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**GENDER IN FACTORY LIFE:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MIGRANT
WORKERS IN SHENZHEN FOXCONN**

DENG YUNXUE

M.Phil

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

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THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES

**Gender in factory life: An ethnographic study of migrant
workers in Shenzhen Foxconn**

Deng Yunxue

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Philosophy**

July 2012

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the gender identities of a new generation of migrant workers. Using a study of Foxconn workers in Shenzhen, various issues are investigated: the development of masculinity and femininity among migrant workers on the shop floor, as well as love, sex, marriage and the expectations of workers in their daily lives. Previous studies show that gender is important in export-oriented industrialization in China's coastal areas. In the first decades of the reform period, transnational production in Mainland China was organized around the image of "dagongmei"—young, industrious and obedient female workers. However, according to the fieldwork of this study, the situation has significantly changed. In the case of Foxconn, men constitute about 63 percent of the total workforce, the dominant workers on the assembly line. This shift involves important changes in the structure of work organization as well as the gendered subjectivities of migrant workers. While Foxconn management attempts to see employees as de-gendered workers, male workers try to redefine and reconstruct their masculinity through rough language, flirting and even sexual harassment. As a result, the complicated struggles over gendered meanings can disrupt managerial control. Moreover, this thesis also explores workers' lives, particularly workers' decisions and expectations regarding love, sex and marriage.

Based on an ethnographic study of Foxconn workers, this thesis argues that work experience, love, sex and family life are inter-related aspects of workers' lives that contribute to the contradictory and fragmented gendering processes of the new generation of migrant workers in China.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Since the 1970s, in the developing world, production in global factories has been organized around the image of young female workers. Female labour is seen as cheap, docile and dexterous, and global capital attempts to decrease labour costs and extract high levels of surplus value from female labourers (Mies, 1998; Lee, 1998; Salzinger, 2003; Pun, 2005).

The situation is quite similar in China. In post-socialist China, “a vast pool of cheap female labour” has fueled the rapid development of export-oriented global factories in coastal areas. It is evident that, since the mid-1980s, young, single and industrious *dagongmei* (working girls) have constituted a major part of workforce in international factories. Labour intensive industries can involve the use of female and flexible labour, low wages and coercive forms of labour control (Lee, 1998; Pun, 2005).

However, after decades of capital expansion and labour absorption, it seems that there are reduced numbers of female workers willing to work for low pay in factories. In the late 2000s, the female labour supply fell much behind that of labour demands in coastal areas. Facing the tight female labour market, increasingly factories hired men for the industry’s feminized positions¹. In Guangdong province, male constituted 57.3 percent of the total number of migrant workers in 2010². Regarding Foxconn, male

¹ A similar phenomenon is documented in Leslie Slazinger’s book “*Gender in Production: Making Workers in Mexico’s Global Factories*”. According to Slazinger, young females willing to work in global factories decreased rapidly in the boom of 1980s in Mexico. Facing a shortage of female workers, global factories adopted different coping strategies. While some imported women from remote areas, most factories hired men into the feminized industry.

² See Xia Lingyan. 2011. Guangdong sheng nongminggong wenti yanjiu (A study on the problems of migrant workers in Guangdong Province), *shuju* (Statistics), 12:66-68. (in Chinese)

workers make up 63 percent of the workforce in 2010³. The predominance of male workers creates new forms of work organization, labour control and workplace resistance, and also reshapes the gender discourse, gendered meanings and practices, and worker subjects on the shop floor.

This thesis attempts to explore the gender identities of a new generation of migrant workers by using a study of Foxconn workers in Shenzhen. Gender identity, in this study, refers to the process whereby male and female workers search for appropriate locations in gender relations through interacting with others in specific historical contexts. It is worth noting two inter-related aspects crucial in this thesis: how gender identities and practices shape factory regimes; and how the factory regimes affect the love, sex and marriage experiences and expectations of migrant workers.

1. Literature Review

In this section, the researcher attempts to review the extant literature relevant to gender identities and Chinese migrant workers. To begin, post-modern theories linking gender subjects to the operation of modern power are reviewed followed by discussion of identity formation process in specific production and consumption processes in the Chinese context. Further, studies of masculinity are also reviewed.

1.1 Gender discourse and gendered subject

Among literature touching upon gender and sexuality, post-modern theories have contributed significantly to exploring the fluid process of gender identity formation. According to some post-modern theorists like Foucault and Butler, sexuality operates

3 See Foxconn Technology Group.2011. *Corporate social & environmental responsibility 2010*, from: http://www.foxconn.com/CSR_REPORT.html.

as a realm of behavior where individuals construct identities and actively govern themselves.

Many discussions of gender and sexuality have been inspired by the work of Foucault. An influential book by Foucault is the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Here, Foucault discusses his theory of bio-power, and “*traces the centrality of sexuality to the circulation of modern power* (Pratt 2004:13)”. Bio-power, according to Foucault, impacts directly on people’s bodies as a ‘discipline’ through governance of the social body, regulating physical and spiritual health. More significantly, this disciplinary power operates through external institutions and also works through “interiorization”, the process of identity formation. For Foucault, gender identity is a project of modern power, in particular the vital object of discourse. Moreover, discourse on sexuality can be regarded as scientific knowledge concerning sex and gender. It can regulate individual gender identity, discussion and categorization (female/male, heterosexuality/ homosexuality). Foucault argues that “*the procedures, which no doubt exist in every single society, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery of self-knowledge* (1997:87)”. Here, gendered subjects are perused and crafted by individuals through the “technology of the self”. By constituting gender identities through regulatory gender discourse, people have contributed to reinforcing their own dominated situations.

Following the work of Foucault, Butler further explores how regulatory discourse regulates diverse gender identities and practices. In her influential book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler suggests that gender is performative and gender performances vary in different social contexts. Therefore, gender is fragmented rather than integrated, fluid rather than rigid, changeable rather than stable. Moreover, Butler argues that gender identity is constituted through repetition of gender performances. She states that “*there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; identity is*

performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results (1990:25)". Individuals come to understand their identities as women or men because they repeatedly perform these identities.

However, the style and content of gender performances are not free choices without constraint or guidance, but are regulated by conventional gender discourses. To achieve hegemonic gender identity, individuals usually have to act according to gender norms (the characteristics men and women are perceived by social discourse). At the same time, usually people need to reject those not fitting in the dominant gender discourse, such as the homosexuality. They tend to develop a strong sense of boundaries to stabilize a purified gender identity as male or female. However, by viewing gender identity as a construction of repeated performance, they open up possibilities to challenge or even subvert gender discourse. As discussed, Butler believes gender identity is not an essential entity. It is based only on the repetition of gender performances and this foundation is not concrete or stable. Although gender identities are constituted through discourses, there is no rigid connection between gender discourses, identities and practices. A failure to repeat a performance or a false performance could involve the reworking and readjustment of conventional gender discourses. Hence, individuals do have the capacity and autonomy to take up, abandon, and re-build gender identities through each act, and then contest and re-shape regulatory gender discourses.

Although Butler points out that gender identity can be understood in concrete social contexts, she does not further explore the relations between discourse, identity and geography. Nevertheless, without the perspective of space, it is most likely to ignore the material conditions (in particular the political-economic foundation) in which gender identity is embedded. Furthermore, the understanding of the specialized gendered subject is even more significant when we focus on a developing country like China, where economic exploitation and political authoritarianism directly oppress

many workers. For Chinese migrant workers, gender identity and practices are constituted both discursively and materially, ideologically and economically in concrete political-economic environments. Therefore, in this research, I will place the gendering processes of Foxconn workers in specific relationships of domination in production and everyday life in today's China.

1.2 Genders on the production line

It is generally accepted that gender is central to capital accumulation worldwide. Maria Mies (1998), who terms the mode of capital accumulation as a “*gendered accumulation process*”, argues that accumulation in the global economy is mainly organized through large corporations and global markets, and the gender regimes of these institutions make it possible for them to organize the labour process and distribute the products in gendered ways. Here, the use of gender division and gender stereotyping is not merely a means of control, but involves a great variety of situations in which gender identity is constructed. Therefore, it is essential for us to check the specific gender regimes in these institutions, and explore how gender identities and practices interweave with social institutions.

In China, many ethnographic studies of industrial workers focus on woman workers. Such studies (Lee, 1998; Pun, 2005; Hanser, 2008; He, 2009) suggest that gender, sexuality and femininity shape hiring and labour control practices.

In her study of woman workers in Mainland China, Lee (1998) argues that the ideology of patriarchy has been incorporated into strategies of profit-making by global capital. According to Lee, the gender hierarchy on the shop-floor is clear: women constitute the lower ranking assembly workers while most managerial positions are reserved for men. Moreover, male management holds the patriarchal discourse defining *dagongmei* as “maiden workers” to legitimate this discriminating gender

division of labour. The terminology, maiden workers, describes *dagongmei* as domestic-oriented female labourers waiting to be married off in the coming future. By stressing the family burdens on them (in contrast to male workers), maiden workers are seen as unreliable workers who do not deserve to get promoted in the company. Yet, woman workers are not passive objects of patriarchal and capitalist ideologies. They can subscribe to the maiden workers identity but they use new meanings to it. For them, maiden workers have the opportunity to develop skills and broaden horizons to create a relatively independent womanhood in marriage and family. In this way, woman workers actively engage in defining their identities and constituting their interests.

Pun Ngai (1999, 2005) is another contributor to the literature concerning the gendering process of Chinese woman workers. Compared to the desexualizing process in socialist China, in post-socialist China there is great interest in resexualizing female labour, for the newly arrived capital crucially dependent on such defined labour in sweatshop production. In her study, Pun suggests that regulation of workers' identities is a key discipline and self-discipline technique. While *dagongmei* are constantly reminded of their femaleness, such as being tender, gentle, submissive and obedient to management, they also wish to express femininity to distinguish themselves from degraded masculinity in the workplace. In addition, Pun notes the identity politics of women workers are constructed through struggles between waged work and married life. This contested nature of women's lives leads to inherent segmentation, suffering and conflict in gendering processes. However, the notion that the *dagongmei* is docile and submissive is only part of the hegemonic imagination of capital. Through gossip, jokes, fighting, screams and nightmares, *dagongmei* can disrupt the dominating gender discourse, resist the disciplinary machine and struggle for the return to being social actors.

In summary, these ethnographic studies discussed above prove that the workplace is a vital space involving gendered subjects in reforming China. Moreover, this gendering process is neither neutral nor automatic. On the contrary, it relates to the logic of global capital accumulation: by using more exploitable female workers, global factories help guarantee higher profit margins. Although these studies are about gender identity in the workplace, their findings help us understand broader political-economic structures, relations and the nature of Chinese society.

1.3 Sexuality, gender identity and consumption

Other scholars attempt to link the politics of sexuality to the logic of national modernization and the market economy. For them, the celebration of sexuality and gender difference is crucial to the state's legitimating project (Rofel, 1999, 2007; Yan, 2008). Moreover, it is central to the development of the commodity economy. Therefore, the construction of femininity and masculinity in today's China, far from being natural processes, are projects of both state and capital.

Lisa Rofel illustrates the role of the state in shaping sexuality and gender identities. In post-Mao China, as Rofel (1999; 2007) argues, the "naturalization" of femininity and masculinity was central to the imagination of modernity. Moreover, far from receding in this process, the state actively engages in naturalizing femininity and masculinity. By crafting a discourse of women's liberation, the post-socialist state legitimized itself as "enabling natural social relationships to come forth from the repression of Maoism" (1999:219). Therefore, women workers are encouraged to express their natural femininity in marriage and motherhood, explicitly rejecting the practices of womanhood in the socialist era. Gender has replaced "labour" and "politics", and becomes crucial in constructing modern identity. Nevertheless, this hegemonic assumption of gender identity is not without debate or struggle. The boundary of conventional gender discourse was constantly crossed by woman workers' behaviours,

such as refusal to marry, divorce and pre-marital sex. Feminine identity is constituted in dynamic interaction between the state and woman workers.

