MANUFACTURING IDENTITY: PEASANT WORKERS’ SPATIAL PRODUCTION IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

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While the social production of identity is widely accepted, what constitutes “social” is often vague. In many discussions of identity production, media representations and discursive production are taken as all there is for a “social” production process of identity. This dissertation follows the constructive perspective that class identity is produced. It examines the identity formation of Chinese peasant workers through the industrial manufacturing processes using an electronics parts production factory in Shenzhen, China as a case study. It argues that materiality constitutes a crucial element of the social construction process of class identity. Specifically, I explore how social and physical spaces, as material forms of social production, participated into China’s internal trans-local labor force formations and served to universalize the ruling class’ desires through economic production activities and the connected everyday social reproduction activities.

This study uses a synthetic theoretical framework that integrates Marxism materialist perspective and Marxian political economy with the importance of material and social spaces developed in geography. Such a synthetic theoretical framework forms an opportune vantage point for examining labor forces’ everyday working and living activities within their social and material spatial contexts. In accordance with the theoretical framework, I use a spatialized Institutional Ethnography as the method to achieve the emphasis on the roles of materiality in the formation of class identity. The combination of the theoretical framework and method makes it possible to examine
Chinese peasant workers’ class identity formation through their daily spatially-mediated activities.

With the theoretical framework and method above, my dissertation examined the wage formation process and the dormitory living of Chinese peasant workers to show how class identity is produced and how spaces, both material and social, are produced to participate in a class production process. Wage and dorms provide two connected lines of activities through which peasant workers’ everyday activities are organized into a class identity.

The dissertation concluded with the importance of space in the formation of what is considered a social process of class identity production, opening chances for further explorations into the tricks that space plays. On its most general level, this discussion helps critical cultural study and communication study scholars concentrating on identity formation understand that a social construction process may have its great potential truncated without integrating the roles materiality plays in the formation of any social processes.

KEY WORDS: Chinese peasant workers; class identity; space; material-social process; identity construction; cultural studies; spatialized Institutional Ethnography; wage labor; dormitory
To a perceivable and practicable future

that makes living the present more meaningful
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Writing is a social process. I come to this understanding by experiencing different aspects of such a social process and by seeing my writing progress and my thinking expand to a level that I had not foreseen before.

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Dr. Barbara Toth once read me one of her poems, which, I think, catches perfectly the deepest social yearning of this journey of mine: “Make it mean something/this traveling thousands of miles to see you.”
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Bloody legislation: Marx (1967) used Bloody Legislation to refer to the state violence in 15-17th
centuries Western Europe against vagabondage. Because the nascent manufacturing industry
needed farmers who had been expropriated from their land, states have issued bloody and violent
laws against vagabondage so that the wondering “free” proletariats were forced to go to the

Institutional ethnography: As Smith (2005) has stated,

The aim of the sociology we call “institutional ethnography” is to reorganize the social
relations of knowledge of the social so that people can take that knowledge up as an
extension of our ordinary knowledge of the local actualities of our lives. It is a method of
inquiry into the social that proposes to enlarge the scope of what becomes visible from
that site, mapping the relations that connect one local site to others. (p. 9)

In this dissertation, I expanded institutional ethnography to a spatialized institutional
ethnography. The spatialized institutional ethnography appeals to how space is formed and
maintained through materialized social relations and how space mediates human activities more
closely than is usually perceived.

Material-social, materiality-sociality: The term was coined as a way to display that materiality
and sociality cannot be considered in separation with each other. It means that materiality
participates in the formation and transformation of social relations. In my dissertation, material-
social, or materiality-sociality, is used as a visual ensemble to emphasize the double-layered
nature of space and identity production.

Problematic: Louis Althusser first used Problematic as a noun in the 1950s. Althusser used
problematic to mean “a systematically interrelated set of concepts,” yet to be examined. See, for
instance, Althusser’s (1963) “Part One Feuerbach’s ‘Philosophical Manifestoes’”: Althusser considered problematic as important moment in research because the problematic can bind the interrelations of the problems and concepts together. In this sense, Linda Smith’s (2005) uses of problematic clearly borrowed from Althusser. For instance, Smith (2005) in her *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*, states “[a] problematic sets out a project of research and discovery that organizes the direction of investigation from the standpoint of those whose experience is its starting point” (p. 227). And also, “the problematic of the everyday establishes a general orientation; the problematic of a particular study orients its focus and direction; the questions of what to look at and where to look remain” (p. 51). While these statements can show the importance of problematic, Smith concerns more about the ways through which problematic can methodologically leads to possible directions of investigation: The following statement of Smith’s “As soon as this problematic is adopted, the problem of the partiality and particularity of perspectives is transformed from a limitation to an essential dimension of inquiry. . . . The relations that coordinate [the individuals] doings are implicit in the particularities of their existence” (p. 43). Smith’s description indicated that problematic has been used to consider the intricacies of everyday livings.

**Sociology of knowledge:** I use *sociology* in this dissertation in the same sense that Raymond Williams (1982) used it in his *Sociology of Culture*. Williams categorized “‘cultural studies’ is already a branch of general sociology” (p. 14). And he continued to distinguish such a sociology from the latter’s usual disciplinary usage.

But it is a branch more in the sense of a distinctive mode of entry into general sociological questions than in the sense of a reserved or specialized area. At the same time, while it is a kind of sociology which places its emphasis on all signifying systems,
it is necessarily and centrally concerned with manifest cultural practices and production. Its whole approach requires, as we shall see, new kinds of social analysis of specifically cultural institutions and formations, and the exploration of actual relations between these and, on the one hand, the material means of cultural production and, on the other hand, actual cultural forms. What brings these together is, distinctively, a sociology, but, in the terms of the convergence, a sociology of a new kind. (p. 14)

In other words, we have to think about wage, identity, and justice differently, more holistically, in the context that is expanded over economics in the latter’s usual usages to reach into the whole way of life, that is, dialectically, deeply economic as it is deeply material-social at the same time. Thus, this chapter concentrates on exploring the different sociological convergences that have made wage possible historically as a material-social institution.

**Space:** Throughout my dissertation, space is used not as a static and rigid emptiness in which social events happen. Rather, space is part of the materiality-sociality. It participates in maintaining and changing social relations, through which people’s livelihood and identities are created through. Space is used in this dissertation in three main meanings: first, space forms a social-natural environment; second, it is used by the forceful social actors to organize people and other material-social resources; third, it can be used by the working class people, in this dissertation manifested as Chinese peasant workers, as tools for class struggles.

**Spatial fix:** David Harvey (2001), in “Globalization and the ‘Spatial Fix,”’ states that I first deployed the term “spatial fix” to describe capitalism’s insatiable drive to resolve its inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring. The parallel with the idea of a “technological fix” was deliberate. Capitalism, we might say, is addicted to geographical expansion much as it is addicted to technological change and
endless expansion through economic growth. Globalization is the contemporary version of capitalism’s long-standing and never-ending search for a spatial fix to its crisis tendencies. Since there is a long history to these spatial fixes, there is a deep continuity (as I and many others have insisted) in the production of space under capitalist social relations and imperatives. There is, from this perspective, nothing particularly new or surprising about globalization since it has been going on since at least 1492 if not before. (pp. 24-25)

In this dissertation, I used the term exactly as Harvey described it.

**Translocal:** In institutional ethnography, translocal is an important concept that is not fully developed. Smith (2005) considers that any social relations that we examined necessarily are connected to more than one specific site. Thus, all the relations are translocal and their examination must cover such translocal connections. However, Smith in particular and institutional ethnography in general did not consider space in its social and material formation. In other words, space in institutional ethnography is still a rigid and reified physical presence whose historical development is left unexamined. In spatialized institutional ethnography, translocal is considered as both a result of humans’ social activities and a cause of those activities. Thus, what is indicated is that space is both formed by human relations and it also forms human relations. The connection of identity production and space, then, is more closely connected through the problematic of such a redefined translocal concept.
PRELUDE

I came to the United States as an international graduate student at Bowling Green State University, Fall 2003. In the winter break of 2005, I decided to go back to China to visit my family and friends. As the first person in my extended family to come to the United States to pursue a degree, I wanted to take gifts to friends and relatives. I would never have imagined that selecting gifts would be connected to my dissertation on identity.

I went to Wal-Mart on a December night, hoping to get ideas on what to buy for them by browsing the shelves in much the same way that de Certeau (2011) described the wisdom of housewives planning meals on the basis of what they found in the stores. However, there were clear differences. My international trip and my graduate student assistantship meant that I could choose only inexpensive and easily packed gifts reflecting aspects of the US. As you might have guessed, I browsed the entire store in the Christmas spirit, and for the first time, I noticed that the “Made in China” products that had made me proud of my motherland had, now, put me into a difficult situation. Seemingly, there was nothing I could buy that was not from my homeland. After consulting other Chinese international students, I ended up buying more than twenty Hershey chocolate bars from Wal-Mart and ordered more than twenty bottles of Alaska Deep Sea Fish Oil online. Nevertheless, the changes from the usual feeling of national pride to the personal difficulty had a dramatically strange effect on me. If consumer items that suggest US “genuineness” are made in China and elsewhere, where is American identity made? Likewise, in what ways do the hands and minds behind the label “Made in China” actually participate in international production that has, equally, made both American and Chinese identities two sides of the same spurious coin, however legally minted according
to their respective national statutes? To what extent have these questions of cultural-geographic
genuineness become irrelevant and the destinies of both peoples become inextricably linked?
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

There is one obvious reason for Apple’s legendary secrecy over the years. If the world sees this line [assembly line], it might change the way people think in this line [people lined up for apple products release] … It takes around 5 days and 325 sets of hands to assemble an iPad.

—Bill Weir, 2/21/12. ABC News NightLine in Chengdu, China, Foxconn.

On January 24, 2012 Apple, Inc., the computer-turned-media company, released astounding news to its transnational investors and to the public. “Apple on Tuesday,” media reports went, “announced it had smashed sales records of the iPhone, iPad and Mac in the final quarter of 2011, the first reporting period after the death of former CEO Steve Jobs” (Keizer, 2012). That quarter the company brought in revenue of “$46.3 billion” and “sales rose by 73% over 2010” (Keizer, 2012). With a total profit of $13 billion, the earnings exceeded twice the $6 billion earned by Apple in 2010’s final quarter. iPhone sales grew “128% over the same quarter in 2010 and jumped 117% over the previous three-month period” (Keizer, 2012). iPad sales were up “111%” over the same quarter in 2010. While global PC sales contracted, “Apple sold 26% more Macs in the period than . . . the year before” (Keizer, 2012).

But not everything was happy in the world of Apple. From 2008, a series of Chinese laborers working in Foxconn, the largest electronics enterprise that makes Apple, Dell, Nintendo, Sony play stations, jumped from the top of the factory buildings. Consequently, the secrecy of Apple’s production and the secrecy of the factory were exposed to the public for the first time through a guerilla video, shot on a camera like the ones made in similar factories. The workers, members of a huge migrant group known in China as “peasant workers,” have grown
in their importance to the world economy and as one of the dirty secrets of the era of corporate globalization, the digital revolution, and the network society. Such media exposures to the secret operations of the factory not only made Foxconn into international news, but also cast different media coverage on international public image of Apple. The media also made the basic working conditions of peasant workers visible to the international audience. “Who are peasant workers?” is now a question asked at an international scale.

The invisibility of this “secret” workforce is no exaggeration. In the same year (2008), as part of China’s Olympic public relations, it was not just Foxconn trying to conceal the identities of the force behind China’s seemingly miraculous development and economic growth. China’s National Stadium, a symbol of state-of-the-art technology and innovation, intended to hide its massive labor force of peasant workers, too. The stadium’s innovative outer-skeleton steel structure that earned the design its nickname, “the Bird Nest.” Created for an international viewing audience, this 91,000-seat venue was especially designed to be “one of the most environmentally-friendly stadiums in the world” (Rayner, 2008). In winter, its underground geothermal pipes heat the stadium, and in summer, rainwater collected and stored in underground cisterns can cool down the stadium, irrigate the lawn, and flush lavatories.

In short, the stadium seemed to be a deliberate showcase of China’s meticulous efforts towards technical innovation and environmentally sustainable development. Overall, the building simultaneously signified China’s development in national wealth, its integration into eco-friendly development as well as its strength in sports that the Chinese media have applauded. The central message reads: China has developed into a modern and prosperous nation despite its earlier histories of foreign colonization.
Figure 1.1. Beijing Olympics: The Bird's Nest stadium. At 8:15PM BST 07 Aug 2008, a trial launch of fireworks from China’s National Stadium in Beijing for the preparation of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games was undertaken. The stadium became the centerpiece of the most expensive Olympics in history, “more than double the budget for London 2012” (Rayner, 2008).

Such a show of China’s national identity as an equal among the so-called “developed” international community was also centralized into the Chinese Olympic theme song, as incorporating others into this event in China. The lyrics were sung both in Chinese and in English, with the English version reading: “You and me / from one world / we are family / travel dream / a thousand miles / meeting in Beijing / come together / put your hand in mine / you and me / from one world / we are family” (“You and Me,” 2008). The two singers also showed an international flavor: Liu Huan is China’s king of popular music while Sarah Brightman is an internationally renowned English singer.

Such an international event is not as Bakhtinian (2009, [1965]) carnivalesque and democratic as it may seem. China’s identity within international development narratives contains within it a contradiction and historical irony. Its so-called “socialism with Chinese characteristics” is a restoration of capitalism and class inequity which socialism originally aimed to eliminate. “Socialism,” in China, became a mechanism to join the rest of the world in neoliberal capitalism. Likewise, the grand, eloquent visual feast of the Olympics opening as a
show of its development suggested a double meaning of competing with other capitalist nations for world economic and political power as well as denying such a message – that the message can be read as a socialist nation’s competition with world capitalism. Such a double meaning again is further shown by its preaching of a “you and me/one world” neo-liberal message with a tonality of non-restrictive freedom and oneness.

If we look backstage by peering into the four years when the stadium was being constructed, such contradictory identities of development become clear: In the four years of the stadium’s construction, the majority of the workers were peasants from Chinese rural areas. At the height of construction, they exceeded 17,000 peasants from the countryside (“China Hushes,” 2008). But, upon completion of the construction and right before the show was put on, Beijing cleared these peasant workers and others by sending them back to their countryside homes to maintain order and the image of the city during the Games; therefore, peace and prosperity were a hushed process of controversies. And, this is a global contradiction: the forms of prosperity, which developed in the highly mediated era of globalization always coexisted with attempts at making invisible its necessary forms of poverty.

Although the innovative design of the stadium has eco-friendly effects, the construction of such eco-friendliness was not always labor(ers)-friendly. The peasant worker welders had to work at great heights and under great pressure, frequently on the ice-covered slippery surface of high-rise steel joints. It was estimated that at least ten peasant worker died during the four-year construction, but “Chinese officials deny that there have been any deaths. The authorities have ensured the silence of bereaved relatives by making unusually high compensation payments, which some workers say can amount up to £13,000 [20,560 USD]. By contrast,
labourers on the site said they earned £3 [4.74 USD] a day and skilled welders earned £4.40 [6.96 USD] a day” (“China Hushes”).

This building, thus, poses ambivalent implications. Its thinly veiled boasts of national pride and patriotism and its hidden exploitation, often through “defaulting wages” (“China Hushes”), seem to constitute a double meaning for such a single space: one of success through the display of national wealth and the other of its failure in social responsibility toward the ill-treated laborers through whose bodies the space was built. The inclusion of peasant workers in the construction of national pride and prosperity and the accompanying exclusion of them in order for the show of national pride and prosperity to be spotless, suggests that peasant workers constitute both a wanted and an unwanted social category for Chinese society. They are wanted as laborers but unwanted as the beneficiaries of the products of their labor. Thus, the story of the stadium, with its internationally staged show of the Olympics becomes a quintessential example of the underlying class differences and the national governance of such class differences in an apparent overall development and prosperity. The new “resolutionary” luxury of the new Apple iPad, likewise, becomes scandalous when the necessary class relations of its production are finally made visible.

What we see in the story of Foxconn and the Olympics is the mistreatment of people through the participation of both economic and political institutions in China. These people can be grouped by the precarious conditions of their economic and political conditions against a transformative nation and a fast developing national economy. Thus, they form a new social class in China with their daily activities being integrated into the internationalized or nationalized capital, or ideological operations. Now that the peasant workers’ treatment is a sure indication that class still exists in China, the exact ways in which class exists deserve
special attention. This is particularly because understanding peasant workers’ class identity is
crucial to understanding the current China, the new digital age, and contemporary
internationalized capitalist production.

This dissertation is about the identity of a group of people, called peasant workers in
China, whose labor has produced these objects of desire: computers, smartphones, stadiums,
and identities. But, more so, it is about how their identity has been produced through the ways
in which their labor has been organized. This research examines the social production of
Chinese peasant workers through their experiences in factories for electronic parts
manufacturing in Shenzhen, China. While the social production of identity is widely accepted,
what constitutes “social” is often vague. In many discussions of identity production, media
representations and discursive construction are taken as all there is for a “social” production
process of identity. However, by tracing the changes in the laborers’ living and working
environment back to their trans-local material formations, this dissertation demonstrates how
the transnational capital production process must be realized through the lived trans-local
experience and negotiation of exploitation and domination. It argues that the wage system and
the living spaces of the laborers form trans-local territorial structures of exploitation and
spatially controlled social reproduction. Such structures and spatially controlled social
reproduction of the laborers participate in a broader possibility of class identity production in
its most detailed everyday social material relations.

Who are Peasant Workers?

Peasant workers are a literal translation of Chinese term “Nongmin Gong.” “Nongmin”
means peasants and “Gong” means workers (Zhan, 2006). From the founding of the People’s
Republic of China in 1949 to the completion of arable land reform in 1953, 46.7 million
hectare arable land were distributed to up to 300 million peasants who had no arable land or less land than required for sustenance (Li, 2004). Peasants as a class have been reorganized through the nationwide land re-distribution. After the founding of People’s Republic of China in 1949, peasants were not a single class formation. Instead, the arable land was one of the most important factors to distinguish different peasant classes (See Table 1.2).

Table 1.2

**Arable Land Possession Before Land Reform**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different Classes</th>
<th>Household No. (10k)</th>
<th>Percentage in rural population (%)</th>
<th>Population (10k)</th>
<th>Population Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Arable Land Held (10k Hectares)</th>
<th>Arable Land Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Arable Land Per Household (Hectares)</th>
<th>Arable Land per person (Hectares)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm laborers</td>
<td>6062</td>
<td>57.44</td>
<td>24123</td>
<td>52.37</td>
<td>1433.53</td>
<td>14.28</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Peasants</td>
<td>3081</td>
<td>29.20</td>
<td>15260</td>
<td>33.13</td>
<td>3105.13</td>
<td>30.94</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich Peasants</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>2144</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>1371.07</td>
<td>13.66</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>2188</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>3839.2</td>
<td>38.26</td>
<td>9.61</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other classes</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>2544</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>286.67</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10554</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>46059</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>10035.6</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Source: Chinese National Statistics Bureau (March, 1980): Thirty Years National Agrarian Statistics (1949-1979)*

From 1949 to 1953, the arable land reform movement has relied on the farm laborers (poor peasants) and middle peasants as the revolutionary classes to redistribute lands possessed by rich peasants and landlords. By the end of 1953, the arable land reform movement was completed, with the result shown as the following (See Table 1.3): As can be seen from Table 1.2 and Table 1.3, the two lowest peasant classes, farm laborers and middle peasants have considerable increase in arable land possession. Both rich peasants and landlords have decreased land possession. But since rich peasants were not considered as more exploitative as landlords, a larger proportion of their lands have remained in their possession. Landlords’ land was reduced from 9.61 to 0.81 hectares, changed from the richest land possessors to the poorest landowners. Thus, through arable land reform, the landlords as a class were eliminated
in China. Peasants were evened politically and economically from several strata to mean the rural population working on agriculture for a living.

Table 1.3

**Arable Land Possession After Land Reform**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different Classes</th>
<th>Household No. (%)</th>
<th>Population Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Arable Land Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Arable Land Per Household (Hectares)</th>
<th>Farming Animals (head/100 Households)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm laborers</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>46.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Peasants</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>90.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich Peasants</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>114.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>23.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other classes</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.02</strong></td>
<td><strong>64.01</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Source: Chinese National Statistics Bureau (March, 1980): Thirty Years National Agrarian Statistics (1949-1979).*

On February 15th, 1953, the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party issued *The Draft Resolution on Mutual Aid and Cooperation in Agricultural Production*. Peasants who had acquired land from arable land reform movement were encouraged to work in cooperation (News of the Communist Party of China, 2006). By the end of the year of 1953, people’s communes (*Renmin Gongshe*), production group (*Shengchan Dui*), and village committees had been established based on natural villages (*Ziran Cun*) (“Chinese Communist Party Central Committee,” 2012; Zhan, 2006, p. 39). Peasants’ ownership of the land was changed into collective ownership. Since all the industry after the founding of People’s Republic of China concentrated in big cities, workers working in these industries also lived in the cities. They earned salaries from such state-owned industries, with food rationings provided by the government through such industrial organizations. The national development planning emphasized on the heavy industry development. So the living and working conditions, together with the education and employment opportunities given to the workers were much better than those to the peasants. In part because people’s communes had collective rules for assigning
peasants to work, also in part because city living is much better rewarded in terms of social and political opportunities, peasants from many regions of the nation moved in to the cities to seek for employment during 1953-1958.

With a strong effort to restrict the countryside to city movement, “the Household Registration System (HRS, or hukou system) was established in 1958 and became a strict system to prevent rural-urban labor migration before 1984” (Zhan, 2006, p. 34). From the very beginning, the HRS has been closely connected with arable land distribution, “food supply, education, employment, health care, and social security” (Zhan, p. 34). Peasants in the countryside who wanted to go to cities before 1978 would have to obtain identification and reference letters from the local villages and public security and they usually could not stay in cities for more than three days. However, in cities, before

the middle of 1980s, most urban residents had been basically organized on the basis of their working units (Danwei). Their Danwei not only provided them with jobs but also social welfare, including retirement pension, medical care, housing, amusements, etc.. Thus urban communities emerged on the basis of this Danwei system and it was especially true when many Danwei built houses or apartments for their employees that made most of them not only worked together but also lived together. (Zhan, 2006, p. 40)

Therefore, in villages, different agricultural classes have been equalized into a collective peasant class whereas in cities, the industrial workers have had many more privileges. Even though the union of peasant class and industrial worker class was the basis of Chinese communist revolution, the differences between the two were legalized through urban-rural divisions through policies and systems such as HRS and collective labor of people’s commune.
Such historically reproduced rural-urban differences have formed premises for the formation of peasant workers as a social group.

At the end of 1970s, Deng Xiaoping came back to power after his political exile under Mao’s reign. The economic reform started at the end of 1978, with the establishment of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ), induced foreign investment into the socialist (or, state capitalist) economic system. China’s cities in coastal areas were opened to the outside world and China’s economic development again focused more on the cities rather than the countryside. Because China’s science and industrial technology was far behind that of advanced capitalist countries, the vast majority of China’s enterprises with international production orientation concentrated on labor-intensive production (Zheng, 1998, p. 30). Take Shenzhen for instance: in 1979, the city’s agricultural vs. industrial vs. service industries percentage is 37%, 20.5%, and 42.5% respectively; in 1985, it changed into 7.9%, 46.8%, and 45.3%; in 1990, it further changed into 4.8%, 49.6%, and 45.6% (Zheng, 1998). Yet, until 1985, 90% of the enterprises were labor-intensive enterprises, with the major industries concentrating on electronic industry, textile industry, food and beverage industry, construction material industry, and chemical and medical industry (Zheng, 1998). All these industries demand intensive and unskilled labor. In 1994, the three industries percentages reached 2.4%, 55.6%, and 42% (Zheng, 1998, pp. 30, 31). High technology manufacturing industries such as computer products, programmed telephone exchange stations, color TV screens, computer floppy disks, bicycles, clocks and watches, light-fiber wires, and acoustics have since been developed (Zheng, 1998, p. 31). Yet, although these products are considered high-tech, their production actually involved a large proportion of labor-intensive work.
Simultaneous to the vast urbanization in the coastal areas, the changes in China’s interior villages were much slower. From 1978 to 1982, a series of government policies changed land usage from people’s commune collective ownership to a nationwide Household Responsibility System. In brief, the Household Responsibility System is the system in which the collectively owned land of people’s commune was redistributed to individual households together with the taxation responsibilities also redistributed to individual households\(^1\).

Individual households receive land based on the number of members in the households under the condition that they have to fulfill the respective taxes. The people’s commune did not have the control over when and how the peasants were to farm as long as at the end of the harvest, peasants pay back the taxation. With such a responsibility, the individual households can keep what is left from the taxation. The Household Registration System allowed the peasants to work on the land. Yet, with the improved incentive to work for earning the difference between the total production and taxation, peasants soon found that the quantities of arable land did not leave much beyond sustenance. In 1980s, surplus rural laborers in China reached 300 million and the movement to the coastal cities began (Chen, 2006, p. 50). They worked in the cities as the second and third industry workers instead of agricultural workers. Therefore, they are called workers (meaning industrial workers)\(^2\). However, because the majority of them still have their original countryside peasantry registration, they are officially still peasants. Peasant workers came into being as an identity between the city and countryside, and emerging social class central to Chinese development, and an economically vital aspect of global capitalist production. Such is the starting point of this investigation into the materiality of class identity.

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\(^1\) Household responsibility system should be distinguished from Household registration system, which registers people according to their places of birth.

\(^2\) First industry refers to agriculture. Second industry refers to manufacturing industry. Third industry refers to service.
and the geographies of labor embedded in the production of contemporary media and computing technologies.

Frequently, peasant workers have been studied within the framework of national demography and internal or trans-provincial migration. Exceptional work has been produced by scholars such as Cindy Fan (2002; 2008) and Mingjie Sun (2011), who investigate the interrelations between labor market, national policy changes, and migrant workers’ unequal treatment. Zai Liang’s (1996; 2001; 2004) demographic study also provides insights on the often debated and highly estimated data on migrant workers. Shenjing He (2005; 2007) and Fulong Wu (1996; 2002) investigated peasant workers’ issues with a concentration on urbanization, urban redevelopment, and changes in rural villages. While such studies all contributed to my understandings of peasant workers’ issues, my study focuses more on entering into the privatized spaces such as peasant workers’ dorms and habitats to examine how their everyday living experiences are structurally influenced. Therefore, on the one hand, my study gleans on the inventive perspectives of the previous studies, which have expanded the very conceptions on what it means to be demographic studies and migration studies. On the other hand, it distances itself from all those studies by concentrating on the translocal connections between peasant workers’ everyday practices and national and international social, economic, and political structures.

**Aim of the Dissertation**

Against the backdrop of such a history of a transitional China, the formation of peasant workers has raised questions for the understanding of identity. The understandings of identity production through media representation became a suspicious point. Such a group of people has, until recently with the Foxconn scandal, received far less media representation than other
social classes, say the emerging middle classes in China. Instead, their identity as peasant workers has close connections with national changes of political and economic policies. While the studies of identity with poststructuralist and postmodernist influences have been important, they have also been inadequate to discuss the political economies of identity production. Such a two-fold discrepancy between Chinese peasant workers’ identity production and an Anglo-centric formation of identity is widened further if we look at the peasant workers in the internationalized media and electronics production industries, as I would explore in detail through my dissertation. This is because peasant workers, as a social group transformation within Chinese borders, suddenly turn on an international gaze. If these migrants travelling from rural to urban China join the internationalized division of labor and internationalized manufacturing industry then, isn’t it true that the changes of their identity are not only about rural to urban, but about national policy changes supporting international capital to continue its survival and prosperity in China? But if that is the case, isn’t it simultaneously the case that peasant workers are likely not just any social group, but an emerging class in the technological, spiritual, and logistical center of internationalized capitalist production?

To address the previous questions, we must address a central question that concerns the construction of China’s peasant workers’ identity: *How is the production of the identity of China’s peasant workers central to the functioning of national and global capitalism?*

Together with the central question come two allied questions: *What roles did materialities play in the production of this identity? More specifically, apart from the actual working tasks and conditions, how do (or do not) wage or living conditions contribute to the production of peasant workers’ identity?* But what these two questions ask in a more philosophical sense is
“How is identity material?” and “How is class identity crucial for understanding the materiality of identity?”

This dissertation aims to address such theoretical inquiries from the perspective of the empirical production of class identity. By focusing on one media electronics factory in Shenzhen, China, I aim to understand how class identity can be examined by looking at the connections of peasant workers’ social activities to materialized social organization systems and such materialized social organization systems in turn put peasant workers into experienced social contents of living. Their class identity, thus, is concerned with the entirety of experienced social contents of living.

The question, “Who are peasant workers?” cannot be adequately addressed, or cannot be addressed at all, without attending to their working tasks and working environments, or attending to how such working environments are connected to the international capital production on one hand and to other environments, such as their rural homes, whose deconstruction has formed the construction of their immediate working environments. Besides such tasks and environments, their identities cannot be addressed without attending to their products, whether they are the miscellaneous daily products that have filled WalMart up, or the Bird’s Nest as a grandeur show of national pride that built on the backs of peasant workers, or the globalized glamorous objects of desires like iPads and iPhones that claims an apple style of life. Of course, such a web of material connections does not define all the potentialities of a human being but such is the case for identity in general. This material web, does present certain limitations and conditions of necessity, which should all be included in the formation of peasant workers’ identity as a new international working force, as an internationalized class, has to be examined carefully.
Besides such more direct consideration of materiality, mainly as material things that are produced through peasant workers’ labor, there is a more important reason for taking materiality as the focal point of my study. It is, rather, that the production of such materiality cannot be possible without the participation of organized and socialized laboring process. Thus, to study materiality is to study the political economy through which such materiality has been produced. Together with the political economy of production, the importance of socialization of labor and laborers will come to the shore. To manifest the close connection between the production of peasant workers’ class identity and the production of material commodities, I borrowed the term “manufacturing” from industry and emphasized the closeness between industrial manufacturing and identity production. I call such an identity formation process *manufacturing identity*.

**Why Class Identity?**

Aiming to explore the important features of class identity in China through examining its manufacturing process in industrial factories, I have stressed two points throughout the dissertation: First, industrial manufacturing is much more than just economic in nature. Rather, by analyzing different social and material rules and regulations of the factories, I examine how such regulations have often neglected social causes as well as social consequences. Accordingly, this dissertation does not examine a factory as an economic institution, but it examines how the social connections of the institution have undermined the everyday operations of the factory. Such stress effectively fends off the separation of economy from other social activities. As a result, such stress theorizes class by attending to the historical theoretical problem of economic determinism that has, in part, been responsible for the negligence of class identity theorization in identity studies.
Second, while my theorization follows a general social production one, the social production theorization usually focuses on a narrow spectrum of the social, particularly with a serious consideration of the roles of materiality in the social process of production. The more pronounced problem in such social production theorization, influenced by postmodernist theories, is that even discourses and language have been considered as having constructed identities of various kinds. Such theorizations, due to the underrepresentation of materiality, cannot fully exemplify certain survival issues that the peasant workers and industrial workers in many other South East Asian countries still face. More importantly, materiality as constitutive of the labor process and regulation process has been largely overlooked or deemed as not producing or adding any meanings to the work of identity formation. An emphasis on the formative roles of materiality in the social production of class identity, thus, both complements many postmodernist influenced discursive and language construction in theorization and integrates the actual difficulties of the living of peasant workers into the identity production process. Such emphasis results in an understanding of class identity that is both connected to Marxian class but reconciled with the overdetermination that Althusser (1996) and Raymond Williams (1977) have argued and that rejoins materiality, part of nature, into the formation of a class identity that does not view class as social strata so much as a total relation of production in which materiality participates with deep social causes and consequences.

Materiality exists with particular forms and shapes and the production of such forms and shapes is a laboring process in which nature participates as the raw material of the production process. Later on, the existence of materiality manifests itself as the environment where laboring activities are performed, where living and sleeping and other social activities
take place. It also takes place in the forms of tools and machinery in contemporary industrial manufacturing. Thus, a choice of factory as the site for observation and examination of the manufacturing of identity provides various forms and shapes of materiality so that materiality can be examined in detail. Understanding how space is produced, then, becomes an integral part of understanding the roles of materiality in the manufacturing of identity.

**Where Is Class Identity Produced?**

Class identity is socially constructed. Yet, theories on social construction can seldom touch the specificities of the construction process. Without such specificities, the social construction process of identity is too vague and inapplicable to the everyday specific livings of people. “Where is class identity produced?”, therefore, is the right question to engage identity’s social production as a spatial project in which a variety of social forces, including peasant workers, contribute to its shaping.

The space where class identity is produced is never a random question. In geography, the importance of space has been, understandably, more clearly understood than in any other discipline. As Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Neil Smith, Don Mitchell, and Linda McDowell have contributed to the understanding of space, the geographical configuration is fundamental in the functionality and survival of capitalism. As Don Mitchell (1996) has contended, on the one hand, space is produced by labor, which reshapes space for a certain class purpose to be carried out, such as capital production and regulation of laborers, and offers the space a rich network of social relations. On the other hand, such a shape and its class function, along with its rich network of social relations and meanings, are not always manifested. Instead, they are usually buried by the naturalizing spatial formation and by the representations on what such a space means. Such a double functionality of space is clearly illuminated in the Beijing Olympic
Stadium, where the livelihood and its denial are effectively anchored and mediated through the functionality and accessibility of the space.

Another example can reinforce this question of “where is identity (produced)?” In China, the start of its political economic reform was spearheaded by establishing Shenzhen as its first Special Economic Zone (SEZ), whose association with the then capitalist and world hub of international trade clearly brought more opportunities to incubate an export-oriented economy. At the same time, this place is also optimal for the low-cost labor forces and the state-launched favorable policies to attract international investments. Thus, on the one hand, it shows that in capital’s actual international operation, the choice of a location where it can have its spatial fix is vital for its survival and prosperity. On the other hand, it shows that, accordingly, the optimal location for studying identity and its production within the internationalized capital is never optional or random. Rather, it is always already presupposed and, to some important degree, determined by the capital’s own footprint. Even more importantly, it suggests that even when that locale, say, the city of Shenzhen can be located as the site for understanding identity production, it is the material and economic connections like trades and manufacturing with Hong Kong, and the labor forces from the countryside that the city as a locale becomes opportune for capital production. In other words, the establishment of any one place must be done through the interconnections and exchanges through other places. “Where is identity (produced)?” has its innate question of what other where has participated into the making of this where.

Space as location is important, especially when any one location has to be produced through its interconnection with other locations. However, the most obvious feature of space, as physicality, masks space’s most significant feature of being sociality. Harvey’s (2000)
usages treated space as being able to mediate people’s social identity. In his “Spaces of Hope,” Harvey considered how the fact that space can be modified, or reproduced, is generative of hope in mankind:

When . . . we contemplate urban futures we must always do battle with a wide range of emotive and symbolic meanings that both inform and muddle our sense of “the nature of our task.” As we collectively produce our cities, so we collectively produce ourselves. Projects concerning what we want our cities to be are, therefore, projects concerning human possibilities, who we want, or, perhaps even more pertinently, who we do not want to become. . . . How our individual and collective imagination [upon what the urban space should look and work like] works is, therefore, crucial to defining the labor of urbanization. . . . If, as Unger (1987b, 8) puts it, we accept that “society is made and imagined,” then we can also believe that it can be “remade and reimagined” (p. 159).

Space is not static; and space as a thing is always maintained through a process of production and reproduction. Both of these interpretations are central to Harvey’s passage. A more general logic lies in Harvey’s reasoning here: that space mediates social changes. It is only because space mediates social changes that its re-imagination and reproduction becomes essential to the imagination and production of social changes.

Harvey’s interpretation of “Where is identity (produced)?” assumes a much deeper and subtler possibility in understanding space than treating it as mere rigid physical locations. Instead, because space mediates social reproductions and changes of human existence, “where is identity (produced)?” actually constitutes an inseparable part of “how is identity produced?” Thus, essentially, how the location for identity production is produced also becomes an
indispensable part for understanding “how is identity produced?” Such questions actually assume a new logic for our investigation to continue: That understanding how space is produced is central to our understanding identity production. Space, instead of merely appearing as a thing with a solid structure, i.e. as built environment, becomes a process of historical production and the material as well as social results of such production. It is material since it always assumes a physical form; it is social because the organization of labor and production as well as its usages upon completion is always social. None of space’s varied reproductions would take place without social organization of labor or the participation of materiality. Thus, space is material social in one combined form. Hence, I use material-social as a term of a visual ensemble to emphasize the double feature of space.

Following Harvey’s indication, the study of space assumes an importance that is connected to space as a site for space production as well as academic observation, but it has a qualitative difference with space as location. In short, space is a historical material-social production process as well as a continuous set of results of such a production process. Both its production process and its varied results contain the desires of the controlling classes of the society. Thus, space is class identity in the latter’s material form. Such an understanding returns the materiality of space into its historical production process. This understanding has its immediate methodological opening: that we can approach the production of class identity by accessing the historical space and materiality productions. With this possibility for both theorization and methodology kept open, we need to further address the connection of materiality with sociality. The notion of malleability of space is related to this task.
The Malleability of Space and Relevance of Class Identity

Harvey’s most important message (2000) is the ability with which space can be reproduced so that social relations can be changed through the alteration of the material shapes. This is what Don Mitchell (1996) has termed *malleable* space. For Mitchell, space is “a totality” (p. 30), in which all kinds of forces such as the forces which have actively produced it, lived in it, and represented it, have constructed “the struggles, compromises, and temporarily settled relations of competing and cooperating social actors: it is both a thing (or suite of things), . . . and a social process, at once solidly material and ever changing” (p. 30). By viewing space as “a totality,” what Mitchell is really interested in is to explore the mixed and combined social forces, often in struggle and contradiction with one another, but sometimes also in accord with one another, that have formed both the complexity of the spaces’ inner complex formation and have established its unified resulting functionality. In his own words, space “represents an important social contradiction within a unity of form: the reproduction of inequality and supposed powerlessness that is codified and naturalized in the landscape carried with it the seeds of revolt” (p. 31).

If we compare Harvey’s (2000; 2008) message of space with that of Mitchell’s earlier (1996) formation, apart from the class position of space which the ruling class can control as the advantage of space and, dialectically, the very opportunities that space can possibly be *shaped* into for societal changes and class emancipation, Mitchell’s formation of space has a more detailed understanding of the inner mechanisms of space (re-)formation. Such a formation of space attracts a follow-up examination of its embodied and experienced existence at the center of laborers’ living. It is through such a joint theoretical formation and its methodological underpinnings that this dissertation explores the formation of identity by going
into the inner mechanisms of spatial formation. Space is part of the materiality, which I examined, but it is also the formation of the environment in which many other activities that changes of shapes of materiality, such as products and tools, are located. The production of space is importantly concerned with the ways materiality can be used and can form the limitations in which class identity can be manufactured.

**Producing Chinese Peasant Workers: Changing Geographies of Class Identity in China**

“Who are peasant workers?” While the whole purpose of this dissertation is to address this question, the nominal or symbolic meanings of peasant workers offer us a starting point for the historical material/social meanings to take place in later chapters. Migrant peasant workers, or *Nongmin Gong*, usually refer to the groups of people who work in areas other than their nationally registered living areas, also known as the Household Registration System, *Hukou*. According to Fan (2008b), they are “people not living in places where they are registered.” As China’s unique population and mobility control system that started from the 1950s, the Household Registration System (HRS) required every citizen to be registered in the place of their birth so that social support could be allocated according to the demands of the planned priority of the socialist regime (Chan & Zhang, 1999; Goldstein & Goldstein, 1987; Fan, 2008a). As a rule, people born and registered in rural China were allocated a piece of land\(^3\) so that they could perform agricultural work without much governmental allocation of social opportunities, whereas people born and registered in urban China had many more advantages such as better education, promised jobs, and food rations. The specific regional differences between city and countryside living became, then, the real differences that HRS meant to Chinese citizens. *Peasants* and *workers*, then, used to represent two very different government

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\(^3\)Compared to US farmers, the land that Chinese peasants have is actually very small. The national average is 1.1 mu.
social treatments after the founding of the People’s Republic of China although the united force of the two were officially recognized as the revolutionary force of Communist China. Their real differences have been retained since HRS has restricted peasants from acquiring or changing their allocated living such as moving to cities.

While the study of peasant workers frequently concentrated on the reasons of their movement, intentions for settlement, and ill-treatment in cities, such theorization seldom connected the formation of peasant workers as a social group with the changed national and international political/economic demands. The question whether new possibilities for social changes have been nurtured through the changing social and political economic environment receives still less attention. “How is peasant workers’ class identity formed?” becomes a probing question for understanding the relationship between class identity formation and political economy in contemporary China. This dissertation is interested in more than political economy. It aims to include the everyday life experiences of peasant workers participating in the social reproduction of labor into a whole sociological project that capital desires to control. In other words, by looking into the social reproduction processes, which peasant workers inevitably experience every day and which capital strives to organize according to its own desire, this dissertation aims to depict the roles that materiality in general and capital and space in particular play in the production of peasant workers’ identity. Considering class identity production from the aspect of materiality, capital and space in particular provide an actual material/social environment that peasant workers experience everyday. Accordingly, peasant workers can be understood as they interact with their environment, which, as I will show in the following chapters, is filled with power. Peasant workers as subjects must be considered in tandem with their social-material environment so that class identity can be perceived.
But how/why are space and capital considered in tandem? What are the innate connections that make their pairing especially useful for understanding class identity formation? The issue raised by these two questions is central in connecting different parts of this project; hence, it deserves a general explanation here.

The pairing of space and capital needs to be understood, from a more general level, on the connection between materiality and sociality or nature and society. Now that the emphasis on materiality in general and capital in particular is common in Marxist social theories, it is in “Uneven Development” that cultural geographer Neil Smith (1999) helps recenter the importance of Marxian political economy to the heart of societal development and individual positionality within any class society. People’s class identity, then, is positioned in such political, economic, and social environments. For his argument, Smith reconsiders the relationship between nature and society, not as two separate entities, but as a combined living environment that is mediated and changed only by labor. Intriguingly, Smith does not treat such labor as purely physical actions of human bodies in work. Rather, he considers that such labor is highly organized, controlled, and mediated by the relation of people to the means of production, i.e. class relations. Importantly, people’s identity, is seen as people’s class-mediated laboring relations with a nature that is also mediated in class relations.

According to Smith, identity formation in capitalist society can be seen as a process in which nature becomes social nature, in which labor, class, and capital join hands in changing so that economic development can happen. In this triangle of labor, class, and capital, space serves not only as locations necessary for labor and capital to function, but, more importantly, as a material-social mediation on which labor and capital both depend and through which they are transformed. Pairing space with capital, then, raises a fundamental question about the
materiality: that if nature in any society has become social nature, then, does it follow that
space in capitalism also bears a class mark? Following that, now that space mediates every
action, if it bears its class mark, what roles does it play in the production of peasant workers’
class identity? Further, what kind of class identity does it help constitute for peasant workers in
Chinese social reality? And what kind of class identity is it capable of in its full potential?
These questions all position space right into the center of identity production and then identity
production right into the features of capital operations in a globalized class society.

After considering the potential of space in organizing labor, class, and capital into a
single observable material-social process, a process in which space is made and remade, I
address another aspect of this polyvalent class identity production process: Why is labor’s
social reproduction process important to understanding class identity production and how is it
connected to capital production? Frequently, labor’s social reproduction is an undertheorized
aspect in Marxist social theories. This is unfortunate because, first, the potential of people’s
everyday living either for capital’s exploitations or for the opportunities of social changes has
not received the deserved attention and, second, social reproduction as the necessary
preparations of capital’s production is neglected; consequently, capital production risks being
discussed as an autonomous entity, particularly creating a spurious economic sphere isolated
from social living at large. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to social
reproduction. Notably, Linda McDowell’s (2009) consideration of class through its important
interconnection with gender formation, David Harvey’s (2000) discussion of the reproduction
of the body as always participating in the formation of value reproduction, and Don Mitchell’s
(2003) examination of the formation of labor through the social and physical space of Mexican
migrant strawberry pickers working and living experiences in California all study class from the interconnections of social reproduction and space.

Take Marxian economic geographer Jim Glassman’s (2006) concept of *extra-economic activity* as a more specific example. Glassman considers formation of economy from the social activities that have enabled it but that have usually been neglected as external to economy. For instance, daycare is of no less importance in generating insights for understanding how economy, capital, and class work than direct economic activities because the former can provide the intricate connection between family care and, potentially, the parents’ negotiation of daily work schedule, salary vs. payment for daycare, etc. In this way, the opportunities for examining capital can be found in much more expanded social life experiences.

To sum up, this dissertation strives to understand peasant workers’ class identity by situating it within the local, national, and international formation of capital reproduction which it helps shape. By situating peasant workers’ class identity, it, at the same time, analyzes peasant workers’ class identity, the actual working mechanisms of local, national, and international formation of capital reproduction, for the two can only be defined and recognized as a whole social process of mutual production.

**Chapter Division for Understanding Peasant Workers’ Class Identities**

How do the following chapters work together for understanding peasant workers’ class identities through the material/social production process? In Chapter II, I consider cultural studies and feminist studies accounts of identity along race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality lines of division for a construction of the genealogy of class identity. I focus mainly on promoting a Marxian genealogy of viewing identity as material-social production process. Surrounding these major theme lines are several major threads in the theorization of identity.
Then, I argue that space can offer a grounded discussion of both political economy and the formation of identity in lived and embodied experiences. Chapter II establishes a dialectical relationship between class identity, political economy, and space by promoting a spatial understanding of the formation of class identity through the political economy.

Chapter III deals with a spatialized institutional ethnography. It situates the importance of space into Institutional Ethnography (IE), an ethnography for people. Institutional Ethnography is chosen over other research methodologies due to its emphasis on reasoning through the actual material-social connections in the field. Expanding IE to include space as one innate part of its theoretical element directs the whole dissertation project toward seeking the connections between space/materiality and class identity formation in everyday experiences.

Chapters IV and V focus on the wage relations of peasant workers as important material-social relations for producing class identity. Specifically, Chapter IV focuses on the theoretical preparation. It argues that wage is more than a sum of money. Instead, its formation projects a series of material-social relations and such social relations subsume peasant workers into an interwoven class network of wages. Chapter V is Chapter IV’s empirical manifestation. In Chapter V, I use peasant workers’ everyday wage earning actions to demonstrate the mechanisms in which peasant workers’ class identity is produced through material-social wage relations. While Chapters IV and V concentrate on the formation of peasant workers’ class identity in present-day Shenzhen, in Chapter VI, I deepen my investigation of class identity production by linking the production process to two interconnected material-social institutions: the institutions of the Household Registration System (HRS) and of peasant workers’ dormitories. Although dorms, as a currently present spatial formation, can be used to
demonstrate the roles of space in the production of class identity, I do not want to limit my project to a contemporary discussion. I argue that peasant workers’ current modes of class identity production depend on the presence of a concretely built environment as well as the material-social relation changes that have made possible the current environment. Thus, HRS, in particular its changes throughout P. R. China’s regimes for the nation’s political and material-social strategies, is used to show it as a material-social institution. Finally, I argue that, first, HRS’s changes have made the presence of dorms in the cities as a historical contingency possible and, second, at any contemporary moment, dorms and HRS join hands as material-social institutions to produce peasant workers’ class identities.

While Chapters IV, V, and VI all concentrate on how mediated capital power, in particular forms of either wages or dorms, produces an everyday experienced peasant workers’ class identity, this is not to suggest that peasant workers are passively identified. To argue for that is to suggest that capitalism’s triumph over mankind is decisive and final. Instead, a message that runs throughout my dissertation is that materiality does participate in forming power that changes people and society. However, materiality does not do so automatically. The class struggles that understand the importance of the double nature of materiality always have their potential opportunities open to the working class. The materiality, in specific physical forms, is never detached from human sociality. On the one hand, as the built environment, it is used for serving different social purposes. In the process of doing so, it becomes part of the social institution through which class is maintained on the daily basis. On the other hand, to maintain its daily services to different class purposes, its forms can be altered when necessary. Thus, though appearing concrete, the materiality is always malleable and its changes serve class interests through serving specific seemingly harmless daily functions. It is through such a social
process that materiality participates in a general social process. Materiality therefore becomes always social-materiality. In the same process, materiality mediates the power hierarchies and people’s everyday social interactions. Without materiality, sociality cannot exist. The social formation of class identity is, therefore, always material-social formation of class identity.

Now that people’s social relations cannot but be mediated through materiality, the ways materiality serves in the formation of sociality becomes utterly important for all class formations. But it can be used to serve a political purpose: If class identity, as a social relation, can only be mediated through materiality, then, the extent to which materiality is made to serve for working people determines the extent to which the social development has achieved.

I did not explicitly state the political commitment and agencies that lie in the roles of materiality in the formation of class identity until the last chapter, Chapter VII. The previous chapters all contributed to materiality’s participation in the social formation of identity to ensure the ultimate importance of materiality and the inseparable materiality-sociality is clearly understood. Thus, in Chapter VII, I pointed out the timeliness and significance of understanding materiality in contemporary international situation by offering several examples. Yet, the systematic engagement of such examples as viable political movements should merit their own separate attention. A project arguing for a class identity politics should be anchored towards a participation in the ongoing world class struggles. It is through such a direction that the academic theorization will be extended to class and political practices. This is an ongoing process.

**Conclusion: Manufacturing Identity**

China’s transfer from a planned state capitalist economy to a market-oriented state capitalist economy since the 1970s demands a vast population of laborers/workers to meet the needs of such an economic change. While such a state-launched market economy clearly marks
its national formation, China’s economic development and labor/class implications cannot be adequately understood in national terms. For one thing, the area where the first special economic zone (SEZ) was established for attracting international investment, the present Shenzhen city, was at once a state allocated and developed spearhead and national incubator for the formation of an export-oriented economy.

As the majority of China’s new labor force, peasant workers are the participants in the formation of China’s city-based export-oriented economy. It is through the production and reproduction of their identity—*their class identity*—that this circuit of global capitalism functions. To investigate their personal experiences ranging from their separation from family, movement to cities, and their working and living experiences in their specific situations offers the study of class its situated specificity while, at the same time, it shows class in its actual demonstrations of real living. The investigation of such experiences, despite the different formation through peasant workers’ experiences, forms other dimensions, such as national, regional, and municipal, that are considerably larger than that of the directly embodied experiences. The experiences of peasant workers, at the same time, show the meanings of their embodied perceptions and also meanings of larger dimensions that their experiences often fail to notice. Class identity, then, connects embodied experiences with larger scale social significance of such embodied experiences. On the one hand, such experiences are not usually known to outsiders, within and beyond China; on the other hand, what such experiences mean to the national and world capitalism’s continuation and prosperity are not usually fully realized by the peasant workers who have such experiences. My dissertation bridges these two levels of knowledge so that embodied experiences can become threaded into the *universality* of class. All the *theoretical* and *empirical* efforts are to achieve such a strategic bridging *practice*. Just
as Neil Smith (2005) clearly reminds us methodologically and analytically, this bridging practice is vital for conducting social changes because the question of research is “not what is happening, for some people in some places, but what else is happening alongside and in blatant contradiction with it” (p. 695). Class identity would mean little if its theorization could not be integrated into the actual living activities.

This dissertation, therefore, examines the formation of class identity through peasant workers’ political-economic activities with their connections to the changes in the national political economy. By exploring peasant workers’ political-economic activities through their urban employment, daily living, and their connections with their rural families, I show the production of class identity within such embodied daily activities that are, nevertheless, nothing but mundane. While previous studies of identity often approach identity from marginalized positions such as dominated race, ethnicity, gender, sex, and religion, the political-economic activities of peasant workers as the actually experienced exploitation have not been equally studied as at the center of who they are. Such a lack in the study of class identity in general inevitably results in a lack of consideration of any social groups as forming classes if they also simultaneously form other social identities. Studying class identity through peasant workers’ political-economic activities provides the study of class identity with a context- and content-specific social happening that, in turn, substantiates any general discussion of class identity with specific social contents; thus, a new understanding of class identity demands a rethinking of political economy and its social functions in situating daily actualities of social activities.

“Who peasant workers are” as an identity study strives to show that not only representations and discourses are capable of constructing identity. Even more importantly,
identity should be viewed as a process of social construction in which elements quite different from representations and discourses participate in important ways to help forge a social reality in which any certain social groups live. By concentrating on the formation of peasant workers in the political-economic production process and by focusing on the spatial arrangement of such political economy, “both for those wishing to see capitalism’s survival and for those seeking to transform it,” I have grounded space into the very heart of class identity formation.

In the process of forging peasant workers’ identity, where identity is produced is an equally important question to what kind of identities are produced because, in the process of capital reproduction, space is one of the most important factors through which the desire for surplus value is realized. In this case, the choice of “where” has, to a large extent, seemed to be accomplished by capital’s expansion. In this sense, the making of peasant workers seems to have what Marx calls a “historical condition not of our choice.” Yet, despite such a seemingly precarious choice, the emancipatory potentials of materiality become really important. In this sense, working class people would abandon a significant element of their social and political struggles if they do not understand the roles of materiality in the formation of class identity.

Disputes, struggles, and organization through space with an aim of reproducing space for the sake of reproducing human’s identity, then, are an inevitable class struggle. This is a major theme that the dissertation strives to develop. Retrospectively, this aim finds its clear slogan in Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) exclamation: “‘Change life!’ ‘Change Society!’ These percepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space” (p. 59). While the same exclamation holds true, it is even more urgent to reiterate its ingenuity in the contemporary formations of space through international capital, national policy making, and local political
economic actions in the formation of space to exploit peasant workers as a domestic work force for internationalized capital reproduction.

No appropriate space for particular notions of identity formation means that such identity formation can only remain as a discursive and imaginary concept. Importantly, the malleability of space, its ability to contain a combination of different, often contradictory forces, yet assuming a concrete unified shape and functionality, means that it can be reproduced for certain social alternatives to be realized. Indeed, space can be used both for the survival of capitalism and its subversion and transformation; this does not mean that space is a neutral entity or an empty container in which powers of either side can be stored. Rather, it means that space itself, as anything produced in the class society, is a result and product of a temporary power balance. *Its material presence is a result of social power over physicality.* Without the efforts of reproducing space in favor of the working class, we would inevitably yield to capitalism’s power of reproducing space and the identities of each subject in its own image. The malleability of space that is the malleability of hopes as well is only a potentiality, albeit a critical one. For without critical understanding and engagement of such malleability, the power of force would continue to drive the shapes of the space and class identity until no one could bear it. Once that happens, then, the potentialities of malleability for the working class would begin to be realized. What follows is an examination of a material-social process of class identity production: what I call *Manufacturing Identity.*
CHAPTER II: CLASS AND THE MATERIALIST POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Introduction

Figure 2.1. He Chunxia at her dormitory room. ‘‘He Chunxia, a former employee in China’s manufacturing industry, shows her work card in a rented apartment room in Guangdong Province. Picture originally published by China Youth Daily.’’

