3 EVERYDAY POWER RELATIONS IN STATE FIRMS

CLIENTELISM IS ONE OF THE KEY concepts in the existing literature on power relations at the grassroots level in post-1949 China. Unlike the use of pure coercion under a totalitarian state, clientelism denotes the bargaining and reciprocity between a power holder (the "patron") who provides protection and benefits for their followers ("clients") and the latter's loyalty to the former, as anthropologists and political scientists have widely observed since the 1960s in their studies of power relations and local politics in African, Latin American, and Southeast Asian societies.[1] The thriving of patron-client networks, as James Scott describes in his analysis of Southeast Asian societies, rests upon "the persistence of marked inequalities in the control of wealth, status, and power" and "the relative absence of firm, impersonal guarantees of physical security, status and position, or wealth" (Scott 1972, 101).[2] In his research on industrial enterprises in contemporary China, Andrew Walder also underscores the prevalence of patron-client ties. Factory leaders at the workshop level, he contends, ensured workers' compliance in production by implementing "principled particularism," that is, to reward "activists" or loyal workers with opportunities in promotions, pay raises, bonuses, admission into the party, or priority in housing allocation and job assignments. This practice resulted in the workers' organized dependence on the leaders, given their de facto life-employment in

the factory and lack of job opportunities outside the work unit. Instead of stratification based on education, seniority, or skills, Walder finds the split of the workforce into the minority of activists and the majority of non-activists, depending on their relationship with workshop leaders; hostile to the privileged activists and their "official patron-client network" with the leadership, ordinary workers, he further suggests, cultivated "instrumental-personal ties" with individual factory cadres for survival because of scarcity (Walder 1986).

Critics of the clientelist model do not deny the existence of patron-client networks in Chinese society at large and the industrial factories in particular, but they dispute the extent to which this network prevailed on the workshop floor, the applicability of this model to the analysis of the entire factory system (Davis 1988), and the split between activists and non-activists in factory politics (Perry 1989). For them, equally important in understanding cadre-worker relations in Maoist China were the formal and informal institutions that empowered the workers and constrained the cadres (Blecher 1987; Womack 1991). Unfortunately, these critiques are mostly based on the commentators' general observations and inferences; few substantiate their criticism with solid evidence from field research.

This chapter begins with an overview of the structure of factory leadership and then addresses three issues. The first is the overall relationship between factory leaders and workers, as seen in their everyday interaction in production and political activities; we pay particular attention to the various formal and informal constraints on the leaders in their decision-making process and relations with workers. The second is the operational reality of the mechanisms by which the material goods and political incentives were distributed. The central question here is whether they were distributed only to the small and fixed group of "clients" according to their loyalty to the leaders or to all eligible workers on the basis of announced rules and regulations, and to what degree the cadres were able to practice favoritism in the process. The third is the relationship between the activists and non-activists, and the question here is whether a split and mutual hostility widely existed between the two. This chapter ends by discussing the implications of the findings here for conceptualizing everyday social and political relations in state firms of Maoist China.

THE CADRES AND WORKERS: AN OVERVIEW

The Three-Tiered Leadership

The factory head and the secretary of the Chinese Communist Party's committee at the factory were the top leaders of a state firm; while the former carried out the specific tasks of production, the latter was in charge of political and ideological matters in principle. Both of them normally did not interact in person with ordinary workers. This was the case in large-scale factories with more than ten thousand employees, where the workers knew who their factory leaders were only "from the photos displayed on the glass-fronted billboards," as Mrs. Zhang Yiping (b. 1955), who entered the No. 17 Cotton Mill in Shanghai in 1971, recalled (S7), and where "the factory head did not come down to the shop floor at all" (*genben bu xialai*), as Mrs. Yang Xiaofeng (b. 1943), who joined the Yimin Food Factory in Shanghai in 1968, witnessed (S8). This was also true in small firms with only hundreds of workers, where the factory heads "did not deal with workers at all" (*he gongren bu daga*), according to Mr. Yue (b. 1949) of the Gongnong Garment Factory, which had only about 280 workers in 1970 (W5; also W1).

Next to the factory head and party secretary were the workshop directors (*chejian zhuren*) and the party's branch secretaries at the workshop level, who were normally promoted from lower-ranking cadres; most of them started as ordinary workers and later were promoted because of their "hard work, good skills, and outstanding performance" (*ken chiku, jishuhao, biaoxianhao*), explained Mrs. Fan (b. 1948), a former accountant of Nanjing Post and Telecommunication Equipment Factory (L5).[3] The workshop director was to see to it that the workshop achieved or surpassed its production goal within a time limit and the workers performed well inside and outside the workshop. The director was responsible, for example, for finding a replacement if a worker in charge of a specific task was absent because of illness or another reason (W5). If a worker was accidentally late or absent and no other alternates (*beiyonggong*) were available, the head had to do the task of the absent worker (*dingban*) (N1, W3). If the workshop had an urgent task that had to be done within a time limit, the head as well as all other factory office staff had to join the workers in completing the rush task, such as the seasonal job of processing tomatoes and mushrooms in large quantities before the produce spoiled, as seen in a food processing factory in Shanghai during the harvesting season (S8).

But the workshop leader's most important jobs were to coordinate with the leaders of production groups, to apportion the tasks to each of the groups, and to oversee their performance. The head thus had to be present on the shop floor all the time (*genban*) (H4), unless they had other engagements such as attending a meeting or conferring with the factory head. In addition, the head had to spend much of their energy on workers' various personal issues, such as illness, family violence, divorce, or illicit sex, and on any conflicts or problems among the workers that the subordinates were unable to handle (B8).

Below the workshop director were a number of group leaders (*zuzhang*), each responsible for dozens of workers that formed a "production group" (*shengchan xiaozu*). Above the group leaders, there might also be shift foremen (*zhibanzhang*), in factories where production continued twenty-four hours a day in three eight-hour shifts, or section chiefs (*gongduanzhang*), in factories where production was divided into several sections with each section responsible for one stage of the entire production line. A group leader's basic duty was to assign specific tasks to each individual. During the height of the Cultural Revolution, the leader also presided over a study session for fifteen to thirty minutes before the shift started. When the eight hours of work ended in the late afternoon, the leader normally convened the group members for a meeting (*pengtouhui*), usually less than ten minutes, in which the leader would discuss "how the production had been done, how much had been manufactured, what problems had occurred, who and what deserved a praise, and what the workers should pay more attention to tomorrow, etc." (N10).

The Costs and Privileges of Being a Cadre

Other than the duties outlined above, the group leader performed the same tasks as ordinary workers in production. Therefore, they were believed to be the least powerful yet the "most hard working" (*zuikude*) among all cadres of a factory (S1, S6). A group leader had to "take the lead" (*shenxianshizu*) (S4) when confronted with the most difficult and dangerous tasks, such as handling an accident or an emergency situation in the factory (W1, W2); otherwise they would lose popularity (*shiqu minxin*) among the group members, and the latter would "not respect and obey" (*bufu*) the leader (N7). When the group's shift was over and all other members were gone, the head had to stay to clean up the floor and examine the tasks done by its members; if anyone left

early or was absent, the group head had to work in their stead. According to the aforementioned Yang Xiaofeng (b. 1943), the group leader was "the most capable yet suffering the most" (*zuinenggan, zuichikui*) among the workers (S8), yet their earnings were no higher than the ordinary members' of the same wage grade (see also S2, S5). When it came to a group discussion on the amount of bonus payment for each group member, the leader had to yield to others if the total amount for bonuses was limited (N7). As an ordinary miner under the Shanghai Metallurgical Bureau observed, "Only after you give up and take the loss, you can mobilize others and make them motivated in production. This was called to 'suffer at the beginning and enjoy later' for the cadres" (N2). Not surprisingly, it was widely believed that being a lower-level cadre meant to "lose (or suffer)" (*chikui*) (W1, N1).

