

BOOK REVIEW  
Robert Cliver,  
*Red Silk:  
Class, Gender, and Revolution  
in China's Yangzi Delta Silk Industry.*  
(Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2020)

*Yige Dong, University at Buffalo, SUNY*

After more than two decades of vibrant growth, partially thanks to unprecedented accessibility to primary sources, the field of PRC history has seen a paradigmatic shift from analyses of high politics and top-down campaigns to locally grounded studies of the social, economic, and cultural lives of the commoners. Unpacking the seemingly monolithic party-state and giving voice back to historical actors once marginal in the master narratives, new PRC histories have reconfigured the Chinese Communist revolution as complex processes paved by unevenness across social groups and rife with unintended consequences. As the new consensus is taking form, still, it requires an author's state-of-the-art skills to articulate and substantiate these insights in a single monograph. *Red Silk* is an exemplar as such. An epic account of the silk industry in the Yangzi Delta spanning half a century, this book offers a multifaceted narrative of how the Communist revolution and the local societies mutually shaped each other—a set of processes principally defined by the heterogenous nature of the Chinese industrial workforce. Skillfully weaving together an impressive constellation of primary sources including municipal archives, newspapers, professional journals, and published reports, this 436-page volume demands readers' diligent attention and promises rich returns at the end.

Methodologically, *Red Silk* takes a historical and comparative approach, “examining changes in labor organizing, factory management, business practices, and state-society relations in silk reeling and weaving factories to determine what factors most strongly affected the outcomes of state policies” (2). It also pays equal attention to agency, exploring the

ways in which the actions of silk workers and their employers influenced the procedures of state building as well as industrial and labor policy-making in the early PRC. Comparing Shanghai's silk weaving sector with Wuxi's silk reeling sector, the book's two major sites of study, Cliver argues that while both faced similar market and state policy conditions, they differed greatly in their gendered divisions of labor and their relationships with state agencies, which led to diverse outcomes in terms of workers' experiences and their capacity in shaping factory politics.

Organized in a roughly chronological order, the seven content chapters together offers a historical narrative that traces the development of the modern (mechanized) silk industry and its labor politics in the Yangzi Delta from the late nineteenth century to the first decade of the PRC. While Chapter 1 and 2 cover the periods of Japanese occupation and the Civil War, the following five chapters (except Chapter 6) each focuses on one key moment in the early PRC period in which the CCP initiated a major set of policies to transform the silk industry and its workforce.

Chapter 3 examines the party's efforts to restore economy and transform labor relations in the silk industry as well as how capitalists and workers responded to these policies upon the takeover. Facing unemployment and skyrocketing inflation, the silk workers enthusiastically engaged in seizing factory properties and joining strikes against capital. Yet, under the principles of New Democracy that prioritized production and stability nationwide, the party opted to walk a fine line between enfranchising

labor and supporting private business, pushing forward “labor-capital cooperation” (*laozi xiezu*) and oftentimes accused workers who demanded for higher wages and better welfare provisions of displaying “leftism” and “economism.” Nevertheless, as Chapter 4 shows, the Shanghai silk weavers and their unions managed to take advantage of the opportunities brought forth by the state-contracted production system to advance their own interests. One important mechanism for them to do so was the operations of the Labor-Capital Consultative Conference (LCCC) that allowed employer and the union in each factory to bring equal numbers of representatives to regular conferences that facilitated “equitable discussion” between capital and labor. Acknowledging many of the LCCC’s limitations documented in existing literature, Cliver suggests that it was still one of the most successful examples of “democratic management” in the early PRC.

Together, these two chapters argue that the Shanghai silk workers fared generally better than their counterparts in Wuxi, and what explain such divergent experiences are the different gender structures and state-labor relations in the two sites. In the case of Shanghai, the city’s long-standing labor activism and robust underground party networks had provided a solid foundation for the CCP to develop trade unions after 1949; its silk weaving workforce, dominated by relatively privileged, skilled, and politically powerful male workers, was able to benefit from the three-way negotiations between the party, labor, and capital. Even though men took control of the leadership in the Shanghai Silk Workers Union, the Union as a collective measure consistently emphasized women’s interests, pushing for gender equality and women’s presence in representative bodies, both being enshrined in the CCP’s gender policy. For example, in Shanghai Meiya Company, the largest silk weaving company in the country then, the LCCC managed to push through regulations to equalize the pay scales for men and women workers (216).

