

**Making the *Danwei* a Big Socialist Family:  
Transforming Urban Gender Relations in Mao-Era China (1949-76)**

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*“It will then be seen that the emancipation of women is primarily dependent on the re-introduction of the whole female sex into the public industries. To accomplish this, the monogamous family must cease to be the industrial unit of society.”*

*Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, 1884*

*“Cafeteria, clinic, kindergarten, primary and secondary schools, office for retired employees, family planning committee and safe guard unit, all were my responsibilities! My task was to make the enterprise our own home.”*

*Quote from the deputy head of a Maoist industrial enterprise, 2013*

**INTRODUCTION**

In socialist urban China, workplace or *danwei* was the principle unit organizing every urban dweller's work and life. A typical *danwei* is a physical compound that combined industrial production and workers' living space. The *danwei* system can be seen as a unique institution to facilitate massive urbanization and industrialization after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Its evolution from the Mao era (1949-1976) through the early reform (1978 onwards) as well as its dismantling in the 1990s have drawn great scholarly attention both

in Chinese and English languages. While the earliest *danwei* research focused on how the *danwei*, as an extended form of the state, controlled its members (Walder, 1983; Parish & Whyte, 1984; Lu, 1989; Dutton, 1992), recent studies have analyzed the *danwei* from more diverse perspectives, seeing it as a means of material remuneration, welfare provision, or community governance, as well as an innovation of socialist urbanism (Li, Zhou & Li, 1996; Frazier, 2002; Bray, 2005; Bian, 2005; Lu 2006).

However, there has been no systemic analysis of how the *danwei* as a socialist urban system has shaped gender relations in China since 1949, except for some sporadic mentions of women's situation within the *danwei* (Henderson & Cohen, 1984; Bjorklund, 1986; Lu, 2006) and a general notion that the gender order in the *danwei* laid the foundation for the disproportionately lay-off of women workers in the reform era (Zhao & Nichols, 1996; Wang, 2003; Liu, 2007). So far, the most extensive account of gender relations in the *danwei* is Lisa Rofel's ethnographic work (1999) that is more of an illustration of female workers' subjectivity than an institutional analysis of the *danwei* from a gender perspective.

On the other hand, studies of urban women's work during the Mao era have focused on analyzing state policies and discourses or everyday experience in only a few major cities like Beijing and Shanghai (Andors, 1983; Wolf, 1985; Robinson, 1985; Wang, 2006; Song, 2011; Zuo, 2013). Having correctly pointed out discrepancies between the party-state's egalitarian gender rhetoric and the persistent gender inequalities in reality, however, these studies provided neither exact mechanisms that explain historical processes in which gender inequalities were enabled nor ethnographic details about urban women's lived experience in the *danwei* during the Mao era.

This study seeks to better understand urban gender relations in the Mao era China by providing an institutional analysis of the *danwei* system from a critical gender perspective.

Combining historical and ethnographic methods, I conducted a case study of a textile-mill *danwei* system in a keypoint industrial city in Mao-era China. Bringing the level of analysis of *danwei* study to the local yet without losing the national picture, this study fills the empirical blank in urban industrial gender relations in the Mao era and opens up a new dimension in the existing *danwei* literature.

My argument is twofold. On the one hand, I argue that, the gender-leveling program in urban China during the Mao era was fundamentally a paradox, mixed with achievements, predicaments and ambivalence. To better conceptualize these outcomes, I adopt the perspective of public/private relations, analyzing patriarchies in the public and private spheres respectively. I argue that compared to other Communist regimes, urban industrial *danwei* in Mao-era China had relatively succeeded in undermining private patriarchy. This was achieved through the *danwei*'s measures to embed reproductive activities, both regarding workers' daily subsistence and generational reproduction, into the public sphere. In the *danwei* community, reproduction was not just largely remunerated by the state, as also evident in many other Communist societies, but it was run by the *danwei* itself and taken care by members from the same community. This embedded mode of labor reproduction, with higher proximity between work and life, distinguishes socialist China from other Communist regimes, making it more effective to attend to *danwei* members' needs of social reproduction while lightened the domestic burden of the female workers to a great extent.

On the other hand, I argue, the major limitations about gender leveling lay in the public realm of the *danwei*. More complicated than "persistence of patriarchal ideologies," two main mechanisms had given rise to the public patriarchy in the *danwei*. First, the *socialist productionism* in the workplace reinforced the gendered divisions and hierarchies of labor in its

public sphere. On the shop floor, conventional gender norms served as principles in assigning jobs, leading women workers to have less autonomy in work and less material remuneration. Despite that many reproductive tasks associated with women's domestic role were shifted outside home, it was still considered "women's job" and assigned to the female members who were the dependents of the formal workers. Therefore, women workers within the same workplace were divided into two sub-strata: the formal and the dependent. Being placed at the bottom stratum of the *danwei* labor system and taken as auxiliary labor, the dependent workers were disadvantaged both in material and cultural senses compared to their formal counterparts.

Second, women workers' representational structure was absent within the *danwei* as a result of failed political bargaining between the Women's Federation and the Trade Union within the power complex of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Without formal representation as a collective group, socialist female workers were marginalized in the industrial sector and individual women's promotion into leadership positions did not challenge the general gender hierarchies.

This study challenges the conventional understanding of labor politics under Chinese state socialism, which portrays a despotic labor regime where the whole industrial labor force was thoroughly dependent on the state and subjugated to universal control (Walder, 1983). I demonstrate that not only did less formal, auxiliary labor arrangements, mediated by sexist principles, exist under Chinese state socialism, but such gendered arrangements actually underpinned the very system of socialist industrialization. Moreover, this study complicates the "patriarchal socialism" thesis (Stacey, 1983; Johnson, 1983) that argues that family patriarchy was the major source in shaping the CCP's patriarchal policies in post-1949 China. I show that in addition to patriarchal logic rooted in the Chinese family and kinship system, a public patriarchy

based on the logic of industrial productionism worked as another key source in creating new forms of gender inequality.

In the following sections, I will first introduce the analytical framework and research methods. Then, based on existing literature, I briefly summarize the gender patterns in industrial sectors in China both before and after 1949. The analytical part offers an ethnographic account of the case of Zhengzhou textile mill *danwei* system and analyzes its arrangements of production, reproduction, and representational structure of women respectively to formulate my core arguments.

### **Rethinking the Communist Regime's Gender-leveling Programs**

Once inspiring many Western feminists, the Bolshevik regime's gender-leveling efforts that drew women into new economic and political roles and to redefine the relationship between the family and larger society have lost their charm since the late 1970s. Especially after the decline of the USSR, scholars turned unanimously critical to the Soviet policies on women and agreed that patriarchy survived the Communist revolution and shaped local post-revolutionary politics in the Eastern Bloc.

A similar evolution of scholarship took place in the China field. The first generation of scholarship about women in Communist China emerged in the wake of the Mao era when concerned Western feminist scholars first started conducting research in China. Once inspired by the anti-family Chinese Communist revolution and the state pronouncements of radical gender egalitarianism, they were deeply disappointed by the real gender order and women's situation in China. They quickly concluded that the women's liberation in China was at best "unfinished" (Andors, 1983) or just simply "postponed" (Wolf, 1985). Thus, their research questions mainly focused on why significant gender inequalities perpetuated the revolution. The answer is either

the patriarchal Party state (Stacey, 1983; Johnson, 1983) or the problem of “double burden” (Andors, 1983; Wolf, 1985; Robinson, 1985; Pasternak and Salaff 1993; Parish and Busse 2000; Hershatter 2004), which risks reducing the source of persistent gender inequality under state socialism to ones identical with that within the liberal-capitalist society and thus may trivialize the former’s political meaning for gender equality.

Against the general decline of interest in the question of women’s liberation in former Communist regimes since the 1990s, there has been a revival of interpreting the Communist gender programs recently. Unlike many of the earlier works that thoroughly dismiss the Communist efforts in gender leveling, recent inquiries take them seriously, acknowledge their historically unprecedented, transformative impact on women’s status, and try to understand flaws, limitations and contradictions from within the designs and implementations of these state-led social leveling programs (Attwood 1990 & 2010; Ashwin, 2000; Gal and Kligman, 2000; Haney, 2002; Fodor, 2002; Fidelis 2010; Wang, 2006; Manning, 2006; Hershatter, 2011; Song, 2011).

Among these works, a common theme has emerged: While the Communist gender-leveling program attempted to “liberate” women by integrating them into society through their participation in social production, it lacked follow-up programs to further eliminate gender divisions of labor and hierarchies in the public realm. It is argued that the seemingly progressive social transformation was in fact premised on an entirely “traditional view of ‘natural’ sexual difference” (Ashwin, 2000: 11). Lenin’s notion seems to support this argument, “We are establishing model institutions, dining rooms and creches, which will liberate women from housework. And it is precisely the women who must undertake the work of building these institutions...women workers themselves should see to the development of such institutions”

(Lenin, [1919] 1937:496-7). And even Kollontaï (1984) shared the idea that the sexes should be assigned to different spheres of work on account of their distinctive characteristics and qualities.

Therefore, in the Soviet states, physiological differences between the two sexes were taken for granted as the basic principle of divisions of labor in production and the role of primary caregiver was still naturalized to women. As mothers, Soviet working women enjoyed 112 days to three years of paid maternity leave (Haney 2002; Fidelis, 2010); as laborers, they were concentrated in light industries and service sectors that were presumably more compatible with their role of auxiliary workers and caregivers (Ashwin, 2000).

### **Transforming Public/Private Relations: Gender-leveling Programs in Socialist China**

While it is plausible to say certain traditional patriarchal ideologies did survive the Communist Revolution, this ideology thesis seems insufficient in explaining the persistent patriarchal order in socialist China for at least two reasons. First, Mao-era China seemed to have seen tremendous changes in terms of gender ideologies. Having had the highest rates of female labor participation (Jiang, 2004) and female representation in political apparatus (Wang, 2004) while promulgating shortest paid maternity leave (only fifty six days), it arguably have gone furthest in delinking womanhood from reproductive labor and domesticity. This change was particularly radical and salient during the Great Leap Forward (GLF, 1958-60) when the state was calling upon women to overcome physiological limits amid productive radicalism in both urban and rural production. Yet, patriarchal power was deeply entrenched in Mao-era China and women suffered from various forms of patriarchal oppression (Hershatter, 2007). It seems that the factor of persistent patriarchal ideology alone could not fully explain why gender inequalities were being produced and reproduced in multiple social spheres, private or public, economic or

political, in the Mao era. In the following paragraphs, I would like to propose to analyze gender dynamics in urban socialist China from the perspective of changing public/private relations.