In contrast, workshop directors were somewhat privileged because they did not have fixed tasks in the production line, and most of time they did not have to work together with ordinary workers. However, they, too, had to join the group heads to "lead in a charge" (*chongfeng zai qianmian*) when the workshop had an urgent or dangerous task. A former group leader at the Shanghai No. 17 Cotton Mill thus said: "Being a cadre, you have to take the lead. Otherwise, the task cannot be done, and you surely won't be able stay in your position for long. When you go down to the bottom level, you have to make people convinced and respectful of you (*baiping renjia*) by demonstrating yourself first. You have to take the lead to make them convinced. Moreover, you have to treat them with sincerity" (S7).[4]

The cadres of different levels had to show their unselfishness and superior morality when deciding wage raises, bonus distributions, apartment allocations, or nominations for advanced workers. On these occasions, they were invariably expected to yield their opportunities to the most qualified workers and "not to compete with the masses" (S10).[5] At the Nanjing Post and Telecommunication Equipment Factory, for instance, the cadres were normally allocated the "worst" apartment units, as a former factory accountant witnessed (L5). In another instance in 1976, at a housing service unit in Nanjing, a workshop director's wife quarreled with her husband because he had repeatedly given up opportunities to receive an apartment; in the end, the work unit decided to give the head an apartment (L3). Such instances, to be sure, may be considered the "best practices" expected of the cadres, but

they do suggest the cadres' concern with their reputation and public image and their eschewal of overt and excessive malfeasance, if any.

The cadres fared no better when there was a wage raise. At the machinery factory of the Port of Ningbo, for example, the wage was increased by 5 yuan for workers but only 2 or 3 yuan for the cadres, when their wages were upgraded by one level in 1971, which explained why our informant from this factory was reluctant to accept the workshop director position (N4). So too was the situation at the General Machinery Manufacturing Factory of Wuhan Steel and Iron Work, where "the wage increased less for the cadres and more the workers" during a wage raise (H12). When determining the level of bonuses to be distributed, again the cadres had to yield. Mrs. Song (b. 1937), a retiree from the Xinghuo Cotton Mill in Nanjing, thus recalled, "If the total amount of bonuses was insufficient to be paid to all workers of the same workshop, usually the leaders had to automatically reduce their rates. At the end of a year, when nominating recipients for a year-end bonus, which had to be publicized, workers had better opportunities than the cadres to get the first-grade bonus, while the cadres, if truly outstanding, only received the second- or third-grade bonuses" (L6). During the most difficult years following the Great Leap Forward, the cadres of state firms were required to take the lead in returning coupons for cloth, meat, and grain to the government to help relieve the shortage of supplies in the market, as a former workshop foreman of Shanghai Compressor Factory confirmed (S11). When promoted to the position of workshop director or any other positions as cadres "detached from production" (*tuochan ganbu*), the grain ration was reduced from the standard amount of 31 catties (1 catty = 0.5 kilogram) for ordinary workers to that of 26 catties for cadres (H7). In state-owned mines, the standard grain ration was 46 catties for miners and 32 catties for all cadres (H13). Hence a popular saying among the cadres: "Promotions come with a reduced grain ration rather than getting rich" (*shengguan bu facai, liangshi jian xialai*) (H6). Workers had a good reason to joke that "the cadres are idiots!" (*ganbu shi sazi*) (C6).

Of course, the hardest times for the cadres were during the political campaigns. Unlike ordinary workers who were "free of troubles" (*meishi*) when a campaign came into the factory, the cadres were invariably the targets of repeated investigations and struggles (H11); they had their worst period

during the first few years of the Cultural Revolution, when most of them were struggled against repeatedly and even beaten up by the radical youth (H14). Throughout the rest of the Cultural Revolution, the cadres "feared the masses" (*haipa qunzhong*) (S6) and therefore had to "keep a low profile" (*suo zhe tou zuo*) when dealing with them (S5). When assigning an extra task to the workers, such as an after-hours shift (*jiaban*), the factory leader had to first discuss it with the group head and let the group head "consult" (*shangliang*) the workers to obtain their consent, instead of imposing on the latter a compulsory order (*mingling*), as a retiree from the Shanghai Medical Equipment Factory explained (N3). If a cadre did something that irked the workers, causing "wide complaints among the masses" (*qunzhong yijian da*) (N5), that cadre would be subject to either protest from the latter, in the form of open "big character posters" (*dazibao*) in the most visible parts of the factory compound or the clandestine "letters of the people" (*renmin laizin*) addressed to higher authorities, or an investigation from their superior and, if verified, subsequent disciplinary measures.

The Maoist state's stress on curbing the cadres' privileges and narrowing their gaps with the rank and file can be seen in part as a continuation of the party's pre-1949 revolutionary tradition, central to which were its cadres' practices of austerity and equality with the masses on the one hand and the masses' voluntary participation and initiatives on the other hand (Selden 1995). Mao's own preference for voluntarism, his profound faith in mass mobilization, and his aversion to elitism and hierarchy (Schram 1989) accounted for the continuity of the revolutionary tradition after 1949 and its triumph over the short-lived attempt in the 1950s to adopt the elitist approach of the Soviet Union, which allowed the cadres and skilled workers a full range of privileges and therefore gave rise to a striking inequality between the cadres and workers as well as among the workers of different skills and wage grades. A more fundamental reason behind the Maoist state's limitation of cadre privilege and its promotion of equality between cadres and the masses, however, had to do with a combination of two factors: the state's strategy that aimed to maximize its extraction of resources for state-led industrialization, and the constraints of resource endowments. The latter forced the state to prioritize the survival of the entire urban population by guaranteeing its full employment, precluding the option of cultivating a privileged bureaucracy and elite workers that would compete with the state and the rest of the population for

limited resources. To motivate the workers in production, the state could only emphasize the use of political or non-material incentives instead of material awards, thus narrowing the gap between cadres and workers in production and income distribution. It is in this context that the relationship between the cadres and the workers can be appropriately understood.

Relations with the Workers

One of the biggest concerns for factory leaders of the Mao era was to maintain good "relations with the masses" (*qunzhong guanxi*) or to "mix up with the masses" (*yu qunzhong da cheng yipian*) (H20). Our interviewees generally agreed that, except for the few who were arrogant and indifferent, the leaders at their factories were "fairly considerate" (*hen tiliang*) (C1) and "quite active in taking care of those below them" (S8), or that they "cared a lot about their relations with the rank and file" (H3; also L3). A retiree from Hefeng Yarn Mill in Ningbo thus described her shop head:

> The head visited our workshop very often, partly to get close to the workers and partly to see how they performed. . . . The head was faced with the pressure to meet the production target, so he had to please the workers. When it was getting hot, for instance, the head would bring to us a basin of cool water so that we could wash our faces—that's how to take care of the workers! Otherwise, we would complain: how comfortable you are sitting in your office, while we sweat blood in the workshop, which is so hot in the summer! The workshop head had to keep a cordial relationship with the workers, or it would be very difficult to keep improving production. (N1)

