

## Chapter IV What—and How—Are Tianjin Workers Thinking?

Marc BLECHER

What are Chinese workers thinking? Few questions have been more freighted with tense significance for the Chinese state in recent years. The country's leadership, taking advantage of the concatenation of the repressive shockwave it sent through the Chinese public in 1989 and the post-1993 economic boom that resulted partly therefrom, and having gained confidence from the success of price reform which was also made possible in part by the crackdown, has since the mid-1990s begun to hurdle perhaps the most politically dangerous obstacle remaining in the pathway of "socialist reform" or, from another ideological perspective, capitalist transition: the restructuring of state socialist industry, involving massive layoffs and the subjection of China's vaunted proletariat to layoffs, plant closures, employment insecurity, loss of social welfare benefits, and the vagaries of the labor market—in a nutshell, the rise of unvarnished wage labor.

The government has been moving ahead with this social (counter-) revolution with a determination and pace that suggests a definite level of confidence. Yet it has also shown signs of deep anxiety about the potential and, indeed, actual conflagrations occasioned by its remaking of the Chinese working class. It has tried to bottle up information about major outbreaks of proletarian protest, with more success than can possibly be evaluated at present.<sup>1</sup> The public security apparatus has made it very difficult for Chinese and foreign scholars to conduct research on contemporary workers' politics, citing the profound political sensitivity of the present situation.<sup>2</sup> More positively, in 1994 the government promulgated a major labor law, and set its massive trade union bureaucracy to work explaining and enforcing it, in the hopes that some rationalization and regulation of working conditions and remuneration would help preempt conflict. It has been keeping its finger closely on the pulse of worker politics, in the form of periodic massive surveys.<sup>3</sup> Researchers with the official labor union federation admitted candidly that the federation now regards its main purpose as promoting working class "stability" (稳定).<sup>4</sup> It wants not just to control but also, like many Western scholars and observers, to comprehend what China's workers are thinking.

## ***Q* Methodology**

The question is as fraught with substantive and methodological complexity as with political significance. The most common approaches to analysis of the political thinking of a group or class such as China's workers are surveys, in-depth interviews, and observation of political expression. Each of these has a distinct objective. Quantitative surveys usually target opinions and attitudes, usually seeking to correlate them with social, economic and political characteristics of those who hold them. In-depth interviews are useful for probing a broader range of questions, the deeper meanings that subjects attach to their experiences, and some of the reasons why they think as they do. Observation of political activity can provide a window into the thinking that lays behind it. My current research project makes some use of all of these approaches. But in pursuing them, I have often run up against the uneasy sense that I am missing something, that the information did not always add up in expected, simple or comprehensible ways. The meaning of what I would learn through standard surveys, interviews, and accounts of political behavior seemed to depend on understanding a larger question: how do China's workers put together the pieces that I was apprehending? How do *they* organize their social and political thinking in general?

*Q*-methodology is designed to focus on this overall sensibility or outlook. Its objectives are: to try to understand the complex structure of subjects' thinking *as a whole*—*i. e.*, the ways in which they link their ideas on a variety of subjects, and to piece together its substantive content and texture. *Q*-methodology's unit of analysis is not the individual subject, but the presumably coherent patterns of thinking that may exist in the population of subjects. This differs from ordinary quantitative opinion and attitude surveying (*R*-methodology), where the unit of analysis would, in this case, be some set of views of Chinese workers as well as those workers' characteristics, and where the goal would be to elucidate which kinds of workers have which beliefs. *Q* begins with the hypothesis that there are discrete, coherent and comprehensible ways of thinking within a population, and tries to find them. It does not, however, prejudge how many there are, of what they may consist substantively, or how coherent each of them may be.<sup>5</sup> These are, indeed, what it tries to discover.

*Q*-methodology is intensive with respect to individual subjects. It focuses on the internal patterning of *individual* subjects' responses to a relatively large set of questions (*cf.* *R*, which concentrates on the responses of a large number of subjects to relatively small sets of questions<sup>6</sup>). While in *R*-methodology the researcher disaggregates individual subjects into their parts (*e.g.* their age or gender and their opinions on some subject), *Q* does not do so, because it is interested in the subjects' overall patterns of thinking. Thus, *Q*-methodology can operate with a small number of respondents(*n*), in contrast with *R*-methodology, which requires a large *n* in

order to be able to achieve some confidence in linking particular characteristics to particular views within a sample and then in extrapolating those linkages to a wider population.<sup>7</sup>

Even though *Q* operates with a small number of subjects, it necessarily involves sampling. It hypothesizes that there are discrete patterns of thinking in a population, which can only be comprehended by analyzing the thinking of individuals whose own patterns of thinking reflect those patterns in the population. In *Q*, the sample should be chosen to reflect in a broad way the general characteristics of the wider population. But issues of representativeness of specific traits are less important than in *R*, since the *Q*-methodologist is not attempting to link the findings to particular characteristics of subsets of the population (*e.g.*, whether men or women of certain age ranges hold different opinions or attitudes).

