行政院國家科學委員會補助專題研究計畫  ■ 成果報告  
□ 期中進度報告

中國工業經濟轉型下的工人參與及其健康安全保護：
深度個案研究
Workers’ Participation and Their Health and Safety Protection in China’s Transitional Industrial Economy: In-depth Cases study

計畫類別：■ 個別型計畫  □ 整合型計畫
計畫編號：NSC 94－2412－H－006－001－
執行期間：  94 年 08 月 01 日至 95 年 12 月 31 日

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成果報告類型(依經費核定清單規定繳交)：□精簡報告  ■完整報告

中華民國 96 年 3 月 31 日
目錄

Abstract ................................................................................................................2
中文摘要 ...............................................................................................................2

Introduction ......................................................................................................... 3
Research Methods ............................................................................................... 9
Results and Discussion ...................................................................................... 13
References ....................................................................................................... 15
Publications and Papers ..................................................................................... 17
Self-assessment of the Research ........................................................................ 18
Abstract

Few studies have addressed the impact of workers’ participation on the protection of their health and safety. In this NSC-funded research, the P.I. conducted an in-depth case study of six Chinese factories to investigate this issue. Workers’ participation is examined through the study of Staff and Workers’ Representative Congress (SWRC) and trade union, two institutions legally entrusted in China with functions that allow workers an input into workplace management. Collaborating with researchers from Beijing and Australia, the P.I. conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups of each enterprise’s managers, shop floor directors, technical personnel and workers; collected materials on enterprise history, SWRC and trade union meeting minutes and records; conducted surveys of each enterprise’s workers and staff about their participation in workplace management and the protection of their health and safety. The analyses of the data show that the trade union and SWRC do have a significant impact on the protection of workers’ health and safety. However, the power of the trade union and SWRC has been significantly weakened during the economic transition from state socialism to market economy and the opportunity and possibility for workers to participate in the protection of their health and safety has decreased. In fact, the democratic institution of the trade union and SWRC has become an arena of labor-management contestation in which workers struggle to protect their interests and the management to reduce their costs and increase their profits.

中文摘要

文献中有关工人参与对工人健康及安全保护的影响的研究十分缺乏。我们这个国科会补助的研究计划就是借由六个中国大陆深度工厂个案研究来分析此议题。在中国，工人参与工厂管理可经由两个管道——职工代表大会及工会，我们研究了这两个管道的民主参与机制及其对工人健康安全保护的影响。本计划主持人与北京和澳洲的学者合作，进行此六个个案研究，本主持人负责工人健康安全保护的面相，在个案工厂作深度访谈及焦点团体访谈。访谈对象包括工 厂管理者、车间主任、技术人员、技术工人、及一般工人。此外，研究团队也收集个案工厂的厂史资料，职代会及工会会议记录及档案。我们也经工场同意后作了100-200个工人的问卷调查。我们的研究结果显现，工场工会及职代会确实有它在工人健康安全保护的明显作用。但是，当改革的程度越深，工会及职代会的功能越弱化，工人参与自己的職場健康安全的保護的機會及可能性越來越降低。事實上，工會及職代會已經成了工人與管理者之間權力的競爭場域，工人借由工會及職代會爭取保護自己健康安全的保障，管理者及廠主卻經由這個場域設法減少成本、增加利潤。
Introduction

The concept of workers’ participation at the workplace historically evolved out of the emergence of industrializing capitalist societies as early as the Industrial Revolution. It was articulated from workers’ attempt to struggle to gain control of the labor process and to democratize workplace management. Since then, workers’ participation has been experimented and practiced throughout various historical periods in countries with capitalist systems, and later, in those with socialist systems (Bayat, 1991).

There is a vast volume of scholarly literature on workers’ participation at the workplace. Arguments in favor of workers’ participation can be briefly summarized as follows: first, it can improve factory’s efficiency and productivity; second, morally and ethically it satisfies human needs for creativity, achievement, social approval, social justice and freedom from domination; and third, it can extend democratic principles from the political sphere to industrial sites (Bayat, 1991; Markey, 2001). Interestingly, but unfortunately, absent from these arguments is that workers’ participation may have important impact on the protection of workers’ health and safety at the workplace which is an integral part of the labor and human rights of a worker.