In contrast to Rofel's interests in the interplay between gender and the state, many scholars focus on the role consumption culture plays in shaping gender identities, especially the femininity. For them, along with marketization and globalization, consumption has grown to become the significant site for gendered identity configuration in China (Yang 1999, Pun 2003, Yan 2009). However, consumption politics in China has some significant differences compared to the western world.

Based on her narrative study of Chinese women, Yang (1999) discusses the gendered consumption space in China. Yang notes that China's new consumption space is characterized by the exaggeration and celebration of gender difference and female sexuality. In contrast to "erasing gender" practices in the socialist period, women are encouraged to be feminine by purchasing fashionable dresses, wearing makeup and emphasizing their curvy bodies. Although the consumption and public space is full of female images, as Yang argues, no space belongs to women themselves. On the contrary, these spaces are essentially male-dominated, situating women as objects for male eyes and desires. Yang indicates that the new construction of feminine identity has a definite material dimension. The sexual, seductive and fascinating figure of women is integral to consumerism, as well as the sex industry. In this way, capitalism not only commoditizes women's labour in the production sphere, it also "*directly commoditizes the bodies, sexuality and images of women*" (1999:52). As a result, the value of the modern female is largely judged by her ability to attract the male gaze, and many women invest in being good looking, which supports the makeup, clothing, and fashion industries in China.

In Yan's study (2009), the consumer figure in the post-socialist imagination of modernity is often associated with middle-class women in urban areas. While middle-class women have a new way to constitute identity through consumption, working-class women find themselves being excluded from urban consumption practices, for their consumption practices are constrained by their meager wages and disadvantageous class position. When they go shopping, *dagongmei* discover that there is an evident gulf between their identity as migrant labour and the idealized urban consumer identity. Nevertheless, this distinction in turn stimulates more desire on the part of *dagongmei* to consume commodities, for they are eager to reduce the disparity between themselves and middle-class women, and to become modern gendered subjects. To achieve that, they have to work even harder. Therefore, although consumption activities appear to be a route to liberation, they are actually more enslaved to global capital, and reinforce the oppression of women.

It is worth noting that these studies stress the specialty of Chinese consumption politics by comparison with western research. In terms of the developing world, they argue that hegemonic consumption desires pervade the Chinese working class willing to sell their labour in sweatshop production and spend their hard earned money on commodities, which benefits industry and commercial capital. Moreover, as cheap migrant workers in developing country, *dagongmei* consumption practices are deeply marked by their class and cultural labels. In consumption spaces, the distinctions between working and middle-class, backward and modern, rural and urban are demonstrated and remade in China.

As we can see, most studies of the gender identities of Chinese workers concentrate on females, while studies of the masculine identity of male workers are very limited (Louie 2002, Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002). It seems that “‘gender’ has become synonymous with ‘women’ because of the failure to focus on masculinity (Louie 2002:2).” Yet, as Connell points out, masculinity should not be imagined as

oppressing, static and homogenous power without careful examination (1995; 2009). It needs to be checked in specific social conditions. More importantly, femininity and masculinity are relational categories which operate fundamentally in contrast with each other. It is by interaction between masculinity and femininity that gender identity is actively constituted. Without analysis of masculine identity, interrelations between two genders are largely neglected in existing research. Therefore, we need to bring analysis of masculinity into Chinese gender studies.

1.4 Studies of masculinity

Robert Connell conducted a pivotal work on masculinity. In his influential book *Masculinities* (1995), Connell highlights the historical context of masculinity and the importance of gender hierarchies among men. Masculinity, according to Connell, “*can be viewed as configurations of practice structured by gender relations* (1995:71)”. In his understanding, masculinity is actively constructed in daily social interactions by people, using the resources available in a given context.

Based on this, Connell argues that masculinity is inherently historical. They are created within specific historical conditions and change over time. With this historical perspective, as Connell suggests, we can trace significant transformations in the images and rhetoric of masculinity in history. Moreover, changes of gender identity in individual life histories can be observed. Inspired by this viewpoint, when we analyze the working-class masculinity, we should not only explore masculinity in one specific workplace, but also in the dynamic of capital and migrant history as a whole. These contexts shape their experience through proletarianization, migration and work. Equally important, recognizing the historical character of masculinity reveals that it can be contested, reconstructed or displaced in certain social conditions, further affecting the gender regime and social structure.

Connell also emphasizes gender hierarchies among men. According to him, far from being homogenous, masculinity is internally divided by social settings, such as class, race and ethnicity. For example, the making of working-class masculinity in developing countries is obviously distinct from the making of management masculinity in the western world. Hence, we should trace the construction of masculinity in specific social structures. In addition, Connell notes there are four kinds of masculinity: hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalized (1995:76-81). Connell argues that different masculinities exist in relations with each other, such as relations of dominance, exploitation, alliance and inequality. Among these masculinities, as Connell argues, hegemonic masculinity is dominating, put into effect by only very few men. Nevertheless, most men (even subordinated ones) still support it, because hegemonic masculinity can help them reproduce existing relations of domination between men and women. In this way, men can agree and maintain the reproduction of the existing gender order.

In many ways, Connell's work is a cornerstone in the study of gender identity. It reminds us that masculinity and femininity are communicatively performed. Therefore, the study of gender identity should be examined in interactions between the two genders. These viewpoints are crucial to understand the multiple masculinities in the Chinese context.

Compared to Connell's analysis of masculinity, Mike Donaldson (1991) focuses on the making of working class masculinity. In his book *Time of Our Lives*, Donaldson illustrates how working class men shape masculinity in family (housebound) and workplace interaction. According to Donaldson, hard labour in factories becomes a proof of the toughness of male workers and a way to demonstrate masculinity. Yet, in capitalist production relations and the discursive sphere, alienated work and low pay also induce and reinforce workers' feelings of stupidity, ignorance and powerlessness, and constantly undermine working class masculinity. In this condition, labouring man

seek confidence, meaning and respect through love, sex and family life. For them, home is the place where they could repair and sustain their masculinity and supporting the family is central compared to the destructive work in the plant. In this way, “*a masculinity undermined at work is assuaged at home* (1991:99)”. However, it is necessary to note that Donaldson’s study is mainly based on the experience of male workers in the western world, in particular workers in Australia, and the construction of male worker masculinity in the developing world countries is significantly distinct from that.

2. Theoretical framework and methodological issue

2.1 Theoretical framework

This study seeks to understand the politics of gender identity in relation to the new generation of migrant workers at Foxconn. Gender identity is a dynamic process which is protean enough to be shaped by historical circumstance, and yet powerful enough to influence social discourse and structure. By exploring gendering processes, this study explores the lived experiences of young male and female workers and traces the politics of gender identity in changing patriarchal, political and economical structures in Mainland China.

This thesis also relies on insights from post-modern theories, labour process theories and studies of Chinese factory women and studies on masculinities.

Post modernism, in particular the studies of Foucault and Butler, provide a crucial starting point for my own thinking. Inspired by them, the gender identities of Foxconn workers will be examined in everyday interactions between people, especially the social interactions between male and female, which are deeply embedded in modern power and social discourses. Moreover, instead of viewing gender identity as an

essential entity, this study explores the changeable and various identity formation processes in specific social contexts.

In addition, considering the situation in China, I will relate the gendering process of Foxconn workers to specific production relations. Thus, this thesis will not only focus on the various and conflicted gender discourses on the shop floor, but also illustrates the concrete management style, labour control mechanisms, wage system, working conditions as well as working experiences. Based on this, I will attempt to understand interrelations between gender identity formation and the logic of capital accumulation.

Moreover, in this study, the process of gender identity formation will not be examined as static in a single workplace. Instead, I attempt to understand various gender identities in multiple spaces, such as workplaces, family houses, stores, discotheques and theme parks. The varied gender ideologies and practices in these spaces will be presented and compared. Furthermore, all of these variations of gender practices are regarded as contributors to the making and remaking of the gender identities of the new generation of migrant workers.

Previous researches on gender and work in contemporary China provide a significant framework for my study. These studies are a reminder that the relations of exploitation in production and everyday life are reinforced by each other, and work together (although not without contradictions) in producing gendered labour. However, it is clear that current gender studies in China have concentrated on femininity while the masculinity has been largely ignored. As male workers have become an important workforce on the production line, we should bring the study of masculinity into gender and work studies. My study tackles this serious analytical blindness by illustrating the multiple masculine identities of Chinese male workers in concrete social institutions. Based on this, the dynamic interplay between feminine and masculine identities will be explored.

Although the role of discourse, production and everyday life are discussed separately in previous sections, they are always intertwined with one another in constituting masculinity and femininity in real life. Therefore, this study will employ intersectional approaches to analyze how dynamic relations of class and patriarchy interplay, produce and take shape through one another, and then shape gender ideologies and the practice of migrant workers in the Chinese context.

2.2 Case Selection: Foxconn—electronic workshop for the world

Driven by the demand for cost-efficiency, electronic production gradually moved from the developed to the developing world, particularly in East Asia in the 1970s; during this time, electronic manufacturers in Taiwan became contractors to Western multinationals. To compete against each other, electronic manufacturer enlarged production and some grew to be huge world factories. Hon Hai Precision Industry Company, one of electronic manufacturer service (EMS) contractors, was founded in Taipei by Terry Guo in 1974. Spurred by increasing demand for personal computers, the sub-company Foxconn was created to manufacture computer connectors for global brands in 1985 and moved to Mainland China in 1988.

Since its initial investment in Mainland China, Foxconn experienced rapid growth (see chart 3). From 1996 to 2008, Foxconn's revenue increased from 0.5 billion to 61.8 billion, and the annual growth rate of Foxconn's revenue reached 30-50 percent. In 2001, Hon Hai became Taiwan's largest private-sector company in terms of sales, generating revenue of US\$4.4 billion⁴. Since 2003, it has been China's biggest exporter⁵. In 2008, the revenue of Foxconn reached US\$61.8 billion⁶, of which exports amounted to US\$55.6 billion or about 3.9 percent of all exports from China⁷.

⁴ Foxconn Technology Group. 2009. *Corporate social and environmental responsibility report 2008*. pp. 10-11.

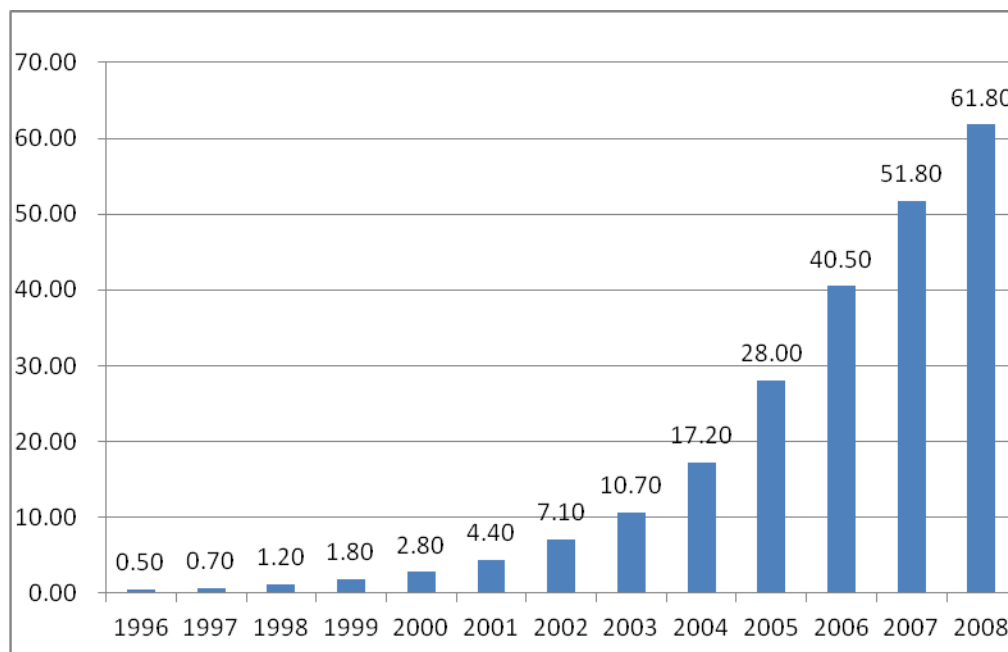
⁵ Foxconn Technology Group. 2009. *Corporate social and environmental responsibility report 2008*. P. 10.

