Foucault argues that an individuals' understanding of identity, for instance what "makes" someone a homosexual, emerges because of the relations of power that confirm this as "knowledge" (or truth) (Foucault and Rabinow, 1991). Foucault (1977, p. 26) describes that such knowledge operated as an internalised disciplinary power (or "microphysics of power") to discipline the body, mind and soul. This view of power is illustrated by Jeremy Bentham's (1843, p. 39) nineteenth century drawings of the Panopticon (or prison), which consists of a circular structure with an inspection house at the centre of the tower. The prisoners in these cells never know if the watchmen in the tower are observing them as they cannot see into the tower, and hence they must self-regulate their behaviours as if they are being watched. This form of "government" creates a "new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind [governmentality or "conduct of conduct" in Foucault's terminology] [. . .]" (Bentham, 1843, p. 39) and leads to an efficient control and reform of the criminals through the internalised gaze of a watchman (Oksala, 2007). The *truth of being watched* under constant surveillance in the panoptic system thus facilitates the automatic functioning of a disciplinary power within the minds and bodies of the criminals without external authority being imposed (Foucault, 1980a).

Using the metaphor of the Panopticon, Foucault (1977) notes that a disciplinary power is embedded in all levels of social relations, including hospitals, factories, schools and families, that individuals engage in. Together these social relations constitute and exercise a regime of a disciplinary power to produce behaviour by individuals within a norm (truth or rule), all the while ensuring that behaviours that depart from this norm are identified as needing to be corrected. For example, schools and families constitute minute social "observatories" and surveillance systems to train and correct children's behaviour – for instance, their piety and morals (Foucault, 1977). This resembles a carceral (or prison) system which creates a dominant class of managed, controlled and useful bodies that serve as the judges of normality in society the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge and the social worker-judge – to ensure everyone acts in accordance with the discourses of truth (Smart, 1985).

The extension of the panoptic system to various unofficial centres in operating forms of indirect supervision have thus *made* individuals subject their bodies, gestures, behaviours, aptitudes and achievements to the discourses of truth that are embedded in their particular society (Foucault, 1980a, 1980b, 1991). It is in this context that Foucault (1980a, 1980b) argues that a disciplinary society emerges, not by the making of laws, but by the internalisation of norms that have conjoined the mind, body and movement of individuals in their societies. This effect is referred to as *government of mentalities* (or governmentality)

that guides the individuals to self-regulate their own (and others') behaviour, to achieve the status of truths (or norms) of their society within the power-knowledge network of their culture in the present day without engaging in critical thinking (Foucault, 1980b). It is these government of mentalities that describe the concept of docility as used here in this paper. That is, docility refers to a techne of government that combines both direct and indirect means to create a "conscience or self-knowledge" (Burchell, 1996, p. 120) that subjugates both the body and soul (Rose, 1989) to acquiesce to the dictates of "government", which in this paper is the Chinese State.

4. Genealogy: the history of the present

Foucault (1991) uses the methodological tool of genealogy to develop an understanding of how governmentality, or a certain knowledge, was established to govern subjects (or people) throughout history. For Foucault (1980b, 1982), a genealogy is the history of knowledge that constitutes and determines how an individual is governed and how he/she is to live their life in the present day. In *History of Madness*, for example, Foucault (2006) problematises the scientific knowledge of mental illness to show how and why different people, such as lazy, poor, unemployed and the mad, were gathered together, characterised, treated and established as "madness" in the history of psychiatry across European societies. By investigating this earlier history, Foucault (2006) notes that while the nature of madness was recognised as a mental illness during the enlightenment period, a new discourse identified "madness" as a moral defect in the late eighteenth century. The effect of this was to categorise "madmen" as patients within the encompassing authority of psychiatric "truth" to provide them with cures, such as moral therapies and education. Through these processes, "madmen" were thus *made* to practice the social etiquette and discipline their bodies in adherence to social norms (or practices).

Like the *History of Madness*, nearly all of Foucault's projects aim to show how governable subjects such as "madmen" become known as being mad, through the internalisation of norms that are generated through social relations over periods of history (Oksala, 2007; Smart, 1985). Instead of assuming that knowledge has a "true" status as in traditional historiography, Foucault's (1976, 1977, 2006) genealogical approach dismantles and challenges the way we think about supposedly universal truths. In developing his projects, Foucault does not search for the notion of continuous progression of thought, but instead seeks to unravel how fragmented and incoherent events that emerge from the ideas and practices (or lived experience) (Thacker, 1997) in fact create knowledge. Foucault's projects and methods demonstrate to us how we can rethink an "event" in a particular way, to search for the multiplicity of causes and conditions so that the governmental discourses, such as sexuality and madness, can be analysed according to the multiple and complex processes that constitute this as an event or a problem (Foucault and Rabinow, 1991). Thus, by using Foucault's (1991) methodological practices one can retrieve the past, silenced and often forgotten knowledge that contributes to understanding what is "known" as "truth".

5. The Chinese history of present

Consistent with Foucault's methodological practices, this paper charts the historical development and the conceptual underpinnings of the social practices and knowledge that have subtly directed workers to think and behave as *workers* by reinterpreting key events in Chinese histories. According to Foucault, the genealogist is interested power, knowledge and the body and how these interrelate (Burrell, 1988). Genealogy does not relate a sequence of events, but instead reads texts to understand how the body becomes known by influences

of power. Thus, the aim in using the genealogical method here was to locate “traces of the present in the past, not with the reconstruction of the past” (Burrell, 1988, p. 225).