Since workers are directly involved in the labor process, they are the ones who are most familiar with health and safety hazards and so their participation in deciding and implementing hazard reduction and elimination is essential in the establishment of a safe workplace. But there are almost universally potential conflicts of interest between the workers and management over this because management tends to equate taking protective measures with increase in cost of production. Management is unlikely to invest resources in occupational health and safety (OHS) unless pressured by workers, or when regulated by an effective state. To protect their own interest, it is essential for workers to participate in OHS management to ensure resources are allocated to protect their health and safety (Loewenson, et al., 1999; Levenstein et al., 1995). However, in the voluminous research on workers’ participation, the issue of workers’ health and safety is either not mentioned or only mentioned in passing.

One might have thought that at least in OHS-related literature there is some adequate discussion and research on the impact of workers’ participation in the protection of workers’ health and safety.
Here it is just as disappointing. Most mainstream textbooks on OHS (e.g., Rom, 1998; Zenz, 1994; LaDou, 1997; Scott, 1997) address only technical aspects of the problem. Workers’ role does not enter into the discussion, research, interpretation and prevention of OHS problems. In most research, workers are treated as passive victims (e.g., Everly et al., 1985; Weiss et al., 1991). Most discussions on prevention of work-related disease and injury focus on technical measures such as the installation of engineering controls and devices, substitution of a non-hazardous substance for a hazardous one, job redesign, work organization changes, personal protective equipment; education, advice and screening and surveillance of workers’ health; and government regulations and enforcement (e.g., Wegman and Levy, 1995; Conway and Svenson, 1998; Herbert and Landrigan, 2000). Rarely is workers’ participation considered as a possibility in playing a role. There is a handful of researchers who do see workers’ participation as important and believe that shop floor workers are most likely to be aware of their own endangered condition, and they lament at the paucity of research and discussion on workers’ participation (Levenstein and Tuminaro, 1997; Loewenson et al., 1999; Gardell, 1982; Wokutch, 1990 and 1992; Noble, 1986; Robinson, 1991). They caution that increasingly the area of OHS is dominated by management or health professionals, sidelining workers from having any say in OHS matters (Levenstein and Tuminaro, 1997; Noble, 1986). Nonetheless, having recognized the importance of workers’ participation, few have conducted empirical research to examine the relationship between workers’ participation and their health and safety protection at the workplace.

**Research Objectives**

In this NSC research, we conducted a three-year study of six in-depth case studies of Chinese factories to investigate the impact of workers’ participation, through SWRC and trade union, on the protection of workers’ health and safety.

**Review of the Literature**

In the following section, we shall first set the political and economic context –how the economic reforms launched in China since the early 1980s affect workers’ health and safety problems. This is followed by a brief description and discussion of the historical developments of the two most relevant workplace institutions by which workers can have some input on OHS matters – the trade unions (TU) and the staff and workers’ representative congress (SWRC, 職工代表大會); and then how structural factors – factory size, financial standing, and ownership type -- may
influence their functions and performance.

**Market Reform and its Effects on Workers’ Health and Safety.**

Over the past two decades China has been undergoing a dramatic transformation from a socialist command system to a market economy. The industrial sector has been significantly restructured. Rural collective enterprises in villages and townships have flourished. Private enterprises and foreign-funded enterprises that were non-existent as of two decades ago have mushroomed. These have challenged the state-owned sector, which has shrunk due to the collapse of many state-owned enterprises. From a rigidly planned economic system China has been transformed into a decentralized economy. In line with this, oversight of OHS conditions have become decentralized and highly deregulated outside the state sector, and increasingly so within the state sector.

