

## **“Labor Is Glorious”: Model Laborers in the People's Republic of China\***

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THE MODEL LABORER (*laodong mofan*) campaign, launched by the Chinese Communist Party beginning in 1942, was derived from Soviet Stakhanovism. The CCP imported the key features of Soviet Stakhanovism such as material and spiritual incentives, upward mobility, publicity in official media, glorification of individual achievement, and making new men, but modified them to cope with Chinese circumstances. From 1950 to 2005, the CCP held thirteen national conferences and elected 25,239 model laborers.<sup>1</sup> The numbers reach hundreds of thousand if model laborers down to the county level are included.

The CCP had at least two goals to promote the model laborer movement. First, it was primarily to enhance economic production in order to win wars and to become a world power. Secondly, it aimed at making a new socialist man,<sup>2</sup> who embodied the concept of labor as glorious, who was selflessly devoted to production and socialist construction, and eternally loyal to the party. Although the forms of propagating Stakhanovism were the same in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, there were certain differences in terms of contents and emphases. These are the focus of the chapter. Its purpose is not to evaluate how much production was increased by the Chinese model workers, but to explore how the CCP created Stakhanovites, how it propagated the movement in order to mold new socialist men, and how people responded to the propaganda. As time went on the political significance of the movement increased. Moreover, it employed different propaganda strategies according to the needs of the moment. Although there were model workers in the countryside, this chapter mainly deals with the industrial ones.

### Stakhanovism in the Soviet Union

A Stakhanovite as a new man can be traced back to the "positive hero" in nineteenth century Russian literature. He was an active, action-oriented, and selfless individual devoted to the common good. He stood in stark contrast to the so-called superfluous man, who sat idle all day long and only liked to talk without taking any action.<sup>3</sup> The positive hero was the prototype of the "new Soviet man" promoted by the Soviet authorities after the October Revolution. The earliest version of the new productive worker were the shock workers (*udarniki*), usually a group of people performing particularly laborious or urgent tasks during the Civil War. It gained new meaning in 1927–1928 when isolated groups of workers, mainly members of the Communist Youth, organized brigades to fulfill their work assignments. They worked hard, remained sober, had perfect attendance, and dedicated themselves to reducing the unit cost of every product.<sup>4</sup> Their work later was incorporated into socialist competitions and was also called the Izotovite movement, named after Nikita Izotov. By setting production records while also receiving privileges, they were precursors of the Stakhanovite movement.<sup>5</sup> The latter, however, became much more prominent in terms of propaganda and attention by top party leaders.

Due to the low productivity of the First Five-Year Plan, which did not meet official expectations, the Soviet authorities searched for various ways to rapidly increase productivity from the outset of the Second Five-Year Plan. On 30-31 August 1935, a young miner named Aleksei Stakhanov (1906–1977), working at the Irmino pit in the Donbass region, "was discovered" and lionized for his superhuman productivity. He extracted 102 tons of coal in one six-hour shift, 14 times more than the general norm. In fact, the secret of his outstanding performance reflected the division of labor. He concentrated only on extracting coal, while the rest of the work was done by auxiliary workers at the coal face. Nevertheless, all the credit went to Stakhanov alone and the authorities made him a national hero. Instantly, similar model workers appeared all over the country, even in the *gulag*, through organized socialist competitions. Thus, those who over-fulfilled production norms became known as the Stakhanovites.

In November 1935, at the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovite Workers Stalin greatly praised the movement as the symbol of the high tide and new stage of socialist competition. Stakhanovism was closely associated with technology and thus differed from previous socialist competitions. Stalin claimed that the Stakhanovites' high productivity had proved the superiority of the socialist system over capitalism. Socialism was not to be construed as "a certain material equalization of people based on a poor man's standard

of living. It required a high productivity of labor, higher than under capitalism, and in this respect, the Stakhanovite movement represented a force for the further consolidation of socialism" in the Soviet Union. Under socialism workers' material condition had improved and there was no exploitation. All lived better and merrier. These Stakhanovites were young or middle-aged workers. They mastered their own field of technique, surmounting existing technical norms and planned production capacity. They were cultured and technically trained people, models of precision and punctuality in work. They were liberated from conservatism and stagnation of certain old engineers and technicians. Stalin's speech repeatedly emphasized that the new man should possess new techniques and new culture. He hoped the workers' cultural and technical level could be brought up to the level of engineers and technicians. Only when the difference between mental and physical labor was leveled, could the communist stage be realized.<sup>6</sup> The authorities believed that the Stakhanovite movement paved the way for the Soviet Union to move from the socialist to the communist stage.

What Stalin meant by culture (*kul'turnost'*) was not simply literacy but also taking part in cultural activities, such as reading classic literature and going to concerts and theaters. This was highly infused with the values of the middle class.<sup>7</sup> Ideally Stakhanovites did not live in the factories; they had familial and cultural lives which were as important as their work. They should take advantage of the good things in life that the Soviet regime could offer. Working to exhaustion was associated not with communist zeal but with backwardness. An ideal life for Stakhanovites was someone who worked "at the factory exactly seven hours, since Soviet power does not permit anyone to work more, who regularly goes to the cinema, visits others, engages in sports and at the same time fulfills all production tasks. . . . They must not only dress beautifully and cleanly—not in the style of workers, but also speak cleanly and not swear."<sup>8</sup>

When Stakhanovism no longer stimulated productivity, it lost its value and was no longer vigorously promoted by the authorities. According to R. W. Davies and Oleg Khlevniuk, the movement "did not achieve a substantial change in economic performance" and "its economic significance already began to decline in 1936."<sup>9</sup> Since then the Stakhanovite movement was routinized as labor activism as part of socialist competition. Yet the term, "Stakhanovism," stopped being used after the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 because it was too closely associated with the cult of personality. Due to the economic crisis in the 1980s, there were discussions again about the revival of Stakhanovism. Mikhail Gorbachev highly praised the movement on its 50th anniversary.<sup>10</sup> But this was only the last radiance of a setting sun. No genuine action was taken.

### The Introduction of Soviet Stakhanovism to China before 1949

According to traditional Chinese culture, "only the learned rank high, all other trades are low" and "those who do mental labor rule and those who do manual labor are ruled." Therefore, people generally despised manual laborers and felt ashamed to be one. The Chinese Communists wanted to eliminate such notions. The CCP also claimed that in the "old society" the fruits of all productions were owned not by the people who labored, but by the capitalists. After the revolution, the CCP had to right the wrong by giving the fruits of production to the workers and presenting labor as sacred and glorious. Right before and after 1949 the communists published many magazine articles aimed at teenagers to explain why labor was great and pleasant. Using the theories of Darwin and Engels, these authors stated that labor was glorious because the world was created by labor and created human beings and human happiness. The pleasure of labor came from its fruit, which was owned by the laborer. In the past a laborer worked for imperialists and bureaucrat-compradors, but under communism he would work for himself and thus would need to be more devoted to work.<sup>11</sup> However, verbal propaganda was not sufficient to correct erroneous notions about manual labor. It was important for the CCP to use more concrete methods such as holding production competitions, appraising and electing model workers, granting them various honors and preferential treatment, and enhancing their political and social status in order to publicize the idea that manual labor was glorious.