By contrast, the filature industry in Wuxi had not seen strong development of CCP-led labor movements before 1949, and women workers, who occupied the bottom stratum on the shop floor, were brutally oppressed and abused by the male

supervisors and factory managers—despite these workers’ spontaneous strikes and walkouts. When the party’s “south-bound” cadres (*nanxia ganbu*) arrived and tried to bring the devastated economy to normal, without any local ties, they had to rely on the same old supervisors and managers to run both the factories and the newly established unions. Aligning their interests with that of the employers and holding antagonistic attitudes toward women, these men in power blocked women workers’ attempts to participate in political activities and suppressed their resistance, only to reinforce the despotic, patriarchal power in the factory regime.

Chapter 5 centers on how workers and capitalists continue to adapt to and negotiate with the transition from New Democracy to a “campaign society” and the unanticipated outcomes out of the process. The gist here is that the Soviet “scientific management” that the CCP initially attempted to model after and the campaign mode of governing that grew out of the need for mobilization during the Korean War (1950–53) were not compatible with each other—a built-in contradiction that featured the early PRC industrial regime. While the Soviet-style management practices would emphasize objective standards, promote advanced techniques, and rely on a system of individual responsibility for production tasks, these criteria were unrealistic to apply when the campaign-type mobilization—such as the “patriotic production competitions” that emphasized activist loyalty and intensification of labor input—frequently undermined attempts at systematizing production on a rational basis.

Chapter 6, titled “Women of the Silk,” is devoted to illustrating the case of Wuxi filatures in great detail—driving home the gender analysis the book sets out to foreground. In contrast with the “labor aristocrats” in Shanghai’s silk weaving factories that embodied “a shared culture of working-class masculinity”(282), which was a key mechanism that connected male workers with their male employers and allowed more effective dialogue between labor and management, what characterized the Wuxi filature factories was outright sexism from the male supervisors and paternalism from the Communist cadres—both conceived of the young women workers “as child-like people whose consciousness needed to be raised by others and who could not

recognize where their interests really lay” (319). Ironically, in reality, these women had always had protested and rebelled, albeit their voices were quelled and their well-being surrendered to “labor-capital cooperation,” economy recovery, and other presumably higher goals.

Finally, Chapter 7 examines the departure from a mixed economy during the First Five-Year Plan through the “socialist transformation” of 1955–56. Contrary to conventional understanding, ironically, the “transition to socialism” was achieved much faster than what the state officials had expected, partially because most capitalists were actually willing to go along with socialization. These capitalists would rather obtain a good position in the emerging socialist economy than cling to the rapidly vanishing market and enterprise autonomy. Unfortunately, the swift pace of transition did not bring about benefits to either the capitalists or the workers. With the role of the party cadres in the factories getting increasingly prominent, the capitalist class reached the end of their time and the workers continued to suffer from pre-existing problems such as low wage and meager welfare. Their misery would finally culminate in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward where the story of the book ends.

*Red Silk* intervenes in several key arenas where major debates have been taking place and shaping the field of PRC history. First, it joins a booming scholarship debunking the Cold-War framework that sees the Chinese Communist revolution as a sudden break from the past and a top-down, teleological process allowing little space for agency and contingency in the course. As Cliver demonstrates, for every step by which the Communist regime attempted to transform the silk industry and the urban society, it had to negotiate with multiple sectors and actors—all had their historical legacies inherited from the pre-1949 periods and the negotiations oftentimes produced surprising outcomes even to the party officials themselves. Moreover, going beyond exposing discrepancies between the CCP’s policy design and its implementations, Cliver’s findings also point to another productive approach to explaining the complexities of the Chinese Communist revolution, which is to scrutinize the internal contradictions of the party’s program. As

demonstrated here, the key source of workers’ grievances and resistance in the 1950s came precisely from the chasm between the regime’s political commitment to a new society serving the proletarian class and its impetus to industrialize and accumulate quickly as a nation-state, which came at the cost of labor’s interests.

