

No. 71 (New York)

Background: (9/28/83, 2 hrs.)

He graduated from lower middle school in 1971, at the age of 16, in Peking. Because he satisfied the family requirements (only son), he was able to avoid being sent down to the countryside. He was sent to Beijing No. 2 Agricultural Chemicals Plant, in the suburbs. The plant had well over 1,000 employees, was state-owned and under the administration of the Beijing Municipal Chemicals Bureau. The plant produced chemicals of several varieties that were used in agriculture, but did not produce chemical fertilizer. It produced insecticides, for example, and also caustic soda. He worked in the shop that produced caustic soda. He worked in the plant until late 1977, when he had an opportunity for a transfer. During his years in the factory he studied English with an acquaintance who had a degree from Yale before 1949. English skills were in very short supply by 1977. So he was transferred to a products research institute in the bureau in late 1977, after making contact with someone who knew a headhunter working for the bureau looking for an English translator. After a year in the research institute, he took the national college entrance exam and passed. He went to Beijing No. 2 Foreign Languages Institute, and eventually got permission to come to the U.S. to study.

Shop Organization

The shop was divided into sections (gongxu) along functional lines. The shop had about 100 people. There was a section for dissolving the industrial salts into a solution (huayan), then the material went to another section for electrolysis, which separated the salt from the alkaline (dianjie), then the salt solution was piped to another shop, while the alkaline solution continued in the production process and went to a 'steaming' (zhengfa) section, where the solution was evaporated into a thick liquid. This thick liquid was piped to a huge pot in the final section, where the heating process continued until the material was solid. The last section was the most dangerous and difficult. The liquid would boil up and splash very caustic material on people, and the air was irritating.

Each of the four sections was in turn divided into three shifts. His shift had only four people in it (this is the shift he worked in for the longest period of time, during the seven years there he was transferred to all of the sections at some time). He worked in the zhengfa section. Workers could be transferred around like this because the skill level in the shop was low. The most common reason for a transfer was a conflict between people. When the small groups are so small, if two people don't get along it makes things difficult.

The head of each of these shifts was called the zuzhang. He had the power to assign work (at this point he brings up the widely different styles, and power exercised by different types of group leaders, we will return to this topic later. The group leaders were usually activists of the ordinary type. But in some cases, rarely, the section head would choose a troublesome worker who refused to listen to orders to be group leader. This was sometime done to try to give the worker a sense of responsibility. The section heads had the power to name the group leaders. The section heads, formally, are called gongduan zhang, or gongxu zhang. But usually they are called 'foreman' or 'bosses': gongtou. Section heads were activists, of course, but they were almost always very experienced workers, often with over 20 years of experience.

Generally speaking, the group leaders have no direct relationships with the leaders of the shop. All dealings go through the section head, or foreman. The section leaders deal directly with the shop leadership. At the shop office, there was a director, one vice-director, a branch Party secretary, and four technicians who were responsible for repairs and such in the shop. There were also two or three very special activists who didn't have any fixed office, but were often in the shop office. They were ordinary production workers, but had a very special status. They often were excused from work to go to meetings. They were kind of like cadres without being cadres. (This leads to a question about what the difference is between a 'special' activist of this type and an ordinary activist. There ensues a long aside on activists and activism).

ACTIVISTS: There are in general four ways that one can become an activist, or four 'aspects' to activism. 1) listening to orders; 2) ability; 3) political thought (zhengzhi biao xian) that is outstanding; 4) having a personal relationship with leaders above--this is very important--also called pai ma pi.

What distinguished an activist? For example, most workers used all kinds of excuses to get out of political study. We used to joke about people who had sick families: one week their father was ill, the next week their mother, and so forth. Everyone knew that this was just an excuse. The practice was very common. When the average person went to the political study meeting after the shift, he didn't participate very actively or very seriously. But activists always attended and participated. Most activists were shunned by ordinary workers, we didn't want to run into them. They were always reporting (huibao) on people for saying things, sleeping on the job (which was common on the night shift), and so forth. Activists were hated by the others (yes, he uses the term hen) because they played up to the leaders and to the Party.

(He thinks it over further). But you can stress one of these aspects of being an activist more than others, so there are different kinds of activists, and they have different relationships with average workers. Those who stress the fourth route, personal relationships, the most, are those who are hated the most. It is considered bu zhengpai, unethical or lacking in integrity, to curry favor with leaders this way. The activists who stress political thought are the ones who really believe in Mao thought and do things according to their beliefs and principles. They don't necessarily use personal relationships with leaders. They do these things because they believe it is right. That is why they report on others. They aren't really hated; but they are isolated from the rest of the workers. They are like heroes in the stories of old, they don't care if they have friends or not, they distance themselves from others. They have unique personalities. You can say they are too upright.

There are also activists who are not interested in politics, and who don't rely on personal relations either. They don't report on others. They do great work, and listen to orders. They attend and listen at political study, but don't speak up much. They can get some promotions, but they don't get promoted very far without outstanding political biao xian. These people are well-liked, but after they get promoted they don't get along well with their old friends.

The 'high-level' activists (referring back to the top of this page) are the most outstanding two or three activists in the entire shop. They have the best biao xian, are very active in campaigns, and have special opportunities to play special roles in campaigns and political activities.