The Chinese translation of the term, Stakhanovites (*Sitahannov yundongzhe*), first appeared in official press in October 1936 when the CCP headquarter was located in *Baoan*.<sup>12</sup> But the CCP did not launch the movement until the second half of 1942. Due to the economic blockade by the Guomindang (GMD) and the lack of cadres engaged in production, the CCP was desperately struggling to survive. In order to stimulate production, the Central Committee of the CCP proposed the slogan, "ample food and clothing," and decided to launch a Great Production Campaign in all border areas. It included a campaign of emulating Zhao Zhankui. Zhao was a worker in an agricultural tool factory. He worked hard and selflessly. He endured hardship without complaint, lived in the factory as if it were his home, and never calculated his personal losses. When the authorities went to factories to examine the production, they "discovered" Zhao Zhankui and decided to make him a production model in order to change ordinary people's attitudes toward labor as well as to enhance efficiency and productivity.<sup>13</sup> This would be the first Stakhanovite movement in China. However, the CCP never used "Stakhanov" directly referring to Chinese model workers probably because such a foreign term might confuse the simple folks. In an award meeting someone excitedly stated that "the Soviet Union has a Stakhanov, we have

a Zhao Zhankui today. The Soviet Union has a Stakhanovite movement; we have a Zhao Zhankui movement, too."<sup>14</sup> The Federation of Trade Unions in Yan'an called for promoting the Zhao Zhankui campaign and emphasized its differences from the production competitions in the past. It had serious political significance. The authorities intended to use Zhao Zhankui as a model to reform workers' thought, to get rid of their selfishness, laziness, and irresponsibility and to enhance their political consciousness.<sup>15</sup> Here the political consciousness meant to have correct attitude toward work and value public property as the property of the revolution.

On 26 November 1943, the CCP held the First Conference of Model Laborer in Yan'an where Mao Zedong lavished praise on the Chinese Stakhanovites' high production records and glorified them as "the leaders of the people." He said the model workers' production accomplishments put the economy on the right track. This was the result of organizing the strength of the masses and could make the CCP's fight against the GMD almost self-supporting. Three days after the conference, Mao Zedong, Zhu De, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and so on, received 185 model workers and awarded them autographed certificates of merit. In return the model workers thanked the leadership of the CCP and the party that had enabled them "turn over" (*fanshen*, liberated from the oppressors).<sup>16</sup> Thereafter, promoting production campaigns and selecting Chinese Stakhanovites become a routine activity for the CCP in all border areas through the civil war period.

While propagating model laborers, the CCP put productivity as the top priority. Also, it emphasized good discipline and correct attitude toward work and devotion to the collective. Here the collective usually meant the work place, the people or even the revolution. Very rarely did the CCP mention dedication to the party or the leading role of the party, probably due to its shaky power base. This is a sharp contrast to the propaganda after 1949 when the collective increasingly referred to the party as time went on, reaching its peak during the Cultural Revolution. Under the coercive one-party state, the authorities could stress selfless devotion to the party and to the collective without worrying about resistance. Also, the Yan'an authorities emphasized that model workers, usually party members as well, get along with their co-workers.<sup>17</sup> This indicated that model workers not only had excellent production performance, but also the need to unite the masses and indirectly implied the CCP was popular among workers.

### Selection and the Making of Chinese Model Laborers in the 1950s

In the 1950s the CCP convened three national conferences of Chinese Stakhanovite Workers. The first one was held in the fall of 1950 to encourage

economic reconstruction. 464 model workers (forty-nine women) attended the first conference, including 208 from industry, 198 from agriculture, and 58 from the army.<sup>18</sup> The Second National Conference was held in 1956 in order to hasten industrialization and over-fulfill the First-Year Plan. In the eyes of the CCP, 1956 was the best year since 1949. The agricultural cooperative movement as well as the socialization of handicrafts, industry and commerce went unexpectedly smoothly and rapidly. The official title of the Conference was not the conference of model laborers, but the Conference of Advanced Producers (*xianjin shengchanzhe*). This might have something to do with the CCP's changing policy toward intellectuals. In mid-January of 1956 Zou Enlai announced at a meeting concerning intellectuals that the majority of them had become state workers, had served socialism, and had thus become part of the working class.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the term, "model laborers," which implied manual labor, seemed inappropriate for intellectuals. Although this Conference emphasized those who fulfilled the First Five-Year Plan ahead of time, it also included those with outstanding performance in the fields of education and science. Because the category of "laborer" extended to intellectuals, the total figure was the biggest one in all national conferences of model workers before and after 1956. The CCP authorities conferred the title of "National Advanced Producer" on 4,703 people.<sup>20</sup> In 1958 the Great Leap Forward (GLF) plunged the entire nation into the craze of smelting iron. The authorities organized and mobilized socialist competitions aiming at "competing with the advanced, learning from the advanced, and overtaking the advanced." In order to sum up the campaign experience and further increase productivity, the Third National Conference of model laborers was held in 1959. This was the last nationwide selection and commendation of model workers until the end of the Cultural Revolution.

How were model laborers selected and processed? In general, the trade unions were in charge of organizing and selecting work. A model worker had to go through different levels of elections from the workshop, factory, city, province, big administrative area, industrial sector (*chanye*), all the way to the national level. The local trade union was instructed that the nomination should come from the bottom production unit (it did not clearly state from the head of the unit or from workers) and went up level by level.<sup>21</sup> Such a bottom-up process was merely an ideal. That the high authorities found it necessary repeatedly to criticize top-down or arbitrary appointments, formalism, and detachment from the masses reflected the underlying reality.<sup>22</sup> The so-called nomination and selection process was usually all done by superiors. Very rarely was it done by low-level workers directly. And the so-called democratic discussion was mostly a mere formality. Some work units only read out the list of the candidates in the meetings or simply directly submitted the list

to their higher authorities without bothering with any discussion. Therefore, it was not an exception, as occurred in Beijing Changxin Motor Plant, that no one knew that model workers had been selected.<sup>23</sup> In fact, since the selection process required organization and mobilization, there was great latitude for manipulation by superiors or party cadres. This had also been the case in the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup>

To promote Stakhanovism both the Soviet Union and China aimed at the economic goal of increasing productivity. Compared with the Soviet Union where the key criterion of selection was record-breaking productivity, the PRC paid more attention to recycling material and to cost savings due to the dire shortage of materials. Since, as Mao Zedong pointed out, China was still a poor country, avoidance of waste and rigorously cutting expenses were long-term goals.<sup>25</sup> This is why Meng Tai, working in the Anshan Steel Plant, was particularly glorified by the authorities. He endured hardship to collect and store thousands of possibly usable bits of scrap, down to nails, pegs or strings of iron wire, and made his co-workers follow his example. This also indicates that the Soviet Union and the PRC were at different stages of economic construction when they each vigorously promoted Stakhanovism. Having gone through World War II and the long Civil War, the CCP simply had to scrape together everything available to restore the economy.

Moreover, the CCP was more concerned about political background which was largely ignored before 1949. In the early 1950s "to have a clean historical background" (i.e., neither the workers nor their relatives had close associations with the GMD or other reactionary organizations in the past) was not a necessary requirement. As time went on, particularly after 1957, a clean political background became a key factor for candidates. Rightists, "bad-elements" and "anti-socialists" were disqualified from the candidacy pool. The Federation of Trade Unions in Liaoning province clearly instructed its local branches that the principle of "good production, good politics and good thought" had to be upheld at all times. Often candidates were disqualified due to their bad political backgrounds.<sup>26</sup> The only exceptional year was 1956 when the authorities claimed that candidates need not perfectly meet all the criteria. It was unreasonable to require both an impeccable job performance and "correct" class background so that the slightest flaw of incorrect thought or behavior eliminated a potential candidate.<sup>27</sup> However, with the 1957 Anti-Rightist Campaign, political background checks once again became routine and strict.