Second, building on earlier discussions about class politics during the Chinese Communist revolution, the book offers a compelling case supporting the notions by scholars such as Elizabeth Perry, Jackie Sheehan, and Emily Honig, as cited in the book, that Chinese industrial workers have never been a homogeneous group nor have they ever developed a unifying “class consciousness”—contrary to what classical Marxist theories had anticipated.<sup>1</sup> Yet, rather than an obstacle for labor movements, cleavages among workers in the silk industry oftentimes served as the very terrain of agitation and mobilization. Turning away from the most privileged workers in large-scale state enterprises under the new regime, who were co-opted by and became highly dependent on the state as Andrew Walder observes,<sup>2</sup> Cliver shows that the much less privileged filature workers continued to struggle with the authorities, revealing a more fraught relationship between the industrial working-class and the Communist regime in the earliest years.

Third, *Red Silk* is one of the first studies that brings gender to the fore in studying urban labor politics in the early PRC. While there is a rich literature critically assessing the Communist revolution’s impact on women and explaining why gender inequalities persisted despite the egalitarian discourse, much remains unknown about how women workers, who were a major political constituency in the party’s rhetoric, fared in local factories and in what ways their experiences differed from their male counterparts. As well demonstrated in the Wuxi workers’ case, in order to mobilize local factories for production purpose, the CCP chose to align with the local male authorities while bailing out on its women constituency, a mechanism of patriarchal co-optation that is consistent with findings in earlier works by Kay Johnson and Judith Stacey.<sup>3</sup> Cliver’s delineation of the party cadres’ male chauvinist attitude in practice, which was in sharp contrast with the party’s feminist commitment

on paper, also echoes research by Delia Davin, Christian Gilmartin, and most recently, Wang Zheng.<sup>4</sup>

Pushing the conversation forward, Cliver argues that the root cause of the predicament lies in the party's inadequate theory about the *intersectional* relationship between class and gender. To recruit women to the revolution, the CCP did a successful job in articulating women's oppression as an integral part of class oppression, as clearly theorized in Mao's early works. Yet, it failed to conceive of women workers' suffering inside the factory as a form of gender oppression *sui generis*. As Cliver points out, "[w]hat appeared to Communist Party cadres as a backward and 'feudal' system of class relations was experienced by women workers as gender oppression and exploitation. For these women workers, the struggle for respect and dignity *as women* was just as important to the process of making filatures worthwhile, dignified, and humane places to work as were the Communists' concepts of class conflict, 'feudal' society, and economic development" (p.293). As acute as it is, the analysis would have been stronger had it consulted more sources from the women's departments of the trade unions, and more importantly, from the Women's Federation. As this reviewer's own work finds, feminist cadres in both institutions had collaborated closely and explicitly resisted the party male leaders' agenda to subsume women's interests under the gender-blind class politics.<sup>5</sup> Approaching the party-state as a gendered organization, this line of inquiry would have strengthened one of the book's main points that the CCP is not a monolithic entity and an effective analysis has to unpack it at multiple levels.

The most novel contribution Cliver brings forth is through the three-way comparison among the female filature workers in Wuxi, the male silk weavers in Shanghai, and the female silk workers in Shanghai, although the last group is usually mentioned in passing in the book. While the comparison between the female workers in Wuxi and the male workers in Shanghai is quite informative, the two cases vary in many aspects including skill level, prestige in the industrial hierarchy, and local political context, which may have confounded the explanatory power of gender in the picture. The comparison that carries more analytical power, instead, is between the Wuxi

female workers and the Shanghai female workers. Both marginalized in local settings and underrepresented in their unions, the Shanghai female workers had gained much more from the transition, as demonstrated in the Meiya case, because the city's silk industry had stronger union power with closer ties to the CCP—a position better equipped to materialize the party's gender-leveling agenda. Although the author does not explain who were the exact agents pushing forward these goals inside the unions, the implication here is thought-provoking: for women workers and any other minority groups who are tapped into certain disadvantaged positions for so long, to advance their rights and interests, collective power based on broader labor alliance would play a vital role in the bargaining with capital and the state, even though struggles against sexism, paternalism, and other structural inequalities internal to these labor organizations will have to continue.