In recent years China has become notorious internationally for weak OHS protection, with many fatal accidents reported on by its own media and the international press. Some western scholars have warned that China’s rapid modernization drive is leading to an explosive growth of hazardous industries and unsafe workplaces and enormous challenges in occupational health problems (Christiani, 1984; Guidotti and Levister, 1995; Abrams, 1980). It was estimated that some 34 million people (about 30% of the industrial workforce in China) are engaged in hazardous occupations (China Women’s News, 1996). In the 1990s there were, on average, 100,000 fatalities from industrial accidents each year (Xia et. al, 2000); between January and July 2002, such fatalities stood at 65,350 (China Daily, August 8, 2002). 11,700 cases of serious occupational diseases were officially reported in 2000, a jump of 14.5% from 1999. Of these, pneumokoniosis was the most serious, taking up 77.7% of the cases. In 2000, 9,100 new cases were discovered, and of these 2,755 of the victims died. The estimated cumulative number of pneumokoniosis cases was slightly over half a million, and the death rate was 23.85% (Bureau of Legal System and Supervision in Health, 2001). The rates of industrial fatalities, injuries and contraction of OHS diseases were so alarming that the Chinese government awoke to the fact that immediate stopgap measures had to be instituted: two new laws – on the prevention and treatment of occupational diseases and on safe production -- were promulgated in 2001.

The serious situation in occupational diseases and injuries was compounded by a restructuring of government bureaucracies at the national level at the end of the nineties, accompanied by a
massive downsizing of personnel. In 1998 the Bureau of Labor Protection under the Ministry of Labor was disbanded and its staff laid off. Nationwide there is no longer a special government institution in charge of OHS. Instead, the Bureau’s functions were taken over by the State Economic and Trade Commission (Mei, 2002). The latter is China’s bureaucracy in charge of economic development, and in the absence of an effective peak employers association in China this Commission has played that role. As such, it has not been protective of labor. Thus when dramatic fatal accidents continued to be reported in the Chinese press, the Chinese government realized it was necessary to rebuild its OHS bureaucratic system. In 2001 the State Economic and Trade Commission established the National Safe Production Supervision Management Bureau, and to emphasize the government’s seriousness in improving the country’s OHS conditions, a Safe Production Committee was set up under the State Council (Labor Protection Magazine, 2001). Whether China’s OHS record will improve in coming years with the re-emergence of these peak OHS bureaucracies still remains to be seen.

The economic reforms have shaped an industrial structure that is also detrimental to workers’ health and safety. Before the market reform, during the Maoist era, the state sector, followed by the urban collective sector, were dominant. There was no private sector, and the state-owned factories tended to be large, often employing several thousand workers. They were therefore easier to monitor. In contrast, after the market reforms many tens of thousands of smaller private and rural collective factories sprang up, making monitoring of OHS protection a daunting task. In addition, there is a booming sector of foreign-invested enterprises managed by Hong Kong, Taiwanese and Korean firms, which are notorious in China for their lack of concern for workers’ health and safety. In Guangdong province, where these Asian-invested enterprises are concentrated, local Chinese newspapers carry stories of total disregard for human lives in the use of labor. Local governments eager to attract foreign investments tend to turn a blind eye to this (Chan, 2001a).

**The Legacy of State Socialism**

Chinese workers have inherited from the Maoist era two institutions which, when activated, may help to soften the assault on workers’ health and safety: the workplace trade union (TU) and the staff and workers’ representative congress (SWRC). These two institutions are legally entrusted, at least on paper, with functions that allow employees an input into management practices, and by extension the protection of their own health and safety. With China’s appalling OHS record and lack
of genuine western-style labor rights due to restrictions on freedom of association and the freedom to collectively bargain, even to allude to the possibility that China has institutions that may serve workers’ interests within factories seems an oxymoron. But based on her observation from her many field studies in China, the investigator posits that these two institutions hold out some hope for an improvement in OHS conditions in China and thus deserve well-designed scientific research that is lacking in the literature.

The Chinese trade union is a quasi-governmental institution whose officials are appointed from above. It often serves essentially as a branch of management in factories, taking care of the company’s welfare measures. But it is stipulated by China’s trade union law and labor law that the enterprise-level trade union branch is entitled, at least theoretically, to “collective consultation” on an equal basis with employers. One of the items that is supposed to be included here is labor protection, and the regulations note that this should not be set lower than national OHS standards. The trade union has the power to monitor OHS conditions in factories. The lowest level at which the trade union can have an input in monitoring OHS is through the trade union small-group labor protection investigator on the shop floor. A worker in each factory workshop is supposed to fill such a role. According to the Trade Union Law, the union has the right to put forth proposals to remedy unsafe and hazardous conditions, and if lives are endangered, it can propose that the workforce be withdrawn from the site. The union also occasionally launches a “rational suggestions” campaign, in which workers are invited to give suggestions on anything related to the workplace, including OHS problems. Those that are serious may become resolutions to be voted on at the enterprise’s staff and workers representative congress (SWRC).