The above picture was taken inside He Chunxia’s rented dormitory. Set on the tiled floor were both Chunxia’s threadbare mattress and her son’s smaller bamboo one. Close by sits a bucket for carrying water from outside for washing and cleaning as well as a bag of clothes. Showing her work card as an employee in the used-to-be giant toy manufacturer, Smart Union, He Chunxia clearly recalled her shock at the factory’s sudden close a month ago: “The factory was operating in full gear before the shutdown. I finished my shift at 2 AM that day and

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returned to my dormitory. I hardly expected to be jobless by the time I woke up” (China Youth Daily).

Chunxia was not the only peasant worker shocked by the company’s sudden and mysterious shutdown. The company she was in, a Hong Kong-listed Smart Union Holdings Ltd., abandoned its over 7,000 employees. Only the day before, closing-down of this company, with its annual income exceeding 700 million HK dollars (89.8 million US dollars), still seemed to be the last thing imaginable. Overnight, both the unfinished products and managerial personnel disappeared, leaving He Chunxia and her fellow workers with unpaid wages, locked factory doors, and empty factory yards.

Although this sudden closing of the factory took Chunxia by surprise, the escape of capital under the cover of darkness is nothing new. Described by Harvey ([1981], 2006; 2001) as capital’s “spatial fix,” such an escape of capital is a typical means of liquidation so that it can find yet another place for its next fix, gaining another opportunity for its reproduction by “externalizing” its crisis to workers like Chunxia (see also Herod, 1997). Therefore, paradoxically, Chunxia’s story as a peasant worker, her experience of living in a substandard apartment room, and her unemployment are intricately connected with the maneuvers of the internationalized circulation of capital. Chunxia’s story and the story of capital’s escape are, in fact, one story. In this single story, Chunxia’s identity cannot escape the concrete materiality that she has to face on a daily basis – the materiality, so vividly called “vagabond capitalism” by Cindi Katz (2001b), which had organized Chunxia’s living experiences.

As the world has become increasingly polarized by income and well-being over the last 40 years, it has simultaneously become increasingly difficult to discuss the cultural politics of these transformations in terms of class. In fact, social theory has diminished and critiqued the
issue of class (Wood, 1998; Brennan, 2006; Zizek, 2009). Likewise, public intellectuals have, with growing delight, described the world in classless terms. This shows, at the same time, that matters of identity and cultural production have become increasingly defined as “immaterial.” This is a study of the materiality of identity. But, further, it is an examination of understanding class identity through that materiality.

Chunxia’s class identity cannot be understood free from materiality. To know how peasant workers’ class identity has come into being, we are obliged to show more than just her crowded apartment room, her substandard living conditions, or her work card that identified her as part of internationalized capital reproduction. We are obliged to portray the ways capital works and the ways China has accommodated such capital operations. The ways capital operates cannot be adequately identified without showing the ways people’s livelihoods through manufacturing are both locally held and internationally connected. Neither can they be adequately understood without considering their life stories and migration experiences from China’s interior to such export-oriented urban spaces for opportunities. Even the thread-bare mattresses, the telephone booths on the street for workers to call their separated family members in China’s countryside have added to a enriched understanding of capital operations (and its escaping) in China.

All these personal happenings may seem mundane and trivial, but these happenings constitute aspects of the actual social content of a lived life. Most importantly, they constitute a materially formed aspect in understanding how people are formed into a class identity of a network of social material relations. Different from the common wisdom, which takes class identity as social and income categories, I explore a class identity that exists by becoming life experiences of individual persons, mediated through employment as well as factory closings,
working on the shop floor as well as living in the dorm room. What Chunxia experienced should not be regarded merely as personal because it is exactly through the maneuvers of the global capital that what could have been dismissed as personal becomes possible. What Chunxia experienced, though apparently personal, actually tells what capital has done to individual bodies, through locally specific conditions such as factory rules and regulations, and it tells us how capital can only act on individual bodies through itself being mediated by those laboring bodies and the materialities that are also metabolized into every aspect of the laboring process and the body’s reproduction. The personal life experiences, therefore, showcase a materiality and space-mediated class identity production process; thus, class can be understood by focusing on such materiality and space-mediated social processes through which capital finds its form of reproducing itself. In its reproduction, capitalism inevitably reproduces what Marx (1973) calls “virtual paupers” (p. 604). In this case, capitalism also reproduces peasant workers through the latter’s experienced class production process. As an exploitative economic system, capitalism gains profit from unpaid work by extracting the surplus value. Yet, as simultaneously a social system, capitalism reproduces experiences that further nurture struggles against itself.

In that this latter process is experienced as personal and has its material social connections with other processes, class identity is thus manufactured, borrowing the same term from industrial manufacturing. It is experienced by individual peasant workers and has aspects that go beyond the everyday experiences of any individual peasant workers.

Seen from another angle, it is not so much that class identity can be studied through the experiences of individual people. Rather, it is that, as Herod (2006) described, the “dirty work” of capitalism can never be fully grasped without considering what it has done to individual
people, through these people’s experiences, and to the environment in which these people work and live. Not only has capital found its footing by localizing and concretizing itself through organizing individual people and their environments, but also, when it escapes for another spatial fix, its effects do not disappear: such localized people and experiences are part of the material whole that it produces. All these people, their experiences, and the environment in which they have lived constitute the actual social contents of class identity and the trajectories of globalized capital. Class identity, then, is not a set of rigid social strata or categories defined by income alone, but it is an experienced foundational relationship to the means of social production and reproduction. As all these aspects of living constitute the actual social contents of the labor forces for the localized construction and reproduction of global capitalism, they also compose the actual experience of who one is, and such is, or being, is still as inseparable, now as then, from the seemingly external “productive forces” that shape how people earn a living. That is, the internal forms of identity are inextricably linked to the globalized political economy. What Chunxia experienced, then, is a matter of class identity that tells a story of her life as much as a story of how global capital has organized such a life in manufacturing for its own reproduction. As global capital has organized its manufacturing in its varied local settings by scrupulous planning, it has also manufactured a class experience and a class identity that are the focus of this dissertation.

The spaces that capital has relied on for its reproduction, including both the now-abandoned factory floors and the previously subsidized dormitory spaces, are far more important than just the images and traces representing the once-present capital. Instead, it is

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5 I use this broadly and with a necessary openness, without invoking any vulgarity of “productive force determinism” that has given the phrase a bad reputation.

6 This is also part of what capital has produced. See Vinay Gidwani (2008; 2011) for provocative work on capital and waste.
exactly through such spaces that capital is realized (rarely perfectly, of course) from a blueprint in the capital owners’ heads to the actual presence and organization that are grounded in reality, performing as an economic force extracting surplus value in its concrete forms. But social and physical space does not exist in our urbanized world without labor, both in the past and present, to produce it in the first place. Then, class identity, as people’s daily experience in the political economy of capital, must also consider its constitution through social and physical space in varied forms and the influences of political economy on such forms. By the same token, political economy cannot stand alone, without considering its spatial presence in varied forms that have come into its own making and the making of the daily experiences of peasant workers, as its localized labor force. A class identity inclusive of political economy and materiality, environment, and space, then, congregates into a grounded, materialist politics of identity. Peasant workers’ identities are closely related to the political economy of the factory and, without explaining such a network, the larger context by which the factory was connected to identity cannot be discussed in depth. Both the workers and the factories become false abstractions in such a scenario.

What are the intellectual stakes of materializing class identity? Who needs such a class identity? Or, with what unannounced intellectual problems is such a delivery of materialized class identity accompanied? Addressing these questions involves a review of identity politics and class identity. Broadly speaking, *identity politics* came into being in political and academic fields in the 1970s. As a marked characteristic, identity politics is raised based on the self-identified small group identities such as gender, sexual orientation, race, or religion. Although identity politics does respond to the social dominance and inequality existing in society, it fails to examine the political economy as central to many forms of social dominance. Its social
grouping is essentially based on the self-identified social interest grouping instead of based on the systematic and historical examination of the political economic inequities of the society (Kauffman, 1990). A class identity thus envisaged does away with the problems of class identity as the overly simplistic arrangements of economic groups in society, which, in turn, is vulgarized to permeate into a questionable cultural sphere.

The Materiality of Identity: The “Substance” of the Self

Identity is at the heart of knowing who one is in relation to a society, a relation in which everyone participates but no one fully controls. Even when the description of society is absent in the conceptualization of identity, the definition of identity has always indicated the existence of society and the latter’s relationship with identity, and, as has been clearly explored over the last four decades, identities are neither essential (Butler, 2004), singular (Deleuze & Guatari, 1987), nor insular (Derrida, 2011). Further, identity is often argued to be an impossible equation of the general and particular (see Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002) and repressive in this sense (Butler, 2004), but it is also understood to be politically crucial (Hall, 1996).

We might begin to track a materialist view of identity. Historically, the formation of a particular Western concept of identity can be traced back to John Locke. In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Vol 1*, Locke ([1690], 1994) centralized the importance of reflexive consciousness and memory in the formation of identity in that “since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e., the sameness of a rational thing” (p. 449). In Locke’s emphasis of consciousness and its crucial faculty of memory, identity is perceived as a thinking self that is distinguishable from other thinking beings. For instance, he considered that “it is always [related to] our present sensations and perceptions: and by this everyone is to
himself that which he calls *self*” (p. 449). For Locke, the existence of self and identity as a consciousness, an understanding, a certain connection of present and past through memory seems to render any material attachment or connections of only secondary importance: “it not being considered in this case, whether the same self be continued in the same or diverse substances” (p. 449). One thing certain to Locke is that consciousness and substance are the binary pair that one is exactly what the other is not. Consciousness assumes an almost autonomous agency in his theorization when he considers that

as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action of thought, so far as it reaches the identity of the person, it is the same self now as it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done. (p. 449)

Therefore, the Lockean formulation of identity locates the presence of self in the *continuation* of the same consciousness. However, the opposite meaning can be shown by the same passage: what, for instance, is the need for consciousness but to “extend backwards to any past action of thought” and why should we as the “present” selves “reflect” at all if selves are absolutely the same as Locke seems to suggest (p. 449)? If identity is only the thinking process over the changes of society, environment, and self, then what might have caused such changes and how could identity—a thinking self at work on its own sameness—simultaneously incorporate such differences through living and constantly reproduce itself at the same time as the same self? In other words, deeply embedded in the Lockean formulation of identity is a personal effort of making peace with the struggles and changes of living that the society inevitably imposes on individuals. What Locke explicated, at most, is a historically insecure identity – a self that has
to face the social changes but strives to maintain his/her conceptual or perceptive balance and continuity.

Such a Lockean contradiction of social changes and individual resistance to social changes is explored by Aronowitz (1992). He explains that, for Locke, identity refers to “the most difficult issue of how individuality is possible in progressively more complex urban environments where identities are constantly buffeted by what [Locke] calls Laws: those of ‘God . . . political societies . . . and the law of fashion or private censure.’” (Aronowitz, 1992, p. 91). Seen from Aronowitz’s understanding, Locke’s contradiction in theorization was clear: At the same time when Locke considered identity as the continuation of consciousness and memories, he was also forced to face many societal interventions to such continuation of consciousness and memories in his theory. While Locke considered that such interventions have “buffeted” identities, he still considered such buffeting interventions as curiously external to identity formation. Identity was still stubbornly formulated as pure and a priori consciousness, memory, and thoughts, only corrupted by those external forces.

In both Locke (1994) and Aronowitz (1992), “environment” was considered to be external to human perception and activities. What Aronowitz deemed as “dialectical” was actually a seriously bracketed dialectics in which much of what constitutes the “external” environment and the roles it plays in “internal” identity formation are yet to be examined. To the most extent, Lockean self seems to be the entirety of consciousness. It is “that conscious thinking thing . . . which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends” (Locke, 1994, p. 307). Yet, such an entirety of consciousness is deemed as free from any mediation/influence of materiality in that “whatever substance, made up of whether spiritual, or material, simple, or
compounded, it matters not” (Locke, 1994, p. 307). Just as Locke added “substance” into his consideration of identity, how it functions was not explicated and is inconsequential to him. The role “substance” plays in the formation of social relationships that constitute identity is bracketed, and thus masked, rather than clarified. Lockean identity is only as “dialectical” as the extent to which substance is constitutive with identity formation.

More seriously, such a lack of emphasis on materiality, substance, and environment posed a contradiction to Lockean identity: Locke has claimed a contradictory self of both being, as Aronowitz (1992) rightly analyzed, “constituted . . . by the external environment” (p. 92) and of a substance that “matters not” (Locke, 1997, p. 307). We might read this as simply a semantic issue. Yet, without an examination of the “substance” of identity formation we are left with a mystery and mysterious “essence” of identity. Given the ongoing critiques of the essential nature of identity, inquiry must not abide such a mystery. The question on how the environment matters must be reconsidered.

Yet, it is from the large scope in which Locke has considered identity that he should be followed, despite the specific theoretical faults that must be revised. The foundation for Lockean identity is that the concept of self was directly positioned against a society, however limited. Identity is the relationships of being within society. Such a scope of identity is also clearly seen in Marx’s (1976) consideration of the relationship between individual people and society. Although Marx did not use the exact term “identity,” his identification of human beings through their involvement in social production contains myriad openings for the formation of identity into his conceptual integration of materiality and physical “substance” into social life. Marx’s materialist integration of “self” and “substance” was achieved first through considering labor (which he advances from Locke’s combination of land and labor), in
a more general sense, as a social process of transforming natural material into social reality. And second, he conceives of this integration complexly—not unidirectionally—by considering human beings as laboring bodies, needs, language, and philosophy as transformed as well in that transformation of nature (see Smith 1984/2008). For Marx, from this self-nature production process emerges class society, social contradictions within the modes of economic production, and barriers (simultaneous with benefits) to human potentialities.

For Marx, labor is not necessarily a class concept, but an integrated social-material process that involves both human purpose as well as natural materials. Instead of being simply contained in bodies, Marx and Engels viewed labor as a process in which materiality is socialized and nature becomes social nature. On the one hand, laboring actions transform the shape and functionality of natural material into social material so that that social material can become a use value and possess exchange value. On the other hand, laboring actions have positioned laborers in a network of social actions of production and circulation; thus, labor is a social relationship through which people are connected and a central means through which people can be identified and reproduced.

What is both invaluable and also controversial in Marx’s (1976) formation of a laboring identity is that identifying people through the formation of political economy seems to emphasize a determined social structural power and overlook or contradict the abilities in which people as meaning-making subjects can identify what they are themselves. In other words, a Marxian concept of identity has a potentially uneasy relationship with experiential formations of self-identification. In relation to a Lockean concept of identity, there exists a historically formed tension regarding identity: How can identity as a concept take into account both the social formation of laboring actions and the conceptions individual people may have
of themselves? Without the former, the latter risks becoming worse than a lazy and meaningless abstraction of autonomous self-willed thinking, for it can very well be taken up by the dominant social power to mask the actually existing social inequity (Lukacs, 1972). Without the latter, the former risks forming a rigid structural determinism that disregards the presence of experiential identification that may very well carry the dissatisfaction and experienced critiques of society, through which detailed contents of a better society can be envisaged (Hall, 1996; Hebdige, 1979). This is particularly true as the Marxian hope that the material environmental experience of class would lead to a unified class-consciousness was shown over and over to be flawed (see Gramsci 2000; Hall 1988).

For Marx (1976), labor is not only actions of laboring, but also the substance that laboring actions work on. In Marx’s own words:

Labour is, first of all, a process between man [*sic*] and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. (p. 284)

The materiality as the object of the labor actions is integrated within the laboring process. Later, Marx made it crystal clear that labor could not be considered separately from the material environment:

In a wider sense we may include among the instruments of labour, in addition to things through which the impact of labour on its object is mediated, and which therefore, in
one way or another, serve as conductors of activity, all the objective conditions necessary for carrying on the labour process. (p. 286)

The products of labor are a *continuation* of both previous substance and utility. They are not only the result of labor, but the result of labor’s organization in certain environments. “The same use-value is both the product of a previous process, and a means of production in a later process. Products are therefore not only results of labour, but also its essential conditions” (p. 287). Through historically positioning products in both the previous production process and the current on-going one, Marx integrated the roles of materiality in a historically positioned production process, and in such a production process, the products, which are mediated through the past human labor, become potential mediations of future human labor.

Thus, labor is a process in which materiality is socialized and in which nature becomes social nature. Despite its apparent irrelevance to identity, such a definition of labor shades the formation of materiality into the *production of self as simultaneously material and social*. Even more importantly, the connection is not made through adding materiality to a purely and abstractly considered sociality, but through materiality as constitutively social since labor is always a social process. Since labor mediates nature into social nature, the conditions of production can become the conditions for human’s positionalities and changes through labor processes. Labor, then, includes not only the human desire for changes, but also the conditions and the transformations of such conditions for the desired changes to take place. Social nature becomes the important medium upon which any thinking about social life must be engaged. The conditions of production also become the conditions for changes in society.

To extend Marx’s (1976) labor formation of social nature to identity, people’s positioning within class society must be mediated through class relations, such as the ways
labor has been organized and capital reproduction realized. Within Cultural Studies, identity, as a key term, has served as a crucial analytical tool since the 1970s. Yet, curiously, the scope of identity as people’s positioning in the social-material relationship—or class—is often bracketed as a “sphere” distinct from gender, sexuality, race, ethnic, and national identities (see Mitchell 1995; 2000). Class identity has been largely replaced by those that Hall (1992a) called “small group identities” and the class relations that can be organized despite gender, sexuality, race, ethnic and national identities, or, more often organized exactly by exploitatively utilizing such identity differences, have been underemphasized.

Interestingly, both Lockean identity and Marxian positioning of labor as central in the formation of society are lost in many much later descriptions of identity. Ironically, such a loss is shown in the very attempt of finding connections between self and society. For instance, Thomas Fitzgerald (1993) rightly pointed out that “looking at identity from the perspective of history suggests that pure self is an illusion” (p. 39). As Fitzgerald considered, “[t]he duality that is the dilemma of human existence always yields some split in identity, the Durkheimian ‘homo duplex’: On the one hand, the individual rooted in biology; on the other, society influencing self and role” (p. 39). The tensions are always felt: “This duality is at the heart of our inner life and represents an inescapable tension between the demands of social life and those of our individual, organic natures” (p. 39). It is not that Fitzgerald did not see identity or society, but his crucial point is that the two are only connected because they are isolated in the first place. Or in other words, the identity and society are still distinctively two entities instead of an intertwined process of social material relations.

Apart from such a fundamental isolation from society in the theorization of identity, identity is often seen as being constructed through an autonomous, self-socialization process.
As an important theoretical branch in intercultural communication, Identity Management Theory (IMT) defines identity exactly through such a self-socialization process. According to Imahori and Cupach (2005), “Identity is formed through mechanisms such as self-categorization into social groups . . . and identification with particular social roles such as husband, wife, teacher, student, and so on” (p. 197). Not only do the authors seem to assume the non-differentiable roles of husbands, wives, teachers, students, but they also ignore that within any actual society, the freedom and liberty of being able to self-categorize into any possible social group and play certain social roles might be the privileges of a few rather than of the whole society. What society contains seems to be both indicated and missed in demonstrating identity as a socialization process.

Defining identity through the process of people’s socialization offers possibilities for identity to cover rich aspects of living experiences. Indeed, what is identity, if it is not a name for a set of actions through which individual people are connected to a society and only through such a connection that each one can have a positionality in such a socialization process. Yet, the socialization process is often reduced to symbolic constructions and categorizations, reduced to discourses and language alone (c.f. Schiffrin, 1996). Such a lack of engagement with society from the broadest sense of connections is, in part at least, accompanied by the over-emphasis of the roles of language and representation as idealistically constructive to identity (Williams 1977). Identity focuses more on how representation can construct the accounts of one’s identity than anything else (Hall, 1992a). Indeed, it might be perplexing that in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Hall (1993) considered identity as a social production yet did not mention any such production processes other than that of representation:
Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production,” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (p. 233)

Such an emphasis on representation came at an unintended cost: the de-emphasis of materiality in the production of identity. However, Hall seemed to hold inconsistent opinions on representation. Sometimes Hall expressed clearly his awareness of the incompleteness of representation in constructing identity but did not develop the roles of materiality as much as he did the roles of representation. As seen in Hall’s (1992a) “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies,” the roles of representation and discourses are more clearly stated:

And yet, there is the nagging doubt that this overwhelming textualization of cultural studies’ own discourses somehow constitutes power and politics as exclusively matters of language and textuality itself. Now, this is not to say that I don’t think that questions of power and the political have to be and are always lodged within representations, that they are always discursive questions. (p. 274)

But if the questions of power, which are so important in the formation of identity, are not “always discursive questions” (p. 274), what can they be? Even in Hall’s most clearly stated doubts on representation and discursive construction, he did not mention the roles of materiality in identity formation.

Historically, cultural studies can be marked by the intent to distance itself from “a certain kind of Marxism” that is deterministic and mechanical (Hall, 1992b, p. 279). Just as Procter (2004) rightly stated, Hall “rejected Marx’s reductive notion of culture as a passive, secondary reflection in order to stress its active, primary, constitutive role in society” (p. 16).
Yet, Hall’s alleviated constitutive role of culture did not dialectically integrate the importance of materialist politics of laboring construction and the political economy of capital. While Marx can indeed be critiqued for a reductive notion of culture, negligence of political economy and materiality in the formation of the majority of Cultural Studies works has left a materialist identity production process out of sight.

Ironically, the negligence of political economy and materiality in the study of identity does not stop identity from being used for its commercial interests. In “After Identity,” Rutherford (2007) shows how such a tension is manifested in people’s living. On the one hand, commercialization of identity has already “transformed the social category of the individual” in that the individual struggle to create a personal identity has become the defining paradigm of how we live in Western cultures: we are called upon to invent our own identity and live in our own way and be true to ourselves. (p. 6)

Yet, on the other hand, identity’s potentialities in transforming society were still undertheorized (see Frank 1998). Rutherford lamented,

Identity, once defined by the new social movements as emancipation from the prejudice and constraints of the old order, has been co-opted by the commercial market value of individual rational choice. Identity has become a more privatized and individualized affair, increasingly defined by social standing and the purchasing of status-giving positional goods. The value of positional goods diminishes as more people acquire them, creating a spiralling of consumption as people strive to maintain their status and identity. . . . The neo-liberal economic order has depoliticized the agency of identity by
reconstituting social activities and relations between people, as market relations between individuals and things. (p. 6)

What has been discussed previously in the instance of IMT, in that individuals allegedly assume their identities through “self-categorization” (Imahori & Cupach, 2005), is clearly positioned against powerful social ideologies, in which no self-categorization, however autonomous it might seem, can be free from the material social relations of society. Yet, in Rutherford’s (2007) formulation of identity, economy seems to be a force in “depoliticize[ing] the agency of identity” (p. 6). Such an economic order also seems to be so absolute in its power of “reconstituting social activities and relations between people, as market relations between individuals and things” (p. 6). Such contrasting positionings of identity—IMT for “self-categorization,” Rutherford for a commodity eroded and destructed identity, and Cultural Studies negligence of materiality—make it necessary for an identity theory that dialectically reconciles the forces of economic order, individual experiences, and the roles of materiality. The danger of identity that Rutherford has sensed indeed exists, although not to the extent that we must abandon identity altogether. When identity has been commercialized and become an active constituent of neoliberal social order, the crucial question for us is what it takes to make identity politically more relevant to social critique. If the power of economic order lies in “reconstituting social activities and relations between people,” and if, in doing this, identity has been used to constitute a capitalist economic order, then, it is theoretically possible to rethink what it takes for identity to contribute to the changes of the capitalist economic order (see Hardt & Negri, 2010).

The possibility and necessity of viewing identity as both being produced by a new economic order and as, therefore, being responsible and capable of intervening in such an
economic order was not to be found, unfortunately, in Rutherford’s (2007) formulation of identity. Rutherford rightly asserted that “[t]he ideal of individual self-determined freedom promised by neo-liberalism is not the world it [neo-liberalism] has brought into existence” (p. 16). Yet, instead of engaging the paths towards new social transformations, especially by critically examining the ways identity has been made, he turns to the liberal ethics and values of undifferentiated and common “liberty, equality and fraternity” (p. 15) as the social aims to pursue “After Identity.” Rutherford (2007) asserted:

The commodification of identity intensifies our anxiety at finding ourselves with strangers in a world that holds no intrinsic meaning or purpose. Difference becomes a source of persecution. In the face of this “nullity” and the paranoia it creates, there is no choice but to create ethical and political meaning: to face one another and persevere in our efforts to make contact and establish communication. (pp. 16-17)

And the communication, understood by Rutherford primarily as establishing connections with other people as central, is not solely meaningful in this process because

[t]he giving of recognition and the need to be recognized by others is fundamental to our existence. Identity is about sameness. Recognition confirms our interdependency. . . . There is nothing more in the world than individuals and what is between us. After identity there is ethical life, which is what we make out of what lies between. In this respect we are all always off centre, reaching out towards the other. (p. 17)

Rutherford’s romanticization of “liberty, equality and fraternity,” nails the coffin for identity, an admittedly problematic concept. Perhaps this is a premature funeral. The romanticization stops any possible serious engagement with political economy and the material social relations through which political economy is currently formed. Not only does it not
examine political economy and material social relations of the former’s production, but it also
does not perceive any previous social structures, institutions, and organizations. All these
structures, institutions, and organizations are combined into too vague a statement that “there is
nothing more in the world than individuals and what is between us” (p. 17). Identity could not
assume any political and economic relevance in Rutherford’s (2007) understanding of identity,
precisely because the material forces that constitute politics and economics “are melted into
air, into thin air” (Shakespeare, *The Tempest* Act 4, Scene 1, 148-158).

This is not to say that “liberty, equality and fraternity,” which Rutherford (2007)
proposed as ethics, are not key values or that I intend to argue for the permanence of identity.
No world without such ethics is worth desiring, arguing, and fighting for. It is not that such
ethics are not worth seeking. It is, rather, that desiring such ethics without attending to the
*immediate* social conditions that might lead to their realization would lead to overlooking the
current difficulties that simultaneously undermine the ethics.

7See for instance, how very similar and ironic between Rutherford’s (2007) idea that “[t]here is nothing more in the
world than individuals and what is between us” (p. 17) and the famous Thatcherism neo-liberal acclimation that
“[t]here is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. There is living
tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon
how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves and each of us prepared to turn round and help
by our own efforts those who are unfortunate” (Thatcher, 1987; cited in Douglas Keay, *Woman’s Own*, 31 October
1987, pp. 8–10). In such a neoliberalism-influenced way of viewing the world, individuals assume an autonomous
and *a priori* existence and their social construction process through a historical class formation of course becomes
subdued. Identity is individualistic as individuals can assume freely their identities. Wouldn’t Thatcher herself
propose a set of ethics should Rutherford have failed to do so?

8Prospero: Our revels now are ended. These our actors,/As I foretold you, were all spirits, and/Are melted into air,
into thin air:/And like the baseless fabric of this vision,/The cloud-capp’d tow’rs, the gorgeous palaces,/The solemn
temples, the great globe itself,/Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,/And, like this insubstantial pageant
faded,/Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff/As dreams are made on; and our little life/is rounded with a sleep.
Manifesto.*”
“Classlessness” and the Appeal to Ethics

In turning towards ethics after abandoning identity, Rutherford (2007) is emblematic of a dominant neglect of the material functioning of political/economic relations. In abandoning identity, he also abandons class, wrongly taking the two as mutually exclusive. Sharing the same neglect, theorists such as Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005) have become major preachers of such classless ethics and affects. In Appiah’s *The Ethics of Identity*, he argues for a liberalist human dignity as the very goal of pursuing identity. While Appiah admits that “we human beings are naturally and inevitably social,” this “social” meaning of human beings indicates a classless and normalized ethics. As Appiah explains it, “social” means that, first,

we are incapable of developing on our own, because we need human nurture, moral and intellectual education, practice with language, if we are to develop into full persons. This is a sociality of mutual dependence. Second, . . . we desire relationship with others: friends, lovers, parents, children, the wider family, colleagues, neighbors. This is sociality as an end. And third, . . . many other things we value -- literature, and the arts, the whole world of culture; education; money; and, in the modern world, food and housing -- depend essentially on society for their production. This is instrumental sociality . . . . [T]his picture recognizes the social construction of the individual self. (pp. 267-268)

What Appiah demonstrates so usefully here is the point of “mutual dependence,” in large part the aim of Marx’s critique of the myths of political economy. Yet, he considers sociality, a general and undifferentiated whole in his usage, to be the solution when such sociality, a certain relation of it, is the very cause of the problem he hopes to solve. Yet, he is never able or willing to distinguish different forces in such sociality and analyze them. Instead, Appiah calls
for a classless inter-dependence and friendship. However, such a call can only remain an unrealizable utopia as long as class struggles and capitalism’s world economic and political maneuvers are untouched. A classless inter-dependence and friendship can only exist when class has been eliminated on the global scale. Before that, calling for it is no different from asking Chunxia to believe that the disappeared managerial personnel are going to come back and pay her back wages. Even if Appiah can persuade Chunxia to show her classless friendship to her social environment, would the disappeared personnel buy Appiah’s preaching for his religious individualist approach to achieving social transformation? What is the equity of footing between Chunxia and the managerial personnel for Appiah’s equity of will?

To a great extent, Appiah (2005) has hoped for a theoretical outlet resembling the “true” socialism that Marx and Engels critiqued as such in the *Communist Manifesto*. The theorization of “True Socialism” has ceased to express the struggle of one class against another, . . . [the ‘true’ socialist] felt conscious of . . . representing, not true requirements, but the requirements of Truth; not the interests of the proletariat, but the interests of Human Nature, of Man in general, who belongs to no class, has no reality, who exists only in the misty realm of philosophical fantasy. (Marx & Engels, p. 25)

Appiah’s (2005) misplaced belief in a general ethics of friendship is representative of the thought that started in the 1980s, which Wood (1998) called “the new ‘true’ socialism (NTS)” (p. 1). Wood pointed out that NTS prides itself on a rejection of Marxist ‘economism’ and ‘class-reductionism’, has virtually excised class and class struggle from the socialist project. The most distinctive
feature of this current is the autonomization of ideology and politics from any social basis, and more specifically, from any class foundation. (pp. 1-2)

Appiah’s (2005) clinging to ethics for a capitalized *Human*, then, is a typical NTS denial of class. The ethics conceptualized by Appiah works in the exact way that Wood (1998) had anticipated in that “a socialist movement can be constructed by ideological and political means which are relatively (absolutely?) autonomous from economic class conditions, motivated . . . by the rational appeal of ‘universal human goods’ and the reasonableness of the socialist order” (p. 2). Geographers such as Neil Smith (2000) echoed Wood’s critique of “the retreat from class” and pointed out that “class represents a crucial political dimension of social difference” (p. 1011). Similar to Wood’s (1998) point, Smith (2000) has seen no hope of qualitative social changes in morality and capitalist liberal multiculturalism (cf. Brennan, 2006; Chilcote, 1990; Dowling, 2009; Goodwin, 1992). To him, “[m]ulticulturalism comes to look like an apology for capitalist ‘diversity’ while politics in academic circles is increasingly equated with the liberal common denominator of morality” (p. 1011). Thus, instead of “a narrow back-to-class appeal,” Smith (2000) proposes to “reintegrat[e] class into the issues of identity and cultural politics” (p. 1011).

Although the aversion to class in critical scholarship has been fairly recent, from the 1960s to the present (Smith, 2000), the lack of class as a dimension of identity has acquiesced to the formation and popularity of classless ethics as an identity subject. The appeal for affection and ethics, at least in part, stems directly from a denial of class and political economy within identity analysis. However, the more serious question of class is how it can change from an important “dimension of social difference” (Smith, 2000) to an important dimension of
social organization, thus organizing social forces and subjects into “a class for itself” on the basis of “a class in itself.”

It is through Hardt and Negri’s (2004) *Multitude* that a sense of classlessness reaches its pinnacle. Hardt and Negri’s multitude mentions quite a few identities as the differences to which their concept *multitude* applies, without mentioning class at all: “The multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity – different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labor; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires” (p. xiv). Thus, I argue, Hardt and Negri’s *multitude* covers a linchpin of categorical differences without organizing them in a practiceable order. Class identity is not only absent from such a list of differences, but its potentiality in forming and organizing such differences is also absent. As a sequel to the two authors’ *Empire, Multitude* is meant to theorize a global politics that is well beyond the descriptions of imperialism (p. xiv). Yet, although the multitude is meant to be inclusive to different identities, its power of inclusion can only exist as an illusion. We have to question: without attending to the forces that can organize *multitude*, how can the multitude itself become a unified social force?

Indeed, in rightly hoping for social changes, Hardt and Negri (2004) potentially mistake problems as solutions and trusted blindly on the non-direction that a plethora of not organized differences lead them to. It is my critique that the authors in these first two works offered no discussions of actual social situations and contexts for certain kinds of differences to take leading roles in forming social changes. Without any kind of unity, differences themselves cannot form meaningful and sustainable social activities and movements or any political edge (even to ultimately do away with identity).
In Hardt and Negri’s (2009) *Commonwealth*, a continuation of the previous two volumes, the two authors use the concept *singularity* to describe such an unorganized subject for social changes. Harvey (2009) criticizes the notion of singularities:

This notion of singularities carries over into the revolutionary view that we can in fact strip ourselves of any and all signs of identity -- racial, class-related, gender-based, sexual, ethnic, religious, and territorial -- and somehow strip ourselves down to a state of pure being from which we can reconstruct ourselves according to entirely different principles. We literally have to forget who we are, where we were born, and how our sociality has been formed through geographically grounded life experiences. But this is where the problem of our identity as, for example, producers and consumers and as grounded geographic beings enters the picture. ("*Commonwealth: An exchange*")

Interestingly, Hardt and Negri’s (2009) concept of singularity forces us to consider identity issues when the many nominal elements of the categorical identities have been forced open: everyday living becomes crucial in our consideration of any identity issue. Therefore, it is my extension that the contents of everyday life are important contents of identity and vice versa. But different from Hardt and Negri, engaging everyday living does not mean an undifferentiated importance in every aspect of everyday living. Rather, Brennan’s (2006) critique of Hardt and Negri (2001) *Empire* has emphasized economics since it constitutes important contents of everyday life. For Brennan, economics is “a material calculus of scarcity and demand, utility and disutility” (p. 177). In my understanding, even when everyday living could somehow deprive everyone of all kinds of symbolic identities, the actualities of living suggest an inescapable presence of class informing various other aspects of everyday living.
Including class into the formation of identity as living experiences, then, holds the potential for making identity relevant to a politics of living.

**What is Class Identity?**

Many discussions of class result from impoverished formulations of vulgar Marxism and economic determinism. Others discuss class as yet another identity parallel to, for instance, racial and gender identities. While the former tends to deem economy as an external force that produces identity as a simple effect, the latter often treats class in simple conceptual terms as yet another dimension in conjunction with identities such as race and gender identities. Indicated in this latter is a negligence of the importance of economy in the formation of social living that none of other identities can replace. Thus, this section seeks to elicit a more useful definition of class by tracing its Marxian development and its possible expansions as well as revisions. Such a (re)turn to Marxian origin, however, is not a pilgrimage for a pure and uncontaminated concept of class that Marx could be imagined to have created. On the contrary, I would trace the Marxian development of class to show how class can be and has always been reproducing itself constitutively with other identity production processes that constitute the everyday living experiences. The problem and goal are to reconceptualize class so as to find a more politically useful conceptualization of class identity. Expanding the first way of understanding class identity, I further illustrate that the social reproduction process contains much richer theoretical opportunities for understanding class identity. In other words, to understand class identity, we must understand its production; to understand its production, we must understand the social reproduction process—or the conditions of reproducing not just living humans but their conditions of life. Connected to such an expanded theoretical potential is the central importance of materiality in producing class identity.
Marxian Formation of Class

Let us explore the notion of class in more depth. One way would be to understand class through a Marxian formulation, not as an origin, but a reference point where theoretical renovations can be compared as one of the most influential ways in which class has been defined. Marx ([1933], 1976, 2004) understood class through a production process, which is fundamentally material:

In the process of production, human beings work not only upon nature, but also upon one another. They produce only by working together in a specified manner and reciprocally exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations to one another, and only within these social connections and relations does their influence upon nature operate – i.e., does production take place. These social relations between the producers, and the conditions under which they exchange their activities and share in the total act of production, will naturally vary according to the character of the means of production. (p. 28)

Marx’s description here concentrated on the formative process through which class can come into being as a social formation, a crucial text against which class/identity is defined in opposition. It is important to note that such a description of class identity aims at defining class relative to a “share in the total act of production” (Marx, [1933], 1976, 2004, p. 28). Class cannot be seen as the total relationship of social production. Rather, it is a historical and particular formation of social production. Furthering the notion of class demands engaging with the regionally specific networks of social production actions to examine the particular roles of materiality in the formation of class relations⁹. Within the foundation of social production as a whole, “class” denotes shared differences in the social relationships to labor.

⁹ Refer here to a definition of class: http://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/c/l.htm
and the means of production. *Class relationship, however, has to be understood in that historical moment, to be constructive to the social production of that period. Class is not simply high income or low income.*

While overall social production is important, Marx and Engels (1996) also formulated a much more formative notion of class through social production. They described a situation in which “the collisions between individual workers and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes,” and in which workers unionize and “club together” (p. 831) to fight against the bourgeoisie; thus, they came to a much clearer notion of class formation:

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lie not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by Modern Industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralize the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. (Marx & Engels, 2000, p. 10)

The above is a vastly productive description. Yet it often slips away from the attention of scholars either supporting or criticizing Marx. First, class as an identity is a constant construction process. Second, concrete social material processes, such as wage struggles, unionization, communication and connections of multiple local struggles, all participate in class identity construction. Third, connected to the previous two, class identity can be better understood as reorganizing one’s positionality within the political, economic network that reaches far beyond what is conventionally considered economic. While Hall (1988) has
discussed the disconnect between the material conditions above and the forms of consciousness that may prevent Marx’s revolutionary consciousness (Lukacs, 1971), this is not a refutation of the condition of class. Overall, materiality of various kinds, in forms not limited to wage struggles, unionization, and communications, plays a crucial role in producing class as a social relationship and may or may not construct commensurate political identities. Understanding these materialities is crucial for understanding class and thus the formation of class identity. To better understand such materialities, recent work in cultural and economic geography must be incorporated into cultural studies concepts of class and identity.

**Theoretical Ramifications on Class Identity**

One’s class identity is directly related to what is meant by class. Recent studies of class in human geography have demonstrated a healthy common emphasis on seeking to ground class in the most complex social and material settings. One way of locating class identity in the midst of complex social material settings is to see how class identity intersects with gender and ethnicity (McDowell, 2010; Rogaly & Taylor, 2009). As McDowell (2010) stated, class is “not merely categories but mutable lived identities that cannot be understood without an analysis of structural changes and the intersections between multiple social categories, constructed in relation and often opposition to other classes, genders, and ethnicities” (p. 241). McDowell further materialized such structural changes and intersections as including Doreen Massey’s theorization of place and “community studies of cities, rural areas, and provincial towns” that “did not neglect the effects of state policies, … or economic restructuring that decimated community ties” (p. 241). In McDowell’s efforts, class does not only intersect with other identities, but it must also be understood in coordination with concrete spatialities as well as
social and economic structures. It might be argued that those “other” identities are formative of class as a relationship to the means of production in its particular historical conditions.

Such a constitutive concept is not the norm. As Dowling (2009) rightly characterized current analysis of class, such studies are “less concerned with class as a form of socio-economic classification, a position in the labour market or as a relationship to the means of production, and more concerned with the ways class as an identity is forged and experienced” (p. 834). Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor (2009) also broke new ground by locating class through its formation process, in particular, “within [the] nexus of particularity and change stories of diverse, contingent, and ambivalent identities and senses of belongings” (cited in McDowell, 2010, p. 241). Jim Glassman (2006) further pointed out the social reproduction process in general and household labor in particular as indispensable in providing a labor force for capital and in making possible the capital accumulation. Glassman recognized the emphasis on the social reproduction process as one of the most important contributions of feminists in the study of class:

The ways in which household labor (productive and reproductive) and subsistence production have undergirded and made possible the accumulation of capital in the money economy, particularly through the role of this labor in social reproduction of a labor force that can be directly exploited by capital. (p. 617)

Clearly seen from Glassman’s appreciation of such feminist work is a turn toward understanding class not as an abstract ideology, but as a process of production that is tangible and experiential as it attempts to ground the understanding of capital operations to everyday practices and spaces.
Understanding class within or constitutive with already formed identities has important theoretical advantages. For one thing, in the analysis of class, such views recognize the presence and relevance of the named social relations and institutions as actual social agencies that are related to broader class formation. For another, such an understanding of class formation through its connection with the already existing social relations, such as gender formations, helps avoid theoretically constructing class in isolation from other social processes. Both these aspects show the shift in academic attention from examining class as categorical existence to examining the actual social happenings as formative to class identity. McDowell’s (2008) explanation of class through gendered differentiations in constructing a kind of division of labor illustrates how class has been grounded from an abstraction into a more embodied production process:

As numerous commentators have noted, the old Fordist industrial order was based on a particular gender division of labor: male full-time employment and women’s work of social reproduction in the household. This division was supported by discriminatory tax and social security systems and by the absence of either collective or private services to replace women’s domestic labour and responsibilities for childcare. Thus, a particular division of labour is built on a set of interconnections between the labour market, the household and state institutions. (p. 23)

A number of important social relations have been named in this short quotation: gender (male and female), differential taxes, social security system, labor, labor market, and childcare. Connected to such social relations, a number of spaces have been involved in such an explanation of class: industrial factory floors, homes and households, labor market, as well as
the sites of other different social institutions such as tax agencies and the social security system.

Apart from its methodological insight, McDowell’s (2008) and Glassman’s (2006) considerations have secretly crossed an accepted boundary in understanding class. Class is understood not through direct capital production alone. Instead, the two authors have made bold moves towards understanding class vis-à-vis the spaces and social relations. Marx and Engels (2004) push us in *The German Ideology* to consider the broader relations of social production as a whole. Understanding class via spaces not only responds to Marx and Engels’ advocacy, but also ingeniously focuses on a subject that is deeply connected to social relations, a subject that Marx and Engels might not have envisaged. Such a cross-over is especially important, for it examines the often underpaid or frequently ignored labor, which is essential for capital production and reproduction to exist. Harvey (2009) reaffirmed the importance of such a cross-over in the study of class when he stated:

> For many years now, I and others have been arguing that the exclusive focus in Marxian political theory on the working classes in the factories made no sense. It was theoretically wrong because it ignored the production of urbanization, the production of space, and all the workers employed in such activities. It was historically inaccurate, given how many of the revolutionary movements in the history of capitalism have been focused as much on urban discontentment with the quality of daily life as on factory-based grievances and even where they were key movements in the factories . . ., it always turned out that organized support in the neighborhoods . . . played a critical but uncelebrated role in the political action. (“Commonwealth: An exchange”)
On a more general level, such explorations of spaces and activities that are not typically discussed in conventional understandings of Marxian “class” are nevertheless immensely instrumental in grounding class in the actual happening social material relations of everyday living. In terms of understanding class vis-a-vis class identity, the theoretical attention to the everyday happenings as experienced by individuals offers class a traceable production process through embodied social material relations. Moreover, in terms of the physical spaces—or, what we can begin to work through as part of the *substance* of identity—the changed theoretical attention suggests that the spaces of capital production are not the only places of capitalist activities and, therefore, capitalist class formation activities. Instead, class formation activities and class identity can be located in multiple, yet connected, spaces. If the “retreat from class” described by Ellen Wood (1998) has been in part a response to perceived economic reductionism in the use of “class,” my argument here is that a deeper and more Marxian understanding of class is required, not the opposite.

While each previous theorization of class offers different aspects of social production as an emerging place for class, they give common attention to the roles of materiality in actual social processes. Seeing economy through its social material-mediated production process offers an expanded view of economy. Such a view positions economy back into the social material relations that also constitute people’s livelihood and, therefore, their identity as the positionality within such social material relations.

Economic production processes, therefore, offer great opportunities to examine the materiality of producing class identity. First, with the production of economic processes involving material conditions and labor’s social reproduction, economic determinism can be replaced by much more dialectical, multi-directional, and sometimes mutual interconnections
of overdetermination (see Glassman, 2006; Williams, 1977). In turn, the roles of materiality can be examined in areas that include economic processes for a better understanding of class identity production.

Such a change of the conceptualization of economy makes the formation of class identity open to regional differences and globalization of capital accumulation and inequity. Importantly, the theorization of class identity, then, can both cover the local specificities and link such specificities to the larger scale social consequences as important to class identity formation. With such a change in the theorization of class identity, the very content of the meaning of class becomes an empirical question of how class identity is actually formed, with the formation itself open to the local specificities of social structures, spatial formations, policies, familial relations, social values, and laboring activities. The change, then, directs the theoretical attention of class identity to the everyday practices in which materiality must work, and always has worked, as a part of the sociality.

**Manufacturing Class Identity: Materiality from Conditions to Mediation**

Another historical return to Marxian considerations of materiality is worthwhile to conceptualize class identity through actually happening everyday practices in their environment. On the one hand, such a historical return is first aimed against tendencies of overemphasizing textual or linguistic practices at the expense of material conditions and limits. It is also aimed against tendencies of distinguishing “cultural” realms or spheres from “economic” ones when materiality is discussed (Mitchell 1995, 2000). On the other hand, it is also aimed at including materiality as part of the social material relations and as part of the everyday experiences within cultural studies of class. One way of doing so is seeing how materiality has been theorized previously.
In the end, tracing back into the theorization of class aims to link class with everyday practices. It is through such experienced class formation processes that class can be understood critically within the context of projects of “class identity.” In other words, class identity has to be identifiable and meaningful to people, and this requires an understanding of class in its connections to daily experiences. Class experienced in everyday life is the very basis for claiming class identity. The actual activities of living and working, and the environment in which such activities occurs, then, become crucial in forming the specific kinds of class identity as experienced every day.

Although such a formation of class has approached the term through everyday practices and the environments in which such activities occurs, it suffers, however, from a view in which environments and human activities are isolated in the reified categorization that distinguishes activities as human and the environment as nonhuman. The latter can, therefore, only be passively used by the former. However, such intuitive wisdom clearly invites an autonomous self that is somehow free from the environment. Marxian views, however, can provide a rich meaning of social-materiality. Materiality, including the environment, is an integral part, or the other half, of human activities, without which human activities cannot exist at all. Such a crucial relationship is contained in Marx’s conception of labor.

For Marx, labor is not a social process that has to be placed physically within a material setting; rather, it is only by being together with materiality that labor as a theoretical totality can be complete. Marx’s formulation, then, is full of theoretical subtlety. Seen from the angle of materiality, it is not to be understood as a passive setting or object to be worked on, for its very nature limits the ways in which the specific labor actions can be performed. It is also in this sense that materiality can also be said to determine the nature of labor, instead of labor
determining materiality. In Marx’s understanding, labor has to be considered together with the materiality that limits, and therefore, mediates labor’s performance. So, such labor can be understood as the laboring activities that are mediated by materiality. Such materiality mediates labor by providing conditions and setting limitations on how labor can be performed.

Understanding materiality as a condition suggests its a priori existence. Such a priori existence is true in the sense that materiality comes from nature or is a part of nature. Yet, the a priori existence of materiality fails to take account of human labor that has to participate through the labor process to produce materiality in certain shapes rather than others. More than just as the object for labor actions to produce and modify, materiality, in the forms of factories, transportation routes, and many other forms of infrastructure, works also as the conditions in which production has to take place. The material mediation of labor—and, thus, everyday life—is a necessarily circular relationship. Neither conditions nor environment can work, or have social functions, without the human activities working on them in certain ways. But this is not to suggest conditions and environments are only passively used by human activities. Indeed, one important aspect of mediation is that environments and conditions, through their particular shapes and functionalities, set limits on the types of human activities that can be performed.

Laboring activities and materiality, thus, form a mutual mediation process. Material conditions mediate laboring activities by the very nature of the object of labor and by the limits and possibilities provided by working environment. Labor activities mediate material conditions by the very activities that change the features and shapes of those conditions. Even the simplest laboring activity—and for Williams (1977) thought and language—cannot be isolated from the mediation of materiality. Importantly, what we call materiality actually
stands in several social material relations: First, as Neil Smith ([1984], 1990, 2008) considers, from the very beginning of human beings, the (trans)formation of nature has never stopped. Any existing environment is importantly the result of both the natural materiality and its historically layered human laboring activities\textsuperscript{10}. Thus, the environments, physical spaces, and any settings are all the results of past labor and layers of transformed materiality.

Materiality as a mediation of labor and social relations, then, can be expanded to the physical environment, settings of working and living, that are themselves the results of past, organized labor. Materiality as mediation in this sense means both to provide possibilities and to set limits through the process of mediation. Often, it suggests that the features of the materiality have in certain ways supported the demands and in other ways limited the possibilities so that the forms of the whole spatial process are simultaneously made possible and limited. Take a classic Marxian example for instance. Gold has a physical potential to function as currency because it “contains” large value in small volume. While such a feature has enabled gold to be a currency (therefore, gold can mediate exchanges), the heavy weight of gold and the high unit price of gold make it both cumbersome and unsafe to use in a transaction. Thus, the whole social presence of gold-mediated business transactions would take a certain form of, say, transactions in heavily guarded places, the existence of professional experts assessing the purity of gold, and even the very shapes of wallets and daily mechanisms of usage. Examining the materiality of gold helps us understand the ways in which business transactions have to be conducted, just as examining the materiality of peasant workers’ wages and dorms can inform us of ways in which the peasant workers’ identities are both supported and limited through the laboring process mediated by wages and dorms.

\textsuperscript{10} I here use laboring activities to refer to the direct actions performed by human beings as distinguished from Marx’s understanding of labor as a totality of materiality and human laboring activities.
Secondly, materiality is both the product of past labor and the condition upon which current labor performs. Materiality includes space and environment as integral parts of the labor process (Kirsch & Mitchell, 2004; Marx, 1976). In such a sense, the emphasis is on how the presence, often in the present forms of such materiality, can serve as important mediations of any social relations. Thus, its presence with certain forms has a social material consequence of shifting the laboring activities. Any material setting, or spatial form, is the result of past labor upon the previous forms of the setting. Then, as a result, such material setting not only indicates a history of its production but also suggests its present power to limit, in socially important ways, current laboring activities. It is, therefore, both a social material process as well as the concrete presence, which functions as an agency.

Third, materiality constitutes the often-missing part of the social construction process. Marcuse (1964) emphasizes the function of materiality by suggesting that the material world serve as the crucial negative part for any thought to be realized. The crucial element for all social struggles, then, lies in changing such material social conditions. As Marcuse states, such materiality of negativity is named so because
dialectical thought understands the critical tension between "is" and "ought" first as an ontological condition, pertaining to the structure of Being itself. However, the recognition of this state of Being—its theory—intends from the beginning a concrete practice. Seen in the light of a truth which appears in them falsified or denied, the given facts themselves appear false and negative. (p. 137)

Marcuse says that an often-missed point of the importance of materiality is that material limits do more than just confine certain specific activities. The limitations also have functions of historical vector, which points to the directions of societal changes. The limitations of
materiality become the necessary material aspect of societal changes that social progress has to consider seriously.

The third meaning of materiality has more to do with the biased previous theorization that often misses materiality, but this meaning also has its applicable significance in informing everyday laboring practices. In that materiality limits everyday laboring activities, examining the present forms of materiality on any given site possibly reveals the difficulties of laboring activities. Interestingly, take Marx’s (1994) famous statement that “[people] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” (p. 1) as one example. The statement can be understood for its methodological underpinning: that the conditions under which people make the world reveal the limits placed on them and on the changes they can make. Identity is central to both the limits and the changes.

**Material Networks of Capitalism: Physical and Social Spaces of Class Identity**

“Space” is a particular way of thinking about the particular materialities that mediate labor and, further, mediate the class identity production process. In recent decades, some Marxian scholars have been concerned with the roles of space in forming capitalism. Henri Lefebvre (1991) advocates the importance of space for social change in his statement: “‘Change life!’ ‘Change society!’ These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space” (p. 59). Don Mitchell (1996) raises the question: “[h]ow does the geographical configuration of the landscape contribute to the survival of capitalism?” (p. 12). Mitchell considers it “the very question that has shaped the struggle . . . over the look of . . . [space]” (p. 12). In order for capitalist production to work, space has to be formed and reformed to carry out certain tasks of specific class interests. David Harvey (2008; See also...
Harvey, 2000, pp. 158-160) in his analysis of what “the city” is, quotes urban sociologist Robert Park (1967) to provide an illustration for a more general understanding of space. According to Park, a city is

man’s [sic] most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart’s desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself. (p. 3)

What is central to these understandings of space is that neither class interests, nor social rights, nor daily living can exist outside space. In other words, class interests, social rights, and daily living all need to take on a physical presence and be mediated. Space is a crucial way of understanding the material social mediation of all these interests, rights, and living activities. Seeing how space is produced necessitates how labor has been organized for spatial productions to take place. Such a production of space, with the organization of labor, is conditioned by the previous formations of space. Space is also historical; therefore, it can be seen as a material social formation, a mediation, and a modality through which class interests and rights can be changed by formulating components of forces that come into its shaping differently. As such, space serves as a material mediation in the production of class identity because the production of commodity takes the interconnections of spaces to complete (Bridge, 2002; Coe, Dicken, & Hess, 2008; Coe, Kelly, & Yeung, 2007; Dicken, Kelly, Olds, & Yeung, 2001).

