

hypothesizes link specific worker characteristics and actions. A compelling set of case studies in the penultimate chapter concerning collective actions involving workers wielding different discursive weapons shows what this kind of analysis could add. This minor critique, though, should not detract from the overall strength of the study.

Rho's argument concerning the long-term prospects of atomized incorporation is compelling. For her, again, the greatest danger for the Chinese government lies not in the people who essentially play on the state's terms. Instead, it is everyone else – young rank-and-file migrants floating between sweatshops and nursing a growing disenchantment with Chinese politics writ large – who might one day overturn the cart. How these marginalized individuals will organize *en masse* given the challenges they have experienced in coming together over more immediate concerns so far is an open question. But there are inklings of what this might look like in, say, the growing activism of Chinese gig economy workers, such as app-based delivery drivers. With the country's economy entering a bumpier period, this book should be read by academics, activists and policymakers concerned with China's evolving workplaces.

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The Master in Bondage: Factory Workers in China, 1949–2019

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The Master in Bondage by Huaiyin Li is an ambitious monograph, which examines workers over a 70-year period across Communist China using a combination of research by others and a collection of interviews. The overall argument is a familiar claim that workers had limited agency in the Mao period, but this agency was lost to capitalism after Deng came to power. However, it is supplemented with a strong level of detail to highlight contradictions and nuance during the Mao period. Li claims to adopt a historical approach, as opposed to the various social-science approaches used by others that he sees as reductionist. Li asserts that his approach provides a more balanced and comprehensive analysis of the broad sweep of history, whilst allowing detailed examples to illustrate or amplify larger themes. The ability to explore a wide range of employment relations issues makes this an interesting if problematic read.

The first four chapters cover the period from the 1950s to the Cultural Revolution, focusing on workers' participation, factory governance and production; chapter five focuses on the Cultural Revolution directly and chapter six on the post-Mao period. Some of the ideas developed in the earlier chapters are reassessed against the backdrop of the two great upheavals brought about by the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution explored in the latter two chapters, but unusually for a professed historical analysis, the historical context is only significant at a general level of periodization: planned economy, Cultural Revolution and post-Mao.

A wide range of issues are covered, from trust in union cadres at various levels through to the workings of participative democracy in practice, the role of model worker designation and points of management leverage over workers. Numerous illustrations at the grassroots level of employment

relations are the key strength of the monograph. Often these are drawn from secondary sources, particularly government archival reports, and sometimes primary interviews. Reporting secondary data is a strength partly because the interviews are problematic, as will be discussed below.

The book's focus on detail is accessible to scholars of the field but would be confusing for a student or a reader new to the subject as there is little context or grounding of the issues discussed. Each substantive chapter starts with a brief recap of some key texts in the literature, but you need to read the originals to understand their significance, and nuanced academic debate is not the book's forte. There are sporadic claims of "conventional wisdom" (to quote Joel Andreas's endorsement on the back cover) and other instances of unreferenced contextual explanations. Andrew Walder comes in for stiff criticism throughout, for example for emphasizing the power of supervisors (unhelpfully still termed "foremen" by Li, p. 112). Li provides two examples, wages and accommodation, to demonstrate a lack of supervisory autonomy, that appear safe subjects to use as critique. Confusingly, however, anecdotal evidence from the interviews provides much support for Walder's argument within a context of state regulation, rather undermining Li's critique.

A deeper problem with the book concerns the lack of structure to support the evidence used. The 70-year period under study covers the whole country, with different types of work units and workers, on a broad range of issues. In the absence of a detailed engagement with the existing literature on which to build a new argument drawn from research, the empirical contribution needs to be structured to ensure, if not actual triangulation of data, at least that case-rich examples are evident. Approximately 90 interviews were conducted by various academics of their family or friends who met certain criteria. There is no evidence of any support in oral history methods given to interviewees, and the result appears somewhat eclectic. Li gives nuance to these interviews by counterposing government-sourced examples to illustrate variation but without a clear argument or line of enquiry. In practice, interview data becomes a sort of noise in which the reader has no basis on which to assess the meaningfulness or significance of a point being made. With each interviewee having such unique personal and work histories – most are CCP members, some were workers who became managers, others were engineers or professionals, covering different locations, genders and potentially ethnicities – it is not possible to define patterns, only instances of data points.

Overall, these problems make for a critical review of this book's contribution. If the monograph was either engaged sufficiently with existing literature to develop an interesting theoretical or analytical argument, drawing on the secondary data, there would be a good case to argue that the broad-brush approach coverage of space and time makes an interesting read. However, it lacks engagement with the existing literature at sufficient depth to make this an analytical contribution. Li proposes a new theoretical argument – "substantive governance" – but it is not discussed in this review as it is not academically argued. Alternatively, this study could be a strong empirical contribution, weaving a narrative between secondary and primary data; there is strong and persuasive use of secondary data which supplements (never contradicts) the bulk of existing research in the field focused particularly on the Mao period. However, an exposition of the methods for documenting secondary sources as well as a rigorous exposition of the primary data would be required.

The book serves as a compendium of important issues upon which scholars of labour and industrial relations history should continue to reflect in order to understand China's working class. Moreover, each chapter provides strong justification for the author's thesis not to reduce this history to economic, rational choice, or to ideological or other types of reductionism, although I am not sure any of us using a critical approach are guilty of this.