### **Reconstructive Methodology**

Because *Q*-methodology is oriented to elucidating overall patterns of thinking, it is not surprising that it has been taken up in recent years by scholars influenced by post-structuralism and discourse analysis. With its orientation to patterns of subjectivity, it has proven a useful tool for those interested in putting their subjects in a more central place methodologically—in uncovering their patterns of thinking, outlooks, or *weltanschauungen*, in letting the subjects speak in their own voices, and in limiting the analyst's role more to that of a listener, organizer and recorder for them. John Dryzek and Jeffrey Berejikian have, for example, set about what they call “reconstructive inquiry”, whose goal is to “determine...how individuals...themselves conceptualize...their own political roles and competences.”<sup>8</sup> In the reconstructive approach, “categories are sought in its subjects, rather than specified by the analyst...The idea [is] that the analyst should attend closely to subjects' own constructions of politics...”<sup>9</sup> To find a way to do this while still maintaining a quantitative approach, Dryzek and Berejikian assembled their survey using statements “drawn from those actually made by individuals involved.”<sup>10</sup> Since my objective is to try to apprehend some of the ways that China's workers conceive their world and their situation in it, and to weave their specific views and ideas into an apprehension of their wider pattern of thinking, it seemed important to find a way to let them to speak as much as possible in their own terms. Reconstructive methodology therefore seemed appropriate and potentially promising.

### **Operationalization**

In order to explore what Chinese workers are thinking using *Q*- and reconstructive

methodology, I developed a survey questionnaire comprising sixty items. They covered a range of topics in which I am interested, based on some of the theoretical approaches that I believe can explain significant aspects of working class consciousness.<sup>11</sup> Following Dryzek and Berejikian's reconstructive methodology, I developed the specific items not out of my own thinking, but rather using language drawn directly from the world of the workers I was studying—words, phrases and formulations that originated with them or at least were likely to feel as naturalistic and familiar as if they had.

These workers all live in Tianjin, where I have concentrated my research. The Chinese proletariat is simply too large, too widely distributed over a vast country, and too variegated to comprise a category about which much of real significance can be said. I chose Tianjin because it lies roughly toward the center of several continua pertaining to level of economic development, reform policy, and the effects thereof.<sup>12</sup> This does not make Tianjin typical or representative of China's working class, of course, since there is no defensible reason to collapse the latter's rich variation at all, much less to do so toward the center of major economic dimensions.

To put my *Q*-survey together, then, I combed the original Chinese-language transcripts of my own in-depth interviews with workers for items to place in the survey. To supplement these, I also scoured newspapers that are regularly read by the workers I would be surveying (mainly the *Workers' Daily* (Gongren Ribao) from 1995-97 and Tianjin's *Evening News* (Jinwan Bao) from 1997), the television programs they see, the political slogans they read and hear, and government documents, publications, announcements and surveys they encounter. From all these I selected statements that seemed particularly expressive and commonplace. I collected over two hundred statements on the range of subjects in which I am interested theoretically, and selected sixty—mostly from my interviews, since they contained workers' own words—that seemed most likely to enable workers to express their thinking on those subjects. I then arrayed them in random order on a questionnaire, placing next to each a scale from -6 to +6 on which the subjects could express their level of disagreement or agreement. Finally, since *Q*-methodology does have to be broadly mindful of the question of representativeness, the questionnaire also included just a few items on the subjects' background: their gender, their age, the ownership form of their enterprise, whether or not they were laid off at the time they were surveyed, and the economic condition of their enterprise. The questionnaire appears in the appendix.

Because of the ways in which the language in the questionnaire items was constructed, it can sometimes contain ambiguities—or what appear to the analyst, with her or his own external perspective, to be ambiguities. As Dryzek and Berejikian say so aptly, ambiguity “is the nature of political language.”<sup>13</sup> But any effort by the analyst to reduce putative ambiguity in advance would undermine the reconstructive project, by forcing the subjects to speak through (by responding to) the ana-

lyst's "clarified" language rather than that of the subject's own world. The *Q*-methodologist can hope that such ambiguities will be "resolved by each subject and reflected in his or her placement of a statement in relation to other statements."<sup>14</sup>

In this study, the questionnaires were administered by a research assistant to seventy-four industrial workers in Tianjin in the fall of 1997 and the spring of 1998. Such an *n*, which is untenably small for *R*-methodology, is ample for *Q*-methodology.<sup>15</sup> The subjects were selected through indirect social contacts by my research assistant, who did not know them personally. In order to try to maximize the truthfulness and frankness with which subjects responded, an informal site off factory grounds was used, and neither I nor any government or enterprise official was present. Since *Q*-methodology does not strive for strict statistical representativeness of a larger population, this mode of selection is not as problematic as it would be for *R*-methodology. At the time they were surveyed, the respondents were all industrial workers. They ranged in age from nineteen to fifty-eight. Forty-eight were male, thirty-five female, and one failed to complete that question. Fifteen worked in state-run enterprises, twenty-four in "collective" firms, one in a foreign-domestic joint-venture plant, and four in private industrial enterprises, and the rest did not respond. Forty-nine reported that their enterprises' economic condition was average (一般), eight poor (不好), nine good (好), and the rest did not respond. Sixty-three were employed, eight laid-off, and three did not respond.

The data were coded in the normal way, with each respondent treated as a case (arrayed as rows) and the score on each question treated as a variable (arrayed as columns). But then the matrix was transposed, because *Q*-methodology treats the overall thinking of each of the respondents—not their responses to individual items—as the object of study. That is, the columns—which normally represent the dependent variables—now consisted of full array of each subject's responses. The transposed matrix was then subjected to factor analysis.<sup>16</sup> Factor analysis extracts an indeterminate number of factors, which are statistical clusters of scores.<sup>17</sup> Each factor has an eigenvalue, a statistic representing the total amount of variation in the matrix explained by each factor. It is the analyst's job to examine the results of the factor analysis to decide how many of the factors—which are at this point nothing more than mere statistical relationships—actually stand for anything, and what it is they stand for, in the real world that is supposedly being reflected in the data set.