⁶ Foxconn Technology Group. 2009. *Corporate social and environmental responsibility report 2008*. P. 11.

⁷ Foxconn Technology Group. 2010. *Group profile*. <http://www.foxconn.com.cn/GroupProfile.html> (in Chinese).

Revenue further increased to 2.9972 trillion NTD with a year-on-year increase of 53%⁸.

Chart 1: Growth of Foxconn's revenue (1996-2008)



Unit: Billion US dollars

Source : <http://www.foxconn.com/PullulateCourse.html>

Moreover, according to the strategic plan of Foxconn—“*China Rooted, Global Footprint*”—Foxconn located the majority of its production sites in Mainland China (see table 1). In 1996 and 1999, the Longhua and Kunshan industrial campuses were established (in Shenzhen and Kunshan), both in the coastal areas of China. Since 2006, running in tandem with government’s go-west development strategy, Foxconn also started to expand its production base in the middle and western provinces of China to save production costs. For example, in 2007 alone, four production sites were established in Chinese inland cities, including Langfang in Hebei province, Wuhan in Hubei province, and Shenyang and Yingkou in Liaoning province. As we can see in table 1, in 2010, Foxconn built more production sites in Henan Province, Sichuan Province, Hunan Province and Guangxi Province.

⁸ Foxconn Technology Group. 2011. *Corporate social and environmental responsibility report 2008*. P. 4

Table 1: Foxconn Production Sites (Mainland China)

Year	Provinces/ municipalities
1988	Guangdong Province (Shenzhen Xixiang)
1993	Jiangsu Province (Kunshan)
1996	Guangdong Province (Shenzhen Longhua)
2001	Beijing
2003	Shanghai, Shanxi Province (Taiyuan), Zhejiang Province (Hangzhou)
2004	Guangdong Province (Shenzhen Guanlan, Zhongshan), Zhejiang (Ningbo)
2005	Guangdong Province (Shenzhen Songgang), Shandong Province (Yantai), Tianjin
2006	Jiangsu Province (Huai'an), Hubei Province (Wuhan), Shanxi Province (Jincheng), Guangdong Province (Foshan Chancheng)
2007	Hebei Province (Langfang, Qinhuangdao), Liaoning Province (Yingkou, Shenyang), Jiangsu (Nanjing), Guangdong Province (Foshan Nanhai)
2008	Zhejiang Province (Jiashan), Jiangsu Province (Changsu), Guangdong Province (Huizhou), Fujian Province (Xiamen)
2009	Chongqing
2010	Henan Province (Zhengzhou), Sichuan Province (Chengdu), Hunan Province (Hengyang), Guangxi Province (Nanning)
2011	Guangdong Province (Dongguan)

At present, in China alone, Foxconn has 31 production facilities across different regions. These plants are huge, ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of employees. Longhua Foxconn, as Foxconn's flagship campus in Shenzhen, has more than 300,000 persons in 2010.

Since 2004, Foxconn has become the largest contract manufacturer in the electronics factory in the world. As an EMS contractor, Foxconn get paid for the assembly of the product or for manufacturing some of the inputs. Moreover, it relies heavily on its made-to-order business from top electronic global brands, such as Apple, HP and Dell. To compete down rivals to secure orders from brands, Foxconn has enlarged its production and market share by recruiting a huge workforce. At the same time, it has strict control over labour costs and has kept workers' wages low.

Tragically, more than 18 young workers attempted or committed suicide at two Foxconn production facilities on Mainland China in 2010 and 2011: the workers were between 17 and 25 years old. The startling serial suicides lead to a public relations crisis at almost all Foxconn's global customers (Chan and Pun, 2011). To deal with the crisis, Foxconn was forced to change elements of its management style. For example, to assist employees to cope with workplace stress, Foxconn provided additional recreational activities, such as a "Family in Love" activity and "Magpie Bridge Dating Party". However, the working conditions, including low wages, high work pressure and strict supervision on the shop floor, remain largely the same.

Foxconn as a case study is suitable and feasible. Regarding suitability, Foxconn's speed and scale of expansion to all regions of China is incomparable. As the world's largest electronics manufacturer, Foxconn can influence work organization and the labour market significantly. Regarding feasibility, I have participated in a Foxconn Study Group (FSG) organized by scholars and students from 20 universities from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. From 2010 to 2012, three surveys were conducted in 14 Foxconn production sites, involving more than 2,400 questionnaires. About 500 workers were interviewed in-depth. Therefore, I have acquired background information on Foxconn production as well as workers' actions. Additionally, the existing Foxconn workers' network also contributes to my fieldwork.

2.3 Methods of collecting data

As to methods of collecting data, ethnographic research has been conducted in both the Foxconn Longhua factory and Longhua industrial community. Besides, two approaches have been employed to collect data in this study, including participant observation and in-depth interviews.

Participant observation is the main method used in data collection. From 14th November to 18th December in 2011, I worked in the Longhua Foxconn factory as an assembly worker. By living and working with Foxconn workers, I had the opportunity to observe the work experiences and daily life of workers, and understand the gendering processes of workers as an insider. Moreover, I lived in the Longhua industrial community outside Foxconn for more than four months—from September to October in 2011, and January to February in 2012—to observe the consumption and entertainment practices of migrant workers.

In-depth interviews have also been adopted in collecting data. The interviewees included 22 female and male workers at Foxconn, all under the age of 32. These workers were chosen according to their different ages, education backgrounds, marital status (married/ divorce/ single), courtship (in/not in courtship), and jobs (assembly line worker, line supervisor, engineer and management staff). Based on this, the distinct gender identities and practices of migrant workers can be explored and compared systematically.

Here, it is necessary to discuss about the issue of research ethics. As I mentioned above, Longhua Foxconn has been chosen as the field site. However, it is not easy to

get into the gate of this factory. Longhua factory, as Terry Guo's Forbidden City⁹, is infamous for its strict, heavy-handed entrance control. Outsiders, who are not Foxconn's employees, are not allowed to get into the workplace. And it is almost impossible for me to get consent from Foxconn's management to do the research. In this situation, I hide my research identity from the managerial staffs and went through the ordinary recruitment process. In this way, I got the job on the assembly line. Although I used deceptions to get access to Foxconn, my co-workers on the production line have been informed of my research identity. After I clearly explained the purposes of my study, they agreed to keep my "secret" from our line supervisors and other managerial staffs. Additionally, all the 22 interviewees have also been notified of my student identity. And they have given me their voluntary consent to participate in this study. Moreover, in order to protect the real identities of my interviewees, all of them are anonymous in this thesis.

2.4 Chapter overview

This thesis consists of five chapters. The second chapter illustrates the changes in the Chinese labour market. It argues that the increasing demand on young female labour creates a shortage of the exact subject in the late 2000s. Consequently, male labourers have become a crucial part of workforce in global factories. The third chapter discusses the gendered work organization and the gendered subjectivities of migrant workers. It suggests that, contrary to the strategy of feminizing assembly work in 1990s, managers now attempt to construct de-gendered assembly lines at Foxconn. In this condition, female/male workers try to redefine and reconstruct their femininity/masculinity through rough language, flirting and even sexual harassment. The following chapter illustrates the love, sexual and marriage practices of Foxconn workers. It discusses how the gender practices of workers relate to their class status and working experiences. Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, argues that production,

⁹ See Jason Dean's report: *The Forbidden City of Terry Gou*, Wall Street Journal, August 17th, 2007
[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118677584137994489.html.html?mod=home we banner left](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118677584137994489.html.html?mod=home_we_banner_left)

love, sexual and family are inter-related aspects of workers' lives, contributing to their contradictory and fragmented gendering processes.

CHAPTER 2

The Labour Market and Foxconn Workforce

1. The Changing Labour Market

1.1 The emergence of a market-oriented labour market

The making of a market-oriented labour market is an important project of global capital and the state in the reform periods. During the socialist period, there was no real labour market in Mainland China. Labour power was forbidden in the market and the power of labour allocation was concentrated in the hands of the state. The reform policy at the end of 1978 brought fundamental changes to the Chinese labour system.

The reform, started in rural areas, was marked by de-collectivization of farming and the creation of a household responsibility system. Distributing collective land rights to individual households meant labour was released from organizational communes. Moreover, the household registration system was loosened and peasants could leave their land and seek non-agriculture jobs in rural and urban areas. Large numbers of workers moved to manufacture and construction industries in urban areas. However, the hukou system continues to deny urban citizenship to migrant workers.

Another important reform was the “open door” and linking China’s economy with the world. Through special economic zones in the early 1980s, an increasing amount of foreign direct investments (FDI) was lured to China. Since 2003, China received the largest amount of foreign direct investment of any country in the world. In 2010, FDI in China reached 105.74 billion USD¹⁰. In Shenzhen, the “borderland” of global

¹⁰ China statistic year book (2011).

capitalism, FDI reached 1929 million USD in 2010¹¹. In the same year, the gross output of industry funded by foreign investments made up 36 percent of total gross output of industry in Shenzhen¹².

The expansion of global capital in China was accompanied by great demand in the labour market and great transformation of labour relations (Gallagher, 2005). To meet the labour demands of global capital, enterprises in the private sector had more autonomy in hiring and firing of labour as well as wage determination (Ray and Ran, 2004). Labour power, like a commodity, now can be sold or bought in the labour market, and its price depends on the labour market and the employee's own bargaining power (Friedman & Lee, 2010). Moreover, peasant workers migrating from rural areas account for the majority of labourers in global factories. At the year of 2006, peasant migrant workers represented 57.5 percent of the manufacturing workforce (Lee, 2007a:6). Compared to socialist workers (*gongren*), peasant workers have been deprived of extensive welfare and social benefits from the state.

In fact, the labour prices of Chinese workers are maintained at a very low level. According to Lee (2005), labour costs in world factories are as low as one-sixth of Mexico's costs and one-fortieth of the US. Moreover, government statistics show that labour income share of China's gross domestic product (GDP) decreased from 56.5 percent in 1983 to 36.7 percent in 2005¹³. One reason for low wages is the unfinished proletarianization of Chinese migrant workers (Pun, 2005). There was life-long employment tenure in the socialist era, but peasant-workers are treated as temporary workers in urban areas with short employment periods, and should return to the countryside for generational and long-term reproduction. Moreover, since each rural family household is allocated a small landholding, many can consume products from

¹¹ Shenzhen statistic year book (2011)

¹² Shenzhen statistic year book (2011)

¹³ Zhang Jianguo, All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU)'s Director of the Collective Contracts Department, quoted in *China Daily*. 12 May 2010. Data shows that labour's share of Chinese GDP fell for 22 consecutive years (in Chinese).

the land or sell in the market. World factories can lower wage levels, providing wages only enough for the reproduction of semi-proletarian households instead of proletarian ones. In this way, world factories shape a specific process of proletarianization and make use of rural labour for production in the meantime (Pun, 2005).