The selected historical events have arguably produced important – but hidden – *li*, that is rules that emphasise filial practices to maintain Chinese docility and the hierarchical power of rulers in histories. *Li* rules were originally linked with a code of capital punishment (or death penalties) to standardise Chinese thinking and behaviours to fortify the dominant position of royal ruling classes from the Zhou dynasty onwards (13th B.C.E.) (Grasso *et al.*, 2009). Zhou’s *li* rules were later modified by Confucius (551 – 479 B.C.E.) to legitimise dynastic *li* rules by rectifying social rankings to establish orderly social relations of hierarchical positions, such as father and the son, the older and the younger brother, under a truth of the “Mandate of Heaven” (Guo, 2013). The Confucian discourse of “Mandate of Heaven” emphasised as paramount the need to accept and obey the natural ruling order and the power of superiors that has been imposed from heaven at the moment of birth as their destiny (Rojek, 1989). Superiors, such as the emperors, were regarded as the “Sons of Heaven”, with divine mandates to rule and control the lower classes (or inferiors) (Grasso *et al.*, 2009). A challenge to the “Mandate of Heaven” of the ruling classes (or superiors) was considered as disobedience or deviation from the *li* codes of conduct (Guo, 2013). These codes of conduct of filial piety and obedience to superiors were inculcated into the mindsets of individuals through moral teaching in social institutions, such as schools and family networks (Rojek, 1989). In this way, one’s behaviour became observable and regulated by others on the basis of a collective moral judgement (of others) and the self. This form of Confucian inner-control system thus enabled the ruling classes to define and redefine the destiny of the docile bodies and minds to ensure that Chinese inferiors continued to serve the interests of the rulers from the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 B.C.) through to Qing (1644 – 1911) – the last Imperial dynasty of China (Rojek, 1989).

By 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established the People’s Republic of China (PRC or China) and declared the eradication of Confucian values (MacFarquhar, 1997). This decision originated from the 1919 May Fourth Movement that was led by the CCP’s pro-Marxist intellectuals to protest against the failure of the Nationalist government to resist foreign domination of the nation after overthrowing the Qing dynasty in 1911 (Grasso *et al.*, 2009). Public outrage at the inability of the Nationalist government to halt foreign encroachment coalesced into a movement that repeatedly demanded a “new culture” to restore China’s independence and sovereignty (Weatherley, 2006). The “backwardness” of the Confucian culture which stressed hierarchical relationships and obedience was articulated by the CCP intellectuals as the fundamental basis for individual passivity, causing China to fall into a subordinate international status (Dreyer, 1993). Consequently, following the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937 – 1947) and the victory of the CCP over the Nationalist in the Chinese Civil War (1946 – 1949), Chairman Mao Zedong made known his disapproval for the Confucian values, exalting instead his socialist ideology of the *Thought of Mao Zedong* (or Maoism) to guide the new socialist China (MacFarquhar, 1997).

While the Confucian values were supposedly dismantled, Mao however continued the Confucian-inspired thought reform programme such as *zhengfeng* (or Rectification Campaign) to create the so-called “masters of the State” by altering individuals’ behaviours in adherence to his revolutionary ideologies (Grasso *et al.*, 2009). Mao in this context sought to first control the inner will of the CCP members in the early 1940s, and from 1949, he extended this to non-party members to eliminate negative thoughts about Maoism (Perry, 2002). Using the principle “from the masses to the masses”, Mao used all means of propaganda, including newspapers and public broadcasts, and a more personalised method of “compulsory study groups” conducted by party cadres (Weatherley, 2006). Either

willingly or under duress, the masses had to self-criticise and confess any incorrect personal thoughts that ran counter to the will of the Party (Lu, 2004).

These Confucian thought control strategies arguably enabled the CCP leaders to continuously manipulate the destinies of the Chinese masses by cultivating docile bodies and minds within them. In 1958, for example, Mao successfully mobilised the masses to transform China into an industrialised, self-sufficient socialist country under the *Great Leap* (1958-1961) slogan of “overtaking Britain’s steel production in less than fifteen years” (Breslin, 2014, p. 5). In so doing, the masses were asked to labour day and night in both State-owned agricultural and industrial sectors in the collective farms (Weatherley, 2006). This led to the reduction of peasants harvesting the fields which in turn led to crop failure and caused the subsequent nationwide famine in 1959 and 1960 (Grasso *et al.*, 2009). Following the crisis of the Great Leap, Mao sought to regain political power by removing his CCP opponents through instigating the *Cultural Revolution* (1966 – 1969) (MacFarquhar, 1997). In this event, the masses were ordered not only to destroy anything associated with traditional Chinese culture, such as books and paintings, but to murder the “intellectuals” (Weatherley, 2006). Their willing participation in these events had once again demonstrated that the populace was spiritually and bodily made docile according to the will of Mao as with those in the Imperial period.

It is argued that the docility created by these historical events in the Chinese populace to act in accordance with the ideas of the “State” were fundamental to the success of the post-Mao leaders in constructing a labour force that was willing to work for the export-led industrialisation programme that the State embarked upon. The CCP revitalised the Confucian filial practices by updating the social hierarchical structure. This work began with the creation of numerous negative identities among peasant migrant and SOE workers by referring to the latter as *gongren* (SOE workers or government slaves in Imperial China) (Wagner, 1998), and the former as *nonmingong* (peasant workers), as well as *mangliu* (blind floats), *wailaigong* (outside workers) and *dagong* (working for bosses). This subservient status was constituted through “low personal quality” (or human capital) discourse (Xu, 2009). In moulding workers into “low personal quality” subjects, the CCP in fact expanded educational opportunities by popularising secondary and tertiary vocational-technical education that taught employment skills to enable graduates to work in the cities (Postiglione, 2011). However, while the national population was “guaranteed” nine years of compulsory schooling by law, access to education was determined by the *hukou* (or household) status the person held (Yan, 2008). The difference in the educational arrangements between rural and urban populations is that the latter was entitled to a set of social rights associated with the provision of medical care and access to local public schools with very low fees (Yan, 2003). Compared to their urban counterparts, rural households – which accounted for more than half of the national population – were excluded from these basic entitlements (Yan, 2008). This deliberate exclusion of the rural groups from accessing to educational resources and opportunities thus enabled the CCP to create a minimum of 300 million illiterate and semi-illiterate “low personal quality” people who knew less than 1,500 characters (Mao, 2004).