Given the importance of worker cooperation in factory production and management, it is not surprising that the cadres at different levels managed to find supporters among the workers, who would take the lead in responding to orders and completing tasks. To have followers was especially important for the cadres who were recently promoted or those who came from outside the factory. The new leaders were particularly interested in finding supporters from among the newly recruited workers, who tended to be obedient, unlike some of the senior workers, who appeared to be defiant, counting on their seniority or connections with other cadres (N5). Motivated workers, too,

were likely to seek favor and protection from their superiors. As our informants all pointed out, however, those who deliberately pleased the cadres by flattering, gift-giving, or outright bribing (together known as *paimapi*) were very few (W1, N1, N2). Most of the interviewed retirees denied that flattering was a common phenomenon in their relations with shop leaders. They claimed that "there was no need to flatter the leaders at that time" (*nashi buxuyao taohao lingdao*), in the words of a retiree from the Nanjing Post and Telecommunication Equipment Factory (L5), or that "it was unnecessary to flatter the leaders" (*yongbuzhao taohao*), as an interviewee from a labor service company in Shanghai put it (S9).[6]

As for why most of the workers in state firms shunned fawning on the cadres, the interviewees offered different explanations. Some of them found the reasons in their personality (H1).[7] Other informants emphasized the larger social and institutional context to explain why cultivating personal ties was not as important in the Mao era as nowadays. A retiree from the General Machinery Factory of Wuhan Steelworks, for instance, explained that few workers in his firm flattered the cadres because "the social atmosphere at that time was fairly good" (*dangshi fengqi bijiao hao*), which contrasted sharply with rampant corruption in the reform era (H10). The retirees of other firms stressed the relatively good quality of the leaders in their factories. Promoted mostly from the rank and file, the cadres were believed to be hardworking and "totally different from [the leaders] nowadays" (*gen xianzai wanquan bu yiyang*) (L3). The workers, for their part, kept "fairly normal relations" (*guanxi bijiao yiban*) (H10, S18), "good relations" (*guanxi manhao*) (L5, S9), or "very harmonious relations" (*guanxi feichang rongqia*) (L3) with the cadres; they respected the cadres and, therefore, did not feel the need to flatter them (H13, H15).

A more common reason behind the limited importance of personal ties in state firms, as most of our informants stressed, was the gross "equality" between the shop leaders and ordinary workers. When talking about their relationship with the cadres, the informants repeatedly stressed that it was "equal" (*pingdeng*) (S10, S18, Y1, Y4), "fairly equal" (*bijiao pingdeng*) (S8, S11), "completely equal" (*yilu pingdeng*) (S11), "on equal footing" (*pingqi pingzuo*) (L2), or "fairly good" (*hai bucuo*) (B9, L4, N4). However, the interviewees each define "equality" differently. For some of them, equality was primarily political and social, which was felt only when they were off duty; while on

duty, workers "had to obey the leaders, because it was widely accepted at that time that to obey the leaders was to obey Chairman Mao, and to accept the state's arrangements" (B2; also S4). Other interviewees defined equality in an economic sense. For Mr. Fan (b. 1941), a retiree from the Zhongxingyuan Silk Mill in Nanjing, the workers were equal to their leaders because their wages were paid in the same way, determined primarily by one's seniority; those who had longer employment and better performance were paid more, regardless of whether they were cadres or workers (L2; also Y1, B9).

The most important reason behind the perceived equality between cadres and workers, however, lay in the fact that the former had only limited power in influencing the well-being of the latter (L2).[8] According to Mr. An (b. 1930), a retired physician from the No. 2 Company in Nanjing under the Ministry of Petroleum Industry, the workers in his factory "normally did not flatter" because "the leaders back then did not have as much power as the leaders have nowadays, and most people just needed to work honestly and seriously" (L4). So too was the view of a retiree from the Port of Ningbo when explaining why the workers there fared well with the cadres: "There were only a limited number of things that the leaders could handle on their own. Our food was rationed and administered by the grain department of the government, our grocery coupons were distributed by the street residents' committees, and the wages were paid according to the state's regulations, which the leaders had no right to deduct. Nor did the leaders have the right to lay off workers, which had to be approved by the superior authorities" (N4).

To recapitulate, two institutional arrangements central to labor management in the state firms shaped the relationship between cadres and workers. First, the workers' lifetime employment and guaranteed entitlement to a full range of benefits on the one hand and the limited power of cadres regarding employment and income distribution on the other precluded the necessity for the vast majority of workers to seek protection from and develop loyalty to individual cadres. Second, instead of the workers' dependence on the cadres for the security of their livelihood, the cadres depended on workers' cooperation for the timely fulfillment of production targets, in the absence of the ability to offer material incentives at their own discretion to motivate the workers. These two features were in turn a result of the state's transplantation of the Soviet factory system model and its adaption to the Chinese context of resource endowments in the 1950s. In China, the huge size of the labor

force and the limited job positions precluded the possibility for workers to freely change jobs between different firms and accounted for their lifetime dependence on their employing enterprises, contrasting with the shortage of labor and hence the high turnover rate in the Soviet factories (Filtzer 1992; Whyte 1999). On the other hand, the limited availability of capital and resources for the industrializing state prevented it from relying on material incentives (e.g., frequent wage upgrades, bonus distributions, or housing allocations) to motivate the workers. The cadres' limited discretion in rewarding the workers, their dependence on the latter for production, and the narrow gap between the cadres and workers in income levels and living conditions all contributed to the rise of a shared consciousness among the workers of being equal with the cadres, which again contrasted sharply with the stark hierarchy and inequality in Soviet society (Lane 1985, 177–194; Filtzer 1986, 101–102).

WAGE UPGRADE AND HOUSING ALLOCATION

To determine whether the relationship between workers and cadres was characterized by a general equality, as many of our interviewees claimed, or whether a split existed among the workers, as the clientelist model suggests, we must look further into how much discretion workshop cadres had in making decisions concerning the workers' material well-being and political standing in the workplace. A key issue that has to be addressed here is to what degree the cadres were subject to a full range of institutional constraints and whether they had "wide discretion" in determining the workers' wage raises, bonuses, promotions, job assignments, and entitlement to various political honors, as Walder claims (1986, 96–97, 160, 163, 166). For Walder, these factors constituted the necessary conditions for worker dependence on their supervisors and the rise of clientelist ties in the factories. So powerful and arbitrary were the cadres, Walder writes, that "discretion can be used to punish workers by refusing to exercise it in their favor. Selected individual can be denied bonuses and raises to which they might otherwise be entitled based on their work performance" (ibid., 100). To illustrate the cadres' personal power and preference, he quotes a description of the foremen at a Budapest tractor factory and suggests that this depiction mirrors the situation in China: "They are emperors here. They hold us all in their hands. They dole out favors as they see fit. . . . The foreman doesn't just organize our work:

first and foremost he organizes us. The foremen fix our pay, our jobs, our overtime, our bonuses, and the deductions for excessive rejects" (ibid., 102). Were the Chinese workshop cadres truly as powerful and arbitrary as their counterparts in Hungary? Let us first look at how wage raises and housing allocations were determined in the Chinese firms.

Upgrading the Wage Level

Wage raises were rare in the Mao era. Since a standardized wage system was introduced nationwide in 1956, there were only three upgrades in the rest of the Mao era: first in 1959 and 1960, when the upgrade was limited to 50 percent (30 percent in 1959 and another 20 percent in 1960) of the workforce in state firms, and priority was given to workers who excelled in production and technological innovation; second in 1963, when 40 percent of workers, primarily those of lower wage grades for the longest period, benefited from the upgrade; and third in 1971, which again gave priority to workers of the lowest grades, including all first-grade workers hired by the end of 1966, second-grade workers hired by the end of 1960, and third-grade workers hired by the end of 1957. In 1977, a similar upgrade took place nationwide, targeting primarily all first-grade workers hired by the end of 1971 and second-grade workers hired by the end of 1966. Therefore, it was unusual for workers to have a raise in the Mao era (H9), and when a raise did take place, it involved almost everyone or all workers of the same seniority, in a method known to them as "pushing all ducks to cross the stream" (*gan yazi guohe*) (H13).