Instead of just a physical environment upon and in which activities of living and working take place, two major kinds of connections and social material relations become perceivable through a “spatial turn” (see Smith 1992). First, any given materiality for analysis
has its immediate space, both constituted by labor and conditioning labor. Second, all spaces, in turn, are formed through actions that are connected with other spaces. Thus, any given materiality incurs a multi-space network explanation. Not only can wage, products, factories and cities, laboring activities, places of living and rest not be isolated, but their connections can be relinked through a spatial approach, by attending to the particular spaces where these moments of labor occur to examine how space can hinge all these relations together. Together, each of these spaces can then be analyzed by focusing on the specific social forces that have contributed to their formation. Of course, such a method of theorization might first appear too polyvalent to constitute a manageable research subject, mainly due to unconventional focus on multiple sites. However, it actually helps detect the constitutive relations that happen at these multiple sites through varied social forces beyond any explicit or implied single-sited analysis. “Where does class identity happen?” is then not a peripheral question attached to “What is identity?” Space is socialized materiality, Marx’s social nature mediates labor and the production of human identity through spatialized everyday being. The examination of space, therefore, contains the potential of seeing both the activities that make space itself and what happens within space. Then, class identity as experienced human positionality through people’s everyday practices gains a unique perspective by looking at how space has mediated such beings.

Mitchell (1996) succinctly discusses space’s importance and social construction in terms of landscape, which he characterizes as: 1) “a process of labor,” 2) the “social organization” through which labor has been organized into a certain form for its production and its current interactions with other entities, and 3) despite its physical presence, which seems to be deprived of meanings, is filled with social meanings of “relations of power and
conflict” (p. 6). Thus, particularly as it relates to the third point that Mitchell makes above, it is important to view space as “both a work and an erasure of work” (p. 6), both the latter’s embodiment and naturalization. Thus conceived, landscapes in particular, and physical spaces in general, are never just nature, nor just material. Instead, they are fraught with social power relations and class struggles, many of which are formative to class identity. Seeing Chunxia in her scarcely furnished dorm and listening to her story about the locked factory gate and absent managerial personnel, then, is nothing trivial or contingent. Rather, these spaces are central to a class identity Chunxia assumes, by participating in the spatial scheme of globalized capitalism and by tentatively and suddenly being laid off from capitalism’s immediate operations. Thus, attending to particular forms of space offers an ingenious access to Chinese peasant workers class identity production.

**Chinese Peasant Workers and the Particular Spatial Forms of Class Identity Production**

More specifically, spatial mediation is possible because particular social and physical spaces are linked to others through human activities. Then, any space is a spatial network, through which social material processes of identity production can be examined in the most materialist way possible. As I would analyze in detail, the laboring activities for earning wages are mediated through both the factory and dormitory spaces, which are further connected to the internationalized space of production by the production standards. Such production standards, in the form of protocols and regulations specific for conducting production activities, are often a joint invention between the target companies and the manufacturing companies. Thus, the immediate wage-earning activities, mediated through factory and dorm spaces, are further mediated through international production spaces. The links between these spaces not only
penetrate the often-separated research on international capital production and laborers’ experiences, but also, only through such a penetration, the social material reasons and consequences of class identity formation can be understood more comprehensively. As a result, the links between spaces can mediate class identity production since such links form a translocal formation that connects capital’s production process with the labor production process.

It is exactly through such connected spaces of factories and dorms that the production standards stop to be rules on paper, but instead become realized productive activities from laborers. When Marx defines labor as “a process in which both man [sic] and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature” (p. 173), he indicates a material condition for labor to be. Space is indeed indicated in such a material condition. In a more direct sense, without space, the laboring actions of “setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature’s productions in a form adapted to his own wants” (p. 173) cannot have a physical condition to be. A more complicated and realistic sense of space always functions with space as physical condition: that with the mediation of space, the various social organizations of labor, either in the form of international production standards, or in other forms, are actualized. “Setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands” (p. 173) is then not deliberate autonomous activities of any individuals’ free-willed actions, but the deeply organized actions of production for capital reproduction. Space, then, is always a mediation of such complicated integration of social material forces that come into the formation of specific living and working activities.
Although everything is always already spatial, certain particular characteristics of spaces as materialized social forces and relations make it possible for Katz’s “vagabond capitalism” to settle in specific locales. Such settlement is crucial because the spatial settlement is the necessary condition for capital to be capital, being able to reproduce; thus, the intricate and specific mediation of social material forces through local space actually has a larger-than-local dimension of significance. Factories and dorms of any local origin can be potentially international, and the international can only take the form of the local for the international to be realized. (Katz, 2001a, 2001b; Mitchell, 2000; Swyngedouw, 1997; Swyngedouw, 2004).

Examining the specific local spatial formations, then, takes on a new significance and so does He Chunxia’s living experience. As Cindi Katz (2001a) argues, “any politics that effectively counters capitalism's global imperative must confront the shifts in social reproduction that have accompanied and enabled it” (p. 709). Seeing how the shifts in social reproduction are done through spaces of everyday living and working experiences constitutes a tangible approach for understanding capitalism’s global imperative in its local formation in the city of Shenzhen.

Although a spectrum of activities and spaces can serve such a purpose, in my dissertation, I have chosen wage and dormitory formation to understand the production of peasant workers’ class identity because these two processes are inseparable from both peasant workers’ everyday experiences and the industrial manufacturing. In other words, these two processes closely link the industrial manufacturing process with the class identity manufacturing process. Seeing how peasant workers earn their wages and live in their dormitories is seeing how internationalized capital realizes itself through the spatially mediated and organized laboring activities, both at the moment of production and social reproduction.
Such mediation through space and materiality is further linked to a much larger area of concern, over the subsumption of the countryside by cities for a nationwide, Chinese effort of capital production (Buck, 2007; Cox, 1998; Cox & Mair, 1991; Katz, 2001b; Katz, 2004; Walker & Buck, 2007). Hence, choosing wage and dorms as the processes through which class identity is manufactured links activities with structural hierarchies, capital production with social reproduction, and experiences with the environment.

**Conclusion: Class and the Materialist Politics of Identity**

Class and the materialist politics of identity are concerned with a concrete and viable person in his/her social environment. Take He Chunxia for instance; it is those mattresses, living utensils and tools, and a shelter that have formed an important part of her daily living and her positionality in the globalized capital production process. Such positionality is, through the materialist politics of identity, rather concrete, for one’s being is always attached to such conditions of living and is always conditioned and limited by such materiality.

_The concreteness of living cannot be overlooked for it has everything to do with one’s class identity: a class identity that concerns to the broadest social senses can exist but perhaps not seen explicitly as it deserves. Yet, such a class identity must be produced for social justice. It is a matter of academic pursuit as well as a matter of the scholar’s political-social practice and stance._

One’s positionality is also abstract at the same time. In order to understand He Chunxia’s conditions of living, we also have to understand the materiality through which Chunxia’s life is mediated. With the increasing internationalization of the economy in China, to understand how local environment comes into being includes considering the local and national spatial changes as well as the structural formation of the global economy to the local
spatial particularity. In other words, although Chunxia or any other peasant worker can only live within a concrete environment with tangible possibilities and limitations, understanding such concreteness demands penetrating its immediate presence so that our attentions can be paid to the connected social material relations that have made He Chunxia’s life possible and necessary as it is.

Both the particularities and wider social material connections that compose one’s positionality in society constitute the subject matter of the materialist politics of identity. Such positionality is composed of both the concrete materiality that constitutes one’s everyday living as a viable person and the materiality that goes beyond one’s immediate experiences; nevertheless, it constitutes the living environment of individual persons from a structural hierarchy. It is the combination of everyday experiences of working and living as well as the structures that have made such experiences take on certain concrete forms limited by materiality. In that such positionality is both exploitative experiences and the structural formations of such exploitation, it becomes a class identity. The importance, then, lies exactly in the connection between experiences and concrete structural formations so that such a class identity can be understood through the lived and mediated experiences of peasant workers.

To understand such mediated experiences constitutes the most important part in understanding how class identity is produced. Further, to understand how experiences are mediated through materiality and space constitutes the core of this dissertation. Such a detailed examination of space is crucial for a deeply dialectical identity theorization. Because space is both concrete as its material shape and transformable, as the outcome of an ongoing production process, its conditioning of human being and identity is both limiting and potentially liberating. Likewise, because space is both transformable through human labor and participatory in the
formation of any human’s everyday experiences and practices, its potential changes to
desirable human social material experiences and practices can be desired by changing material
forms as well as social roles. What can be potentially contributive is that identity change can be
desired from the transformable participation of the material social environment. More
importantly, such identity change that cannot be done without systematic roles of environment
would inevitably change the society at large in its process of changing anything at all. Class
identity understood as such, then, brings together the often split sociality and materiality in its
combined social material process of (re-)making.

With China’s economy deeply interwoven into internationalized capital production, the
examinations of peasant workers like He Chunxia as well as their living and working spaces
have a more clearly defined purpose: to outline the locally specific forms that internationalized
capital has to take for it to have its spatial fix. With such a purpose, all aspects of industrial
production and labor’s reproduction are potentially open for examination. Class and the
materialist politics of identity can effectively map the trajectories of capital on capital’s
formation of class identity in the contemporary political economy of Shenzhen, China.

Although class identity has suffered from historical neglect, recent studies of class
identity have achieved insights to give further theoretical developments a sure footing. In this
chapter, I have centered the importance of space and have argued that class identity must be
understood through its spatially mediated production process. As space both conditions and
restricts human actions and as space cannot be produced without the participation of human
actions from other spaces, any seemingly single space, then, suggests multiple, interconnected
sites. The interconnections between such spaces and human actions that have contributed to
their production and conditions by their presence form the material social connections to
understand the organization of human laborers in specific social material settings. Class identity examined through space is interconnected to the material social organization of labor and the class desires that have been mediated through space into the specific actions of capital reproduction.

Importantly, it is because space can naturalize the multiple social forces and desires in its material form that it becomes an ambivalent material social formation. Indeed, it is also because of space’s naturalization of multiple, usually contradictory, forces, that it as a material social formation can become a powerful ruling class tool for channeling and co-opting different desires into the laboring actions and experiences contributing to ruling class interests. Moreover, exactly because space naturalizes contradictory forces, it becomes the most suitable form for vying forces to be mediated. However, if space is material hegemony, or if hegemony has to take a practice-able form, then, the material form of space contains much more than mere physicality. It is the combination of the physical form and a set of social material relations. As both physical and social, space does not only contain social material relations but also enacts class actions by mediating such actions through its physical shape. It is through enacting by mediating that space-participated manufacturing industry is analyzed in this dissertation. It is also through such enacting by mediating that the space-participated class identity manufacturing process by mediating industrial production is actively producing a dynamic class formation. This dissertation is entitled Manufacturing Identity to show how class identity is produced in a social process that cannot be isolated from the industrial manufacturing. Space participates in such double manufacturing through its most direct material form by being the factories, dormitories, streets, and restaurants. What is contained in its material forms is a complex meaning-making process that it, as material forms, masks so
well. *Manufacturing Identity*, therefore, engages the class forces in their materialized guises by focusing on a material social formation of space. What follows is a social process in which peasant workers’ class identity is produced through the manufacturing process in which these people participate. In the next chapter, I will detail the methods with which I have approached my research subjects, the peasant workers in the field, and a justification for such an approach.
CHAPTER III GROUNDING EVERYDAY IDENTITY: ACCESSING CLASS FORMATION VIA SPATIALIZED INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both. Yet men (sic) do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction. (Mills, 2000, p. 3)

Only he who, by decision, has made his dialectical peace with the world can grasp the concrete. (Benjamin, 1999, p. 22)

And a warning against romanticism:

There is peasant blood in my veins, and you cannot astonish me with peasant virtues. (Chekov, 1965, p. 217)

Getting the tradition right was getting myself right, and that meant changing both myself and the usual version of the tradition. (Hoggart & Williams, 1960, p. 26)

Introduction

With its focus on an emergent group of people called peasant workers in China, this project raises its central question on what is class identity? Such a question is raised against the background of both a self-proclaimed socialist nation and its economic, and connected political, transformations to internationalized capital reproduction. In this context, “what is class identity?”, is an apt question in understanding peasant workers through a transitional
China. The project looks at the production of class identity through peasant workers’ participation in the industrial production process at an electronic factory in Shenzhen by considering the roles the spatially formed everyday working and living activities in the formation of class identity.

To address the question “what is class identity?”, I have decided to investigate one of the most striking features of a changing China, the changes of its space which are closely connected to peasant workers’ everyday lives. These changes, related to their spatial movement from their countryside homes to Chinese cities, entail a spatial mobility that was not previously allowed in China. Further, this mobility means that their work and living from the most mundane aspects have been affected. For instance, they endure isolation from other family members. But, also, the actual working and living spaces in the cities they inhabit transitively, form the concrete environment through which their living standards and who they are have been produced in its most tangible sense. And, in this same sense, clustered in and moving between those spaces, their identity finds its material context in some of the most fundamental ways. It can be safely said that living is spatial; it takes place and takes up space. Thus, centering on the main research question, with a focus on working people in the material actualities of their lives comes the first sub-question, 1) how is class identity produced in the spatial actualities of peasant workers’ everyday lives?

The spatial actualities I have described, in this context, cost money. Thus, as one of the central aspect of these actualities, wages are an economic social thread that connects concretely to the most embodied activities of their working, sleeping, eating, ailing lives, and isolation from their families. At the same time, wages mean an economic social management process that connects to how their work is variously conditioned. The centrality of wages in the
manufacturing industry and in the mundane aspects of the lives of these employed peasant workers, then, raises a second sub-question: 2) how is class identity produced through the everyday wage earning/spending activities and how is the wage connected to space?

If part of the production process of class identity can be found as connected to such mundane activities of living, then, a third sub-question follows: In global capitalism’s highly structured industrial production process, where time literally costs money – in the forms of profit for employers and wages for peasant workers – how does global capitalism produce class identity of peasant workers? Peasant workers’ dormitories, I argue, are the spatial material formation that transpires the global capitalism into the concrete and immediate forms of everyday labor organization in the most mundane way. Such a spatial material formation masks its own existence by receding into the background of being part of the living environment for wage earning activities. Yet, it is through its apparent neutrality of being an environment that its connection with the labor activities and global capitalism becomes most effective.

As a whole, all these three sub-questions revolve around the central question of “what is class identity?” and around the central concern on how class identity is irreducibly spatial. But, they also revolve around an ontological pursuit of connecting class identity formation to everyday activities by understanding the roles that physical and social spaces play in forming all these activities. To get at such multifaceted concerns over space, everyday living, and class identity requires a flexible and multi-faceted research method, to which “institutional ethnography” is well suited. This method, heavily based on what Dorothy E. Smith (1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2002, 2005) has been invented as “sociology for people,” but has also been expanded by adding the perspective of spatiality and dialectics in it. It fits such a pursuit of
understanding class identity through its production process by specifically its contribution in three aspects. First, the method’s focus on the everyday activities and the ways such everyday activities are connected to the formation of higher level institutional connections makes it a good fit for finding the connections between class identity and its grassroots actualities. Second, the method’s emphasis on finding and following actual connections through everyday activities also a way of reasoning that depends on the social material relations as established on site. Such an approach makes it possible to yield in more materialist connections of social material relations instead of theorizing through sheer generalization and abstraction. Third, its Marxian tradition makes possible an expansion based on both theorizations. Thus, IE could first be further integrated with Marxian discussions of the importance of materiality as well as space so that the method itself could be revised to provide specific tailored methods for discussing class identity formation. With its both entry level and secondary level data collection and analysis, the method is apt at linking daily experiences with their structural formations. With such a commitment to understand class identity through everyday spatial practices of peasant workers, a spatialized institutional ethnography (IE) becomes the optimum form of inquiry.

To show why IE is such an optimal method, this chapter sets out by tracing a genealogy of IE with an emphasis on explicating its underlying beliefs and its intellectual origins. The choice of IE as the basic method of inquiry is determined by the significant methodological beliefs. In the second part, I add to IE the importance of physical and social space as an aspect of dialectics. In the last part of the chapter, I detail how such a spatialized institutional ethnography can help identity and cultural studies scholars conduct the field research, data collection and analysis.
Institutional Ethnography (IE) and the Everyday

Designed by Dorothy E. Smith (1984, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2002, 2005), first termed as “sociology for women” and then expanded to a “sociology for people,” institutional ethnography was formed against the conventional sociology which reifies ruling relations of the society. According to Smith (2005), ruling relations refer to “relations that divorced the subject from the particularized settings and relationships of her life and work as mother and housewife” (p. 13). For Smith, the ruling relations work through a deeply problematic knowledge production process in which “[t]hey created subject positions that elevated consciousness into a universalized mode” (p. 13). In academic and professional discourse, such ruling relations are frequently “organized as objectivity” (p. 13).

Under such ruling relations that are embedded in conventional sociological methods, the embodied and experiential knowledge that often cannot be categorized readily through the artificially made categories become invisible and are often dismissed as irrelevant. Smith’s (2005) development of IE as an alternative mechanism of knowledge production is specially designed to view such ruling relations as both embedded in the everyday lives and to be explicated so that everyday living can be transformed through such oppressive formations of ruling relations (See also Howard, Risman, & Sprague, 2005, p. xii). As Campbell (2003) asserted, everyday practices are always involved in activating ruling relations: “no longer can we think of ruling being done by powerful others, somewhere out there, entirely separate from ourselves. We all take up ruling concepts and activate them as we go about our daily lives [italics added]” (p. 16). Important to this basic tenet of IE is its centralization of everyday as the problematic from where the social transformation, on the structural level, can be detected, accessed, and lined out. As Campbell pointed out,
To begin to undermine oppression, one must be able to identify and challenge the prevailing problems in otherwise unquestioned, taken-for-granted, prevailing ways of knowing and acting. That is the sort of inquiry that Smith had wanted to make possible. She imagined that when people begin to see how they participate in their own and others’ oppression by using the oppressor’s language and tools and taking up actions that are not in their own interests, anti-oppressive work could be advanced. (p. 17)

Thus, embedded in Smith’s formation of IE as an alternative form of knowledge production is its centralization of everyday experiences as the starting places of developing knowledge that is subversive to that which is reified or universalized by the “claims of objectivity” and its negligence of everyday experiences as anything relevant (Howard, Risman, & Sprague, 2005, p. xii).

Importantly, IE’s centralization of everyday experiences does not mean it deems experiences of, what Gramsci (2000) and Spivak (1988) call, subalterns—oppressed and outside of hegemonic and universalized norms—as the necessary truth upon which the ruling relations can be both compared and negated. Instead, everyday is deemed as problematic, where the investigation begins. Smith (2005) compared her understanding of everyday with Burawoy, Blum, et al.’s extended case study, emphasizing that IE’s program is one of inquiry and discovery. . . . It means to find out just how people’s doings in the everyday are articulated to and coordinated by extended social relations that are not visible from within any particular local setting and just how people are participating in those relations. (p. 36)

The extended case study, however, used only micro and macro as artificially formed levels of inquiry. For Smith (2005), the extended case study experiences a problematic “ontological shift
as inquiry passes from micro to macro, from the ‘life world’ to ‘the system.’” (p. 35). Such a shift means that at the micro level, the extended case study is “ethnographic, using participation observation,” while at the macro, “it is theory that is operative” (p. 35). The central difference between institutional ethnography and the extended case method, then, lies in that “an institutional ethnography opens ethnographically that level of organization that Burawoy assigns to ‘the system.’ The connections of actual activities performed locally are coordinated translocally, contributing their organization to local practices” (p. 37). Here lies a key significance that marks IE as unique in its sensitivity on space: what happens in any local setting is viewed translocally, whereas, at the same time, the translocally organized social relations are examined on how it has been actually operating in the local setting. In Smith’s words, “[t]ranslocal forms of coordinating people’s work are explored as they are to be found in the actual ways in which coordination is locally accomplished” (p. 38).

**IE as a Subversive Sociology for People**

For IE, *everyday* experiences offer the beginning of the investigation, which, in turn, leads to the actually connected social happenings that contribute to the formation of such everyday practices and experiences. As Campbell and Gregor (2004) stated:

underlying anyone’s everyday life experience, something invisible is happening to generate a particular set of circumstances. It is that ‘something’ that is of research interest. People’s lives happen in real time and in real locations to real people.

Institutional ethnographers explore the actual world in which things happen, in which people live, work, love, laugh and cry. (p. 17)

They continued that IE is not for theoretical explanation, but to certain theorized practices of looking at the actualities of
everyday life. Institutional ethnographers believe that people and events are actually tied together in ways that make sense of such abstractions as power, knowledge, capitalism, patriarchy, race, the economy, the state, policy, culture, and so on.

(Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 17)

It is because of such commitment to understanding people through their everyday experienced living and to inquiring into the ruling relations that have contributed to these people’s experiences, IE is often acclaimed as “a sociology for people not just about them” (Holstein, 2006, p. 293).

As one of the features that distinguish IE from other participant observation and other ethnographic methodologies, it expands research to the causes of such experiences. This, precisely, makes it a worthy methodological framework in understanding class identity formation for two main reasons. First, as participant observation can, its use of the everyday as its starting point zeroes in on the actual happenings, often missing from the discussion of class. Second, the search for reasons, however contingent and multi-vectored, for those aspects of the everyday, demands expanded connections to the localized observations of the everyday. As I will explore later on, spatializing these attributes are a logical extension of the method and make it possible to explain the formation of class identity through material and multi-spaced social links. But, the most important feature is the potential subversive and liberating feature of IE.

The subversive and liberating nature of IE offers a larger theoretical framework, through which the IE concept everyday can be better understood. Starting from women’s standpoint, Smith recognized that “knowing differently was the basis for changing the conditions of women’s [and other people’s] lives” (Campbell, 2003, p. 17). The problematic of
everyday, therefore, means to identify the often taken for granted as problematic and as leading to the ruling relations that contribute to such problematic. As Campbell (2003) put so clearly,

To begin to undermine oppression, one must be able to identify and challenge the prevailing problems in otherwise unquestioned, taken-for-granted, prevailing ways of knowing and acting. That is the sort of inquiry that Smith had wanted to make possible. She imagined that when people begin to see how they participate in their own and others’ oppression by using the oppressor’s language and tools and taking up actions that are not in their own interests, anti-oppressive work could be advanced. (p. 17)

IE, then, uses ethnography as an inquiry for social justice, towards a critique of oppressive relations of ruling, towards a normative engagement with anti-oppressive relations. Everyday, then, is central for institutional ethnographers, in bearing both the problematic and in containing the translocally organized ruling relations that formed the given problematic. The closer a method concretely embraces the problematics of everyday, the greater the contribution it can make in transforming everyday living. Thus, it is urgent to discuss how the translocal connections are conducted and theorized in IE.

**Texts as Mediation for Understanding Ruling Relations**

IE’s steadfast efforts in understanding everyday from the “actual activities of actual people” (Smith, 2005, p. 54) is, importantly, materialist in orientation. It has been greatly influenced by Marx and Engels’ materialist conceptualization of what constitutes the *social*. Gleaning from Marx and Engels’ *German Ideology,* Smith stated that “[H]istory and society exist only in people’s activities and in the forms of ‘cooperation’ that have evolved among them. . . . [Marx and Engel’s] critique [, therefore,] . . . is a critique of a method of reasoning about society and history that treats concepts as if they were agents”(p. 54). The alternative
sociology of IE, accordingly, in its usage of everyday as a problematic, offers a materialist ontology that rests the formation of theory on the actual activities of actual people’s experiences. Such an ontological basis makes it necessary to review the theoretical placement of Smith’s and other institutional ethnographers’ usage of “text,” which have clear influences from theorists, whose approach to materialism is much less clear (or even antagonistic see *The Mirror of Production*, by Baudrillard, 1975; *Mythologies*, by Barthes, 1972; *On Grammatology*, by Derrida & Spivak, 1998; *Archaeology of Knowledge*, by Foucault, 1982). Such a review is necessary particularly because the use of text as the major links to understand ruling relations risks, if not carefully considered, reducing social relations into the agency, outcome, and struggle over “concepts” alone. Therefore, the underlying question is how IE accesses such actualities of activities and experiences that it claims to bear its very ontological premise?

Here, it is pivotal to consider the necessity of *translocality* and the links established through *text* to discover the ruling relations. In essence, IE’s *translocality* means more than a way of describing the expanded spatial boundaries for any given study. Rather, it indicates an inevitable spatial dimension of social relations. In short, social relations have to be spatial relations. Just as Dorothy Smith (2005) made clear, “the actual properties of the everyday/everynight worlds of our contemporary societies . . . are never self-subsisting but always tied in multiple ways to complexes of relations beyond them” (p. 38). This feature of society makes translocal connections and relations necessary in part because “the actual organization of problematic of an inquiry” can only be detected by tracking “from people’s experiences of the local actualities of their living into the relations present in and organizing but at best only partially visible within them” (pp. 38-39). In other words, the partiality of
visibility of people’s experiences is a direct result of the partiality of regarding local activities as autonomous. For Western Marxist Lukacs (1971[1923]), Smith’s consideration of translocality would be considered on the basis that, it is the spatially isolated economic production that produced “the rationalization of the isolated aspects of life” and, it may be added, the rationalization of the local as the spatial dimension for a localized practice (p. 101). Recall, for Lukacs, one of the ways in which reification functions through the distantiation of different aspects of the labor process, of production and consumption, and so forth.

But how can such necessary translocality be tracked; and indeed, how can it be traceable for institutional ethnography? Smith and other institutional ethnographers use the text as the most important means for linking such translocal happenings. In contrast to any imagery of texts being static, i.e. imagining a book on shelf that is to be read, Smith (2005) considers a text to be both imperative in organizing the ruling relations and also, partly because of this, important to be engaged (pp. 101-122). For her, “texts are of central importance to institutional ethnography because they create this essential connection between the local or our (and others’) bodily being and the translocal organization of the ruling relations” (p. 199). Texts are significant, therefore, because they can be “activated” by active readers and through such “text-reader” relationship, texts are no longer static: the “reader” becomes “the text’s agent” to act on the text. For institutional ethnographers, Smith continues: texts in such a case are very important because they “make it possible for us to see the text, activated by a reader, as participating and playing a part in organizing definite sequences of action” (p. 120). In other words, texts exist in institutional ethnography as mediations for the institutional relations (See also Nichols & Griffith, 2009, pp. 241, 245).11

11 As Nichols and Griffith (2009) stated, “texts . . . can only [govern] when they are taken up by people in their everyday work. Texts require someone who is able to actualize them as instructions for action, and then move these
Smith (2001; 2005) started by considering how “words,” written or spoken, professional or in everyday use, serve as “organizing” force (p. 85). She considered: “word and objects are in this account not independent of one another. The object perceived is already organized as such, that is, as an object, by the word that refers to it” (p. 85). What can this almost circular reference between words and objects mean and especially, what can both words and objects mean for being an organizing force? Smith importantly took the concept of word and the object it refers to in a sociological and systematic sense. For instance, she cited Ernst von Glasersfeld (1995): “The child’s concept of cup often includes for quite some time the activity of drinking and sometimes even the milk that happened to be in the cup” (p. 141; cited in Smith, 2005, p. 87). She further illustrated her understanding of text/word by departing from Hanks (1996), who considered table as a concept meaning “a piece of furniture made of rigid material, with flat surface raised from the ground by means of legs or some other device” (p. 41; cited in Smith, 2005, p. 87). Rather, Smith pointed out that “objects are not so simple when we rediscover them in the context of people’s activities” (p. 87). In terms of table as a materialized social organizing force, Smith described tables as “separate[ing] floor and foot level from actions on a surface apt for the upper part of the body” (p. 87). Table, as a word, indicates an institutional power of the ways it can be used. For instance, “whole bodies aren’t welcome on the dining room table” (p. 87). “The textual real displaces even her or his own experience of an event of which she or he has been part” (p. 28). Thus, the text was deemed as necessarily trustworthy, but as part of the everyday as “problematic” (pp. 39, 40, 41, 43, 51, 104, 144, 227).

Importantly, although Smith did not expand the conventional forms of text, as it includes spoken and written forms of any kind, yet, she used text to access the often normalized social

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(or consecutive texts) on to the next someone, somewhere, whose reading and action will continue the textually-mediated relation” (p. 241).
institutional powers and aim to expose of power hierarchies that organize people’s everyday living. This, in itself, is a methodological feat. However, in an important way, our understanding of institutional ethnography can be expanded as the meanings and usages of text can be expanded to include materiality.

Indeed, we can hardly deny the importance of texts in the formation of any organization or social power institution. Texts mediate the discourses of power to carry on the instructions and indications for potential activities. However, it is the exclusive use of texts, especially in their literal understanding as documents that seriously limit the materialist connections of power that Smith and many other institutional ethnographers were attracted to and that the labor ontology is capable of discussing. As Campbell and Gregor (2004) stated, “texts come into a researcher’s hands in many different ways. Many are publicly available” (p. 80). Such uses of texts bracket texts into written forms of documents. Some institutional ethnographers have also extended texts to include “talks” (See, for instance, DeVault & McCoy, 2002; Luken & Vaughan, 2006, p. 301). Yet, the task of tracing translocally organized ruling relations, a very inductive and materialist commitment of IE, risks losing an important materialist mediation of ruling relations by, paradoxically, noticing translocality yet overlooking the importance of space as a materialist mediation of those (and all) social relations.

As an inductive and a materialist commitment of IE, the task of tracing translocally organized ruling relations both means a significant development for ethnographic research to consider space and has its subtle but serious limitations. For one thing, IE’s understanding of texts seems to be verbal documentations of various kinds at best and does not including any social meanings indicated by materiality. For another and also connected to the first, considering translocality as the relationship between two strictly separated spaces seems to
indicate the same lack of understanding of considering material spaces as full of social meanings. The discrepancies between IE’s texts and IE’s awareness of space, but only to a limited degree, can only be solved, first, by understanding translocal spaces through the interrelations between different spaces and, second, by expanding the meaning of text to including the social meanings of materiality, such as space, much the way geographers understand “landscape” (see Mitchell 2000). In doing so, we need to consider how the changes of one space have impacted the other space so that neither of the two spaces can be taken as static ones. We also need to consider how such changes of space can be integrated into the understanding of texts so that the understandings of documentations can be enjoined with the understandings of material-social texts. The mediation function of texts has to be extended to include space as well as materiality as mediators. Thus, texts as access to translocal relations are expanded into taking materiality, including texts, as the necessary mediation for any relations to happen at all.

Indeed, from Smith’s use of the concept text, and the connected concept, discourse, it is clear that, on the one hand, she and some fellow institutional ethnographers (eg. Marie Campbell, 2003), rely on the role of textual and discursive mediation in forming the ruling relations, and therefore, in offering chances for tracking and potentially transforming such power relations. Yet, on the other hand, they are aware of the pit-falls of both concepts in their overly postmodernist and poststructuralist usages. As Campbell (2003) stated,

The tools of Smith’s method, specifically her recognition of the importance of texts, language and discourse in the social organization of people’s knowledge of the everyday world, became a matter of some contention during the last decades of the 20th century. The linguistic turn in scholarship unsettled established ways of knowing as
scholars in different fields began to recognize and criticize how the social and its representation were often treated as isomorphic. Insights of this sort led to claims that nothing could be known outside of discourse. Smith could not leave this claim unchallenged, as it undermined, she thought, years of feminist struggle to speak from one’s experience – to be heard as having something to say. (p. 18)

On the one hand, Smith’s theoretical invention of institutional ethnography was against the “claims of established sociology to be producing objective accounts of society” because Smith claimed that these “objectifying procedures seal off new knowledge from the realm of experience and from what people living the experience know” (Campbell, 2003, p. 19).

Simultaneously, on the other hand, Smith also disagreed with very popular post-structuralists and postmodernists’ positions even though these theorists take “a more radical view of the possibility of knowing” in comparison with those claims of established sociology (Campbell, 2003, p. 19). Indeed, instead of considering that nothing could be known outside of discourse—the claim that as Jane Flax (1992) writes “Truth for post modernists is an effect of discourse” (p. 452, cited in Campbell, 2003, p. 19)—Smith (1999) makes it crystal clear that “indeed, . . . it is meaningful to speak of a reality which is not in language” (p. 99). Smith (1999) disagrees with postmodernists, in this effect, on the assumed exclusive role of mediation through texts and discourses by stating that, for postmodernists, “there can be . . . no reality posited beyond the text with reference to which meaning can be stabilized among different subjects” (p. 100).

Smith’s (2005) caution against texts’ usage by postmodernists and post-structuralists and her reliance on texts more as a materialist medium to trace the ruling relations leaves a theoretical gap as to whether texts can only be deemed as the dubious, yet, nevertheless, the
inevitable mediation for a materialist inquiry of ruling relations that Smith has aimed to work through IE. I argue, in the following section, that translocality can be expanded to include nuanced and complex roles that physical and social space can play as the mediation.

**Marxist Materialist Conjunction with IE**

Although the theoretical origin of IE is not the direct concern of the current project, for its primary concern is to introduce a useful method into embodied experiences of peasant workers so that their class identity production can be examined, yet, it is imperative to sketch on a Marxist materialist tradition that IE did not explicitly draw on. It is my speculation that such a lack in adhering to Marxist materialist tradition has caused IE’s reliance on texts as narrow and truncated ties and such textual ties have undermined IE’s emphasis on actual experiences as its stronghold. Thus, this brief sketch is necessary for understanding the spatialized IE that I will detail on in the following section.

What IE has underplayed, undeserving, however justifiable in its urge to form a materialist connection between experiences and structure, is a Marxist materialist discussion that emphasized on theoretically discussing the materialist epistemology of knowledge production. Such a materialist connection between experiences and structure can be seen in a conjuncture of discussions formed in the Cultural Studies. Raymond Williams, for one, emphasized the inseparability between activities and social organization and structures. Such inseparability can be seen in Williams’s definition of “culture,” as a “community of process,” “a whole world of active and interacting relationships, which is our common associative life” (Williams, 2001[1961], p. 55; cited in Schiller, 1996, pp. 117-118). In such a “culture,” “we cannot understand the process of change in which we are involved if we limit ourselves to thinking of the democratic, industrial, and cultural revolutions as separate processes” (pp. 11-
Williams’ “culture” as a “community of process,” indeed, does not mean everyone shares equal chances in such a community. Thus, such a concept of culture as a totality has its important epistemological underpinning that takes living activities as only parts of such a whole. In what he called the “structure of feeling,” Williams detailed on such an epistemological view as

What I am seeking to describe is the continuity of experience from a particular work, through its particular form, to its recognition as a general form, and then the relation of this general form to a period. We can look at this continuity, first, in the most general way. All that is lived and made, by a given community in a given period, is, we now commonly believe, essentially related, although in practice, and in detail, this is not always easy to see. In the study of a period, we may be able to reconstruct, with more or less accuracy, the material life, the general social organization, and, to a large extent, the dominant ideas. It is often difficult to decide which, if any, of these aspects is, in the whole complex determining; their separation is, in a way, arbitrary . . . But while we may, in the study of a past period, separate out particular aspects of life, and treat them as if they were self-contained, it is obvious that this is only how they may be studied, not how they were experienced. We examine each element as a precipitate, but in the living experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole. . . . It is this, in the first instance, that I mean by the structure of feeling. It is as firm and definite as “structure” suggests, yet it is based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience. It is a way of responding to a particular world which in practice is not felt as one way among others – a conscious
“way” – but is, in experience, the only way possible. Its means, its elements, are not propositions or techniques; they are embodied, related feelings. In the same sense, it is accessible to others – not by formal argument or by professional skills, on their own, but by direct experience – a form and a meaning, a feeling and a rhythm – in the work of art, the play, as a whole. (Williams, 1968, pp. 17-18)

Calling it the “structure of feeling” or not, Williams actually struck on the connection of experiences and the structure in a way that the presence of structure would no longer be reified and would be connected to experiences.

**Spatializing the Mediation of Ruling Relations**

How do we “speak of a reality which is not in language” (Smith, 1999, p. 99)? IE offers a dubious response to this central question: on the one hand, the fact that IE focuses its attention on everyday experiences has already aimed at “a reality” that is often missing in the top-down and highly structuralized research (p. 99). Besides, IE emphasizes the *actual* connections that lead our understanding of everyday experiences to structuralized organizations that are beyond our everyday thinking and knowledge. Such methods pay heed to actions, practices, and experiences and contribute to our understanding of social material relationship as a way of understanding people’s dynamic situations in the society. On the other hand, IE’s reliance on “text” as the central means to access experiences both offers “text” an ingenuous sociological use and limits IE as a methodology within the limits of texts. Texts cannot possibly cover all the social material connections (see Kirsch & Mitchell 2004, Lash 2007, or Thrift 2007). Thus, over-reliance on texts limits IE’s contribution to the limitations of texts. The central problem at hand, then, is to show in what ways connections can go beyond texts without replacing the importance of texts. Space is pivotal in addressing such a central
It is significant to note that IE, developed by Smith and further amplified by other institutional ethnographers, has uniquely developed within its theoretical framework its sensitivity and insights for space. Space is actually treated in IE dialectically. Take Smith’s (1987) explication of IE for instance, institutional ethnographers “look at any or all aspects of a society from where we are actually located, embodied, in the local historicity and particularities of our lived worlds [italics added]” (p. 8). But such actualities of local historicity and particularities “are never self-subsisting but always tied in multiple ways to complexes of relations beyond them,” which demands the ethnographic pursuit to “[track] from people’s experiences of the local actualities of their lives into the relations present in and organizing but at best only partially visible within them [italics added]” (Smith, 2005, pp. 38-39). Just as Smith called the everyday world as “an unfinished arena of discovery,” space in general, and the inevitable translocality in particular, has been integrated as necessary for making sense of such an unfinished arena of discovery. IE does more than indicate space. It actually uses space in the interconnected network through which the social relations can only be detected if the complexities of space are investigated.

Yet, although the translocal connections are recognized as inevitable for social relations to work, institutional ethnography often treats such translocalities as only multiple sites from where ethnographic work investigates social activities and experiences. How each locality itself is made and how the ruling relations have participated in the formation of each locality itself is not examined in IE. Space, then, is still external to IE’s investigation, appearing as only sites within each of which, or through the connections of which, experiences and ruling relations are combined social activities. Such as demonstrated in Holstein’s (2006)
understanding of institutional ethnography, IE “directs empirical investigation toward connections among local settings of everyday life, organizations, translocal relations of ruling” (p. 293). Also as expressed by Smith (2005), “[t]he ethnographic problematic recognizes the real interpenetration of the present and immediate with the unknown elsewhere and elsewhen and the strange forms of power that are at once present and absent in the everyday” (p. 41). What is common in both is their understanding of space as only physical sites, but more importantly indicating that such physical sites are connected in ways that have not been explicated in institutional ethnography.

It is pivotal, therefore, to expand IE’s conception of mediation from texts to materiality, including physical environments and spaces and texts as mediation, through which ruling relations can be understood. Such a turn of thought of IE can start from the logic that IE has professed: consider, for institutional ethnography, any field work has to start from one site, then, it has to investigate activities happened in other multiple sites through which activities in the first site, the local, are connected to. Of course, we can acquiesce space as a mere physical background that IE has to investigate because all the connected activities have been based on such multiple sites. Yet, such acquiescence offers space only a rigid physical presence, as background, stage, or environment. What if we consider translocality as the spatial form of organization through which activities of production and living are organized into a multi-locale process? And what if, more generally, we consider spatiality as the material social form that any organization of social processes, production or not, has to take shape into? These two questions, if connected to the immediate need of finding a more materialistically relevant method, gravitate to a third question: how would the changed consideration of space transform/expand (the spatial concept of) IE? If the formation of social relations through
multiple sites and the formation of each site through multiple sites cannot be possibly parted from each other, and if the translocality, as Smith’s IE would have it, is the very mode through which social relations are organized and can be possibly detected, then, how to use space as a more materialist mediation to understand the ruling relations?

As I elaborated in the previous chapter, it is, thus, imperative that IE has already integrated an understanding of the importance of space within its framework that is not commonly seen in any other ethnographic research. The methodological possibilities that translocality opens demand further expansion. One way of doing this is to integrate a line of literature in the theorization of space that has developed in geography to demonstrate how such theorization is both compatible with, and is a necessary enrichment for, IE as a methodology. Yet, several senses of space from geography can benefit IE in enriching spatial aspects of social life as a necessary mediation of ruling relations and therefore, also enriching IE as a materialist inquiry and discovery in general. First, in the sense that space is used in IE, as physical sites, spaces are shelters and working sites in order for any activities to be possible. But, the arrangement of space is never neutral. As Neil Smith (2008) contended, the formation of physical sites was a way in which nature and sociality, especially the power of the ruling classes, have been concretized into the shape of particular spaces. Therefore, physical space carries with it the desires of ruling classes and is often designed to be utilized instrumentally to channel activities. Thus, more importantly, sites are not just neutral environments. They are, instead, themselves the material forms of ruling relations in their concrete forms. IE, instead of just paying attention to different activities that happen necessarily on multiple sites to contribute to the formation of ruling relations, needs to consider space as *participating* in the formation of ruling relations and everyday activities. Such necessity of seeing space as the very
embodiment (the cause and effect simultaneously) of ruling social relations in addition to, and simultaneously as, its being physical sites, can be clearly felt in a debate in which Don Mitchell (1995) urged to “ground” activities in a more literal sense of space as both physical and social at the same time.

Second, shared both in IE and in Marxism is the underlying tenet of labor ontology. Briefly speaking, labor ontology considers the society as produced by labor and therefore an immediate or mediated result of laboring activities. Therefore, labor ontology places people’s laboring activities, instead of reified concepts or materiality, as the causes of social and material changes of the society. Such shared labor ontology in IE and in Marxism established a common theoretical foundation for a spatialized, and more materialist, IE.

Viewed through labor ontology, space has its present form because it is the result of the past labor. As Marx has named the product the “dead labor,” space, viewed as a human social product in geography, is the combination of materiality and the organization of labor for the transformation of space to its current shape. Thus, importantly, for institutional ethnography, space and translocality do not only mean multiple sites that institutional ethnographers need to travel and visit in order to discover the activities happening upon and within them. Rather, the spaces themselves are connected to labor, past and living, because they are the products of labor (and activity broadly) and also because they manifest the past desires of the ruling relations as well as the relations that are often deemed as victimized and exploited.

Third, the translocal connections that IE has committed to trace and discover are not outside or external to space. Instead, space as both the current and past mediation of labor means that the investigations of actual activities can be changed into the investigation of space. Specifically, such investigations can be done by viewing: 1), how current labor activities are
conditioned, with limitations and possibilities set and provided, through space; 2), how such conditioning of labor activities is organized through changes of spatial formations, both within national borders and transpire them; 3), how the changes of spatial formations, happened both priori to and concurrently with the labor activities, are themselves a laboring process of spatial production. Every space has its current form and its current form is merely a contemporary moment in its historical process of transformation. Thus, On the one hand, the changes of space become the opportunities to investigate the interrelations between spatial forms and the social-material activities that have constituted such forms. On the other hand, the changes of space, with each spatial form as the built environment in which activities have taken place, also become the opportunities to investigate how social-material activities have been restrained and supported by specific spatial forms. Following this line of reasoning, space is no longer external to social activities; nor are social activities external to space. The two must be integrated into one social-material process so that the contradictions of social-material activities can be perceived within an expanded imagination.

These three different, but tightly connected, features of space can contribute to what I call a *spatialized institutional ethnography*. In such a spatialized institutional ethnography, space in general and translocality in particular do not only indicate multiple sites with which investigations of human experiences and activities need to be conducted. Rather, they mean that themselves are both the product and participant of human activities. It is, therefore, imperative to show how it can join in the conventional institutional ethnography to form an integrated investigation of ethnographic research of ruling relations through human subjects and their spatialized and spatial (trans-)formative activities.

With space no longer seen as a static environment any more, the consideration of ruling
relation can trace how space is produced, maintained, or transformed, and by seeing how each human action upon it is mediated through it. In other words, space can no longer exist as a bystander or external to human laboring and living activities. With this change, space lies at the heart of the inquiry with class identity, instead, as a mere necessary mode in which ruling relations work.

Yet, while institutional ethnography noticed the importance of translocality, space and locality remains external to human productive actions, perceived primarily as a physical environment where actions are “hosted.” The awareness and integration of translocality has its direct methodological benefit to IE. Fundamentally, it undermined the site of academic pursuit that is often taken for granted as the basis for study and investigation. In this sense, it expands the academic gaze to areas beyond the immediate “site” of actions and makes the often translocal connections that other researches are not facilitated to observe, as new possibilities for observation and research. Yet, it also, at the same time, stops short at how each locality, upon which translocality becomes actualized, is itself produced and how its production is not external to human experiences. Both as part of experiences, as support and constraint of experiences, this spatial production makes the very contents of daily experiences possible.

Data Collection with Spatialized Institutional Ethnography

Data collection in institutional ethnography can be done in diverse ways (DeVault & McCoy, 2002; Campbell & Gregor, 2004). Yet, it is common for institutional ethnography to start the investigation without planning it out fully. DeVault and McCoy actually considered it “rare” for the investigation to be “planned out fully in advance” (p. 755). Such unpreparedness might as well include “identifying research sites, informants, texts to analyze, or even questions to pursue with informants” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 755). The two authors
likened the IE investigation process to “grabbing a ball of string, finding a thread, and then pulling it out” (p. 755). This does not mean that IE is in any way slack in preparation. Rather, as a methodological concern that is central to IE, to start from the site means to approach it with “something troubling in . . . experiences, or some sense of unease” that may “suggest a focus or problematic of an inquiry” (p. 47).

Apparently, institutional ethnographers seem to have relinquished a highly systematic and structured approach on their inquiries. Yet, their approach is actually equally methodologically-informed: Leaving the direction of the inquiry less structured means leaving the nature of the inquiry open to the local experiences yet to be known. As Smith (1987) noted it, such unwillingness of forming highly systematic and often theoretically and categorically predetermined academic preparation is “to direct attention to a possible set of questions that may not have been posed or a set of puzzles that do not yet exist in the form of puzzles but are ‘latent’ in the actualities of the experienced world” (p. 91).

An Identity Inquiry Starting from an Autobiographical Account

As one that is interested in institutional ethnography, but going back much earlier as a person born and brought up from Chinese countryside in late 1970s, I have the living memory of eating a paste-like staple food made of corn maize flour, three times a day in the countryside, together with other peasant kids. As one that had entered college and had gained a college education in a Chinese city, I also had the living memory of getting used to the city food, clothing, and living conditions such as heating in winter and air conditioning in summer, a luxury that is still largely absent in the countryside now. Frequently, I was puzzled by, and sometimes with the puzzlement even turned into a naturalized numbness and negligence of the importance of the clearly differentiating living and working conditions between countryside
and the city: Why is the countryside living so difficult in comparable poverty and the city so rich in varieties?

My graduate education in the United States availed me the chance to consider Chinese peasants’ situation from a transnational perspective. On the one hand, it is part of my lived experiences to witness that farmers in the US are not necessarily less well off than the city dwellers, as also I witnessed that they could have a farm land of 200 acres while peasants in China, in the countryside where my corn-paste-eating childhood playmates live and work, have about two acres of land for their subsistence. On the other hand, I also noticed that, in order to make money, peasants have to travel to cities, migrating back and forth between countryside and cities, or between cities, to ride the industrialized tide of supply and demand, at times employed as labor force and other times dismissed. Since they are registered as “peasants” from the time of birth but worked as industrial or construction workers, they have been called peasant workers (nongmingong or mingong).

My initial attention to food and money, the most mundane materiality that seems to be so far away from the concerns of culture and communication, from such frequently used terms such as “ongoing,” “always already,” “fluid,” “discourse,” was closely connected to my early youth memories of hardships in the countryside and finally led to my decision and intellectual pursuit of the current research. Indeed, to a stomach that has never been starved or has never had the slight hint of danger of starvation, food and money seems to be so mundane to be really relevant to the theorization of identity that I used to deem as the work of the “minds.” Yet, how could the study of identity not attend such mundane materiality when all the humanity depends on it and especially when it is divided unevenly among people? Although materiality such as food might seem trivial, what has prevented peasant workers, and other people on earth, from
the possibilities of having it and of better living is not trivial at all. Such lived memory and continued reality of Chinese city-countryside division made me think about my personal difficulties of adjusting to city life and about my constant questioning about my past – How should I perceive my past that is not entirely past as my parents, grandparents, and relatives still face financial difficulties, while Chinese cities experience booming economic development? Thinking about such a personal experience, but thinking of it not as personal, but as deeply social, becomes an issue that I cannot but face head on – just as what Raymond Williams (1960) considered and I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, “[g]etting the tradition right was getting myself right, and that meant changing both myself and the usual version of the tradition” (p. 26; cited in Schiller, 1996, p. 107). The key question is: who and what organizations are actually controlling such uneven division of materiality that comes into the very making of their everyday living, to what they have to do to making a living, and, eventually, to who they are?

But if it is highly necessary for any study of identity to attend materiality, what might be the methodological means to actually realize such a study? This question appeared to be very difficult to answer with all the very postmodernist theorization that I was exposed to. Now that the basic demands of peasant workers seem to be far more complex than at the first sight, and certainly more important than being ignored in many identity studies, not finding the right language/theory/method for addressing fundamental needs of peasant workers, whom I could have shared corn-paste with became the intellectual discrepancies that led to my search for the right methods.

If you can see my experiencing of such different kinds of living as discrepancies that amount to an institutional ethnographic problematic that even before I formulated any planning
for the actual field search, then, the discrepancies do not only exist through such lived experiences. Indeed, the living conditions of earlier peasants and peasant workers now were gradually manifested as a research problematic in part exactly because many postmodern texts that I have been exposed to, familiarized with, and in quite some time obsessed with (and I admit obsession is never an appropriate attitude for theorization) do not address such a burning question. My initial obsession with these theories was turned into a more fundamental question about who peasant workers are and the logic goes like an question: If the theories that I am struggling to become familiar with do not seem to have any bearing on such basic needs of such a group of people, doesn’t that mean they have no identity since they cannot be readily addressed and identified by such texts. *How could a research on identity address materiality in its full depth and address it not as an issue external to identity theorization, but as an integral part which identity theorization has to absorb into?*

**Accessing the Site with “Pre-Existing” Social Relations**

Although institutional ethnographers, like many critical theorists, are against the objectivity assumed by conventional positivist theorists, this does not mean that they can be free from the research environment that frequently assumes and requires an objective and pure scholar/observer in the field site. This can be seen from the access to the field through the Human Subject Review Board (HSRB) when it had occurred that the peasant workers I interviewed were accessed through one of my relatives. As a scholar who has grown up from the Chinese countryside, I could not pose to have the detachment and freedom from any relationship prior to my entry in the field that many Western/external researchers can assume. Such an expectation of objectivity not only as a scholastic attitude, but also as a background check on the researchers’ social relations, is apt to produce an isolated and objectified subject
at the risk of losing all the social connections that have made such a subject a living person with lived experiences. This is little wonder then that Smith (2005) stated that it is not uncommon for institutional ethnographers to have problems in getting their research approved by HSRB. But in the real fieldwork, using the pre-existing social relations is not only the most possible, sometimes even the only possible way; it can also provide advantages for the researcher’s positioning in the social network.

**Accessing factories.** I began my ethnographic work on peasant workers in July 2007. I learned from both Mayfair Yang’s (1994) failure of obtaining access to peasant workers’ factories through Chinese government agencies and from Pun Ngai’s (2005) success with access through her personal connections. As one of the highly guarded places, factories and businesses often turn down investigations, even the most harmless kind, and research. Therefore, I followed Pun Ngai’s (2005) example and hoped that my Chinese social relations can allow me a chance to get inside the secret spaces of factories where peasant workers work.

I contacted my brother-in-law, who at the time of my ethnographic research was a purchase manager of a medium-sized cellular phone company in Shenzhen, China, to ask him for possibilities. He replied several days later that he had made arrangements for me to go to three factories, all of which have business connections with his company by providing parts or accessories for cellular phones. I was overjoyed by such easy and quick arrangements.

As a manager who was in charge of ordering parts for his company from the companies that he recommended for me to do the fieldwork, my brother-in-law certainly was in a powerful situation to ask for help. Such a position not only allowed me access that would not have been possible otherwise, but it also situated me in a powerful position that the managerial level personnel could not give me difficulties. Yet, while I was more than a little concerned
with the possible influences on the peasant workers working in those factories, my brother-in-law told me that two of the three managers from three factories were his high school classmates who did not go to college – This is interesting! For not only that meant those two managers were from the same countryside where I was from, but it also meant that they were also two peasant workers who had moved into the managerial level. The power position that I initially became concerned with, for their possible influence on peasant workers that I intended to interview and for their passive non-cooperation in answering questions, could be eased through such country-fellow-classmate-friend-and-relative multi-layered relationship.

Such unique access, not without its initial doubts from HSRB and not without my initial hesitation, proved to be very beneficial for conducting institutional ethnography. Inherent to IE’s methodological approach, it typically demands two levels of data collection, namely, the entry-level data and the second level data. The two levels of data collection are determined by the fact that IE first finds initial problematic, such as the research site and initial contact. It then deepens the inquiry by comparing the data from initial contact with what the author assumed. The discrepancies between data and assumptions are frequently used as the problematic for composing the secondary questions and secondary data. As Campbell and Gregor (2004) stated, “Entry-level data is about the local setting, the individuals that interact there and their experiences. The research goal is to explicate that account” (p. 60).

Based on my brother-in-law’s recommendation, I visited all of the three factories. In the initial contact, I tried to understand what the peasant workers life is like by noting how they spend their everyday/every night. In this process, I noticed that the ways they lead their lives could not be understood without simultaneously understanding the environment in which they are a part of. For instance, because they live in the dorms that had been rented by the factory
owners and they pay their rent to these factory owners, the employers thus also become their landlords. Part of the wages these peasant workers earned had to be resubmitted to the employers as dormitory rents. While this seems to be mundane, it shows that the factory has a very special arrangement that participates in the formation of how peasant workers are organized through such spatial arrangement. Thus, with my initial contact, I noticed that any knowledge of the local setting, individual people’s interaction with the setting, and their experiences cannot be fully understood if ignoring the spatial arrangement. Yet, it was striking to me that not many theorization of the people’s identity has engaged with the space as physical environment but with the social arrangement embedded to it so that it becomes instrumental and efficient in forming the particular ways on how peasant workers’ daily experiences, both their living and working conditions, can possibly be conducted. How does space participate in the formation of peasant workers’ living experiences; then, it becomes problematic leading me into concretizing my questions and formulating my observations and interviews.