The creation of “low personal quality” people was essentially a production of “low-quality” workers who were subject to “quality improvement”. Embedded in this invocation of “quality improvement” was the CCP’s interest to continue poverty by recoding this “problem” as “quality poverty relief” and “cultural poverty relief” in the labour market (Yan, 2003). “Poverty-relief” discourses functioned as a “motivating force” to cultivate a desire within the “low personal quality” workers’ to escape from poverty (Yan, 2008). In these processes, images of the outcomes of “poverty-relief” that

resulted from “improvement”, for example, with the increased affordability of mobile phones and cars, were promoted in the Chinese media (Gabriel, 2006). These commercial activities were used to promote the idea that “the future belongs to those who succeed in the capitalist labour power markets” and to turn workers into customers (Gabriel, 2006, p. 58). With a view to inculcating consumerism into the popular consciousness, mass media was again mobilised as a form of “social education” to publicise the benefits of “improvement” to inspire the subjects’ intentionality towards the “development” of the labour market (Yan, 2003, p. 504). This vision produced a positive demonstration of “poverty-relief” being “gifted” through the opportunities afforded by “development” because “low-quality” workers could “improve themselves by learning from their ‘high-quality’ superiors at work in the cities” (Yan, 2008).

“Quality improvement” discourses thus further constituted a “status consciousness” (Koo, 2001) that was connected to an updated Confucian status ideology in a quality hierarchical social relationship. This relationship was defined by the deterministic identities with which the “low-quality” workers were shaped to see and think of themselves as destined to be the inferiors of their “higher-quality” superiors in the labour market. The intention of indoctrinating workers to accept their positions as their destiny under the discourses of “quality improvement” was to subject these “inferiors” to continual readjustment and retraining to integrate them into the market economy. The workers were taught to “love labour” and “respect regulations”, and to behave “properly” according to the everyday behavioural norms of the workplaces (Efthymiou-Egleton, 2016). For example, they were taught to respect authority to ensure the maintenance of social order (Xu, 2009). Compliance with the social order was highlighted by the Chinese media as a way for workers to protect their rights. Even the Chinese popular press published cautionary tales about workers’ trying to find work beyond the norms. These narratives typically end either with the victims being cheated by illegal labour market brokers (Waōnbào, 2016) or sold into prostitution (Ma, 2013). To reduce social disruptions, services were provided to workers by the government organisations and NGOs, such as job-seeking and educational training regarding laws and regulations in order to highlight the importance of signing labour contracts (Xu, 2009). While the “low-quality” workers were offered new training opportunities for continuous “self-improvement”, it is argued that these “opportunities” are designed to engage them as potential agents in their own governance to uphold the filial practices by themselves as in the Imperial and Mao periods (Figure 1):

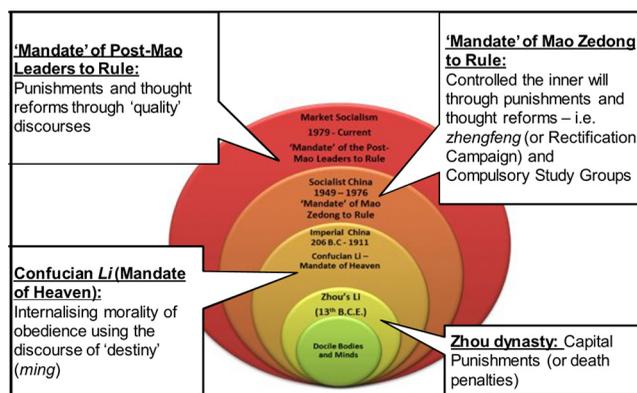


Figure 1.
Filial practices in
different histories of
China

6. Research approach

The study adopted an exploratory qualitative approach of long-term participant-observation and open-ended interviews with everyday workers between 2011 and 2014. Snowball sampling was used with labour NGOs to recruit workers while a random sampling method (Larson and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) had also used to recruit interviewees from the sites frequented by everyday workers such as employment centres, also known as Talent Markets (*rencai shichang*), and NGO workers' service centres. The selected sites covered a spectrum of industry type, size and worker occupation to explore the research focus with a diversity of everyday workers in China. Shenzhen; Panyu, Foshan and Haizhu in Guangdong Province were chosen because of the prevalence of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) which attracted significant foreign investment. Hence, a "flood" of peasant workers nationwide has subsequently migrated to these areas to provide cheap labour in the export factories (Leung and Pun, 2009). Protest activities by these factory workers is a documented phenomenon in Guangdong province (Chan and Hui, 2016). Hefei was studied because this is an underdeveloped region with a large number of SOEs and largely local workers (National Bureau of Statistic's Database, 2011). Hangzhou was also studied because this is one of the most developed regions with the largest number of domestic (or private) enterprises (National Bureau of Statistic's Database, 2011) which have attracted a mixture of local and migrant peasant workers.

7. Research sample

Rather than focusing on the perspectives of protest activists at a single factory, this study yielded insights and pertinent perspectives about the daily lives of everyday workers in different age and gender groups with different work and non-work experiences across industries, including those working in the hotels, motels and factories. The aim was to understand the regimes of truth (or hidden knowledge) that shape their consciousness and activism across different locations. Thus, a random sample of 36 females and 38 males ($n = 74$), aged between 17 and 50, were asked how their work and non-work lives have influenced their willingness to improve their working and living conditions for themselves and others. All interviews had been translated and transcribed into English for this analysis and pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees.

