Unfinished
Proletarianization: Self, Anger, and Class Action among the Second Generation of Peasant-Workers in Present-Day China

Pun Ngai¹ and Lu Huilin²

Abstract
As a result of its open-door policies and 30 years of reform, China has become the "world's factory" and given rise to a new working class of rural migrant workers. This process has underlain a path of (semi-)proletarianization of Chinese peasant-workers: now the second generation is experiencing dagong, working for a boss, in industrialized towns and cities. What is the process of proletarianization of peasant-workers in China today? In what way does the path of proletarianization shape the new Chinese working class? Drawing on workers' narratives and our ethnographic studies in Shenzhen and Dongguan between 2005 and 2008, this study focuses on the subjective experiences of the second generation of dagongmei/zai, female migrant workers/male migrant workers, who have developed new forms of power and resistance unknown to the previous generation of workers. Did the pain and trauma experienced by the first generation of dagong subjects gradually evolve into the anger and resentment that has conditioned the labor strikes and class

¹Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR
²Peking University, Beijing, China

Corresponding Author:
Pun Ngai, Department of Applied Social Sciences, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR
Email: punngai@gmail.com
actions of the second generation? In short, what continuity and change can we observe in the life struggles of this new working class? Is the second generation of dagong subjects compelled to take action as a result of long-endured pain and anger? Self, anger, and collective action among the new working class propel the narrative described in this article.

Keywords
Chinese peasant-workers, proletarianization, working-class formation, anger, class action

There’s nowhere I could find myself happy. No matter where I go, I’m not calm and balanced.

—Xin, a 32-year-old dagongzai, working in a factory that supplies toys for Disney, 2007

Thirty years of Deng’s reform has turned China into the “world’s factory.” A nation that was once viewed as a developing country now poses a challenge to the global economy. Little attention has been paid, however, to the formation of a new working class: more than 200 million peasant-workers, nongmingong or mingong, who have streamed from the countryside to the cities, which have been continuously incorporating them into global capitalism over the past two to three decades. This migration has underlain a path of (semi-)proletarianization of Chinese peasant-workers: now the second generation is experiencing dagong, working for a boss, in industrialized towns and cities. What is the process of proletarianization of the peasant-workers in China today? In what way does the path of proletarianization shape the new Chinese working class? In this article, we explore the subjective experiences of the second generation of dagongmei/zai, female migrant workers/male migrant workers, who have developed forms of power and resistance unknown to the previous generation. Did the pain and trauma experienced by the first generation of dagong subjects gradually evolve into the anger and resentment that has led to the recent labor strikes and class actions of the second generation? In short, what are the elements of continuity and change that characterize the life struggles of the second generation of the new working class in comparison with the first generation? To answer these questions, we explore how anger and the politics of resentment contribute to labor actions and collective resistance, a subject that has not been sufficiently studied in the existing literature.