One of the most serious selection problems was creating a wildly exaggerated record. There were at least two possibilities to create a fake model worker. This could occur when superiors simply chose the model worker based on their own preferences and then invented their spectacular work

record afterwards. Exposure of such problems often took place during the Hundred Flowers Campaign.<sup>28</sup> A very different sort of fraud arose not from bad intentions as shown by an example from a Liaoning coal mine. The originally elected old worker felt that he was insufficiently literate to read the texts prepared by his work unit for the national conference. He suggested a younger, more literate co-worker to replace him at the First National Conference. His superior agreed with the suggestion. The young worker had worked hard, too, but the preferential treatment he received as a model worker made his co-workers jealous. When they accused him of misrepresentation, he lost his title of model worker.<sup>29</sup>

From 1950 to 1959, the three national conferences conferred the title of "national industrial model worker" on 5,286 people.<sup>30</sup> The large number might be good for morale, but it also posed difficulties in terms of defining the characteristics of model workers and publicizing them in a more efficient way. Therefore, it became necessary to feature some "star model workers" in order to give prominence to their outstanding features and values. In addition, those attending the First National Conference of Model Workers were a little too old<sup>31</sup> and most of their outstanding deeds occurred before 1949. Instead, an effort was made to find a younger model worker with achievements made under the new regime to contrast the treatment of workers under "old" and "new" China. This led to the "discovery" of a star model worker, Hao Jianxiu.

Hao Jianxiu was born into a poor worker family and had only two or three years of schooling. At 15 she began to work at the No. 6 National Cotton Factory in Qingdao. Due to the bad equipment, threads easily broke while spinning. To economize raw material, the broken thread had to be found and reconnected as fast as possible. Hao Jianxiu realized that frequent cleaning of the machine and walking in a Z-shaped circuit minimized roller waste. In the Red May Competition in 1950 she performed outstandingly with a roller-waste rate of only 0.25 percent, the average national rate being 1.5 percent. In February 1951 the authorities in Shandong province heard about Hao's performance, believed her work method should be carefully studied, disseminated to others, and publicized in the press. It was encapsulated in the slogan, "the three diligences and the three fasts" (eyes to watch diligently, fast, legs and fast hands to clean diligently and connect threads). *Qingdao Ribao* published this summary and had the practice followed in other factories. The responses were negative, especially by older workers who became exhausted by applying this method. The chairwoman of the All-China Textile Trade Union decided to invite more than 20 excellent engineers and spinners to organize a "Hao Jianxiu Work Method Study Committee." After three months' observations, tests and discussions, the committee summed up the major points of

Hao's work method: (1) maintain a correct attitude toward labor, work hard and responsibly; (2) learn modestly and be willing to enhance technical skills; (3) work with plans, manage time, prioritize; (4) never waste labor time or physical strength, reduce roller waste.<sup>32</sup> As a matter of fact, this summary had more to do with one's attitude toward work than with skill. Later Hao Jianxiu confessed that when the engineer summarized her work method as "making the Z-shape circuit," she had no idea what he meant.<sup>33</sup>

It was obvious that the authorities intentionally molded Hao Jianxiu's work method and model worker image. Hao's experience shows the deep involvement of the CCP in evaluating her performance, informing the press, studying and summing up her experience, and organizing the resulting propaganda offensive. This was similar to the party's involvement in the Soviet Union in creating the image of Aleksei Stakhanov as the model worker.<sup>34</sup>

Also, publicizing Hao's work method coincided with the movement for reforming the thought of intellectuals. In fact, the CCP achieved two things at one stroke by popularizing and disseminating Hao Jianxiu's work method. On the one hand, it publicized workers' creativity, demonstrating that workers were the masters of socialist society under the leadership of the CCP and enhanced workers' social status. On the other hand, it corrected intellectuals' erroneous notions of despising manual labor and workers so as to mold new socialist men with a new attitude toward labor and dedication to the collective good. One engineer from the committee publicly stated his mistakes in *Renmin Ribao* by admitting that in the beginning he subjectively looked down upon Hao's method. He "vulgarized" it and did not think there was anything special about it in terms of skill. He confessed that this was because he did not pay attention to workers' creativity and did not consider relying on workers to raise productivity. After participating in the three discussions and the struggle between new and old thought, he realized that workers had limitless wisdom and that only by closely relying on workers was good production possible.<sup>35</sup> Such a self-criticism matched well with the thought reform campaign among intellectuals in the early 1950s.

#### Propaganda and Problems of Model Laborers

In the 1950s the official press presented model workers as those who possessed a selfless zeal for work and were firmly loyal to the party in general and to Chairman Mao in particular (more radical political campaigns then reversed this order to emphasize Mao). They worked for the country and for the collective with seriousness and responsibility, were willing to use their brains to solve work problems and worked without stop if necessary, had a boundless

love of labor and of the fatherland. They worked regardless of personal danger, sickness, or family crises. Ideally these were the key characteristics reflected in the "spirit of model workers" that the CCP wanted to promote. However, propaganda required more than abstract descriptions in order to attract ordinary people's attention and interest. The honor and special treatment received by the model workers, particularly the star model workers, became the most powerful means to publicize Stakhanovism.

Since the Great Production Campaign in Yan'an, the CCP had realized the importance of distributing substantial rewards to outstanding workers. During the civil war the campaign slogan, "labor is glorious, production builds up family fortunes" reflected this connection very well.<sup>36</sup> Rewards divided into spiritual/ritual and material categories. In a conference publicly commending the model workers, top CCP leaders received them, pinned big red flowers on their chests, and conferred medals or certificates as ways of honoring these workers. Still, the most attractive rewards for the ordinary people were material, in the form of livestock, agricultural tools and money.<sup>37</sup> Other material rewards were to send model workers to study at professional schools, to train them to become cadres or to award them political positions.<sup>38</sup>

Overall, the means of rewarding model workers had been generally set during the Yan'an period. After 1949, the scope and scale of rewards increased. The CCP used the First National Conference of Chinese Stakhanovite Workers to publicize the idea that "labor is glorious; workers have been liberated." Before the conference, a photo and graphic exhibition of model workers' achievements was organized, an accompanying pamphlet was published and a documentary film was made. During the conference, summaries of the accomplishments of 395 model workers were printed. Students, peasants, workers and soldiers were organized to visit the exhibition; while news agencies and radio stations interviewed them.<sup>39</sup>

In order to mold the image that the CCP put high priority on workers, the day before the conference, top CCP leaders, such as Dong Biwu, Chen Yun, Nie Rongzhen and Li Lisan, went to the Beijing train station to welcome the model workers from other provinces. The opening ceremony was held in Huaiyuan Hall of Zhongnanhai. Mao Zedong praised them as "the model figures of the Chinese nation . . . [and as] the reliable pillars of the people's government, and as the bridge linking the People's government with the masses."<sup>40</sup> The representatives of the model workers spoke with one voice that the honor to attend the conference came from the wise leadership of the CCP and Chairman Mao as well as the active support of all people in the nation.<sup>41</sup> Their response was not entirely rhetoric. After all, under the rule of the Nanjing government, the Guomindang (GMD) never held any significant

conferences to praise the accomplishments of ordinary people. The GMD only received and awarded medals to high-level officials and officers.