To begin to make those judgments, I examined the output of the factor analysis (table 1). The output of the statistical manipulation does not itself provide a guide to the number of factors to be analyzed (analogous to the way, for example, that certain correlation statistics can have significance tests). That is up to the analyst. I initially planned to examine the first five, since below that the marginal explanatory power of each successive factor started dropping off much more quickly, and that together the first five accounted for just over half of the variation in the data. However, since only two respondents corresponded most strongly to factor 4

(see below), and since these two were, upon inspection, actually quite dissimilar in their responses to quite a few items, I decided to stop at factor 3. In effect, at this point in the analysis I was being guided by the statistical analysis of the quantitative data to an hypothesis that there are three potentially coherent patterns of thinking among the workers surveyed.

Thus far, however, that hypothesis remained purely an artifact of statistical analysis. The factor analysis by itself does not spit out a list of what the patterns of thinking represented by each of the factors are. What they might be, and how coherent might actually prove, remained to be uncovered, albeit with the help of the statistics. In order to do that, I then searched for individual subjects whose own patterns of thinking corresponded well to those of each of the three factors. To do that, I examined each respondent's loadings—*i.e.*, the coefficient expressing the correspondence between that respondent and the factor—on each of the three factors, and sought out the factors on which they had the highest loading above an acceptable minimum. To define a minimally high loading, I took as a reference point Steven Brown's criterion of  $2.58 \left( \frac{1}{\sqrt{N}} \right)$ , where N equals the number of Q statements<sup>18</sup>—in this case, .34.<sup>19</sup> Where subjects loaded higher than .34 on more than one factor (among

Table 1 Factor loadings

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of variation explained	Cumulative % of variation explained
1	16.20	21.9	21.9
2	8.80	11.9	33.8
3	5.86	7.9	41.7
4	4.62	6.2	47.9
5	3.88	5.2	53.2
6	3.31	4.5	57.7
7	3.13	4.2	61.9
8	2.99	4	65.9
9	2.94	4	69.9
10	2.45	3.3	73.2
11	1.98	2.7	75.9
12	1.85	2.5	78.4
13	1.75	2.4	80.7
14	1.60	2.2	82.9
15	1.45	2	84.9
16	1.36	1.8	86.7
17	1.21	1.6	88.3
18	1.14	1.5	89.9
19	1.11	1.5	91.4

the first three), I categorized them within a particular factor only if their highest loading was at least .1 higher than their next one. Subjects who did not meet either of these criteria were omitted. I then computed the mean scores on each item in the questionnaire of all the subjects categorized under each factor. This produced a representation of the actual pattern of thinking to which the factor was pointing. Those means appear in table 2. To facilitate analysis, the items have been placed in topical order (rather than in the randomized order in which they appeared on the questionnaire).<sup>20</sup>

Table 2 Mean responses by factor, organized by topic

Statement scores on each factor ►	Factor 1 ("market socialism")	Factor 2 ("realism/ workerism")	Factor 3 ("mild con- tentment")
Statements ▼			
<b>Labor process</b>			
8. Piece rates are fair. The more you work, the more you make.	4.73	4.33	3.00
32. In setting regulations such as piece rates and quotas, the management takes into account whether the workers can meet the quota by working pretty smoothly, so that it's not necessary to toil very hard.	0.30	-3.92	0.25
24. When there's work to do, workers usually work hard.	1.88	-1.42	4.00
59. Being a worker is really slow going; a day's work is just like a monk banging his bell all day long.	-1.19	-4.00	-3.25
48. Workers take pride in their work.	-0.78	1.00	4.00
22. Workers do a pretty good job of finding ways to cope with shortages of inputs or other problems that come up in production.	0.22	-1.92	2.00
47. What annoys workers most is when the higher levels frequently inspect their work.	2.26	0.18	2.25
3. Stricter labor discipline penalizes lazy workers and helps improve the factory's economic performance.	4.96	3.25	5.33
13. I think that these days workers' activism in production isn't nearly as great as it was in the 1950s and 1960s. Workers' ability to work together is also weakening.	4.48	2.73	2.00
46. Workers can't do much to improve their enterprise's economic situation. It depends on the leadership's ability, the government's actions, and the market.	-3.57	-2.00	1.25

<b>Authority relations in the firm</b>			
56. Workers are still masters of the enterprise.	-.52	4.50	0.75
44. Workers should be masters of the enterprise.	5.07	4.55	2.25
42. If the factory asks me to do overtime but doesn't pay overtime, I won't do it.	3.07	-0.50	1.00
11. Factory leaders don't fear the workers.	4.30	0.17	4.25
26. In the eyes of some cadres, workers are just labor power to be ordered about.	3.78	0.67	2.25
20. Workers don't dare find fault with the factory manager. If they're not careful, they can suffer.	4.37	2.25	2.25
36. Leaders don't respect workers' talents and knowledge.	3.70	-2.92	1.67
2. Contracts help protect the workers' interests in the factory.	-.70	0.58	0.25
33. Workers have most difficulty understanding how the enterprise leaders can not have frequent contact with or concern for the masses of workers.	5.41	-2.92	1.67
<b>Market</b>			
14. Unemployment is a bigger concern than wages.	2.31	-1.64	-0.50
27. Being laid off isn't so bad, since workers can get a little money from the factory while also finding other work.	-2.85	-2.42	3.50
12. Unemployment is an unavoidable effect of reform.	3.44	1.17	1.25
55. No doubt "face" is important, but even more important is one's "rice bowl". Under the market economy, where there's no "iron rice bowl", I'll go anywhere there are opportunities - no matter if it's a state-owned, collective, or private enterprise.	2.56	4.50	2.50
23. Contracts are not real contracts; things are always in flux.	3.77	2.92	2.50
31. In general market competition is fair, because it provides a space within which individuals can put their abilities fully into practice.	2.54	-0.08	1.50
6. The market does a pretty good job of setting appropriate wages according to the law of value.	2.96	2.33	0.25
50. It's not fair for workers in different workshops in the same plant to get different wages just because some workshops have more orders for their products.	1.07	0.64	-1.00