The most important criterion in determining the workers' eligibility for a raise, as the state's policies made clear for the upgrades in 1963, 1971, and 1977, was their seniority, or years of employment (*gongling*), which was confirmed repeatedly by our informants (e.g., H15, N5, N10, W1). In the memory of a retiree from the machinery factory of the Port of Ningbo, for instance, "The evaluation of wage grade was based on one's total scores, which in turn was determined by one's work performance, workload, seniority, and assessment by the masses. So it was conducted reasonably well, and the major criterion in the evaluation was one's seniority. If you have only fifteen years, while someone else has thirty years, then that person's score was certainly higher than yours. Seniority was the primary standard, and other criteria were considered as well" (N5). A former technician at the Huaqiao Sugar Plant had a similar memory: "After the superior authority imposed a plan,

the factory would have a discussion, which usually took into account these factors: seniority, attendance, work attitude, achievements, relations with the masses, and political performance. Politics mattered at that time; if you were politically backward, you had no chances. Seniority was the primary criterion for workers of the fifth grade and lower; if there was nothing wrong with you, then your eligibility would be determined by your seniority. For those of the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, your performance would be the primary determinant" (N10).

Most of our informants agreed that the determination of one's eligibility for a wage upgrade was "fairly open and transparent" (*bijiao gongkai touming*) or "very democratic" (*hen minzhu*) (N10).[9] The process typically involved several rounds of discussions and the publicizing of the results (H15, L6). At the aforementioned machinery factory at the Port of Ningbo, the determination was done by an "evaluation committee" consisting of the factory leader and several activists. Part of the committee's job was to consult "quite a few" individuals about one's eligibility: "If someone was obviously ineligible, the masses would take him down. There was the so-called practice of 'three ups and three downs' (*sanshang sanxia*). Once the superiors formed a tentative list of the finalists [eligible for a wage upgrade], it would be sent to the masses for a discussion, with feedback returned to the leaders, a process to be repeated three times like this" (N4). At the Xinghuo Cotton Mill in Nanjing, the results of each round of discussion were announced on a large red poster for public examination. "Favoritism and malfeasance were not completely absent, but very rare. Overall, [the evaluation] was done well," our informant from the factory confirmed (L6). Instead of manipulating the wage raise to their own advantage or protecting the individuals under their patronage, the cadres as well as the activists among the workers were expected to give up their own opportunities to the workers of the lowest grades or highest seniority (B7, L8). Mr. Luo (b. 1936), a former workshop director at the Shanghai Compressor Factory, recalled that he reduced his own raise by "half a grade" when it was required that all cadres had to "give up out of modesty" (*qianrang*). During another round of upgrades, he recalled, the cadres were not allowed to have a raise at all (S11). Another policy guiding the cadres' salaries during the Cultural Revolution, as a former vice leader of the Guangzhou Fountain Pen Factory recollected, was that their average wage level could not exceed the average wage level of workers, and

his own wage as the vice factory head was 65.2 yuan, equivalent to the wage of a fourth-grade worker (N9).

Ordinary workers, too, were expected to be modest when they were to receive a wage raise. Yang Wanru (b. 1933), a retiree from a factory of prefabricated concrete components in Nanjing, thus described the situation in her workplace: "At that time, everyone appeared to be well-mannered indeed. It would be embarrassing for one to say, for instance, 'This time I should get a raise!' No, no one said so. Everyone seemed to be modest, and nobody would make a fuss over it." In sharp contrast, in the last two rounds of wage raises in the same factory before she retired in 1985, Yang observed that workers became increasingly discontent; those who did not get a raise would shout, "Why did they get a raise and I didn't?" or "I do deserve a raise but they don't!" (C5).

The tense relationship between the cadres and workers over wage raises in the late 1970s and early 1980s was also pronounced in places where factory leaders' discretion played an important role. In Shanghai, for instance, a large proportion of workers hired after 1960 were not assigned a wage grade on the standard eight-grade scale, and all new employees after 1968, amounting to more than 1.7 million by 1983, had no fixed wage grades at all. Instead, their wages were determined by a different scale that increased by 3 yuan at each level, known as "the single dragon" (*yitiaolong*) system (*Shanghai laodong zhi*: 4.3.1). When it came to a wage upgrade, the leaders of state firms that adopted the non-standard wage system had the discretion to increase their employees' wage levels by 3, 6, or 9 yuan, individually. It was thus likely, as Mrs. Yang (b. 1943), a retiree from the Yimin Food Factory, said, that the workshop foreman "would increase the monthly wage by nine yuan for those whom he believed to be excellent but others would not necessarily think so." She further explained, "There were also a certain kind of people who were really competent for all kinds of tasks but they often arrived late or left early. So how much should their wages be raised? If you had a good relationship with the leaders, you could get six yuan, and if it was bad, then just three yuan. So here is where the leaders' power lay, if any. This is something that is very subtle and hard to explain" (S8).

But the cadres who were suspected of practicing favoritism had to face protests by the frustrated workers (*dage baobuping*) (W5). At Hefeng Yarn Mill in Ningbo, for instance, "those who did not get a raise would shout

abuse. There were always some who did not receive a raise; no one could guarantee a raise with one-hundred percent certainty. So they would shout abuse face to face. Sometimes the workers did not care about anything. They were straightforward when making complaints. If someone was resentful against you, she would dig out everything that was bad about you, including your private matters that had nothing to do with the work [of the factory]. She just wanted to make you notorious; she would say, for instance, how bad your husband had been before or what kind of nasty things you had done in the past. All of the adults and children of the workshop director and group heads were subject to her cursing. The workers cared about nothing indeed" (N1).

Housing Allocation

Unlike wage raises in the 1960s and 1970s that prioritized one's seniority, when allocating housing units, the most important criterion was the per capita size of the preexisting residence of a worker's household; priority was given to those who had the smallest quarters or the most difficult living conditions. This was understandable. In the Mao era, the state's economic strategy was to maximize investments in manufacturing and infrastructure at the expense of the livelihood of the workforce. Therefore, construction of new apartment buildings was rare, and the factory-wide allocation of housing units never happened for most of the state firms. Workers and their families had to rely on their private residences or else be crammed into the compounds forfeited from former capitalists or wealthy families or into the dormitories that had been designed for unmarried workers. By the 1970s, it had become common for a worker's household of three or more generations to live under one roof, where married couples had no private space at all. Therefore, in the late 1970s and more commonly in the 1980s when the state firms started the construction of apartment buildings, the "difficulty level" of workers' living conditions became the most important factor in housing allocation; whether a worker was an activist, a party member, or a cadre did not affect their eligibility ranking. The room for factory leaders' favoritism was very limited (L4). At the Guangzhou Fountain Pen Factory, for instance, workers had to first fill out an application form for housing allocation in 1979. The applicants were ranked by difficulty level: "Those who were the most difficult were ranked at the very top; the number of your family members, the size of the leased residence, and its location were all taken into account."