My questions to the author are as follows: As class and gender are so central to the analysis of the book, I wonder if you could comment more on your usage of these two categories of analysis. In the case of class, concurring with Arif Dirlik and Richard Kraus, you point out that "class" had been used by the CCP as an *operational* category, in the sense that "capitalists" and "proletarians," along with other categories, had become labels for the state to re-classify people based on their political and, to a lesser degree, economic status.<sup>6</sup> When using "class" as an *analytical* category, however, your analysis seems to focus on the tension between the workers and the former capitalists, a Marxian type of class relations set in the old regime. Under the new regime, by attacking and co-opting the former capitalists, the Communist cadres were on their way to form a new privileged class, as Joel Andreas and Yiching Wu's works suggest.<sup>7</sup> In the context of the silk industry, then, how would you address the tension between the old class structure that was revolved around labor-capital relations and the new one, in which the Communist cadres became increasingly dominant?

In the case of gender, I appreciate that you take gender not as a positivist category, which is just another way to compare men and women, but as a set of power relations as most feminist scholars today would agree. This is most evident in your analysis of



the paternalist, sexist culture haunting the Wuxi filatures and the “working-class masculinity” featuring the Shanghai factories—gender here works as sociocultural systems that possess hegemonic power. The book does a thorough job reconstructing the world of Wuxi filatures vividly, but could you say more about how on a daily basis a culture of working-class masculinity was being imposed on and experienced by both men and women inside the Shanghai mills?

Finally, a question about methods. You have mentioned that you had a chance to interview several men and women who lived in Shanghai and worked in the silk industry in the 1950s, and the interviews gave you “superb insights into the mentalities and

experiences of silk industry workers and managers” (24). I noticed that your analysis, however, does not specify where you rely on these interview data. Is this a choice for style reason or other considerations? Hypothetically, would a more intimate conversation between archival sources and interview/oral history data change your arguments or ways of narration? And if so, in what way(s)?

<sup>1</sup> Perry, Elizabeth J. *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor*. Stanford University Press, 1993; Sheehan, Jackie. *Chinese Workers: A New History*. Routledge, 2002; Honig, Emily. *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949*. Stanford University Press, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Walder, Andrew G. *Communist Neo-traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry*. University of California Press, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, Kay Ann. *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*. University of Chicago Press, 2009; Stacey, Judith. *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*. University of California Press, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Davin, Delia. *Woman-Work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China*. Oxford University Press, 1976; Gilmartin, Christina Kelley. *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass*

*Movements in the 1920s*. University of California Press, 1995; Wang, Zheng. *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1964*. University of California Press, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Dong, Yige. *From Mill Town to iPhone City: Gender, Labor, and the Politics of Care in an Industrializing China (1949-2017)*. PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Dirlik, Arif. “Beyond Chesnaux: Workers, class, and the socialist revolution in modern China.” *International Review of Social History* 48, no. 1 (2003): 79-99; Kraus, Richard Curt. *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism*. Columbia University Press, 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Andreas, Joel. *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class*. Stanford University Press, 2009; Wu, Yiching. *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*. Harvard University Press, 2014.

## Response

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I am delighted and humbled to read Prof. Yige Dong's review of my book, which came out in 2020. Prof. Dong's comprehensive understanding of the state of the field of early PRC studies, and her grasp of the relevant sources, methods, and approaches are nothing short of masterful, and I am very grateful to her for writing this thoughtful, thorough, and insightful review. It is an honor and a privilege to participate in this vibrant field alongside so many talented scholars, even as the current political climate in the PRC makes our work more complicated and difficult.