After work they often go to the factory offices for meetings in the propaganda department. Of course they were members of the youth league, and were on the verge of becoming Party members. Close relations with the shop director, and connections with leaders above as well. Of course they are still young people. They are almost equal in authority and status to the shop director, even though they have no powers of office. All factories have these kinds of activists. They are the ones who are most likely to become officials later on. They don't bother to report people who sleep on the night shift, and so forth, because it's beneath them, too small a matter. These are 'plant-level' activists. It is much easier for them to get into the Party. Their typical path of promotion is to get into the Party, do basic-level work in the shops for a while, then get promoted to the personnel department or other plant departments. The common (putong) activists rarely got this kind of promotion opportunity. There is a sharp distinction between these two different kinds of 'activists'.

(10/4/83, 2 hours)

The high-level activists have direct relationships with the administration department, propaganda department, organization department, and personnel department. Most departments have cause for their services. They are all "red"; their political thought is most outstanding. They have forceful personalities, and can really communicate with people and persuade them. They really know how to get things done. This does not mean they necessarily use personnel connections to get things done; they might, they might not. It means that they can convince people to do things, can help out factory leaders through the force of their personalities and energies. Over a long period of time, they are chosen model workers, youth league members, and eventually Party members.

So to sum up: these people have "red" thought; they can really get things done and use their personalities and their relations with people to get things done. After the person has worked closely with a department for a couple of years or so they have close relations with the department's personnel and the department leaders have a good impression of them. They are eventually promoted to become staff members of the department, but for a period of time they continue to work often in the shops at some kind of leadership work. From the department's point of view, they need activists of this kind in the shops who aren't full time department personnel to help it organize its work. Like the propaganda department; it needs people to help it organize national day celebrations, and this is all done in workers' spare time. After a period of helping like this they simply get promoted to become a member of the department's staff, because the head of the department will ask for them by name.

An example: A girl from my class in school was sent to the factory the same time that I was, and she immediately began to establish her activist character and became involved in movements with the propaganda department--all the campaigns of the 1970s. This was the preliminary stage. She accumulated more experience and familiarity with the members of the department over time. They all knew her name and who she was. Eventually she was even sent to other shops to help run campaigns, write posters in her spare time, and so forth. She helped arrange cultural performances in the factory; meetings, posters. She did all the footwork and organizing. For example, on National Day she would organize a program where all the shops would give a performance of some kind.. Sometimes

she would help organize actual operas or orchestra performances by arranging for troupes to come to the plant.

The more political is the work of the department, the more it has a need for these activists to help it in the shop. But each department needs them and they all cultivate contacts informally and in fact informally train them and develop people on the shop floor. For example, the personnel department was always interested in workers who could write well, and they were always looking for people who could do this. It was a scarce skill. Sometimes the head of a department would call up the shop director to borrow the guy if work in the shop was not busy but was in the department. Now this kind of activist of course is "red", that is how he is originally recommended to the department. But his biao-xian is shown not so much through this but in the willingness to sacrifice himself for the good of the factory by staying after every day and helping. This is a form of zhengzhi biao-xian.. I was offered the opportunity to be an activist but I turned it down because it is too much trouble and time. I preferred to go home after the shift. These people really are totally immersed (pao) in the factory's life. They are totally tied in with the personal relations and activities.

Activists for technical departments and production departments have to have real skills and training in addition to self sacrifice and political activism. Often they were university graduates and sometimes graduate students (remember this was the early 1970s, so not unusual--AW). So the requirements are different for different departments. For administrative and political departments skill requirements were not so high.

Activists of this kind rarely have relationships with more than one department. First of all, there are limits to the time that a person has after the shift. Secondly, the work of different departments varies and requires different kinds of abilities. For example, the production department needed "eggheads", the propaganda department needed true believers and people who could talk, and who could pay lip service to the Party, and the personnel department needed people who can write characters well. So the personnel department has no need for talkers and eggheads, and such is the case for other departments.

These relationships arise naturally; departments don't set out purposefully to select activists, nor do people consciously set out to be an activist for a particular department. It happens naturally over a long period, and the relationships evolve and get stronger.

Leaders might have different criteria for calling someone an activist. Some prefer the kind that kiss ass, some prefer political thought, but the main criteria, it seems to me, is willingness to immerse yourself in factory life; and this includes everything about factory life--personal relations, work, campaigns, and so forth.

Now the word activist has bad connotations in China. Many people call these higher activists 'activists', but some don't consider them really to be activists at all; they consider them to be real people, and sometimes they really respect them. The average worker will be cautious and uncomfortable around these plant-level activists, but they won't hate them or feel threatened by them personally as is the case with the small-time activists in the section and shop.

In the CR decade the most important criteria for an activist was the study of Mao thought. But this has changed since then, I could see

it starting to change right before I left in 1978, although I was in the research institute by then. At that time the reputation and credibility of political activists began to decrease drastically. Before 1977 class background was very important in determining who could be an activist. Worker and peasant backgrounds made it relatively easy; cadres children had it really easy. Almost all were young; its laughable for an old person to act like an activist. Old workers would help out a lot, but weren't activists or backbones. They didn't do this for any advantage. There is a rough dividing line at about age 40. After that the demands for activism drop off.