The ranking was done by a "housing allocation group" consisting of nine members, with each member representing the workers of a workshop. The ranking was then announced for public examination, and allocation started only when no one disputed the ranking (N9).[10]

Therefore, most of our informants agreed that housing allocation in their work units was fair, involving several rounds of publicizing and discussing the ranking of eligible applicants (e.g., N7, N15, S3); when describing the process, many used phrases such as "transparent" (*toumingde*) (S6), "open and transparent" (*gongkai touming*) (N5, N7), "fairly open and transparent" (*bijiao gongkai touming*) (L5), "very transparent and allowing no room for favoritism and malfeasance" (*hen touming, meiyou baobi wubi de kongjian*) (H15), "pretty fair and no favoritism or misconduct" (*bijiaogongzheng, meiyou baobiwubi de xingwei*) (L3), "no favoritism" (*meiyou baobi xingwei*) (H17), and "no backdoor deals in general" (*jibenshang meiyou shenme kaihoumen*) (S3). Given the limited availability of housing units and strong pressure against abuse of power, the cadres had to refrain from overt misconduct in housing allocation; instead, they had to appear altruistic, giving up their opportunities to the neediest workers in the same manner they did a wage upgrade (B7, L5). Not surprisingly, at the railroad bureau in the Xiaguan District of Nanjing, an ordinary female retiree recalled that she received an apartment with more bedrooms than the one assigned to a cadre above her before she retired in 1982 because she had more children than the latter (C4).

All these do not suggest, however, that personal relations were irrelevant in this process or that the leaders were free of favoritism. Our informant from a company in the Putuo District of Shanghai admitted that "personal relations surely factored, but always in a covert manner and within an acceptable limit." "Let's say," she explained, "there is such-and-such a person whose living condition is a bit difficult and whose personal relations [with the leader] are a bit better, then he'll get an apartment first. This is just perfectly normal; after all, there is always a bit of personal relations there" (S9). The workers, however, were not powerless when confronted with the leaders' potential abuse in housing allocation. At the Shanghai Artistic Carving Factory, for instance, whenever the workers suspected their leaders of doing "little tricks" (*xiaodongzuo*), "they would rebel, and they were brave enough to protest" (S6). Mr. Yang (b. 1942), a retiree from the Qingyun Aerospace Instruments Factory in Beijing, made a similar remark: "The leader was afraid of showing

favoritism when allocating apartments. Once he showed favoritism, those below him would rebel. Everyone looked closely at one another and knew one another very well, having lived together for long. Once the masses believed there was a wrongdoing, they would write a big-character poster, and expose it to higher levels, and those at the higher levels will take care of it" (B1). The workers protested especially when they believed that the leaders' backdoor deals threatened their opportunity to get an apartment. The only option for them was "to protest and shout" (*qu nao qu chao*): "If you protest in a proper manner, you'll get it; and if you protest in an improper manner, you won't," as Mrs. Yang (b. 1943) from the Yimin Food Factory testified (S8). A good example of this kind of protest was found at the Zhenjiang Mine under the Shanghai Bureau. As our informant from the mine recalled, two or three miners who were ineligible for an apartment firmly demanded one, and they quarreled fiercely with the leader. The leader had no choice but to concede, because he wanted to make sure everyone under him was "satisfied" (*baiping*); however, this could only result in "squeezing" some individuals off the list of eligible members or reducing the size of apartments for the more eligible miners (N2). Alternatively, when such protests did not work at all, the workers would only take action to "occupy an apartment" (*zhanfang*) by force without the factory's authorization if they believed that they would not be qualified under normal procedures (H18). At the Filature of Huanggang Region, for instance, one had to be "aggressive" enough to get a desirable apartment, which was especially true for female workers, who were normally ineligible for housing allocation. "If the woman was very aggressive," our interviewee commented, "she'd get one. If you are a bit aggressive, your apartment would be a bit better; if you are too honest, you'll get a poor one" (H1).

The workers' resistance thus mattered a lot when confronted with cadre abuses. Legitimate or not, their actions of defiance were grounded in their identity as the members of their work unit and the subsequent belief that they were entitled to the rights of subsistence; therefore, it was *righteous*—if not *rightful* by official regulations—for them to take any actions that they deemed appropriate and effective, including shouting abuses and occupying apartments, to defend what they deserved. More often than not, the cadres, too, had to yield to the pressures from the rank and file and accommodated the workers' demands, hoping to avoid an escalating confrontation and to save their own reputation as competent and paternalist leaders able to solve

problems to the satisfaction of all. Instead of the disciplined, impersonal relationship between superiors and subordinates, here both the cadres and the disgruntled workers behaved more like members of the same community living their everyday lives together, where the subsistence needs and the "faces" of all members involved dictated their mutual relations more than anything else.

ACTIVISTS AND POLITICAL REWARDS

As discussed earlier, in most of the Mao years when material incentives, such as wage raises or bonus payments based on work performance, were largely absent, state firms had to rely on political incentives to motivate the workers, such as selecting the most active of them for the various honorary titles ("Advanced Producers," "Model Laborers," and the like), promoting them to higher positions, or admitting them into the Communist Party. According to the clientelist explanation, the criteria used by the factory leadership in selecting the workers for awards, material or non-material, did not have much to do with the recipients' actual performance in production or moral quality as it did with the clients' "concrete loyalty" or "personal loyalties" to the leaders (Walder 1986, 100, 124, 131). The questions that need to be further addressed, therefore, are how the activists were selected for the political incentives, to what extent the selection was based on the activists' loyalty to the cadres or on their abilities in production, and what exactly the relationships were between cadres and activists and between activists and ordinary workers.

Advanced Producers and Model Laborers

The selection of "Advanced Producers" (*xianjin shengchanzhe*, alternatively called *xianjin geren* or "advanced individuals") took place within every production group, with each group producing several candidates from the dozens of group members. Winners of the title were usually those who "showed strong enthusiasm for work and engaged in production with superior quality and quantity" (L1). The material rewards for them were minimal and symbolic, typically including a certificate plus a daily item such as a mug, hand towel, basin, or notebook (e.g., W3, Y1); later, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, being an Advanced Producer also entitled the recipient to a one-time bonus payment, when this was used as a new incentive in some factories (L4). The "Model Laborer" (*laodong mofan*) title was more selective, usually limited

to only a few in a factory. Both the advanced and model workers were given priority when applying for membership in the party and the Youth League or being considered for promotion to a cadre's position (L8, S6); in some factories during the Cultural Revolution, they had the opportunity to join the "workers' propaganda team" (*gongxuandui*), which included a free trip to a different city or a training program for one or two months during which they did not have to work (N6). Being a model worker further qualified the recipient for a wage upgrade by one level when it was allowable in the late 1970s and thereafter in some of the state firms (H15, N6, W4).

As for exactly how the advanced individuals and model workers were selected, our informants almost unanimously emphasized that they were nominated and elected by their peers primarily because of their hard work and dedication to production. Those who won the titles, therefore, were the individuals who "worked every workday throughout the year without absences, never asked for leave when falling ill, saved energy and raw material, exceeded the production quota, and completed in eight hours the work that normally would have required ten hours," as Mrs. Fan (b. 1948), a retiree from Nanjing Telecommunication Equipment Factory described, (L5); the workers who "exceled in production, did not care about the time they spent on work, pretended to be fine and continued to work when they were ill, and sometimes also acted as a mediator when their peers quarreled with each other," as a retiree at the Renfeng Fabric Mill explained (N6); or the workers who "never made troubles and never arrived late or leave early," who "did more volunteer tasks," and who "spoke when there was a meeting," etc., as seen at the Wuhan Rubber Plant (W2). The few who were selected as model workers were exceptionally hardworking. The retiree from Wuhan Pharmaceutical Factory thus described a female model worker in the factory: "She worked more than just eight hours a day. Being a group head in our workshop, she worked even during lunch hours at noon. In addition to her own shift from early morning to the noon, she worked an extra shift in the evening. She turned herself a model worker by working hard (*zuochulai de laomo*). All of the model workers then and now were those who work extremely hard (*sizuo*)" (W4). The advanced workers at the No. 6 Oil Refinery in Jinzhou of Liaoning province, according to a female retiree, "became what they were by hard work, and [they were] hardworking indeed!" (*douzhi gan chulai de, zhen gan*) (C6). At a bedding and clothing factory in Wuhan, a worker by