8. Data analysis

The research adopted the narrative (or story) approach as an analytical device to explore the research focus. Narratives in the social sciences are conceptualised as discourses that are organised by the sequence of historical events in ways that produce meaningful insights about peoples' experiences of another culture (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997). The characterisation of narratives is thus chronological, meaningful and inherently social, and reflects the "knowingness" of the individuals that leads to the shaping of their practices and experiences within their own histories (Foucault, 1997a, 1997b, 2001a, 2006). Recollections of the past and evaluations of the present (or "History of the Present") (Foucault, 1980b) through narrative analysis is by linking a prior happening to the effects of a subsequent event to make sense of individuals' lives in the present day.

In establishing a relationship between specific events in the stories to inform techniques of narrative and discourse analysis, Nvivo 12 text analysis software was used to identify and code the narrative themes. The coding was a summary of each paragraph of interview transcripts which emerged from the data in a bottom-up fashion. Figure 2 illustrates the coding.

9. Findings

Based on historical cycles as illustrated in Figure 1, it is argued that the post-Mao CCP leaders consolidate their “mandate” to rule by continuing the (re-) production of docile bodies and minds among Chinese workers through the internalisation of the Confucian concept of social status. Worker status is arguably reinforced by the “low personal quality” discourse. Table I provides an example of transcripts that illustrate the thoughts and behaviours of the interviewed workers as *the workers* are subtly influenced by their self-acceptance of their low societal status:

As a result of their hierarchical mindset, interviewed workers subsequently self-regulated themselves by consciously making “necessary” adjustments and adaptations to any given conditions in the labour market. Thus, rather than being concerned about an improvement of their treatment and conditions at work, they demonstrated a strong sense of fatalism (or filial piety) that was linked to knowledge about their subservient status in society. The sample of transcripts from workers in Table II illustrates this:

Workers’ internal acceptance of the “heaven-and-earth” difference between educated and uneducated classes of people subsequently reflects a status consciousness among themselves which is linked to their educational qualification. Their self-recognition about their educational deficits is a major influence in their self-constitution within the predefined

At the factory, I only obeyed and followed what I was told; brains were useless at a factory (Xiaoyuan)
We just won't do that because we won't want to go against our work leaders (Xiaoxin)
I can't talk to my boss because he hires me to do the job not to complain about the workload (Yaxing)

Figure 2.
Coding example:
“workers” practices’

Interviewees’ profile	Interview transcripts
Rong, Male, 26-year-old, Tyre Manufacturing Worker, Hefei	I don't think I had any rights at work. The factory employed about 6000 to 7000 people - <i>I was only one of their workers so what rights would I be having?? Even the air is so toxic at work we have no rights to speak to the work leaders about that – I mean even we speak to the leaders about that they just wouldn't care because we're just their workers (dagong) to work for them - we're not here to get them to work for us</i>
Yachai, Male, 35-year-old, Security Officer, Shenzhen	[. . .] there's nothing like what you called unions or Labour Bureau in China and <i>we have to put up anything that happened to us [. . .] We have no rights [. . .] No one will help us [. . .] No one cares about us because we're just the workers (dagong)</i>
Bu, Male, 33-year-old, SOE Ready-mix Concrete Worker, Hefei	<i>We don't have rights [. . .] and we don't think about rights at all. We're just the workers (gongren) [. . .] Living in this society and finding ways to survive are the only right we have [. . .] We seemed to undersand the terms rights and power but our social system and our laws never told us much about that and so we don't actually know whether we have rights or not [. . .]</i>
Xiaoqin, Female, 24-year-old, Cosmestic Sales Assistant, Shenzhen	I don't know what labour laws are about [. . .] I never heard of anyone launching work stoppages (or strikes) to defend rights; <i>we (dagong) just don't have rights [. . .] and we know we are only employed to work for our work leaders whether or not we like the conditions or the treatments at work; no one will go against the leaders</i>

Table I.
Confucian status and
workers’ thoughts
and practices

Interviewees' profile	Interview transcripts
Bing, Female, 30-year-old, Hotel Cleaner, Hangzhou	My weekly roster is like 9 hours a day for 2 days, then one 24-hour shift followed by one day-off [. . .] I do 24-hour shifts 7 times a month [. . .] <i>Educated, high-quality people are always the leaders above everyone [. . .] uneducated low-quality people like me are just like mud sitting on the ground for leaders to step on</i>
Qingjie, Female, 46-year-old, Garment Factory Worker, Hangzhou	You know we have so many brothers and sisters to feed in the village [. . .] so most of us had to come out to work [. . .] It doesn't matter whether we like our working conditions, we had to put up with anything in order to make money [. . .] <i>All jobs were just the same to me because low-quality people like me with less education - the conditions, treatments, and the earnings of any jobs that I could choose are just the same. Dagong's destiny is bitter</i>
Tianjie, Female, 24-year-old, Lighting Factory Worker, Shenzhen	[. . .] my parents ran away from me and my brother – they left us with uncle [. . .] My uncle had his own family and he was the one who brought up all of us [. . .] School fees were about a few hundred yuan it was very expensive for all of us to go to school. <i>I stopped studying and started working. I only considered 'better job' means 'better money' so changing job is just so unnecessary because all jobs for low-quality people are the same. Dagong is Dagong</i> [. . .]
Lei, Male, 50-year-old, SOE Ready-mix Concrete Worker, Hefei	[. . .] unlike our [work] leaders we have to work hard and earn every single cent through our blood and sweat [. . .] <i>gongren [and] dagong are just the same [. . .] we're like the machines of the leaders, doing all dirty work for them because we are uneducated. This is what our lives are like - our lives are just bitter which you will never understand [. . .]</i>