Activists are less important now because Deng stresses real ability. Also there are basically no political movements, so how can you show your political biao xian? Everyone can be good at politics if they want, anyone can kiss ass and cultivate personal realtions (gao guanxi). But now that political environment has changed, talking and guanxi are less important and ability is more important.

Now less incentive exists for people to be activists, and many people now want to just go home after work. Of course they still have meetings and documents and small campaigns, but the scope for activists has been restricted and the scope of real ability increased. Activists are on the decline now because their functions are fewer, as is the case in the propaganda department. Of course they will always be needed, you can't do away with them entirely. People generally accept the promotion of people who simply do good work. But they still don't like the activist who is seen as trying to be an official. You can see it when people leave the plant to go home. Ordinary workers walk in groups and talk among themselves. Activists walk all by themselves. At the bus stops, nobody talks to them. Of course activists aren't too willing to talk and be friendly with ordinary people either, but the feeling is mutual. But this is my personal opinion toward activists--others might say they are really OK.

Ordinary activists: the most important reward is promotion to group leader or something else in the section or shop. But there are also psychological rewards that come from the status of being a leader and "getting into the Youth League" and "getting into the Party". The material things are not always foremost in the minds of the activist. There is glory in being an activist. But of course the activist is always the first one to get wage raises, and there are other rewards: for example, its easier to get a girlfriend if you are an activist or leader, and the same goes for getting a wife. It's also easier for them to get housing (although this is less the case now). Before 1978 at least, it was unthinkable that ordinary people would be able to out-compete an activist for housing.

Shop Floor Activists (10/11/83, 2 hrs.)

First of all, there's a difference between the activities of activists who are group leaders and shift leaders, and those who are not. The heads of groups are always activists. There were four in my section. The main reward is that they eventually will get promoted or get wage raises before everyone else. But the real incentive is that this is the first step on the road to becoming an official. If you aren't already a youth league member by this time, you join. After you're a group leader its easier to get into the Party. Entering the Party and the youth league is itself a step towards becoming an official in many people's minds anyway, because it leads to later

promotion. There are also some (but a minority) who simply are very able and have a strong sense of responsibility, want to serve the people and are committed to the factory. They just do it out of a sense of duty, naturally. Usually all of these motives are mixed together differently in an individual, you can't really say they only do it for the money. Most important in my opinion is a combination of wanting to join the Party and Youth League and to become an official later.

There is an almost automatic connection between being an activist and entering the Party. You have to be an activist to get in. In our section of 20 people, there were about 6 activists, about 6 youth league members (not the same people, though, because some who get into the youth league stop being activists). It's possible to be in the youth league and stop being active, but that's not the case with the Party. Our section had no Party members at all. Only 6 or so in the entire shop, and that includes all the cadres. It was very rare, although it did occur, for an ordinary worker to be a Party member. Almost always a person already has some kind of office by that time. By the time you've entered the Party, you already have become some kind of leader in most cases. Below 7 percent Party membership in the factory as a whole, I guess. The percentage is much higher in the department offices,

Activists in the shops were active in political study and very close to the shop and section leaders. They did 'reporting work' (huibao gongzuo). They talked privately to leaders and that's why they were hated. It was in private, but you knew it was happening because when a meeting was called, the leaders often already knew what was going on. They are also involved in Party and youth league branches in the shop. They are very active in organizing political study and distributing documents. When I was there we had ½ hour of study of politics after work every day. Then the youth league members would have another study meeting of politics for another hour. This was for all the activists in the shop who want to join the youth league. Another activity is the doing of good works (like Lei Feng); being selfless and so forth. Helping other workers, making sure everyone was following the rules. So they pestered us about sleeping and following the rules. These were real young guys, never married, so they had a lot of time to spend at meetings and doing things in the factory. They were activists in following the Party line in the shop and bothered all the other workers. This is what you have to do to get into the youth league. After they get into the youth league, they usually stop being so active and troublesome. By the time one gets into the Party, they don't bother with little things like this anymore. The process of advancement works like this: first you become an activist, then you join the youth league, then you become a group leader for a while, and then a section or shop cadre.

The number of activists is always in flux in the shops, so it is misleading to talk about the number of activists in a section. Let's say you have 10 activists in the section. Five get into the youth league or get promoted to group leader, but they're not so active after that. They may start going home early after that, they might be satisfied with reaching their goal. So it is a process, and it is constantly changing. But after this, you might have anywhere from

3 to 6 new activists rising up from among the young workers.

Yes, there are some activists who may give up after a while if they are not successful; but generally speaking it's impossible to go back to being just a common worker and a member of the masses. You've already paid a high price, people's opinion of you change, and you will never be considered as one of the masses. In most cases people keep trying until at least they get into the youth league, and most eventually do even if it takes a long time.

An example of the price you pay: in our factory we had peasant workers, and they didn't put up with activists who reported on them, not at all. They would just beat the guy up for reporting on them. There usually was no punishment for this--they'd just pull the two apart and tell them to make up. The peasants don't care what the punishment is anyway. They are wild and don't care. Most people, however, just avoid and ignore the activists. Nobody wants to work alongside them, or sit with them at lunch or on the bus. They are isolated and this is one price you have to pay.