<b>Work unit (单位)</b>			
7. Workers regard the factory as their home.	4.15	2.82	3.00
5. After work I hang out with my fellow workers.	1.85	2.00	1.25
16. Even if I am laid off for a year or more and I've found another temporary job, I am still a member of my unit.	-1.33	3.08	1.75
39. Workers have a difficult time getting married if their enterprise doesn't provide housing for them.	3.04	-0.92	0.00
57. I still think that the "iron rice bowl" is good; it protects me rain or shine, and gives me a secure feeling.	.30	-1.83	0.00
18. Getting housing, medical insurance and a pension from the enterprise makes me too dependent on my enterprise.	1.70	0.08	1.25
52. Housing, medical insurance and pensions from the enterprise are distributed equally, which is fair.	3.81	-1.83	0.50
38. What workers care about most is the enterprise's bottom line.	4.69	5.45	2.75

<b>Class</b>			
21. The gap that has opened up in China between the rich and poor is unavoidable, but it's still within controllable bounds.	2.88	-1.42	4.00
29. Nowadays the differences in wages and other compensation in different enterprises, sectors and regions are too great. This undermines the working class's unity.	1.93	-3.08	-1.25
37. The working class is the main force, but that does not determine the position of any one individual. When it comes to individuals, it depends on whether you change your point of view, study, and go find work.	2.59	3.50	3.75
41. Enterprises' money is made off the workers.	5.52	4.17	4.50
9. Workers are being given less and less consideration these days. They are left out in the cold, and their social and political position is low.	3.96	0.17	3.00

<b>State</b>			
54. The union and the workers' representative assembly are organizations for representing the workers' interests. Their role must get stronger.	4.62	5.27	3.00
4. If young workers join the Party, that can stabilize the workers' ranks.	2.07	2.17	0.25
10. China needs a real worker to be leader.	.92	-0.92	1.50
15. Gifts are dispensed to workers at holiday time every year, but it's not done with a generous spirit.	3.63	0.08	1.25
1. Bureaucratism and corruption can't be avoided, so there's no need to make a fuss about it.	-4.07	0.67	1.50

<b>Reform</b>			
35. State-owned enterprises must thoroughly reform, or else they have no future.	4.42	4.55	2.25
51. It's better to reform socialism than to abolish it.	3.08	3.17	4.75
<b>Ideology</b>			
53. China is still a socialist country, so the management can't exploit the workers too much.	1.89	-3.00	3.50
17. Socialist economic principles are fair. Its basic principle is pay according to work. So piece rates and other material incentives are fair socialist measures.	3.54	4.33	-0.75
19. Workers should emphasize righteousness and deemphasize their self-interest.	2.41	0.75	1.25
<b>Efficacy</b>			
45. It isn't just the leadership that is responsible for what happens in society; the people are responsible too.	4.52	2.50	3.75
60. People should control their own destiny.	5.52	5.58	5.00
25. Participating in political activity is not as good as doing something real.	1.77	-0.33	0.75
28. Engaging in politics or slowdowns is very dangerous; the further you hide yourself the better.	-.44	-0.08	1.50
30. The government fears worker unrest.	.85	0.75	3.50
34. The workers definitely have opinions about the factory, but they just complain and that's it; they definitely don't have the consciousness to organize well to bring up problems or defend their rights.	5.15	2.33	3.00

## Findings

Now at last the central question of this analysis can be posed. Do the mean factor scores, which up to this stage in the analysis are still just statistical constructs, point to distinct, coherent outlooks that may exist among the working class? Do they represent distinct forms of working class thinking? While at first glance, no obvious pattern appears, upon careful scrutiny the answer appears to be that they do. Each specific outlook can be given a shorthand name.

### Factor 1: Market Socialism

Factor one resonates with a worldview that could be called "market socialism." It appreciates the value of the market and the political relations behind it both in the enterprise and the wider state, while still retaining a commitment to some core

socialist values. Starting at the shopfloor, the piece rate wage system is fair (8) and consistent with socialism (17), and management does not abuse it (32).<sup>21</sup> Workers are responsive to the needs of their firms, which are now significantly market-oriented (24). Work is mildly interesting (59), a finding consistent with Michæl Burawoy's analysis of the capitalist workplace.<sup>22</sup> Yet it is not a particular source of pride (48). While managers should give workers more leeway on the shopfloor—which might help workers deal better with shortages (as they did, according to Burawoy, under state socialism)—management is also right to exert authority to keep indolent workers on their toes (47, 3, 22). By contrast, in the Maoist period workers were more assiduous and coöperative on the shopfloor than they are today (13). Perhaps for this reason, workers can have a positive effect on their enterprise's economic situation (46).