For many ordinary people, seeing Chairman Mao in person was like being received by the Pope, the feeling of excitement and bliss was beyond description. Many considered the reception by Chairman Mao and his personal handshake to be the highpoint of their lives. After meeting Mao Zedong, workers described how they felt more affection for him than for their own mothers. "When drinking water, we won't forget the well-driller, being liberated (*fanshen*), we won't forget Chairman Mao." Model workers claimed that when facing the toughest tasks and experiencing the greatest difficulties, thinking of Chairman Mao gave them boundless courage and confidence to overcome the challenges.<sup>42</sup>

During the conference all the model workers also participated in the National Day celebrations, attended parties held by the Soviet Embassy and other organizations, participated in panel discussions, visited factories and farms, and toured the Palace Museum, Summer Palace and other historical sites.<sup>43</sup> For most model workers who lived outside of Beijing or who never had even been to any big city, such magnificent treatment brought great honor and pride. It gave the impression that they were really the masters of the nation. When they returned to their hometowns, they proudly retold their stories about their Beijing experience to their relatives, friends and co-workers. This became one of the most forceful and efficient forms of propaganda to encourage others to strive to become model workers.

Provision of educational and upward mobility opportunities also were credible forms of propaganda. The national model workers' average educational level at the First Conference was very low. About half of them were either illiterate or had only two or three years of schooling. In order to eliminate illiteracy and promote model workers to the position of cadres, the CCP established worker-peasant crash-course middle schools in several big cities. The most famous was affiliated with Renmin University (People's University).<sup>44</sup> Thus, compared with the Yan'an period, the CCP now had more rewards to grant to model workers. In fact, the possibility to become a model worker offered peasants and workers one of the few opportunities for upward mobility other than joining the army. Once selected as a model worker, it was easier to become a party member. Upward mobility also included promotion to the level of cadres, managers or leaders (mostly at the level of deputy leader). One hundred industrial model workers were selected as the representatives for the First China People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).<sup>45</sup> Among them the most extraordinary example was again Hao Jianxiu, the new model textile worker. In the fall of 1951, she went to Beijing to attend the National

Day ceremony and the First CPPCC. In 1952, she attended the International Labor Day celebration in Moscow, saw Stalin, and toured several big cities in the Soviet Union. In December 1952 she was sent to the worker-peasant school affiliated with Shandong University. In 1953 she was elected as a national textile model worker. In May 1954 she joined the CCP and studied in the high school affiliated with People's University (1954–1958), followed by four years at the Textile College in East China (1958–1962). *Renmin Ribao* covered her school life almost every year and portrayed her happy life as a model worker and a student.<sup>46</sup> After completing her education, Hao Jianxiu never returned to her factory as a manual worker. Instead her career rapidly advanced. Her highest professional job was vice-minister of the Textile Industry (1977–1981) and her highest political position was election as a vice-chair of the CPPCC in 2003. Her experience was very similar to the Soviet star Stakhanovite workers. Yet, in terms of political position, her advancements were even higher than her Soviet counterparts.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, three kinds of awards did not exist in Yan'an period, but were highly publicized after 1949, based on Soviet practices. One was sending model workers to vacation or relax in scenic resorts, such as West Lake, Lu Mountain, Qingdao, Beidaihe and so on to demonstrate that the CCP cared about workers' health. The second one was to organize some star model laborers to visit the Soviet Union to learn from their "progressive production and methods." Conversely Soviet delegations of Stakhanovites also visited China to share their production experience with Chinese workers.

The third one was the most coveted by model workers and envied by others concerned the allocation of housing. A case in point was Hao Jianxiu, for whom the authorities in her hometown built a sunny six-room house. The workers' housing had been in dire shortage. For example, in a lane of Shanghai Putuo district, 10,000 workers and their families lived in an area of only 2 square km. It was said that in 1952 the government built 217,550 dormitory units to accommodate one million workers.<sup>48</sup> Even if the figure was true, it was not enough to accommodate the 3 million Shanghai workers, not to mention the whole nation. In September 1951 the Shanghai authorities began to build a new worker village, Caoyang Xincun, on the west side of the city. The first batch of housing was 48 two-story townhouses for model and senior workers. The Caoyang worker village was modeled on the Soviet worker compound; it was a self-contained community, including schools, a kindergarten, a movie theater, a gym, a post office, shops, a bank, a market, a clinic, cultural facilities, and so on. Caoyang New Village became a landmark and indicator of workers' liberation. It also became a showcase and obligatory stop for foreign guests to visit. Many lessons in the anti-illiteracy campaign textbooks described the happy life of workers

there.<sup>49</sup> This was the most practical reward and the most powerful piece of propaganda for ordinary people.

Did the Stakhanovites meet the expectation of the authorities and live happily ever after as the official press claimed? It is plausible to conclude that inspired by nationalism, by the vision of a new communist society and even by official propaganda, many model workers were indeed fully and selflessly dedicated to their work in the 1950s. They tried to set good examples by leading their co-workers to join socialist competitions and devoting themselves to production and learning, and sharing their advanced production experience. They also tried to serve as a bridge between the authorities and low-level workers, especially by working long hours and exposing their superiors' bureaucratic attitudes toward work and workers.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, they frequently complained that their supervisors ignored their proposals to improve production. They themselves or the press often attributed this to the supervisors' conservatism or to bureaucracy.<sup>51</sup> This was one possibility. Another could be that their proposals were simply impossible to carry out.

In theory, model workers' major activity was to continue working in their professional fields to promote higher production. In practice, many model workers, particularly the star ones, rarely returned to their former manual work positions. Instead, they occupied management or party positions and spent most of their time engaged in all kinds of social activities, such as attending various national meetings, receiving foreign delegations, giving talks on their production experience, answering the party's call for various political movements, and publicizing the CCP's new policies in the factories, armies, and schools. Certain local leaders treated model workers like "all-purpose heroes" and invited them to participate in whatever activities took place.<sup>52</sup> Model worker who continued in their old jobs complained that these activities caused their production to lag behind their co-workers; their credibility suffered accordingly. Another fairly common complaint was that many people required impeccable behavior from models, rather than evaluating them on a case-by-case basis. For example, for poorer model workers or those with large families to feed, the requirement to buy more government bonds than others became a serious financial burden.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, some model workers soon became smug and felt superior to others. They refused to do team work and to accept criticism. They delegated important projects to their apprentices and once the products were inspected and disqualified, they would curse the inspector. Some took credit for the work of their co-workers and only thought about money. They rejected attending school or accepting less pay.<sup>54</sup> No wonder some people described such model workers as catchers—meaning those who only wanted to catch fame, official position, magnificent treatment, and even a wife!



In addition, Stakhanovism suffered from an internal contradiction. On the one hand, the campaign highlighted production as working for the collective good, not for individual gain. On the other hand, the presentation of model workers as individual heroes eroded the collective consciousness. This contradiction became clear in practical production work. Once the Stakhanovite campaign became routinized, the movement became a championship game for a small group of production heroes, while the rest of the workers lagged far behind. To make matters worse, some plant supervisors had the few high skilled workers concentrate on setting new production records, while the rest of workers remained idle. This resulted in lower production for the entire plant. Some workers resisted participating in such production campaigns for fear that the records set by the model workers would force them to work overtime and raise production norms. Sometimes they would sabotage model laborers' work<sup>55</sup> and the tension between them was strong. In the Soviet Union, the sabotage of or personal attacks on Stakhanovites took place much more frequently and with greater severity than in the PRC.<sup>56</sup> This was because in the PRC wages were not linked directly with productivity. Resentment against model workers was only one of the workers' responses to Stakhanovism. Ordinary people's positive views on Stakhanovism coincided mostly with the official propaganda and its expectation. Their negative opinions would not become known until the end of the Cultural Revolution when society became more open.