The SWRC system was introduced in the 1950s but stopped functioning in the decade of the 1970s (Andors, 1974). When Deng Xiaoping came to power, the system was revived. The congress is supposed to convene about once or twice a year, and it has the right to examine and question the manager’s report on various aspects of the enterprise. The representatives are supposed to have veto power or co-determination power over various matters such as the distribution of housing, wages, major strategic policies, a right to examine the manager’s entertainment expenses, and even a right to suggest to government levels above the factory that the manager be dismissed. According to the

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1 Chinese “socialist” ideology does not accept that management and workers have separate interests and therefore their relationship by definition cannot be adversarial. The procedure in drawing up collective contracts can only be a process of “consultation”, not “bargaining”, a word that suggests a conflict of interests.
regulations for the SWRC, OHS protection is one of the important areas that come within the consultative purview of the SWRC. Representatives have the right to make suggestions on how to improve OHS conditions, and—at least on paper—an enterprise’s major decisions on OHS facilities are supposed to be approved by the congress before they can be implemented. In between congresses the SWRC can set up a special labor protection monitoring or inspection committee. It is specified that leading cadres in the enterprise departments should not become members of this committee. Inasmuch as the union is the workplace organization that convenes the SWRC and serves as its secretariat between congresses, the relationship between the trade union and the SWRC and its representatives are in practice intertwined. In fact, our visits to factories reveals that in some the two organs have been collapsed into one.

Like other institutions inherited from an earlier era, both the trade union and SWRC are experiencing changes as Chinese industry undertakes dramatic restructuring (Howell, 2000). In our NSC-funded research, we also investigated three factors that may have a significant impact on the performance of the trade union and SWRC: the type of ownership of an enterprise; the enterprise’s financial standing; and the size of the factory.

Unlike the state-owned factories, the rural collectives and private enterprises often have no trade union branches. The owners and managers, some of whom were peasants not so long ago, have little knowledge about the dangers of chemicals and little experience with the mechanisms for safeguarding machinery against injuries. Making matters worse, the machines used are sometimes dangerous discards that they purchase second-hand in the market. Their understanding of the need to control OHS problems is minimal (Guidotti and Levister, 1995). As of the late nineties, it was estimated that among the rural collective enterprises, 82% possessed significant occupational health and safety hazards and 62% of their workers who worked with toxic chemicals did not wear protective gear (Xu, 1998). The work conditions often are no better in the Taiwanese, Korean and Hong Kong-funded enterprises that operate in large numbers in the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian (Stevenson-Yang, 1994; Tan, 1994). For example, in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in Guangdong, reports of industrial accidents quadrupled from 1991 to 1992, a period when large numbers of Hong Kong and Taiwanese investors relocated their factories to China (Stevenson-Yang, 1994). By the end of the decade, 75% of the industrial toxic poisoning in Guangdong occurred in these enterprises (Jia and King, 2000).
The financial situation of an enterprise can also critically affect the resources available to protect workers’ health and safety. As many state enterprises operate in the red, large numbers of them owe their workers back wages. In these financial straits, the OHS protection facilities are bound to suffer. Even the state enterprises whose financial situation is healthy are now under great pressure to compete energetically in the market, and management is tempted to skimp on OHS resources.

The size of an enterprise may affect the allocation of resources. A large enterprise may be in a better position than a small one to hire full-time specialist OH personnel and to establish an ongoing system to monitor OHS. We shall explore how these three main structural factors affect OHS protections.