Turning to authority relations in the firm, it is unclear whether workers are still “masters of the enterprise” (主人翁) as they were meant to be in Maoist days—and, in this view, still should be (56, 44). Contracts are not particularly useful in protecting workers (2). Workers retain some capacity to resist egregious management demands such as unpaid overtime (42), though they also fear faulting the management (20). Managers do not fear the workers, and in fact they push them around as if they were not fully human (26). Holiday gifts and dispensations do not represent a real spirit of generosity to workers (15). Managers certainly do not respect workers' knowledge and talent, and they have much less quotidian intercourse with workers than they should (36, 33).

Markets are basically fair (as we shall see in the discussion of class relations below). They do bring unemployment, which is a serious problem but one that's inevitable (14, 27, 12). In fact, the labor market itself provides the means to cope with them (55). Contracts, the state's approach to institutionalizing labor relations under marketization, are in fact undermined by those very market forces (23).

In the market socialist worldview the work unit (单位)—a key institution of state socialism—has been somewhat undermined by marketization, but it still retains its importance to workers in several key arenas. It provides fewer benefits than before, and workers should not rely too much on it for their economic security (57, 18). And unemployment—one aspect of marketization—has weakened affected workers' attachment to their work units (16). But for those still in work, the factory is still like a home—以厂为家—in the Maoist-era colloquialism—and an important locus of social life (7, 5), even if it is the enterprise's bottom line that is now most important (38). Work-unit housing remains important to those seeking to marry (39). Such benefits as are still provided are distributed reasonably fairly (52).

Turning to issues of class, the market produces reasonably fair outcomes (31, 6). In particular, the fact that workers' livelihoods now depend on the economic health of the enterprise in which they happen by sheer good or bad fortune to have found themselves when marketization was brought in in the late 1980s is only mild-

ly unfair (50).<sup>23</sup> Class does not determine people's life chances particularly strictly (37). Yet inequality is something of an issue, and it is undermining class solidarity (21, 29). The working class's position in society is declining, and workers are exploited (9, 41).

At the level of the state, policy and ideology, there is no alternative to state enterprise reform (35). Yet that need not mean the triumph of capitalism: socialism should be, and in fact is being, reformed, not abolished, which limits exploitation (51, 53). As we have seen, piece rate wage systems, which have become commonplace, are consistent with the socialist principle of pay according to work (17). Yet unions do need to be stronger (54). It would help the working class if more young workers joined the Party (4), though it's not necessarily desirable for a worker to be China's leader (10). As we have seen, market socialist thinking is cynical about the true spirit behind holiday gifts (15). Bureaucratism remains a significant problem (1). And workers should be more altruistic (19).

What, finally, of workers' politics? Normatively, it may be desirable and even possible, though disappointing in its actual practice. People, not just leaders, are responsible for what happens both to them and to society (45, 60). Bureaucratism can be fought (1). Protests such as slowdowns are not particularly dangerous (28). Yet politics today is not too useful (25). Workers only complain, but lack consciousness to organize to address their complaints (34). The state has only the mildest fear of workers (30).

## **Factor 2: Realism/Workerism**

The worldview captured by factor #2 combines workerist sensibilities with hard-headed pragmatism. It is realistic about the requisites and effects of China's structural economic reforms, but it also thinks that workers have managed or can manage to stake out a place for themselves and moderate reform's effects somewhat. Piece rates are fair (8, 17). Quotas may be set high, but workers can find ways to reduce the pace of work (24, 32). Thus, management surveillance is not a problem (47). That may be the reason why workers do not do a good job of coping with shortages or other shopfloor problems (22). Work is not boring (59).<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, some level of labor discipline does help prod lazy workers and, therefore, improves the factory (3). Workers' spirit of commitment to shopfloor cooperation was greater in the 1960s than it is today, but the gap is not as great as the market socialist view would have it (13). Workers today do take a some pride in their work, though again not so much as in the market socialist way of thinking (48).

For realism/workerism, there are some limits on managerial authority. Like market socialist thinking, workers should be "masters of the enterprise"; unlike it, though, they actually still are to a significant degree (56). What capacity and autonomy workers have is not the result of contracts (2), which in any event are under-

mined by market forces (23). It may have more to do with actual attitudes and social relations. The leaders do respect workers' talent and knowledge (36). Market socialism may think that management does not fear the workers and that it treats them as mere labor power to be ordered about, but realism/workerism is not so sure (11, 26). Holiday gifts from managers are not necessarily instrumental (56). The leaders do respect workers' talent and knowledge (36). Workers do not hope for more daily contact with factory leaders, though; to put it the other way around, they are more content with quotidian autonomy from their bosses (33). They do fear faulting the management, but notably less than under market socialism (20). Their somewhat lower resistance to doing overtime if not offered extra pay (42) may, therefore, spring from the sense that if they do such work they are not so much caving in to a harsh demand by management as making something of a choice.

Markets are not necessarily unfair (31), though they are viewed as less fair than under market socialism. By contrast, though, the labor market in particular is reasonably fair (6)—a place, perhaps, where workers receive their due. Unemployment not a big concern (14), even though state benefits are insufficient to allay concerns about it (27). Realism/workerism is much milder in attributing unemployment to reform (12). Compared with market socialism, here workers need retain even less loyalty to their state or collective firms now that employment security and benefits are gone. They should seek their own benefit by following the market (55). Wage differentials are not too great, and do not undermine working class unity (29). Perhaps partly for this reason, wage differentials based on the economic health of the firm are not particularly unfair (50).