It was very common for workers to do little things to activists. We would make fun of them; fenci were very common. We would tell the activist, "Hey! Lao San is sleeping, you better go tell the section head!". Also some of the tougher guys would bully them, slap them on the head and insult them. Peasants did this to them all the time. Activists aren't usually strong men, they're just scoundrels. Peasants often threw away their clothes, burn them up, trash their lockers, hit them, and so forth. Peasants did this a lot, they're straightforward and tough. But the rest of us, while we didn't do these things, we still didn't mind it. But sometimes we felt bad for the activists. It's hard to tell who is right and who is wrong in any given situation. Most of the bullying goes a bit too far: burning their clothes is really bad because clothing is rationed and expensive. And activists sometimes were after all doing only what was right sometimes. They weren't always being scoundrels.

If someone hit an activist real good and bruised him, they might call a meeting and criticize the guy who did it. An all shop meeting. They would stop work and pipan. But this didn't always work so well, often the worst punishment was to write a long self-examination, and most peasants can't write anyway so they got out of it. And anyway the peasant would secretly be considered a hero in the minds of workers if they called an all-shop meeting to criticize him. So bullying can't go too far, but there's no really serious punishment for it.

There are many paths to move up: activists at this level can become group leaders or section heads, or personnel in the shop office. They can also move up the youth league organization by becoming a youth league small group head (there is one in each section), and get in close with the youth league branch secretary in the shop, who might promote the guy to work higher up in the organization or to another office as a cadre.

The shop office has its own youth league branch officers (tuan zhibu weiyuan). Its organization is staffed with people in charge of propaganda, organization, study, and so forth. But all of these people are not cadres, but do this entirely in their spare time. The only non-productive (tuochan) official is the league branch secretary himself. All the rest of the activity is done after hours. These activities, of course, are very important for entering the Party. Also it's possible to be promoted to the organization department or propaganda department of the factory, to be a cadre.

So there are several paths to move up, though administrative leadership positions, the youth league or the Party organization. The Party is much less active in the shop than the youth league. First of all, there are many fewer members. Second, most Party members held office and were always too busy for after-hours activities. If there is a study campaign, they just give it to the youth league to run. To get into the Party takes a bit longer. Usually only one person a year for each shop was the quota for Party recruitment, although this varied. The requirements were very strict. You can kid and bully an activist, but you don't dare to it to a Party member.

Group Leader Styles

Most group leaders couldn't act like officials, they didn't have that much power and really weren't that high in status. Most of their responsibility was in organizing production and so forth. They solved problems and such. They are activists themselves, although they have to know their work. They didn't have to solve technical problems because the section head or shop office would send someone down to solve them. Their main responsibility was to keep up work discipline. So the technical requirements weren't all that high, but besides being activists they had to be able people with regard to leadership and organizing. Each person had his own style in leading. A female group leader of our group, for example, just was interested in business, never really paid any attention to entering the youth league and Party. Just liked to get work done and that was that. Others were different.

Group leaders were different according to their abilities. This was an individual thing. You can't really say there are two or three 'types' of leaders. They do vary according to their strength, ability. As far as political biao-xian goes, it didn't really matter. Our section was a pretty technical one so that was the main criterion as far as I could see.

The power of the group leader really came from their ability to report to the leaders above, "He's not a good worker", or "He doesn't listen to orders." That's where their power comes from--the upper levels listen to him. They tell the upper levels what a person's biao-xian is. Most group leaders, however, just want to get the work done and don't pay too much attention to politics.

Group leaders rarely became real close with workers, because most of them are activists, remember, but a small number were not really activists and the people considered them one of them, and their relations are better.

Group leaders often changed. It is not really a fixed, long-term post. Group leaders have opportunities for promotion too, especially if they are in the Youth League or Party. They can become officials in the youth league branch, or a cadre in a section, or in the shop. They don't get promoted to be in departments like the 'all-plant activists', because they have no connections with them. Their promotion possibilities are within the shop itself.

More on Activists (10/18/83, 2 hrs.)

When activists are teased and attacked, they don't retaliate. They expect this as part of the burden of being an activist. Being an activist is tough. You always have to struggle and compete,

especially with the other activists. Now I wasn't an activist so I can't say for sure, but relations between activists seemed very competitive. Things are tough for them; they have to play tricks and plot against one another to get ahead. The life is tough. That's why many people drop out of the competition of being activists after they reach the goal of becoming a youth league member. You can't drop out after entering the Party, but you can if you are just a league member. The way you can tell if someone is no longer an activist is whether they join in with other workers when they stand around and curse the leaders among themselves. When one is an activist, they don't ever enter in, they avoid it. But if someone's no longer an activist, they enter in too. That's how you tell he's one of the workers again.

The cursing of leaders was very common even during the CR, especially from 1972 to 1977. These actually were the most lax periods in the factory. Managers didn't dare grasp production or control (guan) workers, so workers knew they could get away with it anyway. They slept, left during work, did anything they wanted. The managers just ignored it, and tried to be laohao ren, tried to get along with everybody. Sometimes the cursing of leaders took place right to their faces. For example, if a section head told a worker to do something and he refused, and if the leader then threatened to punish him, the worker might say, "Fine! Hold a meeting--I won't show up!" Or "It won't matter to me," and then curse him. Sometimes they'd even hit the leader if the contradiction was great enough. Not group leaders, though. Group leaders rarely worried about this then because they had mostly withdrawn from active leadership during this period. Management was so law and they didn't have much power. During that time punishments weren't backed up by any real actions like docking of wages and so forth. Some workers did this, but not all. Most would curse them behind their backs but not to their faces. Mostly, the workers still feared the leaders. But the real troublemakers sometimes were made group leaders. If someone was really uncontrollable they would give them positions of responsibility to make them act responsible. I mentioned this a couple of weeks ago as an example.