**Entry-Level Data Collection**

During the majority of the entry-level data collection, I intently struck conversations with peasant workers on their spare time with any topics that I could think of and they seemed to be interested to talk about them. Put well by Marjorie DeVault and Liza McCoy (2002), they suggested that institutional ethnography interviews might better be called “talking to people” (p. 756). Yet, despite its apparent non-structured and casual style that might struck some more conventional researchers as lack of preparation, Campbell and Gregor (2004) pointed out the inner mechanisms of such “talking” as the talking “stretches across a continuum from appointments scheduled specifically for the purpose, all the way to serendipitous opportunities
that arise when one is going about one’s daily life” (p. 77). Such “talking to people” led me, in retrospect, to the important and interconnected themes of their living and working practices, not as separated but as spatially connected into what Foucault would call, an “ensemble” of power structure: Their living spaces and schedules were connected to their working spaces and schedules by wages and their everyday activities, were both connected to the highly institutionalized ways in which space is produced, formed, and maintained. For instance, the two factories that I visited have very close supervision on workers’ off-hour schedule. What time to go to sleep, for example, becomes a highly organized activity even if factory owners do not pay for it and are not supposed to have direct control over it. And this control is done through such a factory-owner-and-landlord combined identity. The close distance between dorms and factories is directly responsible for such a success on the factory owners’ part. Based on such initial “talking,” and the basic problem on how space participates into forming the peasant workers’ lives and, indeed, who they are, I was able to choose space as an important material mediation for capital production. But I was still confused about how such mediation actually happens in actual everyday practices.

As Campbell and Gregor (2004) noted, “[w]ith the problematic emerging, the next step is to go looking for data that will explicate it – what we are calling level-two data” (p. 60). And the metaphor that DeVault and McCoy (2002) used to describe the institutional ethnographic process made more sense and, indeed, became quite directive when I was, not without any clue, but still groping to make sense on why peasant workers led their lives the way they did. What DeVault and McCoy (2002) described as pulling thread from a ball, and that is why it is difficult to specify in advance exactly what the research will consist of.

The researcher knows what she wants to explain, but only step by step does she know
who she needs to interview, or what texts and discourses she needs to examine. (p. 755)

In the entry-level, I have collected, through interviews, focus group, and conversations, the useful information that leads me to pay more attention to peasant workers’ working and living spaces, their schedules, their wage-earning efforts, and possibly their isolation with family members. In what ways could I possibly understand this information and make use of it, not based on any artificial categories, but to see how certain important “threads,” as DeVault and McCoy (2002) metaphorically referred to the leads in the field, are tied together to form peasant workers’ living experiences.

My access to the field sites through my brother-in-law proved to be very valuable in my attempt to move from entry-level data to second-level data, from collecting what their everyday experiences were like to what it means to have such experiences. As the contact persons were both my brother-in-law’s high school classmates and also his occasional business partners and as they were also the county folks, they were quite open to my questions on the history and the management of their factories. Because of such an arrangement, they invited me to stay with them in the managers’ apartments and offered me chances to ask them questions and answered them in detail despite their extra busy schedules. The peasant workers’ general background, age group, gender ratio, payment range, the factories’ historical background, business partnership, profits, and the management of product quality, machinery, and product lines are among all the information that I could not have otherwise acquired or at least not so systematically. Information like that is crucial in making sense of the entry-level data collected.

But these managers-contact-persons are even more important for another reason. As Campbell and Gregor (2004) stated, on the second-level data collection, “[s]ome detective
work must be done to discover the missing organizational details of how the setting works. It calls for field research . . . about the broader setting” (p. 60) and “[e]ntry-level research must be complemented by the collection of data at sites beyond local experiences, outside the boundaries of what informants at the local level know. . . . It is the analytic use of both levels of data that distinguishes institutional ethnography from its ethnographic cousins [italics added]” (p. 81). Although managers work in the same factories with the peasant workers, they constitute, for me, the second-level data because daily experiences of peasant workers are greatly influenced by the production of spaces and schedules in both of their living and working conditions. Moreover, the managers’ knowledge of production standards, market demands and requirements, prices vs. wages, and the larger scale of business circulation definitely make their knowledge the second-level knowledge. Indeed, within the proximity of three factories, I entered actually two levels of data without reentering the sites. However, different peasant workers and different managers have also their different layers of knowledge, in which they are experts. Thus, managers do not constitute an exclusive secondary-level data. Rather, it is through cross-referencing that the two levels point to a possible inquiry.

Upon the entry-level knowledge, I decided to concentrate more on the first factory that I visited and stayed there for two weeks. I declined, politely, the manager, Mr. Lee’s, invitation for me to share a room with him in his air-conditioned manager’s apartment, insisting that I did not have much time for the research and would gather more information by sharing a dorm room with peasant workers, which allowed me to collect the information needed.

Second-Level Data Collection

The second-level data collection was marked by the daily immersion with peasant workers, mainly in their dorms so that “talks” could continue, but also in the canteens and
streets where they had their three meals a day and where they strolled, including in the factory floor where they busily worked. Through more conversations and more understanding, the topics we covered included: details about their work, the length of time they worked, and future plans for living with the money they earned, their families, if any, that lived in the area (or not), and their interaction with them. In order to let them know me better, I did not stop at the consent form information about my research and myself. Instead, I also shared with them my experiences in China and the US if the peasant workers asked me. With the data I gathered, I asked the manager, Mr. Lee, to see what kind of management the factory had that might have formed the experiences by carefully hiding any traceable sources that I thought possible to protect the peasant workers from being known by the managerial level personnel. To collect data about wages, I used mostly the interviews together with artifacts such as pay roll slips that peasant workers shared with me. I also took advantage of being able to enter the factory floor and used participant-observation to see what working activities the wage is composed of. Such a plethora of data collection methods compensated my relatively short stay in the factory (two weeks). The data collected about dorms derive mainly from daily conversations with my “dormitory mates” and peasant workers in other dorms. Such a method of data collection is connected with the participant-observation approach to see how dorms as a social space function in forming peasant workers’ everyday living experiences. About the Household Registration System (HRS), I used mostly the historical and public records as well as government documents that are available both online and in print. Since I used HRS primarily to understand the historical changes of HRS and its connection with the dorms, using historical and public records as data delineated a historical trajectory that is needed for my project.

Yet, the second-level data connection does not stop there. As Campbell and Gregor
(2004) pointed out,

The data-collection process in institutional ethnography calls for a process of tracking back or following clues forward from the local site and the data collected there. This aspect of data collection also requires analytic thinking. . . . Data collection cannot be done at the second level without conceptualizing the connections between the two. Theory is therefore an essential background component of data collection. Bring data together with theory happens explicitly in the process of analysis. (p. 81)

In other words, the analysis of, or often times even the feeling of, the entry-level data collection points to the second-level data collection. And the analysis of second-level data integrates both levels of data together to make meaning. The multiple and intertwined connections are the key for IE’s data collections and analysis. Such a process is, then, detailed in data analysis that institutional ethnography had certain defining features to ensure the knowledge it produced was in conformity with its basic beliefs.

**Brief Information of Interviewees and the Choice of Interview Sites**

During summer 2007, I have had conversations with altogether 36 people in different forms such as telephone conversations, in-person conversations, formal interviews, on-site focus groups, participant observations, and in-depth interviews. Thirty-three people that I had conversations with were peasant workers and three people were managers although their official identities are still peasants. Among the thirty-three people that I have interviewed, nine of them were female workers, with one as a male worker’s wife and one as the (assembly-)line director for eight peasant workers working on the same assembly line. Twenty-nine out of the total thirty-three peasant workers that I conducted any kind of conversations with were from the first factory, which, after the initial entry-level data collection, I have decided to make as
the major site for ethnographic investigation. Three people were from the second factory and one was from the third one. Two of the factories, the first and second that I visited, produced electronic components and accessories for cellular phone production and other electronic appliances, whereas the third one produced chemical products for architecture construction.

These different specific ways of data collection were aimed to pierce into an “opening” through which I, as an ethnographer, could begin to make sense on the actual living experiences of the peasant workers that I have interviewed or have had conversations with. Campbell (1998) has noted such a different way of treating interviews and other documents as

Institutional ethnography, like other forms of ethnography, relies on interviewing, observation and documents as data. Institutional ethnography departs from other ethnographic approaches by treating those data not as the topic or object of interest, but as “entry” into the social relations of the setting. (p. 57)

How, then, from two electronic companies and one architectural company can the investigation be made relevant and reliable for an apparently more general manufacturing industry? Connected to this question, how could an interviewing process that lasted two weeks, covering thirty-three people, form a coherent and representative cohort to discuss and investigate peasant workers’ living identity in general? These two questions would pose serious reliability issues if traditional quantitative method was employed and these subjects were used as samples for any generalizable features of the imaginary population, 130 million in size (See Sprague, 2005). Even with the qualitative method in general, and a revised institutional ethnography in particular, it would still be reasonable to cast some healthful doubts: Wouldn’t any generalization seriously risk homogenizing the population and erasing local specificities that institutional ethnography values as its foundation?
These questions, though seem reasonable in every commonsensical way, have secretly borne with them the vestiges of positivistic research’s aim for objectivity and generalization that institutional ethnography as another form of knowledge production process opposes. First, for the generalizability that could be a serious drawback under quantitative methods, institutional ethnography has emphasized from the very beginning that its analysis is not based on theoretically abstracting a theory from the given size of samples. Rather, it is through the actual connections that it seeks to *explicate* the ruling relations. As its major practitioners, Campbell and Gregor (2004) reiterated that

> our theory commits us not to theoretical explanations, but to certain *theorized practices of looking at the actualities of everyday life*. Institutional ethnographers believe that people and events are *actually* tied together in ways that make sense of such abstractions as power, knowledge, capitalism, patriarchy, race, the economy, the state, policy, culture, and so on (italics added). (p. 17)

Clearly, the analytical emphasis is deliberately made to oppose to the sample-to-generalization process that is common to the positivistic quantitative research where abstraction from the specific features is necessary for any generalization to be possible at all. Instead, the “*actually tied*” relationship seeks to expand the everyday experiences to its translocal connection (Smith, 2005; Campbell & Gregor, 2004). Such a feature can be best explicated through, paradoxically, my own research as an example for analyzing the reliability of data.

*Wage as an Example of Analysis*

As I have noticed both through the entry-level and second-level data connection, wage is one of the important links between the capital reproduction processes in which wage is distributed as the payment for the labor power that peasant workers have sold for the
production process to continue. Marx considered wage primarily as a means of economic organization on which capitalists’ exploitation for surplus value is based. However, as currency, the earned wage provides means for social reproduction. Thus, not through any generalization, but through how money is spent after it has been distributed from the factory owners to the peasant workers, the “actual tied” social relations lead the analytical attention from the factory floor to the living spaces of dorms, markets where peasant workers act as consumers, and to the mundane but never trivial paid phone calls to their countryside homes.

During my stay in the peasant workers’ dorms, I have conducted in-depth interviews based on the questions that I have prepared and also the questions that I have come up with during the interviews. When I noticed that the wage earning and spending activities threaded through their whole way of life, I intently asked them to tell me in detail on what work they do to make what they earn, on different elements that composite their wages, and on the ways they spend their wages. I also asked them to show me their wage slips and to explain what each element meant for them in their actual practices. All the conversations are carefully noted and some, upon the interviewees’ permission, are voice recorded.

The connection is far from being limited to such production space and what Marxian concept would have it as “social reproduction process” (See Marx, 1976; Harvey, 2006; Katz, 2002). Take for instance, the concept of capitalism and globalization as the two examples, how would the thirty-three peasant workers and three managers form a reliable story for such terms that Campbell and Gregor (2004) deemed as “abstract” (p. 17). Still, the answer is through the actual ties that the wage is linked to. If we can see that the wage is the payment that factory owners have given as the price for peasant workers’ labor power, then, it is clearly that the unpaid part, or the surplus value of their actual labor is the very profit that factory owners and
the transnational production-market ensemble is formed for at the very beginning and shares. Thus, how the wage is earned and, as I have illustrated before, how peasant workers’ life has been established by using wage as a means for social reproduction, is in every way actually connected to how transnational capital works; and vice verse, how the capital works is connected in every way to how peasant workers’ living experiences are.

How does IE work for understanding the social construction process of peasant workers’ identity? Take wages for example: every penny that peasant workers earn, they earn by subsuming their work and their styles of living in the capital production process. Thus, their actual working and living activities, together with the environment in which they had such activities, become the material-social relations that we can access the international capital. The realization of capital is not merely through selling of commodities. Rather, the connections between capital and individual workers can be accessed at the very site where these hands and bodies ache. As the connection between capital and an everyday account of working and living is made, the peasant workers’ identity can be seen as social-material relations in which capital shapes, and is shaped by, peasant workers’ everyday living.

One of the major shortcomings of my method here is that in my attempts at understanding the translocal relations of identity production in Chinese electronics manufacturing, the depth of everyday relations of life for peasant workers suffers. Further, there were several serious limitations to my access to certain aspects of their everyday lives, pains, pleasures, choices, etc. Thus, for this study, the material connections are my central starting point, which will be developed in future attempts at overcoming the above limitations.

To tell such a story of who peasant workers are, the two following chapters focused on showing different, but connected, spaces that portray globalized capitalism’s work on the
individual bodies through multiple scales of spaces to produce a class identity. Since the data collection and analysis in IE is interconnected with each other, with both connected to the specific aims of the following chapters, the specific data collection and analysis will be detailed in these specific chapters. Here, it is suffice to sketch the more general image on how the data are organized to make sense. The underlying logic of data analysis that has evolved in the field and the later-on in the research and writing process follows such a general line: Capturing globalized capitalism means importantly to link the laboring hands and bodies with the structures through which such laboring hands and bodies have been organized into globalized capitalism. It is through such multiple and interconnected spaces that laboring bodies have formed the most dynamic elements of social class structures. Thus, by grasping these spaces through spatialized IE, I portray a class identity production process that intertwines with the global industrial manufacturing process. Such a class identity production process portrays the moments peasant workers work and rest, live and die, nevertheless, infusing their living labor, unendingly, into the reproduction of globalized capitalism. The key is to grasp what specific laboring experiences means to the globalized capitalism and what globalized capitalism means to the laboring bodies through their specific organization.

**Data Analysis with Spatialized Institutional Ethnography**

People connect with their social environment through experiences. IE considers people’s experiences to be the problematic from which a living human being can be understood within the social forces (Smith, 2005). Data analysis, in accordance to such a central determination of institutional ethnography, must therefore connect both the entry-level and the second-level data together to make sense of the life. This does not, however, mean that institutional ethnographers need to represent their living and working as they have lived it
(which was impossible as well). Rather, more importantly, it means that by connecting with the
second-level data, the data that is beyond peasant workers’ direct experiential knowledge, their
living experiences can be connected to another level of meaning that is out of their direct
knowledge even when they do participate in it. It also means that on the level of first level data
collection, the data from informants could not be taken as it is. Rather, it has to be connected to
second-level data so that institutional ethnographers can be informed of why and how
informants make sense of their world as they did. As Campbell and Gregor (2004) cautioned us:

It is methodologically important, institutional ethnographers insist, to be attentive to
how someone, speaking about their life, misses its social organization. In order to
discover and disclose how its taken-for-granted social organization is meaningful for
what happens, a specialized inquiry must be conducted. For researchers convinced of
the importance of the discursive organization of everyday life, the social organization
of knowledge is useful theory and institutional ethnography is a relevant analytic
approach. (p. 91)

Yet, it is impossible to distinguish the meaning making process from the second-level data
collection. For without the analysis of entry-level data, in the broadest sense of analysis,
second-level data collection would have no direction. Thus, the data analysis could not be
possible without “the idea of social relations at the heart of the research interest” (Campbell &

With wages and space closely linked to the peasant workers’ living and working
conditions, including their expressed concerns, it is important to discuss that the wage as a
social relation has been an important contribution of Marx. Moreover, Marx’s Capital typically
discusses the whole capitalist system of political economy as linked social relations. Borrowing from Marx’s discussion of political economy, then, becomes a methodological necessity for linking the data with what the data could make meaning. Accordingly, the data analysis, at this point, is to see how specific local and translocal activities are linked to each key concepts and how such key concepts contribute to the understanding of the relation between capital reproduction and peasant workers’ social reproduction, with both linking to the necessity, and therefore, the importance of space. If the connections as actually happened in the field can be linked to the explication of economic, political, and social differentiation, then, it could show the class identity in its very production process.

The choice of theory seems to be inevitable at such a stage of research. It is also due to such possible different choices of theories that the result of the research might be highly different. Just as Campbell and Gregor’s (2004) insights stated:

Beliefs about how to know the field – the researcher’s ontological commitments – determine a researcher’s view of acceptable approaches to data analysis. Institutional ethnography is grounded in a particular understanding of the relation between the knower and the known. (p. 87)

The social ontology of institutional ethnography, derived from Marx and Engel’s discussion of ontology in *German ideology*, underpins the data analysis used in my project. Specifically, space as the central concern of the research and peasant workers, as I understand it, does not pose as two centers. Instead, now that peasant workers, as laborers whose work have participated in the formation of capital reproduction through specific factories, understanding how space is used by both employers and employees form a mediation through which peasant workers’ identity can be understood not only through the text-mediated relations, but as
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crrect and tangible, yet at the same time social and flexible spatially-mediated relationships. Human identity, paradoxically, in a proper understanding of social, must be combined with the non-human presence, such as that of the space, to make it completely social. It is also in this sense that the social does not mean much without being at the same time material.

**Materiality as Mediation and its Connection with Dialectical Materialism**

There is more than a slight methodological connection between Smith’s institutional ethnography and Marx’s materialist dialectics: As Bertell Ollman (1993) noted, “[d]ialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world” (p. 10). Such a definition can best grasp the winding and complex process of institutional ethnography’s treatment of entry-level data and second-level data, which are supposed to be combined so that the meanings of everyday life experiences can be altered to make a meaning that transcends the everyday experiences of peasant workers. Moreover, dialectics is more than a way of thinking for Ollman. As Ollman gleaned from Marxian utilization of materialist dialectical thinking, it also includes “how to organize a reality viewed in [its full range] for purposes of study and how to present the results of what one finds to others” (p. 10). Published six years earlier than the prototypical formulation of Smith’s (1998) basic formulation that came to be named as institutional ethnography, “Dialectical Investigations” spelt out a fundamental reasoning process that forms Marxian materialist methods. Aimed at an ontological totality and full range of changes and interactions, dialectics has its clear indication of reproducing the subjectivity of human beings in their living and working experiences and is therefore clearly interdisciplinary and trans-categorical. While its objective shows clear methodical implications of its fitness to be used to analyze peasant workers’ identity issues, it is an even more striking historical fitness to compare peasant
workers as an emergent class with Marxian critique of capitalist political economy. Both Marxian dialectics and institutional ethnography share a common rejection of the reification of objects. Rather, they insist on investigating the *processes* of production so that any objects can be seen in its historical and social development. Again according to Ollman (1993), rightly, as a way of producing “an integrated body of knowledge,” it “restructures our thinking about reality by replacing the common sense notion of ‘thing,’ as something that *has* a history and *has* external connections with other things, with notions of ‘process,’ which *contains* its history and possible futures, and ‘relation,’ which *contains* as part of what it is its ties with other relations [italics original]” (p. 11). It is more than a little comparable overlap between dialectics and institutional ethnography if we translate “external connections with other things” (p. 11) into what Smith would call “translocal” connections to understand the ruling social relations. But what makes the addition of materialist dialects necessary is the indication of “history and possible futures” that ethnographic research usually lacks. In other words, put aside for now the specific ways on how data can be analyzed; would it be more important to think whether the specificities of peasant workers’ everyday experiences, more than just indicating a translocal formation of ruling relations, also indicate a specific mode of capital reproduction that indicates a historical view on what kinds of future that might hold for them?

Thinking back on the specific ways of handling actual data analysis, paradoxically, such an indication that is more clearly detectable in Marxian materialist dialectics than in institutional ethnography directly formulates the ways how the combination of entry-level and second-level data can point to, both in terms of data analysis and in terms of what might count as the relevant “external” that needs to be integrated into the theoretical pursuit of this identity inquiry. To such a dialectical treatment of external/internal, Ollman (1993) suggests, quite
provocatively, that, for non-dialectical thinkers, “If I claim ‘X,’ I can’t at the same time claim ‘not X’” (p. 16). And he contrasted such a linear way of thinking with the dialectical reasoning immediately:

Dialectical thinkers attribute the main responsibility of all change to the inner contradictions of the system or systems in which it occurs. Capitalism’s fate, [and in this case, the changes of peasant workers’ identity], is sealed by its own problems, problems that are internal manifestations of what it is and how it works and are often parts of the very achievements of capitalism, worsening as these achievements grow and spread. (Ollman, 1993, p. 16)

Thus, “contradiction belongs to things in their quality as processes within an organic and developing system. It arises from within, from the very character of these processes, and is an expression of the state of the system” (Ollman, 1993, p. 16). While it seems that Ollman had a contradiction that already exists, in the process of data analysis of institutional ethnography, the dialectical difference/emphasis of the analysis should, rather, be to find the happenings that are usually regarded as external to be included as internal. Such a task, in turn, demands the analytical reasoning to necessarily penetrate the usual categorization of things and establish new kinds of dialectical connections. It is only through such different ways of thinking that different kinds of activities of association can be planned and made possible. This point actually was also confirmed in institutional ethnography, though through different languages. As Smith explained the term explication, a way of making another kind of sense that is both connected to yet moved beyond the everyday experiences, the importance of penetrating the existing categorizations of ruling relations to establish new kinds of reasoning is so strikingly similar to the Marxian materialist dialectics as Ollman had expressed it: “Explication of how
actual people put together the world also shows how it can be acted upon” (Campbell, 2003, p. 20). There are no clear-cut differences between entry-level and second-level data. Rather, the two levels of data are cross-referenced in actual field research and later theorization processes to form a coherent and dependable story of ruling social relations.

With all the possible contributions and the historical emphasis that Marxian materialist dialectics can contribute to institutional ethnography, does it make institutional ethnography unnecessary? The answer is “yes” only if dialectics can remain as an abstract concept and reasoning without attending to the real life experiences. This is exactly where institutional ethnography can be helpful in accessing everyday living experiences so that dialectics changes from an abstract reasoning to a more practical reasoning. Again, trans-categorical connections can be made by referring to Raymond Williams’ (1977) understanding of language when he stated that “[i]t is precisely the sense of language as an indissoluble element of human self-creation that gives any acceptable meaning to its description as ‘constitutive’. To make it precede all other connected activities is to claim something quite different” (p. 29).

The combination of materialist dialectics and institutional ethnography can productively marry the more expanded historical view of the former with the more tangible ways of accessing everyday experiences to rally the analytical forces for a more materially-involved method of investigation. This, paradoxically, though seemingly external to how data can be analyzed, actually directly informs every step of data analysis. In the last sub-section, I will detail the specific ways that I have decided to involve the everyday experienced data with a historical view so that the meaning of peasant workers’ everyday experiences could be connected to historically formed social relations. Methodologically, such an amplification of materialist dialectics offers institutional ethnography a more pronounced advantage of framing the class
identity through its multiple connections with materiality-embedded living activities.

Such a methodological connection between dialectics and institutional ethnography clearly offers room for the nature of the research to evolve with (and within) the environment of field research. One particular advantage of the methodological innovation is that it rests the case of hypothesis and the implied vignette of focuses. A rigid supposition of a wise academic demi-god is replaced methodologically to an observant and sensitive learner and explorer of the field. Actual links located and established through the observations of such a changed academic persona replace the support or nullification of hypothesis.

**Conclusion: Spatialized Institutional Ethnography and the “Actual Ties”**

This chapter explores the methodological possibilities of investigating peasant workers’ class identity production from the perspective of peasant workers’ participation into local, yet globalized, manufacturing industry. Space serves as an important mediation for understanding the actual connections of peasant workers’ identity production in conjuncture with capital reproduction. The delineation of peasant workers’ everyday activities provides access to the social-material structures that have both enabled and restrained such activities. Investigating the ways peasant workers’ daily interactions with space constitutes an important, yet often overlooked, material-social process for uncovering who peasant workers are, *in their relations with space*. Space as mediation of the structural power of capital and as mediation of everyday living of peasant workers makes it a site of contradictions and a site for struggles to go on. Just because space’s double-sided mediation, the struggles over one’s living conditions and one’s class identity can be mediated through the struggles over space.

IE has its pronounced edge in its attention to the importance of materiality and the social aspects of material relations. Yet, such attention is limited by its over-reliance on a
postmodernism and poststructuralism influenced usage on text. Although Smith’s (2005) explanation of text has expanded its use into examining the institutional power structures that governs people’s everyday living, it is important, and coherent to the goal of IE as a “sociology of people” to further expand Smith’s textual mediation to material mediation. The fault between IE’s goal and the limitations of the text as conventional forms of documentation makes it necessary to for us to turn attention from text to some more general yet more basic forms of mediation.

Spatialized institutional ethnography adds the importance of space as a material-social mediation for institutionalized power to text and, therefore, expands IE’s use of text. It is through space as a historically specific mediation of social relations that it is integrated into the funding elements of institutional ethnography. As part of the environment that everyone’s living cannot do without, space is a set of materiality and sociality in which institutionalized power resides. To examine interactions between space and human offers a much more enriched material-social form for understanding people’s relations to the world. Class identity production, seen through such a positioning of space, can be accessed through how space mediates people’s living, “the whole way of life” (Williams, 1974). Based on such a spatialized institutional ethnography, the following chapter examines peasant workers’ wage production as a spatially mediated material-social process of class identity manufacturing.
CHAPTER IV: TOWARDS THE ACTUALITIES OF WAGE: MANUFACTURING
CLASS IDENTITY THROUGH WAGES

Profit . . . is unpaid work. (Godelier, 1970).

Wage, paid in full, is still exploitation. (Zizek, 2009)

I think it is . . . obvious to say that a “good wage,” no matter how good, is never, and never
will be “enough.” (Mann, 2007)

Introduction

March 17, 2003 was the day when the hope for Zhigang Sun’s family was smashed. Born
in a poor village in Huanggang City in Hubei, Zhigang Sun had managed to pass the college
entrance examination and acquired his college degree, one of the very few limited ways for one
from a country village to cross the social-economic barriers set on the basis of one’s birthplace
known as Household Registration System to become an urban citizen. As an art design major
in the midst of China’s fast growing urbanization, Sun had acquired a promising lucrative job.
If only he had not been detained and beaten to death in the Huangchun police station in the
Chinese Southern city of Guangzhou, he might have a very different life (“84 Days and Nights,”
2003).

In the evening of March 17, 2003, Zhigang Sun had gone to an Internet bar. Newly
moved from the nearby city of Shenzhen, he had not obtained a temporary residence permit in
Guangzhou, nor had he remembered to bring his identification card with him. Sun was among
more than thirty people in that single cafe who had been rounded up for not having been able to prove their legal residence in the city. Probably because he thought his college education had entitled him to more chances to reason, he argued with the police. The police refused to let his roommate bail him out. Two nights later, Sun died at the detention center’s medical station; his death was claimed by police to be due to heart failure. Later, autopsy proved that the police had acquiesced other detainees to beat him to death because he had been too “noisy.” (Yun, n.d.).

Media reported Sun’s death as an exceptional case of tragic death of a promising youth and the police atrocity. The coverage did not concentrate on the detention and exportation of Three-Nones, through which thousands and thousands of migrant workers have been detained for forced labor, beaten or otherwise mistreated, and eventually, exported to their places of origin as a legalized punishment of their not having a job or a place to live in cities. “Three-none people” refers to people without national identification cards, temporary residence cards, and work cards (Zeng, 2003).

As anything covered by mass media, Zhigang Sun’s case has long fallen into oblivion in the once agitated Chinese public consciousness. However, the legislation that made Sun’s case possible bears a striking historical resemblance with Marx’s (1967) “Bloody Legislation” in Western Europe. Both, in turn, are instrumental in facilitating our understanding of the relation between wage and the production of class identity.  

Now that in chapter Two I have concentrated on showing how class identity are crucial to understanding people’s relations with one another and with the society, in this chapter, I

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12 Marx (1967) used Bloody Legislation to refer to the state violence in 15-17th centuries Western Europe against vagabondage. Because the nascent manufacturing industry needed farmers who had been expropriated from their land, states have issued bloody and violent laws against vagabondage so that the wondering “free” proletariats were forced to go to the manufacturing industry (See Marx, 1967, pp. 686-693).
examine how wage system is instrumental to form class identities. Specifically, wage is often viewed, more directly, as a sum of money. Such a view neglected wage’s social-material relations in constructing the modes of capital production and accumulation. In order to examine wage as a historical material-social institution, I examine, first, how wage as a social-material and economic relationship has been established in history; and second, how, after the establishment of wage as social-material and economic relations, wage works through varied ways to organize working forces through its relations. For the first point, I examine wage in Marxian concept of *bloody legislation* and for the second, I examine wage by seeing it as a variable capital. The first point concentrates on its historical process of establishment and the second on its theoretical possibilities of usage. Because both points concentrate on wage as a social-material institution for capital’s labor organization, wage’s social function in constructing class identity lies in and is usually masked by wage’s capacity in constructing commodity production. Its material feature, as a sum of money, therefore, bears a contradictory feature of both instrumental to social organization and of denying itself as being social.

**The Material-sociality of Wage**

The intertwined material-sociality of wage is often masked by the apparent intuitive “nature” of wage: wage as a sum of money. While the most palpable example in the capitalist common wisdom often takes income as the only indicator of different class groups, say, upper-middle class, capitalist social theories are frequently tinged by such an idea (Mann, 2007). Wage in this sense is a reified thing: it is a sum of money and it is *owned so that it can become the indicator of one’s class identity*. Wage is, and importantly should be, a sum of money; however, it is more than that. Being a sum of money rigidly identifies wage as a thing, an object, a kind of materiality that is free from sociality in a sense broader than being an identity
marker. The key difference between reifying wage into an object and explicating it through a complex set of social relations lies in the double nature of wage: its materiality-sociality. Social relations must be treated as a defining feature of wage so that materiality, wage as a sum of money, could be understood in the broadest sense of sociality.

Let us first glance into Geoff Mann’s (2007) mechanism of explication of wage’s sociality-materiality as one exemplary way in which wage is taken back into a sociology of material-social relations. Against a common wisdom that treats wage as a sum of money, Mann emphasized “wage as a relation, a hotly contested political site in which quantity is only one of several critical dynamics at play” (p. xii). Mann hit the nail on the head with his emphasis on the social “relation[al]” aspect of wage. He detailed on such relational aspects of wage that every penny on wage has a social and material aspect leading to potential qualitative social changes. Summarizing Mann’s example in a logic here: In the struggles for wage raises, even when the aim of the struggles is for one penny, the social and material relations organized through such a collective struggle would have a significance that could not be expressed by that penny. Mann’s consideration of wage expanded wage as a sum of money, and even wage as a capitalist “exploitative mechanism” (p. xiii) and went right into wage as a means of workers’ social struggles. As such, it is fair to accredit Mann as having carried the theorization of wage into a central spot of working classes’ social and political struggles.

Yet, Mann (2007) missed two major social relational aspects of wage. First, wage as the sum of money cannot exist by itself. Wage can only be preceded by a production of material difference, a difference so different that workers lost their means of production and could only serve as the labor forces for capitalists. Second, it is only when wage as a means to maintain the capitalist mode of production that it maintains itself as central in the capitalist relations of
production. These two social relational aspects of wage are central in understanding wage.

In the broadest stroke, wage can be considered as materiality within sociality, with sociality understood as social processes and relations. Marx’s *Capital* started with commodity as being produced by labor power through certain social organizations. Yet, labor power has to be organized in certain ways for the socialized production to be possible. Wage, as its material presence of a sum of money, is a crucial way in which capitalist modes of production started and prevail. Thus, wage is both materiality and sociality. The importance of its being materiality lies right in its ability of mediating different aspects necessary for capitalist production.

Although Marx (1997) only used the term “capitalist mode of production,” Harvey (2007), with his vigilant grasp to any historical moments of social realities in his explanation of Marx, complicated such a material-social mode into modes, implicitly opening the understanding of capitalist mode of production onto the empirical implementations and analyses of actual societal complexities. He stated:

> The formal analysis of the capitalist mode of production seeks to unravel the stark logic of capitalism stripped bare of all complicating features. The concepts used presuppose no more than is strictly necessary to that task. But a social formation – a particular society as it is constituted at a particular historical moment – is much more complex. (pp. 25-26)

In general, Harvey has touched a common soft spot that many criticisms of Marx have shared: that many times they would critique on a specific feature that seemed to be out of mode or in other ways inaccurate to their own moments of historical social formation or modes of

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13 For a much more in-depth and comprehensive exegesis of *Capital*, see David Harvey’s (2006) *The Limits to Capital*. 
production when that feature could have been used as the perfect spot for them to expand and renew Marx’s specific arguments that Marx would have welcomed. In particular, down to the task that we have in hand, Harvey’s Marxian interpretation that “a social formation . . . is much more complex” and “a particular society as it is constituted at a particular historical moment” (p. 26) meant that wage is capable in facilitating different modes of production.

But if wage is both materiality and sociality, and if it is capable in facilitating different modes of production, doesn’t it mean that wage works as a material-social institution to mediate different social-material forces through organizing them in a logic that it embodies and it centralized around? Summarizing the previous points, we have two major points of wage whose explication makes wage as a material-social institution mediating class identity production clear: first, wage itself as a historical material-social relation has its establishment in particular societies. Second, wage in particular social-material differences may act in different ways to form different modes of production. These two points are crucial for capitalism to maintain flexible productions and accumulations. For the first major point, what elements may possibly affect such a historical coming-into-being of wage as material-social relations vital for capitalism’s own continuation? In other words, what *a priori* social-material relations have promoted the installation of wage as a vital material-social relation as it functions currently in any society?

Nothing might be more persuasive than looking at Marx’s own particular description of a historical moment, in which the modes of social living and the modes of capitalist production interrelate each other and mutually constitute each other. That particular description is *bloody legislation*, in which Marx describes the use of the state and violence to produce the differences through which the wage as a material-social relation is heightened to a historical
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necessity of social relation mediation.

**The Bloody Legislation in History**

Wage becoming a material-social institution of labor and class organization is a historical production. In Western Europe, Marx (1967) considered that “throughout Western Europe,” working class people were forced into the wage mechanism “at the end of the 15\(^{th}\) and during the whole of the 16\(^{th}\) century” by “a bloody legislation against vagabondage” (p. 686). In England, as in France and the Netherlands, till “the beginning of the 18\(^{th}\) century,” enslaving, branding, executing and galleys of vagabonds were used as part of the bloody legislation to enforce the wage mechanism as a common capitalist mode of production. Marx summarized the process: “Thus were the agricultural people, first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible, into the discipline necessary for the wage system” (p. 688).

Capital is not an economic phenomenon in that no economic phenomenon is not a social or a political phenomenon. Although the development of material differences between the would-be capitalists and workers had made possible for more workers to be absorbed in such an emergent modes of production in history, people would rather become vagabonds, panhandling than willingly go to factories to work there: There are still too many social outlets than capitalism could be securely based on a diligent working force.

The development of the capitalism would have been interrupted, or slowed down, if the state forces did not work to make wage system as the only “actually existing” means of living in both the latter’s economic and social senses. The capitalism relying on wage as an automatic economic machine has to rely first on the state, the state violence legalized through its legislation, to feed people to that machine. Although even today, the state force is still one of
the most dependable force for capital’s everyday operation, the initial drive of people from wondering vagabonds to wage-binding working forces of capital was of structural importance for the establishment of capitalism.

Wage as a socially and politically enforced means of living can be seen as even more important than, and is certainly tightly connected historically to, wage as an economic means of forwarding capitalist mode of production. Marx (1967) clearly pointed out

It is not enough that the conditions of labour are concentrated in a mass, in the shape of capital, at the one pole of society, while at the other are grouped masses of men, who have nothing to see but their labour-power. Neither is it enough that they are compelled to sell it voluntarily. The advance of capitalist production develops a working-class, which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of Nature. The organization of the capitalist mode of production, once fully developed, breaks down all resistance. (pp. 688-689)

The economic lure of wages does not come naturally. Actually, for the lure to become certain and to become the only possibility for the working class, the bloody legislation worked to eliminate the possibilities of being “beggars, robbers, vagabonds” even when such being was “in most cases from stress of circumstances” (p. 686). Capitalist mode of production and wage as the means for such a mode to prevail happened hand in hand. But they did not just happen. Rather, economy as a spherical presence and wage as a common economic income, as we know it today, came into being only by a much more general material-social relations have forced people into such an economic sphere of livelihood. Thus, economy is always already social and remains forever so. It is only when the bloody legislation has forcefully naturalized wage as a means of earning that
Direct force . . . is used . . . only exceptionally. In the ordinary run of things, the labourer can be left to the ‘natural laws of production,’ *i.e.*, to his dependence on capital, a dependence springing from, and guaranteed in perpetuity by, the conditions of production themselves. (Marx, 1967, p. 689)

The conditions of production can be referred to as *themselves* by Marx only because that the state forces, through bloody legislation, have made such conditions seem *natural* to the working classes.

Historically, to say that the wage system as an economic system is only *naturalized* through the participation of state forces is to say that the formation of wage has a social-material-political-cultural aspect that cannot be overlooked. Take the naturalization process for example, the naturalization of wage as a capitalist exploitation system is also the naturalization of wage’s organization power. Wage is not just a sum of money, but is a capitalist mode of production. Therefore, workers who accept wage do not just accept a sum of money; they also invariably, subject their living and working to the capitalist mode of production. To be a subject under wage relations, therefore, is to subject to the organization that earning wages demands. *Wage is thus a material-social institution of identity production.*

Wage as a material social institution at the beginning of changes was not enough to generate the social structural changes necessary or thorough for the capitalists. In such partially changed traditional structure,

The subordination of labour to capital was only formal – *i.e.*, the mode of production itself had as yet no specific capitalistic character. Variable capital [or, mind you, wage] preponderated greatly over constant. The demand for wage-labour grew, therefore, rapidly with every accumulation of capital, whilst the supply of wage-labour followed
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by slowly. A large part of the national product, changed later into a fund of capitalist accumulation, then still entered into the consumption-fund of the labourer [or, mind you, wage again, only in its appearance as national product]. (Marx, 1967, p. 689)

Importantly, a full understanding of wage’s material-social function in driving people into a capitalist mode of production could not be achieved without the state forces that worked in tandem with wage. Marx considered the use of state forces “during the historic genesis of capitalist production” (p. 689). He stated that

the bourgeoisie, at its rise, wants and uses the power of the state to ‘regulate’ wages, i.e., to force them within the limits suitable for surplus-value making, to lengthen the working-day and to keep the labourer himself in the normal degree of dependence. This is an essential element of the so-called primitive accumulation. (pp. 689)

Historically, such state forces installed wage as a material-social institution for organizing workers by legally eliminating other possibilities of living. Such an elimination of possibilities of living by law is a necessary condition, and a condition that should always be maintained, for wage to continue to work as a material-social institution for organizing workers.

What we see in this part of Marx’s discussion of blood legislation is a great historical transition. The subtitle of the chapter (Chapter XXVIII in Capital) tells exactly the importance of wage in the formation of working class: Forcing Down of Wages by Acts of Parliament. Importantly, Marx positioned wage’s function as a material-social organization of workers into its historical formation through the state forces. Importantly, forcing down of wages and forcing workers into the wage system happen as a jointed material social process through which workers have been changed from various states into the working forces for capitalism.
China’s Bloody Legislation: From Forces to Services

The statute that legalized the detention of Zhigang Sun and other people in the same Internet bar was issued on October 15, 1982 by the Civil Service Ministry of the State Council. The statute was named The Opinion of Urban Vagabonds and Beggars (Chengshi Liulang Qitao Renyuan Shourong Qiansong Banfa Shixing Xize). Different from its 15\textsuperscript{th}-17\textsuperscript{th} centuries Western European counterpart, the statute was issued by the central government. Thus, such a statute gives governmental branches in charge of the city image as well as public security equal rights to detain people without identification papers or cards, city’s temporary residence card, or employment card (Chai, 2003).

The statute was issued only three years after China started its economic reform. The new opportunities emerged with the opening to the outside world in coastal cities have widened the social gaps between the cities and countryside. Therefore, people from the countryside rushed into cities made the urban social services and labor resource management difficult. Thus, the statute offered a tool necessary for the surplus laborers to be detained and exported to their places of origin (Chai, 2003; “Opinion,” 1982).

Apparentively, the “Opinion” as a statute worked seemingly exactly opposite to the bloody legislation that Marx described. For, in West Europe, the legislation was used to push the landless people into the factories while in China, the legislation was to push vagabonds back to the land to which they have been assigned. However, in its very social function, the two legislations work for the same purpose of cleansing the route for a wage-mediated mode of production. For Western Europe, the chief contradiction was the slow formation of working class against large demands for labor forces generated by the emerging capitalism. As a result,

\footnote{Refer to Chapter VI on HRS.}
the legislation worked to force people into the factories. For China, with its large rural population and the limited urban capacity at the beginning of the reform, a big surplus labor force would create management problems for Chinese cities. Anyhow, neither a deficit nor too much a surplus of labor force would make the opportune social-material conditions for capitalist production and consumption. Both Western Europe and China, then and now, have to resort to state forces to install the wage system as a crucial system for organizing people into the capitalist production system. Ironically, despite many neoliberalism-inspired expectations on market and nongovernmental regulations, one of the most important part of the capitalism, the wage, cannot deliver its own birth and had to resort to state forces regulating uses of space and the bodies that belonged there. The state, as midwife of capitalism, creates a spatial-identity-wage apparatus in “bloody legislation.” Interestingly, although in Western Europe the legislation worked to force landless vagabonds to work, in China the legislation worked to force the floating population without work back to their lands. Yet, despite their apparent differences, they function so similarly for cleansing a social-material environment for wage system to work.

In 1998, China signed in International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was issued in 1966 (Chai, 2003). Yet, the international covenants, or the constitution do not have much binding power for government policies such as the aforementioned Opinion. It is not my point to state the confusing legal systems in China. Rather, it is to suggest that many statutes would actually function despite their apparent contradiction with other statutes. Zhigang Sun’s case in March 2003, with its national media coverage, has exposed a long-lasting legalized national mistreatment.

At least in part due to the nation-wide media coverage and the wide spread Internet
popular discussion and outrage, in April, 2003, cities such as Tianjin has allowed the Three-
None people to freely use the retention center facilities (Zeng, 2003). On June 18, 2003, the
State Council passed Opinions on Assisting Floating Population and Beggaring People in the
Cities (Chengshi Shenghuo Wuzhuo de Liulang Qitao Renyuan Jiuzhu Guanli Banfa). The
previous Opinion, after twenty-one years in effect, was actually abolished. But it is reasonable
to suspect that the increasingly dominant capital accumulation has long rendered the previous
old Opinion unnecessary. As shown in 2004 and 2005, the shortage of laboring force in coastal
areas was huge. In Guangdong province alone, where Zhigang Sun died, the demand for
peasant workers was estimated to amount to one million in the year 2004 alone
(“Mingonghuang in Zhujiang River Delta,” 2005). Such a demand could not have been
developed solely within the year of 2004. Thus, it is very possible that China’s bloody
legislation might have just worked detrimentally to capital’s demands for wage laborers. In any
case, Zhigang Sun’s case triggered and actually marked the abolition of the legalized urban
retention system.

With the government forces on retention abolished, would it be possible that the de-
legalization of government retention means the power of wage system has been imbedded in
the economic system and can work with less of the political attachment of power and more of
an economic means of organization? Does the power shift from direct government force to
wage as a seemingly socially-detached economic way of organization mean a change in the
ways in which identity as a set of social-material relations is organized? To address these
questions we need to see how wage functions within the political economy. So in here, this
chapter changes from the first point to the second point: From seeing whether wage as a
historically developed social-material institution has to be social because its very birth was
delivered by state forces, to exploring how even wage taken as a means of constructing economic production is also *social in its most intricate connections*.

In particular, now that the wage relation has been installed as a predominant means of acquiring and maintaining laborers, the importance of wage as social-materiality remains, but the particular ways in which state intervention and economic means of production are combined may as well vary. While it is still true that wage as economic is still backed up by state power, it is especially important to understand how a conventional understanding of wage as economic is actually social. In other words, it is crucial to show how wage as a naturalized economic subject is social and to what end such sociality works and what kind of identity wage as economic is capable to produce socially. I argue that wage as seemingly purely economic is a material-social institution that mediates social and material resources into capital’s best image. For that matter, Marx’s conception of the interrelationship between constant and variable capital, the two crucial parts of capital, offers an opportune start point.

**Wage as Material-Social Mediation of Social Relations for Class Identity Production**

In contrast to such rich and broad social vision on the formation of wage as a form of distribution integrated in the production for an exploitative capitalist system is Marx’s later simplified and formularized consideration of wage. Marx considered that “the capital \( C \) is made up of two components, one, the sum of money laid out upon the means of production, and the other, the sum of money expended upon the labour-power” (Marx, 1976, p. 204). Thus, in \( C = c + v \), capital is made up of the constant capital \( c \) and variable capital \( v \). Marx theorized that because \( v \) is the capital used to hire laborers and paid to them as the price for their labor power, \( v \) becomes the variable capital, the only creative part of the whole capital production chain that can work an extended period so that the surplus value, \( s \), can be produced. Hence,
the transformed capital, \( C' \) is produced and \( C' = (c + v) + s \). In terms of the money invested by capitalists and the commodity produced, such a transformation from \( C \) to \( C' \) can be expressed as \( M - C - M' \), namely money – commodity – money’ (original + surplus).

Indeed, mathematics might be the most powerful abstraction ever. Marx’s (1974) \( c + v - (c + v) + s \), ie. \( C - C' \), or \( M - C - M' \) reduced the rich overtone of the social conditions that he has so wonderfully considered in *Grundrisse*. Not surprisingly, money was further reified and reduced into representing the totality of Marx’s thought. Lebowitz (2003) criticized Marx on the basis of what he called Marx’s “general formula of capitalism,” saying that this formula had not done enough in weaving a complete theory of working class and wage-labor, but instead wrote on the logic of capitalism:

*Let us be frank. Not only the absence of socialist revolution and the continued hegemony of capital over workers in advanced capitalist countries, but also the theoretical silence (and practical irrelevance) with respect to struggles for emancipation, struggles of women against patriarchy in all its manifestations, struggles over the quality of life and cultural identity – all these point to a theory not entirely successful* [italics original]. (p. 20)

Lebowitz ([1992], 2003) seconded E. P. Thompson’s (1978) critique of *Capital* to be a study in the logic of capital, not of capitalism, and the social and political dimensions of the history, the wrath and the understanding of the class struggle arise from a region independent of the closed system of economic logic. (p. 65; cited in Lebowitz, 2003, p. 23)

In addition to such critique, it is even more cutting, and I think rightly so, that Lebowitz (2003) considered *Capital* resulting in a “one-sided Marxism . . . inadequate to grasp the
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concrete totality. On offer are objective economic laws, determinism, economism and one-sided concepts that bear little relationship to the real movements in society” (p. 136; cited in Panitch & Gindin, 2003, p. 116).

Arguments could be made against Lebowitz on the basis of Marx’s purpose in Capital to show the logical fallacies internal to political economy’s own principles on one hand. And, on the other hand, Lebowitz’s purpose further to show the historical fallacies in the political economic notion that capitalism’s inequalities (between workers and owners) developed out of industriousness alone, rather than theft, violence dispossessions, and “bloody legislation” (Panitch & Gindin, 2003, p. 116). But more fundamentally, Lebowitz ([1992], 2003) failed to look behind the abstract formula which he further reified by criticizing Marx for an “one-sided Marxism” (p. 136), while he could have joined others in reinforcing people’s relation to nature, society, and history that started in Marx’s Grundrisse (1973) and German Ideology (1932).

However, what Lebowitz ([1992], 2003) failed to consider is the rich social and material contents behind the formula in real capitalist practices. Wage, as the price of labor power, or variable capital (v), is positioned with constant capital (c), or the money spent on production instruments, land, raw materials or parts, and other infrastructure, as the two elements for capital and hence for capital operation. Marx (1973; 1978) called them variable capital and constant capital in relation to the transformation of value. Because only laborers can work more than they are paid for, laborers are the only part in the capital formation that can produce more capital. Thus, the capital spent on purchasing the labor power is called variable capital. Constant capital, similarly, means that all the investment spent is only transferred into the products. No value is added or subtracted, thus, it is termed constant.

Connected to their respective real world forms, constant and variable capital prepare for
the production of surplus value to begin. And importantly, they have real world connections that the mathematical formula cannot express. Thus, it is important to analyze the two in their real world connections against the mathematic abstraction so that the connection of wage to class configuration can be clarified.

*Constant capital* is not constant in the real world for two reasons. First, the formation of constant capital is never a rigid or fixed formula. Instead, in the actual planning for investment, the expenses of factory building, and ideally, its design and construction, as well as machinery are often preceded by the choice of the investment site. Thus, even before constant capital in the monetary form of investment is realized, the policies, prices of land, and availability as well as qualities of other infrastructure, such as electricity, water, and transportation, distance to raw material resources and to markets are all considered. With transnational capital seeking surplus value on the global scale, such factors are often compared transnationally in the global South and the Third World nations so that decisions regarding where to invest can be made to determine the maximization of capital before any investment is allocated. Thus, in view of so many factors that the capitalists considered as crucial in their viability reports, constant capital, as part of the investment in its money form, and even a smaller part of the investment decision-making process, is nothing more than a variable, determined by all these social and political complexes.

Second, ironically, although constant and variable capital appear in the mathematical formula as two distinct and parallel factors: $C = c + v$, the variable capital, as the local prevailing or minimum price of labor power, is often one important factor for transnational capital to consider in investment decisions. Thus, in the actual planning process, with the transnational capital offshoring and outsourcing its production to low wage regions of the
world, variable capital is always considered with constant capital before the constant capital is allocated for the actual facility building and production machinery purchase. Hence, variable capital is a constant factor in the consideration of investment planning and is often compared through different regions in the world. In other words, wage, before it comes to the worker’s hands as the truncated payment for their labor power, has a relatively stable structural difference on the international level. Such a structural difference carries with its various local, social and political practices that capital can take advantage of. The unearned wage by the prospective workers in a certain locale is determined by the specific local differences in the formation of society, daily practices, and government policies. And such differences are, in most cases, carefully considered during the investment planning process and are considered a priori to the constant capital is set for factory construction.

Seen from the angle of variable capital, the previous two points on constant capital actually form the social material conditions upon which wage as the organization for capital production can begin. In other words, instead of a parallel factor to the wage, constant capital has to be imagined as materialized in the actual forms of social and political relations. Then, wage earning, even before the recruitment of workers, has already been formulated in a rich network of material social relations. Such relations not only include the forms of factories, machines, and spaces of their arrangement, but also the hierarchical order of such production facilities. Importantly, such relations also include social orders in forms of government and local policies, as well as the social political relations realized in the forms of material construction of factories and production regulations. Wage, in the midst of the material social relations, is already a classed formation.

While wage is itself a historical material-social product that Marx’s (1967) description
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on Bloody Legislation has so provocatively illustrated, wage is in no way a passive product (see pp. 686-693). Instead, it participates in a dynamic formation of the modes of production, which it is a part of, by maintaining workers’ means of production. We can understand this classed formation by dissecting the mystified abstraction of constant capital (c). Constant capital, in its actual social material form, is far less monolithic than v in the formula of C = c + v might suggest (Marx, 1967, pp. 204-210). The constant capital is not a thing. Rather, it is social material processes in the investment decision-making process as well as in the production process. Take production instruments for instance: together with the factory building and the infrastructure needed, the money spent on these is integral to the total v.

However, the choice of production instruments, in the regions where the wage labor is much cheaper, will be degraded to the less efficient ones so that the overall maximization of profit, or surplus value, can be obtained. Let us consider everyday public hygiene for example. In the United States, where the wage level is much higher than in China, the blowers powered by fuel are used for cleaning the fall leaves and lawn mowers are used for cutting grass. In China, however, where wage level is low, people are hired to sweep the streets and cut grass using hand tools that cost a fraction of power tools used in the US. In both cases, the wage level influences the expenses of the production instruments. Constant capital and variable capital, thus, are strategically adjusted, reflecting the social material, political, and financial differences in the hierarchical order of the given society. Wage, then, is clearly connected to, even caused by the overall material social structure that is often more directly manifested in the forms of different constant capital.

An active class formation is not only contained in the demystification of constant capital in the wage relations. More generally, wage relations become the materialized forms
through which class formations take certain recognizable social and material forms – the forms of wages. Harvey’s (2006) consideration of class formation implicated a flexible, yet materialized formation of class in socially explicit forms when he states:

[C]lass configurations that actually exist under capitalism have to be interpreted as the product of forces ranged in support of both the accumulation of capital and the reproduction of laborer as bearer of the commodity labour power. Class configurations cannot, therefore, be assumed a priori. They are actively produced. (p. 450)

Any “actually exist[ing]” “class configurations,” and any social material “forces” have to have their forms of existence to be “actual” at all. The ways wages are calculated, legalized, expanded through extra working hours, spent on living, and made to not only betoken, but mediate everyday livings of peasant workers offer an opportune approach for us to understand class configurations through the lived class identities that cannot be without the mediation of wage.

What I have suggested, in general, is to see the constant capital in its actual social formation, as the social material context instead of abstract parallel variables of the wage. Thus, the formation of wage and wage earning clearly point to the social material relations that exist in certain locales.

What social relations can wage as material-social mediation possibly mediate? And what does that mediation have to do with the production of class identity? Discussing wage, from a sociological point of view, offers a theoretical freedom that can cover a breadth that actual empirical research on one or several sites may not cover\textsuperscript{16}. Therefore, from this point on,

\textsuperscript{16} I use sociology here in the same sense that Raymond Williams (1982) used it in his \textit{Sociology of Culture}. Williams categorized “‘cultural studies’ is already a branch of general sociology” (p. 14). And he continued to distinguish such a sociology from the latter’s usual disciplinary usage. “But it is a branch more in the sense of a distinctive mode of entry into general sociological questions than in the sense of a reserved or specialized area. At
I would summarize several theoretical possibilities in which wage mediate material-social relations.

First, wage appears most directly as a sum of money, in cash or in other forms. Yet, such forms of wage are just a material appearance. They tend to mask wage as a set of social-material relations to maintain capitalist production. For one thing, although wage is the paper money, at usual times, without the bankruptcy of the government, the social-material relation guaranteed, albeit dynamic, purchasing power means that wage can be expected, actually used, in exchange for commodities. Thus, wage means a potential for materiality. It is an adjourned moment and mediation within the material-social relations to the means of production. In its money form, wage mediates the exchange for commodities. Moreover, it also mediates a whole personal rationality on how money should be spent or not. Thus, wage as a means of purchase is an axis around which different individualized reasoning for how life should be lived spins. In this sense, wage mediates not only the actualities of one’s spending, but also the often silent or even untraceable moments of decision-making.