the name of Zhang Xiangwen, who died in 2012 at age eighty-three, was selected as the "National Model Laborer" in 1959. "How was he selected?" Our informant explained, "By the quality of his work. His record at that time was making 190,000 pieces continuously without defective products. In 1982, he made another record: making 220,000 pieces without defects, and again became the model worker of the city of Wuhan. He worked so hard that his fingers deformed" (H6). Chen Fangfang, a worker for more than ten years at Hefeng Yarn Mill in Ningbo, was named a model worker at the city level, and finally the president of the General Trade Union of the city, because she "was so skilled in production that no one else could compete with her" in tying up the broken yarns as smoothly and quickly (N1). So too was Wang Jiafang at the No. 17 Cotton Mill in Shanghai, who "had good work skills, making products in better quality and larger quantity than others without defects" and always won first place when there was a production competition (S7). Likewise, Ye Guiying, a worker at the filature in Huanggang of Hubei province, was named a model worker of the firm and later a model worker at the provincial level. Her job was to have the cocoons boiled and delivered to the reelers, and "every day, she arrived at the factory earlier and left later than all others" (H4). Mr. Cui, a retiree from the Shijiazhuang Chemical Fertilizer Plant in Hebei province, described the model workers in his factory as "truly skilled and competent, and truly excellent in work" (*queshi you zhen benshi, queshi gande bucuo*), which contrasted sharply with the so-called model workers nowadays who earned their titles by "using personal connections and going through the backdoor" (*la guanxi zou houmen*) (B2).

Relations with Co-workers

In addition to excellence in production, another indispensable quality of advanced and model workers was maintaining "good relations with the masses" (*qunzhong guanxi hao*). Our informants thus typically characterized them as the individuals who were "hardworking and popular" (*gongzuo hao, renyuan hao*) (S19), "enthusiastic for work and popular among the masses" (*gongzuo jiji, qunzhong jichu hao*) (Y1), or "easygoing" (*jiang suihe*) and "getting along well with everyone, or they won't get elected" (C1). The aforementioned informant from the pharmaceutical factory in Wuhan particularly stressed the importance of popularity for the activists: "They were elected by the workers, rather than selected by the leaders. The leaders did not have the

guts to select on their own. They were elected level after level, first at the small group level, then at the team level, and finally at the workshop level. They were thus determined through different levels. It was impossible for any leader to appoint and decide on any of them. Again, they were selected through elections. Those who had superior qualifications won" (W4). So too was the opinion of a former welder at the Shengli Oil Field in Shandong: "The advanced individuals were elected by the masses; without good relations [with co-workers], was it possible for them to get elected?" (Y1). Mrs. Yang (b. 1943) of the Yimin Food Factory in Shanghai put it bluntly: Those who became advanced and model workers "got along with the masses fairly well; otherwise, no one would vote for you" (S8). Similarly, at the machinery factory of the Port of Ningbo, those who were selected as the activists "usually had a reasonably good basis of popular support, or they won't be able to be elected. If the workers all had a low opinion on someone, they would protest and topple him down even if he was elected" (N4).

One of the central procedures in selecting the activists, therefore, was a discussion (*ping*) and competition (*bi*) among the workers that took place at every level, and candidates had to demonstrate their particular abilities in front of their co-workers (L6, N1); the winners were all produced "through a competition" (*doushi bi chulai de*) and by an "election by the workers" (*kao gongren xuan chulai de*) (W4). Those who competed to become model workers, therefore, had to show their exceptional abilities by "specific numbers that were convincing enough" (*yaoyou nadechu de shuju*) (S7). Thus, once they were selected, the rest of the workers respected the winners. Our interviewees typically described their attitudes toward the winners as "being sincerely convinced" (*xinfu koufu*) (L5), "all convinced" (*dou hen fuqi*) (S3), "all convinced and respectful" (*doushi futie de*) (N1), or "all admired them" (*dou hen peifu tamen*) (L4, S4).

Upon being announced as advanced or model workers, the winners were expected to show their appreciation for the support from co-workers by spending money on some candies or other treats to distribute to the members of their group (S8); in the words of a retiree from the No. 768 Factory in Beijing, "You can't have both fame and profit" (B9). Afterward, throughout the year until the next round of competition for the honors, the winners felt compelled to "mix up with the masses," to keep a low profile, to take the lead

in production, to be altruistic and ready to help others, and to be active in volunteering activities, such as cleaning the public toilets (L4).[11]

There were, to be sure, co-workers who were unconvinced, resentful, and envious toward the winners. Mr. Fang (b. 1938), a retiree from Xi'an Instrument Factory, believed that those who were "unconvinced and contemptuous" (*bu fuqi, kanbuqi*) of the activists certainly existed, but they were limited to the few (S10). So too was the situation at the Shanghai Artistic Carving Factory, where some "cynical words" (*lengyanlengyu*) about the winners were unavoidable after the results were announced (S6). Likewise, Mrs. Yang of the Yimin Food Factory commented that "it was perfectly normal that there were some workers who were jealous, just like there were workers who admired [the activists], but the jealous ones were very few," and she pointed out a reason why it was impossible for the activists to get along well with everyone: "Because you are so skilled in production, it was likely that you would always blame others who were unskilled and slow-paced. Those who were blamed were certainly resentful of you." However, Yang denied that this was a serious problem among the workers as to cause antagonism between the activists and ordinary workers; after all, she explained, "people at that time were not really that resourceful and malicious" and "people at that time were not as quibbling and contentious as they are today" (S8). Resentment was also likely to occur among the workers who failed in the competition for the honors, especially if the margin was narrow between two possible candidates who were equally qualified for the titles (W5). As Mr. Guo (b. 1942), a retiree from the No. 768 Factory in Beijing, described, "Among the workers, there were indeed some who particularly cared about it [the honors]. They won't feel good throughout the year if they did not get something they coveted. Let's say that he failed in the nomination and election [of the activists], then he would appear picky and resentful from the beginning to the end of a year. He would quibble over this and that with everyone" (B7). There were workers who were resentful because they actually worked harder than the winners and they failed in the competition only because "they did have the perfect family background" or because they "did not have good relations with the leaders" (H15). In a few cases, the activists won their honorary titles by flattering the leaders (*paimapi shangqu de*) (L1) or because of their personal ties with the leaders (*kao guanxi shangqu de*) (W1), and they would find it difficult to get

along well with the co-workers who "had a low opinion of them and refused to collaborate" (W1). Nevertheless, these instances were exceptions rather than the norm in the selection of the activists. To infer from these instances that hostility widely existed among ordinary workers toward the activists and that a split prevailed between the small number of loyal clients and the rank and file in Chinese industry (Walder 1986, 26, 164–170) exaggerates the divide, if any, between the activists and non-activists in most of the state firms.