Group Leaders and their Groups

Groups leaders often would have some sense of agreement with workers in the group. This usually happened only when the group leader wasn't really an activist, or was an activist but had a weak personality and didn't enforce rules too tightly. You get a "gentlemen's agreement" (junzi xieding). These agreements are usually with regard to production and rules. For example, if a group leader knew that a section head's assistant on the night shift was going to come by to check on sleepers, he might warn the group ahead of time in return for their not sleeping. He would get in trouble himself with the section leader if workers slept. This also occurs in the setting of jobs--the group leader might tell the group that he would try to get the quota reduced. Or sometimes criticism would be formalistic and everyone knew it was. This kind of leader was fairly common.

There was another kind of leader, more rare; the "iron-faced non-compromiser" (tiemian wusi). This is a guy who just said don't do it. Why not? Because the leadership says so. They don't take the time to explain to workers, just rely on orders. "Orders are

orders." These kinds of group leaders are activists, but not lax. They are "hard-liners" (tiegar), that's what we called them. Group leaders differed in the degree to which they were real activists.

In the bigger groups of up to 10 people, the group leader had a couple of activists in the group to help him lead. This was called "concentrated leadership". One of the methods of leadership was tanxin, or "speak from the heart", where the youth leaguers or activists reveal their thoughts, criticize themselves, talk about their own biao-xian, doubts, wavering. This was always done in Party and League meetings when people want to become members. This is another form of leadership, along with the "gentlemen's agreement." This atmosphere around this often seems false, often this is just a show.

Another method of leadership is to get in good with the one or two big, strong tough guys in the group to help you out as group leader. Still another method is to be very hard. Report people to the shop no matter what, affect their livelihood and do things to them that are troublesome. This workers are afraid to contradict this kind of leader, or be caught sleeping by them.

Often the size of the group had a lot to do with the types of leadership methods used and whether it worked or not, whether the workers accept it or not. One is the size of the group: 4 people or 15-20? Another thing that affects it is what kind of workers are in the group. Hard, tough old workers sometimes will only listen to you if you use the laohao ren method; they aren't afraid of you. So you have to look at the size and composition of the group.

Biaoxian

There are many kind of biao-xian; work, lifestyle. Each has a different meaning, and a different measure. Biao-xian means something that shows a person's moral character (pinde). So a person has a character to be assessed in all three areas. The group leader always has assessments of people in his head. And he is always relaying these assessments in reports to leaders. This is in fact another method of leadership.

Ganqing and Guanxi

These are also means of leadership. The first kind of leadership method described earlier uses this method. There is sometimes a kind of gemen yiqi, or 'brotherhood loyalty' between a group leader and some of the workers, and they become loyal to each other. This is a method they use to get along with workers; like not reporting a worker for breaking something, a tool, or wasting a piece of metal or a batch of products. This is part of the art of leading the group. If these relations between group leaders and workers are too close and the section head finds out, then he will transfer the leader out, trade group leaders with another group. This is called "mixing sand". No matter what the method of leadership used by the group leader, despite the fact that they are still called workers, workers always consider them cadres, leaders.

(10/25/83, 1.5 hrs.)

Without gemen yiqi, its hard to get things done. "Gemen" has bad connotations, most people say just "yiqi", or personal loyalty. This is less general a term than ganqing, but its very important in getting things done, especially in leadership and in relations with

leaders. Yiqi is used more than ganqing. Ganqing is more general, yiqi is one piece of ganqing. (He says that yiqi may be used more commonly in north China, because people in the north tend to be more straightforward and open in their expression than Chinese elsewhere. He suggests that ganqing may be used more often in southern China where people are more indirect--the implication is devious).

There are many articles in the press now that attack yiqi, but it is very important in getting things done, and in fulfilling production targets in the factory. The plant-level activists, of course, have yiqi with the heads of the propaganda department. That's why these people are selected from among several other people who may be more qualified. These activists are able to become officials not because they are more able, but because they have yiqi with leaders. Going through the back door and guanxi are also certain manifestations of yiqi.

The yiqi method can lead to advantages for all the people who are officials or all who are connected with them. The higher you are, the higher the advantages. Not so much true for plain activists who have not yet been promoted or entered the Party. But certainly so for group leaders. An example: housing. They have quotas for apartments that can be given away in each shop, section, group. Each level decides how much each unit gets. Each level then distributes them. It is usually done equally, per head. So they will say they have two new apartments for a shop of 50 workers. Same thing for the movie tickets given away to workers as part of the union's benefits. They get down to the level of the section, and then it goes to the group leaders or, if they have adequate housing, then it is offered to the activists if they need it. Often the Party secretary of the shop will make suggestions to the section head about who should really get something. If the group leader gets offered it, but doesn't need it, then he will suggest someone with who he has yiqi, usually his activists.

But these distributions are not always done equally according to the population of each shop. Some shops and sections have better guanxi with plant leaders, so they might get a few more apartments or tickets, regardless of the number of workers in the shop.