Table II.
Workers' fatalism

status hierarchy. [Table III](#) shows that this status awareness which was instilled in the mindsets of workers by historical events has incited their internal willingness to co-construct a destiny for themselves that “fits” into the prearranged positions in the occupational hierarchy:

Their self-knowledge about themselves as uneducated, unknowing and mindless has stabilised their own perception that their destiny is to be “low-quality” workers. Hence, even though they recognised that their lives and health are potentially endangered by their working environments, these workers demonstrated an internal acceptance of these exploitative and threatening conditions as part of their prearranged destiny within their low societal status: “[. . .] occupational accidents and illnesses are [. . .] destined to happen to the low-quality people [. . .]” [Table IV](#) reveals this truth is further strengthened through their interactions at the workplace, government organisations and even NGOs within their social relationships:

The evidence suggests that judgements, assessments and diagnoses of the Chinese workers are implicitly made up of the hierarchised high-low-quality discourses in their power-knowledge network. The commitment of this network towards the regulation of themselves and others according to the quality discourses has further confirmed their destiny of what they *ought* to be in their own social and historical setting. Consequently, work grievances faced by workers are often ignored by themselves, given the governmental apparatus are in place as educators to teach and correct workers' thoughts and behaviours to restore what their norm of performance. [Table V](#) illustrates the sense of “normality” or “standards” that are embedded in the Chinese

Table III.
The destiny of
workers

Interviewees' profile	Interview transcripts
Rong, Male, 26-year-old, Tyre Manufacturing Worker, Hefei	My working environment was very smelly and dusty [. . .] sometimes the dust was yellow, sometimes it was grey, but most times it was black [. . .] A few workers at work were sick and then they never come back to work. I never wear a face mask [. . .] no one is wearing one at work and I don't want to look odd [. . .] <i>Getting sick from work is a normal thing for most of us [. . .] our life and destiny are all very bitter</i>
Ding, Male, 30-year-old, SOE Ready-mix Concrete Worker, Hefei	<i>All working environments are dirty and unsafe for 'low-quality' people</i> [. . .] what do you think we are? You think we can choose where we want to work and can refuse to work in dirty, dangerous areas? [. . .] all of us working here don't have social insurance [. . .] we only earn \$70 a day and we have to budget our daily expenses [. . .] why would we want to pay for that insurance? [. . .] <i>Low-quality is low quality - we're all destined to live like this</i> [. . .]
Daoqing, Female, 19-year-old, Food Processing Worker, Foshan	[. . .] compared to others – mine was just a very small matter [. . .] it's not like I was dying or anything [. . .] some workers lost their whole arms or all their fingers at work, but I lost only two fingers so I was quite lucky. Imagine if I had lost my whole arm or leg. I wouldn't even have been able to find a job to earn a living. <i>I feel that occupational accidents and illnesses are just some kind of normal things that are destined to happen to the low-quality people</i> [. . .] <i>it's just a matter of when</i>

social lives have guided workers to co-construct a destiny for themselves to further regulate their (and others') choices of actions:

Their conscious compliance with their destiny is arguably guided by their sense that all “the low” are the same. Henceforth, they interpret and evaluate their own and each other's actions in the same way of what they can or cannot do, and what they can expect from society within their low societal position. The mental acquiescence of these workers thus embeds attitudes of passivity and vulnerability in the core of their subjectivities to steer them to live and behave within their prescribed destiny in their position.

10. Discussion

In the same way as Foucault's analyses on sexuality (1976, 1986), subjectivity (1980 b, 1982) and madness (1977, 2001a, 2006), the practices of everyday workers in this study are found to be subject to historically constituted discourses. The findings illustrate that workers devalue themselves to be subservient because of a truth that had been deliberately constructed, and which confers upon them a prearranged destiny as low-quality status workers. This mindset is the main determinant of their docility at the workplace.

Much like the relations between a *true sex* and gender identity (Foucault, 1986), the idea of “true quality” determines workers' identities and subsequent behaviour in the marketplace. The truth about their negative identities and status pushes them not only to work in certain occupations but also to also think and behave as *the* “low-quality”. This truth, as Foucault (1982) explains, emerges as specific forms of knowledge defines what is “normal” or “abnormal”, relegates behaviours of individuals to different categories or identities, for example, low-quality versus high-quality. Individuals' engagement in the (re-) production of the discourses of the truth is termed by Foucault (1980a) as the effects of governmentality that describes the effective operation of both direct (the State or institutions

Interviewees' profile	Interview transcripts
Xiaoyuan, Female, 19-year-old, Foxconn Worker, Shenzhen	<i>We won't discuss our grievances with our work leaders [...] but Foxconn is very good because we have Wang Mama Hotline and so all of us can speak to the counsellors at the unions about anything we want. I rang up Wang Mama Hotline once because my work leader was either swearing at me or punishing me because I didn't stand or sit properly at work, so I was feeling a bit upset. The counsellor said I was very lucky that Foxconn hired me because my quality is better than most of the Chinese workers. She said that's why I earn a bit more than many other workers and that our leaders were a bit harsh on us because they wanted us to improve to become better workers. [...] She's right because the quality of the leaders is higher than us – that's why they're our leaders [...] I felt much better after talking to her</i>
Ge, Male, 23-year-old, SOE Car Factory Worker, Hefei	<i>Last time my co-workers found out we earned 200 yuan less than other factory workers, so they went to talk to our trade union officials at work. Our union officials said that it was because the workers of other factories were of a higher quality than us and so they were able to earn a bit more. The officials also said that we could also earn that extra 200 yuan or more if we worked faster to exceed our work quota [...] They're right about this because this is how the 'low-quality' people earn a living in China - it's just the way it is</i>
Tai, Male, 22-year-old, NGO Worker, Hefei	<i>[...] workers only came to see us for their unpaid wages, and none of them came here to sort out their working conditions [...] I mean you might think that their conditions were horrible but the workers feel fine about it [...] we're all in the same boat and we all know that there is no way to improve our conditions for better treatment or better rights at work – we won't get what we want anyway so why would anyone bother to think about all this? We talk to the workers sometimes when they feel upset; you know, sometimes the work leaders are very difficult to please. I just told them to improve themselves to make their lives easier I don't care about the workers and I'm not interested in knowing how they live - everyone lives this way. It's not my job to think about their conditions or their rights - what sort of rights do the low-quality people expect to have? They have no rights; they won't have anything better unless they improve their quality if they want to make their lives easier – I really don't care. My job is only to provide legal advice to those who come to see us about their issues, such as unpaid wages or occupational injuries; but otherwise I don't care about their little things</i>
Yu, Male, 23-year-old, NGO Worker, Hangzhou	