The issue of public/private divide has been central to feminist critiques of capitalist gender system.<sup>1</sup> Acknowledging the different genealogy of the public and private sphere separation in the Chinese history, Gail Hershatter (2004) uses the conceptualization of public/private divide to theorize gender relations in China under socialism. She argues that while the Confucian family system had been the core site for both productive and reproductive activities in the imperial history, the twentieth-century revolutions dismissed its value and built a new public sphere outside the family system. Upon the establishment of the PRC in 1949, family for the first time in Chinese history became a purely private sphere. In contrast, the public sphere became the site where most political and economic programs exercised. Accordingly, women's public roles as socialist laborers were heavily emphasized while their roles in the family were theoretically neglected. With their gender roles in the family unaddressed, women in socialist China suffered from unremunerated labor at home that prevented them from achieving higher public statuses.

As by far the most thorough theorization of gender relations under Chinese socialism, Hershatter's analysis draws empirical evidence from the rural area solely, where while most peasant women were mobilized to work in the field, public services such as childcare centers and cafeterias, as the state never planned to subsidy them, had never been institutionalized (except

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<sup>1</sup> In industrial capitalist system, the household and kin group that used to be the primary social institutions to organize economic and sexual relations became gradually shrunk into the "private" space, with their size, duration, logic of operation and function fundamentally changed (Weber, 1978). In the middle of the twentieth century, "household" shifted to refer to a purely private "nuclear family" that only carried functions of reproduction and consumption, with the father, mother, and children filling their "natural" roles of human beings respectively (Cherlin, 2009). The family was regarded as a place of emotional warmth and security, without hierarchy or one dominating over another (Parsons and Bales, 1956). Later feminists point out that rather than being "a haven in a heartless world" (Lasch, 1995 [1977]), the privatized domestic realm in fact operates around oppressive patriarchal principle and the strict public and private divide is the fundamental cause for gender inequality in the capitalist modern world (Friedan, 1963; Hartmann, 1982; Okin, 1998).



for a short period of ill-fated experiments during the Great Leap, which was ended by a great famine). What Hershatter's analysis has missed was an alternative set of gender programs in the industrial urban centers, where public services pertaining to reproductive activities were relatively well equipped and financed.

In fact, contrary to Hershatter's claim that the CCP just neglected the family and women's reproductive roles, there had been theoretical discussions about socialization of reproduction and women's double burden within the Party and the Women's Federation. Based on her research about the Chinese state discourse of domestic work in urban socialist China, Song Shaopeng (2011 & 2012) argues that in the *danwei* in socialist China, the family was neither invisible from the public nor neglected by the state. Rather, the domestic was *embedded* in the public as a result of institutional designs. The state explicitly stipulated that under socialism, family would not diminish immediately but it would not serve as the unit of production anymore. A majority portion of childrearing labor should be socialized. Women would get liberated from their heavy domestic duties and join social production by and large. This would also "advance their political activism and make their manpower fully actualize."<sup>2</sup> Following the Party's imperative, the socialist industrial *danwei* financed and staffed cafeterias, bathhouses, laundries, libraries, clinics and recreational facilities and theatres to assist workers' daily maintenance and also nursery rooms, childcare centers, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools to take care of labor's generational reproduction. In this way, the domestic was institutionalized as part of the public, presumably to liberate women workers from their home. However, as Song points out, while this embedded mode of public/private relations might

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<sup>2</sup> Hu, On Collectivization and Socialization of Domestic Labor, *Hongqi*, 1958,7.

have potentials for changing the conventional gendered divisions of labor, it failed to bring out gender equality.

Song attributes the disappointing gender outcome to the production-centric nature of industrial socialism that prioritizes productive labor over reproductive labor as does industrial capitalism do. In other words, although embedding the family to the *danwei* challenged the public/private separation that was presumably the fundamental root for gender inequalities in capitalist societies, it did not change the very hierarchy between production and reproduction. However, Song does not explain why this hierarchy persisted to be fundamentally gendered, given that most of the reproductive labor was now taken out of the domestic realm and socialized.

Hershatter and Song's research shed light on our reexamining of China's state gender programs. Rather than asking the banal question "whether communism or socialism liberated women," or uncritically accepting the notion that gender equality failed to be achieved in urban socialist China because of persistent patriarchal ideology, what we may ask at this moment are as follow: Why did China appear more radical in deconstructing the essentialist association between womanhood and reproduction compared to other socialist industrializers? Why didn't this anti-essentialist egalitarian gender ideology bring about true gender equality? How can the China case shed light on our understanding of gender relations under socialist socialism and more generally speaking, under the process of massive industrialization and urbanization?

I propose to analyze gender pattern and order in the *danwei* from the perspective of public/private relations. Resonating with Sylvia Walby (1990), who has theorized the evolution of patriarchy in the West and argues that under capitalism, patriarchy has transformed from one that was mostly intensified in the family to that more imperative in the public (Walby 1990), I argue that patriarchy in socialist industrial China had also transformed towards a more public

oriented mode. It was this historically produced unevenness of patriarchy across the private/public boundary that made the overall gender order in Mao-era China so ambivalent and intriguing. To push forward this line of explanation, in this paper, I provide a meso-level analysis that captures the concrete mechanisms that shaped and reshaped gender inequalities in urban industrial *danwei* in the Mao era.

## METHODS AND DATA

This study was conducted in an urban textile mill community in West Zhengzhou, the capital city of Henan province, central to China. The data is based on a total of five-month fieldwork conducted in Zhengzhou between September and December 2013 and in June 2014. There are three advantages of choosing textile industry. First, textile industry in urban China has been operating since the early twentieth century to the present. There has been good research about gender relations in the textile industry before 1949 and after 1978 that can provide me a crucial perspective to capture the pattern of change regarding gender relations. Second, the textile industry has the highest concentration of female labor and thus can provide rich source for investigation of gender relations and women's lived experience in the socialist period. It is an excellent site to "view the conflicts and problems confronting women -- both as females as workers" (Andors, 1983: 81). Third, as the prototypical industry of sociological research, there has been rich research on textile labor across the world, which will well inform further theorization and comparison.

I chose Zhengzhou because after 1949, Zhengzhou started from scratch and quickly became one of the six textile industrial bases of China. With little influence from pre-1949 industrial development and being regarded as one of the most typical Maoist cities, Zhengzhou's

textile industry can closely reflect the ideal patterns of reproductive activities of the socialist era. In Zhengzhou, I lived in this declining textile mill community, closely interacted with individual and some groups of old workers, and familiarized myself with the current situation and culture of these workers as well as the local history of this community. I conducted 35 interviews in total; 26 among them were in-depth, fully carried out sections that lasted 1.5 to 4 hours. The other 9 were less fully developed, with only part of the questions asked.

Recruitment of interviewees was based on snowball sampling method. I had developed some local contacts and asked them to introduce potential interviewees based on their social networks. I told my contact persons that I would like to talk to the first generation workers, cadres, and other staff in the textile mills, especially women. Among the 26 participants of the full interviews, 17 were females and 9 were males. 20 participants are first-generation workers who came to Zhengzhou in early 1950s and 6 participants are the second generation of workers who started working here in late 1960s but had significant experience in growing up or working in the factories. Rarely documented in official archives, Zhengzhou textile workers' everyday life under Mao can teach us information and logic that differ and challenge the hegemonic narrative both during and after the Mao era.

In addition to interview data, I conducted two-week archival research in the Zhengzhou Municipal Archives. I browsed all available digitalized archives (about 15,000 items) under the categories of Zhengzhou Women's Federation (1949-1980), Zhengzhou Federation of Trade Unions (1949 -1980), and the Zhengzhou Textile Industry Bureau (1953-1985), and closely analyzed 150 items that are most related. I am among the first few researchers who are allowed to access the Zhengzhou Municipal Archives and my time of research was restricted.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A problem of using published data to assess the Mao era is that these data are suspected to be unreliable. A method to remedy is to cross-verify information from different documentary sources, secondary literature, and from the oral

## GENDER PATTERNS IN CHINESE TEXTILE INDUSTRY BEFORE AND AFTER 1949

Run by either foreign or indigenous capitalists, modern textile mills in China before 1949 resembled the typical textile mill in England and U.S. when they first industrialized. First using male and child laborers, it quickly turned to recruiting disproportionately young female who were supposed to be docile, dexterous and expecting lower wages. Yet, when textile industry became female-dominated, labor continued to be strictly divided and segregated by sex.

In general, the division of labor reflected estimations of the strength, dexterity, and skill required for each job, weighed against the availability and price of men, women, and children (Honig, 1992; Hershatler, 1993).<sup>4</sup> Assumed to be easier to manage and less expensive than adult men, women were assigned to jobs that required patience, good eyesight, and manual dexterity, such as packing bundles, stripping, spinning and weaving. As women gradually took over jobs that had been dominated by men, the technical jobs, such as electricians and machine repair, remained the domain of male workers even in extreme cases. In Shanghai, women counted 75 per cent of the frontline workers in the textile mills in 1929, men counted 22%, and children 3%. Among the 36 types of jobs she listed, except for some foremen positions in certain departments, such as warping, there were few jobs that did not have a gender preference.

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histories. To enlarge my data scope, I used factory gazetteers, statistics books published by the governments, newspapers, pamphlets, and some scholarly publications in Chinese. These data helped me understand the political economy and politics of the time and locality that I investigated and verified some information reported by the informants. It also helped me connect my findings to general picture at the national level, understanding what was particular and what was representative about my case.

<sup>4</sup> According to Honig (1992) and Hershatler (1993), around 1920, mill work force in Shanghai and Tianjin was originally composed primarily of men and children, because working outside home then was not an option for women. Over the next thirty years, there was an increasing tendency to employ women. Many of the “women” employed during this period were actually girls no older than twelve or thirteen, and some were even younger. Men were always paid more than women for the same tasks. Women in only two departments, slubbing and roving, made more than the lowest-paid men. Between 1945 and 1949, the Kuomintang (KMT) government-owned mills classified workers according to grade rather than sex, but women on average were ranked one or two grades lower than men.