In addition, the state intervenes in capital-labour relations through a legal framework (Lee, 2007), especially labour laws and minimum wage legislation, introduced in 1994. After forming capitalist production relations, however, the state has greatly changed. The Chinese state—at different levels—is dependent on large enterprises for economic resources to fund development (Naughton, 2010; Hung, 2008). To lure foreign investment, Chinese local governments have made great efforts to create a capital-friendly environment, including “flexible” enforcement of labour laws and minimum wage regulation (Hung, 2008). Therefore, labour protection and welfare are severely lacking on the Chinese mainland.

In conclusion, with the marketization and privatization of the economy, a market-oriented labour market has been created in China, and millions of cheap workers are involved in the international division of labour (Brooks and Ran, 2004; Lee, 2005). This labour market, which represents the reorganization of labour in the new international division of labour, is characterized by low labour prices and flexible labour. Moreover, the highly exploitive and flexible labour system spurs the tightening of the labour market.

1.2 The age and gender composition of the labour market

A crucial part of China’s economy is the huge number of migrant workers from rural areas. In the past three decades, they have fueled the rapid expansion of global factories. Statistics shows that the number of migrant workers increased from 38.9 million in 1997 to 153 million in 2010 (Cai, 2006; MHRSS, 2010).

Table 2: Number of migrant workers on the Chinese Mainland

Year	Migrant Workers
1997	38.9
2000	78.5
2005	108
2006	132
2009	145
2010	153

Unit: million

Source: For 1997 and 2005, Cai Fan. 2006. Scientific Development Philosophy and Sustainability of Economic Growth; for 2000 and 2006, Cai Fang, Yang Du and Changbao Zhao. 2007. Regional Labour Market Integration since China's World Trade Organization Entry: Evidence from Household-level Data; for 2009, Migrant Workers Survey 2009; for 2010, The Development of Human Resources and Social Security Statistics Bulletin 2010.

Although large numbers of workers has already been transferred to non-agriculture sectors, many scholars believe that surplus labour in agriculture sectors is still immense in the 1990s and in the early 2000s. For example, Cater, Zhong and Cai (1996) estimates that there were 172 million surplus labourers in 1990. Another finding (2002) indicates that there were 170 million surplus labourers in 2000, accounting for 46.4% of the total rural labour force (RSST-NBS, 2002; Liu, 2002). The SCRO (State Council Research Office) report suggests that “nowadays and in the near future, the supply of labour force in our country is still more than the demand in general (2006:9)”. From the above data, we can see that China has a large number of workers in the labour market and a huge reserve army of labour in rural areas.

In terms of demography, Chinese migrant workers are young. According to the State Council on Chinese migrant workers (2005:4), 61 percent of migrant workers are

between the ages of 16 and 30; the average age of migrant workers is 28.6¹⁴. In 2009, workers aged between 16 and 30 account for 61.6% of all migrant workers, and only 16.1% percent of workers are above the age of 40 (RSST-NBS, 2009) (See table 3).

Table 3: The percentage of migrant workers in different age periods

Age Periods	16-25	26-30	31-40	40-50	Above 50	Total
Percentage	41.6%	20%	22.3%	11.9%	4.2%	100%

Source: The National Bureau of Statistics - Rural Division: the report of monitoring survey on migrant workers in 2009

http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjfx/fxbg/t20100319_402628281.htm

Regarding gender, investigations show that male migrant workers outweigh females. According to a national census in 2000, female migrant workers accounted for about 47.5 percent of all migrant workers in 2000 (Liang and Ma, 2004). According to the State Council on Chinese migrant workers (2005), females account for 33.7, while males make up 66.3%. In 2009, males accounted for 65.1 percent of total migrant workers, and the percentage of female was 34.9% (RSST-NBS, 2009). From these data, it is clear that although the number of female migrant workers increased from 1990s to 2000s, but men still account for the majority of migrant workers.

However, the gender composition of the Guangdong labour market is different from the nation. Statistical data indicates that labour-intensive industries in Guangdong attracted large numbers of young female workers since the mid-1980s. In 1987, 58.3 percent of migrant workers in Guangdong Province and 63.2 percent from outside the province were female, according to the State Statistical Bureau. In 1991 female workers in light industry made up 62.8% of the total workforce¹⁵. Moreover, ethnographic studies suggest that in the mid-1990s, there was a massive supply of

¹⁴ See: state council research group. 2005. *Zhongguo nongmingong diaoyan baogao* (An investigation report on Chinese migrant workers). Beijing: Zhongguo yanshi chubanshe (Chinese yanshi Press). (in Chinese).

¹⁵ Shenzhen statistic yearbook (1992)

young, single, rural females keen to work in factories in coastal areas (Lee, 1998; Pun, 2005). In the electronic factories studied by Pun (2005) and Lee (1998) in the 1990s, about 80 percent of assembly workers were rural women. When the factories recruited new workers, teeming crowds of female migrants jostled before factory gates for jobs.

Taking advantage of the huge pool of young rural labour, foreign and domestic capital tends to employ migrant workers in “golden ages” (between 16 and 25). According to the Chinese Labour Market Information Network Monitoring Centre in 2008, 46.21% of jobs in the Shenzhen requested employees between the age 16 and 24; in 2010, over 40 percent jobs explicitly required workers under the age of 24 (see table 4). Workers at this age are deemed more suitable to high intensity production lines.

Table 4: Labour demands in different in Shenzhen (age groups)

Year	16-24	25-34	35-44	Above 45	No requirement on age
The 1th quarter of 2010	47.33	33.87	8.3	1.59	8.88
The 2th quarter of 2010	47.14	36.31	9.64	2.22	4.67
The 3th quarter of 2010	41.05	39.09	12.03	2.16	5.64
The 4th quarter of 2010	41.01	40.23	10.59	1.92	6.24

Unit: Percentage

Source: Chinese Labour Market Information Network Monitoring Center (CLMINMC), Analysis of labour market supply and demand in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province (2010) 16

http://www.lm.gov.cn/DataAnalysis/node_1452.htm

¹⁶ The data of CLMINMC was collected by the Department of Human Resources and Social Security in Shenzhen by investigating on the 30 largest employment agencies in Shenzhen City.

Furthermore, global capital also has specific demands regarding gender. Young oriental working girls, seen as docile, silent, diligent and cheap, are sought by factories (Cavendish, 1982; Lee, 1998; Pun, 2005; Salzinger, 2003). Hence, the demand for female labour is much higher than for male workers in global factories. For example, monitoring data indicated that 78 percent of jobs in Guangdong’s labour market were for female workers between the ages of 18 and 25 in the second quarter of 2004¹⁷. Moreover, in the first quarter of 2008, 86.73 percent jobs have specific demands regarding employee’s gender: 50.51 percent request female workers and 36.22 percent request male¹⁸. In 2010, more than 46 percent of jobs demanded females in Shenzhen’s labour market (see table 5).

Table 5: Female and male labour demand in the Shenzhen labour market

Year	Demand (Female)	Demand (Male)	No Specific Gender Demand
The 1th quarter of 2010	48.54	36.86	14.59
The 2th quarter of 2010	49.02	37.61	13.35
The 3th quarter of 2010	46.32	37.4	16.26
The 4th quarter of 2010	46.17	36.93	16.88

Unit: Percentage; source : Ibid

However, labour supply is far from “inexhaustible”. Research indicates that since 2003, coastal cities, especially in the Pearl River Delta, have experienced a shortage of peasant-workers (*mingonghuang*) (Chan , 2005 ; Cai , 2007 ; Liu and Wan, 2007; Cai and Wong, 2008).

¹⁷ Labour and Social Security Study Group. 2004. *Guangyu mingong duanque de diaocha baogao* (An investigation report on the shortage of mingong). (in Chinese)

¹⁸ Chinese Labour Market Information Network Monitoring Center, 2008, *Analysis of labour market supply and demand situation in the first quarter of 2008 in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province*. (in Chinese)

After 2004, labour shortages became more severe in Guangdong. Although labour supply grew rapidly from 1.374 million in 2001 to 12.75 in 2010, huge labour demand still cannot be met (see table 6). In 2010, the gulf between labour demand and supply reached 920,000.

Table 6: Labour supply and labour demand in Guangdong Province (2001-2010)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Labour demand	102.4	111.5	166.0	237	365.3
Labour supply	137.4	119.1	174.8	238.5	299.0

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Labour demand	729.9	952.4	857.3	1124.9	1367
Labour supply	482.2	670.7	730.1	1089.9	1275

Unit: Tens of thousands

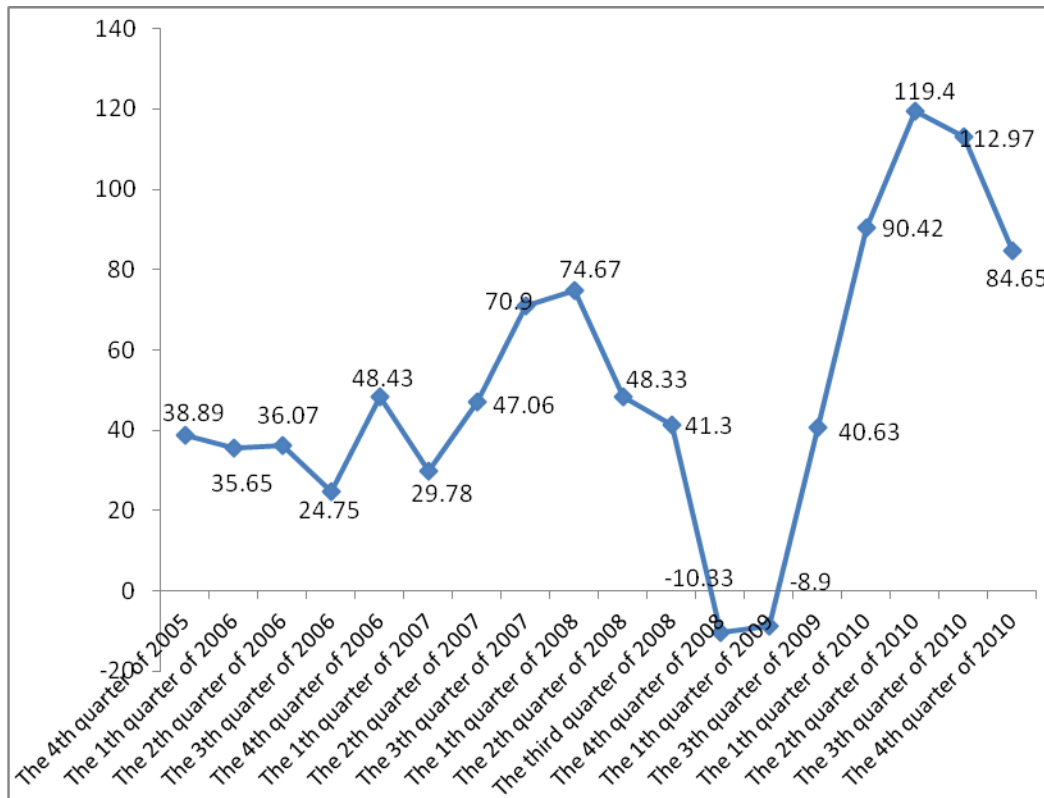
Source: The Labour Market in Guangdong Province (guangdong laodongli shichang wang) <http://www.gd.lm.gov.cn/page3.asp>

The Website of Statistics Information in Guangdong (Guangdong tongji xinxi wang) <http://www.gdstats.gov.cn/default.htm>

The situation in Shenzhen is more serious (see chart 2). According the Department of Human Resources and Social Security in Shenzhen, labour shortages reached unprecedented levels of 1,194,000 in the third quarter of 2009. Moreover, the problem of labour shortages is even more severe in the electronic manufacturing industry. According to CLMINMC, labour supply could only meet about 30 percent of labour demand in the electronic industry in 2010¹⁹.