The work unit remains a focus of sociability and, somewhat less, identification (7, 41), even in the face of extended unemployment (16). The latter view may stem in part from the fact that realism/workerism is more dubious about the work unit than market socialism is. It need not provide housing for people to get married (39), and in general it is not an effective provider of security (57). Moreover, such benefits as are provided are not distributed particularly fairly (52). As in market socialism, what matters most about the enterprise is its bottom line (38).

The working class's position in society is not declining. Inequality is not a major issue, as it is for market socialism (21). Nor is it corrosive of class solidarity (29). Like market socialism, workers are exploited (41), but class is not a strict determinant of life's outcomes (37).

Turning to the state, policy and ideology, like market socialism, realism/workerism thinks that state industry must reform, and that socialism should be reformed rather than abolished (35, 31). Yet, consistent with its workerist sensibility, it also believes that socialism has been undermined, and that exploitation has gone quite far. It inclines to the view that unions should be stronger and more workers should join the Party (54, 4). In line with its realism, though, it feels more strongly that a worker should not lead the country (10), and it is less worried about bureaucracy

(1). In contrast with market socialism, realism/workerism does not expect workers to be more altruistic; it is all right for them to pursue their self-interest (19).

In terms of workers' politics, while realism/workerism agrees with market socialism that "people should control their own destiny" (60) and that they are partially responsible for social outcomes (45)—though, following its realism, it is less sanguine about the power of popular forces than leaders. Nonetheless, is it not as negative about politics as market socialism. It agrees that there is some space for worker politics in China today (28, 30), and it is also pessimistic, though much less so, about workers' capacity to use it (34).

### **Factor 3: Mild Contentment**

This way of thinking is basically satisfied with and, therefore, acquiescent to the status quo. On the shopfloor, piece rates are fair (8), though there is some doubt about their consistency with socialism (17). Workers are somewhat responsive to needs of firm (24), and, in contrast with market socialism and realism/workerism, they do a good job coping with shortages (22). Work is not boring (59). Management is not oblivious to workers' capabilities, so workers do not have it especially hard (32). Workers do like autonomy from shopfloor management (47). Yet managerial discipline is needed to keep lazy workers in line (3). Workers may have been somewhat more committed to work, and had somewhat more shopfloor cooperation, in the 1960s, but this is felt less strongly than by market socialism and realism/workerism (13). Work is a much greater source of pride as well (48).

Here views about authority relations within the firm are the blandest. There is the weakest commitment to the view that workers should be "masters of the enterprise" (44). Workers might resist unpaid overtime, but only weakly (42). Management doesn't fear the workers, and tends to treat them as labor rather than people (11, 26), but less so than in the view of market socialism (though, to be sure, more than realism/workerism). Likewise, workers fear faulting managers (20), managers don't sufficiently respect workers' talents (36), and they should have more daily contact with workers (33), though all these views are less pronounced than under market socialism.

Markets are marginally fair (31, 6). Unemployment is not a serious concern, and the most positive view of all the factors is taken of the effect of losing one's job (14, 27). Moreover, mild contentment actually takes a positive view of the inequalities in pay resulting from different enterprises' economic performance (50). While there is still considerable skepticism about the value of contracts, there is less of it than in market socialism or realism/workerism (23).

Mild contentment too thinks of the factory as a home and something of a source of sociability (7, 5), even in the face of extended unemployment (16). It is ambivalent about the value of benefits such as housing and economic security, and

the fairness with which they are distributed (39, 16, 52). The enterprise's bottom line is important, but less so than under market socialism or realism/workerism (38).

Likewise, class is the least determinative of individual outcomes here (37), despite a definite sense of exploitation (41). The working class is in decline (9), though that does not necessarily conflict with the general theme of contentment in light of the relatively low salience of class here.

The conviction that state enterprises must reform is, not surprisingly, held significantly less strongly (35). Likewise, there is the strongest sense that the country is still socialist, that exploitation is limited, and that socialism should be reformed rather than abolished (53, 51). In this same vein, there is the weakest support for strengthening unions (54), and no sense at all that it would help workers for more of their younger ranks to join the Party (4), even though there is very mild support for a worker leading the country (10). Bureaucracy gets its lowest level of concern here (1).

Looking finally at workers' politics, mild contentment agrees with market socialism and realism/workerism that ordinary people share responsibility with leaders for social outcomes, and that people should control their own destiny (45, 60). Yet politics is only minimally useful (25) and, unlike the other views, mildly risky (28), even though it is only here that the state is thought to fear the workers (30). As in market socialism and realism/workerism, however, worker politics so far is not effective (34).

### **Implications**

These data suggest that Chinese workers in Tianjin in 1997 were thinking in several distinct and coherent ways about the deep structural reforms—including significant layoffs and the rise of wage labor and the labor market—that have been put into place in the past decade. Each of these outlooks involved a complex and textured admixture of positive and negative postures toward various aspects of the structural reforms. Each is reasonably coherent, suggesting that workers have found ways to make sense of their rapidly changing world. None of the outlooks is firmly or fundamentally oppositional. To take the most potentially explosive issue, concerns about unemployment are real, but they are tempered by a sense that the levels are tolerable, that other issues (especially wages) are more important, and/or that there are ways to cope.

The differences among them are to be expected, even if they cannot be analyzed in a small *n* study like this one. People are, after all, bound to differ in their overall sensibilities about their work. Reasonable hypotheses would trace the variation to a number of possible factors. Generational differences involving both age and, especially in the Chinese case, experience of a rapidly changing world (from

the Maoist period and the Cultural Revolution through the halfhearted reforms of the 1980s and on to the more radical structural changes of the 1990s) are bound to shape workers' worldviews in profound ways. A good hypothesis would be that older workers cleave more to market socialism or workerism/realism than to mild contentment, for example. Economic and labor market factors could also be playing an important role, inducing workers in better-off firms or those in more secure, well paid, or skilled positions in them to be more content. Gender too could be an important factor, though hypotheses are harder to formulate and run the risk of essentialism.