The gender relations within the pre-1949 mills were generally contentious. In the Shanghai mills that Honig studied, there were four factions of male power: the mill owners, either indigenous or foreign capitalists; the technicians, usually foreigners trained outside China; the foremen of the shop floor, also called “No.1”, who were usually connected to the local gangsters, coercing and overexploiting women workers by harassing and blackmailing, and lastly, the male workers who saw the females their competitors threatening their jobs (Honig, 1992 ; Luo, 2011).

Workers in the pre-1949 mills usually lived in single sex dormitories or commuted a long distance to work. Like their western counterparts, a majority of women textile workers before 1949 were illiterate, unmarried teenagers recruited by labor agency from villages, who would live in the dormitories provided by the mill or barracks provided by the agency with much worse condition. For married women in the Shanghai mills, they usually lived far away from the factory and had to take care of all domestic services before and after work. Although provision of welfare services including housing, dining hall, clinic, schools, consumers’ cooperative, bathhouse, as well as paid maternity leave existed in some mills, as they were also evident in eighteenth century England, these measures were set up for pure economic purpose and collective dormitories were designed with disciplinary function (Peng, 2013; Bian, 2005). For example, as Hershatter (1993) finds, the Tianjin dormitory residents only accounted for about one-fifth or one-quarter of all workers; most of them were single workers. These dormitories were locked and workers were not allowed to leave without permission.

Before 1949, modern industries in China were restrained in a handful of treaty-port cities and their operations had been continuously interrupted by wars. The first decade of the PRC saw a dramatic scale of industrialization all over the country and corresponding exponential growth

of industrial labor force.<sup>5</sup> Following the Soviet model, China adopted a heavy-industry-priority development strategy that squeezed consumption and give rapid industrialization the highest priority. The government controlled the economy directly and used its control to pump resources into the construction of new factories. Over the Mao era, China's investment rates have been high and rising, though sometimes unstable.<sup>6</sup> Most investment went to industry, and of industrial investment, more than 80% was in heavy industry.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the state extracted all surpluses from agriculture to invest in industries with a strong bias to heavy industry (Naughton, 2007).

From 1949 to 1957, the female proportion of the urban labor force increased from 7.5 percent (about 600,000) to 13.4 percent (about 3,286,000) (Andors, 1983: 30-36). In this period, the majority of women workers were concentrated in the light industries such as textiles, tobacco, matches, and food processing. The textile industries expanded, especially the cotton mills, where women constituted about 70 percent of the work force.

Despite political turmoil and economic crises in the following two decades, women's participation in urban industries continued increasing in general. During the Great Leap Forward, the CCP reinforced the idea of emancipating women from the home to work so that they could substitute for men who were to undertake new industrial projects that required more intensive labor or higher skills. Preliminary statistics claimed that the number of urban women workers had more than doubled in 1957-58, from 3 millions to 7.5 millions. While many of the Great Leap's urban collective industrial projects were short-lived, and the early 1960s saw a backlash in female labor participation, by 1960 women numbered about 10.087 million in urban industry,

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<sup>5</sup> This section heavily relies on Phyllis Andors' book, *The unfinished liberation of Chinese women, 1949-1980*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. Cross-reference comparison of data is needed in future revision.

<sup>6</sup> Investment increased rapidly to over a quarter of national income and soared further during the GLF, although crashed in the catastrophic aftermath of it (Naughton, 2007: 56).

<sup>7</sup> Between 1952 and 1978 industrial output grew at an average annual rate of 11.5% and industry's share of total GDP climbed steadily over the same period from 18% to 44%, while agriculture's share declined from 51% to 28% (Naughton, 2007: 56).

accounting for 20 percent of the total urban work force. The period after 1962 in general was one of urban industrial expansion. Urban factories in the state-run sector, as they recovered from the recession, seemed able to provide necessary services for female workers by and large.

On the eve of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), women workers were found in every enterprise, but clearly female labor tends to cluster in sectors that were regarded as feminine: textiles (women counted 60-90 percent of the work force); clothing (50-60 percent); shoes (33 percent); small mechanic tools (50 percent); chemicals and drugs (20-50 percent); light durable goods (33-50 percent); and, in unique stances, in heavy industry also. What marks the 1960s as distinct from the pre-Leap period is that in addition to working in textiles and other light industries women made significant inroads both in the heavy industry sector and in the relatively new industries such as chemicals, drugs, and small mechanic tools.

Urban women's employment peaked during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a large portion of the urban youth was sent down to rural villages and a labor shortage occurred in cities. Thus, quite a number of urban housewives were organized into "May 7" factories or "platoons of housewives" affiliated with state-owned enterprises. By the end of the 1970s, the employment rate for urban women old enough to work was more than 90 percent (Jiang, 2004). In sum, without losing dominance in certain light industries, overall female representation in the modern industrial sector increased.

Gender pattern in the textile industry in the socialist era distinguished from its pre-1949 counterpart in two main ways. First, while women were never paid equal as men before 1949, now the CCP implemented nominal equal pay policies and maternity benefits for women workers. Also, as workers in the PRC were entitled to permanent employment and welfare provisions, most female workers continued to work full-time after getting married and having



children. In other words, while the pre-1949 textile factories to a large extent relied on labor of young and single women, the typical new or restructured textile mills in the PRC used labor with families. This demographic change had significant impact on the institutional formation of the textile enterprises, which will be intensively discussed in later sections.

Second, having eliminated the capitalist class within the enterprise by 1956, the textile industry nationwide became publicized and Communist party cadres and some veteran male soldiers replaced the managers, technicians and foremen from the old regime (Diamant, 2010). Compared to the pre-1949 mills, the proportion of male employees in the textile industry increased. In a typical textile mill in the Mao era, the male percent was about 30 (as my primary data of both Shanghai and Zhengzhou showed), while they only counted about 20 percent in the pre-1949 era (Honig, 1992; Hershatter, 1993).

### **THE CASE OF TEXTILE-MILL *DANWEI* SYSTEM IN ZHENGZHOU**

Right in the center of Mainland China and on the south side of the Yellow River, Zhengzhou is the capital city of Henan, an inland agricultural province that is understudied.<sup>8</sup> Designed as a keypoint light industrial city, Zhengzhou was a “blank slate” in terms of level of industrialization by 1949.<sup>9</sup> Rapid state-led industrialization in the first decade of the PRC transformed Zhengzhou into a brand new industrial city that absorbed a large population of peasants and urban poor from the periphery of Zhengzhou and other parts of Henan. From 1954 to 1960, 425, 000 people migrated to urban Zhengzhou; by 1960, the total number of urban

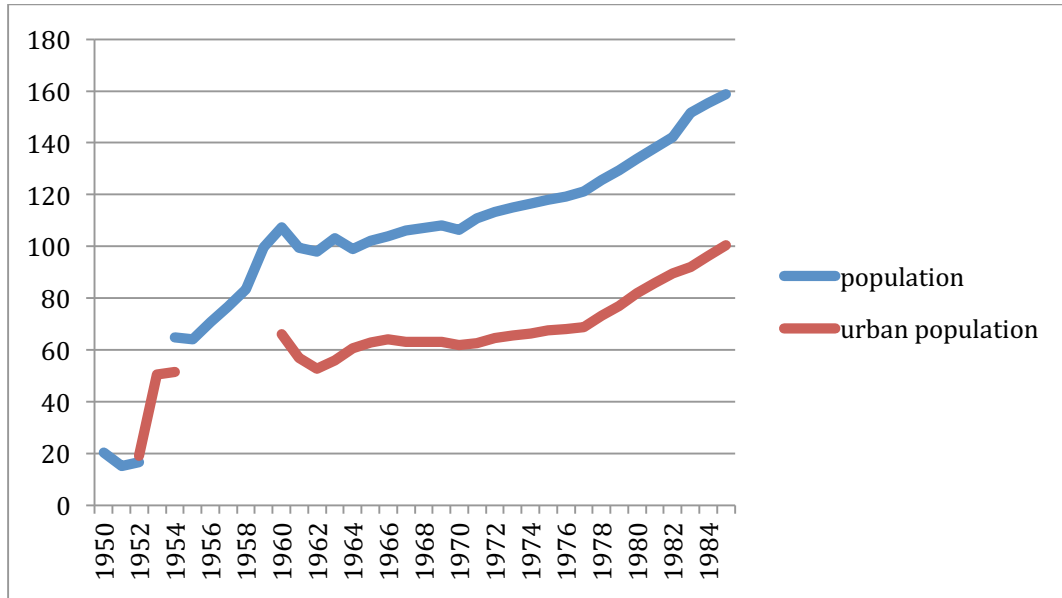
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<sup>8</sup> Henan today is the most populous province in China, with 100 million population, GDP ranked No. 5 in China, but GPD per capita ranked among the lowest.

<sup>9</sup> Zhengzhou had its first modern textile mill, 豫丰 *Yufeng*, in 1919, invested by a prominent nationalist capitalist Mu Ouchu. Yet, *Yufeng*'s production was frequently interrupted by economic crises and warfare, and it was relocated to Chongqing in 1937. When it was moved back to Zhengzhou in 1953, the brand new Zhengzhou No.1 State-run Textile Mill had already been under construction. *Yufeng*, then, was restructured into No. 2 Textile Mill, and located in its original place in the inner city, far away from the textile mill community that I investigated.

dwellers occupied 62 percent of Zhengzhou's population, most of them worked in the industrial sectors.<sup>10</sup>

*Figure 1. Population change over time in Zhengzhou city, 1949-85 (unit: 10,000)*



The textile mill zone in this study was a product of the first wave of industrialization under the PRC. In January 1953, when the first Five-Year Plan (FYP) was launched, construction of the Zhengzhou State-Run No.1 Textile Mill started with the help of the Soviet experts. It took one year and two months to finish the construction. Between 1954 and 1958, No. 3, 4, 5, and 6 textile mills were launched sequentially. By 1960, this textile mill zone occupied a land of 6 million square meters (about 9000 *mu*), larger than the entire old Zhengzhou City. This round of land grabbing was also the largest one between 1949 and 1990, accounting for half of the land grabbed in total.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> I combined both urban and total population (including rural) in Zhengzhou because the urban data by year was not complete in the ZZA documents available to me. Providing data of the total population could let the reader have a better sense of the trend of change over years.

<sup>11</sup> Editorial Committee on the Zhengzhou Zhongyuan District Gazetteer, *Zongyuan District Gazetteer* (Zhongzhou Guji Press, 1996), 140.