#### Propaganda Distinctions on the Adoption of the Stakhanovite Model in China

Literal application of the Soviet model was difficult because of structural differences between the two countries, as well as the evolving preferences of Chinese leaders. Firstly, from the very beginning the Soviet authorities closely associated the movement with new technology, even when this departed from reality. Stalin claimed that the "Stakhanovite movement would be inconceivable without new and higher technology."<sup>57</sup> Although learning from the Soviet advanced production experience was highly publicized by the CCP until 1956, new technology did not become the key focus of the propaganda in China. In the early 1950s there were reports that the improvement of technology created a huge surplus of labor forces and factories had to pay for those workers who had nothing to do.<sup>58</sup> In other words, in an extremely over-populated country to use machines to replace laborers meant to increase the unemployment which ran against the CCP's great effort to reduce it and debased the legitimacy of the communist regime.

In 1954 due to the invention of a new instrument which immensely enhanced work efficiency, Wang Chonglun, nicknamed "walking ahead of time," was elected as a model worker. He and a group of model workers proposed that the All-China Federation of Trade Unions launch a national technological innovation campaign and the Union agreed. *Renmin Ribao* made some favorable reports.<sup>59</sup> In fact, the campaign caused many problems. Some said the innovation campaign interfered with production and planning. Many thought mechanized production in their factories could not be improved. Others stated that due to workers' low literacy and low technical skill, and limited investments, their plants lacked the necessary conditions for technical improvements. In the end the Central Committee of the CCP intervened to cancel the slogan of technological innovation.<sup>60</sup> Although during the Great Leap Forward the authorities greatly propagated the technological revolution, it was more a slogan, even a disaster, than the reality for many products of terribly poor quality resulted from the so-called technological revolution.

Secondly, Soviet propaganda highlighted material incentives, publicizing and emphasizing the monetary rewards as well as the magnificent treatment received by Stakhanovites for breaking production norms. The Stakhanovites were encouraged to state their material rewards in national Stakhanovite workers meetings. In their speeches they proudly told the audience how they used the money to buy a radio, a bicycle, new clothes, or perfume (very bourgeois purchases from the Maoist point of view).<sup>61</sup> The official star Stakhanovites' biographies did not hesitate to record such statements, "easier work, more pay," "good wages for good work," "more money means more things, additional comfort," "the more we work, the more we earn," and so on.<sup>62</sup> In the eyes of Maoists, these statements reflected a full-blown "economism." Maoists were not entirely wrong. For the Soviet authorities the reason for focusing on material incentives was closely linked with breaking norms and piece-rate payment. Soviet propaganda concentrated on breaking norms in order to stimulate higher productivity because Soviet workers' pay in the 1930s was based on piece-rates. Low pay gave workers little incentive to work more. The authorities intended to use Stakhanovites' record-breaking norms and their resulting high pay and prestige to stimulate production and speed up economic development.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast, the CCP propaganda on material incentive changed radically before and after revolution. Before 1949 the CCP press highly publicized material incentive without reservation as an expedient measure. After 1949 the official media emphasized honor and downplayed material incentive. However, the material incentive still played a major role in reality, it particularly appealing to lower level workers. In fact, many workers competed to become Stakhanovites simply because of the material incentive. Already before the



turn to the left during the Great Leap Forward, the CCP criticized this tendency as the bad influence of "economism," whereas the Soviets continued to rely on monetary rewards. One reason why China did not directly link production with piece-rate payment was its backwardness. China's industrial supplies chronically suffered shortages. Using piece rates to stimulate productivity might cause workers' salaries to fall due to the sudden huge demands on raw materials and supply of tools. Also, Soviet incentive systems involved complicated administration, "required a large corps of trained labor and wages personnel to continually revise rates and calculate pay, all within the confines of a financial plan." China had ample politically reliable cadres but they were not technically well-trained.<sup>64</sup> And due to the demographic factor, the CCP had to adopt a low-pay policy in order to reduce the unemployment rate,<sup>65</sup> which was considered one of the major achievements under socialism.

Another significant factor in China that discouraged material incentives had something to do with the CCP top leaders' mentality. The authorities did not intend to link high production directly with the improvement of worker's lives. For example, in 1953 the Central Committee of the CCP instructed the Federation of Trade Unions to correct the slogan, "Production increases by 10 centimeters, welfare increases by one centimeter," because it too obviously linked the present interest of the individual to long-term collective interest.<sup>66</sup> Such a thought was further elaborated by Mao Zedong during the Great Leap Forward. He more explicitly stated his views after reading the *Political Economy: Textbook*, which was closely monitored by Stalin, commenting that it was not necessary to rely on material incentives every day, every month, and every year. During difficult times, as long as the Party reasoned with people, they would still work and worked well even with reduced material incentives. Mao considered it was a grave mistake in principle that the *Textbook* emphasized one-sided material incentives and did not emphasize political consciousness. The CCP ought to stress arduous struggle, the expansion of production, and the future vision of communism. The Party needed to educate people with communist ideals. It had to emphasize the subordination of personal interests to collective ones and the subordination of current interests to long-term ones. People should make national and collective interests, not personal interests, the first priority. The CCP should not follow the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which led people to "one lover, one house, one car, one piano, and one TV, and led them to individualism, not down to the socialist road."<sup>67</sup> Instead of stressing material incentives, Mao Zedong relied more on mass mobilization, thought reform and other political campaigns to stimulate productivity.

The third difference between the Soviet Union and the PRC in terms of propagating the image of Stakhanovites was the cultural aspect. For Soviet Stakhanovites had to become "cultured" as Stalin expressed it in the speech in

1935—to bring themselves to the cultural level of engineers and technicians. Thus, it was not enough for them to be literate, they had to cultivate the ability to read great literature, attend concerts and theaters, and visit museums, etc. For example, the bookcases of a Soviet Stakhanovite should have the collected works of Lenin and Stalin, books written by the great Russian/Soviet writers such as Pushkin, Gogol, Chekhov, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Ilya Ehrenburg, Nikolai Ostrovsky, Mikhail Sholokhov and western writers, such as Walter Scott, Jules Verne and others—books on travel, adventure stories, descriptions of far-off countries.<sup>68</sup> This reflects a more wishful thinking than reality. In fact, many Stakhanovites remained illiterates and spent their free time not engaging in cultural activities but drinking. However, the propaganda projected the official expectation of workers to be cultured. Interestingly, Stalin's identification with bourgeois cultural value was in sharp contrast with Mao Zedong's preference for peasant culture. At least in their propaganda the CCP did not project the image of a model worker as in possession of the treasures of China's literary past.

Except for the period of the GLF, generally speaking, for the CCP workers, culture meant being literate. In 1958 the Party called for technological, education and cultural revolutions. An ideal laborer was required to have both high socialist consciousness and high culture with the knowledge of science, that is, to be red and expert, to combine mental with manual labor, to combine expertise with labor, and to integrate intellectuals with workers and peasants.<sup>69</sup> In the beginning of the GLF the whole country plunged with zeal into carrying out campaigns to terminate illiteracy and to found peasant universities. The campaigns proved short-lived and resulted in low quality and highly inflated quantity. In theory the campaigns hoped to intellectualize workers and peasants; in practice they peasantized intellectuals. Although the slogan loudly proclaimed the goal of uniting education with labor, it turned out the authorities cared more about manual labor than mental labor. And further evidence of this is the fact that after 1958 the crash courses for peasants and workers, which were established in the early 1950s and functioned better in terms of quality education, vanished one by one.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Mao constantly wanted the intellectuals to learn from peasants—at its most extreme, this took the form of the May Seventh cadre schools and sending intellectuals to the countryside to receive reeducation from the poor and middle peasants during the Cultural Revolution.