Second, wage, also as a sum of money, but in the scale of formulating the workable mode of capitalist production, is a vital part for luring and maintaining labor forces in the formation – both material and social – of capitalist production. And it does this so efficiently when it, more often than not, is taken socially as an equal exchange for the workers’ labor.
Although Marx (1967) emphasized to unveil the mask to explain clearly what is behind the mask, that is, the exploitation for surplus value, the unpaid labor, yet, it is even more important, particularly in complement to Marx, to emphasize that wage as a mask does not mean that only what is behind wage, the value theory, is true.

In a sociological sense of wage, wage as a mask is vital and crucial for wage as what is behind the mask. That is for the theoretical importance of wage as a mask. But wage as a mask has its empirical implications: By considering wage as a sum of money and a means of living, but missing wage as a social-material organization of labor resources, wage laborers’ choices on which factories to work would possibly leave the agency on social structural impact connected with wage to capital owners. For instance, Marx (1967) considered that the bloody legislation was historical made necessary in Western Europe because “the subordination of labour to capital was only formal” (p. 689). Marx was describing a historical period in Western Europe when nascent industrial manufacturing developed and were in urgent demand of industrial workers (see pp. 686-693). However, people “free[d]” from their land did not all choose to go to industrial production (pp. 686, 689). Indeed, the wage-laborers did not even constitute the dominant part of the mode of production (p. 689). Marx suggested that the dominance of wage-labor in a society, i.e. Western European nations, is a sure indication of the dominance of that society’s mode of production. From Marx’s understanding, we can derive that, first, in this process of societal transformation, wage indicates a structural change: wage, as a social-economic-material mediation of capitalist-labor relations and also the capitalist mode of production, then, marks the extent to which a certain mode of social production has transformed to another mode of social production. Apart from the structural indication, wage also mediates material-social resources into capitalist mode of production. In both structural and specific
senses, wage has produced capitalist and proletariat by attending to most miscellaneous details in capital production and individual living.

Third, connected to both and in part as a combination of both, when we think of wage in terms of actual social control that capitalists can or expect/desire to wield in the organization of its workers, what could be more effective when capitalists’ goals of production are aligned with workers’ desire of earning wages? Thus, wage as a sum of money has an immense organizing and socializing force. Capitalists can, actually, play within, at the margin, or, if necessary, beyond what the national and local laws *legalize as doable, or simply do whatever the laws could not possibly cover*\(^\text{18}\). In this point, wage has a pair of contradictory features: On the one hand, it is a powerful social-material organization strategy in which capitalists can organize the labor resources once it works. On the other hand, it is not so powerful because, historically, its own installation had to be done with the state violence. By the first feature, we need to examine how wage is actually used as social-material organization. By the second feature, we need to realize that wage’s violent historical installation means that its organization of labor resources, however natural it may seem, is at best a process of naturalization. Thus, we need to understand, against a naturalized social process, how wage has formed structural changes concerning wageworkers’ everyday living and working conditions.

To consider the last point on wage in real life situations: It is hardly news to elucidate China’s so-called *sweatshop* working conditions in which Chinese workers earn their wage. Such descriptions, often with a detached and pitiful overtone from Western viewers and commentators often start and stop at the same spot of an actually very similar “what a terrible working condition China has!” statement overtly stated or clearly implicated. But such a spot of critique seldom covers a sociological depth/breadth of the situation. Rather, the working

\(^{18}\) See Don Mitchell (2000) for his provocative argument on negative power of law.
condition, no matter how terrible it is, does not stand alone. Instead, many times, it is strictly connected to the wage system. Again, we cannot imagine wage as a pure sum of money. Instead, as a set of social-material mediation in which social relations are mediated, wage has a default voice: The time I have paid is the time in which I can fill in any kind of conditions allowed by the law and social customs. Thus, in this way, wage actually works on a vast uncharted area of wageworkers’ material and social rights. I do not mean wage masks the time that it has not paid the workers for, i.e. the surplus value. Rather, I mean that both in the time period for workers to work on earning their wages and for them to produce the surplus value, the working condition, as the condition resulted from constant capital, being viewed as belonging to capitalists and having become part of the objective environment and material norms of work, is actually the largest default power of wage. It means that wage has paid for workers to work for one hour *naturally means the workers need to work in the given conditions of the factory*. The fact that such conditions, or the majority of such conditions, do not ever come up in the initial discussions of employment does not mark any individual workers’ carelessness or inexperience, or any capitalists’ cunningness or rich experience. Rather, the fact means that wage covers a large area of uncharted area as its default rights and those rights, in turn, becomes the *fringe benefit* for the employers-capitalists instead of employee-workers. Wage as a material-social institution actually covers the spatial environment, and other parts of the constant capital, as the default, objective, and unspoken rules of work. It is in this sense that it becomes a rich social institution and this institution is richly social to a great deal because the unspoken, objective, and neutral material presence is inevitably wrapped within the social relations that wage has summoned up.

By the means of wage, capitalists hire workers and subsume/subordinate them to
specific working actions and the specific working conditions. By doing so, wage also mediates such varied working actions and working conditions into a unified capitalist mode of production. Such a mode of production can only exist in actuality through the varied specificities of working actions and conditions. But it is through such varied specificities of working actions and conditions that peasant workers’ relations to the means of production form the general mode of production. It is through such specificities that wage as material-social institution actually becomes a whole way of life, a culture of production and its relations made production possible. Thus, *wage does not only produce class identity through its powerful material-social mediation, it also does so by attending to individual differences, allowing the voices and decisions of individual workers to be part of its overall mediation, thus producing class identity as if it had not done so.*

For instance, with the possibilities of not defining sitting, the capitalists can pay workers their wages on the condition that they have to stand to work\(^\text{19}\). The relation/mode of production in one area, be it a factory or an assembly line, can be conducted without the production line installing seats. If squatting is not considered as detrimental to a degree that is either unbearable by workers that they start to struggle against it, or not by capitalists as destroying the squatter-workers’ future labor-power, then, squatting would be used as a working mode and the work platform would not be heightened. Thus, the capitalists use wage sociologically to their own advantages to create *minute parts of the mode of the specified capitalist production.*

\(^{19}\) Different from many nation’s considering squatting as improper behavior or even illegal, one peasant worker working on die casting told me that for his company, it is a common practice to lie the raw dies on the factory floor for subsequent soldering, cutting, polishing work. The factories save the money on having proper work platforms, part of constant capital, whereas workers work years and years in that discomfort position prone to chronic back and eye problems. But instead of critiquing just on sweatshop condition, such a working condition cannot be solved without the whole level of working conditions raised. Thus, wage gets to mediate such social-material condition as a *natural* condition for earning.
Yet, this specified mode of production is also the most general in its sociological sense of connection, with wage’s unspecified actual working conditions filled as the default and unspoken conditions of workers’ obedience/capitalists’ rights. And a factory where workers squat for eight hours or more to work on dies for automobiles or other production becomes possible. Philosophically, within the room left between the cracks of laws, there are always endless possibilities for wage to maneuver the workers, changing and malletting them into different bodily positions, postures, movements and paces of movements. Thus, usually, such intricate connections through wage’s unsaid and default use of time of labor-power means that what wage purchases is a general blank of theoretical and practical interests. In this general blank, endless possibilities of actual bodily treatments can be happily filled in by capitalists with their individualized adjustment of social customs, rules, and laws. Wage as variable capital does not only mean that it is crucial for workers to work for more time then they are paid to – not only this sense of labor-power as variable and expandable for working more, but also variable in an important sense that bodies of workers are reproduced to suit the situation defined by constant capital.

Unfortunately, however, such intricate social-material relations that wage is made into and such endless possibilities that wage as a social-material institution is enabled in, for, and of a class production are often grossly and indifferently reduced to an isolated derogatory statement of “terrible working conditions” or a simple-minded “sweatshop environment.” Actually, these conditions are more systematic than they appear to many, with the system central to wage as a social-material institution that works, in spite of struggles by working class

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20 Here “reproduced” refers not to any finished and rigid production. But it refers, mainly, to the dynamic working processes that workers are subject to, with the possibilities of changes anytime new orders are given. Of course, with such readiness of possibilities, some rigid bodily productions can occur, such as the work diseases of all kinds. But it is important to understand the reproduction in this dynamic sense where everything seems to be natural for workers to accept orders in their paid hours to work as required.
and possible changes, directly for specifying and realizing a concrete set of workers’ realizes and actualities of living and working. It is in this same reason that class identity is produced by such a wage as social institutional organization of laborers by preponderating all the unspecified and unstruggled spots and practices to a unified structurally inferior position of workers. Class identity can be produced through a hierarchical structure of everyday social-material life practices. To the fascination of capital, metaphorically, wage acts as if it is a smooth structural slop. Through its mediation, living and working practices all slides to the disadvantages of working people.

**Conclusion: Wage from Theoretical Possibilities to Empirical Actualities**

In his effort to resolve the errors of classical political economists’ interpretation of value, Marx (2003 [1967]) considered wage to be the “phenomenal form” – “value and price of labor” that “makes the actual relation [of exploitation of surplus value] invisible” (p. 505). Borrowing heavily from Marx’s discussions on wage and its historical formation but distancing my argument from Marx’s iconic discussion of wage as mask for capitalists’ exploitation of surplus value, I concentrated actually on developing a theoretical speculation on a sociological sense of wage – on how wage as a historical entity as well as an economic entity can never be isolated from its being simultaneously social-material mediation. In short, I explored wage as a material-social institution. Importantly, both the brief historical view of China’s bloody legislation and the later on theoretical speculation are aimed to explore the theoretical possibilities of wage as mediation. Such a theoretical speculation is necessary especially when the specific empirical research tends to yield only one or part of the possibilities that wage can mediate. This does not mean empirical research is not important. Rather, it means that neither theoretical speculation nor empirical research alone can be complete. It further means that the
connection of both can help us envisage a possible class identity from the current conditions people suffer from. 

Class identity manifests social material hierarchical differences constantly experienced through the various activities that are connected to a central system of social structural differences. Such social structural differences can become a central system exactly because the differences are dynamically, yet continuously, reproduced to maintain a classed relation to the means of production. So let us marvel at this exquisite device particularly when such a device is used to a detrimental reproduction of working people into an exploited class identity\textsuperscript{21}. I do not consider wage as a marker of classes. Much more participatory and everyday than merely a marker, wage is a material-social institution of and for a class identity construction and production. It is crucial to the capitalist formation of modes of production particularly because of its capacity to attend to details of each movement through which actually existing capitalist production is produced or realized. In this way, it is a weapon out of capitalist arsenal: a weapon of mass destruction yet of mass destruction by attending to individualized activities. It can be much better likened to an AK-47 than to an atomic bomb in its wide presence, in its attendance to individuality, and, on a larger scale, in its impact on the social structure. In one word, wage produces class identity by realizing the material-social contents of everyday wage earners’ living and by connecting such living, different by every individual, but collectively as a class, to a means of production that it participates in realizing, too\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{21} Here Foucault’s antithesis against negative power has to be refuted.

\textsuperscript{22} This is not to say the wage, as a social-material institution is the final success of capitalism. Rather, it is to say that any struggles against wage, from raising wage to equality wage treatment, to the abolition of wage system, must attend to the above-discussed features of wage to become possible for social changes. In other words, the same thing has been said when Hall describes in “Gramsci and US” that we are one hundred percent inside the system. Thus, a possible subversion must be based on a comprehensive understanding of its embedded yet significant features. It is in this sense wage as a social-material institution of class identity manufacturing lies right in the center of Gramsci’s (2000) trench war in his \textit{war of position}: “The superstructures of civil society are like the trench-systems of modern
As such, the manufacturing of class identity can be understood by looking at how various everyday activities produce, and are produced by, overall social hierarchies. Economy, with its elements such as constant and variable capital, all produced in actual forms through the social material relations, involves all such social material relations into its own formation for class identity manufacturing. Since economy is irreducibly a social process, scrutinizing it might yield an understanding of class identity formation through different social material forces congealed towards the economic production.

Now that the investigation of class identity production has been narrowed down to the investigation of the economic process, which is irreducibly social, the economy needs to be seen in its most active production process. Chiefly, it means that we need to consider the formation of economy by looking at the formation of economic production process as a social material process. What I have argued in the previous section on the social material formations of constant capital provides important ways through which wage, as variable capital, is formed. Wage, through its formation in the economic production process, as the payment to laborers, and through its uses in the laborers’ everyday living experiences, as the means of livelihood, is not only closely connected to their money-mediated working process, but also money-mediated daily living process. Thus, on one hand, in that wage, as a material form, bridges the economic production and the social reproduction of laborers, it forms a thread penetrating and interlinking the often rarely discussed areas of economic and social reproduction. On the other hand, in that wage is positioned in the midst of all the social material relations in the formation of warfare. In war it would sometimes happen that a fierce artillery attack seemed to have destroyed the enemy’s entire defensive system, whereas in fact it had only destroyed the outer perimeter; and at the movement of their advance and attack the assailants would find themselves confronted by a line of defence which was still effective” (p. 227). And “the fundamental task was a national one; that is to say it required a reconnaissance of the terrain and identification of the elements of trench and fortress represented by the elements of civil society, etc.” (Gramsci, 2000, p. 229). Wage as a material-social institution belongs to one of the “elements of trench and fortress” (p. 229).
of constant capital, the interconnections between wage and constant capital can form a link between the daily experiences of laborers and the translocal and larger-scale decision-making and other operations for economic production to commence and continue. Thus, constant and variable capital should only be seen as temporarily stable in overall possibilities of changes for organizing surplus value production, with surplus value production understood as the entire circle in which capital is realized, not just the production process for commodities.

In a different context, Glassman (2006) argued that we needed to treat the primary accumulation of capital as a constant phenomenon instead of a historical period that has passed. Such an argument changes the understanding of capital production from being constituted from distinct and also rigid, historical periods to being constituted at any moment and in every operation through a social material process of acquiring social material resources necessary for capital production. The current topic of class identity production is a different topic, yet it shares with Glassman’s approach of integrating an active element of viewing certain economic process from the view of its formation from much larger social material and spatial potential. Seeing constant capital as temporarily stable and constantly readjusted to the overall purpose of capital production is to extent the social material forces that come into the formation of constant capital as a continual material social process that is constantly considered by the capital owners.

Through such an understanding of constant and variable capital, class identity production involves the actual social material, spatial, and political forces into the apparently mere economic process. Such forces are not always distinct from one another. In the actual social material process, they are often intertwined and interactive with one another. As often, they also form the contradictions that the capital owners have to solve through different
regulations of laborers and different organizations of such social material forces for economic production to continue.

To investigate such forces and see how they are organized to evade the contradictions is to investigate the interrelationships of complicated social material processes for the general purpose of capital production. Importantly, and central to our purpose, the laborer’s positions, by capital owners, as well as through the materially-mediated subjections, and not without the laborers’ own understandings of their positions, actions, and purposes, as well as their own struggles and resistance, constitute an expanded theoretical potential for understanding class identity both in the thick of theory and in the site of empirical research. Even more importantly, the possibilities/contingencies of any theorization can only be made certain through the actualities of wage in the field. The combination of the two is necessary because neither could have assumed its own epistemological autonomy. In here, I am not returning to the methodological discussion of Chapter III. Rather, it is a reiteration of the importance of empirical data for the completion of a totality that theorization must meet with empirical data. The theorization of the class identity production developed in this chapter, as with any theorization, is only a framework of potentiality to be gauged with the actualities of wages found in the field. Thus, this chapter is also formatted with its title “Towards the Actualities of Wage,” pointing to an actual material site in which this chapter must be poised. With these theoretical possibilities open and herein clearly exposed, I now turn to the field I visited, stories heard, and laborers seen.
CHAPTER V: IN THE ACTUALITIES OF WAGE: MANUFACTURING CLASS
IDENTITY THROUGH TRANSLOCAL ECONOMIC PRODUCTION

Introduction

The previous chapter has demonstrated the theoretical necessities and possibilities of understanding class identity production through wage formation. The central idea that I have strived to come across was to consider wage not only as a sum of money, but as a social material process in which both capital production and labor’s social reproduction are included. Through such a theorization, wage can be viewed as mediated social relations that manifest social and material forces that have come into its own making. Since wage is dissected by demonstrating its possible theoretical compositions in the human social material relations, it is possible, then, to envisage the formation of class identity by looking at how wage was actually constructed. After a theoretical discussion of such a possibility, I demonstrate through empirical research how wage forms class identity in the broadest sense of the social material relations.

This chapter focuses on how the actual social forces that have formed the wage relations also form class relations and experiences. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the factory through my observation and my conversation with my contact person, Mr. Lee. Then, my observation, furthered by information from interviews, is presented through two subsections: first, in what I called pre-wage social material relations, I demonstrate how different social forces and laborers are channeled into capital production wage system. Second, in wage social material relations, I investigate how the shop floor activities have been organized through a wage system into class formations. Throughout the chapter, the empirical
data is woven with the theoretical analysis that is more detailed and more specifically delivered towards understanding wage as a class identity strategy. To best demonstrate the meticulous everyday practices of peasant workers’ working and living, I rely on institutional ethnography, Marxism, Cultural Studies, and cultural geography and economic geography as my theoretical resources. The chapter concludes that wage, as actually existing social material relations, offers important ways to perceive class identity through its everyday formation.

**Basic Information of the Factory**

Mr. Lee is my contact person. He is one of the three managers in the factory where I chose to conduct my research. He is in charge of the production. According to him, the factory produces electronic wires and other electronic parts for cellphones, computers, and home appliances. The wires and electronic parts are produced on contracts with other larger companies, either foreign direct-invested (FDI) companies or the Chinese supply factories for foreign transnational companies; thus, the major proportion of the products is eventually sold to the international markets.

The factory was registered in 1998. It was located in Bao’an, one of the production districts of Shenzhen. After nine years, it has expanded from a mall factory that had eleven workers to a larger one with about 160 workers. Mr. Lee told me that the international offseason for home appliances and cell phones are in the summer time, so the factory had only around sixty skilled peasant workers in the summer, and the factory produced the subcontracted orders from larger parts factories. Lee also indicated that it had been a “common thing” that during the summer time, the larger parts factories would subcontract their orders to the smaller parts factories so that the latter could survive the bleak summer; thus, during the peak season, which usually started from middle or late August until springtime, small factories
would be able to channel the extra production burdens for the larger parts factories. According to Lee, the key to overcome the offseason was to obtain direct overseas orders. During my stay in the factory in July, Lee and other managerial personnel in his factory were busy preparing a foreign goal company inspection for production capacity. Lee then told me that the production maintained by the sixty workers in summer, though at a reduced interest, remained essential to keep the “machines running” for the inspections and also to attract the peak season “backbone skilled workers.” Currently, the factory produced AV cables for a nearby bigger parts company by subcontracting from it.

Smith’s (2005) use of translocal connection has to be expanded here into different dimensions of specific connections. In Smith’s original usage, translocal connections are used to indicate the directions of the field research. Specifically, it means that any seemingly single events necessarily can be seen as caused and causing events happening in different areas. It is through such translocal connections that the institutional power that govern localized events as experienced by local people can be revealed as the investigation continues. In itself, this use of translocal as the directions for finding connections to expose the hidden institutional power is not a bad thing at all: What a reified account of people and events we would have had any research focused only on a default site of observation and investigation? How could changes in people and events be adequately accounted had the places that are formative to their different stages of development not been enclosed in the whole picture? Would it even be possible for causal relations or dialectical relations to be established had spaces in different stages of people’s and events’ development not been taken into consideration? But, too frequently, Smith’s (2005) right concentration on developing a methodological openness through the “sociology for people,” paradoxically, prevented her from exploring what is implied in the
translocal connections. Thus, translocal connections are leveled to methodological openness rather than committed to certain theoretical threads, although, importantly, Smith (2005) shared the labor ontology with Marxian materialism. Thus, it is important to see what translocal can be more theoretically committed for working class sociology than a vague and loose concept of people in her concept of “sociology for people.”

*Translocal* can be better expanded by making its connection with labor ontology explicit. Take peasant workers’ living and working activities within the wage relation for instance: From the first sight, what I/we saw is a conglomerate of people and their place within and around the factory. Thus, the approximation of the factory can be viewed as a site, the default site that conventional research usually takes for granted. Yet, such a site is merely the site of departure, for its connected sites must be understood for this default site to be understood. Taking the production orders and the future markets of the ordered commodities into consideration, the default site is a site of production and the site for providing commodities for its transnational sale. Importantly, with the orders of commodities came with their specific requirements, the default site of production has to make spatial and temporal adjustment so that peasant workers can work in ways to best fulfill the orders. In this sense, the sites of market orders and the site of production are connected not only as a linear causal connection: production → market. Instead, the orders aimed towards the final markets, often came from overseas in the export-oriented, or outsourced manufacturing facilities, formed the causes and regulations of production. Thus, the causal connections between two sites, or among more sites, are a circular one: Orders/markets → production → fulfillment of orders/markets.

Of course, in a Marxian classical understanding of the circuit between production and
In the Actualities of Wage market, in terms of how capital is circulated and surplus value reproduced, such a circular causal relationship is seen primarily in the light of how surplus value is produced (See Marx, 19). However, such a conventional Marxian view overlooked the necessary requirements of fulfilling the orders can be the very forces that change the default site of production and also change the ways laborers, or in this case peasant workers, are related to one another and to the default site.

What does this circular causal relation in the field mean in the case of peasant workers’ wage formation, which can be now used as an example to illustrate the theoretical expansion at hand? And what does it mean for the understanding of the translocal connections? When I asked Lee about the specific working regulations used for producing different batches of orders, necessarily from different nations and regions of the world, Lee told me that the orders from different regions of the world usually have different requirements. He specified that the orders from Germany and Japan usually had the highest and most detailed quality speculations. When I asked him how he would adjust to such demands, he showed me several documents from his computer and said:

Products might appear very differently in their external appearance. However, the underlying regulations are less different than the external appearances of the final products. You see this [he pointed to me a file named “ISO9000”]: this is the industrial manufacturing standards that I have saved from my previous job when I was a peasant worker [instead of the factory manager]. It is quite complete set of rules and regulations for equipment arrangements and production procedures. We are still striving to work up to this standard. But the standard gives us an idea on how we prepare for specific orders from different customers. For the inspection that we are preparing now, it offers
important guidelines for what to prepare and what to expect from the perspective
customers. [He then moused over several other documents and told me:] These are all
different standards. Orders from some nations follow certain standards more closely
than other standards. But these standards give up a ballpark idea on what to prepare and
how to usually train our workers.

Importantly, the orders, not necessarily even in actuality, pose actual pressures of changes for
changing the default site that is the factory. But these orders also come to organize the
underlying manners in which the factories and productions are organized and laborers trained
and regulated. Thus, the connection between the production and the order is much more than
from products to market. Rather, the connection has deep impact on the ways the default site is
shifted and peasant workers’ relations with each other and with machines and their general
environment organized. The most superficial and direct one, probably, is that the pressure of
orders will change the working time and the specific working actions within the altered
working time in the production site.

The production site is not connected with the site of market as two separate spaces. The
connection is much more formative than that: Actually, the demands from the markets
reproduce the site of production. And the sites of markets are realized through the sites of
production that markets shaped. Of course, the formation of the site of production by sites of
markets cannot be done without human participation/activities. Importantly, the formation of
the site of production must be understood both through labor ontology and through the
formative roles of other sites. In terms of labor ontology, the site of production cannot exist or
cannot be maintained in certain ways without the active labor power. In terms of formation of
one site by other sites, it is important that the site of production, then, is connected to the sites
of social reproduction. In places where workers live in the same region as the site of production, such sites of social reproduction might mean, for instance, families and households. Yet, in this specific case, when peasant workers come from countryside and live temporarily in cities, the sites of social reproduction, intriguingly, are both the sites of dormitories and countryside families. The multiple interrelations, thus, make a locally specific formation of the site of production possible. Thus, the site of production and the sites of reproduction are interrelated. If we connected such interrelations between the site of production and the sites of reproduction back with the market sites, then, importantly, all these different sites are mutually formative to one another.

An important question arises with such mutual formation between sites: If the formations are always mutual, do all the sites share same importance? Do they benefit one social group the same as other social groups? Underlying these questions are a central question: To whose foremost benefit are the sites interrelated to one another? Importantly, this question is an empirical one. We must understand its theoretical underpinning from the ways different social relations have been destructed so that certain new or emerging social relations can be constructed. Such a dialectic relational understanding becomes the theoretical backdrop against which the chapters on wages and dorms are organized. But before we go on with the most specific empirical analysis, it is important to reflect on the question: How do such discussions of translocality benefit our understandings of peasant workers’ identity production?

In the central part of the expanded concept of translocality is the idea that one space takes a certain form and has a certain social functionality because it is interrelated and produced through the corresponding changes of other spaces. Thus, importantly, space is no longer reified objects with marked borderlines. Rather, they are better understood as
materialized social relations, or materialized sociality. As materialized social relations, their existence has to be understood through the human labor that has been used to shape such spaces in particular ways. But if spaces are the results of human labor that changes social material relations, then, importantly, we can also understand human labor in the mutually formed spaces. People’s social existence as interrelated material social relations can be examined with such materialized social relations being considered into an expanded understanding of what the social might consists of. In other words, understanding translocal through the mutual formation of spaces provides a unique analytical tool for integrating the functionality of materiality into the analysis of formation of human identity.

As is common for Shenzhen, the factory was located in an enclosed area with the entrance guarded by securities. Four small factories shared this space boasting two three-story buildings. One of the two working sites as well as the managerial office for the factory was on the second floor of the front building. Just outside the guarded entrance was a six-story dormitory building; the sixth floor was set aside for peasant workers working in Lee’s factories to rest. The factory building and the dormitory building directly faced each other, with a distance of three to five minutes’ walk.

Following this basic information about the chosen factory, I will highlight what I had seen and heard of in the factory during my visit to explicate class identity, wage, and to triangulate my data to reveal how these two notions are interwoven: how wage transforms into a social organization through which class identity is formed, produced, and maintained. In other words, investigating class identity formation can be accomplished through investigating wage as social material relations.

As one who uses a spatialized institutional ethnography, I am interested in how wage
actually forms a social material, as well as spatial, organization. In particular, I am keen to know how different social material forces have been subsumed to activities of wage earning. My presumption is: If wage is more than just a sum of money, and further, if wage earning has to be conducted through channeling a set of various social material forces into such wage earning, then, it is clear that wage earning is a way of social material organization. Seeing how human beings’ living has been subsumed into such wage earning activities, then, shows how human beings have been “identified,” or organized, into an actually existing class formation process. This process also coincides with the process of wage making—prewage and wage stages.

**Pre-Wage Social-Material Relations: Recruiting Peasant Workers into Wage System**

**The Ubiquitous Job Posters**

Bao’an district, the district where the chosen factory locates, is one of the manufacturing centers in the city of Shenzhen. The factory lies in a relatively new section of the city, and there was much construction going on there when I visited. My first day’s experience with job posters is highly valuable: first, their presence as a social material structure that asserts its influences and second, their apparent passivity of being merely posters for job advertisements.

The day when I first arrived at the factory was sunny, though it was raining heavily when I was on the bus. The sun had almost cleared away the rainwater in the street, except the small poodles. The streets were clean, with four automobile lanes and two lanes for bicycles and pedestrians. Apparently, everyone was staying indoors that day and the streets looked pretty empty. I looked around – and immediately saw several people surrounding a white full-size poster on my side of the street. The factory was two to three hundred meters’ away from
the bus stop on the other side of the street. “What was on that poster?”

I approached the poster; it was just an aluminum frame glass poster hanging on the wall, right beside the factory gate. People surrounding the poster were all in their early 20s, short and thin. The poster had several hiring notices; each was printed on A4 paper. Each job posting detailed the position requirements such as genders, ages, marriage status, and salaries, from 600 to 900 yuan. Interestingly, though advertising for different positions at different factories, the last paragraph of all these notices is identical: “This position had plenty of extra hour working opportunities.” Why would people be willing to work extra hours? I thought to myself.

Across the street, on the side where my destination factory was located, stood another poster. It was also an aluminum-framed glass poster, but it stood on the pavement, four times as large as the previous one. It had an aluminum top on both sides of the poster, making it a shelter against the sudden summer rain. The poster had a long list of hundreds of jobs, one line each on the single lined A4 paper. For each job, there was the job title, gender requirement, and possible monthly income. At the end of the long file were phone numbers for the interested peasant workers to call.

Such poster stands were not new things. In the interior of the nation, Xi’an city, where I had my college education, almost all colleges and work units had such poster stands, wood-framed though, with newspapers, such as People’s Daily, or school or work units’ notices posted in it. Those used to be the centers of the localized information. Here, such stands serve as a venue to share job information for laborers who come from other provinces in China to work in this city in the South.

Apart from providing job information, these posters could also be traps for those who
were not street-wise in cities. For instance, the previous poster had more detailed information and once one was capable for the job, he/she might be instantly employed and start work right away. But the current larger poster with hundreds of jobs and a telephone number to contact was, for certain, from privately owned job centers. For one interested in a job, he/she had to pay a yearly 100-yuan service fee to the job center. During that period, job centers were alleged to introduce new jobs continually to the registered laborer once he/she was unemployed. Yet, for one thing, there were a lot of uncertainties on payment, working conditions, and distance from one’s living place, as well as the accruing cellphone fees. It was not uncommon to hear that job centers had their partner factories to which they would introduce the new peasant workers so that apparently, they had fulfilled their obligations. Some of these factories would fire the workers several weeks later. In many factories, especially the small and medium sized factories, peasant workers had to pay a security deposit, usually as much as one month’s salary; then, getting fired would mean that peasant workers would lose their security deposit as well as the payment for their work. Were there ways to detect the good working job centers from the bad and deceptive ones? New peasant workers tended to ask other workers regarding the centers’ reputation, but the experienced peasant workers would seldom rely on the job centers for employment opportunities. They would instead have their network, whether relatives or friends, to inform them of the opportunities. These were free and safer for them.

However, the potentially deceptive job centers would always exist, or more precisely, there would always be unsuccessful and frustrating job search experiences with job centers. These job centers penetrated the public spaces through such job poster stands, forming a material presence of potentialities that were fraught with dangers for entering wage relations at
all. Indeed, if wage meant exploitation in the capitalist production, such means to intrude upon wage relations could only be referred to as para-wage. They belonged to a social relation that exists as peripherals of wage relations, and they would not be described as wage relations; however, they were actually the existing relations that every peasant worker was involved in on a daily basis. These peasant workers have often been overlooked in such social material relations that positioned them within an actual material social relationship, one that could be called a materialized hegemony, or diffused and decentered power system.

Although it was defused and did not function as a centralized power system, nor did it rely on the oppressive system, provided as service, it manifested a way in which social and material forces fostered a centralized and oppressive system and penetrated into the living space and everyday life experiences in benign forms. It fits Raymond Williams’s insight on hegemony, which did not always take “forms of control” only as “those ordinarily seen as ‘manipulation’ or ‘indoctrination’” (p. 110). For Williams, such a material presence is a social force that can be composed of “a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living” (p. 110). It included “our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world” (p. 110). Even more importantly, such presence of job posters was neither directly our “senses and assignments of energy,” nor directly “our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world” (p. 110). In most cases, they have been so obvious that they have become invisible. Yet, it is through such an invisible omnipresence that the network of services has shaped our perceptions and our world, not by directly working on our feelings and senses, but by delimiting the conditions in which feelings and senses of ourselves, can be formed. Thus, such a network of job posters has, together with other social material forces, formed a network in which our perceptions of the world are formed in the most direct ways possible, the
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ways of physical penetration and access to the spaces of everyday livings.

In fact, two hundred meters away from these job post stands, was the gate to the factory. The gate had two openings that were connected with a room around eight square meters in size. The room had two windows, each facing its respective opening. There were three or four young security guards inside the room. The guard stopped me, asking where I was going and whom I came to visit. I said my contact person’s name, Mr. Lee. The guard replied that he did not know the person, because, “there are several hundred people in this manufacturing facility. I cannot remember everyone’s name.” Then, I was requested to call my contact person to take me inside. I did and Lee came out in about five minutes. Lee nodded to the guard and the guard nodded to the two of us: I was allowed to enter the site.

The above-mentioned two social institutions, the job poster stands and guarded gates, are what peasant workers encounter on a daily basis. Actually, even before they are recruited into laboring for wages, they are likely to be living in the midst of them. The fact that these two social institutions are not the industrial manufacturing per se does not disqualify them being the actual social material institutions that are affiliated to the manufacturing. Rather, these institutions are essentially functional, social, material, and economic. Indeed, an abstract wage cannot exist in society. What exists can only be a wage system working in an actualized material social system. In this sense, although guarded gates and job poster stands are, by surface, the social institutions that peasant workers experience even before they enter the space of production and earning wages, they are, nevertheless, not pre-wage relations, nor pre-production. In that they actively participate in this wage production process in a seemingly passive and invisible way, they become part of a social material institution of wages.

What the peasant workers are subjected to were, then, the actual social relations that
have been formed by such institutions, working together with others. It is true that such institutions do not manufacture any explicit or clear-cut class identity for peasant workers. Yet, its unclear, seemingly benign appearance, indeed, by providing services of finding jobs and protecting the safety of the population, has formed it as the most well preserved social material forces. It works not by exerting oppressions, but by offering opportunities that one needs in everyday living. Although guarded gates might appear to be anything but benign, they are usually framed as providing security and safety for workers.

But here lies the problem: by actualizing a full scale of human potentials into a few truncated choices of jobs, their positive and servicing appearance mask their reification of an underlying presumption of socially and materially positioning of peasant workers into such positions and choices; thus delimiting their actually available social choices. These institutions, therefore, work in a more secretive manner than the already often-criticized capitalist wage relations. The production of wage in the industrial production process has participated in the manufacturing of certain actually existing class experiences and class activities, contributing to a class identity that can only possibly be identified by scrutinizing the most mundane everyday apparatuses such as job stands and guarded gates.

**Engaging Peasant Workers into Wage System**

After this theoretical analysis of the seemingly pre-wage social institutions, I would use the data I collected to draw a vivid picture of the lives of peasant workers in the chosen factory to best represent the identity of this special group. This section still focuses on the pre-wage production stage, but the discussion is based on my observation of the factory and my interaction with the peasant workers. Part of it delineates the daily lives of the interviewed peasant workers to define how wage is formed at a specific time and at a specific location to
demonstrate how class identity is formed, maintained, and challenged in the mix of various social forces, and, in particular, how class identity is intersected with wage.

As indicated in the methodology chapter, to best understand this special group, I chose ethnographic research methodology because that will give me the opportunity to understand them and represent them in a more accurate way. As a firm believer of the importance of dialogues and how much dialogues can reveal, I chose to interview my participants. Most of the peasant workers were willing to volunteer to participate in my research, in order to share their stories as well as opinions. Since I was fully aware that my interviewing could be an interruption of their daily busy routine of working and resting, I scheduled all my interviews during their lunch break for the night shift workers and during the evenings for the day shift workers. Occasionally, for the peasant workers who were awake in their dorms and were willing to talk, I approached them to ask if I could interview them. Since the lunchtime was short and I wanted to conduct as many interviews as possible, I decided to invite them for lunch and conducted ad hoc “focus group” discussions. Both interviews and focus groups yielded good results in interlacing their answers with my experiences and observations. The following sections focus on what I have gained from these interviews and focus groups, and how their class identity is closely related to wage production in peasant workers’ daily lives.

Traveling to Earn Wages

During my one-week stay at my chosen factory, I interviewed 31 participants, 29 workers and two managers. The conversations I had with them were enlightening, insightful, and inspirational. To best reveal the power of such dialogic interviews, I transcribed the authentic conversations below. I picked a few typical ones to justify my arguments in this chapter. I value in-depth dialogic interviews more than quantitative data because the interviews
can review more on how the peasant workers view and make meanings on wages and how their
everyday laboring activities are conducted. How the peasant workers have travelled to cities to
earn wages constitutes an important social element that is often overlooked in the description
of wage as a sum of money, or even as a laboring process that has been subjected to the capital
production system in China.

The (peasant worker) girl was thin and short. She would smile or laugh from time to
time since she was still a bit shy and embarrassed to be interviewed. When she told me that she
was from Shaanxi Province, I asked her which county she came from. She told me she was
from Fuping and she knew I was her county folk. I was surprised; she explained to me that
when I walked and talked with Mr. Lee the day before, she recognized my accent and guessed
that. Given her young age, starting at fifteen, and already having worked in the city for four
years by summer 2007, I asked her, “Now you are under the legal age to work [the legal age is
eighteen]. But when you were here, you told me that you were only fourteen. Did your
employer know this? How did you get the job?” I was trying to see how the national law of
labor was conducted in this real life experiences. She said with a smile,

Several of my girl friends in my village had come to Shenzhen to work. All of them
worked in this factory. At that time I was in my junior middle school. Unlike you, I was
not good at study [she laughed again]. I also had a younger brother. He studied ok. So,
I did not want to waste any more money and time on continued on schooling. Even if I
could pass the college entrance examination, the fee would be too high. So I talked with
my friends when they came back home. One of the villagers, at my father’s age, had
also contacted this factory. He recruited several young people in my village and more
in others, altogether twenty-four and organized us to come together. It would be safe.
None of us have graduated from high school. But since the factories here all require high school graduation certificates for hire, he managed to get all of us high school graduates certificates (laugh). The certificates had our “changed” ages there. Some factories here just look at the certificates – and they do not care (about the age). You can tell them how old you are. Each person paid him 85 yuan for all the certificates and for the “referral fee” to be escorted from village to the factory. He gathered all of our national id cards and our train ticket fees. We had our luggage and some money for ourselves.

“Could someone come to the factory by him/her self – that saves money?” I asked.

Not in our villages. Occasionally, several persons would come to cities together. I had never come out of our town before and my parents would be worried. Besides, if you let the person lead you, he would tell you all the stuff you need to prepare. It would save money to buy things in our hometown, such as medicine. I would never have thought of taking medicines with me. Who could take medicines when he/she is in perfect health?

Through the talk, I was invited into an innocent girl’s observations with little without the least of the experience of travelling, eager to earn money and eager to help the family, but not prepared for city living. I continued, “so it is a good thing to have such a referee to lead you to the factory?”

She smiled again:

Mostly, but not on all the aspects. When we arrived at the factory, that person told us that the factory asked for twenty-five yuan for registration fee. We did not know [the truth], so each of us gave him that. But later, it turned out that the factory did not require registration fees at all. But he had gone back home already.
“Would you ask for the money to be returned when you go back?” I asked.

“It’s a long time already. And also, he and I are in the same village. I would be embarrassed to ask him for that.”

As I have learned from interviewing other peasant workers later. The reference process was actually quite common for the young peasant workers and these peasant workers’ families actually preferred such a reference process although it cost money. Even though not many peasant workers would be swindled by the referees, referees’ finding every opportunity to charge money from peasant workers was not uncommon. Such an often-undocumented social material process of coming to the factories showed that wage earning itself is neither a thing nor a thing. Rather, it is complex social material relations that have derived from the current economic production process. Such social material relations and the economic production process have mutual dependence for the peasants; some of them are just like this girl’s experiences, namely, middle school drop-outs, to be positioned in an intricate network of social material relations. Such a finding-the-right-peasant-workers-for-the-right-factories-and-bring-them-there network never seems systematic in the sense that it is designed or planned by a single person, with a malicious purpose behind it. Nevertheless, the whole process formed by interconnected networks, each part with its chief actors, putting the peasant workers in an overall disadvantageous situation in the production process. In such a process, wage, as the ultimate goal for the peasant workers, is a symbol of wealth that has suggested ability, responsibility, and self-reliance. This symbol, however, is more than just a symbol. For the symbol to be actualized, peasant workers, willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or unknowingly, subject themselves into such intricately interwoven social material relations that they knew little about so that the potential of the symbol, wage, could possibly become real. Then, it is
through such an actually existing social material relations that wage as a sum becomes possible at all.

For peasant workers, these existing social material relations constitute something that can aptly be called the pre-wage relations. It is not to split such relations with the wage earning relations happening within the production process, but, importantly, to suggest that for any wage to be, it has long begun and it will already coexist with social material relations that subject and prepare people as wage laborers in the most materialistic manners, like the money the girl had to submit and the distances they had to travel to come to the factory.

*The Subsumption/Subordination of Old Crafts and Trades to the Newly Developed Industries*

Not all the peasant workers were as young and innocent as the young girl. Some of them had already had working experiences in the countryside. One peasant worker I interviewed in a man’s dorm was from Gansu Province. He was forty-four years old in 2007. Calm and reserved, he asked me questions regarding my own identity and my research. Only when he was reassured that the interview was harmless to him, he agreed to be interviewed. When I asked him how he became a peasant worker and what he did before he became a peasant worker to work in the cities, he told me that he had taught himself to repair watches and it used to be a lucrative business:

*I started to repair watches in 1979. At that time only a few wealthy people could afford watches. Salaries are much lower than they are today. The government officials had monthly salaries of about thirty yuan (about 5 US dollars) whereas a new Plum Blossom brand watch cost forty-five yuan. In fact, not everyone who had the money could buy a watch. Watches could only be sold to one if he had the government-issued*
watch coupon. At that time, you needed a coupon for everything—Cloth coupon for cloth, oil coupon for oil, food coupon for if you want to buy meals in the state-owned or collective-owned canteens. So I found that watch repairing must be a good occupation. I learned it by reading books and by working on an old watch that I had bought for ten yuan. When I had mastered the skills, I went to five different local bazaars, which fell on different days each week. I would have my watch repair stands on the street. I made the stands myself because I also taught myself carpentry before. For each day, I would earn eight to twelve yuan. That meant for about three hundred yuan a month. I was much richer than a government official.

During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, all the private business activities would be called the “capitalist tails.” Such activities in cities and countryside alike would be reported and punished, called “cutting the capitalist tails.” The one who was caught for such businesses would have the danger of being labeled as “the capitalist roader,” an identity that denies one from the working class in China. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the control on business activities was loosened and later on encouraged. In the countryside, there were national campaigns for reporting “10,000 yuan households.” These households would be reported to the county and rewarded so that other people would follow the lead to become wealthy.

“Were you one of the ‘10,000 yuan households’?” I asked.

He nodded with a smile and said,

But my watch repair [business] worked for about 8 years only. After the government allowed people to have businesses, people had more money. Salaries for government officials were raised several times. For peasants, after they had their land back in their own hands from the collective commune ownership, they also wanted to invest time and
money on the produce. After paying the tax in forms of the produce, they would have all the rest at their own disposal. They could sell it to the market and have cash. So they became richer too. At the same time, the electronic watches were imported to the Mainland from Hong Kong and other coastal areas with the emergence of long distance businesses. These watches originally cost ten yuan, later to five or three yuan. They became everywhere and you could buy them from a street vendor in the countryside. Not many people would repair their [electronic] watches. When they stopped working, people just bought another one. So, I stopped to go to bazaars to repair watches in '86 or '87.

“What did you do after that?” I asked.

He told me that after he quit repairing watches, he started an asbestos tile factory. The tiles sold well for six to seven years but later people began to use concrete for their roof surfaces. So again he closed his factory. He stayed in his hometown for several years, afterwards, doing what was available for him as a skillful person. He did construction work, sold groceries, and later opened a small convenience store. Then his wife took over the convenience store and came to Shenzhen to work as a peasant worker about six years ago. He had two kids and the elder one was a daughter. The daughter was in high school and studied well. He said that the work in the cities could accrue more for her college tuition.

He covered, in his watch repair and asbestos tile business, a historical change in China’s social organization. When the planned economy was broken down by the central government at the end of 1970s, the reform allowed business transactions. The newly developed and produced electronic watches, first from Hong Kong, then, from coastal area city manufacturing industries, have caused what to a watch repairman in the countryside meant an
industrial structural change. As a result, watch repairing as an enterprise at every countryside bazaar was pushed out of business. The changes of the construction materials from the cheap asbestos to concrete were actually the changes in economic structure manifested in forms of construction. Although for him, it was a personal experience that led to his later successful maneuver into manufacturing construction materials, it actually was, on a larger scale, a way that the innovative kinds of businesses and industrial development had subsumed and eliminated the social material opportunities for many old businesses to develop; thus, although such subsumption of peasants labor forces into the urban production industry took the form of personal experiences for individuals, yet, on a national scale, the erosion of the countryside livelihood had narrowed down peasants’ employment opportunities by degrading the countryside livelihood and by changing the structures of such livelihood into a nationwide internal migration that prepared labor forces for coastal industries. Although such accounts happened long before the peasant workers’ wage-earning activities actually started, even before they actually came to the cities to be employed, they were the social material relations that wage as a kind of actually existing social material relations could not be isolated from. It is through such actual, social material relation changes that wage became possible. While apparently peasant workers were prepared to earn wages, in actuality, it is crucial to understand the wage-earning process because wage, as a way to organize and maintain social structures, has been “prepared” to be integrated into a nationally reorganized labor process. In such a process, the countryside is subsumed into the formation of urban industrial production. Importantly, it is through such a process that peasants who lived in the countryside moved to cities to work as peasant workers.

I also interviewed a peasant worker from Fuping County, Shaanxi Province, who used
to be a movie projectionist. He recalled for me the detailed technology know-how on what kind of movie copies to rent to projections in villages to earn more money and vividly demonstrated the opening remarks to advertise his business. It was during the 1960s to 1980s when television sets were very rare in the countryside. I have the memories of the whole village buying a 20-inch black-and-white TV and there were only two channels, Channel 4 and Channel 8. The whole village would gather outside in summer and inside the designated village public room to watch TV. When there were big events such as marriages, deaths, or the third-year filial piety observation of deaths, it was likely the better-off families would pay for an open-air movie night. The projectionist would come with the projector and film copies. The village would gather around such open-air movie nights with the movie screens hanging between trees or electric poles. When I asked why he stopped his movie projection business, he said:

*Who watches movies in our countryside now? Only little kids. Every family now has big color TV sets, with more than ten channels. If they have cable connection, they get even more channels. The newly married all have DVD players and many of them have computers. They can rent a DVD for one yuan and they can watch both new foreign and Chinese movies. I could not compete with these advanced technologies. I could not rent the newly released film copies. They are not available for projectionists like me, only projecting it for one night at an open air village “theatre.” They are only available for the city theaters for a designed period of time. In the past when there was no TV, I could project some very old movie copies like Anti-Japanese War movies and Liberation War movies. People had all viewed these several times, but because they had no other entertainment, they would sit for yet another time and cheered for the plots that they were already so familiar with. Now it’s totally different. Old people*
would stay at home watching TV. Only little kids would come out to watch movies. The young parents have all come to the cities to work as peasant workers.

There is little exaggeration in his words. For the Fuping County I know of, from the high school and junior middle school drop-outs to men aged less than forty have mostly come out to work as peasant workers. Some of them with construction skills work in the construction industry to earn higher monthly wages and others with less skill or training work in the manufacturing industry, usually with less monthly income. The overall structural changes in people going to work in cities as peasant workers have also made many changes in occupations. He said:

Take the big events of marriage, deaths, and kids’ first birthday celebrations, for example. These are the biggest events in the countryside. Marriages and deaths are, most likely, events for renting movie nights. But now, it is so different. In our countryside (nongcun, or villages), these events used to mean that the host family would ask the extended families to help with cooking, cleaning the house, borrowing tables and chairs from other families, returning them after the event, and treating the relatives. Things ranging from directing the relatives’ little kids where to pee to registering the presents that relatives have brought for the events, from slicing the meat and vegetables for the chef to prepare the banquets to sticking the couplets (duilian) on the family’s front and second doors would be assigned to specific helpers from the extended families. You know that, for a death in the family, the more closely related families members would be the filial members. They would be lining up in a queue with the order of generations and seniority, who would follow the present table to go back and forth between the outside of the village and the house to usher in the newly arriving
guests and relatives. At the burial, young male folks in the same village would carry the coffin within a ritualistic burial wooden frame, which requires sixteen men to carry from the house to the grave. At least another sixteen men would be required to change the initial sixteen men. Within these three years, it has completely been changed. Now, with all the young people leaving to work in the cities, the burial becomes a problem. The close family members, who used to be the filial members who were supposed to follow the coffin, now would take off the filial robes and join the carrying team. At the beginning [of change], the event host family went to the nearby villages to invite young, strong men to come to carry the coffin. But later on, people felt that it was too troublesome and they could not find enough shoulders (he laughed) even if they go to three or four villages. So the coffin frame renters started to change the coffin frame from men carrying the frame to the frame that could be installed to a flatbed car attachment, and that solved the problem. Now everything has changed. If you go back to our villages, for big events, bread will be ordered from some families who make and sell bread. Cooking is still done at the event house, but the chef brings with him the orders of all the vegetables and meats necessary for the event. Bowls and plates are rented. Even the ritualistic decoration for death events is ordered from the professional makers instead of being brought by the relatives as a show of respect to the deceased.

The owner of the event would just need to pay the money.

This is an intricate circle happening in the countryside with the peasant workers going into the wage relations. The shortage of hands has brought about the changes of the countryside rituals, which require all the community assistance to be changed into money-mediated services and commodities, which, in turn, requires money to be used for a grander and more vantage point
in the everyday existence of the peasants.

Such changes, then, are part of the social material relations that produce wage, maintaining the wage laborers for the city industrial production by taking care of the big events at their families with the new professions that help to solve these immediate family problems but also eliminate old businesses. At the same time, such changes are costly. Seen from such ritualistic events of the countryside, the changes of the most fundamental social practices in the countryside have been linked to both the need to earn more and to recognize the more elevated importance of wages as necessary mediation in the everyday living of peasant workers and their families. The distant countryside that this peasant worker referred to has already been more deeply connected to wage as a material mediation of social relations.

How does wage appear in the social material relations that have been subsumed into the decisions and actions of earning wages in the cities? Different peasant workers told different stories. Yet, such different stories shared the same subsumption process in which many social material relations interwoven into their everyday living have now been partially changed; this change then transformed them into peasant workers who earn wages in cities far away from their homes. Importantly, the presence of posters, the traveling to make a living, and the subsumption of the countryside trades and crafts all pointed to the wage earning in cities as a class formation process that does not solely happen upon individual peasant workers, but happen on a larger scale of trans-local structural changes, the subsumption of the countryside to cities in China.

Such subsumption took place in apparent forms of individual or collective autonomous decision-making, but these happened with forces. The many social economic structural changes manifested in peasant workers’s recollections have shaped the social structure that
mobilized their decision-making; thus, the pre-wage social material relations are only *a priori* to the wage-earning activities if peasant workers are considered as individuals. They are not *a priori* to the wage as social material relations of labor organization in terms of the continuation of capital production. Instead, they are part of wage-earning and surplus value exploitation that is constantly needed and maintained, like the capitalists maintaining the laborers during the off-season of the production so that the production can happen in no time once they are needed.

Gathering people for wages, even before the wage-earning activities can happen, or possibly to happen in reality, shows clearly that wage is more than just a sum of visible physical money. Rather, wage is social material relations that organize labor as variable capital and as social material resources. It is not the actually earned wage that motivates such labor, but wage as the potentiality, as the realizable potential, that motivates the presence of posters, cross-province traveling, and the vast change of lifestyle among peasant workers. This claim, however, in no way, suggests that wage works as an abstract, empty ideology at this stage. Rather, on the contrary, the presence of structural changes, including the presence of posters, the formation of countryside-to-city laborers’ routes, and the changes in the countryside craftsmanship and trades, all result through structural changes based on the previous labor that has contributed to such structural changes. They are part of the social material relations that have contributed now to the formation of the peasant workers as a continual labor army for the capital production to happen as a sustainable development of exploitation.

**Waged Actions: Social-Material Relations on the Shop Floor**

If pre-wage social material relations can exist for the peasant workers as a realizable potential, this potential is not only unsatisfactory for peasant workers but also for capitalistic owners, for neither can realize the potentials of wage as money for peasant workers and wage
as a way of exploiting surplus value for capitalistic owners; thus, it is important to see what has happened in the actualities of waged actions, when wage as social material relations happen on the shop floor – when the production does begin and continue.

In this section, I focused on two actual social material relations: first, the actual production activities; second, the material conditions of such activities. I believed that for the production activities to begin and sustain in the actualities of living, the focus has to be shifted from wage as masking the actual exploitation to describing what has actually been masked – the actual presence of varied techniques and measures for wage earning of peasant workers and for surplus value exploitation from capital owners.

Accordingly, I planned to explain, first, the wage actions and the time frame of such actions and, second, the formation of wage working ethics by different peasant workers. Third, I planned to explain the meanings of wage by going through the wage slips as an accumulating strategy of the capital owners. Methodologically, I have followed the previous section by integrating interviews with my observations as well as the theoretical analysis.

**Wage in Time**

Time is more than an abstract mechanical time that any clock can tell. It is more than the abstract necessary social time that determines value. It is a bodily experience of different activities that come into the formation of the products – the use value. Such a bodily experience includes what the environment has forced on one’s bodies, for, unless you have experienced it, with dizzy eyes and swimming minds, and the sweating bodies stuck to the cheap nylon T-shirts, you could not necessarily tell the difference between the time spent with and without air-conditioning, with and without even the ventilation fans. You could not tell the difference between the time that has to be spent in the midst of such humid heat and the time
that one can spend in the air-conditioned coolness. You can think of it, but you could not name every little difference that such differences can make to your body and your mind. The time these peasant workers actually spend on working is shown in Table 5.1. They have a half-hour break for lunch or snack that makes their complete working hour eleven hours each day.

Table 5.1

HyperLink Company Work Shift and Break Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Shift durations</th>
<th>Lunch/Night Snack</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>6:30am – 6:00pm</td>
<td>12 noon – 12:30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night</td>
<td>6:30pm – 6:00am</td>
<td>12 a.m. – 12:30 am</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Peasant workers usually have six-day working weeks. The day off is determined, however, by the day of a power supply turn-off that alternates in several city districts to ease the pressure on the industrial demand of power supply.

Facing the shop floor door was a notice board with the number of workers, task numbers, objectives for the day’s work, and the raw materials used. There were about thirty peasant workers working in the big room. These workers were divided into six rows, with two rows of people facing each other. The working table had bars and frameworks so that the different finished wires could be hung on different slots in frameworks and bars. Everyone was busy and several looked up when I passed by as quietly as possible and quickly came back to their work. On the inside wall, there was a glass shelf with all the water bottles, of different kinds, colors, materials, and shapes tightly squeezed on the shelf. Next to the shelf was a corridor to the insider space. There was a small room for a hot water boiler. Next to that room were the restrooms, men’s and women’s on different sides.