Establishing a modern textile industry in a new industrial city, the Central-South Regional Textile Bureau (中南纺织局 *zhongnan fangzhiju*) helped the textile mills recruit labor from the suburb and countryside and reallocated technicians and managerial personnel from coastal textile mills that operated before 1949 to this new textile city in the inland. Meanwhile, the new textile mills would take veteran soldiers of the People's Liberation Army, nearly all males, and staffed them in middle- and upper-level positions within the *danwei*.

To organize a large labor force for mass industrial production, the textile factories established the *danwei* system as all other state enterprises did then. For every textile mill built up on the north side of the *Jianshe* Road, there would be accompanied by a living quarter for workers, about the same size of the factory zone, south of it across the street. As most Chinese *danwei* compound looked like, both the factory zone and the living quarter was gated and walled. Within the living quarter, there were multiple-story brick apartments for cadres and workers. The apartments were usually very small, ten to sixteen square meters, with shared kitchens and bathrooms. Sometimes, the housing supply was so limited that only by the time the first child was born could the couple get a small apartment. Besides housing, there was a full set of facilities for living, education, and leisure, including cafeterias (with a special Muslim cafeteria), bathhouses, nurseries, kindergartens, a primary school and a high school, a worker's club with theatre and library inside, a hospital, a guesthouse, and a playground for sports.

### **Beyond Hao Jianxiu: Female Labor and Gender Order on the Shop Floor**

On June 1, 1950, Hao Jianxiu, name of a female worker from the Qingdao No.6 Textile Mill appeared in the People's Daily and was made known to every household in China. Having been working in the mill for only six months, the sixteen-year-old spinner with four years of

education found a new method that could significantly reduce the end breakage rate. In August, the Minister of Textile Industry decided to name this new method after Hao Jianxiu and promoted it in more than 400 textile mills over the country. In May 1952, Hao Jianxiu was elected as a national model worker, followed by spinners from Xi'an, Shanghai, Jiujiang and other cities during the first years of the socialist industrialization. Since then, the image of a female textile worker, most typically a spinner wearing a white cotton apron and a white cap, became the symbol of urban women laborer in the Mao era. In fact, this image also became the symbol of the socialist textile industry, as if it was predominated by women workers.



*Figure 2. A Typical Poster with Hao Jianxiu's Name Printed on the Apron from the Mao era*

Zhengzhou also followed the national agenda to highlight and promote the image of dexterous female spinners and weavers. Among the seven national model workers in textile mills from Zhengzhou over the Maoist years, six of them were female spinners or weavers. The only male was a machine fixer. Like Hao Jianxiu, four of the female model workers would later be

promoted to managerial positions, ranked from leaders at the factory level to Deputy Chair of the Henan Trade Union to Factory.<sup>12</sup>

In my encounter with Zhengzhou local informants, such successful and glorifying stories dominated people's memory about textile workers during the Mao era. On the one hand, it is certain that the female workers conveyed their sense of entitlement and empowerment by relating their own experience to national celebrated models who worked in the same industry. On the other hand, however, my interviewees' account of the past also revealed hardship, scarcity, personal struggle between work and family as they told their own stories. The real gender dynamic in the *danwei* was much more complex than documented in the national media.

#### *Essentialist Gender Norms under Taylorism*

Against the conventional hindsight that the Maoist industrial production was imperatively featured by the "iron girls" who suppressed their sexuality and femininities and embodied industrial masculinities (Yang, 1998), the Maoist textile industry operated on Taylorist principles that took full advantages of the conventional gender norms. In the textile factories, womanhood that was associated with docility and dexterity were strongly emphasized and further reinforced rather than challenged. In fact, such feminine characters were functional to the Taylorist model of labor discipline.

In the instruction pamphlet written for spinners by the National Bureau of Textile Industry, a Taylorist style of instruction carefully prescribed every single step of the spinning work with drawings that specified standard gestures of the fingers and fixed routines to walk among machines. Based on and modified from Hao Jianxiu's experience, this national standard required the spinner to be highly conscious and super intense in using every part of her body and

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<sup>12</sup> The statistics is based on Gazetteer of Zhengzhou Trade Union (郑州工会志 *Zhengzhou Gonghui Zhi*) (Zhongzhou Guji Press, 1990), 394-408.

accurately allocated every single minute during her shift. As a pamphlet for trainers, it used feminine version of the pronoun “they” (她们) to address the spinners, assuming all of them were women.

Figure 3. Selected Pages on Instruction Pamphlet on “Hao Jianxiu” Method<sup>13</sup>



As female frontline workers' images were associated with dexterity and docility, the essentialist gender distinction in the production domain was hard to breakthrough. Ms. Kong, the national model worker from Factory No.1 I interviewed was a weaver and the reason that she became a national model in 1959 was because her “diligence, high motivation, dexterity,” as she self-reported. As a well-behaved (老实, *laoshi*) worker, she worked for the same factory for thirty years until retirement and never got promoted. Her rank remained as an ordinary worker.<sup>14</sup> After Kong's interview, I found a model-worker evaluation report about her in the archives of

<sup>13</sup> Hao Jianxiu Working Method (郝建秀工作法), Textile Industry Press (1959), p.38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, Dec 10, 2013.

the Zhengzhou Trade Union. The report was written by the trade union of Factory X one year after Kong was elected as the national model worker.<sup>15</sup> It praised Kong's diligence, skills and *laoshi* attitude at work as well as her kindness to others and frugal life style (such as good at saving for the family), and only briefly expressed a minor concern about her insufficient participation in mass meetings at the end. Such an image of a model worker did not violate the public impression of a typical married female worker, who was diligent and *laoshi* at work and virtuous in managing the household.

In contrast, within the textile mills I investigated, even though male workers were not the most representative of socialist manpower (compared to their counterparts in the heavy industries), they were regarded as superior than women in general. Their jobs were associated with the image of being more militant, disciplined, politically loyal, and with mechanic and technical skills, rationality, spirit of innovation and their compatibility with modern scientific management. In 1958, a technical innovation team in factory Y invented a new type of jet loom and this attracted Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi's sequential visits within one month in 1960. Chairman Mao was very impressed to see China could have its own innovation in textile machinery, and amusingly commented, "Above the sky, we have jet planes, and on the ground, we have jet looms!" When I asked about the gender combination of the team, an informant who remembered this event answered, "all thirteen engineers and worker members of the innovation team were **of course** male comrades."

### *Consequences of the Essentialist Gender Norms*

In a nutshell, strong essentialist gender norms had led to rigid gendered divisions of labor on the shop floor, significant gender differences regarding autonomy of work, and concrete

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<sup>15</sup> ZMA: 1960-09-19.

inequalities in material remuneration. In the following paragraphs of this section, I will first use Factory No. 4 to illustrate the gendered divisions of labor.<sup>16</sup>

Established in 1956, Factory No.4 had 5608 employees, with 487 administrative and technical cadres, 4457 workers and 664 other staff. 1470 (33%) of the workers were male and 2987 (67%) female.<sup>17</sup> The actual employment figure and gender ratio fluctuated over time. The total number of employees reached 5960 during the GLF (about 68% were women), dropped to 4586 (57.83% were women) after the “retrench and send down” (精简下放 *jingjian xiafang*) in the early 1960s and grew to 5659 by 1974 (56.9% were women). In January 1975, women employees counted 59 percent among the 28,653 employees in the six textile mills and 50 percent among the 41,146 employees in the Zhengzhou’s light industry in general.<sup>18</sup> The fluctuation of total employment and gender ratio in Factory No.4 reflects the general trend of women’s employment nationwide as documented in previous section.

In the production sector, there were 218 types of jobs. According to the official explanation of Factory No.4, 106 among the 218 were jobs suitable for females, occupied by 3055 workers (67.37 percent of total workers), including cotton carding, slubbing, reeling, spinning, roving, doffer, baling, warping, oil cleaning, floor sweeping, weighing and etc. 100 were not suitable for females, occupied by 1279 male workers (28.42 percent of total workers), including bundling, mechanics, repairing, moving (former coolies). 10 were only suitable for

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<sup>16</sup> I chose this factory because all five factories were designed based on one Soviet model and Factory No.4 was about the average in terms of time of establishment and scale. It can represent the general situation, and analytically, it makes more sense to talk about job divisions within one mill rather than talking them altogether.

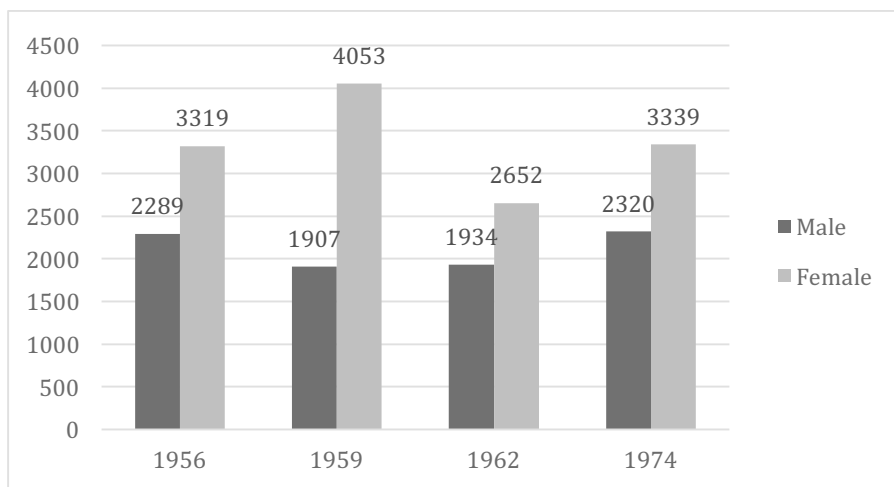
<sup>17</sup> Gazetteer of No. 4 Factory, 1984.

<sup>18</sup> Zhengzheng Bureau of Textile Industry: Numbers of Employees and Wages in Light Industry in Zhengzhou, 1974. ZMA: 061; The total number of employees in the textile industry grew to 8622 in 1979. ZMA: 029-051-023 (Report on Childcare Service at Factory No.4).



women who were not pregnant,<sup>19</sup> and the rest 2 could be suitable after improvement of the working condition. It seems that except for weighing, sexual divisions of labor repeated the pre-1949 pattern by and large, although in general, the portion of male workers in the frontline increased from 22 percent in 1929 to 28.42 in the Mao era. In defense of these sexual divisions of labor, the document mainly referred to the fact that women general were weaker than men and they would get pregnant and thus could not take work that was too intense.