Chart 2: Shortage of labour in Shenzhen

¹⁹ Chinese Labour Market Information Network Monitoring Center. 2010. *Analysis of labour market supply and demand in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province.* (in Chinese) http://www.lm.gov.cn/DataAnalysis/node_1452.htm



Unit: 10 Thousands

Source: Person

Source: Chinese Labour Market Information Network Monitoring Center, Analysis of labour market supply and demand situation in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province (2005-2009)

http://www.lm.gov.cn/DataAnalysis/node_1452.htm

Moreover, regarding gender, labour shortages tend to involve shortages of female labour (see table 7). In Guangdong province, female labour supply has fallen behind labour demand since 2005. In 2007, female labour supply only met 67.1 percent of labour supply, and shortages of female labour reached 1,398,600.

Table 7: Male/female demand and male/female in Guangdong province

Year	Male labour demand	Male labour supply	Female labour demand	Female labour supply
2001	29.62	69.50	42.21	67.87

2002	30.32	65.55	42.31	53.58
2003	46.92	97.11	73.15	77.72
2004	69.07	127.94	108.64	110.59
2005	111.49	167.92	149.95	131.09
2006	240.40	277.43	312.39	204.81
2007	345.67	385.46	425.06	285.20

Unit: Ten Thousands

Source: The Website of Labour Market in Guangdong Province (guangdong laodongli shichang wang)

<http://www.gd.lm.gov.cn/page3.asp>

The Website of Statistics Information in Guangdong (Guangdong tongji xinxi wang)

<http://www.gdstats.gov.cn/default.htm>

In Shenzhen, although there was significant shortage of labour from 2006 to 2010, male labour supply was much higher than demand until 2010, while the supply of female labour was much lower than demand (see table 8). For example, in the second quarter of 2010, female labour shortages reached 766.4 thousands, accounting for 84.76 percent of the shortage of labour.

Table 8: Male/female demand and male/female in Shenzhen

Year	Male labour demand	Male labour supply	Female labour demand	Female labour supply
The 1 th quarter of 2006	40.71	43.91	45.30	28.12
The 2 th quarter of 2006	37.28	38.16	43.92	26.25
The 3 th quarter of 2006	32.05	32.80	52.83	21.58
The 1 th quarter of 2007	59.28	65.75	59.63	40.60
The 2 th quarter of 2007	56.28	63.10	74.06	44.47
The 1 th quarter of 2008	65.61	66.57	91.49	39.88
The 2 th quarter of 2008	58.43	70.01	69.83	50.47

The 4 th quarter of 2008	57.41	91.99	72.60	69.05
The 1 th quarter of 2009	60.45	98.00	82.53	71.58
The 3 th quarter of 2009	55.53	83.17	87.49	55.80
The 1 th quarter of 2010	69.76	61.56	91.85	37.24
The 2 th quarter of 2010	106.65	102.05	138.99	62.35
The 3 th quarter of 2010	99.00	95.53	122.62	56.17
The 4 th quarter of 2010	73.51	72.55	91.91	41.81

Unit: Ten Thousands

Source: Chinese Labour Market Information Network Monitoring Center, analysis of labour market supply and demand situation in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province (2006-2010)

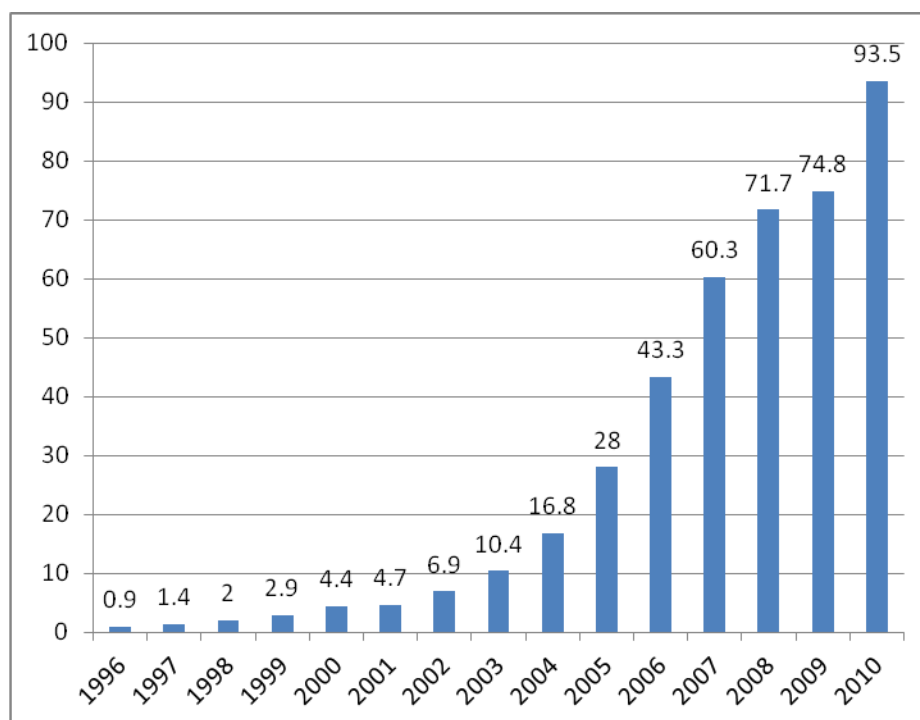
It is clear that the gender composition of the Shenzhen labour market is undergoing change. In the 1980s and 1990s, female workers made up a large part of the labour market; by the 2000s, the number of young women willing to work for low wages fell in relative terms. Factories began hiring men to work in export-oriented industries. From 2006 to 2010, female workers only met 64 percent of female labour demand in Guangdong (see table 8); moreover, men account for around 60 percent of the total labour force. Females made up about 40 percent from 2005-2010. As a result, the number of male workers in manufacturing increased rapidly.

2. The Foxconn workforce

As discussed previously, Foxconn grew rapidly since it entered Mainland China and spurred demand for young migrant workers. From 1996 to 2010, the number of Foxconn workers grew more than 100 times in 15 years. As of Dec. 31, 2010, there were 935,000 Foxconn employees with year-on-year increases of 25% from 2009²⁰.

²⁰ Foxconn Technology Group. 2011. *Corporate social and environmental responsibility report 2008*. P. 14

Chart 3: The growth of Foxconn: number employees (1996-2010)



Unit: Ten Thousands

Source : Foxconn Technology Group. 2011. Foxconn Corporate Social & Environmental Responsibility (2010), from: http://www.foxconn.com/CSR_REPORT.html

Here, an important question emerges: in labour shortages, how is the recruitment of such a large number workers in a short time possible?

The answer lies in the role of local government. As a matter of fact, the project of recruiting workers is not simply the automatic effect of market, but also represents a particular political program of government towards export-led industrialism driven by GDP-growth. Local governments, to lure Foxconn investment, have made great efforts to fulfill fast-expanding enterprise human resource needs.

Take the Henan government as an example. Since the establishment of the Foxconn production site in Zhengzhou, the provincial capital of Henan, government systems from the provincial level to the village level were all motivated to recruit workers for

Foxconn. In 2009, the Henan provincial government issued a document called “A Notice of the Poverty Relief Office about the Recruitment and Training Project of Foxconn Workers in the Poor Areas in Our Province²¹” that ordered local government at lower levels to fulfill recruiting assignments. According to the provincial government, about 20,000 workers have to be recruited for Foxconn in September and October, such as from remote villages and vocational schools.

Under pressure from provincial government, local government transferred rural labour to Foxconn factories in the name of “poverty alleviation” projects. For instance, the Neihuang county government was asked to recruit 1,000 workers for Foxconn²². The county government formed a special working group to recruit workers for Foxconn. While the vice county magistrate acted as the group leader, more than 10 government bureaus were involved in this group, such as the Human Resource Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Public Security Bureau, the Finance Bureau, the Agriculture Bureau, the Roads and Traffic Bureau, the Public Health Bureau and the Civil Service Bureau. Moreover, the county government is not only responsible for recruiting workers, but also in charge of training workers, giving them physical examinations, dealing with social security, and then transporting them from rural areas to the Zhengzhou Foxconn factory.

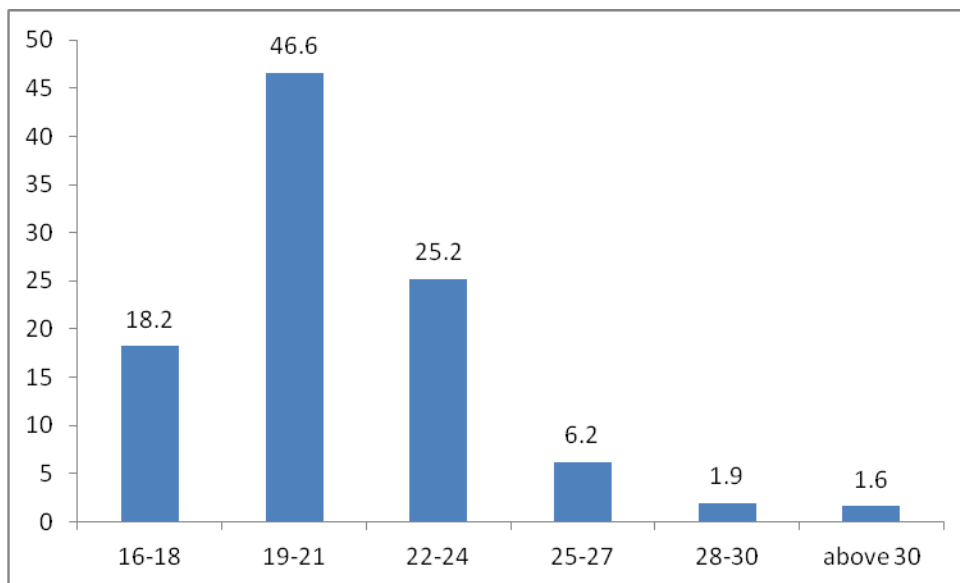
Additionally, the government also gave huge financial support to the recruitment of Foxconn workers. To motivate employment agencies to send people to Foxconn, the government agreed to pay the labour agency 200 RMB per worker. For people who willing to work in Foxconn, the government gives each 600 RMB for living subsidies. It is estimated that the two subsidies will cost the Henan provincial government 16 million RMB (about 2.53 million). Thus, the local state supports the recruitment of large numbers of workers for Foxconn.

²¹See the poverty alleviation website of Luoyang city: <http://www.ly.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/lvsfpb/cate1-8/201008/44039.html>. (in Chinese)

²² See the Neihuang government website: http://www.neihuang.gov.cn/info/news/zfxxgk/info_content/57913.htm. (in Chinese).

On the other hand, Foxconn has loosened its strict age and gender requirements. Before 2009, Foxconn only recruited workers between the ages 18-24 (Xu, 2007:235). Yet, in the face of the tightening labour market, Foxconn loosened the age requirement to 16.5 to 35 years old²³. Foxconn also collaborated with vocational schools to recruit a large number of student interns with many teenagers under the age of 18. In this way, Foxconn managed to maintain a very young workforce. Based on investigation of more than 1,700 Foxconn workers in 2010, the Foxconn Research Group discovered that 85 percent of respondents were under the age of 30 with the average age being only 21.2 (see chart 4).