Another possible reason that the CCP cared much less about enhancing peasants' cultural level is that it gave priority to the effort to reduce the very high rates of illiteracy in the countryside. Before the communist revolutions in China and Russia, both had rural illiteracy rates of over 80 percent. According to the statistics of 1939 in the Soviet Union, in the 9–49 age group, 94

percent of the urban population and 86 percent of the rural population were literate.<sup>71</sup> This was twenty-two years after October revolution. Estimated by UNESCO in 2000 the total literacy rate in China was 85.2 percent.<sup>72</sup> This was fifty years after the revolution, and the rural literacy must have been lower than the average. Obviously due to the immense population and relative backwardness in China, the CCP in the 1950s was not able to aim too high with regard to culture.

### The Discussion on Labor Models in the Reform Era

What impact CCP propaganda actually had on ordinary people was difficult to assess due to the limited sources available from the 1950s. In contrast, ordinary people were able to voice opinions on model laborers more openly in the reform era. Note should be taken of the impact of the Cultural Revolution on reform era views about model workers. Most model workers were horribly persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, because they were loyal to the party secretaries who had nominated them in the 1950s. Most of these party secretaries fell into disgrace early in the Cultural Revolution. By association, this implicated model workers who, like their party secretaries, also suffered great calamities. Many were accused of being "royalists," "fake model workers," "traitors to worker's interest," or having the "social background of a bourgeois fellow-traveler." They were criticized, denounced in public, paraded on streets, and jailed. Many died or become handicapped.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, a few model workers such as Hao Jianxiu, Wang Jingxi, Yu Fengying, and Li Suwen became members of the Revolutionary Committees set up in 1968, seemingly holding high positions during the Cultural Revolution. However, they were actually just pawns of factional political infighting.<sup>74</sup> They merely served a decorative function for the proletarian dictatorship and did not hold any real power at all. Their power evaporated with the fall of the Gang of the Four.

The havoc of the Cultural Revolution disillusioned many people with the CCP and the ideals of communism. Influenced by the market economy, people expressed negative attitudes toward model laborers more explicitly and visibly starting in the early 1980s. The negative views were fully exposed in a novel, *A Life in the World (Rensheng Zaishi)*. The protagonist of the novel, Chen Aizhen, was a textile model worker from 1950s. Her only focus and joy in life was work. But people in early 1980s tended not to believe that happiness or a sense of self-worth could be found in labor. Chen was cold shouldered not only by her co-workers but also by her own children when she focused on correcting factory shortcomings and enhancing productivity.

They mocked her ossified thinking, considering it to be unrealistic. A young worker even retorted, "Being a model worker . . . so what? During the Cultural Revolution you were persecuted, too." Some considered her to be "an evil member of the herd." Her hard work and devotion to her job had forced everyone else to work more. After the collapse of the Gang of Four, Chen Aizhen was never reelected. Another young worker bluntly told her that it was easier to be a model worker simply by bribery than by working hard. The novel, however, ends with the triumph of Chen's commitment to the value of labor.<sup>75</sup> This reflected not the views of the majority but the author's (or the Communist Party's) wishful thinking. However, there were still some positive views of the model laborers. Some model workers were hired by private companies to advertise new products because they were considered to be symbols of honesty and reliability. Many did well at their new jobs.<sup>76</sup> Their success in advertising also reflected the positive views many ordinary people still held of the model workers of the 1950s.

After a twenty-year interval the national selection of industrial model workers was resumed in 1979. Meanwhile, in order to search for new avenues of reform and to denounce the claims promoted by the Gang of Four that distribution according to labor was equal to material incentives, the merits of Stakhanovism were again discussed in the official press in the late 1970s.<sup>77</sup> During the 1980s and more intensively in the 1990s, public attention turned to the value of model workers and the importance of material incentives in light of the miserable situation of many old model workers and the impact of the market economy. Increasingly more people were urged not to expect perfection from model workers who were doing the most difficult jobs while denying themselves fame or profit. Some stated that poverty should not become the hallmark of model workers or of socialism. Their glorious hard-work should not come at the expense of their health. Model workers should be allowed to have personal enjoyment and entertainment. And they had the right to choose work, rather than have to accept work appointed from above.<sup>78</sup> The relatively open market brought a greater humanism and individualism to people's thinking concerning model workers. In general, in the 1950s model workers were expected fully to devote themselves to the collective without any consideration of their own benefit. In the reform era, they were allowed to seek personal rewards and enjoy life. Honor and collective good were no longer the only legitimate considerations.

Although the CCP tried to improve the living condition of those model workers who languished in poverty, they also knew that the efforts were far from sufficient. In order to respond to the challenges of the market economy, the authorities proposed to transform model workers. They maintained that

model workers should emphasize professional skills over simple hard work and creativity over mere experience. They also praised enterprises paying model workers high salaries to advertise new products, because this enabled them to serve as the leaders of market competition.<sup>79</sup> When the CCP encouraged old model workers to work for big private enterprises, to a certain degree this suggested that the workers served the capitalists. In a sense, this is a great leap backward in terms of communist ideology. Some old model workers probably became confused by the rejection of the old ideology and questioned the purpose of their many sacrifices of the 1950s to construct a "beautiful communist society."

In April 2005, the 13th National Conference of Model Workers in Beijing selected 2,969 national model workers. Four features marked this conference and attracted national attention. (1) For the first time, twenty-one migrant workers from the countryside were selected for their contribution to urban construction. Without objection all highly applauded this selection. (2) Famous athletes, such as Yao Ming and Liu Xiang, became model workers. Some questioned whether selecting model workers should reflect the "celebrity effect." Others argued that these outstanding athletes' success mainly came from their innate physical talent which could not be obtained simply by emulating them. (3) Most controversially, many managers and senior officials were elected and questions arose whether the selection was for labor models or for leading cadres. They argued that the contributions of many senior government or party officials relied on the power of their positions, not their own labor. This was particularly unfair to the peasants, workers, and teachers.<sup>80</sup> (4) Equally controversially, thirty-three private entrepreneurs were elected, including Liu Yonghao, ranked as one of the top ten billionaires in China by *Forbes* magazine. Many argued that they were capitalists. How could they be considered as laborers? A sociology professor objected on the grounds of social justice. He maintained that the term, laborer, had been expanded erroneously to encompass all fields. Model workers had become, in principle, the outstanding people in all professions and trades.<sup>81</sup> The official response to such criticisms was "the criteria for selecting model workers have to evolve with the times. . . . Whoever creates a fortune for the society becomes a laborer and thus is qualified for selection."<sup>82</sup> Whether rich private entrepreneurs were entitled to be model workers was not a question the authorities could directly answer, now that capitalists were allowed to join the Communist Party. This is a kind of dilemma the CCP cannot solve up to the present. Also, when the definition of "model worker," like the definition of "communism" "has to evolve with the times" and has become so broad, the term actually becomes meaningless.

## Conclusion

Stakhanovism was a product of communist ideology. The Communist Party primarily had two aims in promoting it: economically to increase productivity with greater devotion to work and politically to raise correct consciousness of devotion to the collective good in order to mold a new man. The CCP adopted the Soviet practice of selecting model workers which was coordinated with mass mobilization, organization and propaganda. Although the forms of propaganda between the two countries were similar, the contents had different emphases due to the structural constraints which included China's relative backwardness, over-population, and low literacy. Another crucial distinction is that Mao paid far more attention to political consciousness than Stalin. Also, he preferred peasant culture while Stalin preferred a bourgeois one.