Table IV.
Low-quality workers
in social
relationships

per se) and indirect (the social network) forms of disciplinary power in guiding people's behaviours to achieve the *desired end* of others (Caspersz, 1998).

The narrative and discourse analysis of the empirical findings illustrates the effectiveness of “governmentality” whereby Chinese workers self-regulate their thoughts and behaviours to achieve the CCP's desire of maintaining an abundant docile labour force. Influenced by the deliberately constructed discourses of “quality” in the updated Confucian framework, the majority of workers describe a feeling of “disgrace” if they engage in open and direct confrontation with work supervisors and authority figures because of their categorisation as “low-quality”. Hence, unlike those in the Imperial (13th B.C.E. – 1911) and Mao (1949 – 1976) periods who were forced or threatened to comply with external demands, filial practices by workers are self-directed by their thought about themselves as occupying “low-quality” status in a social hierarchy that is based on the notion of “quality” which in turn is linked to educational attainment. This mentality guides workers to subject

Table V.
Norm of performance
among low-quality
workers

Interviewees' profile	Interview transcripts
Yaxing, Male, 26-year-old, IT Worker, Shenzhen	I kept quiet while I was waiting and hoping that my boss would give me back the wages he owed me one day. You know my boss didn't pay me wages for around three months, from August [2011] until now [October]. I didn't say anything about it but just continued to complete my work tasks, because I didn't want to ruin my working relationship with my boss and maybe my leaders – <i>I didn't want to get revenge at work or to lose my job</i> [. . .] <i>I decided that if I didn't get paid for a few more months, until no one else wants to lend me money to live, then I will have to quit the job and work somewhere else</i> [. . .] <i>we are very flexible</i> [. . .] <i>and our jobs are forever temporary; nothing permanent</i> [. . .]
Qingjie, Female, 46-year-old, Garment Factory Worker, Hangzhou	I thought about quitting this job many times [. . .] but I have nowhere to go [. . .] I worked a few places previously [. . .] and to me <i>all jobs are just about the same for any low -quality people like me - the working conditions, treatment and the earnings at all the jobs I could choose were quite similar to one another. Like this young migrant [pointing at a girl] in the sewing line, we didn't even complete junior high school - what sort of better jobs and opportunities do we have? What are our options?</i> We have a huge population in China but the quality of most of us is really low. <i>Low-quality people aren't even worth a cent [no value] and that's why we can't get better jobs with better pay and conditions</i>
Xiaoqin, Female, 24-year-old, Cosmetic Sales Assistant, Shenzhen	I have to put up with my own conditions like everybody else [. . .] I'll just do whatever my leaders want me to [. . .] it's even [. . .] say to clean the toilets. <i>Work leaders have every right to ask the dagong to do anything because we're getting paid to work. We have to listen and obey our leaders and we also have to show them our ability to complete many tasks, even if those are extra work. You know, one of our co-workers got fired because she told the leader she didn't want to do extra work</i> [. . .] <i>who did she think she was? She's just a low-quality dagong but being so disobedient she deserved to lose her rice bowl [job]</i>

themselves to the strict set of self-imposed regulations according to their cultural understanding of proper behaviour towards their superiors.

It is argued that workers' willingness to define and reinforce their filial practices as a result of their collective recognition of their truth discourses have created passive minds and docile bodies. Their identities and subjective capacities – their choices, desires, skills, thoughts, behaviours and lifestyles – are all assured by the fact that their activities are conducted within the deliberate setting of specific norms and prescribed routines (or destiny). This context reflects that workers are not only the products of power but also the agents in exercising a “micro-physics of disciplinary power” (Foucault, 1977, p. 26) to self-control their own thoughts and behaviours. Thus, it is debatable whether everyday workers in China can overcome the centuries-old cultivation of passive minds and docile bodies to engage in activism to improve their living and working conditions in China.

11. Conclusion

There are many limitations to this study; for example, the relative smallness of the research sample limits the claim for generalisability of the findings. However, the application of Foucault's genealogical methodology to the exploration of how worker consciousness is

shaped by the power-knowledge relations which illustrate a continuation of (re-) production of docile bodies and minds in histories. It is argued that China's stable polity is facilitated by the abilities of the CCP to retain and update the Confucian framework. Confucian (*li*) filial piety that used to control the masses from the Imperial period through to Mao's China is still a vital theme in manipulating workers in today's China. This theme is repackaged into new governmental discourses of "quality" that has classified high (educated) and low (uneducated) societal status. By conforming to the governmental discourses, the workers in this research have constituted a status consciousness that is linked to the Confucian past to maintain their internal docility. The link between their past knowledge and present social practices is the element that constitutes them as docile bodies and minds that severely constrain their possibility to act beyond the defined norms in their power-knowledge relations.

It is suggested that while the research presented here conveys a pessimistic analysis of the possibility of worker resistance in China, by drawing on the work of the later Foucault, it can be argued that that it is the very same matter of how the "low-quality" workers put Foucault's work into practices that is the key for them to actively resist normalising power to improve their working and living conditions.