Relations with the Cadres

Nearly all our interviewees denied that the advanced and model workers received their honorary titles primarily because of their personal connections with factory leaders; instead, they stressed performance in production as the most important factor leading to those titles (S4).[12] This does not mean, however, that the leaders were unimportant in selecting the activists. Quite the contrary, our informants emphasized the decisive role of the cadres in determining the finalists. A precondition for the candidates to be selected, as a retiree from the Gedian Chemical Plant stressed, is that "the leaders deem highly of you" (*lingdao kanzhong ni*); "if the leaders did not think of you highly and paid no attention to you, you won't be named as a pace-setter, no matter how hard you've worked." To be considered by the leaders, he added, "you have to demonstrate yourself and perform well. The most important thing is that you did a good job, so that the leaders valued you" (W1). Mr. Wang (b. 1956), a retiree from the Shanghai Silicon Steel Factory, had a similar view: "First of all, you got to make sure that the leaders valued you. Otherwise, no matter how hard you worked, you just can't do anything about it, if the leaders did not think of you highly. So is the saying: thirty percent by effort and seventy percent by luck." To be considered by the leaders, the would-be activists had to "play a leading role, doing everything ahead of all others, and they then would have the chance to be selected. Without exceptional contributions, no one was able to be selected" (S2). Mr. Le (b. 1951), a retired miner from the Shitouzui Mine of Daye, Hebei province, observed a similar situation in his firm, where the miners were grouped in military units during the Cultural Revolution: "When all of them looked almost the same [in terms of their qualifications], the selection [of the candidates] was mainly up to the leaders for a final decision, which in turn was based on the company commander's impression of you. Although there were procedures

at the meetings of teams and groups, the power for a final decision lay in the hands of the company commander." The reason that the leaders "admired" the selected candidates and "designated" them as the activists was because the candidates "used to play a leading role and get along well with ordinary workers" (H11). In other words, the activists maintained good relations with the leaders primarily because of their outstanding performance in production, rather than their cultivation of personal ties with the leaders through flattery or bribery. As a retiree in Shanghai who had worked at an electronic instrument factory in Xingan county of Jiangxi province described it, "The leader surely like you if he finds you working hard. As long as you show your abilities, the leaders surely like you" (S5).[13]

There were, to be sure, indeed "a few" (*shaoshu*), "very few" (*jigebie*), or "a small proportion" (*shaobufen*) of the activists who obtained their honorary titles by flattery or by counting on their particular personal ties with the leaders, and they thus found themselves in an awkward relationship with their peers on the shop floor (L1, S18, W1), as mentioned earlier—a situation that became more common in the post-Mao era (B1, B2). Nevertheless, as many of our informants quickly pointed out, while one's particular relationship with the leader was important and sometimes even critical to being selected as an activist, that relationship alone was never sufficient enough to warrant an honorary title. More important than the leader's personal preference was the "collective consent" (*gongren*) of the workers as a group. "If the group members do not consent, it is impossible for one to be selected by counting on the leader only. Otherwise, they will rebel," so explained Mrs. Yang, our informant from the Yimin Food Factory in Shanghai. She added that "the masses would disagree" (*qunzhong yaoyou yijian*) if the leader blocked someone they personally disliked from being selected who was nevertheless competent and fully qualified. Thus, overall, those who were eventually selected truly deserved the titles. "At that time," she averred, "the leaders were acceptable by and large. After all, what they did could be put on the table [for public examination]" (*neng zai taimian shang jiajian guang*) (S8). Mrs. Zhong (b. 1954), a retired cadre from a service company in the same city, had a similar view: "If someone is named as an advanced worker simply because of [their] particularly good relationship with the leader, all others will be resentful once it is announced" (S9). So too is the view of the retiree from Hefeng Yarn Mill in Ningbo. To be named as an activist, she explained, "one

has to get through the test of the leaders. Without the leader's approval, it is impossible to be selected. However, it does not work either if one counts on his or her relations with the leader only. The leader has to think about this: If selected, would this person be exemplary enough and have the basis [of support from other workers]?" (N1).

The promotion of workers to the position of cadres in state firms was a bit different from the selection of activists that prioritized one's performance in production. To be promoted to a cadre, merely working hard was not enough; one had to have necessary education and enough literacy to perform the cadre's tasks. Most important, the candidate had to demonstrate their leadership abilities, as a former factory head and party secretary at the Jiefang Plastic Factory in Shanghai explained (S3). This was especially true for leaders at the workshop level, who, as mentioned earlier, had to not only oversee production activities of all teams and groups in the shop but also the personal issues of the employees, such as marriage, divorce, family violence, any issues involving couples (*nannu guanxi*), or even criminal activities and charges that involved the workers (B8). Not surprisingly, there were those who were qualified and nominated by the superiors to be shop leaders but chose not to accept the positions. This was exactly what happened to a maintenance worker at the Zhenjiang Mine under the Shanghai Metallurgical Bureau. As he recalled it, "The factory wanted me to be a shop head, but I was unwilling to accept it. I only wanted to do some assistance work. The reason was that I was not a good speaker. Yes, I worked hard. But it would be against my will if I was asked to supervise others. I just wondered why I had to supervise others. People are different. Some wanted to climb upward, and they would feel more comfortable once promoted. For people like me, however, to be promoted like this would only make me a sufferer" (N2).

When appointing the cadres at different levels, the factory leaders, too, had to first consider the candidates' abilities; they could not make appointments merely because they had a personal relationship with a candidate without also considering their competence. As an ordinary worker who retired from Hefeng Yarn Mill remarked, "When it comes to promotion, one's abilities matter! Otherwise, people will have rumors over those who were promoted but incompetent. They would say: Look! What kind of abilities that person has? He does not know how to work at all! . . . So they would be subject to rumoring" (N1). Concerns with the possible disgruntlement among

the workers was only part of the reason why the factory leaders had to prioritize one's abilities when promoting a candidate to the cadre position. More important was the reason that, as shop head and team or group heads, the middle- and lower-level cadres' competence in coordinating and supervising the activities of individual workers and communicating with them was key to maintaining efficiency in production, which in turn was linked with the factory leaders' own performance rating and possible promotion to higher levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy. Therefore, for the factory leaders, the first and foremost criterion when appointing cadres to the middle and lower levels was the candidates' competence. In the words of Mrs. Yang, who was a former group head at the Yimin Food Factory in Shanghai, the candidates "must be able to stand the ordeal" (*yao neng cheng de qilai de*). "It just won't work if they can't stand," she added. "How could it be if you are unable to command others and if you yourself are unskilled and incompetent? This is something serious that cannot be glossed over. You have to be competent enough to be promoted. At any rate, one's ability counts. He has to be at least sixty or seventy percent competent, if not one hundred percent" (S8). Mr. Han (b. 1938), formerly the vice lead of the No. 768 Factory in Beijing, has a similar view: "You have to demonstrate yourself in work (*gongzuo yao na de qilai*). No matter how successful you are in building personal connections with those above you, you have to demonstrate yourself; you cannot be just an idiot. When it is up to you to take action, you have to roll up the sleeves and work right there immediately, and you have to make the workers below you convinced with respect and awe (*yao zhen de zhu xiamian de gongren*). This was especially true when selecting workshop leaders; they had to be tough enough" (B8). Not surprisingly, even in the two cases mentioned above where personal ties with the factory leaders played a key role in the promotions, the promoted person had to work extremely hard (H18) and "had to be capable enough and performed fairly well" (H16).

Clearly, unlike selecting recipients for honorary titles, which was primarily based on workers' consent and objective criteria of performance in production, granting promotions did allow the factory leaders a greater degree of discretion, since it involved no nomination or voting by the workers. It was likely, therefore, that personal ties and loyalty played a role. Nevertheless, the cadres' choices of who to promote were still subject to certain constraints, including the requirements of the candidate's family background or

competence for the desired position. The candidates' personal ties with their superiors could be a key factor only when they met the other requirements. The cadres could never grant their followers promotions merely because of personal loyalty, disregarding their actual qualifications.