Housing distributions like this took place very infrequently. More common were distributions of bicycles, radios, sewing machines. Actually it is the coupons that are distributed. This is usually done once a year. Guanxi works in getting some groups and sections more coupons than others. Some groups might have two and some none at all. This is another example of yiqi. Of course, those who get more of these goods have to do something in return, like get the group to work overtime for the leaders.

Other things that are distributed this way--there are so many I can't even begin to describe them. Another example is work clothes. They will get a batch in once a year and distribute them free to selected people. Another common example is lumber. Very valuable and hard to get. Needed to make furniture, which is very expensive. Lumber isn't bought by the administrative department for distributing this way. It just happens sometimes that in the informal trading that goes on between factories that they will get some lumber, and if they don't need it for the factory they will sometimes decide to distribute it to employees. Of course the leaders get most

of it, the higher the office the more they get. But sometimes it gets down to the worker-activists.

The factory distributes many things. The 'eight big pieces of furniture' (ba da jia): nightstands, watches, radios, bicycles, sofas, wardrobes, sewing machines, and I forget the 8th. The factory distributes all of them. Why? They aren't available on the market, or at least they weren't back then. You needed coupons for all of these things, or at least for the better brands of bicycles like Feige and Yongjiu. For all these things the commercial bureau distributes the coupons to factories. The factories distribute them to shops, and so forth. The factories don't actually get these goods, but the coupons. Factory departments get tickets from the commercial bureau, sometimes through guanxi of their own. They supply the bureau with certain difficult to find chemicals, and the bureau gives them a few extra coupons for other goods. Then they distribute them to shops, departments, sections, etc. Of course the demand is much higher than the supply, so often they have "distribution small groups" set up to find out who needs these things badly. They are supposed to determine who is neediest according to the number of people in the family, and so forth, but it doesn't necessarily work like this in reality. Guanxi and yiqi are very important in distributions.

There is one other way to get coupons for furniture. When you get married they used to give everyone who applied a coupon for a bed and wardrobe. But only other way after this was to get it from the factory.

Unions and Fringe Benefits (11/1/83, 1.5 hrs.)

The things that unions have to give out are just ordinary. The factory administration itself is the source for the really big things like sofas, and this is informally done. The unions' functions are very small, but it still has a role. Everyone automatically becomes a member of the union. It has only a few cadres who aren't also holding production jobs.

At the end of the year they give out jucan, coupons with which workers can get meat and other things at the plant canteen, like on National Day. This comes out of the spare money from the dues. The most important thing the Union does is organize athletic teams: basketball and soccer especially. The factory built itself a basketball court, but didn't have its own soccer field.

The union also educates backward elements, people who chase girls and so forth. They hold study groups for the backward elements to get them to study Mao Thought. To apply for union benefits you go to the union head of the shop after the shift, and apply directly to him.

For applications to visit family and so forth you apply first to the section head, and he passes up the request to the shop, and the shop to the appropriate staff department for approval and to check it against regulations (the personnel department does this). Shop officials can't really put pressure on workers by refusing their applications for these things if the matter is specified in national regulations--like the tanqin jia. But for all the decisions that are not specified in regulations, the leaders can deny things to people they don't like. Things can get arbitrary sometimes. Personal bias does work in this decisions, just as furniture is given out to the people the leadership really likes.

Worker Resistance

Whether workers can resist orders from leaders depends on who they are. It's not hard to resist group leaders, because they might be afraid of you if you're tough. The section head is less afraid, and shop leaders are not at all afraid.

If the workers in a group get together and just don't listen to the group leader, there's nothing he can do. In a section, the method is passive resistance (xiaoji daigong). You tell the leaders you are tired, and don't follow orders. This was very common when I was working. But now that there are bonus incentives and punishments this kind of thing is harder to get away with.

Open resistance, a collective strike, is very rare. This is considered reactionary, and the bureau might investigate, and security department would get involved. But if only an individual does this, it's not a big problem. If you say "I'm tired," go home, it's considered a personal problem. Collective resistance is usually passive (xiaoji). This gets the point across because it affects production. But if there is a strike the security department gets into the act and tries to find out who the leaders are and punish them. There are strikes from time to time, but very few and they are short. During the Gang of Four period they usually were connective with politics (ie. the Tiananmen period). Since then they are often connected with benefits or pay issues--a couple of shops, for example, will walk out over bonuses. But this simply isn't a problem, because they are so small. The main reason is that they always investigate right afterwards, find out who the leaders are, and arrest them.

Investigation and Surveillance

This is very pervasive in China. Investigations are very severe (lihai). The security department is only a small part of it. They have so many people reporting to them, you can't be sure who is involved. And they use the practice "confess and we'll be lenient, deny it and we'll be severe." There are eyes and ears reporting all around. An example: once I told a joke in the shop about a fair lady in the forbidden city. Just joking around. The next day, there was an announcement over the p.a. system. "Wang XX, report to the security department." They wanted to know why I told the joke, what it meant, who told it to me. Back in those days, if you didn't confess, then the matter got worse. I said, "It was just a joke, I don't remember where I heard it and I don't know what its meaning is." They looked doubtful, told me it was about Jiang Qing. Two days later, I was again called to the security department office, and two guys from the Peking Municipal Public Security office came to question me; told me it was a counterrevolutionary rumour aimed at comrade Jiang Qing. They gave me a serious questioning; they really wanted to know who told the story to me. Rumors were very widespread in that period, and they were trying to control them. This is why activists are hated in China--because they are always making these xiao huibao secretly to leaders and it often gets people in trouble for no reason. This kind of "white terror" has ended since the Gang of Four fell. It was an abnormal period.