Note

1. Filing labour dispute arbitration with the local labour bureau is the prerequisite for filing civil lawsuits. See [Friedman and Lee \(2010\)](#).

References

- Bentham, J. (1843), *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, William Tait, Edinburgh.
- Blecher, M. (2002), "Hegemony and workers' politics in China", *The China Quarterly*, No. 170, pp. 283-303.
- Breslin, S. (2014), *Mao: Profiles in Power*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Burrell, G. (1988), "Modernism, post modernism and organizational analysis 2: the contribution of Michel Foucault", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 221-235.
- Caspersz, D. (1998), "Globalization and labour: a case study of EPZ workers in Malaysia", *Economic and Industry Democracy*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 253-286.
- Chan, A. (2001), *China's Workers under Assault: The Exploitation of Labour in a Globalizing Economy*, An East Gate Book, New York, NY.
- Chan, A. (2011), "Strikes in China's export industries in comparative perspective", *The China Journal*, Vol. 65, pp. 27-51.
- Chan, A. and Siu, K. (2012), "Chinese migrant workers: factors constraining the emergence of class consciousness", in Carrillo, B. and Goodman, D. (Eds), *China's Peasants and Workers: Changing Class Identities*, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, MA, pp. 79-101.
- Chan, C. (2010), "Class struggle in China: case studies of migrant worker strikes in the Pearl river delta", *South African Review of Sociology*, Vol. 41 No. 3, pp. 61-80.
- Chan, C. (2012a), "Community-based organizations for migrant workers' rights: the emergence of labour NGOs in China", *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 10, pp. 1-17.
- Chan, C. and Hui, E. (2016), "Bringing class struggles back: a Marxian analysis of the state and class relations in China", *Globalizations*, pp. 1-13.
- Chan, C. and Pun, N. (2009), "The making of a new working class? A study of collective actions of migrant workers in South China", *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 198, pp. 287-303.

-
- Chan, J. and Selden, M. (2016), "The labour politics of China's rural migrant", *Globalizations*, pp. 1-13.
- Chen, F. (2000), "Subsistence crises, managerial corruption and labour protests in China", *The China Journal*, Vol. 44, pp. 41-63.
- Chen, F. (2003), "Industrial restructuring and workers' resistance in China", *Modern China*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 237-262.
- Chen, F. (2006), "Privatization and its discontents in Chinese factories", *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 185 No. 1, pp. 42-60.
- Chen, F. (2016a), "China's road to the construction of labour rights", *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 52 No. 1, pp. 24-38.
- Chen, X. (2016b), "Elitism and exclusion in mass protest: privatization, resistance, and state domination in China", *Comparative Political Studies*, pp. 1-27.
- China Statistical Yearbook (2015), China Statistics Press, available at: www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2013/indexeh.htm (accessed 11 August 2016).
- Cooke, F.-L., Xie, Y. and Duan, H. (2016), "Workers' grievances and resolution mechanisms in Chinese manufacturing firms: key characteristics and the influence of contextual factors", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 27 No. 18, pp. 2119-2141.
- Database (2011), "Main indicator of private industrial enterprises (by region)", available at: http://219.235.129.58/reportView.do?Url=/xmlFiles/en/42e506eeaea24621bec9bcb589ec0a4d.xml&id=0dc9400055324e318b7cf88637af6548&bgqDm=20110000&i18nLang=en_AU (accessed 31 January 2013).
- Dean, M. (2010), *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 2nd ed., Sage, Los Angeles.
- Dreyer, J. (1993), *China's Political System: Modernization and Tradition*, Paragon House Publishers, New York, NY.
- Efthymiou-Egleton, I. (2016), *Do We Really Know China?: an Outsiders View*, Xlibris Corporation, Bloomington.
- Foucault, M. (1976), *The History of Sexuality*, Penguin Books, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M. (1977), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Sheridan, A., Vintage Books, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M. (1980a), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, trans. Gordon, C., Marshall, L., Mepham, J. and Soper, K., Vintage Books, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M. (1980b), *Truth and Subjectivity*, University of CA, Berkely.
- Foucault, M. (1982), "The subject and power", in Dreyfus, H. and Rabinow, P. (Eds), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, pp. 208-226.
- Foucault, M. (1986), *The Care of the Self*, trans. Hurley, R., Pantheon Books, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M. (1997a), *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, trans. Hurley, R., The New Press, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M. (1997b), *The Politics of Truth*, Semiotext(e), New York, NY.
- Foucault, M. (2001a), *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Vintage Books, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M. (2006), *History of Madness*, trans. Murphy, J. and Khalfa, J., Routledge, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M. and Rabinow, P. (1991), *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Franceschini, I., Siu, K. and Chan, A. (2016), "The rights awakening of Chinese migrant workers: beyond the generational perspective", *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 48 No. 3, pp. 422-442.