*Figure 4. Gender ratio of all employees in Factory No.4 between 1956 and 1974<sup>20</sup>*



Even for some jobs that did not require high physical strength, women might still be considered “not suitable.” For example, for pipe-aligning, the assumption was that a male worker could take care of 27 twisting machines in a given time while a female only 18 machines (yet it was not clear how this estimation was made). Thus, according to the factory officials, given that factory No.4 had 108 twisting machines, 12 male workers would suffice whilst it required 18 female workers for the same work. Given that “the pay had to be equal,” reasoned by the officials, it was more sensible to use men. Here, it seems ironic that in order to implement the

<sup>19</sup> For jobs suitable for male or female, the document only gave a handful of examples, without listing all of them. The document did not specify which ten jobs were suitable for both genders either.

<sup>20</sup> There is no straightforward data on this. The statistics is estimated based on my compilation of data from different sources including the Factory Gazetteer, ZMA achieves cited above.

“equal pay” policy stipulated by the state, gender exclusion had to persist in certain types of job. In doing so, it reinforced the sexist view that women were less valuable than men if the ultimate goal is to optimize productivity, despite the fact that the estimated gender difference might just be arbitrary.

Rigid gendered visions of labor had directly led to highly gendered experience of autonomy in work, i.e. to what extent workers can decide how to do their jobs, which is a crucial indicator of working condition. In a nutshell, women workers enjoyed much lower level of autonomy than their male counterparts did, since women were more likely to be assigned to jobs that had to be synchronized with the running machines, such as spinning.

All positions within the factory could be divided into two general types: those who took rotating shifts (运转班 *yunzhuan ban*) and those who worked for regular day hours, usually 8 am to 5 pm (长白班 *changbai ban*). While all administrative jobs and rear-duty jobs were day hour based, most jobs in the production sector, except for that responsible for some forms of machine maintenance (about 10% in each workshop), were rotating shift-based.<sup>21</sup> In most cases, women were concentrated in rotating shift-based jobs. It was usually male workers who fixed and maintained the machines in the daytime and female workers in the frontline who took rotating shifts. Even for men who took rotating shifts, since the nature of their jobs were usually assisting female weavers and spinners, such as docking packed cottons, transporting spindles from one workshop to another, and sweeping, they had more autonomy than women to leave the machine for a smoking break or so. On the contrary, women who worked as spinners and weavers,

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<sup>21</sup> There were three shifts within 24 hours. The morning shift started at 7 am and ended at 3 pm, the noon shift operated from 3 pm to 11 pm, and the night shift was between 11 pm and 7 am of the next day. A worker would take morning shifts for a whole week, then switched to night shifts for the next whole week, and then shifted to noon shifts for another week.

although perceived as highly skilled jobs, had to spend every single minute with the machine during a shift, unless they had been pregnant for more than seven month or breastfeeding.

One of my informants recalled, “For men, whenever they finished fixing the machine, they just slipped away; but for women, we couldn’t leave the machine. Even for restroom, we had to run fast.” Such a working mode with high intensity had changed female workers’ life style. For several decades of working as a spinner, this informant “only spent ten minutes for each meal.”<sup>22</sup> During the Great Leap, working hours were even longer. “We tried to work 24 hours non stop, and I was too sleepy and hit my head on the wall accidentally. It really hurt, and I woke up,” one informant told me.

During my interviews, while the male informants tended to express their political take on the Mao era, the female workers tended to recall somatic experience. The most frequent words they used to describe days on the shop floor were “exhausting,” “tiresome,” “sleepy,” “noisy,” “humid,” but in the same time, they were also very proud of working for the factories. Absorbing workers’ energy and time, the looms never stopped except for a few national holidays during a year. “Because it was not good to shut down the machine, our factory ran 24 hours a day and seven days a week all the time during the Mao period. I only remembered machine shutdowns a few days during the Lunar New Year, or on the Labor Day and the National Day, because then workers would go to mass parades organized by the municipal government,” one informant told me.<sup>23</sup>

Ironically, while the International Labor Women’s Day is a public holiday in China since the Mao era and many urban female employees would take a half-day off, the female textile workers could not celebrate their own day by taking a break. One informant explained this to me,

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<sup>22</sup> Interview, December 20, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, December 12, 2013.

“We couldn’t have the March-8 holiday, because all of us were women, once you took a holiday leave, the machine would need to stop. Those women who worked in the heavy industrial sectors could take a March-8 leave, because they were the minority there anyway. But we couldn’t. When you were at work, you needed to keep running among the machines. You even didn’t have time going to the toilet; if you couldn’t bear it, you had to find someone to replace you for a moment.”

Finally, gender biases also led to concrete material sense. For example, over the Mao era, Zhengzhou female workers consistently received 20% less of monthly food coupons than male workers. While the standard for male frontline workers was between 20-22 kilograms/month over the Mao era, that for female was between 16 to 18 kilograms/month. And for workers in the rear-duty department (mostly women), it was only 13-15 kilograms/month.<sup>24</sup> When I asked why this gender gap existed, the answer among the workers, both men and women, were again, “**of course**, men eat more than women do.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Making a Big Socialist family: Embedding Private Family into the *Danwei* Public**

Persistent sexual divisions of labor on the shop floor can be understood as a product of two factors. First, there was a path-dependency effect that made the arrangements of jobs in the current textile mill follow that was operating before 1949 in China, which embodied rigid gender principles as mentioned earlier.<sup>26</sup> Second, more importantly, the principle of socialist industrial productionism provided incentives for the textile officials to keep the gender distinction based on

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<sup>24</sup> Interview November 28, 2013. The standard fluctuated over the Mao era due to the famine after GLF.

<sup>25</sup> Interview November 27, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> There has been no direct archival or documentary evidence showing how the Soviet gender practice affected the set up of the post-1949 Chinese textile mills. However, according to the ZMA documents, textile mills in Zhengzhou were modeled after the Soviet mills and the gendered divisions of labor here were pre-designated before labor recruitment. Based on literature on Soviet studies, it seemed that the Soviet mills also featured rigid gendered division of labor (see Lapidus, 1978).

unwarranted assumptions that women were inferior to men, despite the CCP's gender egalitarian rhetoric.

Despite these predicament, as I show in this section, the *danwei* did took great efforts, both materially and ideologically, in transforming gender relations in the reproductive, private realm by embedding it into the productive, public realm. I argue that this embedding effort was primarily to mediate between the state's high-accumulation-low-consumption developmental strategy and the local workers' demands for livelihood amid scarcity and hardship. However, it also worked effectively in undermining the patriarchal power in individual families and complied with the interests of the female labor. In the following paragraphs of this section, I will first elaborate the tensions between production and reproduction existing within the work force and how the *danwei* system attempted to cope with it. Then, I argue that these measures had paradoxical consequences in terms of gender relations.

*"Build the Danwei into a Socialist Family": Solving the Tension between Production and Reproduction*

While the primary goal of the industrial *danwei* was to maximize social production, it had to rely on the same women workers to cultivate the "buds of the motherland," i.e. the next generation of labor. By the late 1950s, about 90 percent of the women textile workers in the mills I studied were married and with at least one young child.<sup>27</sup> The ever-running machines just consumed too much of their energy for them to take care of their children. The seriousness of this problem varied across families and marriage types.

For female workers married to their co-workers and both of the couple took rotating shifts, although the wife still felt responsible for house chores and primary care, the energy-

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<sup>27</sup> On average female workers in the Mao era would give birth to 2-4 children.

consuming work and the night shifts made her unable to afford much time at home. Thus, division of domestic labor would be more availability-based. Of the husband and wife, whichever got home first would cook. As one informant recalled, “I always felt totally exhausted after the night shift. When I was breastfeeding my older son, I put him in the nursery room next to the workshop. But after the night shift, I was too exhausted to pick him up. I would go home to take a nap first, and when I woke up a few hours later, I went to the nursery room to feed him.”<sup>28</sup>

For female workers married to cadres or technicians who worked during the regular day hours, they would rely on their husbands to do some basic house chores like cooking and cleaning. Although whenever they had time, they would do most sewing work and laundry. In the late period of the Mao era, many women would want to quit the shift-based frontline jobs and transferred to regular day hours when they got married. Some women whose husbands were cadres managed to do so first.<sup>29</sup> Another popular strategy among workers was to rely on their parents to take care of the children while they were working.

In the earlier years of the socialist era, the factory well noticed this tension between production and reproduction. Both its spatial and institutional developments attempted to address this tension. Spatially, the factory attached the workers’ living compound intimately to the factory workshops, made the *danwei* like a big kin/clan corporation, in which members were not only colleagues but also fellow members of the kin. Living together and knowing each other well, workers sometimes relied on their neighbors for childcare and cooking, although it depended on the neighbor relations.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview on Dec 20, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, Nov. 25, 2013.

More important than its spatial resembling of a family, the work unit used its public resources to fulfill some functions that used to be done in the domestic. A series of public services were provisioned by the factory using a relative modest amount of money squeezed from the profit they turned over to the state. While it was the state's idea to socialize childcare as early as before 1949, the state did not have a budget for these services but told the enterprise rely on themselves. These services include cafeterias, laundries, public bathhouse, clinic, grocery and diary co-op, childcare centers, nursery rooms, etc. Basically, the factory moved a significant amount of domestic burden into the semi-public sphere within the *danwei* (they were not totally free, but the fees were just nominal and thus very affordable.)

For eating at the cafeterias, the factories operated on a subsidy system. Each month, the worker paid 12 *yuan* from their own pockets, about one fifth of their monthly wage, and the factory subsidized another 12 *yuan* for the worker to dine at the cafeteria during workdays. Based on my interview, single workers without a kitchen usually chose to dine at the workplace; married workers usually cook at home to save. It seemed that the cafeterias did not really solve the working mother's problem. But some mothers would let their children cook for the family. As one of my informants, a second-generation female worker recalled, "I started cooking for my whole family when I was nine years old. Both my parents were too busy, so I started cooking for them and my little brother every morning, and later for dinner as well."