As Prof. Dong mentions in her review, recent scholarship on the Chinese revolution and the early PRC has moved well beyond Cold War studies focusing on the Communist Party, elite politics, and international affairs. With excellent access to archives in China at the turn of the twenty-first century, a great many scholars have achieved significant breakthroughs, much like historians of the Soviet Union during the same period.<sup>1</sup> Like our Soviet Studies counterparts, we have begun to examine not only continuities across revolutionary regimes, but something we might call "everyday Maoism," following the formulation of Sheila Fitzpatrick and others.<sup>2</sup> As Prof. Dong astutely notes, the resulting studies depict a revolutionary regime that interacts with society in complex ways, is inconsistent in its policies, is frequently unable to achieve its stated goals, and is forced to negotiate, compromise, and adapt to complex and changing circumstances in its efforts to build a state, construct socialism, develop China's economy, and bring about revolutionary transformation. I am very pleased that I have been able to make a small contribution to this exciting and growing body of scholarship.

Prof. Dong is generous in her assessment of my work, describing it as an "epic account" and praising "state-of-the-art" methods. Having witnessed how

the "sausage" was made I question whether my work deserves such praise, but I am grateful and I will do my best to address the criticisms and questions she raises in this response. Prof. Dong adroitly recognizes the major debates and broad trends *Red Silk* engages with – the complex and contradictory nature of the Chinese revolution, the heterogeneity of China's working class, and the gendered dimensions of labor history in the Chinese context. In contrast with Cold War notions of the "totalitarian state," in contemporary scholarship the Communist Party is viewed as much more entangled in society and fraught with internal contradictions (not simply elite power politics).

The same is true for the gendered dimensions of urban labor in China. I am honored that Prof. Dong compares my work to that of several prominent scholars whose research has been greatly influential for me (and I would include Gail Hersatter in this group). I am only sorry that I was unaware of her dissertation, which was accepted in 2019 when I was completing the final revisions of my manuscript. I look forward to reading this work when it is published.

In regard to Prof. Dong's suggestion that I should have looked at the archives of the women workers' departments of the unions, as well as the Women's Federation, I wish that I could have done so. As I discuss in chapter three of *Red Silk*, despite the official rhetoric, in practice Chinese unions in the early PRC frequently neglected women workers and served them poorly. This was particularly true in the filatures of Wuxi, where the unions were dominated by male supervisors and factory owners. Not only did they replace the voice of the workers in negotiations with the authorities, in most cases they did not even establish labor-capital consultative conferences or other forms of democratic management, let alone women workers departments staffed by women

workers. These shortcomings remained throughout the 1950s and beyond.

Similarly, the work of the Women's Federation in Wuxi, as in many southern cities, focused on women's domestic lives, not their representation in labor organizations or the working conditions they faced. This included things like hygiene and childcare that were usually the purview of the Women's Federation, but not wages, working conditions, or participation in factory management.<sup>3</sup> The situation in Wuxi was very similar to that described in the late great James Gao's book on Hangzhou regarding the limitations of the Women Federation's work in southern cities.<sup>4</sup>

I agree with Prof. Dong that Wang Zheng's excellent 2017 book goes a long way toward balancing the earlier critiques of Communist Party policies toward women,<sup>5</sup> but there was a vast gulf between the high-ranking cadres who advanced a feminist agenda at the heights of power and the young women who worked in the silk mills of Wuxi. Lacking any support from their unions or the Women's Federation, these women had almost no access even to local authorities and were forced to take matters into their own hands as they had done since the 1920s.<sup>6</sup> This is just one of many aspects of working women's lives that saw little immediate change after 1949 due to the limited reach, if not the goals or motives, of the ruling party.

Prof. Dong is also correct in her assessment of the three-way comparison attempted in *Red Silk*, in which women workers in the silk industry in Shanghai are merely "mentioned in passing." I attempted to bring out these women's experiences as much as possible, including both women silk weavers and filature employees in Shanghai (where there were only three filatures in 1949). There are historical reasons as to why this group of women was much smaller and left fewer traces in the archives than filature workers in other cities. I discuss these workers more when contrasting the material and political resources available in Shanghai and Wuxi, something I discuss more in a chapter for a conference volume edited by Toby Lincoln and Xu Tao.<sup>7</sup> But it is true that this group gets short shrift in *Red Silk*.