- Friedman, E. and Lee, C.K. (2010), "Remaking the world of Chinese labour: a 30-Year retrospective", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 48 No. 3, pp. 507-533.
- Gabriel, S. (2006), *Chinese Capitalism and the Modernist Vision*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Grasso, J., Corrin, J. and Kort, M. (2009), *Modernization and Revolution: From the Opium Wars to the Olympics*, 4th ed., M.E. Sharpe, New York, NY.
- Guo, S. (2013), *Chinese Politics and Government: Power, Ideology and Organization*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Hess, S. (2013), *Authoritarian Landscapes: Popular Mobilization and the Institutional Sources of Resilience in Nondemocracies*, Sprinkler, New York, NY.
- Hinchman, L. and Hinchman, S. (Eds) (1997), "Introduction", *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, State University of New York, NY, pp. 13-22.
- Koo, H. (2001), *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation*, Cornell University Press, London.
- Larson, R. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014), "Flow and the foundations of positive psychology", in Csikszentmihalyi, M. (Ed.), *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology*, Springer, Dordrecht.
- Lee, C.K. (1999), "From organized dependence to disorganized despotism: changing labour regimes in chinese factories", *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 45, pp. 44-71.
- Lee, C.K. (2000), "Pathways of labour insurgency", in Perry, E. and Selden, M. (Eds), *Chinese Society, 2nd Edition: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, 2nd ed., Routledge, New York, NY, pp. 71-92.
- Lee, C.K. (2007), *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*, University of CA Press, Berkeley.
- Lee, C.K. and Friedman, E. (2009), "China since Tiananmen: the labor movement", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 20, pp. 21-24.
- Leung, P. and Pun, N. (2009), "The radicalisation of the new Chinese working class: a case study of collective action in the gemstone industry", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 30 No. 3, pp. 551-565.
- Lu, X. (2004), *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication*, University of SC Press, Columbia.
- MacFarquhar, R. (Ed.) (1997), "Introduction", *The Politics of China: The Eras of Mao and Deng*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 1-4.
- Ma, X. (2013), "14 Sui shàonǚ zhaō gōngzuò shàngdàng bèi Bī màiyín 20 tiān jièkè 200 Cì (14-year-old girl forced into prostitution)", *Sina*, 27 September (accessed 4 August 2016).
- Mah, B. (2011), *China and the World: Global Crisis of Capitalism*, iUniverse, Bloomington.
- Mao, X. (2004), "China: views of a medical geneticist", in Wertz, D. and Fletcher, J. (Eds), *Genetics and Ethics in Global Perspective*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, London, pp. 208-222.
- Oksala, J. (2007), *How to Read Foucault*, Granta Books, London.
- Perry, E. (2002), "Moving the masses: emotion work in the Chinese revolution", *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 111-128.
- Perry, E. (2009), "A new rights consciousness?", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 17-20.
- Postiglione, G. (2011), "Education", in Zang, X. (Ed.), *Understanding Chinese Society*, Routledge, New York, NY, pp. 80-95.
- Pun, N. (2005), *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace*, Duke University Press, Durham.

- Pun, N., Chan, C. and Chan, J. (2009), "The role of the state, labour policy and migrant workers' struggles in globalized China", *Global Labour Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 132-151.
- Pun, N. and Lu, H. (2010a), "A culture of violence: the labor subcontracting system and collective action by construction workers in Post-Socialist China", *The China Journal*, Vol. 64, pp. 143-158.
- Pun, N. and Lu, H. (2010b), "Unfinished proletarianization: self, anger, and class action among the second generation of peasant-workers in present-day China", *Modern China*, Vol. 36 No. 5, pp. 493-519.
- Rojek, D. (1989), "Social control in the people's republic of china", *Criminal Justice Review*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 141-153.
- Siu, K. (2017), "Labor and domination: worker control in a Chinese factory", *Politics and Society*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 533-557.
- Smart, B. (1985), *Michel Foucault*, Tavistock Publications Limited, London.
- Thacker, A. (1997), "Foucault and the writing of history", in Lloyd, M. and Thacker, A. (Eds), *Michel Foucault on the Social Sciences and Humanities*, Macmillan Press, London, pp. 29-53.
- Wagner, D. (1998), *A Classical Chinese Reader: The Han Shu Biography of Huo Guang*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Walder, A. (1991), "Workers, managers and the state: the reform era and the political crisis of 1989", *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 127, pp. 467-492.
- Waōnbào, Z. (2016), "Bèi Piàn 8000 yuán nóngmíngōng Shàngdiào zìshā (8000 Yuan cheated, migrant workers hanged himself)", *Zhèngzhōu Waōnbào*, 3 February (accessed 4 August 2016).
- Weatherley, R. (2006), *Politics in China since 1949: Legitimizing Authoritarian Rule*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- The World Bank* (2017), available at: www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview (accessed 20 April 2017).
- Xu, F. (2009), "Governing China's peasant migrants: Building Xiaokang socialism and harmonious society", in Jeffreys, E. (Ed.), *China's Governmentalities: Governing Change, Changing Government*, Routledge, New York, NY, pp. 38-62.
- Yan, H. (2003), "Neoliberal governmentality and neohumanism: organizing Suzhi/value flow through labor recruitment networks", *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 18 No. 4, pp. 493-523.
- Yan, H. (2008), *New Masters, New Servants: Migration, Development, and Women Workers in China*, Duke University Press, London.

Further reading

- Chan, C. (2012b), "Labour policies under Hu-Wen's regime: transformation and challenges", in Cheng J. (Ed.), *China: A New Stage of Development for an Emerging Superpower*, City University of Hong Kong Press, Hong Kong, pp. 357-388.
- Foucault, M. (1987), "The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom: an interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984", *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 12, pp. 112-131.
- Foucault, M. (1989/2002), *Foucault: Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Smith, S., Routledge, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M. (2001b), *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, trans. Hurley, R., Penguin Books, London.
- Foucault, M. (2003), *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. Sheridan, A., Psychology Press, East Sussex.
- Foucault, M. (2008), *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. Burchell, G., Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY.

Giddens, A. (1993), *The Giddens Reader*, Macmillan, London.

Kent, A. (2007), *Beyond Compliance: China, International Organizations, and Global Security*, Stanford University Press, California.

Pringle, T. (2011), *Trade Unions in China: The Challenge of Labour Unrest*, Routledge, New York, NY.

Reed, M. (2000), "The limits of discourse analysis in organizational analysis", *Journal of Organization*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 520-530.

Corresponding author

Elly Leung can be contacted at: elly.leung@uwa.edu.au