There were other examples. One time a worker drew the words "Knock down Mao!" on a poster, and there was a big investigation with a mass meeting about that. Another time a worker scribbled a bunch of characters on a piece of scrap paper, and some security cadre made out the characters "Guo-min-dang"--so this was counter-revolutionary, and they launched another investigation.

Dang'an

This is the most important thing about an individual. It is kept when they enter elementary school. It is a highly classified document. Everything about your background and biao xian. This is personnel department's material. Only the head and vice-head of the personnel department can read them. Not the factory director or the party secretary. Because they are so secret only the top ranking personnel of the personnel department can see them; this is very sensitive material. If you don't have a dang'an, then you aren't legal, you don't exist.

The problem is that if you make one mistake, it will always follow behind you--you can't enter the youth league, Party, get promotions, even though you're an activist. When it comes time to select youth league and party members, these organs ask the personnel department head to submit a report on a person--they can't read the files, but the personnel department head reads them and submits a report about the person's fitness. There is no way to know what is in your file.

Factions and Groups among Workers (11/15/83, 1.5 hrs.)

They exist, but hard to put any particular ideology to them. Sections close together on the shop floor are where they form. The activists in the shop of course were one faction. There are also always huai fenzi, in our shop they were the peasants (but not all peasants were bad elements). (The peasants were permanent workers from the suburbs. They were hired because all the youth were sent down and therefore there was a shortage of new workers in the city). The biggest contradictions were between rural and urban workers. They looked down on each other. Often this broke out into conflict--swearing and so forth. Conflicts often occurred between the activists and especially the peasants just starting work in the factory. Peasants often refused assignments and cursed the group leader. You could see in some sections the peasants would talk only to each other, and the urban residents with one another. You had to pay attention to assigning work in groups only to peasants or workers.

Another group were the huai fenzi, all were peasants. They played cards, messed with women, didn't listen to orders. Sometimes they fought, argued, stole things. Too few intellectuals in our factory to form a faction.

There were small, personal cliques that usually were people that lived in the same area and went out together to eat and to the movies, left together and arrived at work together. These really are called bang rather than pai. Pai has a political implication. You could say that there were pai among the factory leaders, often based on political views. But all these other groups are really called bang. Pai came into play when it was time to promote people to cadre positions. Bang usually have nothing to do with this.

Bang have use in the resistance of workers to orders of leaders. Bang can resist orders when they work together. They often try to divide members up and assign them to different shops and groups. A bang in a group opposed to the group leader can resist orders easily. Bang are formed on all kinds of bases; commonly background, personality.

Resistance by workers to orders by slowing down and refusing orders was ineffective. But they could influence the shop director, depending on how reasonable they were, through their section heads. If the section heads were not ass-patters toward the shop head. Some section leaders would talk to workers and find out their views; sometimes they would push their views with the shop head. If enough section heads got together, they could influence the shop head. In the factory they do have a kind of constituency politics. The shop leader has to please the leaders below him somewhat to keep their support and cooperation. And they play some off against the other and balance them.

If all the workers really hate a shop head and resist--as happened in one shop where the work was dangerous and the shop head didn't bother with safety--then they can influence the leaders to transfer him. This happened in my factory when several workers and section leaders wrote the factory leaders to express dissatisfaction with an incompetent and uncaring shop head.

Labor Problems

The worst period was 1976 around the time of the Tiananmen incident. By this time all the workers were sick of the Cultural Revolution--surveillance, political study, ass-patters rising up, people not daring to say what they wanted. This accumulated dissatisfaction broke out in the Tiananmen incident. This had a very big impact on workers; you could even say that the workers were the basis of the movement that affected the whole country. It was like a spark hitting dry kindling and starting a fire.

Workers were very happy in 74-75 when Deng came back and Zhou was rising in influence. You could see things relaxing a bit. Of course, the wage question was a big source of dissatisfaction. During this period they discussed whether to raise wages, and they had discussions in small groups, and the opinions were passed up to the Central Committee. The top leaders discussed it for a couple of years and in the end didn't do anything. There were many workers upset about the treatment of Zhou's funeral, and many were involved in the Tiananmen incident. Its not clear whether they really loved Zhou that much, but this was a way to protest the restoration of the old policies that it looked like was going to happen. At the Qingming festival that year all the workers made wreaths at work; at Beijing No. 2 Steel Factory they made an iron wreath 20 feet high and brought it to the square. The authorities thought something was going to happen on Qingming, and they forbid workers to go, but that day all the factories were empty. They arrested a lot of workers and interrogated all those who were absent from work that day about whether they were there, who they saw. A "white terror". The investigations went on for weeks afterwards.

Nonactivists (2/8/84, 2 hrs)

There are those in the factory who don't want to participate in politics. Being an activist you really pay a price. If you aren't interested in advancement either in material or spiritual sense, then you don't become active. Its just not possible, though, to completely separate yourself from politics because you have to participate in meetings everyday. But it is possible not to listen, just put in the time. This way you can not really participate. But

this depends on the period too. But even if you don't really care, all of these documents and editorials read in meetings have an unconscious effect on you. I have a friend who thought he didn't like politics and didn't believe any of it, but he came to the US to study political science and found that he really had absorbed a lot and accepted a lot about the Chinese political system without being aware of it. The whole environment affected him. Even if you don't pay much attention they cover a lot of material with you over the years, and it has some effect.