Turning back from my short tour, I noticed that of all the six rows of peasant workers,
the two rows on the right were quite different from the rest. Instead of working on the tables with small machines, these two rows of workers worked with four larger machines that were about two feet higher than a person standing up. The majority of the noises of the shop floor, the heat, and the foams of hot plastics came from these machines. A detailed account of what I had seen is rather necessary to help people understand what took the peasant workers to earn 1,200 yuan RMB per month.

People who worked with these bigger machines were finishing the final step for the wire making. All the wires that were made from scratch were molded here to have their different connectors. For instance, the inside copper wires and the outside plastic skins for the different computer wires might be the same, but it was by different interface connectors that they could be used as USB portals or power cords. The plastic molding, as this last step of wire making, was for molding the wires with their designated connectors. On the day when I visited, they were making AV cables.

To make AV cables, the three different colored connectors, red, yellow, and white, were to be molded to their respective wires. Other workers had already made the metal connections previously. The molding workers needed to put the three wires into the lower cast in correct positions. The molding guns were above the upper part of the cast, hanging above the lower cast. The workers, after putting the wires into position, needed to use the other hand to lower the upper cast together with the molding guns. Once the upper and lower parts of the cast were positioned together, workers need to step on the pedal switch so that the molding could begin. The liquidified plastics were infused into the cast. After that, a certain time was needed for the already molded connectors to solidify before the workers lifted the upper cast with the molding guns. After workers lifted the molder, they needed to have on-site inspection
of the AV cables. The good products were, then, hung on one bar on the workers’ left sides, and the bad products were thrown into the wastebasket also on their left sides. At the end of the shift, both the good products and the bad products were given to the products inspectors for inspection and also for bookkeeping on the products and wastes. All these numbers were calculated, in order to determine the monthly salary and bonus.

Two steps are the most crucial to determine the efficiency of the workers. One was the ways in which the parts could be exactly positioned in the lower part of the cast. The agility of hand coordination was essential here. The worker held the three wires between the lower four fingers. The slightest movement of the distances between fingers would adjust the distances between wires. Then he put the rightly distanced wires into the lower part of the cast and lowered the upper part of the cast to start the molding process. Another important step was the overall adjustment of the molding machine. As the molding speed could be adjusted and as the owners of the factory had given the molding workers the right to adjust their “own” machines, then, the quicker and more skillful a worker was, the quicker the molding machine could be adjusted to produce more wires. The agility of the hand coordination, a direct result of one’s bodily movements, then, was connected to the machine, part of the constant capital for more products. Like Foucault (1977) described in *Discipline and Punishment*, time has been split into “infinitesimal” units (see pp. 136-137). Together with those split is the whole social material process in which the machines and bodies joined together. Such a whole social material process is the detailed labor organization system in its actual operation, in which the piece wage pushed on for quick movements of bodies, hands and feet. These movements are supported by the machines in ways the constant capital and variable capital are integrated into the hand-machine coordination, in which what appeared as the support of the machines
actually functioned as the extra exploitation through machines that are aspired by the peasant workers to excel others and their earlier selves.

The machines, as constant capital, and the bodily movements, as labor power, the variable capital, had been fused into a joint formation of productivity through the labor power. It is quite Marxian to suggest that labor power is the only creative part in the whole process of productivities and the making of the surplus value. Yet, what has often been overlooked is how the constant capital, the making of the machine and the general environment, has constituted a restricted working condition for the laboring forces. If wage is the monetary expression, the price of the labor power in actual social relations, it is also the linchpin upon which many social relations can be hooked. Perceiving wage as a linchpin is to observe how these social relations actually have formed the environment, in which the labor activities take place. For instance, what has made the unbearable heat of the shop floor something that has to be endured? While the activities of labor seem to point to specific movements of the body, it certainly also raises questions about the environment in which such movements have to be performed, because it is in this part of production that the constant capital becomes the manifested social relations in which the mechanisms of identity manufacturing has often been overlooked.

Time in actuality is not temporal. Time *alone* cannot exist, or time as temporal can only be abstract. Even in its most abstract form of hours and minutes of clock/mechanical time as measure of activities, simultaneously *it has to be spatial so that such measurement can make any sense*; thus, space, as stages for human activities, is inseparable from time. Time, as measurement of the living process, has to be connected to the materially mediated environment. Because time is always closely connected to its material environment, time itself
is mediated into one’s experience even though a universalized and abstract time offers itself as a neutral and objective measure of activities. In other words, time is only connected and relevant to human living in that it is particularly invented through the materially mediated environment. Actual movements of activities not only mean the actual intensity of work, which is usually measured by the abstract time and concrete wage; they also demonstrate the regulations that come into the formation and social material construction of time in its most localized but actual manners.

I have concentrated on the shop floor where actual production activities take place to demonstrate how wage has been made into a plastic, extendable, formation of social relations in which peasant workers’ class identity is formed through ongoing, dynamic, yet always actual, social material processes. Such processes contain both the structural push of the constant capital as well as the bodily activities of peasant workers. It is important to note that considering peasant workers’ bodily activities as part of the class identity formation does not suggest that they are willing to participate in making their identity as such. Instead, it is to suggest that any structural formation of the capital production cannot be maintained without the actual bodily activities of the workers. The wage earning process and the embodied experiences, suffering or not, are the identity production in action. Moreover, it is also to suggest that how the workers’ actual bodily activities have been conducted can always find a social material structural formation that makes it possible and seemingly the only “rational” way for the bodies to be positioned as such. Furthermore, it is to suggest that struggles have to take up its structural and material formations to yield any lasting social material differences in the formation of capital.
In the Actualities of Wage

Figure 5.2. “Nail” your work. Some of the peasant workers’ work requires less of machinery than good eyesight and ambidextrous hand coordination and a certain length of nails so that work can be done in the infinitesimal divisions of time. Haraway’s concept of cyborg, interestingly, if used here, means not the invasion and integration of machinery into the biological bodies, but reversely, the assertion and articulation of biological bodies as part of the totality of the machinery for capital production.

The Formation of Wage Working Ethics

The social meaning of wage constitutes an inseparable part of wage. In Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) *Distinction*, he argued for a theoretical position that defies the simplified understandings of treating materiality and spirituality as isolated from each other. According to him, to say *social reality* is to invite the integration of both materiality and spirituality as an enjoined part of social reality. Peasant workers’ understandings of their wages fit with his understanding of *representation* and *class formation*, both as familiar terms but both re-theorized in a more inclusionary manner:

[T]he representation which individuals and groups inevitably project through their practices and properties is an integral part of social reality. A class is defined as much by its being-perceived as by its being, by its consumption — which need not be conspicuous in order to be symbolic — as much as by its position in the relations of production [italics original]. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 484)

Such theorization of *class* and the peasant workers’ understandings of their wage earning, as a form of *representation*, fits the task at hand with a double strength: First, after we have
considered how heat as a natural-social result of class formation, which focuses more on the structural underpinning, it is important to consider how wage is perceived by the peasant workers themselves. Second, although such an analysis of the peasant workers’ perception of the wage earning can be considered as the “consumption” of “the relations of production,” as the “being-perceived” nature of its “being,” interestingly, such “consumption” is formed by peasant workers within “the relations of production,” and with the “being-perceived by-selves” within the exact same space and existence of “being” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 484). In other words, the consumption of who self is, the understanding/perception of what one’s identity is, constitutes the integral part of one’s “being” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 484).

This subsection was developed around the interview questions such as: “What is your biggest aim for working in the city of Shenzhen?” and “What do you think are the best ways of earning wages?” In the interview processes, I refrained from the more vague and philosophical and, hence, baffling questions such as “What do you think of wage?”, or even worse, “How do you define wage?” Instead, the questions, like the first two and their derivatives used in different interviews to fit the situations, were prepared and asked so that certain experiences and personal stories could be invoked. For one thing, it was through such experiences that the particular happenings can manifest the vivid answers to what they really thought about wage; and, for another, their answers were bound to point to certain structural issues that I would not have known of without such experience-sharing and story-telling. The result of these questionings has been divided in the following into three different categories: professional pride, attitudes against frequent changes of jobs, and attitudes for career mobility and development through changes of jobs.

Different from Appiah’s (2005) understanding of ethics in his *The Ethics of Identity*,
ethics formed through everyday practices of working and living tells the actually existing
politics over working. It is during the lunchtime after my workshop observation that I did a
group interview with the peasant workers. Altogether, eight peasant workers came for the
lunch. As a compensation for their time, I insisted on buying them lunches. The interviews,
then, were conducted in a small restaurant where we ate together. The following episodes were
different opinions gleaned from this group and my following interviews. They are the most
articulated expressions from these workers to show the field-specific actual ethics developed
over wages.

**Striving for promotion.** Wang was in her early 30s, married, and had two daughters.
She had worked as an elementary school teacher in her town for five years before working as a
peasant worker in cities. Due to Wang’s hard work and the work ethics she demonstrated, she
was promoted to the line leader who was in charge of eleven other workers. When I asked her
what she had learned from her work experiences, she told me:

*I do believe that hard work and always doing the right things are the most important
qualities that I can hold on to. Not only do I finish my workload and try to do more, I
also regulate and help the other members in my team. I offer them my suggestions so
that the new members in my team can learn more quickly. As I can teach and lead them,
I have been promoted to be the line leader. And I believe in hard work. With my hard
work, I would continue to be promoted.*

Many individuals simplify the wage-earning process as individual struggle and
Individual edification. Diligence, frugality, kindheartedness and social savvyness are among
the often mentioned ethnics/morality essential to people with such a view of job ethics.
However, the assumption of a general, neutral, and even more, fair and classless society that
these workers explicitly or implicitly hold does not exist. But importantly, some of these workers who have suffered from previous unemployment, uncertainties of work, and poverty also mentioned perseverance as their ethics. Perseverance would not have been so crucially important had not the society been so hierarchical.

**Stasis in job and silent acceptance.** Chen, the peasant worker who was the watch repairer in his hometown, was in his forties. When I asked him the same question, he said:

*If you want to make money, you have to stick to one factory and work hard. Many young workers do not realize that and they change working places frequently. For each factory you enter, usually you have to have one month’s salary as the deposit. If workers change work places frequently, what they earn may not even be enough for the deposits. Besides, after one quits his current job, he cannot always be employed right away. The living expenses will quickly reduce any savings that he has made before, if he has any at all. A lot of young workers complain about the working conditions and many leave their jobs for better ones, but even the better ones are only slightly better. Constantly changing jobs to find the better ones, one can quickly end up having nothing left, or even in debt. I have calculated all these in the beginning weeks of my working experiences in cities. After that, I only change my jobs when I have to.*

Based on the mathematical sum of the money that one can save over a given period of time, the peasant workers have accepted the exploitations and viewed job changing as avoiding hard work and the workers who frequently change jobs as lacking in perseverance. He added,

*We are all from the countryside, but these young people are so different from me. They are stupid and they do not know how to live thriftily, nor how to earn more in a shorter time. All they care about is playing around and they play video games, and they also go*
to net bars to download games, music, and songs on their cell phones, one piece for half a yuan. What playing games and listening to music can bring to them is only a waste of money.

I asked then, “How do you contact your family members now that they are in the countryside [if you do not have a cell phone]?”

*I can go to the phone bars on the street. It is only one tenth of a yuan for a minute’s long distance talk. I make three calls a week with five minutes each and that’s only 1.5 yuan for one week. For the whole month, I would only need to spend six yuan on calling home. And I actually spend much less than that.*

Many peasant workers who are beyond thirty-five years old tend to spend as little as possible to save their money. They also form “down-to-earth,” practical ideas on how to earn more money; however, such formations of ethics of sticking to the same work place and spending less has had little impact on the exploitative nature of the factories and the work places. They are also dissatisfied with their situation. But they have formed the everyday wisdom of accepting the status quo and not to go against the system. They are seasoned in that they might even know the social inequity but also consider the most practical way of living is between accepting it and avoiding direct struggles against it. They are silent but not necessarily contented. When they have accepted the exploitative manufacturing system, consciously or unconsciously, their class identity overlaps with what the system has assigned them to do.

*Mobility and precarious resistance.* Apart from the silent group, there are also peasant workers who are not contented and decided to act. One peasant worker in his early 20s told me that he had quit his job. He stated:

*The most important thing regarding working in cities is the opportunities that you can*
grasp and the people with different skills that you can meet and become friends with. I do not want to just work as a worker in my whole life. I want to be a boss and have my own factory or company one day, so I have to experience different things. Having a company is not as hard as it sounds. Many of the company heads start with one major machine and several workers. The most important thing is to receive working orders. One small order from a big company can let you earn enough money to expand your company. Many companies that I have worked for have started that way. So knowing more people or being able to stay connected is crucial to get the order. I have to know more people, constantly contact them, and frequently change jobs to know how others are managing their factories and companies. As you know, I am now a line leader in this factory. I can earn more than 1,200 yuan one month, higher than many peasant workers. But I do not want to save that money. It is too little to be worthy of saving. Instead, I must spend that money to socialize with people, invite them to dinners, and make friends with all kinds of people. For my cell phone bills alone, I spend usually 180 to 200 yuan – a regular cost that you must spend if you want more than what you can actually get. Some workers, I am sorry to say this to you, but especially those from your Shaanxi Province and several other provinces in the northern part of China, only know how to earn by working hard and saving what they can save between their teeth [literally meaning eating less but figuratively suggesting being extremely thrifty]. Nevertheless, how much can you save for one month if your overall salary is only 1,200 yuan, or even less? I am not going to just save that meager amount to waste my life here. I use the money I have earned for gambling (figuratively speaking). The stake is the salary and the bonus is the relationship that I have established. I only need one
He told me that he was holding a welfare party in a restaurant. He had asked the boss for his
salaries and since he was a good worker, the boss was reluctant to let him go. Later, the boss
gave him the default wages that the factory owed him. For many workers, to quit with a short
notice would mean a loss of a one-month salary as the deposit and the reduction of the last
month’s salary. However, since he had received all the money that was due to him, he invited
several fellow workers from the same province and several other friends to dinner and to sing
dkaraoke songs during and after dinner.

These three cases of understandings of wages are different: first, as the payment for
honest and hard work; second, as the means of saving and accruement of money for a stable
family income; and, third, as the speculative funding for slim possibilities, which are,
nevertheless, worth fighting for, or more precisely, waiting for. These peasant workers
positioned themselves to the different usages of wages and that also determined their
understandings and the social material practices in establishing certain kinds of relations. On
one hand, although they structurally fell into the same category of peasant workers, the
formations of these individuals’ identities were based on different meaning-making processes
about their work; on the other hand, there were only a very small proportion of peasant workers
who could really become bosses. In this sense, the meaning of wage has served both as illusion
for some peasant workers and disillusionment for other peasant workers.

Although the mental positioning may let certain peasant workers differentiate
themselves from other peasant workers, the structural hierarchy makes them all being exploited
through the capital production process. This is exactly the power of the structural hierarchy;
before the changes can touch the structure itself, all the changes will only be entertained when
the hierarchy that enables exploitations is entertained and maintained, mostly by the ones that range from being content with the hierarchy to resisting its presence. However, such power of the structural hierarchy does not mean that the differences that peasant workers make are, inevitably, nullified, or snubbed and, hence, can come to no avail for the changes of their identities.

A more intricate relationship between the structure and the individual peasant workers’ meaning-making has to realize both the persistence of the system and the potentials of the different thinking of the peasant workers. The importance of these potentials not even lies in their possibilities of becoming reality, but more or less lies in the hope that the material social relations that can help nurture more realizable potentials might change the current structure of exploitations. In short, such potentials are hopeful not because upon them social changes can be solidly laid, but because they suggest the sought-after possibilities of the presence of hopes. With such possibilities, it means that other possible potentials can be nurtured. It is towards the other kinds of potentials that we must consider the meanings of wage from its symbolic meanings of the wage slips. After a thorough reflection of the interviews with peasant workers on what they think of wages, I would like to explore the symbolic meanings of wage, not to show what it has masked, but to show how as the symbolic meanings, they have nevertheless, formed the social material relations that come to construct another layer of social structure within which peasant workers are positioned.

**The Meanings of Wage through the Meanings of the Wage Slip**

Due to space and the order of analysis, I will divide the picture of the wage slip into two separate tables. I have not included in my recreated table the first four columns for the clarity of the tables, but the importance of these four columns demands a brief explanation. The
first four columns are

![Image](image-url)

*Figure 5.3. One peasant worker’s wage slip on his bamboo-sheeted bed.*

different ways in which the given worker can be identified, namely, first, by a serial number on
the factory’s payroll list, second, the worker’s name, third, the bank account number under
which the actual amount of money has been deposited in the worker’s employment account,
and the fourth, the work card number. With such cross listing of the workers’ symbolic
identities in interlinking, yet different registers, the wage slip starts with an appearance of
scientific precision. Such preciseness is further consolidated by the fact that by the time when
workers have received their wage slips from the factory, the wage has already been deposited
in the bank that the factories assigned and workers mandatorily opened. The technology of the
paperless process in which the money is deposited to the workers’ bank accounts eliminates the
use of paper money when the workers and the factory cashiers need to meet in person to ensure
the *correct* amount. Interestingly, when Marx considered the importance of the money in
*Capital*, he compared it with the barter trade, saying that the presence of money changes the
simultaneous buy-sell action of the barter into the separated buy and sell actions, namely, sell for money and use the money to buy. Now with the automatic electronic transaction of the wages, the two actions of cashiers give workers the wages, and workers sign on the cashiers’ payroll list, which has been consolidated into one single direct action of receiving the wage slip. The possibilities of the assumed incorrectness, workers’ possible dissatisfaction, and probable comparison with other workers and the dissatisfaction with the cashiers, the representative of the factory on the payday, have all been displaced and eliminated from the actual personal contact and communication.

The technology is used to suggest “scientific-ness,” which is further used to mean automatic and correct. All the dissatisfactions could only be deferred with the money deposited to the workers’ account and the signatures, as the signs of symbolic agreement, are completely eliminated through such an electronic process. Therefore, the remaining wage slip becomes a material notice from the factory, a “stub,” a form from, or more precisely, constituting the capital’s vantage point with the assumed acceptance and therefore the actual circumvention of immediate actions of disagreement from the peasant workers. As such, the presence of the wage slip is a strategic formation that changes the transactions of payment from that of the personal immediate interactions in the actual spaces into that of the electronically mediated transactions that both assume the presence of peasant workers and at the same time deny them of their immediate and embodied agency. Now, officially, the workers do not have a space, nor time per se, for wage disagreement in the factory. All the possible actions have to be made on the run, with the factory management’s special agreement and specific appointment.
Politics within and beyond the Basic Wage

The wage slip, as the symbolic composition of different parts of the actual wages that the peasant workers can earn, forms the official explanations on how the wage is determined. The surface logic for the slip is clear: apart from the basic salary that workers are entitled to, the workers are also subjected to the subsidies, bonuses, and fines for their performance at work; however, first, the relationship between the basic salaries and the subsidies is unclear. For instance, who actually decides the sum of the basic salaries and who pays for the subsidies? Second, not all the subsidies are actually paid. Third, the paid subsidies have different actual meanings apart from the surface meanings that they seem to stand for.

Take the following table for instance, the basic salary was 1045.54 yuan. When I asked the worker how the basic salary was determined, he told me:

*I am not sure how that is determined. I have worked here for three years. My basic salary used to be about 700 yuan. That was the basic salary for the new workers. For each shift, we had the assigned hours to work [eleven hours and a half]. And during that period of time, we were given specific numbers of wires to finish. We used to have to finish 1,000 wires during one shift. They are called one kilo. Some skilled workers could finish that many, but about half of the workers could not. Then, these unskilled workers had to work extra time to meet the quota. During that time, they were not paid extra. The skilled worker who could finish the quota within the assigned working hours could continue to work on an extra rate to earn more money. Later, when the workers all became fairly skilled, the managers raised the bar to 1,100 and then 1,200 wires. And now the normal task is 1,300.*

23 Importantly, nowhere can be seen the standards on which the basic salary is calculated against, nor who, factory, or government, has the right to offer the subsidies.
What the basic salary covered was not typical time wage, nor pure piece wage, but piece wage insured with the length of time assigned by the factory management, or the time wage consolidated through the enhanced rhythm of working. If the workers desire to earn the overtime extra wage rate, they would have to finish the assigned workload within the assigned time and continue; thus, the basic wage actually is based on the combination of time and piece wages, whichever brings more profits for capital owners. The combination acted as an effective way of enhancing the work rate and the relative exploitation rate.

Table 5.4

*From Basic Salary to Subsidy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Salary</th>
<th>Subsidy</th>
<th>Bonus</th>
<th>Fine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Attendance Subsidy</td>
<td>Task Subsidy</td>
<td>Night Shift Subsidy</td>
<td>Paid Absences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1045.54</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>72.69</td>
<td>120.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to that worker’s explanation, the formation of the basic salary rate is based on how long the workers have stayed at the factory to work. The new incoming workers have their basic wage level. After they have become skillful, they will have another wage level. But these changes of salary level based on the skills and the time one has worked in the factory are further complicated with the factory management’s intricate assignment for the pieces of wires that workers have to finish during their normal shifts.

Here, what is considered in the factory as the normal working hour, eleven and a half hours, is far beyond the national normal working hours of eight hours a day. In terms of time,
then, the factory has formed localized normality, which, in actuality, has nullified the
jurisdictions of the national law and displaced it by the localized factory management. The
increased assignment for the number of pieces is a further step that works to organize the labor
power into its prolonged working hours as well as intensified working rates.

The above explains how working has become the prolonged and intensified social
material activities for the workers. Working can become such activities since the wage as
social material relations has been consolidated into organizing the labor power as such; in other
words, the wage system, through its sum, has formed and internalized social material relational
practices by organizing and coordinating each specific movement of the workers. However,
this practice does not explain how the basic salary has been determined, although it does
explain how that sum, indeed, has meant how workers should work for that sum of money.
Many of the workers consider that the factory management has dynamically adjusted the work
intensity according to the workers’ developed skills without raising the wages to comparable
rates. What would the factory management say about this practice? I asked Lee for the
determination of the basic wage. Lee said:

*The basic salary is regulated according to the national labor law and the basic
conditions of the peasant workers’ home situations. Compared with the general
conditions of the majority of the peasant workers’ families, the monthly wage they can
earn is already very high. At home, they could only make half of the wage they can earn
here. Also, compared with the other companies in this area, ours is much better. First,
we usually do not delay the workers’ payment but if we do, at most, we only delay it
about two weeks. That happened only once or twice last year and once we had more
flexible money, we paid them immediately.*
I asked him to give me examples on the current production. Lee said:

As you know, the AV cable production is subcontracted from other companies. So the profit margin has been low for us. For one cable, the net profit for us is two jiao (0.2 Yuan). For each cable, the rough average profit, for the final molding procedure is four cents (0.04 yuan). Workers working on other procedures would have lower pay because those tasks were simpler and demanded less skill.

I did the calculation, too. With the final pay of around 1,200 yuan for instance, and with the monthly work days as 26 days, the everyday earning for each worker would be 46.1 yuan and the average of the daily workload for each worker would be \( \frac{4610}{4} = 1152 \) AV cables. With the “normal” work shift of 11.50 hours, the hourly output would be exactly 100 AV cables (equaling 1.77 cables/minute). This further means that the average worker earns \( 4 \text{ cents} \times 100 \text{ cables} = 400 \text{ cents} = 4 \text{ Yuan} = 61 \text{ US cents} \) (at the rate of 1 US dollar = 6.5 yuan).

What was appalling to me was not that I have spotted a sweat shop right here at the first factory that I visited, nor was it that my later encounters with other peasant workers had helped me realize that Lee’s factory was not at all the worst. Rather, it was the wage slip that made this into a complex matrix of checks and balances, which seemed that every merit would be awarded and every demerit would be punished. But, before I turn to explain how the subsidies are awarded to the peasant workers, it is, indeed, important to analyze Lee’s calculation upon which the four cents became the average pay for each cable.

The wage slip is part of the materiality of the wage-identity relation. First, Lee’s calculation fits the final actual wage that the worker has earned and, according to Lee’s explanation of his calculation, he did not refer to the miscellaneous rewards and punishments that were present on the wage slip. If Lee had, indeed, referred to the final wage, then, the
isolation between the basic wages and the rewards and punishments were only made artificially. In other words, the reward and punishment system might have been better called a system of floating wages with part of peasant workers’ own earning separated for both rewards and punishment. Lee, essentially, had rewarded workers with their own money.

That the money for rewards has come from the peasant workers’ labor should not have surprised anyone. Anyway, Marx’s idea of capital has generally attributed all the value formation to the labor power of laborers. Yet, it is important to think otherwise, in an almost directly opposite manner, about how effectively such changes have socially constructed the eagerness and striving from the peasant workers in order to intensify their current efforts and to earn more instead of considering any systematic and structural changes.

Second, the wage slip was from a veteran worker and he had all the skills necessary for the work. For the new incoming peasant workers, the wage level can be much lower. The amount, as Lee suggested, was based on the peasant workers’ possible earnings in the countryside. Many peasant workers I interviewed later seconded Lee’s reasoning. Considering that Lee’s factory was more export-oriented and the peasant workers had the majority of working and leisure time in cities, it is a big issue as to why peasant workers should consider their origins as the basic line of their identities and compare what they can get from cities with what they can get from the countryside. What, for instance, has stopped them from thinking about the necessity of living permanently in cities, or, at least, has offered them equal chances of buying apartments and having their children be educated in the place where they work? What could have stopped them from demanding a living standard based on the city living instead of the countryside living, especially when the majority of their time and energy was spent on the city?
Interestingly, wage as a social material mediation organizes labor, from a bodily movement into a social, political, economic, and material movement for a class purpose of profit making. Although wages as exploitation tells no news, the tricks on how peasant workers’ wages are composed of actually tell the stories of specific capitalism construction. And it is in such a sense that the wage slips are not merely symbolic. Or rather, more specifically, it is a truth of the peasant workers’ situations told in the simulation of being symbolic, thus, even the symbolic split of the wages, as bonuses or fines, basic wages or subsidies, must be paid close attention to. The symbolic here should not be viewed as masking the truth of wage. On the contrary, the symbolic of the wages is part of the very truth of the wages, where the wages have taken a specific form of persuasion and of meaning-making. Let us return to the analysis of wage slip as the symbolic and artificial division of what the peasant workers should have earned in the reward system. A repetition of the same table (Table 5.4) would make easier reference here:

Table 5.4

*From Basic Salary to Subsidy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Salary</th>
<th>Subsidy</th>
<th>Bonus</th>
<th>Fine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1045.54</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>72.69</td>
<td>120.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the subsidy (or rewards, as both are correct translations from Chinese) from what the peasant workers have earned, perfect attendance subsidy of 30 yuan had to be earned with all the working days attended, including the days that went beyond the “normal” six weekdays when the factory had to meet deadlines. “Task subsidy” was the money paid to the line leaders,
50 yuan for a month. “Night shift subsidy” was not enforced although it is listed on the wage slip. Lee explained to me, “this is because everyone would have night shifts.”

“Paid leave” was only paid to workers who had the perfect attendance. In other words, “paid leave” is not paid for one’s leave. Instead, it is only paid if one does not leave (the work). “Distance residence subsidy” is 18 yuan for a month, barely enough to cover any residence rent. So the factory encourages the workers to live in their assigned dorms and pay rent to the factory. “Food subsidy” is a 120 yuan addition for workers with perfect attendance or four yuan a day with the absences. “Previous month salary correction” is for the errors in payment. In addition, “bonus” and “fines” are listed for extra hard work and good/or bad working quality. For instance, each month, the factory will have one or two workers of the month appointed to a sixty-yuan bonus. Workers with bad products are subject to fines with the sum determined by the factory management, ranging from twenty yuan to one hundred yuan. With this subsidy system, the wage slip is a symbolic division because all the rewards are the money that should have been given to the workers. Even more importantly, the slip also establishes specific social material relations that organize the work. Perfect attendance, no leaves, hard work, and good quality of work are all awarded. Or, in other words, if workers are to get what belongs to them, they do not only have to work, but they have to work in a manner designated through the social material relations that the wage slip stands for and maintains. Some workers may choose not to obey the regulations congealed in the wage slips, but they do so only at their own damaging risk. The wage slip may also explain, at least in part, the preference over stasis mentioned earlier, in the work ethics of everyday practices.

The monthly wage (Table 5.5) is reduced in this part of the slip by deducting the water and electricity fees of living in the factory dorms. The rent is also set for the factory dorm
living. Water and electricity are overcharged according to specific peasant workers so that the
dorm is nominally offered free to them. The final actual wage for the worker is 1234.73 yuan for that month.

Table 5.5

From Wage Reduction to Actual Final Wage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reduction</th>
<th>Final Actual Wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water and Electricity</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan for Food</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform and Work Card Deposit</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling Fee</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1234.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This part of the wage concerns the very important part in which the factory owners also become the leasers and the wage earned from them is partially paid back to them as rent again. Living experiences concerning this part will be covered in the next chapter devoted to peasant workers’ dormitories. It is now important to consider how the wage has organized peasant workers’ class identity in varied ways.

Conclusion: Peasant Workers, Wage, and Class Identity

What is Wage?

Geoff Mann (2008) has pointed to the importance of money through its social construction by saying that:

most [of “r]esistance” and “organization” do not challenge the hegemony of money as the stitch of space-time – they do not constitute a challenge to a capitalist political economy institutionally contained in a subtle yet apparent inescapable monetary form.

(p. 9)

Wage as a monetary form indeed forms such “hegemony” as “the stitch of space-time.” Yet,
even more importantly, wage can be the stitch of space-time only because wage has been used by the owners of capital to organize workers’ laboring activities, conducted through their laboring activities. Neither space nor time has stitched the reality of wage; rather, it is laboring activities that have stitched the actualities of both time and space. Indeed, we have to consider the formation of wage as the actualities of social material relations that can only be constituted through the laboring activities of the laborers.

Yet, labor does not exist in a vacuum or abstract. The activities of labor, its payment, as well as where and when the energies are most needed by the capital production have been intricately interwoven in the production of wage as a social material relations. First, wage, as part of the overall value that is produced, can only be produced by the peasant workers, but such a Marxian assertion does not tell entirely what wage is. Second, wage as being produced through the social material relations demands us to look before and beyond the moment when the workers are actually working in the factories and look at the broader time and space ranges to understand how different social and material forces have participated into the making of wage. Yet, as such, wage, as an exploitative strategy, is not emphasized. So, third, wage through its symbolic division, as shown in the wage slip, has formed the factory’s local level hegemony through which labor, as a general and abstract category, ceases to exist. It has been replaced by the actualities of orders, regulations, prolonged work time, and specific requirements of the activities for producing good products. In this way, wage has become the hegemony as “the stitch of space-time” (Mann, 2008, p. 9).

Class identity cannot be imagined as a separate category; much less can it be defined against other social material processes. Instead, the understanding of class identity has to be positively positioned in the social material processes in which a human being can only be
understood as *human’s being* within actually existing situations and environment. Class identity cannot even be defined because defining varied trends and characteristics will pose not only challenges in covering the enormity of these varied characteristics but also risk overlooking the mechanisms through which such characteristics have been formed.

Thus, the understanding of class identity has to be accomplished through a formation process in which social material relations that are not easily linked to class identity can be shown as actually forming a class tendency. Wage, in this way, does exactly such a thing. Its varied formations are actually shaping a class tendency by maintaining the exploitative hierarchy between capital owners and the workers to maintain capital production. Yet, Marx has already pointed out the existence of class more than one hundred years ago. Adding to this conversation, I considered wage as the social material relations through which peasant workers have been subsumed into the wage relations, not only with their specific movements of hands and feet regulated by the wage system, but also their reasoning and meaning-making has been positioned against a scientific-looking wage slip. The symbolic form of the wage slip, often would be viewed for its masking effect, actually reviews the specific form in which exploitation has been made to mean to peasant workers. In all, wage is both a sum and a social material relation of subsumption. It is both materialistic and symbolic. More importantly, it is through its symbolic meaning of materiality and material effects of symbolism that wage becomes a mysterious presence that carries the power of capital through its very forms and sums. In carrying that power, it actually mediates that power and, in mediating the power, it organized peasant workers into the formation of class through the waged industrial production. Currently, in Shenzhen, China, the individual people’s understandings, work and leisure activities, and the factories’ particular strategies to organize and regulate through wage, no
matter how local all these may appear, have been linked tightly to world capital production. It is through this social material process that their daily routines of work and leisure, their thoughts, and communications form a class identity that is deeply diffused.

As shown through the ubiquitous job posters in Shenzhen, wage itself does not exist by itself. It is an ensemble of different social material formation Wage, by organizing peasant workers into a useful resource for the capital production, works effectively as a regulating and organizing mechanism, maintaining the structural hierarchy between capital owners and laborers. Such maintenance through organization makes wage an imperative mechanism for class formation. The actualities of wage, in any specific local situations, show the dynamic process in which local differences are channeled into a generalizable process of class identity formation. More than that, many material formations also work jointly with wage to form class identity. In the next chapter, I will investigate one of such forms, that is, the peasant workers’ dormitories as a place that both contribute to, and work in joint force with, wage to produce class identity. Many material formations actually contribute to the formation of wage as the actually working social material mechanism of class identity formation.

Wage, in its monetary form, is only a sum of money that the workers can get for each month’s work. Yet, in the actual society, wage stands for a variety of social material processes. First, wage has to be considered from the point of the actual activities and the environment in which such activities are performed. Second, default wages and security deposits should not be considered as the anomaly of wage. Rather, they should be seen as the structural results of an anomaly of actual society in which peasant workers are positioned against. Marx considered wage as masking the actual exploitations of capital. Yet, the actual importance is not just to stop being satisfied with wage as masking, but to consider how wage actually stands for what
kind of exploitations. The weight of the explanation, then, has to be shifted from its function of masking something to the actual things, or social processes, that it has tried to mask through its monetary form and its surface equation between labor and pay. It is through looking inside the mask that wage can be returned as a series of rich social material processes through which peasant workers are “manufactured” in ongoing, dynamic interactivities between the relatively constant structures and the minute activities that are always subject to changes.

Just as such rich social material processes have formed the everyday experiences of wage earning, they have also positioned peasant workers in the midst of the social forces through such processes. Then, the actually existing wage earning activities are the actually existing exploitations of the actually existing class identity in its everyday manifestations. There is not a single appearance of such class identity, for it can only be accurately shown as interacting social material processes of activities. Because of the many appearances that form such a class identity, it is not right to imagine class identity as a distinctive sphere at all. In its actuality, class identity is formed in the exact formation of wage, of surplus value, and of the capitalist production in what Harvey (2005) has called “the actual historical geographies of capitalist social formations in all their rich complexity” (p. 450).

A Social-Material Relational Imagination of Class identity

Although I have demonstrated the particular ways in which Chinese peasant workers’ class identity has been manufactured in the wage production process, the more generally applicable message that I want to deliver amounts also to a methodological one: that to view identity not as an essential item/subject but as social material processes whose exegesis and demystification must be accomplished through attending to the living realities. Class identity has to be recognized as local under the condition that the local is always formed through
translocal material-social relations. Thus, understanding the livelihood of the people’s class identity helps us see class identity as *actually lived experiences*, especially actually lived experiences that often are not accounted as class-related. The attention to the actually lived experiences departs the theorization of identity from its rough and abstract ideological and categorical formation. Instead, theorization of identity starts to carry the material and social contents that are central to feasible and actual livings of peasant workers. While Marx (1994) had contended that no changes of history can be made without attending to the conditions that we could not choose, it is important to realize that the question of how such conditions are connected to human living is vital to the question of what changes of class identity are worthy of desiring. In that no actions of changing the world can be made free from the conditions, the extent to which such conditions become formative to everyday activities and thinking, the experiences, must be attended with meticulous attention. While this chapter has focused on how wage has been used as a social-material organizational strategy for forming classed daily activities, the next chapter will focus on how peasant workers’ dorms become another of such social-material organizational strategy for manufacturing classed everyday experiences. The chapter does so by focusing more on a spatial perspective, seeing how dorms are lived, organized, and made into a historical transition of class identity formation.
CHAPTER VI: IN A RESTRAINED PLACE: MANUFACTURING CLASS IDENTITY

THROUGH HISTORICAL CONTINGENCY OF SPACE

Figure 6.1. Stranded in Space. The 6th floor was locked during the day so dayshift peasant workers could remain in their dorms to rest. The dayshift workers and I were limited to the 6th floor where we stayed. Each floor had a bar gate that was locked in accordance with the working hours of the respective factories.

Introduction: Stranded

It happened in the early afternoon on the third day of my arrival. After interviewing the peasant workers, I had an early lunch at a street stall. Then, I went to the 6th floor of the peasant
workers’ dorm to take a nap. At around 1:30 p.m., I woke up, washed, and went downstairs to conduct more observations of the shop floor. As I began to head down the stairs, I found a locked iron gate between the 5th and 6th floors. I was shocked by such an unexpected lock-up. While the bar was present from the first day I was in the factory, I had never paid attention to it until then. I felt isolated, cornered, and a bit uneasy – What if there was a fire in the building? Wouldn’t we (including the peasant workers sleeping in their beds) be burned alive because of these iron gates? In panic and disbelief, I quickly ran up to the 6th floor and asked the peasant workers about what I had seen, hoping someone would open the gate.

The peasant workers who were not asleep at that time were quite indifferent to my over-reaction. According to them, the iron gate was part of their daily lives. During the majority of the day and night, the door between the 5th and 6th floors would be locked, thus preventing the workers in recession from going somewhere else and doing something other than resting. The gate also prevented the workers in session from quitting early. If they did, they must find another place to go because they could not return to their rooms. “What if there was a fire?” I asked in my frenzy over the locked gate. One peasant worker looked at me and responded, “We are very careful. Who would make a fire? And most of us have cellphones anyway.”

The reply rendered me speechless. I was dumbfounded by the indifference over such restriction of freedom: How could one be so callous to such a potentially hazardous environment? Moreover, even if the extreme physical danger did not manifest, how could one be so at ease with the deprivation of one’s daily freedom? At the apogee of my dumbfoundedness, the disbelief of the peasant workers’ indifferent reactions changed, suddenly, into self-doubt: “What if I am overacting? What if such a construction, not as a surplus or even an accessory of the dorm, but as part of the dorm, is proof that the peasant workers are different people living in
different environments -- so different that what I have learned about freedom and about the rights of people cannot be applied to this environment?” I tried to understand such a material presence of the bars and locked gates, the literal barrier that prevented my freedom. I asked myself: Should I consider the peasant workers as different from me and their environment as a part of the differences, or should I consider that it is such differences of environment that have contributed to the differences of peasant workers, or more precisely, participated in creating these indifferences in peasant workers? I was in a restrained place, with my own actions literally barred behind an iron gate. Such restriction came to me as a surprise; but to the peasant workers, it is part of their everyday reality, a reality so present that they do not recognize its significance. What does it mean to think about such material social construction of (in)freedom and what does it mean to be peasant workers within such a restrained space?

I tried to calm down: a barred dormitory might be one extreme example of such environments. Perhaps there are many dormitories without bars and locks. Yet, this dormitory exists as an extreme form of bodily organization: For one, it is important to realize that the dorms, as socially constructed spaces for laborers’ social reproduction, are not neutral spaces. Instead, they are connected to the political economy of production. For another, as Chapters 4 and 5 argue, the formation of wages constitutes a social organization and therefore, a social construction of laborers’ class identity through the wages’ social production. But wages cannot be reproduced for capital owners nor peasant workers without a space for the laborers to rest, rejuvenate, and prepare for the next shift. Thus, it is valuable to question: If dorms are not neutral spaces, then for whom do they work? How is their work done? Will examining such forms of physical restriction, however extreme in their forms, lead us to a more prevailing and common mechanism through which space functions as social organizations to form class identity?
Following the previous two chapters on the organizational function of wage in its formation of peasant workers’ class identity, in this chapter, I explore how the dorms can be understood as central spatial forms of peasant workers’ social-material reproduction. In order to come to such an understanding, the key is to display how dorms both support and restrain human activities on a daily basis.

In order to display how dorms support and restrain human activities on a daily basis, I need to first explain how the dorms as a space of restraining support have been historically produced. By connecting the production of dorms as a type of construction in the city of Shenzhen to the national space policy of the Household Registration System (HRS), I showcase how the formation of dorms as a typical construction in the city and the partial changes of the HRS relate to shape peasant workers’ class identity.

Thus, this chapter starts from an analysis of HRS historical changes to its contemporary combination with peasant workers’ dorms as an institution of restrained support for peasant workers’ daily living. I analyze how the dorms and HRS have produced selective changes of space’s social-material functionalities to produce peasant workers’ class identity, i.e., as permanently temporary laboring forces within cities. The production of the nature of ‘permanent temporariness,’ I argue, becomes the historical form of peasant workers’ class identity in contemporary China.

Theoretically, winding from HRS to peasant workers’ dorms and analyzing their combined social functionality as producing an identity institution aims to extend the understanding of a contemporary space form, the peasant workers’ dorms, into its historical forms before the dorms took their actual physical forms. Historical changes are then used strategically to form a historical continuation of social-material relations that make any specific
appearances of spatial forms a historical contingency. Within such a historical understanding, the specific shapes that dorms take, then, have a historical dialectics. The actual spatial forms assume two features against such a historical dialectics: One as a physical concreteness for its purposes of specific mediations of everyday living activities while the other as a moment in a historical current of changes. Peasant workers’ class identity produced through the mediation of dorms thus also bears these two features. To begin, we need a brief history of the Household Registration System.

**A Brief History of the Household Registration System**

The Household Registration System (HRS) is a national governmental policy that links Chinese citizens’ social status with the place where they were born. The newborn is registered in the assigned local public security bureau according to the places where the family is. If the family is in the countryside, then, the registered status for the newborn is a countryside status; or in other words, the newborn is registered as a peasant. If the family is in a city, then, the registered status is a city registration. Or in other words, he/she has more opportunities for food rations and job opportunities in cities. It was difficult for people with countryside registration to change to city registration. The most common chances were through the college entrance examination and the marriage with the city people. The former was only possible for the peasants’ family who could afford to let their children to learn for eleven years and the latter is only for very limited number of unmarried young women in the countryside. The HRS started in the 1950s to deter the population’s rush into Chinese cities after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. From its very beginning, it assures the economic livelihood and political loyalty of China’s industrial workers, the Chinese government provided non-agricultural *hukou* holders with food ration and grain subsidies.
and granted non-agricultural and urban residents greater employment opportunities, subsidized housing, free education, medical care, and old-age pensions. (“China’s Household,” 2005)

Even when the 1954 Constitution clearly mandates that Chinese citizens have freedom of movement and relocation, the HRS, in actuality, has produced differences in population between urban and rural areas including different economic and social benefits, education, housing, taxes, and food rations. Under the HRS, parents pass their hukou status to their new-born children, who, upon birth, have to be registered by local authorities, with rural residents registered according to agricultural status and urban residents according to, non-agricultural status (Zhu, 2004). The HRS is also a rigid population monitoring and controlling policy that typically favors the city-registered household residents. For instance, it is clearly mandated in the 1958 issued Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Hukou Registration that rural populations traveling to the cities for more than three days must apply and register for a temporary resident permit before or within three days upon arrival. Although the same policy applied for the urban dwellers traveling to rural areas, in actuality, such travels are much less likely since the urban dwellers have clear advantages to rural population (“Regulations of the People’s,” 1958; Wang, p. 126). In the 1970s, the system was administrated with such rigidity that “peasants could be arrested just for entering cities” (Young, 2002).

The late 1970s in China were marked by political changes, such as the ending of the Cultural Revolution in 1977, the rise of Deng Xiaoping to the central government leadership in China, and the central government’s decision to reform the economic and political difficulties that had become widespread. Such reform commenced in the countryside with the allowance of peasants to work on small patches of land and retain a larger portion of their produce and grains.
With the land previously collectively owned by the people’s commune allocated based on one’s residential area and registration status to individual households, both the productivities multiplied and the actual working hours decreased. Surplus labor became prevalent in the countryside with the agricultural registration status. In 1979, the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ) was established to induce the capitalist mode of production into this newly allocated area as a “test tube” for Chinese economic experiments (Deng, 1993). In 1984, the central government changed the hukou policies by allowing peasants to move to small towns and cities to work as unskilled laborers in urban areas provided that they must have their own self-supplied food rations so that they will not add to the burdens of the city (Kam & Zhang, 1999). Although such changes did not meet result in large-scale movements, they manifested policy changes to selectively accommodate peasants in the city areas.

Previously, the HRS has been studied primarily as a localist “Chinese” government policy. For instance, studies argue that the HRS has direct effects on China’s national one child policy (Cooney & Li, 1994), maintaining population records (Goldstein, 1987, 1990; Goldstein & Goldstein, 1987-1988), and access to benefits such as food rationing, state or industrial employment, medical services, and pensions (Wang, Li, & Wen 1990). Fan (2002) argued that the HRS enabled an “institution-based opportunity structure” that centered on unequal accesses to “distribution of services and job opportunities” (p. 103). He pointed out “resident status is central to explaining migration process and labor market segmentation in the Chinese city” (p. 103). Yet, such studies usually view the HRS as a change from a more centralized government control to more decentralized economic and market regulation. They do not address how the changed HRS, in its current forms, have been integrated with other social material relations of the city to form a new kind of social force and a new type of social material power formation.
In addition to being represented as a national policy, household registration system has long been presented through a more or less covert localist vision of a Chinese national rural-urban division system. Wu and Treiman (2004), for instance, considered the HRS to be the mechanism that “divides the population into ‘agricultural’ and ‘non-agricultural’ sectors” (p. 363). The authors rightly considered the mobility enabled by the partial loosening of the HRS to be a “government-endorsed mobility” (p. 380). Although the authors cast their doubts on considering HRS as the reasons for peasants’ mobility, they, nevertheless, failed to overthrow the linkage between physical mobility and “societal openness” (p. 382). The best the two authors proposed was only that both rural and urban components should be “pooled together” so that “[a]nalyses of truly national probability samples . . . [could become] a necessary condition for valid findings regarding the extent of social mobility and ‘societal openness’” (p. 382). However, although the doubts were reasonable in addressing the rural-urban divisions in China, the two authors fell into the same trap – mistaking population mobility as equivalent to “societal openness” (p. 382) that many studies the authors set out to argue against have fallen into. The linkage between social mobility and “societal openness” excluded the possibilities enabled by the loosening of the HRS regulations. It has opened chances for such mobility to be combined with the new forms of social material relations and, therefore, also overlooked the possibilities that more repressive social material forces can function through changed mechanisms. To state it the same in another way, in the two authors’ rushed determination to find the correlation between social mobility and societal openness, they overlooked the possibilities that social mobility might do just the opposite. By mobilizing different social material relations, the entire scale of societal openness might have been off set, so much so that societal openness might have to be delinked from social mobility.
While social mobility resulted from the changed HRS, the extent to which social mobility has changed societal organization extends beyond the national level. To be more specific, such a view, in its haste of gouging China’s societal openness and human social mobility, overlooks the fact that the HRS, with increasingly Chinese participation in the international and transnational capital production and circulation, cannot be contained within the national level since the population in control has become an internationalized division of labor in globalized capital production. The very mobility, not only social mobility but also spatial and physical mobility, might very well cater to the needs for formulating China’s internationalized capital production and circulation, and thus make mobility itself not a desired result of the social changes, but the very mechanism of a changed mode of social control, labor organization, and class (exploitation) reiteration through yet another geo-political form.

Uneven Selective Changes of HRS

Although the HRS is a national policy, different municipalities in China have adapted it differently according to their economic development strategies and demand for peasant worker population. For instance, in 2004, the Zhejiang provincial regulation required that children holding non-local hukou be educated in the place of their hukou registration. Such an adaptation of the HRS actually barred the peasant workers’ children from receiving their education in the city where their parents lived. The adaptation also evaded the burden of establishing structural educational facilities either particularly designed for the peasant workers’ children or expanding the current facilities to include peasant workers’ children. For families with one parent who worked out of the province as a peasant worker, the other could tend to the children’s needs in their countryside homes. Yet, for those families where both parents were peasant workers, the children’s care and education would have to be left to the grandparents. Thus, in effect, such an
adaptation isolated peasant worker parents from their school-age children. Educational opportunities as an important trans-generational social reproduction of labor forces have been unfavorably and structurally inflicted on peasant workers in Zhejing province.

The Zhejing provincial regulation of HRS is not atypical: Provincial policies that have directly or indirectly allocated the place of registration as the place proper for social access and public services are commonly available in different forms. For instance, it is common for the city public schools to regard the migrant workers’ children as a source of additional income, levying extra “out of educational district fees” on them. In addition, city-dwellers who have benefited from the public school system also put the blame on the invasion of the peasant workers to the urban (“Zhejiang Provincial Government Opinion,” 2004; “State Council Education Notice,” 2004; Shi, 2005; “Notice of the Shandong Provincial Government,” 2004; Froissart, 2003; “One-fee System,” 2004).

Thus, the social mobility restrictions of the HRS are not equally distributed to the entire population. HRS is actually used to the cities’ and provinces’ advantages as a means to regulate the peasant worker population and avoid the economic burden and social responsibilities of peasant workers’ social reproduction. Interestingly, this single adaptation of the HRS has been used in two contradictory ways: first, it granted the mobility of peasant workers as effective labor forces. Second, it restricted other members of the family from coming to cities by restraining school-age children from seeking an education outside of their hukou. As such, the HRS both promoted and prevented social mobility. The overall view of the adaptation, then, is that the adaptation of the HRS paradoxically selected the labor force to enter the cities and restrained others from doing so. Thus, the HRS has worked effectively as a policy to regulate human resources as economic resources.
The nation-wide adaptation of the national identification card in the late 1980s changed the social functionality of the HRS. Before the enforcement of the national ID cards, traveling, education, household registration, and employment all required the Household Registration Book of the whole family. National ID cards are now required to obtain resident permits, employment, open bank accounts, obtain passports and driver’s licenses, and apply for colleges. In cities where peasant workers are employed, once one has obtained a resident permit with a national ID card, the resident permit, usually called the *temporary resident permit*, is used with the national ID card for employment and public security identity inspection. Yet, while national ID cards have been used widely, the HRS is still in use for important reasons: the issuance of a resident card is based on the address of residence listed on the national ID cards. This address is the place of household registration. Thus, if the address on the ID is not the local address, then only a *temporary resident card* can be issued to the peasant worker.

The symbolic freedom of movement that ID card has brought in for the peasant workers has received much, if not too much, scholarly attention. In contrast, less attention is paid on how the physical mobility of the peasant workers has been subsumed into a larger and more dynamic hierarchical social system in China. For instance, HRS as obsolete and one euphorically stated such:

In the pre-reform period, the unit was one book per household in cities and towns, and one book per village in the countryside. Today, every person has an ID card regardless of his *hukou* status. This new approach, better suited to the new circumstance of population mobility, reflects the state’s de facto recognition of millions of peasant migrants and the failure of the *hukou* system. (Zhang, 2001, p. 8)
But despite Zhang’s announcement of the failure of the *hukou* system, an ID card itself does not usher in the immediate death of the HRS, which now has an altered function with its changed social material relations. In fact, writers such as Mackenzie (2002) contended:

> Regardless of these encouraging announcements, reports of the *Hukou’s* death are probably somewhat exaggerated. The process of dismantling the system will likely be difficult and will be met with opposition every step of the way by powerful stakeholders, including: urban residents wary of having their entitlements diluted; local governments whose rent-seeking behavior has turned the *hukou* into a lucrative commodity; public security personnel who fear the resulting influx of migrants will hamper public order and even threaten to destabilize the government; and private business people whose exploitative labor practices are facilitated by the *hukou*. (p. 315)

These are concrete concerns of the vying interests in opening up the ways to selectively change HRS’s applications and social functionalities so that different purposes could be fulfilled. HRS, then, has been changed from a national rural-urban division or uneven developmental strategy, into its more decentralized and locally adapted functionalities of specified social regulations allowing physical mobility. More nuanced theorizations of the HRS, such as Wang (2005), have analyzed the HRS from its sociological function as an *organization through division and exclusion*. However, Wang failed to reach the point that both division and exclusion are actually selectively produced through the tradition of the national HRS system.

Usually deemed as a national policy, HRS actually was formed through a set of national and local policies. The changes HRS has experienced, therefore, form a social process of dynamic uneven selective changes of HRS. Generally, it changes from emphasizing on the Urban-rural division and restriction of rural→urban migration to emphasizing on holding certain
rights exclusively for the city permanent residents against peasant workers. Yet, there is a contradiction between HRS as a policy of selective changes and a living condition that peasant workers need to have to live and work in cities: Whereas HRS restrains peasant workers from having permanent city residents’ status, it has to also be lenient enough for peasant workers to become work forces for a fast expanding capital accumulation. What kind of space should the city be so that it can at once be a space where peasant workers work as long as possible and a space where peasant workers do not become permanent residents? Peasant workers’ class identity, in this chapter, shown as what I called permanent temporariness, demands a suitable space for its realization. What kind of space is that space of permanent temporariness that is both the identity of the space and the identity of peasant workers? In order to address these questions, we need to know the dorms’ historical resemblance briefly.

**Peasant Workers’ Dorms’ Historical Existence**

The social functions of dorms in cities are seldom addressed, let alone their historical origins carefully recorded. However, it is safe to consider its resemblance with the spatial construction of work unit, or danwei in Chinese, during China’s socialist market economy period (roughly from 1950s to 1970s). Usually located in Chinese cities, danweis are working units, including governmental branches and state-owned factories, where social benefits and securities are closely connected to employment. Not only do danweis have their collectively-owned bathing rooms, factory-owned canteens and cafeteria, nursery and daycare centers, and primary and secondary schools, but the dorms and apartments are also allocated to all the workers according to their seniority and experience, either for free or at nominal charges. While they are not without problems, such dorms and apartments do provide convenience for
workers who are employed in nearby factories or government offices. These dorms associated with *danweis* can be seen as predecessor to peasant workers’ dorms.