Most informants voluntarily mentioned several important facilities regarding childcare services. Every female worker had fifty-six days of full-paid maternity leave.<sup>30</sup> Usually, the pregnant worker would work until she was due and took fifty days of leave before coming back to work. When she came back, she would bring the newborn baby to the workshop, putting it in the *nursery room* next to the workshop. She can nurse her baby every few hours. After six

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<sup>30</sup> This was the national standard for all state-run enterprises.

months and until three years old, the child would be sent to the *daycare center*. Between three until seven, the children would go to the *kindergarten*. They ate and slept in the kindergarten Monday through Saturday. On Saturday afternoon, their parents came to pick them up and then sent them back on next Monday. The monthly fee for kindergarten was between 40 cents and 2 *yuan* for each child, while the average wage of a worker was about 40 *yuan*.

Although the provisions mentioned above may resemble some measures in mills before 1949, the textile mills during the Mao era made these services firmly institutionalized and become the fundamental feature of the *danwei* system. In fact, by the 1980s, the most pressing burden for the enterprise was to provide sufficient housing, medical care, child and senior care, schooling and job replacement quota for the adult children of the old workers'. As a deputy factory head whose title literally meant "factory head supervising workers' living (生活副厂长 *shenghuo fu changzhang*)" recalled, "cafeteria, clinic, kindergarten, primary and secondary schools, office for retired employees, family planning committee and safe guard unit, all were my responsibilities! *My task was to make the enterprise our own home.*"<sup>31</sup>

The second aspect in which the post-1949 mills distinguished from its pre-1949 counterparts in terms of welfare services was its emphasis on reproducing the second generation of the working class. The reason for welfare provisions was not only worker's daily reproduction but the generational reproduction of the labor force, who was the symbol of the triumph of revolution and the future of socialism.

To celebrate the International Children's Day of 1963, Deng Yingchao, Deputy Chair of the ACWF and Deputy Chair of the Chinese People's Commission on Protection for Children, gave an important speech. She called for all parents, senior family members and people working

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<sup>31</sup> Interview, December 19, 2013.



for children to “cultivate the children into tough and reliable successors of the revolutionary undertaking.” She emphasized that, when educating the children, “we should look from the macro perspective, and rely on the state’s guiding principle. People who have children are both parents of the children and the masters of the nation. Educating the children for the public and the home is the double-responsibility of parents...The children are their parents’ offspring, yet at the same time, and more importantly, they are the next generation of our nation, members of the people, as well as the successors of the people’ revolution.”<sup>32</sup>

In the socialist era, all the five mills established their own kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. They were also open to non-employee families living nearby. Some of these affiliated schools remained popular until the dismantling of the work unit system in the 1990s. But in general, they had been always less competent in terms of academic results than the secondary schools where children from the college professor families and cadre families were concentrated.<sup>33</sup> After 2000, all these factory-run secondary schools were detached from the rusting factories and now became regular secondary schools under the full control of the Zhengzhou Educational Bureau. In any case, during the Mao era, family was not the primary agent of second-generation education; this became the full responsibility of the *danwei*. The *danwei* promised the worker parents that their children would be secured a job when they grow up, most typically to replace their parents’ position within the same factory.

The *danwei* as a mediation between production and reproduction described above had significant implications for gender relations. Embedding the worker’s family within the state-run enterprise, not only did the *danwei* change the conventional gendered divisions of labor within the family, it in fact redefined the function of the family itself. Recruited from rural areas or the

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<sup>32</sup> Deng Yingchao, On International the Children’s Day, *People’s Daily*, May 31, 1963.

<sup>33</sup> Interview, Dec 16, 2013.

suburbs at a young age, the majority of the workers were single and away from their primary family when started working in the textile mills. Several years later, around the late 1950s and early 1960s, most of them married co-workers or other Zhengzhou citizens and started a small family, often housed within the same *danwei* compound. This type of small family within a larger collective community became the prototype of new working-class family in the Mao era, which substantially differed from the traditional Chinese family. Although some couples would have their rural parents living with them and helping them with the children, since the parents were unemployed dependents, the authority within this small family was at the hands of the young couples.

In terms of gendered divisions of labor, as I have shown in previous paragraphs, in the new working-class family, the link between gender and certain types of domestic chores had been weakened. Divisions of labor on tasks such as cooking and cleaning would be based on availability of off-work time. Nevertheless, women did report taking primary care of sewing and shoe making. For child rearing, neither parent could spend sufficient time with the children because they were exhausted from work. Children were sent to nursery centers after six months and later public care centers and schools. In general, working class parents had very limited resource in terms of time and cultural capital for their children. In terms of women's status, these changes were not necessarily linked to improvement of quality of life, yet they did alter the traditional gendered division of labor at home, which would be otherwise strongly immune to social change.

In terms of functions of family, the new working-class family within the *danwei* compound now became a semi-private family that still carried the function of daily reproduction of labor as its counterpart in the capitalist system did. However, family was not a pure private

place. To use the term from the textile mills, family now enjoyed “small freedom in a big collective” (大集体, 小自由 *da jiti, xiao ziyou*).<sup>34</sup>

To a great extent, the *danwei* had replaced family patriarchy to become the new authority of individual families. In pre-1949 Chinese families, married women were controlled by their husbands and mothers-in-law; now, they were both protected and subordinated to the *danwei*. Since the early 1960s, the textile mills started advocating family planning following the state’s population policy (Scharping, 2013). It also launched the “four-period protection” (四期保护 *siqi baohu*) program that taught female workers public health knowledge during menstruation, pregnancy, maternity, and nursing period.

### **The Rise of Public Patriarchy in the *Danwei* System**

However, the same process that stifled family patriarchy and shouldered female workers’ domestic burden had paradoxically given rise to a socialist *public patriarchy* in the industrial realm under state socialism. In this section, I show that this public patriarchy was consolidated through two main mechanisms: *dividing and marginalizing*.

#### ***Divided by the Formal/Dependent Line: The Two-Strata among Women in the Danwei***

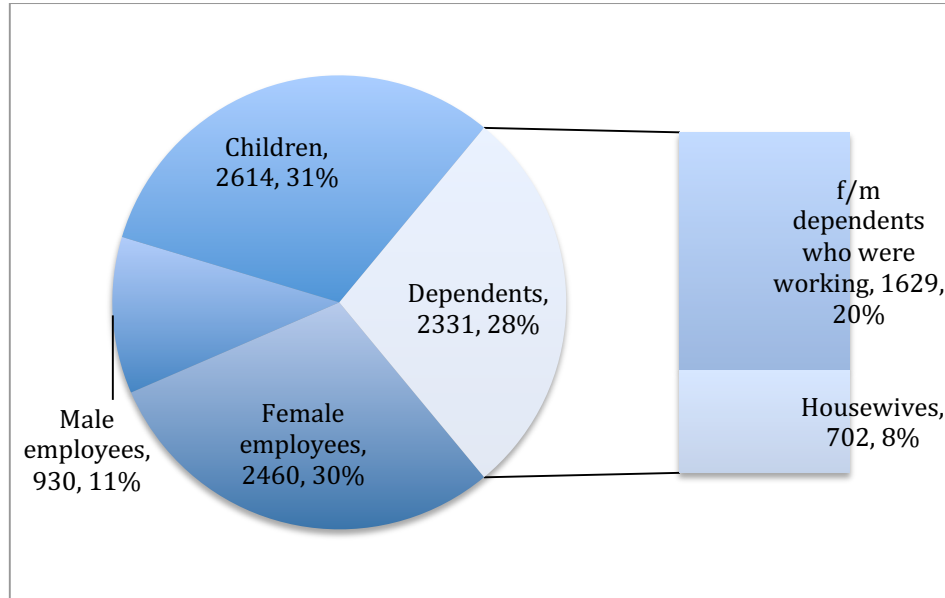
Figure 5 shows a typical distribution of gender and employment in the *danwei* compound of Factory No.5 in 1962.<sup>35</sup> Among the 2460 formal female employees, 91.8 percent were married, with two or three children on average. The total 1,229 households were housed in the living compound and divided into three dependents’ committees.

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<sup>34</sup> ZMA:029-040-016.

<sup>35</sup> I would like to report population composition of Factory No.3 in different periods over the Mao era, because it did fluctuate due to a series of productive and political campaigns. But the only data available and comprehensive is from year 1962 when it approached to the end of the post-Leap Forward crisis and industrial sectors went back to routine operation. The current data, I would argue, can still reflect the typical situation in the Mao era and thus informative.

Figure 5. Distribution of Population by Gender and Employment in Factory No.3 in 1962.



(Total Number of Population: 8335; Number of households: 1,229; Number of dependents committee: 3; Source: Zhengzhou Women's Federation: Investigative Report on Female Workers' Thoughts in No. 3 Factory, ZZA: 029-050-005; ZWF: Investigative Report on Workers' Dependents in Factory No.3, ZZA: 029-050-007)

As most existing works emphasize the political and economic controlling functions of the *danwei*, they mainly focus on looking at power dynamics between the cadres and the formal workers, yet barely mention the adult dependent members of the *danwei*, who were either working elsewhere or just housewives living in the same compound. Some of these workers' dependents, most of them female, became "dependent workers" (家属工 *jiashu gong*), who would be organized by the local Women's Federation to produce shoes and other handicrafts in the first years after 1949 and then worked in the factory or collective enterprises during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960).

The other group of the workers' dependents would just stay home doing "domestic labor" (家务劳动 *jiawu laodong*). They were typically rural married women coming with their

husbands who were revolutionary cadres and assigned cadre-level jobs in the factories. As Figure 5 shows, by 1962, there were still 702 housewives in Factory No.3, slightly less than the number of male formal employees, which was 930.

According to the Zhengzhou official record, during the Urban People's Commune (UPC) movement (1958-1960), 52,055 women, including both dependents of the workers and housewives of other citizens, were "liberated" from home and joined social production, accounting 81 percent of the total population that were "liberated" (from home to work in the public domain) in Zhengzhou during the movement. Among these former housewives, 14,000 were assigned jobs in industrial enterprises and public service sectors, and the rest (about two-third) were assigned jobs in commune-run industrial enterprises and service sectors.<sup>36</sup> After the post-Leap Forward retrenchment, some of them stayed in the service sectors of the factory.

The more commonly mentioned group of women in the *danwei* system were the formal workers. These female workers counted about 60 percent of the labor force within the Zhengzhou textile industry. Aged between 16 and 22 in mid-1950s, they were new workers recruited from urban proletarian or petty bourgeoisie families or rural areas who did not have any opportunities at home and were promised of better living conditions by coming to Zhengzhou. In the new factories, they would have stable incomes and live in the dormitories until got married; by then, they would be assigned to an apartment with their spouse.