Chart 4: Age distribution of Foxconn workers



Unit: Percentage

Source: FSG: Investigation Report on Foxconn by Scholars and Students from 20 Universities from Mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan, 2010

²³ However, most job applicants are still young workers rather than elderly workers. Because they believed that elderly workers don't have enough energy to suite the fast working speed and high work intensity in the assembly line.

More importantly, due to shortages of female workers, Foxconn hired a large number of male workers to work on the assembly line. For instance, of 150 workers recruited with the researcher by Foxconn, only 29 were female; the remaining 121 workers were male. The shifting recruitment strategy leads to changes in the gender composition on the line.

Table 9: Female/male employees and the total number of employees in Foxconn (2006-2010)

Year	No. of female employees (10 thousands)	Percentage of female in total workforce	No. of male employees (10 thousands)	Percentage of male in total workforce	Total No. of employees (10 thousands)
2006	21.65	50%	21.65	50%	43.3
2007	38.65	64.1%	21.65	36.9%	60.3
2008	33.8	47.15%	37.9	52.85%	71.7
2009	30.97	41.4%	43.83	58.6%	74.8
2010	34.6	37%	58.9	63%	93.5

Source: Foxconn Technology Group. 2009-2011. Foxconn Corporate Social & Environmental Responsibility (2008-2010), from: http://www.foxconn.com/CSR_REPORT.html

As we can see in table 9, the number of male workers has gradually surpassed the number of female workers since 2008. By 2010, male workers make up 63 percent of total workers, and females only constitute 37 percent of that. In Foxconn, males have replaced females to become the majority workforce working on the production line.

Moreover, the predominance of male labour has brought crucial changes to the labour process. There are new forms of labour control and workplace resistance, new gender discourses and practices and gendered worker subjects in the plant. Both aspects will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Gender on the Line

When I entered Foxconn's enormous workshop, I seemed lost under the bright white light: more than 2,000 workers working on the line, all wearing the same white loose anti-static coveralls and white caps. The uniforms hid the workers' gendered bodies and caps covered every strand of hair, and it was difficult for me to recognize gender at first glance. However, a closer look at assembly workers surprised me: men instead of women constitute the majority of the workforce on the line. To be specific, on the assembly line where I worked, there were 21 girls and 69 boys; among the 1,920 night shift workers, 1,511 were male and only 409 were female: men made up more than 70 percent of the workforce.

Enlightening ethnographic studies (Cavendish, 1982; Lee, 1998; Slazinger, 2003; Pun 2005) suggest that gender, sexuality and femininity form the basis of regimes of workplace control and play a central role in the accumulation of global capital. In the first decades of China's reform period, electronic assembly was regarded as "women's work" by global capital in Mainland China (Lee, 1998; Pun, 2005). However, along with the transformation of gender in the labour market, this has changed. Nowadays, males have become the primary assembly line workers in Foxconn. Here, several important questions emerge: how can men do "woman's work"? What are the control practices and discourse on the shop floor? What happens to the making of working class masculinity and femininity? Furthermore, what forms of resistance have emerged under management mechanisms?

In this chapter, I seek to explain these inter-related questions. Specifically, four aspects will be closely examined, including the constitution of de-gendered assembly lines, masculinized management styles and the making of worker masculinity and femininity as well as conflicts on the line.

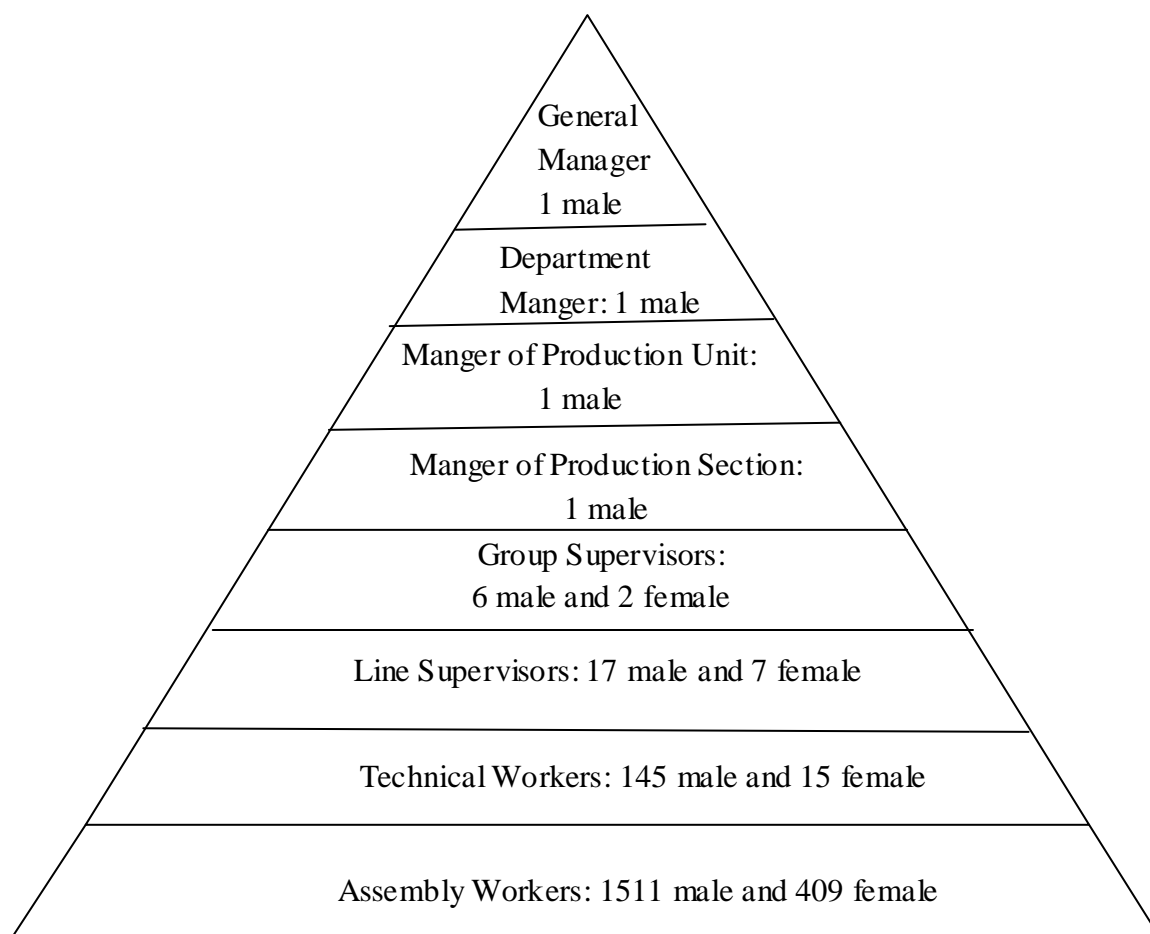
1. Constructing the de-gendered assembly line

In this section, I argue that gender distinction is not emphasized at every moment. As a highly situational terrain, gender distinctions can be made and elaborated in some situations, and be unmade and ignored in others. As to management practices on the Foxconn shop floor, gender differences are ignored and de-emphasized: both men and women work on the line as “ordinary workers”, endure high work intensity and despotic supervision for low wages. As a result, under coercive management, the basic division is between managers and workers, not between male and females.

1.1 The gender division of labour

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, workers’ gendered bodies are made indistinct by identical white overalls and caps. Moreover, according to Foxconn dress codes, jewelry, long nails, heavy makeup, mini-skirts or shorts are all prohibited, making gender more difficult to distinguish at first glance. In fact, the uniform and dress requirements are designed designate different ranking of employees: all ordinary workers wear white anti-static coveralls but line and group supervisors wear blue vests. Meanwhile, technicians wear blue coats and quality controllers—female and male—wear pink anti-static shirts and pink caps. Therefore, it is rank and job (rather than gender distinction) that are visible and obvious on the shop floor.

Chart 5: Gender Hierarchy in the Workplace



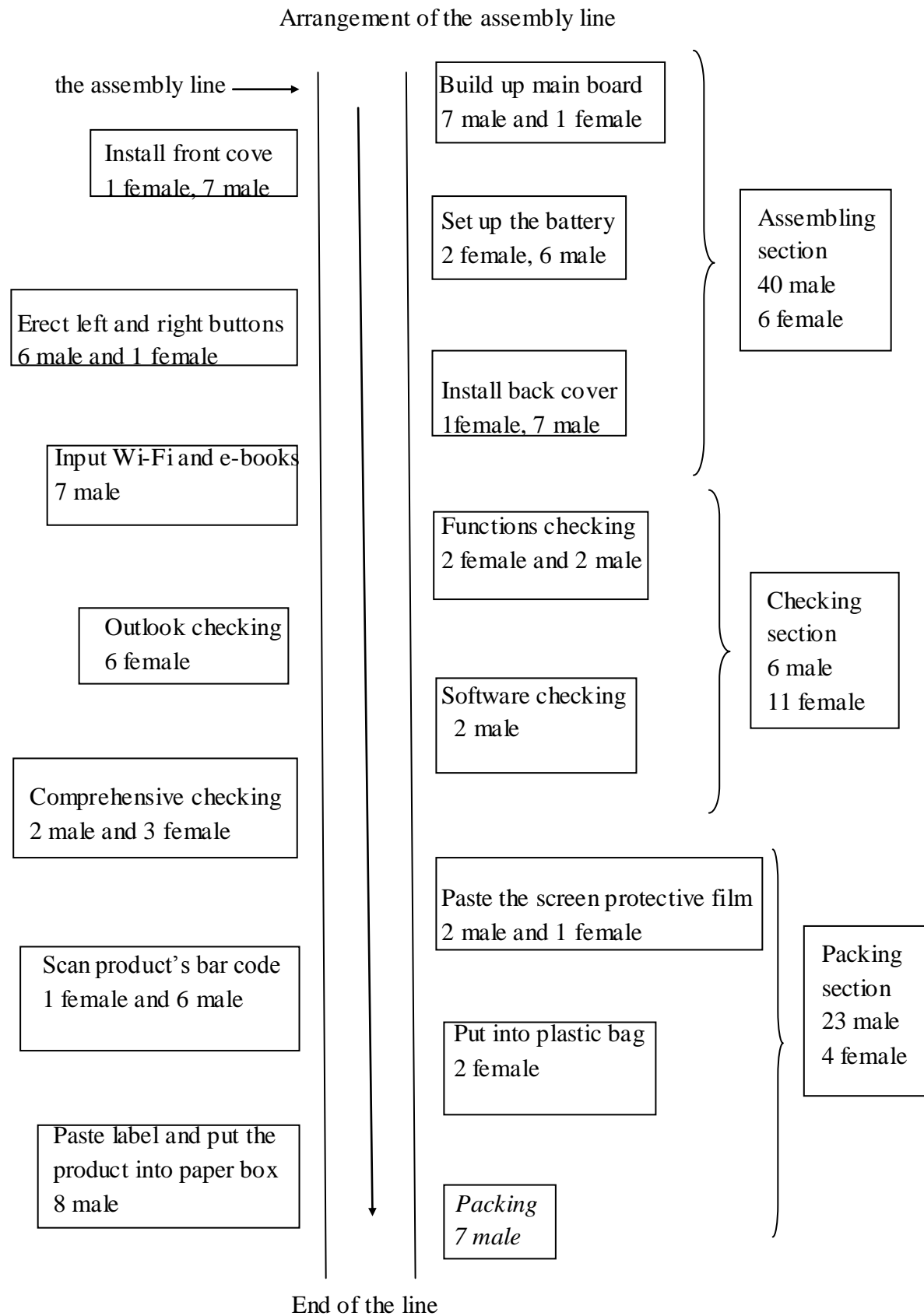
There is no doubt that gender hierarchy exists in the workplace: males predominate in important management occupations, such as general and department manager, manager of production units and manager of production sections; meanwhile females do not occupy any management position above group supervisor (see chart 1). In addition, males also occupy the majority of technical jobs: among the technical workers, only 15 are female and another 145 are male. However, this gender segregation has been blanketed by two factors: one is that most men are also allocated to the lowest ranks of assembly workers; the other is that for males and females in the same rank, their wages and work are quite similar. Therefore, the gender hierarchy has been justified by the different positions that men and women occupy.