Since the end of the 1970s, sweeping economic reform in China has exerted profound impact not only on the planned economy as a whole, but also on the actual material-spatial structure of factories in cities (Lin, Cai, & Li, 1996). With the state-owned factories privatized through direct selling or contracted to private hands, the change of ownership has also changed the structure of the factories (Chow, 2005). The job and social security that was a primary concern of the socialist-planned economy was replaced by the single-minded concern for maximization of profits. The factory-affiliated facilities, such as dorms and apartments, schools and nurseries, and collectively owned bathing rooms, have been sold, contracted, or demolished, so such social spaces that were once affiliated with specific *danweis* could be taken over by the market (Bray, 2005). Thus, factory ownership is further and further delinked from the socialist-planned economy. Workers were simultaneously allowed, sometimes pushed, into the markets through lay-offs (Lee, 2000). The new rich who manifested during this transition from the planned economy to the market economy could afford to buy their own apartments, and some of them have been financing the construction of new and renovated apartment buildings. With the coastal areas opened for direct foreign investment (DFI) or joint ventures, new industries aimed at the global markets have been quickly established and benefited from the low-wage laborers from the interior-rural areas of China. Peasant workers rushed to coastal cities in the middle and latter 1980s. Subsequently, until 2011, a huge floating population of approximately 221 million people has provided a docile, low wage, and low social status labor force for the soaring Chinese economic growth ("Transient Workers," 2011). With its exact origins unclear, cities’ peasant workers’ dorms bear several resemblances
to danwei dorms and apartments: First, they are both physically close to the actual working areas, usually within walking distance. Many of them can be seen as part of the factories rather than separately standing residential areas. Second, those living in the dorms are affiliated with the same working unit, the then danwei and the now factory. Third, both the first and second resemblances provide the spatial and social possibilities and conveniences for the factory leadership to be extended to the dorms. Fourth, together with the previous three resemblances, dorms from both periods have made possible the most efficient social organization and control over the use of dorms (Bray, 2005).

Yet, there are also important differences between the then danwei dorms and the current factory dorms. Importantly, the existence of socialist danwei dorms is the overall political structural concern of the socialist workers’ welfares. The decision processes of construction and allocations of socialist danwei dorms were usually participated by the socialist workers’ unions that existed in every danwei. However, the presence of the peasant workers’ dorms is a joint result of the maximization of the profit as well as a changed political-economic concern for cities’ public images and their tourism and retailing potentials. For instance, an administrative regulation issued by the State Council in 1982 had provided the legal basis for internment and deportation by public security authorities. Such holding measures were not nullified by government until 2003, when a college graduated factory employee in Guangzhou city was detained as one of the three-none people (usually appears in Chinese government documents as three no people, or Sanwu Renyuan) and beaten to death only hours after being detained. Abbreviated as three-none people by police, they included people without identification cards, employment certificates, and/or permanent or temporary resident permits. A spatially concentrated residence area instead of privately rented residence
areas that are more likely to be far away from the factories, would not only make it convenient for the workers to be available to the daily calls of duty, but also lessen the danger of skilled workers being mistaken as *three-none people*, therefore detained and deported from cities. Thus, the dorms for peasant workers serve a social structural/spatial fulfillment for the multiple purposes and multiple agencies of the government’s desire for an orderly city and population control, of factories’ emphasis of continue and steady skilled work force supply, and of peasant workers’ desire for safety from the police’s city three-none people raids that were common in the 1990s. Dorms form a social structure of domestication of an otherwise vagabond class. In performing this role, the establishment of dorms as a common place of the urban migrants has taken the place of any explicit “bloody legislation” and has served as a spatial domestication of labor forces for capital (Marx, 1967, p. 686). An otherwise vagabond class identity, due to the establishment of dorms, has been transformed into a labor class.

**The Selective Formation of Supportive Restraints in Dorms**

Before engaging in a specific analysis of peasant workers’ dorms, it is important to consider the roles of space in providing both support and restriction to living. As a material presence of space, dorms are not neutral. Rather, their roles in forming structural hierarchy lie subtly in their double-function: On the one hand, they provide possibilities for certain kinds of living, but on the other hand, they restrict such living. At the surface level, the dorms support the social reproduction of peasant workers’ living. Dorms in HyperLink, the factory I visited, were no exception. The factory had rented the sixth floor of a nearby building as the dormitories for peasant workers and then, subleased it to the peasant workers, thus forming a collective renting that only opens to the respective factory workers. Each dorm holds six bunk beds. Another three square meters space on the hinder end of the room is partitioned off the
sleeping area of the dorm and is used as a tiny kitchen. Next to the kitchen is a restroom with a cold-water shower available all the time. A plastic showerhead and a simple water toilet are the furnishings.

Usually ten peasant workers are housed in each small dorm, with one bunk bed serving as a makeshift closet for the peasant workers’ baggage. Each dorm is equipped with a 14-inch electric ceiling fan. For the dorm that I have stayed in, it was always kept on once the dorm had people in it. Two peasant workers of our dorm had purchased their own 12-inch fans that can be put at the foot end of their bunk beds and the three fans would hum each summer night.

Since the factory collectively rented the dorms, the factory had more direct power over the dorms’ management. When I questioned, the manager, Lee, and the peasant workers living in the dorms about the cost, they told me that the rent was 33 Yuan per month (about 5 US dollars), including water and electricity bills. If the peasant workers live in self-selected dorms or apartments, the rent would be much higher, ranging from 180 to 240 Yuan per month depending on the area and furnishings. Managers also live in the collectively rented dorms, but with only two people sharing one dorm and with air-conditioned rooms. Interestingly, with one dorm usually housing ten peasant workers but can house twelve maximum, the rent collected from peasant workers will be 330 Yuan or 396 Yuan. Thus, presumably, by collectively renting the dorm, the factory owners can provide cheaper living space for peasant workers and can earn from the margin between the overall rent paid by the peasant workers and the rent demanded from the factory owners. Therefore, peasant workers pay less as long as they are consent with the smaller living space they can have.
Figure 6.2. One bunk bed used as a luggage shelf and a TV Stand. This dorm was the best equipped. The peasant workers bought the TV set, DVD player, and the water cooler collectively. Other dorms are not equipped with such luxuries. The bunk was also used, like in other dorms, to shelf luggage.

Apart from being cheap, the collectively rented dorms are also safer than the privately rented ones. Lee reported that the whole district of Bao’an was a manufacturing center in Shenzhen city and was full of peasant workers from other provinces, with a majority of them from the countryside; some gangsters in the area have specifically targeted the peasant workers. Lee told me that the factory had constantly advised the peasant workers not to go into the street at night. The barred gates and the guards guaranteed that strangers could not enter the living spaces of the peasant workers.

In addition to economic and safety issues, the collectively rented dorms are usually close to the factories and surrounded by the social services that cater to the peasant workers’ needs at a cost they can afford. There were several small restaurants that offered three Yuan (half a US dollar) meals just outside the dorm. For three Yuan, each person could have unlimited rice, one vegetable, and one meat portion.
Figure 6.3. One of the three-Yuan meal stands. This three-Yuan meal stand was positioned in front of the restaurant on the sidewalk. The peasant workers who did not want to eat inside the restaurant could pay three Yuan to have rice and choose two dishes from eight different varieties. Meal times for the nearby factories are similar to one another, so the stands usually appear from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm for lunch. After lunch is done, the stand will be pushed inside the restaurant.

Such (Figure 6.3) three-Yuan meals are popular for the peasant workers, but even if one orders off a different menu, the price is still affordable. Figure 6.4 was a menu on the wall showing the prices.

Although the restaurants are not part of the dorms, they, with the collectively rented dorms and the nearby factories, have formed a work-eat-sleep ensemble that caters to the peasant workers’ income and time requirements. Workers who want better facilities would have to live much further away from such an ensemble and travel by bus to and from work places. In terms of cost and convenience, the collectively rented dorms indeed provide support for the peasant workers.

For the small factory like HyperLink, the providers of restaurant services and hotels are not directly linked to the factory owners. Rather, the providers of these services are attracted by
the economic opportunities of the niche market for providing food and hotel services. Among other services for the peasant workers are: hair dressers, clothes stalls, convenient stores of daily necessities, street internet download services especially for downloading songs to peasant workers’ cellphones (many cellphones have MP3 audio player functions), IP telephone services, entertainment such as Karaoke and street billiards.

Figure 6.4. Summer specialties. This hang-on-the-wall menu is called “summer specialties.” The left column has staple foods, like noodles, from northern China, and the right column lists rice dishes, staples from southern China. The price ranges from three to five Yuan.

But for larger factories, such as Apple’s assembly factory Foxconn, the dorms,
restaurants, hairdressers, banks, and postal services are all within the huge factory complex that has 200,000 peasant workers. With the exception of banks and postal services, all the other “built-in” services have hired peasant workers as their main laboring force. Interestingly, the system for social reproduction and the system for economic reproduction, in this case, manifest a division of labor between peasant workers for the capital accumulation to function.

*Production-Centered Social Reproduction*

Although dorms support the daily living and working practices as if they are neutral in power, actually, the support these dorms offered centers on industrial production. For instance, the dorms mandate hours for closing doors as well as availability of electrical power.

- Enforcement of barred gate closing from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., and at night from 12:00 p.m. to 5:30 a.m.
- Enforcement of power off at 9:00 p.m. on work days and 11:00 p.m. on weekends.

The power-off time and the door openings and closings ensure that peasant workers stay in the dorms. Thus, the timelines actually guarantee the production of labor power for the next day’s/night’s work. The dorm door opening and closing and the power-off time did not just coincide with the factory production time. Lee explained them by saying:

The major concern is safety. You do not know the youngsters. They might go to the Internet café to spend their days or nights. [In doing this, they] not only waste time and money, but also put themselves in an unsafe place. So, we have to protect them if they are our workers. I told them that once you are workers of our factory, then you must obey the safety regulations. Who’s going to be responsible for you if you are hurt at work when you do not have enough sleep when you are supposed to? So, we paid an elderly peasant worker to enforce the door opening and closing as well as the power-off
time. He stayed at the first floor of the male dormitory section and would keep an eye on
the peasant workers. He would ask the strangers if they want to come upstairs.

While Lee’s comments suggest that such restrictions are beneficial to peasant workers, such a
system actually subjected their personal time and space to the factory’s regulations. Indeed, if
safety were the major concern, then this reality contradicted with the fact that no specified
person guarded the door on the female side of the dorm. When I asked Lee about this apparent
contradiction, he simply told me that the managers also stay on that end of the building and they
keep an eye on safety.

Thus, if we consider dorms not only as a form of physical existence, but as a spatial
form of material social relations, then the dorms not only support the peasant workers, but also
and more importantly, restrain their means of social reproduction that are not directly beneficial
to industrial production.

**Direct management from the factory.** The factory management closely regulates the
dorms. First, collective renting makes it the factory management’s decision regarding what kind
of dorms with what appliances and how close to the factories such dorms will be located. In
HyperLink, the dorm floor and the shop floor can be seen from each other. They are a three-
minute walk apart. Such a short distance makes it convenient for the factory management to
check on the peasant workers in the dorms. Both the short distance and the manager/landlord
status enable the factory to directly manage the dorms. As Lee explained, the factory has hired a
worker to lock and unlock the door as well as switch on and off the power supply at the times
determined by the factory management. The peasant worker-guard also monitors who enters
and exits the dorm to make sure only workers stay in the building.

By collectively renting and then subleasing the dorms to peasant workers, factory
owners also become the *de facto* landlords. Such a combination of the roles of the factory-dorm management generates two direct changes in the political economy of peasant workers’ identity making. First, the factory owners can acquire both the surplus value from the peasant workers’ work and also get their rent from them by subleasing dorms to them. Second, by blurring the gap between living space and working space, dorms actually become a colonized space in which the factory management controls the dorm space through the regulations that are in accordance with those of the factory. Therefore, the factory management actually has the combined social power of being the factory manager and the *de facto* landlord; correspondingly, the peasant workers with their staying in the collectively rented dorms have to subject their social reproduction space and time under the regulation, supervision, and surveillance of the factory management. The space of the dorms and that of factories becomes, in this case, a *spatial power ensemble*. Such a space ensemble, due to the capital owners’ double identity, neutralizes the necessary isolation of the jurisdiction of the management of capital production, making dorms an appendix to capital reproduction. Assigning a peasant worker supervisor to closely monitor people’s spatial flow and time schedule actually manifests the advantages of such spatial formation based on the co-existence of peasant workers and their factory owners.

Yet, it is far from the case that peasant workers and factory owners are bound in a reciprocal relationship in which they both benefit from such a factory-dorm regime. Factory owners have gained the advantages of peasant workers’ monitored and manipulated sleeping time, controlled and delimited social relation opportunities, and the more directly influenced time management for capital production. When factories and dorms share the same “boss,” the space created through such spatial ownership, extended management, and shared interests is a completely different social control-and-consent-making entity that is both material and social.
Such a spatial ensemble works to the advantage of the ruling economy in such a microcosm. Indeed, space, itself as an entirety of material social relations, participates in the production of how time is administered. Dorms, as both the restricted space and the space of restrictions, have actually put pressure on how the daily routines should be and how time, even leisure or personal time could actually be spent. By doing so, the dorms-factories space ensemble has maintained a detailed and intricately woven spatial-temporal power on everyday activities of peasant workers.

**Dorms as a single-sex space.** As a space for peasant workers’ social reproduction, dorms only reproduce a limited range of activities that peasant workers need for normal development. Maintaining dorms as a single-sex space is one example of such restricted social reproduction. Rules established by the factory management ensure that the dorms are a single-sex space, and no friends or family members of the opposite sex are allowed to enter the dorm without permission, let alone stay overnight. From my observation, this rule maintains the orderly management of the population that works for the factory. However, if we see the dorm as a space of social reproduction, then such regulations of single gendered space seriously limit social support for peasant workers. Of course, the dorm still functions as a shelter and resting space for the peasant workers, with the limited leisure time they enjoy. Yet, the regulations governing who enters the dorm space seriously truncate their social activities. Although the majority of the peasant workers are in their twenties, courtship and friends of the opposite sex are excluded from the dorms, meaning that this part of social reproduction could only be enjoyed in other spaces, such as small canteens, on the streets, and other public spaces. Then, with the dorms being locked at certain times of the day and night, such social activities have been both spatially and temporarily restricted in the space proper for peasant workers.
Although not all the dorms have locks as ferociously installed as those in the factory dorms, many have mechanisms for similar restrictions. One middle-aged peasant worker from Shaanxi Province explained:

I am so lucky that my wife’s factory and my factory share the same weekends. So I can go to visit her. Since both dorms do not have dorms for couples, they do not allow the opposite sex to stay in the dorms. So we would stay in the hotel room for ten Yuan per night.

With the dorms regulated as a single-sex living space, cheap hotel rooms have been constructed around the factories with regular peasant worker customers. For the couples, married or unmarried, who cannot afford or are unwilling to pay for the privately rented dorms, the cheap hotel reunion has become an essential means for the social functions eliminated by the factory dorms.

If the lack of social reproduction function of the single sex dormitory rooms can be partially fulfilled by the cheap hotel rooms, other social reproduction functions that are seriously restrained cannot be fulfilled without larger structural changes. For example, peasant workers’ children in the city and their education are seriously restricted from the dorms. Frequently, peasant workers’ children and their education are not considered to be concerns of the factory/dorm management. Yet, it is through such normalized exclusions that the dorms function as the central space of peasant workers’ lives and subsequently lack in certain important social reproductions. Such restrictions are both contained within, and masked by, the services that the dorms provide. As support, the dorms maintain a positive stance; and as a physical construction, they pose a neutral stance of material existence. But it is through such positive to neutral positions that the dorms function as relegating certain living possibilities to
the peasant workers while eliminating, or excluding others. Dorms regulate by not supporting all the social reproduction functions necessary for peasant workers. Rather, they selectively support certain functions and such selectively supported functions all center on the industrial production. By contrast, certain social functions necessary to peasant workers’ development as a socially healthy person are eliminated or seriously restricted from dorms as the most important living space of peasant workers. Thus, the personhood produced through dorms, or, in other words, the socially produced identity of peasant workers, is a highly selective production favorable to industrial production than anything else. The class identity production through the dorms, thus, lies in its selective production of peasant workers’ social activities.

Thus, dorms function as the mediation of more direct factory management and as the spaces for social reproduction that center on industrial production. As single-sex spaces, dorms do not only assert spaces as gendered; rather, they also, more importantly, manifest that the purposes for reproduction of gender do not lie in gender itself but in class formation of social forces along gender lines. The resulting daily practices of the class formation of social forces, thus, transforms peasant workers into a personhood lacking essential components of human reproduction.

**Dorm’s Supportive Restraints as Mechanisms of Class-Identity Production**

We must not let these particular experiences, both of peasant workers and of mine, slip by as only particularities, for the presence of barred doors, penetrating regulations from factory spaces and dorm spaces, and socially as well as materially divided by living between men and women peasant workers are too connected to be deemed as separate or particular practices. As connected practices that have asserted an ensemble of social material relations, these practices have mounted a social material power, which produces class identity.
Probably the best way of showing the vantage positioning of these practices in producing class identity is by linking such particular practices to a positive understanding of power and then evaluating its presence and functionalities. Understanding the supportive restraints of dorms frames the question of how and what kind of class identity is produced. To understand the supportive restraints of dorms, we need to understand the nature of social power. Foucault (1977), in *Discipline and Punish*, asserted a supportive and formative nature of power that comes into the production of human identity:

The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an “ideological” representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I [Foucault] have called “discipline.” We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it “excludes,” it “represses,” it “censors,” it “abstracts,” it “masks,” it “conceals.” In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (p. 194)

In his urgency to refuse a negative understanding of power, Foucault overemphasized its productive, formative, and supportive functions. Yet, such a productive power, in that “it produces reality” fails to reflect on what could have been its dialectical pair – the exclusionary production, or partial exclusion for the purpose of production. A question of linking such a “one-dimensional” theoretical ideal might be how do we, from a critical perspective, understand that power produces a reality that overshadows a utopian possibility of equality? Would we be content with the production of individuals as locked objects in a factory, even for a limited period of time, simply because it is *the reality that power has produced*?
The negative pair of the productive and formative functions of power, against Foucault’s (1977) outcry that we “must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals’” (p. 194), must be redeemed from its foreclosure to revitalize the consideration of the productive functions of power and to rethink the relations between the identities produced vis-à-vis a productive-repressive, or a supportive restricting nature of power.

As a result of missing the negative nature of production, Foucault’s (1977) statement on identity production also missed the meaning of “rights” as can be produced through yet another round of negation against the negative nature of the power, the oppression, and the exclusion. For instance, Foucault considered that “[w]e must cease once and for all to [use to] describe the effects of power” (p. 194). Mitchell’s (2000) description of rights provided the missing piece of Foucault’s puzzle:

At the most basic level, “rights” means an institutional, societally sanctioned promise that you can be. The modern, bourgeois, nation-state, however, has typically not enshrined the “right to be.” It has instead been structured around the distribution of negative rights. Negative rights allow citizens to remain free from state interference in some aspect of life (such as speech and thought, religion, police brutality, etc.). The “right to be” has been at most a byproduct of these “negative” guarantees [Italics Original]. (p. 289)

Put in conjunction with Foucault’s statement, and with the actual reference to the peasant workers’ dorms, what could have been identified as Mitchell’s negative rights? Could Foucault’s antithesis against negativity and Mitchell’s advocacy of it be reconciled to make a more productive way of rethinking identity production? Different from the often clearly articulated state ordinance, peasant workers’ dorms have, for instance, articulated through their physical
presence, the peasant workers’ rights to remain protected from bad weather and safety concerns due to lack of shelter. Yet, importantly, the formation of peasant workers’ activities in favor of the industrial production centers the social reproduction of peasant workers on industrial production but at the cost of what Mitchell (2000) calls the “right to be” (p. 289).

The definition of the “right to be” must be unfolded throughout human social development so that human possibilities can be expanded. However, at the moment, it is important to stick to the question: What material social presence of the dorms has formed a kind of right of being, as the actually lived forms of living? This question has to be considered with the functionalities of the dorms in its supportive restraints of peasant workers’ being.

The Supportive Restraints of Being in Everyday Practices of Class Identity

Could space, as a material presence, produce class identity? And if so, what kind of class identity does it produce? The problem lies in an often-misunderstood concept of materiality as well as mistakenly reducing space as physical, and the physical as contrast to meaning. In calling space, or, more precisely, landscape a “quasi-object [italics original],” Don Mitchell (1996) emphasized the rich social relations that are shaped into the forms of the landscape. Landscape is “quasi-object,” in a great part, because it is more than just a reified object. Instead, Mitchell perceptively viewed landscape as an object that “embod[ies] all the multifarious relations, struggles, arguments, representations, and conclusions that went into its making – even if it often appears as only an inert, or ‘natural,’ thing” (p. 33). Thus, as a material form, the object contains the sociality in the specific forms that it assumes.

If we connect such theorization with the specificities of peasant workers’ dorms, the question is how have the daily practices been structured into a class being? Mitchell (1996) further explained the functionalities of landscape: “As a quasi-object, . . . landscape structures
social reality; it represents to us our relationships to the land and to social formations” (p. 33). In fact, an analysis of the dorms’ function can yield an even more intricately woven and, therefore more specific, mechanisms of space’s rendering social reality. Dorms as a social-material produced space have combined the following features all-in-one: Its manned surveillance, together with the mechanism of barred gates, its accordance between the factory working time and gate closing regulations, its closeness with social services as well as with the factory are all the features socially and materially produced through the presence of dorms. Most essentially, none of such features is a coincidence. Rather, they are all social-materially produced selective formation of peasant workers through the use of spaces.

Thus, the dorms as a space become a silently enforced power structure, the recognition of whose power can be most clearly made through the attempts to break such a power structure. Should one peasant worker wish to buy more expensive food, live in privately-rented rooms, disobey the timetable of the dorms and work on his own time, and go ahead and enjoy/suffer the political as well as economic consequences; he will also spend more and save less, walk longer distances or take buses, be late to work and risk being fined, and enjoy the city adventure at the possibility of being mugged. Particular instances of one or several of such mis-behaviors exist among peasant workers. Yet, it is through such a political and economic gird which takes specific spatial forms that the space in general, and dorms in particular, have formed a structure of normality and natural(ness), the already irrefutable presence of reason of materiality, which is in reality, a rigidified presence of social logic.

Interestingly, the class identity produced through such social logic assumes a form of materiality saturated with sociality. Because such social logic takes such a material form, often in appearance of mere everyday practices, it masks the social significance of being class
identity, of assuming a much larger social impact on who the peasant worker is. Who the peasant worker is, paradoxically, can only be understood through material social processes of his being as practices.

Then, the dorm as a particular form of landscape and space does more than just structure every movement of peasant workers’ lives. Rather, the dorm presents itself in every decision-making process that forms the everyday living activities of peasant workers by forming one type of rationality that aligns with a personalized political economic cost versus a higher cost of doing otherwise. In this way, it is no longer the structure understood as the form detached from everyday activities. Rather, with its materialized hierarchies of interests centered on capitalist production, the dorm as a space participates and mediates an everyday formation of class. As such, the dorm has become a spatialized rendition of hegemony, which Raymond Williams (1977) has compared with a less materialized rendition of ideology:

Hegemony is . . . not only the articulate upper level of “ideology,” nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as “manipulation” or “indoctrination.” It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting – which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. It is . . . a “culture” as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes. (p. 110)

In that hegemony is formulated beyond ideology, Williams stated hegemony does not “equate consciousness with the articulate formal system which can be and ordinarily is abstracted as
‘ideology’” (p. 109). If we distinguish hegemony from ideology, then a spatialized formulation of hegemony, or a hegemony defined as being able to recognize the greater significance of space that is often masked by the space’s physicality and visual distinction, can be gleaned. The physical presence of the dorm, as landscape and a form of space deprived of the rights of being relevant to any social meaning apart from material environment, is the exact form any social power must assume. Not only every social power must have a form to exist and exert its power, but also such a material-social existence is the only form of existence. The physical existence of power does not deny its social meanings, nor does it deny its partisanship. Rather, it is the spatial form that often gives the built structures, such as dorms, an air of neutrality that they do not have.

But such an air of neutrality that space can often successfully wear on any of its built structures deserves more attention. In the end, the importance of realizing the power of space is not so much that it does not have the neutrality that it assumes as that what it can done with such neutrality. In other words, not that neutrality of space is wrong or false, but that what such an often assumed neutrality can function in the society as social-material power. Williams’ (1977) assertion on a more material-infused understanding of hegemony can be used to understanding such a sociology of space’s assumed neutrality:

It does not equate [beliefs, meanings, and values] with consciousness, or rather it does not reduce consciousness to them. Instead it sees the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living – not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific
economic, political, and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense. (p. 110)

It is through such articulation that the daily practices of passing, or being restrained by the barred gates can be more comprehensively understood. As a place in peasant workers’ everyday living, dorms belong to such “limits of simple experiences and common sense” (Williams, 1977, p. 110). It is exactly because of such limits that the understanding of dorms as a spatial element participating in a material-social formation of capital accumulation becomes crucial.

It is, further, through the physicality of dorms which cannot be easily uttered that the mediation of the dorm as a spatial power of class identity formation can be best played out through its connection with everyday activities and decision-making. Although the everyday activities and, maybe especially decision-making practices, are easily seen as subjective actions of human beings, the inlaid possibilities/impossibilities of actions through the dorms as a spatial presence, make each and every day assertion/articulation of subjective action an objectively mediated one. The passing, or not being able to pass, through the barred gates, for instance, makes the most mundane yet the most intricate activities of everyday practices a component of class identity formation. It is the everyday practices of the nature of a class identity formation because the very action is an action that has been based on a spatialized class hierarchy, and each similar action further consolidates such a hierarchy. Of course, the latter part of the statement does not mean that one can resist the maintenance of class identity production by refusing to think that the barred door is there, open or closed. It means, however, that both the seemingly natural act of referring to one’s watch stops to be a subjective activity, or that any such subjective activity is always mediated through the presence of spatialized form. In that such activities are mediated through the spatialized form, this form aligns activities with the
central interests of the industrial production that the space has been built to assist.

Of course, dorms cannot independently perform such class identity formation. Without the factory rules and regulations, without the nearby restaurants, and even without the more distant and expensive hotels and apartments, the dorms would not function as they do. Yet, the importance of the dorm should be seen from its presence in the exact forms that it has assumed: Without its barred gates, power supply switch, then the social functions of the factories would function in a different manner, a manner that replaces the current presence of the dorms.

But there is an even deeper meaning of the dorm than the social functions mediated through its particular form: That is, as presented in the above statement, dorms are never independent forms of social material relations. Walls, doors, and pavement that might have physically marked a dorm’s isolation as well as its distinct status are only a type of visual deception. Because the dorms are not only physical but also social; they never function independently. They are formed through the trans-local connections of spaces. It is also in this sense that dorms are not the centers of class identity production; they are part of a spatial form of social material power ensemble in which the rules and regulations of the factories function as importantly as the personal decisions of where to eat lunch for the peasant workers, in forming the ensemble of class identity. It is also in this sense that the political economy of the factory’s industrial production cannot do without the form that the dorms and the surrounding restaurants take – all revolving around one another as a materially and spatially mediated process that exerts a structural hierarchy that renders peasant workers into less favorable existences of classed living. Dorms make and are themselves made to assist a class identity formation by participating into a whole series of daily practices.

The understanding of dorms as a material form of sociality does not address the question
of what ways such forms have come into being. Nor does it address the fact that dorms as such are only a new invention when the city of Shenzhen has a 30-year history. How do we understand the historical changes that have produced the dorms in such forms in a transitional China? These questions generate other equally important questions: How has the historical contingency of change taken a spatial form of relative stability in physical construction? Why? Over what social material processes has such a historical contingency been consolidated into the built structures that interact with everyday living experiences?

**Production of Historical Contingency of Dorms Through Selective Transformation of the Household Registration System**

In this section, I concentrate on explaining how dorms in cities are formed as a historical contingency of social material tradition in China. Such a tradition can be seen through the historical changes of the Household Registration System (HRS). Therefore, by investigating the roles a transitional HRS played in the construction and daily usages of dorms as well as the roles dorms played in actualizing HRS as a contemporary social organization system, I locate the historical contingency of dorms by examining the material presence of the built structures.

**Dorms as a Selectively Forged Spatial Form of the Past Social-Material Relations**

As indicated in the previous section, dorms are not neutral. They are part of the spatial ensemble through which the social relations are mediated in ways that are closely associated with the very forms of the dorms into a social material power. This section starts from where the last ended, with the lack of neutrality or the partisanship of dorms as a social material form. The question of why and how the historical contingency of changes has taken a spatial form of relative stability of physical construction equals the question of what kind of partisanship dorms have taken and how they have been forged through a tradition that no one can escape from. In
order to explain such a formation of dorms, especially their partisanship, it is important to link the relative stabilities of space with the historical significance that is often delinked and under-theorized.

The relative stabilities of space make the space suitable for mediating social relations through its forms. Sometimes referred to in geography as *landscape*, space is understood as a combination of physical shapes and also social relationships. Harvey (1996), for instance, deemed “landscape” as a “structured permanence” – a “relatively stable and solid thing . . . that we daily encounter in the world and without which physical and biological life would not and could not exist as we know it” (p. 50). Importantly different from the common perception of landscape as a solid, neutral, and never-changing mass, Harvey’s consideration of landscape as “relatively stable and solid” (p. 50) implies that its solid and stable shapes are made and remade historically, *with purposes*. Thus, the “structured permanence” (p. 50) should not only be seen as *permanence*, but how it is *structured* and how such *structured* permanence can serve the purposes of control by shaping the everyday experiences. Thus, importantly, the consideration of spaces as conditions has expanded in two directions: first, it indicates any current forms and shapes of space as being made and remade in history and with certain purposes. Second, it opens the analytical potential to explore the relationships between the actual shapes of physical space and their influences on daily encounters, experiences, and activities.

Mitchell (2003) considered such structural permanence from a historical view, contending that not only such permanence is “not naturally *necessary*” (p. 240), but also, imperatively, “historically contingent, developed to solve some problem or fill some need (trumped up or not)” (p. 240). Then, landscape is a “complex moment in a system of social reproduction” (Mitchell, 1996, p. 35). The fact that landscape has a specific form at any moment
of the historical development manifests as a most profound paradox: It is, at the same time, historically contingent and such historical contingency is concretized into the material forms. As such, landscape realizes multiple social functions through its relatively stable and solid shape. It is in this sense that landscape is a “relatively stable and solid thing” (Harvey, 1996, p. 50). The crux of class identity as the formation and fixity of particular shared and lived experiences then lies in showing how the solidified historical contingencies have been selectively produced to fulfill certain purposes while it nullifies others. This is a step further than the selective production of everyday practices into class identities of peasant workers. Instead, this step investigates how the space that produces class identity is itself selectively produced through the selective changes of the traditions as a social material ensemble. This step further addresses how dorms as a form of space have historically acquired their ensemble for the hierarchical formation of class.

**Dorms as One Material Form of Historical Contingencies of the HRS**

Despite the cliché argument that the unchanged HRS had formed an urban-rural spatial and social-status division influencing class identity of workers and peasants, the often under-theorized point is that the HRS has offered peasants arable land and space for their houses in the countryside. The providence of housing space and arable land explains why the HRS as a policy could be maintained from its 1956 issue without significant changes. In other words, the unchanged HRS had its material structure in the countryside, so peasants could not go to cities from 1956 to the 1980s because they could not obtain the same basic and essential material life support as city dwellers.

Then, what is the material support for the selectively adapted HRS when the peasant workers have been formed as a large rural population living in Chinese cities? Where is their
living space and where does their food come from if they are to devote as much time as possible
to industrial manufacturing? Now that the selective changes of the HRS has let the young and
robust labor forces out of their registered countryside and has left behind the old and the weak,
what else must be done for such selective HRS changes to maintain the social functionality of
keeping such a structurally chosen population in Chinese cities? In other words, does HRS, as a
social, spatial, and material policy in China, have its spatial form? Does such a spatial form
change over time? In this section, I argue that peasant workers’ dorms are important material
forms through which the historical contingencies of HRS have been concretized into a spatial
practice. Such a spatial practice is essential for the industrial manufacturing practices in China.

The changed HRS alone, as a government policy, cannot function even one day without
the spatial formation of construction designed for this selected labor force. Dorms, then, have
become a form of historical contingency regulating such a chosen labor force population in
cities. Dorms are the stable form of construction for the historical contingencies of HRS
alteration. The forms of dorms have been determined by several factors: First, only dorms,
especially single-sex dorms, can provide for a high-density population living together. Take the
city of Shenzhen’s population density for instance (See Table 6.5.)

Table 6.5
Shenzhen: Population and Density by District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>square km</th>
<th>Density (persons/square km)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Economic Region</td>
<td>2,558,000</td>
<td>291.7</td>
<td>8,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td>2,112,000</td>
<td>1,657.0</td>
<td>1,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,670,000</td>
<td>1,948.7</td>
<td>2,396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Source: Municipality of Shenzhen official website. Posted 12/09/2003*

How does the 8,769 persons per square kilometer translate into each person’s holding of the
land? It is not translatable! Although the special economic region had the highest population
density rate in the city, only a small portion of the area used to calculate the population density was actually allocated for the peasant workers to live! The population density, as the actual sleeping space for peasant workers, was about two square meters per person based on the dorm population and dorm area. This means that each person actually has the area of one single bed to his own!

Taken from there, if we were to realize a spatially more democratic construction of the city where peasant workers would buy their own apartments, then the city’s transportation, education, management, public services, and housing would be an entirely different story – the city would be a different city. This is not to suggest fatalistically that given the current city formation, there would be some living substandard lives. Instead, it suggests that dorms as a high-density living method and a construction type constitute an inseparable material form. On one hand, with the dorm as the material form of support, the HRS can become a feasible policy; on the other hand, with the HRS, dorms as a city structural construction type stabilize the city’s social material construction of capital production as a whole.

To analyze the formation of dorms on the scale of municipality, as a specific spatial form, the popularity of dorms lies in several characteristics: first, as analyzed before, their high-density capacity makes it possible for local governments to absorb more laborers for the labor intensive manufacturing industries to prosper. Second, in part due to their capacity to house eight persons in a single dorm room keeping the shared rent at a low level, dorms have made low wage levels possible while still attracting peasant workers to the city as a reserve army of laborers. Third, the surrounding food and catering businesses have formed a circle of low-level wages around the peasant workers’ living and working areas. All these made the dorms suitable spatial forms to enact typical social material relations that the HRS’s selective adaptation has meant to create:
dorms provide spaces for producing laborers with constant availability, but availability without causing overburdening of the city facilities and public services, nor raising the city’s overall production costs.

Thus, the existence of dorms is both a result of and also a condition for the selective changes of the HRS. As a spatial formation that is both cheap in rent and close to the working place, dorms make it possible for peasant workers to continually be treated as enclosed outsiders of the city, enclosed as the readily available laborers for industrial production but outsiders as they are excluded from having many aspects of labor’s social reproductions that city dwellers with registrations possess. Important, the dorms’ structural significance on municipality levels expands to the international level of low-wage laborers. As necessary shelters for peasant workers who work for capital accumulation, the cheap rented dorms provide make-shift places for selectively producing peasant workers into industrial laborers, by eliminating many social reproduction demands of peasant workers. As such, these dorms not only produce a national low wage level, but also an internationally competitive manufacturing industry in China. The dorms do so by becoming the new material/spatial forms of a changing population policy, HRS.

**Peasant Workers’ Permanent Temporariness of Class Identity**

Dorms provide a very basic spatial form of existence for China’s current population system, a changed HRS. By providing such a form of existence, dorms have produced a kind of labor forces by attending to the everyday details of such labor forces’ social reproduction. Therefore, it is important to examine the kind of living that peasant workers have led through a life mediated by dorms.

As a type of construction, dorms have formed a type of residence with the following functions: first, dorms constructed a type of residence that is centered on the social reproduction
aligned with industrial production; second, they formed a highly concentrated form of group living. By doing so, dorms formed an alternative residential type that the city’s apartment living could not possibly have hosted. Third, connected to the first two functionalities, dorms materially formed a relatively stable social relation of the city’s demand for permanent laboring forces and simultaneously provided lodging that delayed the urgency of the city’s permanent residence, thus creating peasant workers’ temporary residence. In all, dorms have formed the permanent temporariness of the peasant workers as class identity formation.

The permanent temporariness of the peasant workers is shown through a paradox of peasant workers’ living. On the one hand, the peasant workers are highly demanded in Chinese cities. Until 2011, the estimated total population of peasant workers has reached “221 million” and is “increasing at an annual rate of 10 million” (“Transient Workers,” 2011). Thus, such a peasant worker population has become a permanent sector of China’s total population. On the other hand, their identities and belonging still remain temporary. In no way their job security, social security, and public services can be compared with the privileged city dwellers. As presented in “China’s Household Registration System,” (2006),

[w]hile recent reforms loosen the hukou system for the privileged, they do not address the primary problem still facing poor migrants: the continued linkage of hukou registration to public services. Restrictions on public services often apply both to unregistered migrants as well as to long-term residents who have complied with the procedures for acquiring a temporary residence permit.

Far from providing peasant workers with a social mobility that can come in accordance with the physical mobility, a changed HRS, together with the spatial support provided by dorms, has produced a permanent temporariness of peasant workers by maintaining a social-material
difference between the city dwellers and peasant workers. Thus, the permanent temporariness of peasant workers’ stay in Chinese cities has become a strategic choice in China’s progress of “Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics” (Harvey, 2007). Thus, even though the current reforms of the household registration system have started to loosen the rural-urban division by changing the actual accessibility of public services, the rural-urban division exists in a more masked and profound way. The division has taken a new form of peasant workers’ permanent temporariness of staying in Chinese cities, as the constantly available work force and as the always under-served population.

**The Permanent Temporariness of City Residence as Dormitory-Centered Bodily Activities**

The permanent temporariness of peasant workers’ city residence is part of the historical contingencies of a national formation of spaces. More importantly, such formations of dorms as the historically contingent form of producing permanent temporariness can be seen from the very activities of the bodies surrounding dorms. According to Harvey (2000), bodies are the accumulative strategy for capitalist production. Such strategies are not only connected to variable capital but also connected to the formation of constant capital. With the dorms being affiliated to factories, the living spaces, which are usually under the control of the workers themselves, have been structurally subjected to the formation of constant capital. Thus, in terms of the Marxian (1992) conception of variable and constant capital, the formation of dorms as part of the factory means that such factories have expanded their formation of constant capital. In turn, the factory mandated regulations mean that dorms are the formation of the variable capital. More specifically, the social reproduction of such a group of laborers can be formally subjected to the factory’s regulation over the constant capital. In other words, the factory’s regulations of the dorms are not regulations over a neutral space, nor are the regulations themselves neutral.
Instead, the hierarchical formation of the regulations combines with the hierarchical formed
dormitory space to ensure that the formation of the dorms has significant influence on bodies’
social reproduction as variable capital. The selective production of the social functions of the
bodies, then, is a direct result of such hierarchical production of constant capital over variable
capital. Although the two capitals in Marx’s conception are distinct, the spatial formation of the
dorms has integrated them to the benefit of capital production.

**The Invisible Presence of Translocality**

The presence of translocality exists mainly as the invisibility of it. All these peasant
workers come from places other than the site of the investigation. Their presence at the
workplace and dorm places and their availability in working for the capital accumulation,
paradoxically, becomes a presence that is embedded in translocality. Such a presence embedded
in translocality has the following importance: 1), their presence is not a static presence. As
human belongings, their connections with the family members left at their countryside homes are
constant. Thus, any moment of presence (at the workplace) is also a moment of isolation with the
family members. Presence embedded translocality, then, is a manifest contradiction of isolation
of peasant workers for the sake of capital accumulation. The presence/isolation is a reified
identity of peasant workers that becomes part of their everyday living. Such presence/isolation
strictly revolves around a political-economic axis of peasant workers’ everyday living. Such a
presence/isolation as one aspect of translocality has its significant manifestation in the forms of
female peasant worker’s pregnancy.

Female peasant workers are a common favorably discriminated group in the electronic
industry. Lee once told me that “we love to have more women workers because they are easier to
manage. However, the men workers are like boys and some of them can become unruly. For
those, it is very simple for us, we just fire them.” Although favorable, pregnancy is an issue that is much more connected to the female’s bodies and has an impact on working. One peasant worker from Sichuan province told me that his wife went back to his hometown when she was three month’s pregnant:

My wife and I got to know each other when we were working in the previous factory, about three years ago. She is a docile girl and we like each other. So we rented an apartment room nearby that factory and lived together. Last year, she was pregnant and I asked her to quit the job. She had quite a reaction of pregnancy. Since I had to go to work, no one could look after her or cook for her. The expense of living also became overwhelming since she quit. So, I called my mom and asked her to go back to my hometown. My mom was very happy to see her daughter-in-law for the first time and with her pregnant. Although my wife had not been at my home before, she’s a gentle girl and she got along with my family members very well. All the people at my home love her.

Then he told me that his baby son was already over two months old. I asked him what would his future plan be for the mother and the baby. He told me that he was not certain: “I was thinking that maybe my wife can come to join me after the baby reaches one. Then, he will be big enough for my parents to take care of.” The isolation of peasant workers’ husband-wife, or parents-children is a common phenomenon, let alone the isolation of peasant workers with their own parents. Actually, since the peasant workers’ isolation with the family is common, and usually it is women, aged people, and kids are left in the countryside, a term, the 386199 Army, was jokingly used online to refer to the people are left for taking care of agricultural works in particular, and of the family daily tasks in general. 38, March 8th is the national women’s day.
June 1st, is the national children’s day. And 99, or Chinese lunar calendar September 9th, is the national aged people’s day (Biao, 2007; Tan, 2009; Zeng, 2004).

From that Sichuan peasant workers’ life story, the translocality, or the presence/isolation of family members also take on a new look: that such presence/isolation does not only impact on each individual peasant worker, it also have a structural issue on the population and the social-material activities of everyday living. The isolation becomes the necessary cost of one’s right/possibility of earning in the cities, yet it is also the unpaid social price that has impact on the peasant workers’ children education and care for the aging parents.

However, the Sichuan peasant worker’s life, though separated from his loved ones, is still complete in the sense that the courtship led to marriage and to a child, although such a completion must be understood with the distance between them viewed as if it did not matter. But there are much more less-well-structured love stories and isolation. One peasant worker wrote me a letter in which he mentioned that “the relationships between male and female workers are very loose. [Female] workers who needed abortion operations must line up to wait for their turn in both large hospitals and small street side clinics.” Translocality not only means isolation from several family members, it also means, inevitably, the presence/isolation of a different set of social-material support/management system. The pre-marital and extra-marital pregnancy is more than a biological issue. But it is a strictly social-material spatial management/support issue that concerns the everyday living of peasant workers, male as well as female.

Second, translocality is not only about the everyday living activities of the isolated families, though these activities are on their own very important aspect of their social-material identity. But more importantly, translocality has happened to deliver its impact on the
interrelationship between city-countryside. Countryside, on the one hand, is more and more subsumed into the status of labor force resources and reportorior for the surges of unemployment of peasant workers. Zhao (2000) considered the presence of such Chinese countryside as an important reason why Chinese cities do not develop the city slums and urban decay once the economic situations of the named cities go amok. Connected, on the other hand, translocality becomes another name for a sustaining inequity between cities and countryside as well as a sustaining presence of separation of peasant workers’ families as a phenomenon of peasant workers’ national specific class identity. Thus, the translocal presence/separation of peasant workers and their daily activities constitutes a phenomenon that actually means the reification of their class identity as, socially the city’s outsiders. But more importantly, translocality as a spatial social project works not to totally keep the peasant workers off Chinese cities. In essence, it works exactly by keeping their working bodies in cities but a large part of the bodies social supporting system and social reproduction of these bodies elsewhere – maybe in the countryside. Philosophically, peasant workers do not necessary belong to their countryside origin, neither does such an origin mean that they have to, eventually, return to. However, the continual association of their city presence and their countryside, as an origin is reinforced everyday through a city’s discrimination and structural imbalance that is spatially manifested as translocality of their identity. In short, translocality of peasant workers’ presence/isolation is at best a normalized compromise/contradiction of peasant workers class identity through its material and spatial presentation. Pointing out the translocality of peasant workers’ presence/isolation does not solve any actual problem. It just concretized a material and spatial presence of an otherwise abstract issue of peasant workers’ contradictory class identity.
To be a concrete material spatial presence, translocality has its important everyday contents. For instance, with one peasant workers couple each earning 1,500 yuan per month and with an apartment of 100 square meters soaring to one million yuan, and the down payment for installation at 20%, that is 0.2 million. The time for them to be able to afford the down payment is 7 years and for the entire payment, 35 years—without them spending one penny. In other words, the city living is next to impossible. But on the other hand, because of the wage differences between countryside and cities, which can be as high as city earning double the countryside earnings, it is still reasonable for the peasant workers to come to the cities to work. The margin of profit for peasant workers comes only at a social chance of earning in the cities with the minimal requirements of social reproduction and remits the earnings to the countryside so that the members at home can have a life better than if they work and spend in the countryside. But this will become a more complex issue. Thus, the subsumption/subordination of Chinese countryside to cities, the peasant workers as a stable labor source for Chinese manufacturing, and their presence at cities and isolation with their family members is a stable structural hierarchy that makes peasant workers’ class identity as a translocal temporary permanence of labor force.

The Types of Class Identities Produced through Dorms

After specific discussions of the permanent temporariness as part of peasant workers’ identity and the historical contingency that shapes the forms of dorms, it is important to consider the issue more generally: On what condition should we consider the formation of class identity through the forms of spaces? In other words, is the discussion of space a necessary condition for the discussion of class identity? And if so, what kind of different understandings can such discussions of class identity add to discussions of class identity formation without the
Soja’s (1989) consideration of the importance of space in the discussions of class struggle has shed illuminating light on the above questions:

[Class struggle (yes it still remains class struggle) must pass and focus upon the vulnerable point: The production of space, the territorial structure of exploitation and domination, the spatially controlled reproduction of the system as a whole. And it must include all those who are exploited, dominated and “peripheralized” by the imposed spatial organization of advanced capitalism: landless peasants, proletarianized petty boorgeoisies, women, students, racial minorities, as well as the working class itself. (p. 92; cited in Tufts, 1998, p. 228)]

More importantly, although Soja’s depiction of the specific production of space and the territorial structure of exploitation is vastly different from China’s formation of spaces, the seminal provocation on the spatial formation of exploitation and domination actually calls for the examination of more locally specific spatial formations to supplement such provocations. Admittedly, Soja’s emphasis on class struggle has been changed here into my emphasis on class formation. Yet, such a change is necessary because without considering class formation from its most basic and locally specific spatial formation, the discussions of class struggles would be like a castle in the sky, without the down-to-earth spatial formation of class identities in the first place.

Then, in what ways should we consider the spatially-formed class identity in general and the dorm-formed permanent temporariness in particular? Typically, the difficulties of understanding the spatial formed class identity lie in considering class identity as social categories and classification based on nominal standards, such as the levels of income, places of
origin, and social differences of treatment. Admittedly, such standards can serve as significant perimeters in indicating different class formations. Yet, dorms are not only the results of the social material process of class identity formation, but they participate in the social formation of class identity. In considering the spatially-formed class identity in general and the dorm-formed permanent temporariness in particular, dorms serve as the concrete physical presence that combine the past and present social material relations. At the same time, they are lived and, through such living, participate in the formation of the peasant workers’ everyday living experiences.

Such participation in the formation of the peasant workers’ everyday living experiences has a profound impact on how class identity can be understood. Instead of social categories, class identity can be analyzed through the everyday formation of certain social material forces into the making of personhood. It is through such particular formation, with its ingredients of certain social material forces and lack of certain other social material forces, that the “rights of being,” as derived from Mitchell’s (2000) term of “right to be” becomes a much more flexible formation of class identity.

In particular, such a flexible formation of class identity opens the possibilities of theorization to both peasant workers’ own subjective decision-making processes and their activities and the constant power of the dorms as material forces in shaping, or more precisely, in shifting the peasant workers activities through its structural power. Thus, as a form of material presence in shifting activities, the dorms in particular, and the spaces in general, are not only a docile or inactive background or environment. Instead, by shifting the activities, by offering daily activities of production and living practices within its particular forms of restrictions, dorms in particular and spaces in general act as a living material force that mediates the activities
through their material presence. Such active formative forces of spaces have long been under-
thorized in the formation of class identity.

Connected to such different theorizations of class identity formation is the ways in
which the imagination/conceptualization of class identity goes beyond categorical
classification. Instead, we must consider class identity through the shapes, forms, and social
material formations processes that are not typically considered belonging to class, nor even
relating to class. To be specific, this is the wrong question to ask: What is this class identity
that is produced by the dorm? The question incorrectly assumes a class identity that can be
summarized or generalized free from the material social mediations through which it has
assumed its shape and can only assume its shape through such social material mediation. In
other words, the statement that the dorms form class identity does not need to be sublimed into
a more general, especially not a more materially detached, form of class identity formation.
The class identity, as such, is formed through the dorms. The desire to find more theoretically
pure forms of generalization must not be considered as equal to depriving the theorization of its
material construction and material participation. Instead, the theorization of class identity from
the dorms must return to the dorms so that the issues such as class struggle can focus on the
dorms as the very form through which class identity has been formed. It must return to the
varied and intricately connected social material relations that have formed the dorms not as the
beginning place for abstraction, but as the beginning place for the demands for the equally
intricate formations of counter-hegemonic social material forces so that both the discussions of
class formation and class struggles are deeply imbedded within the interwoven hegemony of
material social forces.
Peasant Workers’ Identity and the Formation of Human Agency through Nonhuman Actors

In both chapter IV and V, I have concentrated on considering how wage as a material-social institution has organized peasant workers’ working activities; in chapter VI, I have concentrated on how HRS and dorms have formed a historicized material contingency through which peasant workers’ everyday living activities are mediated. Thus, apparently, I have formulated the production of peasant workers’ identity through wages, dorms, and HRS. In what ways can such an emphasis on materiality benefit (or, as equally a theoretical possibility, detriment) our understanding of identity? What kind of identity do I want to address here? Maybe even deeper than the kind of identity that is emphasized by emphasizing materiality is a question of what possible political efficacy and agenda as well as more general theoretical concerns underlie such an identity? After I have detailed on the more specific theoretical issues as well as more specific empirical data, it is high time to tie the more general theoretical loose ends by making explicit my underlying understandings below the specific theoretical and empirical engagement before the dissertation draws to its end. In many ways, this is merely a theoretical reiteration by ignoring the more specific theoretical and empirical engagements I made before so that the major threads of connections can be manifested more clearly.

What my methodology, a specialized IE, and my theoretical foundation, Marxist materialism share is a labor ontology: In which the materiality of the world is considered to be the results of the previous labor. However, the materiality is not only the effect of labor. Instead, the materiality is also the conditions in which labor performs. As Kirsch and Mitchell (2004) considered that, “the emission of carbon dioxide” (p. 701) as the result of labor, the “dead” materialized previous labor, actually “dominate[s] the living labor that makes it” (p.
701). As I extended from Kirsch and Mitchell, people’s living activities within such “dead,” yet acting labor, constitutes a dynamic relationship between people’s living and the environment. Such a totality constitutes the identity that a group of people shares in their common relation with the materialized world.

Even though such a description can be easily read as reified identity formation, it is not so because of the following reasons: first, the formation of such materiality, or material environment is not itself reified. They are not treated as things or objects. Rather, materiality is seen as the result of the previous labor, which inevitably involves the social organization of such labor in the past and the social interactions of such materiality at present. Materiality as results of previous labor and the labor’s social organization makes materiality historically social whereas materiality as a participant in social interactions at present makes materiality a contemporary social actor that participates in the human’s (re-)formation of the world.

Based on the first point is the second point that further distances materiality from reification. Materiality as the result of the previous labor and as the participant in mediating the actions of the current labor makes labor a historical continuation whose mediation through history can only be completed with the assistance of materiality. In this sense, then, what Marxism and spatialized IE have emphasized as the labor ontology, in its dialectical changes, becomes a relational ontology: that materiality with its current forms, can be used to participate into the current political construction and that materiality can be used by either capital class or working class. As a rationale, then, the preparation and uses of materiality becomes an integral part when we consider the political-academic project of social transformation.

Closely connected to the previous two points is the third point: In the process of my emphasis on the importance of materiality, I do not mistake materiality as agency as if it can
act like zombies. Instead, just as Marx said about materiality when he actually used the term *capital*, “Capital is dead labour that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (p. 224). Materiality, such as wage, dorms, and HRS as policies with their actual material contents, can only function when the current living labor becomes aware their potential power and integrates them into their struggles for social power. But this does not mean that materiality is waiting only for the working class’s waking kisses. Instead, in a society in which class hierarchy has been installed historically through the permeation of international capital power, materiality has often already been used more engagingly by capitalists than by working class. It is in this sense that the recognition of the power of materiality and the waking kisses by working class, in this case, peasant workers, becomes important in their potential project of changing their environments to change themselves. Until then, their identity will continue to be a struggle for such changes to come. In this point, materiality does not mean reification because it is always engaged in the social and political process to make the world to work to certain class interests more than others.

In the whole dissertation, I have taken pains to make clear such a relational ontology: that people do not exist alone as pure human beings. They can only exist as beings exchange to the natural world. But in the class society the natural world is a social nature, a class nature. Yet, even when such an environment could not be chosen, it can be changed. People’s change of their environment lies in their actions of changes, yet mediated through their environment. Now that people can really only change their interrelationship by changing their collective relations with the social natural world, the ways they understand their material environment and the ways they interact with them becomes crucial for their future-oriented identity production. It is in this sense that materiality is deeply embedded both in a historical sociality
and a current use by the active embodied human labor power. Even when no human can exist autonomously as individuals, their desire of living collectively freer from the restrictions of material environment is a social desire on which a better identity is nurtured material-socially.

**Conclusion**

As a particular social material and spatial form, dorms participate in human activities and meaning-making processes. The physical forms of dorms often leave the impression that the dorms, like other physical structures, are neutral. To contest the misunderstanding of physicality as neutrality, Don Mitchell (2003) clearly disputed that “[t]he landscape, when uncontested, thus functions to establish the conditions under which surplus value is extracted [italics mine]” (p. 241). Thus, it is our urgency to pierce the neutral appearances of the physical space to investigate the highly political potency of space in their participation in power.

As a specific form of space, dorms where Chinese peasant workers reside participate in the formation of peasant workers’ class identity through three important measures. First, dorms function in supporting peasant workers’ everyday living experiences, especially when they are closely affiliated with industrial production centers and provide uneven chances for peasant workers’ social reproduction. Such uneven chances favor industrial production as they disfavor comprehensive and balanced social reproduction of peasant workers as human *beings*. Thus, the class identity that the dorms mediate of peasant workers’ everyday living experiences manifests as an uneven formation of human *beings* by attending to human’s everyday activities of *being*. In other words, by facilitating certain activities more than other activities, dorms have mediated the peasant workers’ class identity. It is worth noting that dorms can do such things not because dorms, as physical forms, can act as if they are persons. Rather, it is through the factory regulations, enforced as rules by particular social actors, that dorms stop being sole
physical structures, but are the ensemble of physicality and the social material relations. The uneven development of human activities, taken the form of supportive restraints of the dorm, has been produced through the uneven hierarchical order and is also itself part of such uneven hierarchical order.