If these questions remain for future research, the present findings are nonetheless significant. The three major worldviews of these Tianjin workers may vary systematically, but they do so within a fairly narrow range. None of them appears to provided fertile ground for radical disaffection or protest. Of course these data come from just one city which lies in the broad middle range of Chinese industrial and economic performance. The worldviews of workers in China's devastated rust belt can reasonably be expected to be rather different from those reflected in these data. Nonetheless, insofar as the situation in Tianjin bears some resemblance to that in other Chinese cities, that may help explain the puzzle of why, despite some sizable outbreaks of opposition, the overall political situation has remained stable through what are already several years of profoundly damaging attacks on China's large, strategically located, and historically radical working class.<sup>25</sup> They challenge or at least supplement explanations for working class quiescence and defeat that emphasize political repression and disorganization.

And insofar as such worldviews take on a hegemonic quality, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>26</sup> they suggest that the triumph of the Chinese state in deradicalizing its working class may rest on a firmer foundation than one built on repression of disorganization alone—one, moreover, that could well survive some further opening of the Chinese political system.



## Appendix: The Q-Survey

年龄: \_\_\_\_\_ 男性 女性 在工作 下岗或失业

工厂所有制: \_\_\_\_\_ 工厂经济效益: 好 一般 不好

	很不同意					很同意							
1.官僚主义和腐败贪污不可避免, 没必要大惊小怪。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
2.用工合同能维护工人的利益。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
3.严格的实施厂里的规定处罚懒惰工人、提高企业的效益。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
4.青工入党能稳定职工队伍。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
5.我下班以后常和同事们聊天。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
6.市场按照价值规律决定合适的工资。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
7.工人应以厂为家吗。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
8.计件工资是公平的 多劳多得	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
9.工人得到的关心越来越少, 人情冷漠, 社会、政治地位低。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
10.中国须要真正的工人来当领导	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
11.厂里领导不怕工人。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
12.失业是改革的不可避免的结果	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
13.我认为现在工人的生产积极性没有五、六十年代时候大, 工人的凝聚力也在减弱。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
14.失业比工资更受关注。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
15.温暖年年送, 年年不温暖。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
16.如果我下岗一年或更长 我会找份临时工, 但我仍是原单位的一员。	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6

17. 社会主义经济原则是公平的。  
它的基本原则就是“按劳分配”。  
那么计件工资、物质鼓励是  
社会主义的公平措施。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
18. 单位给我住房、医疗保险和  
养老金、这会使我好多事  
不好开口。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
19. 工人应该重义轻利。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
20. 在工厂里，工人不敢给厂长挑刺。  
不小心就挨开了。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
21. 中国国内出现的贫富差距是  
不可避免的，但仍  
在可控范围内。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
22. 在生产中发生材料不足、  
设备有问题，工人一般  
想办法解决或者对付。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
23. 合同不是真正的合同，  
总是要变。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
24. 只要有活，工人总尽力去干。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
25. 参加政治活动不如  
干点实事业。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
26. 在某些干部眼里，工人只是  
任由驱使的劳动力。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
27. 下岗不是很难受，因为再找  
工作时可以从厂里得一点钱。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
28. 搞政治、怠工很危险，  
躲得远越好。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
29. 现在不同企业，行业，地区的  
工资和劳动报酬的差距太大，  
破坏工人阶级的团结。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
30. 政府怕工人闹事。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
31. 市场竞争总起来说是公平的，  
因为它提供了个人充分  
施展能力的空间。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6

32. 领导规定计件率、定额等等，他们会考虑到工人干的比较顺利、不用干得很辛苦。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
33. 工人们最不理解企业领导不接触，不关心职工群众。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
34. 工人对厂里并不是没有意见，但工人常常只发发牢骚而已，并没有很强的组织起来提出问题、争得自身权利的意识。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
35. 国有企业必须彻底改革，否则将不会有什么前途。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
36. 领导不尊重人才和工人的知识。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
37. 工人阶级是主力军，并不是指个人的地位。对个人而言，逼着你转变观点，去学习，去找活干。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
38. 工人们最关心的是企业的经济效益。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
39. 单位如果不给住房结婚就很困难。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
40. 如果工人觉得厂里有不合理的事，他们想办法向领导反映。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
41. 企业的财富来自工人。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
42. 厂里要我加班要是不给加班费，我就不干了。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
43. 企业领导管理水平不高。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
44. 工人应该是厂的主人翁。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
45. 社会上发生的事不论好坏，不但领导有份而且人民也有份。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6
46. 工人在提高他们企业的经济状况方面作不了什么。它依靠领导的能力、政府的行为和市场。 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 +6