As to the work organization, production is based on labour-intensive use along assembly lines rather than high technology or automation. There are 24 assemble lines in the workplace, and each have 80 workers for day shifts and another 80 for night shifts. Moreover, every assembly line has three operation sections—assembling, testing and packing (see chart 6). It is noteworthy that works on the line, which used to be considered as women’s work (Cavendish, 1982; Lee, 1998; Salzinger, 2003; Pun, 2005), are vaguely divided into male and female work at Foxconn.

Although this division is not absolute or rigid, it seems that most males are responsible for assembling: screwing, welding, installing and boxing. “Men’s work” is usually connected with printers, scanners, compressors and other instruments, and considered as more “technical” for it requires certain knowledge about machines. Besides, men’s work demands more physical strength and endurance. Taking boxing as an example, packing thousands of boxes in a day is toil and exhausting and is more suitable for tough masculine bodies instead of feminine ones.

On the other hand, managements arranges most females in charge of checking and packing sections, such as outlook checking, software and pasting screen films. For instance, all of the outlook checking is performed by young female workers. They have to find minor roughness and scratches on the surface of products, and examine the tiny gap between keyboard and screen without the aid of instruments. This job requires nimble fingers, sharp eyes and being mindful and scrupulous which are regarded as characters of young girls and not men.

Chart 6: Work Processes and Sexual Division of Labour on the Assembly Line



Nevertheless, the lack of young females makes it difficult for managers to keep gender segregation. The boundary between male and female work is flexible and can be easily crossed. In fact, men work on all workstations on the assembly line, except the outlook checking station. Consequently, it is common to work on female work stations. For example, on the production line I worked on, several boys were in charge of pasting screen protective film and comprehensive checking, which requires finger dexterity and patience. On the other hand, several females were responsible for screwing and installing. Therefore, though there was feminine work and masculine work, the division is neither obvious nor rigid.

Furthermore, while both male and female workers labour in different workstations along with the pace of assembly lines, production efficiency between them is not distinct. Even when there is difference between work rates, line supervisors attribute it to the “*attitude of working (gongzuo taidu)*” or “*moral quality (ren pin)*” of individual workers, not gender. Male workers, as well as managers, are convinced that men can work as fast as women on the line if they want to. In fact, according to my observation, some men even work faster than women. Lin, for instance, can paste screen protective film much faster than his female co-workers. He even acts as the “*master (shifu)*” for new workers coming to this workstation. Since the work performances of men and women are similar, the “feminized nature” of assembly work has been challenged and ignored.

More importantly, it seems femininity is ignored and absent in supervisor language and practices. Management online does not emphasize worker gender identities; rather, they address both male workers and female workers as the same “*ordinary workers (pugong)*” who “*lacks culture (mei wenhua)*”, and have no other choice but work on the line. During work, I constantly heard line supervisors remind the rebelling workers of their “*pugong*” identity. “*You are just an ordinary worker. If you have*

capacity, you can be an engineer. But you don't have diploma or capacity, just behave yourself and work well.” “*Who can you blame? You can only blame yourself for your bad study performance. You didn't go to college and you don't know the five pen input method (wubi shuru fa). Otherwise, you could sit in the office and use a computer.*” As we can see, the frontline supervisors, by stressing the “*low education*” of ordinary workers, attempt to convince workers to accept their low status in Foxconn, and legitimate the distinction between engineer/office staffs and ordinary workers by different education levels.

As to the production quota, each production line has to assemble 3,800 Kindles in a working day, meaning we have to do 3,800 repetitions of same movements every day. Workers complained that the work at Foxconn is much harder than at other electronic factories. For example, Jinshi, a 22-year old male worker, controlled two computers and two scanners at the same time. He used both his left and right hand to lift two scanner bars simultaneously, doing the work designed for two workers.

Jinshi is not alone. Many workers on the line have to work very hard to fulfill the high work quotas. Take my work, function checking, as another example. The operational procedure is as follow:

Step one: pick up the product from the conveyor.

Step two: select option “O”, examining if the screen changes into 12 graphics from grey to black;

Step three: Press the left button, check if the screen changes into black and white mosaics;

Step four: Press the left button, insert the USB interface, check if the light emitting diode turns from yellow to green;

Step five: unplug the USB interface, check if the back/ keyboard/ fiveway /menu/ home/ right/ left buttons are functional;

Step six: Put the product back on the conveyor.

During peak hours, my partners (one female and two male) and I check more than 10 Kindles at the same time. To catch up with the working speed, we have to press the buttons with both hands very quickly, making ourselves exhausted and stressed. After 10 hours of intense work, it is common for us to have stiff shoulders and neck ache. Here, I argue that the heavy workload makes assembling into manual work. For most workers, working at Foxconn requires more physical endurance and strength compared to other electronic factories. A famous saying among workers—“*Foxconn treats women like men, and treat men like machines (fushikang ba nvren dang nanren yong, ba nanren dang jiqi yong)*”—also implies that work is relatively masculinized at Foxconn. With the de-gendering (as well as de-feminizing) of work, men’s working on the assembly line is further legitimated.

Despite high workloads, both male and female operations are strictly controlled by the standard operation procedure (SOP), designed by the department of industry engineering (IE). With the implementation of SOP, all operations have been decomposed, designed and measured to maximize product efficiency and keep production rates high. Workers are trained as a standardized "parts" of a machine and further integrated into the production line. Many Foxconn workers call themselves “machines” on the production line.

Moreover, the SOP system also sees workers as interchangeable workers. Since all the operations have been standardized and simplified, workers don't need to acquire specific knowledge and new employees can familiarize themselves with work in a short time. With rigid instructions, a worker’s autonomy at work has been decreased

severely. According to most workers, repetitive work on the assembly line is “inhumane”. Workers do not get a sense of confidence, satisfaction or accomplishment in work. In a female worker’s own words:

“I felt like I am tiny dust on the production line. The line supervisor always said to us: ‘it doesn’t matter if you leave or stay. That’s it. If you leave, someone else will work in here.’ For this factory, we ordinary workers are nothing. We are just working instruments. If we are old or broken, they will replace us with a new one.”

On the shop floor, the working experience—such as exhaustion, boredom, powerlessness and degradation—are widely shared among workers, which in turn reinforce their collective identity as de-gendered ordinary workers.

1.2 Working time and the wage system

When I worked in Foxconn, I encountered the busy production season of e-books. To manufacture Kindles fast enough to meet global demand, we worked 10 hours per day for 14 days before having a day off. In November, we have over worked for 114 hours, which far exceeded the legal maximum limit of 36 hours of overtime work a month.

At Foxconn, production runs day and night: workers labour in day and night-shifts to fuel conveyor belts. When I was at Foxconn, I worked 15 days on night shifts and 15 days on day shifts. During the night shift, my working hours ran from 8:00pm to 8:00am the next day. During the working day, workers have two hours (from 11:00pm to 12:00pm and 4:00 am to 5:00am) to have dinner and breakfast. After the suicides in 2010, management arranged a 10-minute break every two hours, during which workers can drink water or go to the toilet.

In addition to normal working time, Foxconn also requires workers to attend admonitory talks (*xunhua*) by line supervisors when workers arrive half an hour earlier (with no payment). Moreover, when work ended, we spent about 30 minutes to exit the workshop: there were only four doors and more than 2,000 workers had to pass metal detectors one by one. Hence, most workers needed to spend 13 to 14 hours at Foxconn. While I spent eight hours sleeping, I usually only had two hours to take a bath, wash clothes, entertain and socially interact with others (see table 10). Workers usually do not have much time for personal lives.

Table 10: My timetable at Foxconn

18:00	Wash face
18:30-19:15	Meal
19:15-19:30	Walk to Foxconn
19:30	Gather and listen to admonitory talk
20:00-24:00	Work
24:00-01:00 (the next day)	Supper
1:00-5:00	Work
5:00-6:00	Breakfast
6:00-8:00	Work
8:00-8:15	Admonitory talk
8:15	Get off work
8:15-10:00	Bathing, washing clothes and entertainment
10:00	Bed

As regards payment, all workers are paid an hourly wage: 7.7 RMB (1.2 USD) per hour during normal working times, and the wage system is the same for male and female ordinary workers. By the time I worked at Foxconn, the monthly basic salary had increased (from 900 RMB in 2009 to 1350 RMB in 2011). However, after the wage increase, Foxconn started charging for food and dormitories. Consequently, I

had to pay about 400 RMB for food and another 110 RMB for accommodation. After wage deductions, I only got 1746.4 RMB (276.2 USD) for working 10 hours per day, 28 days a month.

As we can see in Table 11, about half of my salary was earned by overtime work. This kind of wage structure is very common at Foxconn: due to the low basic salary, most ordinary workers, to support themselves and their families, have to do a lot of overtime work. Without overtime pay, they would only receive about 800 RMB (126.5 USD) a month after deducting food, social insurance and dormitory costs. They can barely support themselves to live in Shenzhen, let alone support families. Therefore, for workers, a “good job” is one where there is much overtime work to do.

Table 11: Wage Structure in Foxconn

Basic Salary	Overtime Payment ²⁴	Factory Food Cost	Factory Dormitory Cost	Insurance Cost	Total
1350	1016.3	-400	-110	–about 100	1746.4

Unit: RMB

Furthermore, owing to the hourly salary system, wage payments are stable and predictable and, more importantly, not directly connected with production efficiency directly: wages are not used to incentivize work and maximize production efficiency. Workers understand clearly that their payments will not increase no matter how many products they assemble per hour. Therefore, a question emerges: how does

²⁴ My overtime payment was reduced by Foxconn. Total overtime pay should have been 1443.1 RMB and therefore 426.79 RMB was disregarded. This situation is not uncommon at Foxconn. After the consecutive suicide attempts in 2010, to respond to international media scrutiny, senior management required that overtime work should not exceed 80 hours a month. However, in the production sections, in order fulfill orders, workers needed to labour more than 100 hours a month. However, the production section was afraid they might be punished for violating overtime work regulations, so they didn't report actual overtime to the department of human resources, resulting in a reduction of payments to workers. For example, my co-workers and I completed 114 hours of overtime in November 2011, but only received overtime payment for 80 hours and another 24 hour overtime payment was disregarded.

management guarantee internal order and production efficiency at Foxconn? The answer lies in the despotic discipline system at Foxconn factories.

2. The making of management masculinity

If we say the work arrangement on the line is de-gendered and de-feminized, than the quasi-military management at Foxconn is a highly masculinized one. In this section, I will argue that quasi-military management, characterized by a set of strict disciplines and despotic punishments, is associated with aggressive, commanding and ruthless management masculinity. Management masculinity is elaborated and constituted to meet the demands of coercive production at Foxconn and in turn reinforces the "ordinary worker" collective identity and makes antagonistic capital-labour relations more explicit and obvious.

Quasi-military management may be best exemplified by the heavy-handed security guards at Foxconn. It is estimated management hired over 1,000 security guards for the Foxconn Longhua plant²⁵. Equipped with batons on their belts, security guards are responsible for keeping internal order and maintaining despotic discipline at the plant.