In the same textile mill, while formal skilled and semi-skilled women workers in the front line benefited from the reproduction-related provisions from the *danwei*, it was their unskilled or informal counterparts who served those reproductive sectors and earned much less than those in the frontline. These undervalued sectors included mess halls, laundry stations, bathhouses,

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<sup>36</sup> Zhengzhou Municipal Archives (ZMA), 029-032-005. "The dexterous girls" movements. "Dexterous girls" here refers to 巧姑娘 in Chinese, arguably the opposite image of the "iron girl". While the latter symbolized women's masculinity in socialist construction, the former symbolized more conventional femininities.

groceries, kindergartens, nursery centers, hospitals and so on. Oftentimes, it was female workers and the male workers' dependents, mostly their unemployed, illiterate wives and mothers, who staffed this space, with some men serving as the leaders in these sectors.

For formal employees who staffed these rear-duty departments, their wages were much less than that of the frontline workers. According to Factory Y's investigative report on its childcare service in 1962, "nearly 100 percent of the staff in this department were unsatisfied with the low wages." As the head of the care center complained, "Among employees who came to this factory in 1956, those who worked in the frontline workshops now earned between 53 and 57 *yuan* a month. But look at our care center: seven people earned 39 a month, five people 35 a month, and all of the rest thirty-nine staff only earned 30.5 a month."<sup>37</sup> Young graduates did not want to be assigned to care work, because they thought doing this job had lower status than other jobs and doing it had "no future" (没前途 *mei qiantu*). In factory No.4, due to lack of care work staff, some women workers who had worked in the frontline workshops were relocated to the care center, and they felt very angry. As one of them complained, "wages in the care center were too low. Now, my wage is 46.7 a month, which is the lowest in my workshop but the highest in the care center! In the future, when economy gets better, wages in the workshop would increase, but that in the care center would not."

However, within the care and service departments, those who occupied the lowest strata were not these formal workers but the contracted staff, usually the dependents, or *jiashu gong*. In 1958, factory Y recruited 53 *jiashu gong* to the care department. These 53 people became

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<sup>37</sup> ZMA: 029-050-023. In factory No.4, there were 130 staff working in the care service department. 46 were in the kindergarten, 51 in day care center, and 33 in nursery rooms.

contract workers who were not entitled to welfare provisions that the formal employees had. Thus, they consistently received less food coupons and coupons for industrial products.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, even though the gendered divisions of labor within individual families had been changed, the general association between womanhood and reproduction-related labor was not. It was reproduced from the home to the public space. This peculiar gender division of labor featured the industrial *danwei* system in general over the Mao's years. As I show in this paper, this was even true within the textile mills where female formal labor was highly concentrated.

Thus, I argue that the socialization of reproductive labor, which initially was to help the female workers, actually gave rise to a gender-based segregated public sphere that placed women who provided service labor secondary to those worked in the frontline production. While the textile mill relied on and provided historically much progressive welfare services to female workers in the frontline, it made this progress at the cost of taking advantage of another large group of women within the same *danwei*.

### ***The Absence of “Women-Work”: Marginalization of Women Labor in the Danwei System***

In this section I turn to the findings that female labor was institutionally marginalized in the *danwei*'s power complex. I show why, despite that the CCP had a long tradition in doing “women-work” and its arguably strong party-controlled Women's Federation in mobilizing the women mass after 1949, women-work was virtually missing within the *danwei*. I argue that this was a product of the institutional interactions among the Women's Federation, the Trade Union and the *danwei*, with structural reasons and contingency.

In the first few years of the PRC, the All China Women's Federation (ACWF) was enthusiastic in dealing with women-work within factories. Yet, after a series of institutional

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<sup>38</sup> ZMA: 026-209-002.

realignments, the Women's Federation's power became confined within the residential area, targeting only issues in the domestic realm.<sup>39</sup> The factory-branch of the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) system took over women workers and dependents of workers within the *danwei*. This was the overall case nationwide and also true to Zhengzhou. Due to its non-gender specific nature, the trade union in the *danwei* took little interest in gender-related issues. In general, this institutional split up made women workers unable to solve conflicts between her productive and reproductive duties in a systemic way; politically, it marginalized women's voice within the trade union system and thus contributed to their general marginalization within the industrial workforce.

Established in January 1949, the Zhengzhou Women's Federation (ZWF) followed the national ACWF's agenda, organized different urban women's groups including female workers (mainly in the tobacco industry), intellectuals, students, handcraft workers, and housewives, set up "housewives associations" in residential areas, and held eight municipal women's congresses between 1949 and 1962. At the municipal women's congresses, women representatives from all social sectors in Zhengzhou submitted their self-drafted proposals, expressing concerns and suggestions over a variety of topics around work, home, and daily life.<sup>40</sup>

Over the socialist era in general, the Women's Committee at the residents committee level had a dual-role among the mass women. On the one hand, it was arguably the most intrusive state agent in mobilizing urban women to join social production, political movements, and public health campaigns. Physically close to the mass, the WC controlled, monitored, and disciplined the grassroots communities in an intense way. On the other hand, the Women's Committee was in turn the most responsible organization that protected women from abuse

<sup>39</sup> For a full discussion of the ACWF's power was confined in the street community, see Wang Zheng, "Dilemmas of Inside Agitators: Chinese State Feminists in 1957," *China Quarterly*, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> ZMA: 029-011-001 Report on the Forth Zhengzhou Women's Congress, 1952.



within the family. Embedded in the local communities, it became a popular place for women to turn to when they had complaints and grievance about had other complaints about the domestic life and marital relationship.<sup>41</sup> For example, if a woman was beaten by her husband or had a quarrel with her mother or father in-law, she would go to the WC housed in the office of the Residents Committee to seek public intervention into domestic affairs. Problems would usually be “solved” by the mediation of the women cadre. As a result, married women started calling the Women’s Federation their “maternal family” (*niangjia ren*) to express its proactive function. *Niangjia ren* later became a very popular term referring to the Women’s Federation in urban Zhengzhou vernacular. In addition, when domestic conflicts happened, the head of the workshop (*chejian zhuren*) or the section chief (*gongzhang*) might also come to intervene.

*The Institutional Exclusion of Women’s Federation from the Danwei*

In the first years of the PRC, the Women’s Federation system also played an active role in supporting female workers within the factories and other women labor in social production. However, its engagement with women in the labor force was restricted and then disrupted as the Trade Union system took over mass work in the factory system by the mid-1950s. In 1951, the ACFTU and the ACDFW co-issued a notice regarding the division of leadership between the two mass organizations:

“Female workers belong to the working class, so that female-worker work is an indispensable part of the work of the trade union. Meanwhile, female workers also belong to the mass women and they share the same need with women from other social strata, that is, the need for liberation. Only the working class can lead them to realize this ultimate liberation...However, due to unclear division of leadership between the trade union and the women’s federation, there

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<sup>41</sup> Based on conversations with three informants. While further empirical evidence is needed to support the notion, the fact that the saying “the Women’s Federation is our natal family” (妇联是娘家人) has become popular language in today’s Zhengzhou (and some other cities) implies the Women’s Federation used to be an effective space for women to turn to.

has been incoherence of work dealing with the female workers and female dependents of workers...To further integrate the women's movement into the worker's movement...the trade union should make clear its sole leadership of the female workers and workers' dependents while the women's federation's role is to assist the trade union.”<sup>42</sup>

The notice made clear that the main task of the women's federation was to organize housewives in the households living outside of the *danwei* compound (散居家属 *sanju jiaoshu*), and it was the Trade Union's duty to work with workers' dependents living within the *danwei* compound. This notice also mentioned “when a female worker cannot fulfill her duties to both the trade union and the women's federation, the two organizations should negotiate to reach a resolution. Before the resolution reached, the women's federation should support the trade union's opinion.”<sup>43</sup>

These regulations conditioned the institutional divide between the Women's Federation and the Trade Union in doing women-work. Since then, women-work related to female workers and dependents of male workers became the sole responsibility of the Department of Women Workers (DWW) within the Municipal Trade Union. For each factory with more than fifty female workers, there should be a Committee on Women Workers (CWW) with a full-time woman cadre; for that with less than fifty, there should be a half-time woman cadre whose regular duty was to work in the front line. Under the women cadre, there could be three to fifteen women representatives elected through the women worker's congress.<sup>44</sup>

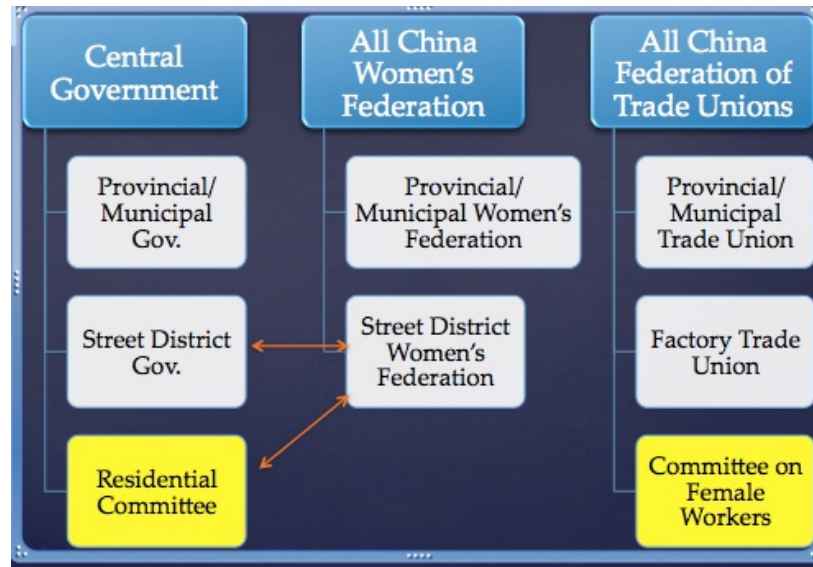
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<sup>42</sup> ACFTU and ACDFW, Notice on the Leadership of Female Workers and Workers' Dependents, in ZFYZH, Vol. 2, 94-95.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Cai Chang, Several Issues on Work of Female Workers (Speech on the Working Meeting of the Trade Union, 1949) in ZFYZH, Vol 2, 34-38.