There is a good example to illustrate the significance of political consciousness on selecting model workers. In the early 1950s a worker in Dalian always went to the factory earlier to make all necessary preparations before his work time began. Because of his professional attitude toward work, many suggested he should be elected as a model laborer. He replied, "It is nothing. I have been doing it this way since the Japanese came to Manchuria." This reply instantly disqualified him as a model laborer for having low political consciousness.<sup>83</sup> Before 1949 he could be selected as a model laborer for his devotion to work. However, after 1949 the CCP would not settle only for this, political correctness, which included acknowledging the leadership of the party, became increasingly important.

In the 1950s some model workers competed for selection for material reasons and appreciated the CCP's role in enhancing their social status, others also identified with the ideal of communism. Many model laborers considered themselves liberated by the communist regime. In return, they bravely took the toughest jobs, worked devotedly for socialist construction, and loyally followed party policies, right or wrong. This was exactly the spirit of the new socialist man, which the authorities wanted to promote. However, the market economy has destroyed a large number of socialist values which were highly publicized by the CCP in Mao's era. For ordinary workers the fame and material rewards which under Mao could be gained mainly by becoming a model worker came through other channels in the reform era. Today the title of model worker has degenerated into a decorative symbol for top officials, party cadres and millionaires. Even though the CCP claims Mainland China is still a socialist country, the economic and social structures have gone through tremendous changes or even metamorphoses. In reality, the criteria for electing the model workers run into some absurd contradictions just as the CCP is trying to integrate China into the capitalist system.

## Notes

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1. The figures before 2000 come from the All-China Federation of Trade Unions website, <http://acftu.people.com.cn/BIG5?67589/4612353.html>, (accessed on 23 November 2007). In 2005 there were 2,969 model laborers.

2. The term “*xinren*” in Chinese has no gender. In translation I use “man” instead of “person” for I fully agree with Jochen Hellbeck’s view that new Soviet or socialist man had distinctly male features. See Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 366(8).

3. Rufus W. Mathewson, Jr., *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975).

4. Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40, 54.

5. Nikita Izotov also became a Stakhanovite in the mid-1930s. Semen Gerberg, *Stakhanov i Stakhanovtsy* [Stakhanov and stakhanovites] (Moskva: Politizdat, 1985), 39.

6. “Rech’ na pervom vsesoiuznom soveshchanii Stakhanovtsev (17 noiabria 1935 g.)” [Speech at the first all-union conference of stakhanovite workers, 17 november 1935], I. V. Stalin: *Sochineniia* [I. v. stalin: works], ed. Robert H. McNeal (Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution, Stanford University Press, 1967) vol. 1 [XIV], 79–101.

7. For the most illuminating and detailed account of middle class values in Stalin’s era see Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middle Class Values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990).

8. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 233–44.

9. R. W. Davies and Oleg Khlevnyuk, “Stakhanovism and the Soviet Economy,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 54, no. 6 (2002), 397–98. Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 306–7.

10. “Nesmerknushchie traditsii trudovogo podviga, Rech’ M. S. Gorbacheva” [Immortal tradition of labor feats, speech of M. S. Gorbachev], *Pravda*, 21 September 1985, 1–2.

11. Yu Guangyuan, “Laodong chuanguo shijie (1)(2)(3)” [Labor creates the world], *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 11–13, July–August 1949, 11, 14, 13–14. Yuan Bing, “Weishenmo laodong shi weida he yukuai de?” [Why is labor great and pleasant?], *Jinbu Qingnian* [Progress youth], no. 219 (Jan. 1950), 12–13. Zhang Bi, “Laodong chuanguo shijie” [Labor creates the world], *Jinbu qingnian*, no. 222 (April 1950), 9–12.

12. “Shehuizhuyi jianshe shenglide Sulian gongren zhuangkuang” [Soviet workers’ condition in socialist construction victory], *Hongse zhonghua* [Red china], 15 October 1936, 3(N).

13. Xie Anbang, “Zhao Zhankui yundong de zuoyong jiqi jingyan” [The function and experience of Zhao Zhankui campaign], in *Zhongguo gongren yundongshi yanjiu wenji* [Collected research works on the history of Chinese labor movement], ed. Cao Yanping (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 2000), 156–62.

14. “Nongju gongchang jiangli mofan gongren Zhao Zhankui” [Agricultural tool factory awarded to the model laborer, Zhao Zhankui], *Jiefang ribao*, 29 September 1942, 2(N).

15. “Zonggonghui haozhao kaizhan Zhao Zhankui yundong” [Federation of trade unions calls to launch Zhao Zhankui campaign], *Jiefang ribao*, 12 October 1942, 2 (N). Gao Changjiu, “Jixu zhankai Zhao Zhankui yundong” [Carry on promoting Zhao Zhankui campaign], *Jiefang ribao*, 22 December 1942, 1–2(N).

16. Mao Zedong, “Zuzhi qilai” [Get organized] *Mao Zedong Xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1953), vol.3, 928–36; “Sishi niandai Yan’an dashengchan yundong” [The great production campaign in Yan’an in the 1940s], <http://www.globalview.cn/ReadNews.asp?NewsID=2206> (accessed on 25 December 2007). “Shan-gan-ning bianqu diyijie lao-dong yingxiong daibiao dahui xuanyan” [The declaration of the first representative conference of labor heroes in the border areas of Shanxi, Gansu and Ningxia], *Jiefang ribao*, 17 December 1943, 1(N).

17. *Renmin ribao*, 18 November 1948, 1; 16 September 1949, 4(N).

18. *Renmin ribao*, 23 September 1950, 1(N). For the gender issue of model workers, please see Yu Miinling, “Woman Holds the Plow?—Female Tractor Driver in the PRC,” in *Parting Ways: Politics and Economics across Taiwan Strait Since 1949*, ed. Chen Yongfa (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 2006), 171–206.

19. Zhou Enlai, “Zhengzhi baogao, (zhier)” [Political report, part II], *Renmin ribao*, 31 January 1956, 2(N).

20. Among them were more than 100 scientists and professors, 250 people in the arts and literature, and 31 athletes. Xinhuashe, “Yingjie quanguo xianjin shengchanzhe daibiao huiyi” [Welcome national representative conference of advanced productive laborers], *Renmin ribao*, 28 April 1956, 1(N). “Yipi wenhua yishu gongzuozhe, yundongyuan he tiyu jiji fenzi jiangchuxi quanguo xianjin shengchanzhe daibiao huiyi” [A batch of cultural and art workers, athletes and sport activists will attend the national representative conference of advanced productive laborers], *Renmin ribao*, 29 April 1956, 3(N). Later during the Hundred Flowers Campaign, some presidents of universities called for reevaluating the appropriateness of including professors at higher education as advanced producers. See “Chuxi quanguo rendaihui huiyi bufen daibiao zuotan gaodeng jiaoyu gongzuo wenti” [Attending national people’s congress a number of representatives discussing the problems of higher education works], *Renmin ribao*, 4 July 1956, 7(N).

21. “Shanghaishi 1950 niandu laodong mofan yundong chubu zongjie (xiuzheng gao)” [A preliminary summary on the model laborer campaign of 1951 in Shanghai, revised version] Shanghai Archives, C1-2-197, 21–23.