But having said this, there are some people who are able to completely cut themselves off from politics. In the factory, especially the old workers from before liberation who still have old ideas. They are respected as elders, so people don't bother them too much for political study and reading documents. They can't read much anyway. But the pressures on the younger workers are greater. But these old guys, there's just not much you can do. They are basically exempt from politics.

Another group are people from the suburbs with low educational levels. They just don't understand and they don't care. They might mouth the words but they don't understand their meaning. Some men have not lived in the city for a long time. But this depends on your factory. How big and advanced is it? In a factory like mine, a small chemical plant in the suburbs, a lot of people got out of politics. But it's not possible in a large machinery plant or computer plant.

Everybody must participate in politics, but people understand it at different levels and participate at different levels. It depends on your intellectual level, among workers there are such differences. And often political study is very superficial and formalistic. But you can't be too lax because they might test you: "OK, you read Mao's works, what did he say in this essay, explain it to us." You do have to read the stuff, but it's passive, not active participation.

Non-Activists and Distributions

Now it's true that activists get first pick of material things, but often they can't bring themselves to accept them. They're supposed to be selfless and serve the people. So sometimes for moral reasons they refuse. They may take into account the needs of other people in the group as well. The really valuable things, like housing, will be distributed to workshop cadres first, sometimes the ordinary masses will be offered apartments too, the ones who are not activists, but who are just very good workers with clean records. In fact you could say that this kind of worker gets these things even more than the activists, because the activists often refused the privileges. The workers who get in trouble, however, who have a bad work attitude, never get these opportunities to get these things. This is for distributions inside the factory.

Activists, however, often get the raises before others, but it's not the same for furniture, rations, housing, and so forth. Most people in the factory are ordinary workers with decent records and no problems on their records. There is a minority of activists, a minority of ones who get in trouble or have had bad reports. So activists get a little less than the ordinary ones, while the bad ones get nothing. But in the future the activists are better off than anyone else. They are the officials of the future. And in raises

and promotions they are favored too over the long run. The long-run advantage favors the activist.

How do ordinary workers get ration cards for watches, etc? The factory will get a certain amount of watch coupons, give two or so to each shop, and tell them to distribute them as they wish. Then they ask who wants them, of course everybody does. Sometimes this can lead to conflict. Sometimes the group leader or section leader decides. They can also use arbitration, talking things over with the ones who don't get it after he's decided. Sometimes individual workers will try to endear themselves to group leaders and talk them into it. Others will argue and give them a hard time until they give in; fight for these things. But group leaders often have to go just on biao xian, very important still. They sometimes use a rotation method or take turns. There are individual cases as well. In one case I remember they gave a worker on the morning shift who always came late the first choice on alarm clock ration coupons. For a real hot item like a bike, problems are more serious because everyone needs this, if not for themselves then for a relative. Even the activists who could have first choice often take themselves out of the running because they want to keep a reputation as a selfless activist. Personal relations with leaders, guanxi, can also be used. This is very common; you can read about it all the time in the papers.

Guanxi is a different matter altogether. We've been talking just about one side of it up to now. There is also bribery and the use of personal relations as well. Some people at all levels might accept a little case in return, like a group leader or section chief. They can also use their ability to talk to people, be nice, obedient, and attentive to certain leaders to get special relations and influence the distributions. Bribery is the crudest form of this; simple personal relations is more subtle. This kind of bribery takes place at all levels. In the shops it might be a few cigarettes, when the factory is dealing with a bureau, it might be a color TV, or a dinner, dependent on what's needed, or money. A few cigarettes don't solve problems at that level like they do on the shop floor.

An example from the shop. To get out of political study or a shop meeting, you need to get the permission of the group leader. To get out of a shop meeting, you need the shop leader's permission. So you might just give the group leader a couple of cigarettes and ask for the leave, and that might increase your chances. At the shop or section level, cigarettes won't work. Then you "give a gift" (song li). This is a deliberate thing. You have to make it seem not to be a bribe. It is a very subtle art. You can say "I don't need this anymore, just let me leave it in your office for awhile (like a TV or something)". The cadre will say, "Well, OK", like he's letting the guy just leave it in his office for awhile, but it's really a gift. But on the surface it doesn't look like it. It's a delicate and complicated thing. This example is more likely to occur between a shop director and a factory director, and it is likely to get a higher return like a promotion. This is like a "token of appreciation", not a bribe. It's also a "down payment" that obligates the person to do you a favor later on, or be embarrassed. It's people who aren't really qualified for promotions who have to give gifts. Chinese short stories now are full of these kinds of things these days, also cross-talk. Of course many people think it's wrong

but it still goes on. This is more common in factories than in universities or research institutes, where intellectuals think its undignified.

This has more of an effect when only one person makes the decision. But for raises and promotions a committee at upper levels may decide it. And if you've only got one person on your side it may not work. There are also honest people who refuse to be influenced. But this is never really a direct bribe; you cultivate a connection and it pays off later.