Figure 6. Organizational Structures of the ACWF and the ACFTU from the Central Government to the Local Level



The CWW had two major targets of work: the formally employed female workers and the female dependents of workers. The work around female workers focused on “labor protection”, “production mobilization” and “workers’ education.”<sup>45</sup> Especially, the CWW emphasized “protection for female workers’ special interests,” because “women have special physiological conditions that are responsible for human’s reproduction. Therefore, while women should get equal pay when they are doing the same work and having same capabilities with men, we should consider the working condition when assigning jobs for women, to avoid harming their health. To assure the health of the mother and her child, we should provide certain days of maternity leave and a system of childcare.”

The other major working target of the CWW was the dependents of the workers, who were mostly females. As mentioned earlier, the first organization that took care of the workers’ dependents was the WC system led by the local Women’s Federation immediately after Liberation. However, by 1951, it was made clear that the Women’s Federation should hand over

<sup>45</sup> Organizational Rules on the Committee of Women Workers, in *People’s Daily*, September, 21, 1950.

the responsibility for workers' dependents living on the *danwei* compound to the CWW of the factory trade union.<sup>46</sup> In medium-sized industrial cities like Zhengzhou, such type of dependents counted more than 70% of all the dependents of workers. In this way, the industrial *danwei* had virtually excluded the ACDFW's control over its labor organization/service system.

Over the years that the ZWF had been functioning, it constantly emphasized in its internal files that the women's federation needed to cooperate with the ZTU to help female workers and dependents in the industrial *danweis*. With dramatic contrast, the ZTU barely mentioned the role of the ZWF in its internal files, neither did the individual union in each factory, except for a few investigative trips that the ZWF paid to the factories. Both the ZTU and the unions at the factory level acknowledged that it had somewhat overlooked women's issues.

#### *Gender Outcomes of the Missing of Women-Work in the Danwei*

Like the *danwei* set up itself, the missing of women-work there had brought significant gender consequences in the industrial labor force. First of all, given that there was no women's collective organization functioning in the core of the power structure of the *danwei*, women's underrepresentiveness in the managerial domain perpetuated. In a textile mill where the majority of labor was women like Factory Y, among the thirty-three factory heads and deputy heads between 1954-1976, only three of them were women. Among the eighty-eight advanced and middle-level engineers and technicians between 1954 and 1985, eighteen were women (20.5%), and half of them were not in the production domain, but accountants and doctors.<sup>47</sup> In general, except for a few cases, women cadres occupied the bottom strata of the cadres. Second, as a result virtually excluding the women's federation from the industrial enterprises, relative more

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<sup>46</sup> ACFTU and ACDFW, Notice on the Leadership of Female Workers and Workers' Dependents, in ZFYZH, Vol. 2, 94-95.

<sup>47</sup> Factory F Gazetteer (Factory F, 1985), 68.

conservative gender norms and unequal gender relations were entrenched within the industrial workplace.

Despite the popular impression in contemporary China that the ACWF system was the embodiment of the state among all women in China, its influence within the textile industry was much less than that imagined by the Chinese (and western watchers) today. As previous scholarship and my own findings have shown, although institutions that addressed women's interests and workers' interests, i.e. ACWF and the ACFTU, were bureaucratically equal at the same rank within the CCP system, within the industrial enterprises, women workers were conceived as a subcategory under the more general category of "workers." The ACWF's more progressive gender-equalizing forces could not be institutionally transferred into the enclosed industrial *danwei* system. Without the women's federation's direct intervention, there was no factory-level<sup>48</sup> women's organization within the *danwei* that could oversee all operations within different sectors from a gender-equality perspective.

The missing overarching women-work apparatus within the *danwei* prevented it women members from addressing "work-life" problem holistically or forming a collective awareness. Since the women workers' concern both at home and in the workplace were not encompassed by the union-led CWW holistically, when their family issues prevented them from committing more time to work, the factory cadres would suggest them to overcome the "personal special difficulties" (个人特殊困难 *geren teshu kunnan*) at a very abstract level. As individuals, they did not have a set of languages to justify the structural reasons behind their "difficulties" (Song, 2011).

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<sup>48</sup> By factory-level, I mean women's organization that counted as an independent department and its head ranked only secondary to the factory head and factory Party secretary.

The more serious gender consequence due to the institutional split up was the marginalization of female workers' power within the labor force. As the CWW was the subordinate of the male-dominated union (and only weakly linked to the municipal Women's Federation as a group member), it was unable to establish a sense of solidarity among women workers for rights sake. It was more like an accessory rather than a real representative structure for women workers within the union system.

In absence of a rights-based representational structure for women, their requests, complaints, and grievances that were not related to maternity but with labor-universal components: such as requests for opportunities of getting ahead and discontents of gender hierarchies and segregations were hard to channel up. For example, while the female workers consistently received 20% less of food coupons than that the male workers, the former, as a collective group, had never questioned this gender inequality. However, individual complaints about low wages were frequently found. Also, without institutions that could legitimize gender-universal concerns for women workers, even the "equal pay" policy could undermine women's labor value. As the previous example of the gender bias in pipe-aligning job illustrates.

## CONCLUSION

Transforming patriarchal gender relations requires efforts from multiple social dimensions. In this paper, I tackled one dimension of the complex, asking why radical transformation of public/private relations in Socialist China could not eliminate patriarchy and through what mechanisms patriarchal gender relations perpetuated. I examined the case of urban industrial China in the socialist era and locate my site in the *danwei* system. I argue that the Chinese *danwei* system should be re-interpreted as a gender institution that enabled a new mode

of public/private relations different from that in both the liberal capitalist system and other Communist regimes. Re-embedding reproduction into the collective community, *danwei* provided female workers unprecedented opportunities to participate in social production and hence gain social recognition. It seems that Gail Hershatter's notion that the CCP had neglected the family women's reproductive roles would not hold true if we take into account of gender and family issues within the urban *danwei*. As I showed in this study, the CCP had implemented serious institutions to socialize reproductive work and solve women's "double burden" problem at least within the *danwei* system. And compared to the rural communes in China or Soviet workplace, the *danwei*'s gender-leveling measure seemed better institutionalized and lasting longer. However, despite weakened family patriarchy, the public sphere of the *danwei* had seen strong patterns of sexual divisions and hierarchies of labor as a result of the combination of capitalist industrial legacies and the socialist productivist principle. Nevertheless, the historically transformative gender-leveling effects should not be dismissed.

In this way, I also complicated the "patriarchal socialism" thesis that sees family patriarchy as the major source in shaping the CCP's sexist policies in post-1949 China. I showed that a public patriarchy arose within the *danwei* and became another key source in creating new forms of gender inequality under socialism. I argued that this socialist public patriarchy had its own logic of operation other than that at work in the family system. In the process of industrial production, manhood was closely associated with a new type of masculinity that featured socialist modernity, highlighting political participation and technological expertise. While in contrast, womanhood, although not confined within the domestic anymore, was not linked to that socialist modernity.

The rise of the public patriarchy in the *danwei* was through two mechanisms. First, while formal female employees benefitted from the embedded mode of public/private relations and they were to a great extent freed from childcare labor, this labor would be transferred to another group of women who were the “dependent workers” of the *danwei* community. In this way, gendered divisions of labor based on sexual differences were being reproduced in the public domain. Moreover, this arrangement paradoxically divided women members into two strata, those formal workers in the frontline and those auxiliary workers in the reproduction-related sectors.

The other crucial mechanism perpetuating patriarchal power was marginalizing women by virtue of the institutional absence of women’s representational structure within the *danwei*. Rather than being passively excluded by the trade union in the work unit system, such an institutional absence was a result of the strategic negotiation between the Women’s Federation and the Trade Union at the state level. While the Women’s Federation arguably took over the street communities in urban China during the Mao era, it managed to do so at the cost of removing itself from the industrial *danwei*. Had there been a stronger women’s organization within the *danwei*, the gender dynamics there could have been different. The relative autonomy and political power of the Women’s Federation outside the *danwei* system during the first years of the PRC, as I documented, suggests that a more autonomous women’s group is possible and necessary for gender equality even under state socialism.

This case also reflects some more general logic of the CCP’s labor politics. The *danwei* system attempted to embed reproduction into the community, which can be seen as a radical and innovative measure to counter the logic of capitalism and overcome the gender inequality created by the capitalist private family. However, under great impulse for industrialization, industries in



Mao-era China operated around the same productivist logic as its fellow Communist regimes and their capitalist counterparts did. When there were conflicts between the *danwei*'s goal in production and its members' demand for reproductive services, the productivist side would always win.

To be sure, existing literature suggests that very similar mechanisms could be found in the Soviet history. It has been consistently shown that like their Chinese counterparts, the Soviet female workers were concentrated in the light industries and service sectors as well (Lapidus, 1978; Ashwin, 2000). Neither were there autonomous women's organizations within the Soviet industrial factories (Fidelis, 2010). While affirming that some patriarchal strategies could work across regimes, my study has provided a much more nuanced and detailed account illustrating how these historical processes have unfolded in the particular context of the Chinese *danwei* and how they shaped individuals lived experience locally.

By revealing that informal, auxiliary labor arrangements, mediated by sexist principles, existed under Chinese state socialism, I challenged the conventional understanding of urban labor system in the Mao era, which has been taken as a despotic labor regime where the whole industrial labor force subjugated to universal rules. In analyzing gendered process of the post-Mao reform, Wang Zheng reminds us that “‘[w]omen’ as a social category has to be complicated and concretized if it is to provide explanatory utility. Age, education, type of industry, skills...are all important variables that intersect with gender in differentiating women in the turbulent social and economic transformations that are reshaping China” (2003:178). I would like to add that the Mao era deserves the same analytical nuanceness. As I showed in this paper, despite commonly shared gender discrimination among female workers, it was the women

members at the bottom of the *danwei* strata who suffered most during the years of scarcity, hardship, and crises.

By placing gender at the heart of my analysis, this study enriched the existing *danwei* literature that tends to ignore the question of gender when analyzing politics, economics and culture of the *danwei* system. Here, rather than merely making women visible, I demonstrated that gender principles had been operating ubiquitously in designating jobs, disciplining workers, and redistributing resources. In fact, without the gender-based Taylorist management, extraordinary rate of accumulation in light industries and the subsequent surplus draining to heavy industries in Mao era China would not have been possible. In other words, far from being a peripheral issue in studying China's socialist development, gender as a labor management logic underlies the entire process and as an analytical category, gender exercises unmistakable explanatory power.

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