22. Jiangsu Archives, 3008/Changqi/6/3-4, 8 September 1950; 3003/Changqi/40/35, 4 December 1952.

23. "Changxindian jiche xiulichang xuanchu qici laoda daibiao hou, gongren hai bu zhidao" [Changxindian locomotive repair plant had selected the 7th model laborer conference representatives, but the workers still did not know about it], *Neibu Cankao* [Internal reference] (hereinafter as NC), 21 April 1958, 447. "Beijingshi zai pingxuan laomo zhong suo faxian de wenti" [Discovering problems in the process of appraising and selecting model laborer in Beijing], 2 March 1956, 354-55.

24. Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 170.

25. Mao Zedong, "Guanyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodunde wenti" [On correctly handling problems of people's internal contradictions], *Renmin ribao*, 19 June 1957, 1(N).

26. During the "Three Antis Campaign" (1950-1952) those who were penalized were not allowed to be in the candidacy pool. Jiangsu Archives, 3008/Changqi/6, 3003/Changqi/40, 4 December 1952, 36, Shanghai Archives, 3 February 1955, C1-2-1625, 76; B1-2-112, 13, 19; A45-1-138, 2-5; Liaoning Archives, DE22/Yongjiu/165, 11, 94.

27. Xu Yao, "Dangzuzhi yao jiaoyu ganbu zhengque di zhangwo xianjin shengchanzhe de biaozhun" [Party organization must educate cadres in order to correctly master the criteria of the advanced productive laborers], *Renmin ribao*, 8 April 1956, 3(N).

28. Zhou Jingyu, "Shangmianyao, xiamianzao" [Whatever the higher authorities want, the lower level makes it]. Ji Wan, "Jingren de 'chuangzao'" [Astonishing "creation"], *Renmin ribao*, 29 November 1956, 2(N).

29. Liaoning Archives, DE22/Yongjiu/6, 2-6; DE22/Yongjiu/164, 93.

30. The statistics are based on *Zhongguo zhigong laomo dizidian* [Dictionary of China model laborers], ed. Li Yong'an (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 1995).

31. The average age was 35.5 years old; the oldest 61, the youngest 17. The statistics comes from calculation based on *Zhongguo zhigong laomo dizidian*.

32. *Renmin ribao*, 21 August 1951, 2(N); Men Hong, "Hao Jianxiu gongzuofa shi zenyang zongjie chulai de?" [How was hao jianxiu's work method summarized?] *Renmin ribao*, 3 September 1951, 2(N). "Fulu yi: hao jianxiu gongzuofa de chansheng jiqi yingxiang" [Appendix 1: The making and impact of hao jianxiu's work method], in *Qingdao shizhi: fangzhi gongyezhi* (Gazetteer of Qingdao city textile industry) (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 1999), 230-37.

33. Hao Jianxiu, "Wo zai xuexiao li" [I am in school], *Renmin ribao*, 26 September 1954, 5(N).

34. Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 181-82.

35. Wang Erxiang, "Women jishu ren yuan yao dapo baoshou sixiang, zhongshi gongren qunzhong de zhizhi he chuangaoli" [We, technical personnel, must smash the conservative thought and pay attention to the wisdom and creativity of the labor mass], *Renmin ribao*, 3 September 1951, 2(N).

36. *Renmin ribao*, 12 April 1947, 2(N).

37. *Renmin ribao*, 17 June 1948, 1; 23 December 1948, 2; 18 March 1949, 2(N).

38. *Renmin ribao*, 22 August 1947, 2; 23 July 1948, 2; 28 September 1949, 6(N).

39. "Zhengwu yuan fabu: Guanyu zhaokai zhandou yingxiong daibiao huiyi he gongnongbing daibiao huiyi de jue ding" [The Administration Yuan announces: decision on convening representative conference of combat heroes, workers, peasants and soldiers], 21 July 1950, Shanghai Archives, C1-2-197, 6. "Zhou Enlai zongli mingling gongbu guanyu quanguo gongnongbing laodong mofan daibiao huiyi de zongjie baogao" [Prime minister Zhou Enlai orders the publication of the summary report of the national representative conference of worker-peasant-soldier model laborer], *Renmin ribao*, 19 December 1950, 2(N).

40. "Mao Zedong zhuxi daibiao zhonggong zhongyang zai quanguo zhandou yingxiong he quanguo gongnongbing laodong mofan daibiao huiyishang de zhici" [Chairman Mao Zedong represents the central committee of the CCP to make a speech in the national representative conference of the combat heroes and worker-peasant-soldier labor models], 25 September 1950, in *Jiangguo yilai zhonggong zhongyang guanyu gongren yundong wenjian xuanbian* [Selected documents of the central committee on the labor movement since the founding of the PRC], ed. Zhonghua quanguo zonggonghui bangongting (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 1989), vol. 1, 10.

41. *Renmin ribao*, 23 September 1950, 1(N).

42. *Renmin ribao*, 29 September 1950, 2; 2 October 1950, 2; 5 October 1950, 3; 21 October 1950, 2; 28 March 1959, 2; 21 October 1959, 2(N).

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## 10

### The Soviet Impact on "Gender Equality" in China in the 1950s\*

Jian Zang

THE SOVIET IMPACT ON GENDER equality in China was profound, especially in the 1950s when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) started emulating many practices of the Soviet Union. Of the various facets of Soviet gender equality, the one that had the greatest influence in China was equality of job opportunities for women. An entire generation of women in China benefited from this Soviet influence not only in their way of thinking, but also in the way they lived their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the studies of gender equality in China in the 1950s, first published in the 1970s and 1980s, were written by Western scholars.<sup>2</sup> Mechthild Leutner, a German scholar and an authority on women's studies in China, argues that the majority of Western literature on gender equality in China has emphasized the socialist character of China, thereby distinguishing the Chinese concept of gender equality from the Western concept of "women's liberation." Western scholars who have a positive view of the "socialist liberation" of women stress the benefits that the CCP has bestowed upon Chinese women. By contrast, scholars who focus on the negative consequences of "socialist liberation" argue that the totalitarian nature of Chinese socialism has prevented the true liberation of women. From this negative perspective, Chinese women not only lost their femininity during the process, they were also prevented from achieving real liberty.<sup>3</sup>

In more recent literature, most Western scholars interested in gender issues have turned their attention to the study of the changing status of women in China. These scholars argue that since the liberation of women has often been subordinated to the larger goals of class struggle and revolution, no real



## “Labor Is Glorious”: Model Laborers in the People's Republic of China\*

*Miin-ling Yu*

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THE MODEL LABORER (*laodong mofan*) campaign, launched by the Chinese Communist Party beginning in 1942, was derived from Soviet Stakhanovism. The CCP imported the key features of Soviet Stakhanovism such as material and spiritual incentives, upward mobility, publicity in official media, glorification of individual achievement, and making new men, but modified them to cope with Chinese circumstances. From 1950 to 2005, the CCP held thirteen national conferences and elected 25,239 model laborers.<sup>1</sup> The numbers reach hundreds of thousand if model laborers down to the county level are included.

The CCP had at least two goals to promote the model laborer movement. First, it was primarily to enhance economic production in order to win wars and to become a world power. Secondly, it aimed at making a new socialist man,<sup>2</sup> who embodied the concept of labor as glorious, who was selflessly devoted to production and socialist construction, and eternally loyal to the party. Although the forms of propagating Stakhanovism were the same in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, there were certain differences in terms of contents and emphases. These are the focus of the chapter. Its purpose is not to evaluate how much production was increased by the Chinese model workers, but to explore how the CCP created Stakhanovites, how it propagated the movement in order to mold new socialist men, and how people responded to the propaganda. As time went on the political significance of the movement increased. Moreover, it employed different propaganda strategies according to the needs of the moment. Although there were model workers in the countryside, this chapter mainly deals with the industrial ones.

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