Research Methods

Conceptual Framework

This study is based on the theory that workers’ participation, through SWRC and the trade union, has significant impacts on the protection of workers’ health and safety in the workplace. The system and measures of the protection of workers’ health and safety will in turn influence the status of workers’ occupational illnesses and injuries. The larger context, i.e., the national laws, regulation, and policies will affect the condition of the workplace, which, in turn, will influence the condition of the workplace. In particular, the industrial economic reform is likely to have a significant impact on the restructuring, financial operation, and other conditions of the factory. The enterprise’s ownership type, financial standing, and size, along with the national context, will then condition the relationships between workers’ participation and their health and safety protection. This conceptual framework is exhibited below.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

| National laws regulations and policy | Factory conditions ownership type; financial standing; factory size; reform of the factory | Workers’ participation SWRC and trade union | The system and measures protecting workers’ health and safety | Workers’ health (occupational illness and injuries) |

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Research Methods

As is clear from our review of the current status of the research regarding the impact of the workers’ participation on their health and safety protection, little is known in this area of research. Therefore, at this stage of the knowledge, it is important first to understand the mechanisms by which the SWRC and trade union function within the various enterprise ownership structures and their impacts on the protection of workers’ health and safety. The investigator, collaborating with researchers in Beijing and Australia, conducted in-depth case studies of six enterprises, covering a range of ownership types.

1. Description of Cases

In collaboration with the researchers in Beijing and Australia, six enterprises were selected for case studies. These enterprises include various types of ownership. They were selected not only because they represent various types of ownership, but also are in various geographical areas. A brief description of each enterprise is provided below:

1. Printing Machinery Share-holding Company in Northern China
This is one of the biggest offset press manufacturers in China. It is located in one of the biggest cities in China. It was established in 1952. It was a state enterprise until 1994, when it became a shareholding enterprise with a larger holding (62.5%) from the state, a smaller share (25%) from a Hong Kong private investor, and an even smaller share (12.5%) from the stock. Company A has about 3000 employees.

2. Joint-venture Automobile Share-holding Company
This is the first joint-venture – in 1980’s-- approved by the Chinese state. It was a joint-venture between a Chinese automobile manufacturer and an American automobile manufacturer. It is located in one of the big cities of northern China. The share-holding for this joint-venture is 58% from the Chinese state capital, and 42% from the U.S. capital. In 2003, the plant has about 3300 employees.
3. Ship Construction Company in North-east China
This is a state-owned enterprise. It is located in a north-east city of China. It is the only heavy industry type of factory among six studied factories. It is a large-size factory, with about 10,000 workers.

4. Automobile Compressor Company in South-west China
This is a collective-owned enterprise. It is located in a south-west city of China. It produces compressors for automobiles. It is a small collective enterprise, with about 100 workers.

5. A Footwear Manufacturing Company in South China
This enterprise is a subcontractor of one of the largest footwear manufacturing multinational corporations in the world. It is owned by a Taiwanese investor. It is a large factory, having 30,000 workers.

6. A petrochemical Company in East China
This is a private enterprise, producing petrochemical products such as detergents. It has 1000 workers. It is located in east China.

2. Data Collection
A. In-depth interviews and focus groups
   (1) Semi-structured and open-ended in-depth interviews with individuals and focus groups holding various kinds of positions of the studied factories were conducted. Contents of interview included occupational health and safety system, the function and mission of the SWRC, the functions and mission of the trade union and its relationship with SWRC, the relationship between the trade union and workers’ health and safety protection, the relationship between the SWRC and workers’ health and safety protection, the coordination between the SWRC and trade union concerning the protection of workers’ health and safety, and the impact of the reform or changes of the factory on the relationships between the trade union and SWRC on the one hand, and the protection of workers’ health and safety on the other.

Persons interviewed
The persons at the enterprise whom we interviewed include the following:

High-level management: top-manager, chairperson of the trade union, party secretary, director of the board, the chair of the supervisory board.

Middle-level management: director of the human management department, director of the
safety and technology department, the chairs of various committees of the SWRC, department work managers.

**Shop floor directors**

**Technical personnel:** high-level engineers, middle and lower-level managers, and technicians.

**Workers:** SWRC representatives (male and females), trade union group representatives, skilled workers, semi-skilled workers, unskilled workers, shop floor group leaders, non-contract workers, retired workers, service workers, layed-off workers, workers who have had occupational illnesses or injuries, relatives of workers who died from occupational disease or injuries.