This chapter then focused on dorms as specific forms through which historical contingencies of class formation take shape. By connecting dorms with the selective transformation of HRS, I argued that dorms have served as a spatial form in producing peasant workers as the labor forces suitable for China’s participation in world capitalism through manufacturing. More importantly, the dorms, as a particular form in which the historical contingencies of social material forces work, have served as spatial organizations to give both peasant workers’ being and capitalist production a concrete shape: its functionality in producing peasant workers’ class identity centers on its functionality in offering a space for a kind of capitalism with its specific requirements on its labor forces. Dorms both bear the current changes of HRS by forming themselves as the spatial guarantee for the implementation of the HRS policy and work hand-in-hand with it to form a larger material-social institution of identity production. The class identity produced, in more specific terms, is the peasant workers’ permanent temporariness in cities. On the one hand, the demands for peasant workers in Chinese cities’ industrial production will likely continue. Yet, on the other hand, such demands, due to the uneven development of social reproduction in favor of industrial production, determine that essential aspects of peasant workers’ livelihood, or being, in the cities will be forever delayed without qualitative changes. Thus, the permanent temporariness of class identity forms a selective and uneven construction of peasant workers’ social roles and their rights in society. In that dorms are produced and used in ways to facilitate such selective construction of peasant
workers’ social roles and rights in society; they have participated in the manufacturing of class identity of the peasant workers through attending to their everyday working and living activities.

In the end, I have used dorms as space and a form of built structures as a specific case to show the importance of space and structure in the manufacturing of class identity. Space and built structures can participate in manufacturing class identity because they are at the same time powerful, yet they have their power shielded in the appearance of neutrality. They can also participate in manufacturing class identity because their materiality is always a material form of sociality. Thus, they can participate as a material form of social relations into the social relations. The essence of materiality in society is that it is always also sociality at every moment of its material existence. Connecting dorms with the selective changes of the HRS, then, is aimed to pierce the neutral appearances of space through a historical change of social regulation systems. Mitchell’s (2003) reminder cautions that landscape as a hidden power of social regulation needs to be revisited here:

To the degree that the landscape is uncontested, to the degree that labor unrest can be stilled because of the sense that there simply is no alternative, then surplus value can be expanded. Landscape is thus a form of social regulation. The structured permanence that is the landscape both shapes and regulates social contest (helping to determine what is possible and what is not, displaying what is ordinary and expected, and what is not) at the same time as it is shaped through and regulated by social contest. (p. 241).

Studying dorms with the selectively transformed HRS, then, importantly connects the political economy of landscape with that of an internationalized manufacturing industry and the associated intra-national mobility of peasant workers. Within such a connection, dorms serve as the most powerful spatial presence and the materially formed social power that bear social forces
within their material presence. They manufacture class identity of peasant workers exactly by attending to the miscellaneous details of everyday living and working activities and by, often without being seen, eliminating important social possibilities for different living conditions to be desired and experienced.

It is through such a naturalized space of peasant workers’ dorms that this chapter of denaturalization has attempted to understand dorms in the midst of internationalized capital production and intra-national formation of labor at the center of peasant workers’ everyday working and living experiences. It is exactly through such centrality of dorms in the capital production, national formation of labor forces, and in the formation of peasant workers that dorms have become a secretive means of class identity manufacturing that works in accordance with the internationalized capital demands for labor and surplus value. As places to sleep, however, the power of dorms in manufacturing class identity maximizes when it appears most neutral and when it is separated from social forces and regarded as a sheer physicality of place. So we must keep sober at such restrained sleeping places.
CHAPTER VII: MANUFACTURING POSSIBILITIES
THROUGH CLASS IDENTITIES

Introduction: The Magic Apple of Identity

In the international Foxconn scandal, peasant workers’ resistance bears several intertwining threads: to the extent that peasant workers’ deaths and suicide attempts have received international media coverage, it is important to realize that the resistance has come to the foreground of what constitutes as peasant workers and the ways their interact with the working conditions not of their choices. On the one hand, such a condition, working as material-social relations, has left not so many alternatives for them apart from resistance with their own lives at stake. On the other hand, equally importantly, peasant workers’ suicide resistance is not just a passive reaction of the oppressive condition, for their actions of suicides and suicide attempts have formed a tension over the meaning of iPhones, iPads, Apple, Foxconn, and transnational capital at large. Thus, it is proper to state that these suicides have put forward peasant workers as a visible social force for the agencies of resistance to be seen on the international level. It is at this level that the visibilities of peasant workers have put the production line of Foxconn-Apple into the spotlight. i.e. the visibility of peasant workers as agencies of class struggles in this case is the visibility of the Foxconn’s exploitation.

After the first suicide in 2008 and a series of 18 suicides through 2010 with 14 succeeded, in January 2012, around 150 peasant workers at Foxconn, the world’s largest electronics manufacturer that manufactures iPhone, iPad, Dell, PlayStation two and Nintendo, threatened to commit suicide by leaping from their factory root in protest at their working conditions (Telegraph, 2012).

Peasant workers have taken their position!
And they *made a scene* (pun intended), with their lives at stake. It is a performativity of their identity, as Judith Butler (2004) would suggest; perhaps it is also a simulation within a hyper-real existence, as Jean Baudrillard (1983) would assert. A performance takes place usually when the movements on the stage are considered fake and all the audiences and their world as real. Therefore, a performance, good or bad, can be judged or analyzed, with a detachment and an assurance that “it is not really happening.” A simulation as well: As Baudrillard considered in his *Simulations*, now that people would think the presence of the Disney World as a fake creation to ensure their senses of safety and certainty of their world and their existence, the presence of Disney World actually shows that the rest of the *real* world is as fake and created as the Disney World. Baudrillard suggested that no place in this world is safe and certain as the basis of one’s *being* and we are all in a world of hyper-reality. Foxconn’s scandalous labor relations only conceal the fact that the whole world is China, Foxconn; we are all peasant workers.

There is an important logic that can be read out from Butler and Baudrillard: This is not about whether a jumping threat is, or is not, a performativity or a simulation. Rather, it is about how the social drama you see there on a stage at the top of a Chinese factory building tells you not about their possible death – but about an air of death you and they share in common. *Who bit the magic-poison apple/Apple of capitalist accumulation?*

Now that the magic apple/Apple has with it an air of death, it also *contains* a sense of hope and possibilities. This is a mode of living that tells the death smell of a system that puts people on the top of the building as part of their position and their identity. With that cry against death, can you hear the voice for a new kind of life?

After I returned home in the year 2005, I went back once again in 2007 for the
interviews that eventually resulted in this dissertation, the finishing lines of which I now type. Since then, many things have changed. In 2007, no one had yet died at the now, press-covered, internationally-famous Foxconn electronics factories. In January 2012, when the Chinese New Year joined the joy of my completion of this project, peasant workers lined up, about 150 of them, to demonstrate a power of life/death. My longing for my homeland and my indignation for their, and our, living in such a condition stopped me from writing in a calm and reserved manner, for my memory of a scene in the countryside in North China in summer has dramatized these peasant workers. In one’s quiet study or classroom, you could not have imagined what noise a group of cicadas can make. This is an insect of about one inch in length. They were born into the roots of the tree, taking tree sap as their staple while being buried under the ground. Then, after several years in total darkness, unsure, as local people would say, they would creep up to the surface and to the top of trees. Hundreds and thousands of them in the tree-spotted villages – When one starts to sing in the high heat of the summer, others would immediately join – submerging the whole villages under its non-stopping singing, yelling, shrieking, howling, or screaming. No one can stop such a choir: It is loud, annoying, and you may not know what they mean. But everyone has to pay attention when it is so loud. My memory of summer is always audio-ly deafening, for the cries of cicadas have made into what the summer is. This makes me think back again to those 150 peasant workers who certainly have made their noise/voice loud and clear. Have their voices been interwoven into who they are and what the society is?

Paul Willis (1977), in his *Learning to Labor*, grasped the fundamental connections between a continual reproduction of class identity and labor’s functionality in it. Willis considered that “[c]lass identity is not truly reproduced until it has properly passed through the
individual and the group, until it has been recreated in the context of what appears to be personal and collective volition” (p. 2). As a Marxian scholar, Willis envisaged a class identity that is lived and experienced, and more importantly, a class identity that is always under reproduction through such lived experiences. In his own words, “the point at which people live, not borrow, their class destiny is when what is given is re-formed, strengthened and applied to new purposes [italics added]” (p. 2). He even ventured, rightly, to point out the ways in which such new purposes could be made possible, in that

[I]labour power [serves as] the main mode of active connection with the world: the way par excellence of articulating the innermost self with external reality. It is in fact the dialectic of the self to the self through the concrete world. Once this basic compact with the future has been made everything else can pass for common sense [italics original].

(p. 2)

Thus, class identity links one’s own everyday activities and the structural hierarchies of the society. It connects individuals, their bodies and their meaning making actions with the capital production. It also merges materiality with sociality in this common process of social reproduction. Such a connection through class identity enables working class people like He Chunxia, or other peasant workers interviewed, to live in both the physical space where they cannot escape and also the larger scale social processes in which their activities count for social changes, whether they realize it or not.

Since the class identity construction process cannot do without materiality, I have investigated the manufacturing industry in Shenzhen, China, as a real world example of the integration of materiality and sociality for class identity production. Through this ethnographic work, I have argued that class identity manufacturing, a metaphor borrowed from its closely
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knit industrial manufacturing process, is a process in which materiality participates in its varied everyday forms. With a focus on Chinese peasant workers’ class identity manufacturing, this project employed wage, dormitory, and internationalized division of labor as lenses to showcase how and where class identity manufacturing takes place as well as how materiality plays a crucial role in the formation of class identity.

Now that space has been used in the actual formation of one’s living identity, it is important to address how space has contributed, theoretically, to the formation of class identity. To explore the significance of materiality, I examined class identity, space, and labor in the lives of peasant workers. Important questions include: What might be the impact on the identity of peasant workers? Furthermore, if space in particular, and materiality in general, has been used as a tool to formulate a certain identity for peasant workers, could it, potentially at least, be used by peasant workers to manufacture their own desired identities? Besides, if space can be used both by powerful social actors as well as peasant workers to forge identities for these peasant workers, does this mean that space has served as an important mediation for identity production? These questions, or more accurately, these actual world discrepancies have guided my dissertation through winding paths of investigation for a materiality-infused identity production. The following sections highlight the issues addressed in the previous chapters, discuss the implications of this research for fellow identity scholars and peasant workers, and then propose future research to further this area of interest.

Manufacturing Class Identity

As a theoretical discussion, this dissertation has explicated the formation of class identity through everyday social material processes. I have focused primarily on investigating how class identity is produced through everyday activities that are part of the industrial
manufacturing process. Such theoretical discussions have viewed wages (Chapter IV), and dorms (Chapter V) as material social processes that contribute to both industrial manufacturing and the formation of class identity. Postmodernist discussions of identity emphasize the roles of representation and discursive construction but overlook roles of materiality in the production of identity. With the internationalized bipolarization of wealth and poverty, and with people’s altered lifestyles due to technological innovations and developments, it has become significant for scholars to explore how such uneven distribution of wealth impacts the laborers. To investigate how peasant worker class identity has been produced through everyday living activities that are also part of the industrial manufacturing, therefore, offers an inside view on such issues of uneven development.

Thus, studying the class identity of peasant workers means to connect the peasant workers’ everyday living activities with the larger structural formations that such activities have produced. The chapters examined such crucial material social processes as wages, dorms, and internationalized division of labor in the formation of class identities. All of these three material processes, therefore, link peasant workers’ everyday living activities with the structural capital production processes.

Institutional ethnography (IE) was a useful methodology for linking everyday living activities with the translocal connections that happen in other locales and other regions of the nation, or world. One of the most important ways that differentiate IE from other methodologies is the former’s emphasis on actual connections, which provided the most appropriate methodological tool to best expound how class identity as a material and social process penetrates through local, regional, national, and international borders. The ethnographic notes and interviews, together with the institutional ethnographic emphasis on
actual connections, have provided reliable and valid sources of information of daily activities that give insight into much larger, structural level issues. Likewise, the method also makes room for integrating space as one kind of materiality of everyday living.

As shown in the examples at the beginning of Chapter One and Two, space has not only served as an influential tool for the government and business organizations to exert their power, but also effectively excluded the peasant workers from a series of social benefits. Space has served as an important and effective tool for the capital owners and government to regulate who the peasant workers are by shifting and changing the everyday actual living circumstances of these people. Then, it serves as a problematic on how identity theory can incorporate such important forces of space, or, in other words, how space in particular and materiality in general, function in the ongoing production of identity. Chapter One and Two focused on such a problematic and used it as the central incentive to bring together discussions of identity in the field of cultural studies and geography. The major focus was on how space, usually regarded as materiality, a given, and as isolated from meaning making, is itself produced and how such a production process is also a class identity production process. In previous chapters, I argued that class identity is not just an empty category. Instead, it is formed through everyday activities.

With such a general argument, Chapters Four, Five, and Six concentrated on more detailed subjects to show the identity manufacturing processes from different angles. These three chapters concentrated on dorms and wages as important social processes and institutions to show space reproduction as a mixture of power in which peasant workers’ everyday living is closely determined by such spatially activated institutionalization. Space in these chapters has concretized social relations by formulating the actual living activities and by formulating class
identities as the actually lived possibilities.

The whole dissertation aims to deliver one central idea – that class identity cannot be manufactured in a void. Its actual production involves both previous social formations and participates in the current social formations. Hence, its changes can be desired as the very places where social changes can happen. Thus, its involvement on everyday basis with the capital production provides insights into the very mechanism in which the social structural formations necessary to capital production are organized through class identities of peasant workers.

As a special material social formation, space mediates power and struggles. As such, space can be better viewed as concretized shapes of organized power. In that labor shapes space, space can be seen as the result of the previous labor; but in that labor has to be performed in space, space can be seen as the preconditions of ongoing labor. Space and labor, then, form a dialectical process of mutual formation in which people’s class identity takes concrete material-social forms.

In such a case, it is not from a romantic Archimedean point that changes can be levered; rather, the formation of certain spatial forms can, among other things, form a spatial dimension of differentiated forces that exert their transitional power to other social formations.

Limitations

With such designated contributions to the field, my dissertation, due to time and geographical constraints, has its limitations. In accordance with my attempt to show the social material processes in which class identity is manufactured, my choices of actual social material processes are limited to wages, dorms, and Apple’s internationalized supplier in Shenzhen, China. Such limited choices are not without benefits: On the one hand, such limited choices of
social material processes are central to the living experiences of peasant workers; on the other hand, they gesture towards future studies for a more systematic examination of identity manufacturing.

Take Harvey’s (2007) advocacy for studying working class children’s growing up experiences for example: At the end of *Limits to Capital*, Harvey pointed out that the social production of living as a way is not always successfully controlled by capitalists. Harvey proposed to understand the actual living experiences as a different, yet vastly productive perspective to understand capital, and he proposed to study the social production processes of working class children from “the birth of a working-class child” (p. 447).

Harvey’s proposal of considering the formation of capital can incur a complete rewriting of *Capital* from its daily lived experiences of people, when their living bears all kinds of socialized and materialized implications of power from capital. This can also be an intriguing and systematic blueprint for understanding the footprints of capital in different areas of the globe. In part, my project was inspired and borrowed from Harvey’s advocacy to choose wage, dorm, and the internationalized divisions of labor through the outsourcing of the transnational corporate. Within such a framework, my project offers its limited contribution.

Besides the limitations of choices over what social and material processes show the manufacturing of class identity, all the plants that I have visited and interviews I have conducted are in the city of Shenzhen. Thus, the stories of identity manufacturing tell particular ways in which capital has been realized in the same process when the class identity has assumed its daily routines of production. The generalization from such particularities might be limited because of this limited geographical region.

Due to limited time and access in Shenzhen, I was not able to investigate the
interactions between government agencies and business organizations that might have contributed to the manufacturing of class identity. However, such interactions could be reasonably suspected in Foxconn-Apple’s dealing with their peasant workers’ suicides, when the local government and public security organizations remained almost completely silent in the cases of the peasant workers’ deaths. Actually, a viable hypothesis can be raised regarding the local government’s connection with business organizations. For instance, local government’s inaction based on “arguments that the state should not unduly interfere in the business practices of particular firms,” (Mitchell, 2000, p. 290) might have formed “a structuring [that] works to the benefit of particular social actors” (pp. 289-290) such as business organizations at the cost of peasant workers’ “right to some good; the right to be” (p. 289). While the curious silence of Shenzhen’s local government might have formed a neoliberal acquiescence to the wrongdoings of economic organizations, lack of access to such information prevented me from investigating more in this aspect.

**Future Research**

The social reproduction process of labor is a proven fertile ground for generating new research because it can be connected to Marxist discussions of political economy, yet at the same time provide the actual living experiences that both influence and are influenced by the political economy of capital reproduction. When such discussions of this reproduction process are merged with theoretical concentration on the particular political, economic, social, and material happenings in non-Western centers, they become even more richly imbued with the particular traces, trajectories, and mechanisms of the localization of the internationalized political economy. The future research that I propose is aligned with the following basic understandings:
**Future Research Topic 1: In Other and/or More Cities**

Since the particular formations of capital production and their environments have great constraints on the actual daily contents of the class identity formation, it is important to scrutinize the different formations of cities other than Shenzhen on how such city formations and peasant workers’ class identities are connected. A comparison of different cities with their respective labor treatment can be conducted to demonstrate the relationship between the urbanization process and the actual facets of peasant workers’ class identity.

In recent years, internationalized capital has migrated more to the interior of Chinese cities while the current research on labor, class identity, and capital are still primarily located in China’s coastal areas. A comparative study of peasant workers’ treatment in a coastal city and an interior city can be insightful in understanding the uneven regional development and the resulting class formation.

**Future Research Topic 2: Peasant Workers in Different Professions**

In my dissertation, I investigated peasant workers employed in the electronic manufacturing industries. Such a choice was aligned with my overall goal of reconnecting class identity formation with the industrial and capital production. In other words, my emphasis was on how industrial production constitutes labor reproduction. However, investigating identity formation of peasant workers in different fields can be a rewarding investigation. For instance, peasant workers, especially young female peasant workers, employed in domestic professions as temporary servants and nannies in wealthy city dwellers’ households are bound to show very different ways in which everyday living practices are connected to meaning making and identity formations. The interconnections and intersections between gender differences, social hierarchies, trust and care, as well as social formation and division of labor
can be important intersections for understanding the complex mutual formations between
gender identities, everyday living, and class identities. Likewise, peasant workers employed in
other more conventional industries, such as coal mining in China, can also show important
aspects of class identity formation.

**Future Research Topic 3: Families and Children**

Such research can either be conducted alone or combined with future research topic 2
to form the intersecting investigation into how peasant workers’ employment in cities has
impacted their own families and children. When Harvey (2007) proposed future research at the
end of his *Limits to Capital*, he proposed to study the working class identity through the rearing
of working class children, specifying that the study could start from “the birth of a working-
class child” (p. 447). Importantly, if such a proposal could be conducted on a Chinese peasant
worker’s family, with the child being raised separated from the city-dwelling peasant worker
parent(s) and juxtaposed with Chinese countryside subsumption to China’s urbanization, the
care, or lack of care, that the child receives, then, manifests the class identity formation from
both an experiential level and its connected structural level.

**Future Research Topic 4: Communication Technology**

One of the limitations of my dissertation is that I only stayed in factory dorms for two weeks.
With urban-dwelling peasant workers’ familiarity with communication technology, such as
Skype, MSN, and QQ, it is possible to conduct elongated online ethnographic research that
follows peasant workers through their changes of jobs, work treatment, and struggles for better
treatment. Theories that are more integral to peasant workers’ social-material practices, i.e.,
theories that peasant workers need to build a world of them and for them, are open to
opportunities that elongated research is capable of. Media representation of peasant workers,
especially regarding events such as organized worker movements and labor unrests can be examined together with personal communication. An identity study can also be examined through both media representation and everyday material mediation, focusing on contradictions that point to the particular discrepancies in the formation of power so that class struggles can be better envisaged. Opinions of permanent city residents regarding peasant workers’ stay and work also constitute future research projects.

**Future Research Topic 5: The Historical and the Present: Peasant Workers in Transition**

Apart from the previous four areas of studies, there is another topic that links the historical and the present together to understand peasant workers in a changing and transitional China. I have attempted to establish such a link in my chapters on dorms in general and through the changing social functions of Household Registration System (HRS) in particular. However, more work can be done in dialectically locating the historical positions of HRS so that the changing identities of peasant workers can be historically connected to China in its historical transition.

In addition to the importance of tracing the historical changes of social material structure such as HRS, an in-depth investigation on the historical functions of media in changing China as a whole and in constructing peasant workers’ identities in particular can be envisaged. It is particularly worth pursuing issues such as why a socialist China can breed into a capitalist mode of production and still enjoys, to a large degree, its popular support and what functions media might have taken in China to foster (or resist) such a societal transformation. This topic, then, brings the attention of a materialist identity study back to the importance of the interactions between media and social-material structures.

With my research interests of connecting China’s labor facts with the internationalized
capital production process, such proposed research can form a more systematic approach to understandings peasant workers’ class identities formation and their positioning in the internationalized capital production process. In the end, it is important to link all these different topics together in varied ways so that a better understanding of China’s transitional period and its connections to international capital production can be achieved. Together achieved is a better understanding of the identity changes of its historical subjects, peasant workers.

**Afterword**

Mitchell (2000) has pointed out that “[r]ights . . . are closely linked to identity. In turn, identity, as it has been structured through the nation-state, has been closely linked to the land, to particular areas or regions” (p. 291). Class identity of peasant workers has been structured through the rights to wages and dorms. And through wages and dorms, the class identity is further connected to the industrial production process and HRS as the past labor formation. With all these rights effectively permeating aspects that can only be generalized as everyday, the choices of places to study in previous chapters, implications of this dissertation, and the advocacies for future research all point towards more systematic pursuits in manufacturing new kinds of identities as actually lived experiences and possibilities.

The manufacturing of class identities, with the integration of such identities into everyday living, is nothing less than the manufacturing of hopes and possibilities of living in its current historical moment of development. In referring to the contradictions of such hopes and possibilities, Paul Willis (1977) addressed the qualities of daily life as, “[a]t best, daily life, like art, is revolutionary. At worst it is a prison-house” (cited in Hebdige, 1979, p. 134). Then, manufacturing hopes and possibilities lies largely in transforming the limitations of material social conditions. On the one hand, it is through such a theorization of class identity that the
very nature of class identity is integrated into the empirical natures of particular regions and locales, as well as the particular political, economic, spatial, and social formations of a given society. Without taking into serious considerations of such empirical natures, manufacturing hopes and possibilities cannot be achieved with positive results to the regions. On the other hand, such attention to empirical particularities could only be possible by attending to the regional struggles from a universalized consideration of possibilities as the re-creation of reality through struggles.

It is towards attending to such regional struggles as actual social-material changing practices that we need to rub the necessity and nature of materialist theory against the real happenings of struggles. As Roy Edgley (1983) emphasized in “Marx: The First 100 Years,” “Marx’s materialism insists on the need not only or primarily for materialist theory, a theory about practice, namely social science, but for practice itself; indeed, is itself a practice” (pp. 267-268). Theories can become practices only if theorists are willing to incorporate practices into their theorization and endeavor to make their theorization work for practices. The bell that Roy Edgley struck almost thirty years ago tolls with a more resounding voice, against a sea of local struggles whose meaning could only be grasped on a globalized scale. In 2010, peasant workers’ strike against wage inequity in Honda’s transmission plant in China paralyzed not only production in that plant, but also halted its four plants in China (Bradsher & Barboza, 2010).

On May 30, 2010, a MacStories reader Jay Yerex, an Apple product fan, urged Steve Jobs to “send off your message” about the peasant workers’ suicides with the ending signature “Steve/Apple can do better!/Sent from my iphone” (Viticci, 2010). Yerex was both confused and dissatisfied with Steve Jobs’s ambiguity in his reply, which read: “Although every suicide
is tragic, Foxconn’s suicide rate is well below the China average. We are all over this” (Viticci, 2010). With around 150 more attempting to suicide, it is hard to tell if the rate will continue to increase significantly. Yet, it is precisely through Job’s reply that we can see lives can be viewed so calmly as statistical rates (see Lukacs’ reification). But doesn’t it tell exactly what labor forces can be treated in global capitalism, as mere appendix of capital? Don’t all those struggles present and past tell an ongoing class/identity struggle, through which an alternative future can only become clear through participating in such a struggle? Theorization must become a class practice and it cannot do otherwise. To refrain from participating into struggling with the peasant workers does not only refrain from desiring a future social identity on which a society of new hopes can be pinned; even worse, it only claims a false neutrality and actually participated in reinforcing the current social-material relations on which current class identity manufacturing gains its various social-material resources. Thus, scholars and theorists have no choice but to take sides: To re-create the reality, the current reality has to be used and engaged to provide its social and material conditions for social re-creation to begin with and to be conditioned in.

And, here we return to the performance of our peasant workers atop the roof of the Foxconn factory, threatening to take their own lives because of their immiserated working conditions and lives. Dramatic as they are, such changes of lives of peasant workers should not be taken as a common form of peasant workers’ identity struggles. Many more instances in which peasant workers endure their lives in the globalized manufacturing might suggest more prevailing forms of capital organization and identity production. In this sense, what Foxconn showed is a highlight and spotlight of a performance that international capital stages on China. On the one hand, the discourse of class struggles has been shifted, maybe in an untimely way
from a prevailing presence of exploitation to the spotlight of the Foxconn peasant workers resistance. It might also be possible that the ongoing struggles in China might gain inspirations from Foxconn’s workers and in the sense Foxconn incidents might be able to have an expanding discourse that can be associated with it. However, on the other hand, we cannot afford to romanticize the Foxconn’s suicide resistance as being able to establishing a concrete, strong, and stable agency. They are drastic moves and to some extent effective, but they can also be seen as an exceptional case of the prevailing contradictions between the desires for living better and the hierarchical structures that have foiled such desires. But, as an act, it does not give us any greater understanding, for instance, of the wage-labor relation as a global condition. Thus, the detailed and to some extent mundane living of peasant workers and the contradictions within it still constitutes the most prevailing mode in which oppression and resistance have to be thought about and, more importantly, analyzed. From such a deep and detailed structural level, the Foxconn’s resistance and the agency of such resistance cannot afford to be taken as the norm. Rather, the prevailing structural aspects of existing class identity formation lies in the miscellaneous and interconnected relationship between social behaviors and material environment, between the contemporary ways of living and the historical change of discourses have made such ways of living as one form of the historical contingency.

It is from this latter point that Foxconn’s peasant workers resistance could potentially not mean a shift at all, but a historical continuity and a smoke screen of the prevailing everyday forms of class identity formation. It is at such a moment the “angels of history” have to be called upon to make sense of the contemporary and exceptional issues of events so that the deeply entrenched ways of living that have served as ways of class identity formation have to be connected
with each other. Walter Benjamin (1973) metaphorically and vividly construed such angels of history as:

His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.

This storm is what we call progress. (p. 259)

The attention to drastic events and the appeal for dirty and quick establishment of agencies certainly adds to this storm. The Angel of History has to look into the past to see the similarities of the contemporary and the future, for neither the present nor the future is worth living, or worth dying for, if the living and dying is not at the same time contemporary and historical. The ongoing research on the class identity does need to detect the historical connections of the contemporary events.

But if the drastic events cannot be the beginning moment of social changes, what can? What can possibly lead to the transformation that alters the reproduction of social material system, class identity of peasant workers, as well as the reproduction of capital that capitalism desires? The answer lies, in part, on how we consider the Marxian term of determination. As I would agree with William Schroeder (2005) on this point, he clearly pointed out that

Probably the vaguest work in Marx’s vocabulary is “determine.” It has been taken to mean “causally necessitate” or simply “provide a condition for” or even “is a factor that
bears on.” Marx’s position gains plausibility as the interpretation of this term is weakened. (p. 67)

If we understand determine as “provid[ing] a condition for” or “[being] a factor that bears on” (Schroeder, 2005, p. 67), Foxconn’s peasant workers’ resistance is a realized/materialized formation of historical contingency. Perhaps the theoretical differences made at pains here between the material-sociality as conditions for changes and the actual forms that changes can take, bear the relations between a possible history through the conditions in which history is produced and the actually existing historical forms that historical discourses take. The two have connections, but the actual connections must be resulted from the struggles that push their class interests. In doing so, the exact forms that class identity takes can be re-liquidified into its pulp-like historical ingredients so that material-social creative practices can take place, with its exact forms always a potential but unknown without struggles to realize it in certain directions. The agency and identity is always half human and half non-human. It is half non-human with the non-human part being produced by humans through the conditions congealed in such non-human conditions. Humans mediate their changes through the struggled-over changes actualized in their materiality-mediated sociality. Thus, the determination of class agency and identity struggle is a social process of production that takes the importance of materiality into the latter’s full account so that material-social can be both historically supple and concrete at any given moment of such a human history. Patient waiting and observation and active steps are equally important in generating potential changes in general. Their specific combinations, however, need to be linked to historically connected as well as future-oriented strategic goals.

Secondly, the production of class identity and agencies of resistance has to be viewed systematically. It is important and correct to take different suicides and suicide attempts as a
whole and link those with Foxconn-Apple. The real human social-material agencies lie in such imaginations and the activities to make the connections and make the preparations. This is an agency that is more promising, without being deterministic, than the agency through which jumping to death has been mistaken as. Everyday connections of gradual changes does not mean social evolution, but should be considered as revolutions that touch the most basic and minute social vectors of power formation.

Studying peasant workers class identity formation through accessing their actually existing lives is investigating into the basic power formation upon which a sociological sense of society has been, sometimes more dynamically, sometimes more stably, established. The significance of such a nature of study lies right in its apparent mundaneness that the ways power and social class identities have been produced so openly that the production becomes almost invisible.

Raymond Williams (1977) has insightfully stated the relationship between social re-creation and conditions in which such re-creation has to be positioned in through what he called *creative practice*. As Williams put it:

> When [creative practice] becomes struggle, . . . it can take many forms. It can be the long and difficult remaking of an inherited (determined) practical consciousness: a process often described as development but in practice a struggle at the roots of the mind – not casting off an ideology, or learning phrases about it, but confronting a hegemony in the fibers of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships. It can be more evident practice: the reproduction and illustration of hitherto excluded and subordinated models; the embodiment and performance of known but excluded and subordinated experiences and relationships;
the articulation and formation of latent, momentary, and newly possible consciousness. Within real pressures and limits, such practice is always difficult and often uneven. It is the special function of theory, in exploring and defining the nature and the variation of practice, to develop a general consciousness within what is repeatedly experienced as a special and often relatively isolated consciousness. *For creativity and social self-creation are both known and unknown events, and it is still from grasping the known that the unknown – the next step, the next work – is conceived* [italics added]. (p. 212)

Here Williams refers to “creative practice.” But it can be equally accurately applied as “mechanisms of possibilities,” “dialectics of hope,” and “steps towards social changes.” What Williams truly has grasped is the ways of conceiving hope and possibilities through the uneven developed social material conditions. Such a contradiction between conditions and possibilities is exactly what my dissertation has strived to do: by describing the actual active actions of the capital and the peasant workers, the conditions on which new kinds of *be(com)ing and identities* are made possible. Class identity, in this latter sense, stops to be only a class in relation to others, as a result of the exploitative and manipulative capital operations, but it becomes a way of organizing resources and knowledge anew. It is only through class identity as a way of organization that the very possibilities of qualitatively different identities can be perceived and pursued. Here lies the very dialectics of class and identity: that it is a class that aims to abolish itself as that it is an identity whose full realization is its metamorphic constantly self-negating practice.

Now that it is from the very activities that happen within each day that the possibilities are only lived possibilities, such possibilities cannot transcend the everyday material social processes without first engaging and changing these processes. And the engagement and
transformation has to be done through everyday interactions. It is exactly in this sense that the wages, dorms, and struggles form an intriguing and contradictory paradox. From the aspect that wages, dorms, and struggles are being controlled and mediated by capital owners, they form a materiality-sociality in which the everyday is lived. In this case, on the one hand, everyday living activities connected with wages, dorms, and struggling processes are also connected with control, manipulation, and exploitation. And, on the other hand, the activities of changing such control, manipulation, and exploitation must be conducted through changing the living activities connected with wages, dorms, and struggling processes. Thus, the very difficulties that everyday activities have to face become the exact conditions on which any changes can be possibly desired and conducted. Such difficulty-possibility forms a contradiction that is central to class identity. The transformation of the contradiction lies in the very conditions where living endures.

On the one hand, we cannot afford to forget the very conditions of living. On the other hand, we cannot afford to ignore the importance of our collective hope, which we have the potential share because we share those conditions. Thus, in a way, you are not merely reading about peasant workers such as He Chunxia who is abandoned by the global capital, or peasant workers who have succeeded in their struggles for salary increase in Honda plant, or the ones who stand at the top of the Foxconn’s plant building with their lives as the stake for negotiation. Within this tragedy, even if you have joined the international identification of/with peasant workers as a suffering working class that followed the Foxconn’s suicide scandal, reading about is still a distance too far away to let you realize your own danger. More importantly, we need to read peasant workers’ suffering as a symbol of our unified suffering – suffering that only differs from ours in specific forms but not in kind. They but only represent a unified
suffering that we as human kind *is under when global capitalism looms large*, they also
represent what is to come of standards of living at the hands of global capital without a
collectivized struggle.

“Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls
It tolls for thee” (Donne, 1624)

Perhaps *we are all peasant workers* – their suffering ours – until together the manufacturer of
such identities is no more?
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References


June 5, 2007

TO: Kang Sun
COMS

FROM: Richard Rowlands
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H07D294GE7

TITLE: Living Conditions of Peasant Workers in ShenZhen

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of June 5, 2007, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on May 22, 2008. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures (including increases in the number of participants), please send a request for modifications immediately to the HSRB via this office. Please notify me, in writing (fax: 372-6916 or email: hsr@bgsu.edu) upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/Modifications:

C: Dr. Radhika Gajalala

Research Category: Expedited #7
July 30, 2010

TO: Kang Sun
COMS

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H10D201GFB

TITLE: Manufacturing Identity: Peasant Workers' Spatial Production in China

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of July 30, 2010, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on February 2, 2011. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures (including increases in the number of participants), please send a request for modifications immediately to the HSRB via this office. Please notify me, in writing (fax: 372-6916 or email: hsrb@bgsu.edu) upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/Modifications:
Stamped consent document is coming to you via campus mail.

c: Dr. Clayton Rosati

Research Category: FULL BOARD REVIEW
Informed Consent Form for Peasant Workers (Face-to-Face)

Dear Participant,

My name is Kang Sun, a graduate student in Communication Studies Department at Bowling Green State University, Ohio, USA. I am doing research about the living conditions of peasant workers.

My purpose in this study is to investigate various aspects of living conditions of peasant workers in the city of ShenZhen. Actual living conditions of peasant workers have not been investigated in depth before. Therefore, my research will contribute to how peasant workers as a special group in cities are living and how their living and government policies and economic activities of the city influence one another. This research will give voices to peasant workers who are working and living in the cities.

I am requesting permission to interview you about your life experiences of arriving and living in the city of ShenZhen. In order to gain in-depth knowledge, the interview will take about 120 minutes. It will be conducted fact-to-face in Mandarin Chinese with both video and audio recording and then translated into English later on as I draft my dissertation chapters. I, the interviewer, will be the only person to view the video and to listen to the audio recordings. All the tapes will be safely kept and used in private places where no other persons have access to. The tapes and/or video I will use to record our conversations will be kept for three years and then destroyed.

Since you have lived experience in ShenZhen, I would like to refer to you by name in the dissertation unless you do not wish to be named. To make sure all of your information is accurate, I will be providing you with transcripts of our conversation if you request it and will also let you know exactly what I will use in my dissertation. Participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you are allowed to withdraw from the research at any time. The interview will not affect your occupation or affiliations.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me (by phone, (001-419 202-1616 or email me at kangs@bgsu.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Radhika Gajjala (by phone 001-419 372-0528 or email radhik@bgsu.edu). If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) at Bowling Green State University, Ohio (by phone 001-419 372-7716 or email them at hsrb@bgsu.edu).

Would you like to be named in the research?  □ Yes  □ No

Would you like transcripts of our conversations?  □ Yes  □ No

Can I contact you later to tell you what I will use from our interviews?  □ Yes  □ No

By signing this document, you are declaring that you have been read the document, your questions have been answered, and that you agree to participate in the study.

Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________

Contact information:

School of Communication Studies
302 West Hall
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403
419-372-8349
fax: 419-372-0202
http://scs.bgsu.edu
给民工的采访同意书（现场采访）

贵参与者，

我叫孙康，现就读于美国俄亥俄州鲍灵格林大学交流学系。我此次研究的主题是民工在深圳的生活状态。此研究将深入探讨深圳民工生活状态的方方面面。因为对民工作为城市特殊群体的研究还不多，该项研究将填补民工生活及影响民工生活的各方面因素，并反映在城市生活的民工的呼声。

在此，我请求能采访你。为了能更好的研究，本次采访将持续120分钟。我将使用普通话并录音录像以便以后翻译著述。你的录音录像带将妥善保存，我将是唯一能听取和收看录音录像带的研究人员。录音录像带将保存三年以备研究并在三年后销毁。

鉴于你在深圳的切身生活经验，如果你同意，我将在我的博士论文中引用你的名字。为确保信息准确表述你的本意，如果你索取，我将想你提供我们谈话的文本并告知论文中信息的具体使用方法。你的参与是完全自愿的，你可以在任何时候退出本研究。本采访不会影响你的工作。

如果你有疑问，请垂询。电话：001-419-202-1616，电子邮件：kangs@bgsu.edu。你也可以与我的博士导师 Dr. Radhike Gajjala 联系。电话：001-419-372-0528，电子邮件：ridhik@bgsu.edu。你还可以联系鲍大的伦理课题评审会（HSRB）。电话：001-419-372-7716，电子邮件：hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu

你愿意你的名字出现在论文中吗？ 愿意_______ 不愿意_______

你愿意我寄给你我们谈话的打印稿吗？ 愿意_______ 不愿意_______

你愿意我以后联系你并告知采访的引用细节吗？ 愿意_______ 不愿意_______
你的签字表明你已通读本文件，你所提问题也已得答复，并且，你同意参与本研究。

签名_________________________日期_________________________

联系方式

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________
Informed Consent Form for Household Registration Officers (Face-to-Face)

Dear Participant,

My name is Kang Sun, a graduate student in Communication Studies Department at Bowling Green State University, Ohio, USA. I am doing research about the living conditions of peasant workers.

My purpose in this study is to investigate various aspects of living conditions of peasant workers in the city of ShenZhen. Actual living conditions of peasant workers have not been investigated in depth before. Therefore, my research will contribute to how peasant workers as a special group in cities are living and how their living, government policies and economic activities of the city influence one another. This research will give voices to peasant workers who are working and living in the cities.

I am requesting permission to interview you about the changes of policy of the household registration system in the city of ShenZhen. In order to gain in-depth knowledge, the interview will take about 120 minutes. It will be conducted face-to-face in Mandarin Chinese with both video and audio recording and then translated into English later on as I draft my dissertation chapters. I, the interviewer, will be the only person to view the video and to listen to the audio recordings. All the tapes will be safely kept and used in private places where no other persons have access to. The tapes and/or video I will use to record our conversations will be kept for three years and then destroyed.

Since you have experiences in regulating peasant workers as a special group of people, I would like to refer to you by name in the dissertation unless you do not wish to be named. To make sure all of your information is accurately documented, I will be providing you with transcripts of our conversation if you request it and will also let you know exactly what I will use in my dissertation. Participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you are allowed to withdraw from the research at any time. The interview will not affect your occupation or affiliations.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me (by phone, 001-419 202-1616 or email me at kang@bgsu.edu) or my advisor, Dr. Radhika Gajala (by phone 001-419 372-0528 or email radhika@bgsu.edu). If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) at Bowling Green State University, Ohio (by phone 001-419 372-7716 or email them at hsrb@bgsnet.bgsu.edu).

Would you like to be named in the research? □ Yes □ No

Would you like transcripts of our conversations? □ Yes □ No

Can I contact you later to tell you what I will use from our interviews? □ Yes □ No

By signing this document, you are declaring that you have been read the document, your questions have been answered, and that you agree to participate in the study.

Signature _________________________________ Date _________________________________

Contact information:
给户籍管理官员的访问同意书（现场采访）

贵参与者，

我叫孙康，现就读于美国俄亥俄州鲍灵格林大学交流学系。我此次研究的主题是民工在深圳的生活状态。此研究将深入探讨深圳民工生活状态的方方面面。因为对民工作为城市特殊群体的研究还不够，次项研究将填补民工生活及影响民工生活的各方面因素，并反映在城市生活的民工的呼声。

在此，我请求能采访你。为了能更好的研究，本次采访将持续120分钟。我将使用普通话并录音录像以便以后翻译著述。你的录音录像带将妥善保存，我将是唯一能听取和收看录音录像带的研究人员。录音录像带将保存三年以备研究并在三年后销毁。

鉴于你对深圳民工的了解，如果你同意，我将在我的博士论文中引用你的名字。为确保信息准确表述你的本意，如果你索取，我将想你提供我们谈话的文本并告知论文中信息的具体使用方法。你的参与是完全自愿的，你可以在任何时候退出本研究。本采访不会影响你的工作。

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你愿意你的名字出现在论文中间吗？愿意________ 不愿意________

你愿意我寄给你我们谈话的打印稿吗？愿意________ 不愿意________

你愿意我以后联系你并告知采访的引用细节吗？愿意________ 不愿意________
你的签字表明你已通读本文件，你所提问题也已得答复，并且，你同意参与本研究。

签名__________________________ 日期__________________________

联系方式

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________
Appendix D: Interview Questions 326

Interview Questions for Types of Participants

Due to the fact that the Chinese interviewees do not speak English or may not be comfortable speaking in English, I will provide them with a Chinese version of the Informed Consent letter and will interview them entirely in Chinese.

The Living Conditions of Peasant Workers in the City of ShenZhen

Temp. Questionnaire Number __________ of the Date __________ (mmm/dd/yyyy)
Final Questionnaire Number __________
Place __________ in the city of __________
Contact Person __________
Duration of __________ of _____ days

School of Communication Studies
Bowling Green State University

City Code __________
Factory Code __________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Visits</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Duration of interview (in minutes) __________

Audio Record ___ Yes ___ No
Video Record ___ Yes ___ No

Interviewer Code __________

Reviewed By __________ Approved By __________

Questions for Peasant Workers/Peasant Managerial Personnel Working in ShenZhen

1. Sex: Male _______ Female _______ Age __________________________
   性别: 男 _______ 女 _______ 年龄 __________________________

2. Town or city of birth __________________________
   出生地 __________________________
3. Province of birth  
出生省份

4. When did you first work away from family? Year: _______ Month: _______
你是什么时间离家在外打工的？年份 月份

5. When did you first arrive in Shenzhen? Year: _______ Month: _______
你是什么时间来深圳打工的？年份 月份

6. When did you first arrive in this local area? Year: _______ Month: _______
你是什么时间来到本地区打工的？年份 月份

7. Please tell me your journey from the place of your family to present location by indicating each individual move and when it occurred. Follow the example provided in row 0. 你可以告诉我你从家乡到本地区之间还在什么地方工作或停留过，多长时间？

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left or moved from</th>
<th>On (Date)</th>
<th>Arrived at/in</th>
<th>On (Date)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>来自</td>
<td>时间</td>
<td>到达</td>
<td>时间</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0. Example: Fuping, Shaanxi</td>
<td>July 7, 1989</td>
<td>Xi’an, Shaanxi</td>
<td>July 7, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>陕西富平</td>
<td>1989年7月7日</td>
<td>陕西西安</td>
<td>1989年7月7日</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1.                  |           |               |           |
| 2.                  |           |               |           |
| 3.                  |           |               |           |
| 4.                  |           |               |           |
| 5.                  |           |               |           |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduced/led by</th>
<th>With Goals</th>
<th>With whom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>带领</td>
<td>目标</td>
<td>同行</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0. My father</td>
<td>Go to college</td>
<td>My girlfriend and other friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>我父亲</td>
<td>上大学</td>
<td>女朋友和其他朋友</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1.                  |           |           |           |
| 2.                  |           |           |           |
| 3.                  |           |           |           |
| 4.                  |           |           |           |
| 5.                  |           |           |           |
8. Years of Education Completed?

教育状况

High School ________ Middle School ________ Primary School ________
高中 ________ 初中 ________ 小学 ________

Specialized Training? ________ What Kind? ________
专业和特别培训 ________ 何种培训 ________

8. Years of Education Completed?

Assumption and Hypothesis: Everyday enforcement of Household registration system has its impact on peasant workers lives. Through these every enforcement/actions, household registration system has been internalized into every person’s consciousness. It controls by posing its regulatory force and by reminding peasant workers its existence and potential power towards the temporary stay status for the peasant workers?

Methods: Compare household registration system in the comparatively more rigid national grid with the household registration system in regulating the highly mobile populations? Part of this question will be surveyed in this questionnaire while the rest will be covered by a survey of the personnel who are in charge of the registration system. Research questions: How has household registration system been changed in the process? how does it affect peasant workers lives in the cities? How does it construct part of peasant workers identity and existence in cities? How large is the impact in peasant workers behavior?

9. Where is your household registration location?

你的户口居住地在

Province ________ City ________ County ________ Village ________
省 ________ 市 ________ 县 ________ 村 ________
10. For how long have you lived in your household registration location?
你是从哪一年到哪一年在户口居住地居住的？
From Year __________ to Year __________

11. What documents did you have to prepare for working in the city?
要在城市工作，你需要准备哪些文件材料？
High school graduate certificate
高中毕业证
Y_____N_____  
Citizenship Card
身份证
Y_____N_____  
Household registration card
户口本 / 户口卡
Y_____N_____  
Other certificates, cards, or documents
其他
Y_____N_____  
Please specify ________________________________  
请指明

12. What documents have been asked to show when you arrived in the city?
从你到达城市以来，你曾被要求出示哪些文件材料？
High school graduate certificate
高中毕业证
Y_____N_____  
Citizenship Card
身份证
Y_____N_____  
Household registration card
户口本 / 户口卡
Y_____N_____  
Other certificates, cards, or documents
其他
Y_____N_____  
Please specify ________________________________  
请指明

12.1. Do you feel about such checking?  Y_____N_____  
你对检查证件有何看法？

13. Who asked you for these papers?
是哪一些人要求你出示身份证件？
Police
警察
Y_____N_____  
Factory recruiter
Y_____N_____
Appendix D: Interview Questions

13.1. How many times/How often are you checked for your staying documents?
你曾有多少次被检查过身份证件？

14. Can you tell the story that you remember when your staying documents are checked?
你能讲述身份证件被检查时的情景吗？

16. Do you notice any changes in the documents needed and the enforcement of checking cards after you have arrived in the city? (If YES, what are they? What are the incidences that you have experienced these changes? If no, what are the old ones like? What are incidences that you have experienced the examinations?)
你经历过是某身份证件要求和具体执行方面的变迁吗？石墨时候？石墨具体变化？If YES, tell in chronological lines, when and what Changes 请以时间顺序排列

16.1. Do you think such changes do you any good, necessary, advantageous, disadvantageous, no difference, or little difference?
你认为这些变化对你有利，有害，还是影响不大？
17. What organizations, procedures, and personnel do you need to go through for your temporary stay in this city?
在城市临时居住要通过哪些机构，程序，以及人员的审查？

18. Do you want to continue to stay in this city, move to another city, or to move back to your household registration location?
你将来想在城市继续居住，迁居其他城市，或回到你的户口居住地？
Which one __________________ or other answer __________________
哪一个--------------------其他
WHY? 为什么？

19. Who else in your family still live in your household registration location?
你家里还有谁仍居住在户口居住地？
Parents
父母

Children
孩子

Spouse
配偶

Other relatives
别的亲属

19.1. Is it possible for you to let them move to the city?  Y____ N____
你有没有计划让他们也来城里？
WHY or WHY NOT
为什么？为什么不？
20. What are the biggest difficulties for you to stay in the city? (You can choose multiple answers. If so, rank them in order)

你在城里长期居住所面临的是什么？（你可以有几个答案，请将你的答案从最大困难到最小困难的顺序排列）

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding prospective spouses</th>
<th>Limited salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expensive house</td>
<td>Limited job opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different concepts with city dwellers</td>
<td>Children education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>配偶难找</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>工钱太少</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>买房子太贵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>工作机会有限</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>和城里人观念不同</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>子女在城里受教育困难</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>其他</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. Do you want to earn some money and then come back to your household registration area? Or do you want to earn some money and continue to live in the cities?

你想赚钱以后继续留在城市生活还是回到原户口所在地？

Which one ____/____ and why 为什么？

22. What is the biggest obstacle of becoming permanent resident in the cities and Why?

成为城市永久居民最大的困难是什么？为什么？
23. What do you think of household registration system?
你怎么看待户籍管理制度？

Factory Regime and Other Controlling Power

In this section, I ask how factories control peasant workers in cities. Informed by Nygn’s (2003) term of factory dormitory regime and Foucault’s (1985) concept of discipline, I hypothesize that control for peasant workers in cities are decenterized control. Specifically, I use the term to mean the following: 1. The control from the factories or whatever units in which peasant workers are working is decided by the factory managerial level, but not government. This makes the control of peasant workers decentralized as well as showing the transition of neo-liberalism in state control. 2. The enforcement of governmental official regulations is, to a very great extent, at the disposal of the regulation enforcers, who may choose very different penalties for similar degrees of documentary violation. The protection offered by state laws is not enforced in factories. With the lack of state law protection, factory becomes the center of economic and physical control of peasant workers. 3. The control of the factories is itself a dynamic regime that disciplines and controls peasant workers bodies and behaviors.

Arguing the decentralized control links the general state political regime transformation with the factory regimes and peasant workers bodies. The logic flow is the following: The lack of protection from the state and the local government→ the explosion of different factory regimes in terms of space, time, body controls→ the relationship between the controlling and the controlled (factory managerial personnel and workers).

24. How often are you paid?
你多长时间领一次工资？
Weekly
每星期？
Biweekly
每两星期？
Monthly
每月？
Once half a year
半年？
Irregularly
不定期？
Specify

请具体说明：

25. How much are you paid? ____________________________
你每次领多少工资？

25.1. Are you paid by hours, units, or others?
你是计时，计件，或其他工资计算法？请具体说明：
Hours__units__others__specify________________________

27. How many hours do you work per day? 8hrs__9hrs__10hrs__11hrs__12hrs__
你每天工作多少小时？8小时 9小时 10小时 11小时 12小时。

28. Tell me your typical workday time schedule 你每天的工作流程：

29. What does the manager say if he/she wants you to work extra hours?/
你的经理怎样让你答应加班？

29.1: Are you paid more for the extra hours? WHY or WHY NOT?
你有加班费吗？为什么？

30. Do you think you are paid fairly?
你对工资满意吗？为什么？

If Y____, what do you compare your payment with to let you think you are paid fairly?
If N____, why do not you ask for a rise from the managerial personnel?

If N____, why do not you leave for another job?

31. What trainings have you received when you are recruited?
你被聘用以来受过何种职业培训？

32. What regulations have you been told to observe?
你要遵守哪些制度？

33. What regulations do you think are beneficial to you?
那些制度是对你有利的？

34. What regulations do you think are detrimental to you?
那些制度是对你不利的？
35. Does this factory provide you with meals? Y _ n _ How much does it cost?
你的公司给你提供三餐吗？一顿饭多少钱？

36. Does this factory provide you with lodging?
If yes __, what facilities are there in the lodging?
你的公司给你提供住宿吗？住宿条件如何？

How much do you pay monthly for the lodging?
你每月住宿付多少钱？

What regulations do they have for the lodging?
住宿有何规章制度？请具体说明。

Networks, Job findings, and Other Helps:
In this section, I will concentrate on how networks and channels they use to achieve what
goals, such as job finding, childcare, child education, living and eating.

Did you have any difficulties in finding jobs?
Who did you turn to for help?
你在找工作中遇到过困难吗？你会找谁帮助？
Appendix D: Interview Questions

Did you have any difficulties in learning skills required for the job?  Who did you turn to for help?
你在学习工作需要的技能中遇到过困难吗？你会找谁帮助？

Do you have any children living here?  Y___ N____
你孩子也在这里住吗？

If YES, Did you have any difficulties in finding childcare? Who did you turn to for help?
如果是，你在照看小孩中遇到过困难吗？你会找谁帮助？

Did you have any difficulties in finding schools for children, living and eating? Who did you turn to for help?
你在为小孩找学校，住宿，饮食中遇到过困难吗？你会找谁帮助？

Questions for Administrative Personnel in Charge of Household Registration System in the City of ShenZhen 深圳市户籍管理人员调查

1. When did the household registration system in ShenZhen start its enforcement?  
   深圳是在何时起执行户籍管理制度？
2. Are there major changes in the household registration system? What are they?
户籍管理制度有那一些变化？他们是什么变化？

3. How are peasant workers living and working in the cities regulated in the city of ShenZhen?
民工的生活和工作是怎样管理和协调的？

4. Are there any local policies in ShenZhen regulating the peasant workers activities and lives?
在管理和协调民工生活和工作方面本地有什么法律，法规，和条例？

5. How do you define the peasant workers in ShenZhen?
如果让你定义深圳的民工，你如何定义？

6. What are the requirements for regulating the peasant workers movements and lives in ShenZhen?
在协调深圳民工的流动和生活方面，有何一些具体要求？
7. Are there any differences in policy requirements for the other migrants working in ShenZhen and the peasant workers working in ShenZhen?
深圳在管理其他打工人员和农民工打工人员方面有什么政策条文上的不同？

8. Are there any differences in policy implementations for the other migrants working in ShenZhen and the peasant workers working in ShenZhen?
深圳在管理其他打工人员和农民工打工人员方面有什么政策执行上的不同？

9. What documents do the laws require peasant workers to have for living legally in ShenZhen?
深圳打工人员合法居留需要那些文件材料？

9.1. Are those local laws or laws from central government?
这些是地方法规还是中央法规？

10. What will you do if the documents required from peasant workers are not complete when checked?
打工人员合法居留文件材料在检查时不齐全怎么办？
11. What are your comments on the peasant workers working in the city of ShenZhen as a social phenomenon?

你怎么看待民工现象？