

Agency in an Era of Multiplication of Labour Regimes

An International Workshop organized by the Centre for Social Innovation Studies
at CUHK and the French Centre for Research on Contemporary China

24 June 2019, 10.00-18.00, Room 505, Wong Foo Yuan Building,

The Chinese University of Hong Kong



Concept note

In *Border as Method or the Multiplication of labour*, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson highlighted how the transformations of global capitalism have implied shifting forms of articulation between economic processes and state power (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013 : 5-6). Notions such as precarity and the precariat have been proposed to summarise a general trend towards increasing casualisation and deregulation of employment relationships, as well as corresponding patterns of anomie and fragmentation of working-class politics, chiefly in Western Europe. In many countries of East Asia, while irregular patterns of employment have originally been quite widespread, one witnesses a “multiplication of labour regimes” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) and a global trend for workers to experience increasing degrees of flexibilisation, casualisation, and informalisation (Friedman and Lee 2010; Pun 2016; Kelleberg and Hewison 2018) producing “permanent impermanence” for an ever-wide spectre of workers (Lazar and Sanchez 2019). Overall, current processes of flexibilisation and casualisation of labour produce at once possibilities for a politics of solidarity and agency, but these processes also create the conditions for fragmentation and depolitization (Atzeni and Ness 2018). In the present era, what forms of agency (individual and collective) and of transformative politics (Lazar and Sanchez 2019) are being crafted and struggled for, from reducing the everyday effects of systems of exploitation and domination to their minimum to more visible and organized forms of labour politics? How do processes of precarisation and informalisation transform workers’ politics and labour relations? We would like to delve into forms of workers’ creativity and agency that go beyond traditional forms of collective labour activism. From odd-job, domestic workers, frontline production and dispatch-workers, to delivery workers and high-tech programming workers, how do various categories of workers organize and in which measure are these politics of resistance reinventing patterns of agency and mobilisation? How are class, gender, ethnicity and place differences articulated in these politics of labour?

09.30-10.00 Registration

10.00-10.15 Welcome address:

Chris King-chi Chan (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Eric Florence (The French Centre for Research on Contemporary China)

10.15-12.45 PANEL 1: Workers’ experiences and perceptions on changing patterns of employment

Chair: Jack Linchuan Qiu (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Platformisation and flexible Labour: an exploration of takeaway couriers in China, Sophie Ping Sun (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences)

Autonomy and precarity: young workers' dilemma in Hong Kong and its implications for labour organizing, AU-YEUNG Tat Chor (The Chinese University of Hong Kong) and Victor Wong (Hong Kong Baptist University)

Flexible work and precarious employment within the digitalized enterprises in China, Wang Jing (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, from September 2019) and Meng Quan (School of Labour Economics, Capital University of Economics and Business)

Employees in Shanghai: between precariousness and stability?, Gilles Guiheux (Université Paris Diderot)

12.45-14.00 Lunch

14.00-15.30 PANEL 2 (1): Precarisation and workers' agency

Chair: Eric Florence (French Centre for Research on Contemporary China)

Precarity and workers' reaction to factory automation in South China, Huang Yu (University of Hong Kong) and Xu Yi (Sun Yat-Sen University)

Rethinking civil society and democracy: lessons from construction workers in Beijing and Delhi, Irene Pang (Simon Fraser University)

15.30-16.00 Coffee Break

16.00-17.30 PANEL 2 (2): Precarisation and workers' agency

Chair: Chris King-chi Chan (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Employment Mobility and Poverty among the Young in Japan: Importance of Counter Strategy through Solidarity among Labour Unions and Civil Society Organizations, Fujita Takanori (Seigakuin University)

Transnational labour regimes and the multiplication of labour in East Asia-the Cambodian case, Chang Dae-Oup (Sogang University)

17.30-15:50 General discussion and conclusion

15:50-18:00 Concluding remark

Jack Linchuan Qiu (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)