**B. Collection of materials on enterprise history**

We collected books, reports, or documents of the enterprise history. Most factories in China have documents or reports regarding the history of the factory. In addition, we gathered historical changes from our in-depth individual and focus group interviews.

**C. Collection of SWRC and trade union standing committee minutes and records**

In order to understand the changes of the SWRC and trade union concerning the above-described contents, we copied the SWRC and trade union standing committee minutes and records of some of our case factories.

**D. Collection of materials on the specific industry and the region where the factory is located**

These materials are important to provide the context for the case studies. Therefore, we collected the materials concerning the specific industry and the region where the factory is located.

**E. Survey of workers and staff concerning workers’ perception of the workers’ participation and the protection of their health and safety**

Our in-depth interviews can only include a small proportion of the workers in the factory. In order to obtain a more complete understanding of workers’ perceptions and attitudes toward the issues of workers’ participation and their health and safety protection, we conducted a survey of workers of some case factories, including shopfloor workers and lower and middle-level management staff. The questionnaire asked questions concerning workers’ and staff’s age, gender, occupation, marriage status, party membership, education, their participation in SWRC and trade union, their individual income and family income, their perception and attitudes toward the enterprise’s protection of workers’ health and safety, whether they have contracted with occupational illnesses or injuries, their evaluation of the SWRC and trade union in the protection of their health and safety.
Results and Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the major findings of this research in three parts: 1. the impact of workers’ participation on the protection of workers’ health and safety; 2. the impact of the transition from state socialism to market economy on the trade union and SWRC vis-à-vis workers’ health and safety protection; and 3. the micro-politics of the trade union and SWRC as an arena of workers’ interest articulation in relation to the protection of their health and safety. Most of these findings have been or will be discussed in the three papers written by this researcher and her long-time collaborator, Anita Chan. Two papers have been published and the third is being written and will be presented at the North American Chinese Sociologists’ Association annual meeting in August, 2007.

The impact of the trade union and SWRC on workers’ health and safety protection. The results of our analyses confirmed that the enterprise-level trade union and SWRC do have a significant impact on the protection of workers’ health and safety. Employees in enterprises with ineffective trade unions and SWRCs are much more likely to report ineffectiveness or poor quality in the design, facilities and implementation of their factory’s OHS system. In addition, our analyses show that the performance of the trade union and SWRC has statistically significant and independent effects on the occupational health and safety system, and these effects are strong and consistent even after ownership type, enterprise size, and financial standing are taken into account.

Another revealing finding concerns the interaction between the impacts of the trade union and SWRC. In most factories, while the SWRC is supposed to hold a veto or co-determination power that the union does not have, it is convened only once or twice per year, and sometimes less frequently than that. The union is the organization that convenes the SWRC and that carries forward the resolutions of the SWRC. The union provides daily services and promotes other activities for workers in between congresses. Therefore, an effective union is vital to an active SWRC. The union on the other hand needs the veto and co-determination powers of the SWRC to realize its legal functions, such as protecting workers against persistent OHS hazards. Our findings demonstrate this interaction statistically. The union’s strong and consistent independent impact on the effectiveness and quality of the OHS system is well demonstrated, but some of the union’s impact is also shown to be realized through an effective SWRC. Nevertheless, our analyses show that the mere existence of an SWRC is inadequate in ensuring a better OHS system. The enterprise’s SWRC has to be deemed effective in its operations for the statistical evidence to show a positive effect.

The impact of transition from state socialism to market economy. As mentioned above, PRC, in the past decades after the founding of the state, has developed a system, composed of the trade union and SWRC, through which Chinese workers have participated in protecting their own health and safety. Our analyses demonstrated that, even after PRC adopted the market economic system, this system still seems to present a potential means for Chinese workers to meet the occupational health and safety challenges. However, this system, as promising as it may be an
effective mechanism though which Chinese workers participate to protect their health and safety, is also undergoing changes -- and in fact, may be losing its impacts while China is going through great economic transformation.