- |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 47. 工人们最烦的是上级领导<br>频繁地检查工作。   | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 48. 工人以工作而自豪。   | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 49. 企业领导搞特权以权谋私。  | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 50. 同一厂里不同车间定购量<br>不同工资就不同，<br>这是不公平。                                       | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 51. 改革社会主义比放弃它要好。   | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 52. 单位分配住房、医疗保险和<br>养老金平等，这才是公平的。   | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 53. 中国还是一个社会主义国家，所以<br>管理者不会很重的压榨工人。  | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 54. 工会和工人代表大会是代表工人<br>利益的组织、作用亟待加强。   | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 55. “面子”固然重要，但“饭碗”更重要。<br>市场经济条件下，没有“铁饭碗”，<br>不管国有、集体还是个体私营，<br>哪儿有机会就到哪儿去。 | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 56. 工人还是厂的主人翁。  | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 57. 我还是认为“铁饭碗”好，<br>旱涝保收，心里觉得踏实。  | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 58. 有些企业家族化，<br>大小官位均由亲属把持。   | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 59. 作为一个工人也没有什么奔头，<br>作一天和尚撞一天钟。  | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |
| 60. 自己的命运应该由自己主宰。   | -6 | -5 | -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 | +5 | +6 |

## Notes

- 1 For just one example, an enormous protest in which over 20,000 enraged workers in Nanchong City, Sichuan, laid siege to the city hall for thirty hours, parading their factory manager around town Cultural Revolution-style in the agonizing “airplane position”, was successfully hushed up in the Chinese media, to the consternation of even some local journalists. See Matt Forney, “We Want To Eat,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 June 1997, and personal communication with Mr. Forney.
- 2 Personal experiences and anonymous communications.
- 3 The largest is the quinquennial survey of workers’ thinking undertaken since 1982 by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (Zhongguo Quanguo Zonggonghui). For its report on the 1992 survey, see Zouxiang Shehuizhuyi Shichangjingji de Zhongguo Gonren Jieji., 1993; for the 1997 survey, see Quanguo Zonggonghui zhengce Yanjiushi Zhongguozhigongzhuanguandiaochoa (Xiyuan Chubanshe,1999).
- 4 Personal communication.
- 5 It does, as just noted, give its subjects the benefit of the doubt by beginning with an assumption that there is some definite coherence in their overall thinking—a coherence that may not be evident to an analyst operating within a very different historical, material, existential and cultural frame. Q is a tool that such an analyst can use to bridge the gap. That said, Q is also a tool for evaluating the level of coherence in the views it is able to unearth.
- 6 R-methodology questionnaires may, of course, contain as many items as Q-methodology ones. But R-methodology looks at subjects’ responses to smaller, discrete subsets of questions one at a time; Q, by contrast, always analyzes the entire set of responses at once.
- 7 For the methodological justifications on this point, see Steven R. Brown, *Political Subjectivity: Applications of Q Methodology in Political Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, 66.)
- 8 John S. Dryzek and Jeffrey Berejikian, “Reconstructive Democratic Theory,” *American Political Science Review* 87, 1 (March 1993): 48.
- 9 Dryzek and Berejikian: 49.
- 10 Dryzek and Berejikian: 50.
- 11 These include the labor process, shopfloor politics and authority relations, the market (including especially the labor market), the work unit (单位), class, the state, reform policy, ideology, and workers’ sense of their political efficacy.
- 12 Tianjin has not been at the forefront of industrial “reform” policies such as privatization or globalization compared with the likes of Guangzhou and Shanghai, and whose economic performance has been somewhat ahead of national trends but not extraordinary so. From 1991 to 1999, gross value of industrial output in Tianjin grew 14.2% per year, compared with 10.9% nationally. It is more difficult to find consistent time-series data on household income over this period, but the following may provide a rough guide: in 1999, urban “real income” (实际收入) in Tianjin was ¥7,671, which was 368% higher than the average urban “cash income” (现金收入) of ¥2,087 in 1991. Comparable national figures are ¥5,889 and ¥1,996, a 295% increase. Tianjin’s average urban real income in 1999 was significantly below that of Shanghai (¥10,989), Guangdong (¥9,206 [*n. b.*, this is **not** Guangzhou, which would surely be higher]), and

- Beijing (¥9,239). Sources: Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian (*Statistical Yearbook of China*) 2000 (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2000), p. 319; Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian (*Statistical Yearbook of China*) 1992 (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 1992), p. 288.
- 13 Dryzek and Berejikian: 51.
  - 14 Dryzek and Berejikian: 51.
  - 15 Dryzek and Berejikian, for example, used thirty-seven.
  - 16 There are several ways to conduct factor analysis. In this case, a varimax rotation of a centroid solution—which is the most standard—was used.
  - 17 The number of factors that will be extracted from a data set depends on the specifics of the data; taken together, all the factors will explain all the variation in the data.
  - 18 Brown, 263.
  - 19 N=59. Item #40 was eliminated due to a printing error on the questionnaire.
  - 20 Obviously, some items fit under more than one category, a fact which complicates the task of interpreting the data., but does not change the statistical analysis or the interpretation.
  - 21 Parenthesized numbers refer to the question numbers in table 2 (which are also the ones used on the original Chinese questionnaire).
  - 22 Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process Under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); \_\_\_\_\_, *The Politics of Production* (London: Verso, 1985). The reasons for this sentiment could be similar as well. Workers I interviewed reported that they engaged in the same shopfloor “games” that Burawoy identifies as a source of work interest in capitalist firms.
  - 23 See Marc Blecher, “Hegemony and Workers’ Politics in China,” *The China Quarterly* 170 (June 2002): 283-303.
  - 24 Hypothetically, this view could reflect workers’ playing “games.”
  - 25 On working class radicalism even in the Maoist period, see Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Boulder: Westview, 1997).
  - 26 ‘Hegemony and Workers’ Politics in China,’ That article also begins to explore the reasons **why** Tianjian workers have responded with these and other forms of consciousness.