Regarding the question of why male union leaders in Shanghai were so dedicated to advancing women workers' interests, this was difficult to explain with the sources available to me. I can only attribute it to their background and ideology as veterans of the labor movement and members of the Communist Party who understood these workers' situation. This is not the only gap like this in the book – I need to learn more about the government officials in Shanghai's United Front organization to explain their apparent reluctance to take over the silk industry despite the obvious pressure from Mao and other leaders in 1955. Clearly there is much room for further research on these questions.

In the review, Prof. Dong raises some excellent questions, which I will do my best to answer here. The point about the party's deployment of class as both an operational and analytical category is well taken, and the criticism is very much on-point. I believe that the Chinese Communists, of all the state-capitalists in world history, were the most concerned with the emergence of a new administrative class following the revolution, but they were no more successful in resolving the issue than were the Yugoslavs, who also attempted to critique and prevent the emergence of a bureaucratic class of "red capitalists."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, although the old capitalists were never allowed to remove their class labels, even after they no longer controlled the means of production, those who took over leadership positions in industry – party cadres – rarely or never turned Marxist class analysis on themselves. This did not become a major critique of the system of state management until the Cultural Revolution of the late-1960s, and it was defeated in that context.

It is important to remember that, with a couple of notable exceptions, state administration only came to the silk industry very late, in 1956, following the Socialist Transformation of Industry and Commerce (and even then, the appointment of managerial cadres was delayed). The only place in the context of my study where there is conscious criticism of administrative cadres as a "new class" opposed to the proletariat is during the "blooming and contending" of 1957, when it was most often expressed (at least in the sources I was able to access) by the old capitalists, for whom the comparison came quite readily.<sup>9</sup> According to scholars like Liz Perry and

Jackie Sheehan, there was almost certainly a similar critique of the cadre class from industrial workers following the Socialist Transformation, but these voices have been suppressed and it is difficult to find traces of them in the archives.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the archival documents that Perry cites in her 1994 article are no longer available to most researchers at the Shanghai Municipal Archives. They do not appear in the catalog and requests for those files meet with rejection.

Interestingly, although the Communist Party certainly deployed class as both an analytical and operational category, gender seems to have been purely operational, or simply rhetorical, and not a category of analysis as Joan Scott formulated it in the 1980s.<sup>11</sup> I have found Scott and similar theorists very helpful in understanding the gendered dimension of power relations in Chinese society, politics, and industry, especially in the context of the sometimes violent “war of the sexes” in Yangzi Delta silk filatures. I think one of the strengths of *Red Silk* is the deployment of gender as an analytical category in the context of labor relations, something that many other scholars have done before me, but which the leaders of the PRC seem to have neglected. As I explain in the book, China’s Communist leaders viewed class as something that happens in workplaces, and gender as something that happens in the home, in the context of family, kinship, and marriage. Despite widespread recognition of the importance of women workers in Communist organizing efforts, and the deployment of the category “Woman” as a rhetorical symbol in Communist messaging from the 1920s to the present,<sup>12</sup> there were great limitations on the party’s ability to reach working-class women or meet their needs during the 1950s.

I hope that I have done justice to the topic and to previous scholarship in my study of gender in the Yangzi Delta silk industry. One area where I feel the study is sorely lacking is exactly what Prof. Dong highlights, that is masculinity – specifically the “culture of working-class masculinity” that I assert in Shanghai silk weaving workshops, but do not “unpack” or provide much evidence for. My friend and colleague S. A. Smith asked me about the same thing after reading an earlier version the manuscript years ago. To my shame I do not think have I

adequately addressed this in the published book. I am getting this notion from a couple of places, including Liz Perry’s book, *Shanghai on Strike*, and conversations with older workers in Shanghai who told me about life in silk factories before Liberation. It seems very real to me, and I can provide specific examples of what it means. However, I failed to do this in the book for two not very good reasons.