Our analyses of the data of the printing machine manufacturing factory reveals that, as the social status of the workers are declining and the power of the company is shifting toward the management, the impacts of the TU and SWRC are weakening. The following two excerpts from our in-depth interviews can best characterize this change:

“… Only if the company can survive financially, would the workers be able to keep their jobs; would they be able to labor; would the company be able to improve working condition, to decrease labor intensity, and to protect workers’ health and safety.” (interview with a full-time chairperson)

“… If the boat was shaking, then people on the boat would become ‘sea sick’… if the company has enough rice, every employee would have rice to eat… The company has to lay off workers if it deems to be necessary…”  (interview with an office worker, workers’ representative)

Overall, our analyses of this printing machine manufacturer illustrated that the power of both the SWRC and the trade union has been significantly weakened. Consequently, the opportunity and possibility for workers to participate in the protection of their health and safety has decreased.

**The trade union and SWRC as an arena of labor-management contestation.** We are in the process of analyzing the data collected in this study to examine the micro-politics concerning the TU and SWRC’s function in the protection of workers’ health and safety. We analyzed the data of two companies, the printing machine manufacturer and the automobile joint-venture company. Our preliminary analysis of the workplace micro-politics regarding the working of the TU and SWRC in the protection of workers’ health and safety shows that, these two institutions have become an arena of management-labor contestation. On the one hand, workers – particularly those who were responsible for TU or SWRC or occupational health and safety work during Mao’s era—were struggling to maintain this legacy of state socialism and to enhance occupational health and safety by maximizing the impact of the TU and SWRC. While participating in the protection of their co-workers’ health and safety, these workers tried to use the state laws – including the Labor Law, Trade Union Law, Occupational Disease Control Law, and Safe Production Law—to strengthen their power relations with the management. They also used the power of the Party to their advantage in these power-relations. On the other hand, the unfavorable conditions resulting from the transformed labor relations have been undermining the function of the TU and SWRC in protecting workers’ health and safety. These include the increase of management’s power over that of the workers, the financial standing of the enterprise, the declined power of the TU, workers’ job insecurity, the financial dependence of the TU on the enterprise, the decrease of personnel, and the diversification of the interests of different strata of workers and employees. As we proceed further in our analyses, we will obtain a better understanding of how the workers articulate their interests through the trade union and SWRC.
In sum, as the industrial economic reform deepens and as the industrial restructuring is accelerating, China is confronting serious OHS problems. To meet these challenges successfully, the state, the OHS professionals, the employers, and the workers would need to make great efforts. As the workers are the ones who are most likely to be affected by the OHS problems, they should also be the first ones who should be given the opportunity and responsibility to take part in the protection of their own health and safety in their workplaces. In this NSC research, we found a system existing in China through which Chinese workers have participated in protecting their health and safety. This system is composed of two institutions – the trade union and SWRC. Our research illustrated that, after decades of historical development, this system seems to present a potential means for Chinese workers in meeting the serious OHS challenges. However, this system is also undergoing changes -- and in fact, may be losing its impacts while China is going through great economic transformation. This depressing prospect thus calls for more research and greater attention on various aspects of the current status of these two institutions in Chinese enterprises of different types of ownership and the means through which they can be sustained and their potential can be realized.

References


**Publications and Papers**


3. 尤素芬，陳美霞，台灣職場安全健康保護之勞工參與機制探析，has been submitted to 台灣衛誌 and under review

Self-assessment of the Research

Basically, this project has achieved the major objectives originally planned. Part of the research findings have also been published in international journals or edited books (listed above). The P.I. noticed that the published articles have also stimulated discussions among the international OHS researchers. The P.I., through several years of research efforts focused in Chinese workers’ health and safety, has accumulated several research papers. She is planning to possibly publish these papers in a book.

The research team, composed of the researchers of Beijing and Australia and this P.I., has collected an enormous amount of data. Only part of this huge data set has been utilized. Therefore, one aspect of this NSC project that needs continuing efforts is further analyses of these data. This work will be part of this P.I.’s future research endeavor. But even the analyses the P.I. has conducted so far have provided important information and understanding of PRC’s mechanism of workers’ participation through which Chinese workers can use to protect their health and safety at the workplace and how this mechanism is faring under PRC’s great economic transformation.