THE EQUILIBRIUM IN POWER RELATIONS

For the workers in state firms in Maoist China, the factory or workshop was not only a place where they labored eight hours a day, but it was also the very site where the security of their job and livelihood resided. The identity they developed with their work unit (*danwei*) was as strong as what the villagers in pre-1949 China had with their community or clan. Just as these villagers assumed their subsistence rights as superseding the claims by any authorities in or outside their community (Scott 1976), the workers took for granted their entitlement to the rights and benefits provided by the firm or state. For them, the cadres' legitimacy lay not only in their appointment by the government as the supervisors and managers in production, but it was also tied to their abilities and impartiality in distributing material and non-material benefits to ensure worker' subsistence. So too was the self-perception of the cadres, who had to not only perform their duties in production and labor management but also take care of workers' everyday needs outside the workshop. The work unit, in a word, was not just a workplace but also a community where the cadres and workers lived together side by side. The workers would not hesitate to defend themselves against potential abuse by the cadres not only because of their taken-for-granted rights as full members of the work unit, but also because of two state-firm institutions that were central to the workers' formation of self-identity and attitudes toward the cadres. One was the Maoist discourse that upheld the workers as the leading class with the correct political consciousness and juxtaposed them with the cadres, who were perceived as corruptible and inclined to be "power holders taking the capitalist road" (*zouzipai*); in theory, therefore, the workers had the innate right to supervise the cadres and correct their mistakes. The other was workers' secured livelihood in the state firms, with the state's guarantee of permanent employment and full entitlement to fringe benefits. Unless they were motivated for upward mobility, ordinary workers saw no reason to seek favoritism from the leaders or to worry about the security of their subsistence when fighting against abusive cadres.

In sharp contrast, the cadres were politically and discursively disadvantaged. They were invariably the targets of political campaigns, including the Three-Anti Campaign (against corruption, waste, and red tape) and the Anti-Rightest Campaign in the 1950s, the Socialist Education and the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, and the One-Strike, Three-Anti Campaign in the early 1970s. It was no wonder that the cadres who suffered the recurrent campaigns developed the psyche of being "fearful of the masses" (*pai qunzhong*), because whenever a campaign took place it was up to the workers to expose the "wrongdoings" of the cadres; keeping a good relationship with the vast majority of the workers was the surest way for cadres to survive these events. Administratively, they had little leverage to demand the personal submission and loyalty from most of the workers, given the secured employment and fixed wages of the latter; quite the reverse, the cadres counted on the workers' cooperation to ensure the timely completion of production tasks, which was essential to keeping their positions and eventually being promoted. Economically, the cadres were not too different from the rank and file, especially senior workers, given the narrow gap between their income levels and living conditions.

Therefore, there was an overall symmetry—or an equilibrium—in the relations between the cadres and the workers, when the political, ideological, administrative, and economic factors outlined above were all taken into account. This equilibrium in turn reflected the Maoist approach to labor management and factory governance. As full members of a state firm with lifetime employment, the workers no doubt depended upon their work unit for livelihood, but it was less likely for them to develop personal dependence on the cadres for subsistence. Quite the contrary, whenever the cadres were suspected of practicing favoritism, those who suffered unfair treatment would be in a position to protest. This protest could be expressed in an informal, traditional manner that was grounded on the subsistence ethic inherited from pre-1949 Chinese society, such as picking a quarrel, cursing, or even beating up the cadres when the workers believed that these individuals had hurt their rights or interests. They could also protest in a formal manner, as shown in the previous chapter; their growing consciousness of themselves as the "masters" (*zhurenweng*) of the factory certainly emboldened them.

All these should not lead one to assume, however, that the relationship between the cadres and workers was equal, as claimed by the Maoist rhetoric.

Nor should one deny the existence of personal patron-client ties between some cadres and the few workers who were politically motivated in seeking promotion from the rank and file. This, however, should not be equated with the clientelist explanation that assumes on the one hand the cadres' unrestrained power in determining workers' wages and jobs and on the other the personal dependence of the latter on the former, hence the predominance of patron-client networks in factory politics and the split between the activists and non-activists among the workers (Walder 1986, 162–189). The prevalence of clientelism became possible only in the late 1970s and afterward, as will be shown in Chapter 6, when the reform of state-owned enterprises resulted in the devolution of power to individual enterprises in production and marketing and when the contract system was widely introduced; the factory leaders eventually had autonomy in hiring and firing workers, determining the workers' wage levels and bonus payments, and building housing units and allocating them by their own policies. At the same time, the workers remained dependent on their work unit for livelihood before they were able to freely change their jobs without losing their welfare benefits. It was likely that the patron-client networks sprang between factory managers and workers under these circumstances, as our interviewees frequently complained. These personalized networks were also likely to develop in the small collectively owned firms where the cadres had greater control over production and labor management than their counterparts in state firms. All in all, the clientelist relations were less likely to prevail in the state firms of the Maoist era, because their preconditions (i.e., the cadres' autonomy in employment and labor remuneration, *and* the workers' personal dependence on the cadres rather than the work unit) did not exist. Nor was there sufficient evidence to show a split of workers into two separate and confrontational groups of activists and non-activists as the most salient consequence of the patron-client ties.

Therefore, much of the disjunction between the clientelist explanations in past studies and the findings in this chapter can be attributed to the fact that most of the workers interviewed in the late 1970s and early 1980s still had a "fresh" memory of their recent experiences in the state firms, where the factory leadership had just obtained a degree of autonomy in labor management and where material incentives were recently introduced, much of which were at the cadres' discretion; clientelist networks thus were likely to sprawl at the beginning of the post-Mao era as a result of economic reform

that centered on distributing power to individual enterprises. In contrast, our informants recalled their past experiences from a distance; they were better able to disconnect their experiences in the high Mao era from what happened right after Mao. There might be also a psychological factor among the retirees; some of them indeed appeared to be nostalgic for the "glorious" old days when the workers were hailed as the masters of their factories, which contrasted sharply with their strong resentment toward the prevalence of personal ties and favoritism in the post-Mao years. This nostalgia undoubtedly tinted their narratives, but nevertheless the sharp contrast in factory politics between the Mao and post-Mao years as represented in this study is unmistakable, eclipsing the possible distortions inherent to any representation based on oral history.

To recapitulate, an equilibrium prevailed in power relations in the state firms of Maoist China. Underlying this equilibrium was a set of economic, social, and political institutions characteristic of the industrial enterprises under the socialist state. As intermediaries between the state and workers, the cadres at different levels of a factory did have a degree of discretion in making decisions that could directly affect workers' opportunities, and cultivating activists among the workers was indeed an effective tool for the cadres to keep the firms running smoothly. However, this should not lead one to assume that the activists were selected only based on personal loyalty to the cadres or that the cadres only awarded their supporters with wage raises, bonus payments, promotions, and other opportunities. After all, the cadres did not own the enterprises they supervised, and they were subject to both the formal supervision from above and the informal constraints from within the unit in their charge. Their limited power in employment and labor remuneration and their dependence on the workers in production on the one hand, and the workers' security of living guaranteed by the state on the other, made the relationship between the cadres and workers of a state firm very different from that between the owner of a private firm and its employees before and after the Mao era. The relationship between cadres and workers in the state firms of socialist China, in the final analysis, was neither the one of equality and intimacy, as the Maoist rhetoric claimed, nor the one of "extreme dependency and arbitrariness" (Whyte 1999, 178). It was characterized by an equilibrium, or an overall symmetry in power relations between cadres and workers, which grew out of their shared identity with the work unit and mutual subordination to the state.