The first is that what I learned about silk weavers’ “culture of working-class masculinity” in interviews was mostly secondhand, not the direct experience of the individuals I was interviewing. I was also unable to corroborate this information in archival sources, which had almost nothing to say about the culture of the men who worked in silk weaving. Some of the things I heard, however, indicate that these men’s working lives, and their relationships with their employers, were very different from those of female filature workers in two main respects. For one, silk weavers’ work could be (I was told) very casual and relaxed, even to the point that weavers could set machines running and then go get a cup of tea or lunch and return later. From what I have learned about the intensity of even automated silk weaving, however, this does not seem likely and was perhaps an exaggeration or legend. The second aspect is more easily confirmed, however, and that is that there was much less direct supervision of silk weavers, who were often very independent, even when they were employed in a large factory with professional management staff. These men (and the few women who did this work) did not face the same kind of intense surveillance and misogyny as filature workers. I believe that was due in part to the greater amount of trust and respect between workers and employers, who shared a common background, education, and even language, as they all came from the same silk towns in northern Zhejiang. Whether we define this common culture as purely “masculine” or not, it was a basis for more commonality and trust than existed between male supervisors and female workers in the filatures of Wuxi.

This brings me to Prof. Dong’s final question concerning the interviews I conducted. Prof. Dong quotes my claim in the introduction that interviews provided “superb insights into the mentalities and experiences of silk industry workers and managers”



and asks where, specifically, these insights are revealed in the book. Perhaps the claim is overly-enthusiastic. I mainly wanted to express my appreciation for my informants and to highlight their contributions to the book, even if these merely aided my general understanding rather than providing specific insights. The fact is that I was only able to conduct a handful of interviews, and most of the information I received, while fascinating, did not contribute directly to the book's main arguments concerning workers. More than half of my interviews were with former capitalists and management staff, who on average live longer than working-class people. I have cited these sources in the footnotes where they arise, and I wish that I could have conducted the kind of extensive surveys and interviews so helpful to social science research. This was not possible under the circumstances, however.

As my fellow historians will understand, we must work with the sources available to us, even if these are not always ideal, in the hopes that drawing

information from a variety of sources and perspectives, and corroborating these with one another, will enable us to approach something like historical fact. Hypothetically, were I able to survey silk workers of the 1950s more extensively, rather than simply collecting anecdotes, I think it would greatly improve those aspects of the book that Prof. Dong criticizes – understanding workers' responses to state administration, their opinions of the union organizations and how they served (or failed to serve) women workers, and their own thoughts on categories like class and gender. Sadly, at present we are lucky to get any access to archives in the PRC at all. Perhaps these questions will have to wait for improved access to historical materials in China, or more creative and diligent scholarship.

Thank you once more to Prof. Dong and Prof. Wu for including my book in the *PRC History Review*, and thank you to all my friends and colleagues for your interest.

<sup>1</sup> For a sampling of some of the most recent scholarship, see earlier issues of the *PRC History Review* online.

<sup>2</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times – Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> On the shortcomings of women workers departments in union organizations in China in the 1950s, and desire to avoid establishing separate unions for women workers and “splitting the working class,” see Phyllis Andors, *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women, 1949-1980* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> James Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou: The Transformation of City and Cadre, 1949-1954* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1964* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> For an example of filature workers in 1957 resorting to the kind of direct actions their predecessors adopted in the 1920s see *Red Silk*, pages 368-9.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Cliver, “Second-Class Workers: Gender, Industry, and Locality in Workers' Welfare Provision in Revolutionary China,” in Toby Lincoln and Xu Tao, eds., *The Habitable City in China: Urban History in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> On Chinese efforts at “democratic management” see Robert Cliver, “*Minzhu guanli*: The ‘Democratization’ of Factory Management in the Chinese Revolution,” *Labor History* 50, no. 4 (Nov. 2009): 409-35.

<sup>9</sup> See *Red Silk*, chapter 7.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Perry, “Shanghai's Strike Wave of 1957,” *China Quarterly* 137 (1994): 1-27; Jackie Sheehan, *Chinese Workers, A New History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998). Sheehan's book is based mainly on newspapers, including 内部参考.

<sup>11</sup> Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–1075.

<sup>12</sup> On this point, see Gail Hershat, *Women and China's Revolutions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018).