Longhua Foxconn is fenced on four sides by high concrete walls; some walls are topped with barbed wire. There are seven main entrance gates guarded twenty-four hours a day. At the gates, security guards check whether workers have punched their electronic staff cards when entering factory premises. There are also security checkpoints with guards around the clock at every floor of every production building checking worker identities.

²⁵ Jason Dean. 11 August 2007. The forbidden city of Terry Gou. *The Wall Street Journal*.

Additionally, workers are not allowed to bring USBs, music players, mobile phones or hard disk drives onto the shop floor. Meanwhile, management, to prevent workers from stealing products, ordered workers to pass through metal detector when they leave the workplace. Whenever workers need to go to the toilet, or eat, drink or leave work, they are checked by the electronic system. If they have anything that contains metal (such as metal buttons, watches, belts, wired bras and zippers), and can't pass the door, they will be body searched by security guards.

There are also rigorous rules on the production line: no talking, sleeping, and no walking around the work station. When workers have to leave work stations to drink water or go to toilets, they have to apply for an off-duty permit (*Ligangzheng*) from line supervisors, and each line manager has only three off-duty permits. If the supervisor denies the request, workers cannot drop work; even if they get the permit, they cannot be absent for more than 10 minutes.

After the waves of worker suicides, Foxconn developed a set of greeting gestures to cheer workers up. During the admonitory talk (*xunhua*), when the management asked, “*how are you today?*”, workers are supposed to say in unison “*good! good! very good! yeah!*” Moreover, they have to thumbs up and reach arms out three times; while saying “*yeah*”, workers are required to lift arms and let arms form a 45-degree angle with the body. Yet, many workers think this greeting is ridiculous and foolish, and makes them feel manipulated.

According to workers, the core of quasi-military management is “obedience”. In Lily’s understanding, military management is “*do whatever the supervisor asks you to do. Whatever he is asked, you do it, for no reason.*” Another male worker Zhang explained that “*this is military management: I am the boss (laoda). You have to do whatever I ask. The party-state (dangguo) asks you to die, and then you go to die. If*

there is a mistake, the subordinates have to pay the price. While the superior yells at the subordinate, the subordinate has no one to yell at. That is why most suicides are by ordinary workers.” As we can see, a rigidly hierarchical distinction has been stressed over and over through discipline. Moreover, all of these despotic regulations and disciplines show no respect or trust of ordinary workers. To the contrary, quasi-military management emphasizes the low-class status of production workers on a daily basis.

Another aspect of quasi-military management is various punishments. In the “*Foxconn technology group employee handbook*”, there are 127 articles about punishments, including warnings, recording demerits and expelling workers. In pre-work training, the human resource department warned us that staying in the toilet for more than 10 minutes will provoke an oral warning; chatting during work gets a written warning; sabotage or striking will lead to dismissal. Moreover, according to the Foxconn Study Group in 2010, 16.4 percent of workers have experienced physical punishment by management or security guards, and 54.6 percent feel unsatisfied or angry about factory regulations and management.

It seems that verbal violence is also systemic in the Foxconn system. Supervisors on the line tend to yell rather than persuade, and verbal abuse becomes a routine control practice. Aiqi, a 25 year-old girl said: “*do you know the most commonly used word in Foxconn’s management? It is ‘fuck’!*” Lily, a 17 year-old girl, even told me that “*I think Foxconn is still a slave society. The superiors scold you whenever they like, and we, the subordinates, simply suffer silently.*” When I was working in Foxconn, I heard line supervisor yelling at workers who made a mistakes. They said: “*Get out of here (gun chuqu)!*” “*Are you an idiot?!*” “*Are you dead?!*” “*You are a pig!*” “*You are just a piece of garbage.*”

Qing, a 17-year old girl from Chongqing, described her experience of being cursed:

“When I first worked at Foxconn, I was not familiar with the operation, and I made mistakes. And then, the boss (a line supervisor) scolded me. She said: ‘Why are you as stupid as a pig?!’ I felt so bad. I have never been spoken to like this. She said so many bad words. Sometimes when she yelled at me, I felt she is not yelling at a person, but a dog, or a pig.”

As well as verbal abuse, workers making mistakes may also be scolded, forced to stand, write confession letters and copy the quotations of Terry Guo many times. On the production line, if production quotas are not met, all workers have to stand for 30 to 60 minutes as punishment after work without payment. Wangfa, one of my male co-workers, was asked to write a 500 word confession letter just because he forgot to scan a product. He was asked to read the letter in front of us during admonitory talk.

Under highly violent control mechanisms, workers called Foxconn’s management culture “*diaoren culture*”. Literally, “*diao*” in Chinese is an indecent term for male genital organs, and “*ren*” means people. At Foxconn, this phrase usually means to bully, scold, curse or name call someone, and it is commonly used when supervisors, especially male supervisors, yell at low-level workers or staff. It is worth noting that workers use the word for male genital organs to symbolize Foxconn management. This metaphor also implies that the managerial mechanism is highly masculinized.

Here, I want to assert that the aggressive masculinity of management is not pre-existing; rather, it is emphasized and developed at Foxconn. To be in this management, one has to acquire generic, ruthless and competitive managerial masculinity. A male worker Shen told me: “*one of my friends was selected to be a line supervisor, but he quit a few weeks later. He doesn’t know how to yell at others, and*

he doesn't want to yell at others." Mr. Lin, who graduated at university and works in a human recourse department explained:

"Many line supervisors only graduated from junior high school. They can do management work, because they are capable of oppressing workers and guarantee production output. They are more aggressive and more vicious than others, and they have the capacity of controlling others. Let me say in this way, the ones that get promoted are the ones who have the more ruthless methods (shouduan hen)."

Moreover, ruthless masculinity is shaped and reshaped on the shop floor to meet the demand of production organization. For frontline supervisors, they are under great pressure to make workers work at high speed and ensure high quality products. There are large computer screens in the meeting room, which is called a "War Room (zhanqingshi)" at Foxconn, which shows the line production output every hour of every day. If an assembly line fails to reach production targets, the line supervisor may be scolded by the group supervisor. Moreover, as we mentioned before, there is no "consent" on the shop floor, and workers have to work fast and earnestly. Hence, under production pressure, many line supervisors resort to threats and yelling, just as one supervisor Yin told me: *"If you don't want to be yelled by your boss, you have to yell at the subordinates."* Therefore, under the highly coercive working environment, a more ruthless and offensive management masculinity is developed in the workplace.

Since the management subject is high masculinized, female line supervisors have to act like men: that is, work long hours, focus on production and quality, use dirty words and yell at assembly workers. My co-workers call a ferocious female line supervisor Zheng as *"an old monster in the Black Mountain"*. Xiao Hei, a 20 year old male worker, talked about her with an exaggerated expression: *"When she loses her temper, she would shout and pound the table angrily. It seems the table would fall*

into pieces, and you could hear her roar half the workshop away.” As a matter of fact, some male supervisors are more harsh and offensive than Zheng, but they did not cause discussions like this. The problem is the disconnection between female bodies and the masculinized management style. In order to be a frontline supervisor, you have to acquire toughness, physical dominance and aggressiveness—which are regarded as the components of masculinity (instead of femininity). For a female, experiencing and seeing themselves in this management role is conflicting and untenable, which in turn legitimates male-dominated gender hierarchy in the workplace to some extent.

In brief, the quasi-military management is inter-locked with insensitive, commanding and offensive masculinity. This happens not because man is naturally aggressive or violent or has a talent for management; instead, management masculinity is made and emphasized in an aggressive way under highly despotic capitalist labour processes and daily discipline.

3. The making of worker masculinity and femininity

In the de-gendered and despotic workplace, what happens to the making of worker masculinity and femininity? In this section, I will try to answer this question by viewing the gendering process as contested terrain. Supervisors and workers can address each other’s gender on the shop floor (Salzinger, 2003). Compared to the de-gendering practices of Foxconn management, workers, especially male workers have remade and celebrated gender difference through making masculine identity, flirtation and sexual harassment.

3.1 “*Diaomao*” as identity

In Foxconn, “*diaoren*” management has nurtured workers identity through “*diaomao*”. *Diaomao* is the most popular calling among Foxconn workers, especially male workers. As mentioned above, “*diao*” means male genitalia, and “*mao*” means hair, so literally, the term refers to the pubic hair of men. In the workplace, you can hear male workers calling each other *diaomao* in many different and conflicted situations. For example, in most occasions, *diaomao* are used to greet and joke with others. By stating that we are all *diaomao*, co-workers show their intimate and close relationship with each other. Yet, *diaomao* can also be used to curse people. In this occasion, using *diaomao* is a way to remind others of low-status and humility being in the factory, which usually causes quarrels and even fights among workers.

In the first place, I argue that *diaomao* is a gendered class identity. Compared to the identity *dagongzai* (working boys), which means young migrant male workers working for capitalist bosses (Lee 1998; Pun, 2005; Yan, 2007), *diaomao* is even more negative and depreciating. As a language created and widely used by Foxconn workers, *diaomao* shows the self-positioning and self-awareness of a young generation of migrant workers about their class status in contemporary China. By likening themselves to *diaomao*—pubic hair—which is powerless, trivial, degrading, numerous but fragile, male workers illustrate their frustration and disappointment about their devalued labour power and humble existence in the global factory.

The construction of the *diaomao* identity is embedded in the daily working experience in the workplace. As discussed before, in a highly coercive working environment, most male workers do not find a sense of confidence, control or accomplishment; what is worse, their sense of independence, pride, self-value and self-esteem, a fundamental part of masculinity—has been eroded by the repetitive, stupid and low-paid work on the shop floor. Furthermore, the daily despotic supervision also damages male workers’ masculine identity. While management can develop and reinforce

masculinity through commanding and controlling others, working-class men, being strictly commanded and controlled, find their masculinity constantly questioned, undermined and degraded.

Second, *diaomao* is also a masculine identity. Through linking themselves with male genitalia constantly, male workers assert and unfold their maleness, and make the workplace a relative masculine space. It seems that the collective identity of *diaomao* builds on a working-class masculine solidarity. On the other hand, this is a solidarity that divides male workers from female workers—it is not appropriate for a Foxconn girl to share the identity of *diaomao*. Therefore, this collective identity is based on the masculinity and the rejection of femininity. In fact, the making of the masculine *diaomao* identity is connected with the subordination of women on the shop floor, as we will discuss below.

One outstanding character of being a *diaomao* is using dirty words, such as bitch (*biaozi*), whore (*jianren*), son of a bitch (*ta ma de*), fuck (*cao*), motherfucker (*cao ni ma*) and sucker (*sha b*²⁶). For *diaomao*, dirty words are weapons to fight back and express anger and dissatisfaction towards Foxconn management. It is the violent working environment which pushes workers to speak in such an aggressive way, like Jinshi said: “*you have to act like a hooligan (liumang) in order to live in Foxconn*”. Another male worker Li commented:

“Foxconn’s corporate culture is totally rubbish. Frankly, it turns good people into bad people. In high school and college, we behave politely to our classmates and teachers. We seldom speak dirty words, and we don’t want to use dirty words. But in here, you can’t survive without using them. Do you know that people in Foxconn called talking farting? It is so uncivilized, and we would never use this expression at school.”

²⁶ In Chinese, “sha” means stupid, and “b” usually refers to female genital organ—vagina. Therefore, this word is based on contempt for women’s stupidity.

However, as we can see, gender discrimination was apparent and articulated in the use of curse words. For example, dirty words—bitch (*biaozi*), whore (*jianren*), son of a bitch (*ta ma de*)—are based on contempt for women’s triviality and stupidity; while other words like fuck (*cao*) and motherfucker (*cao ni ma*) implies sexual assault of females. When conflicts occur between males and females, many dirty words with strong gender discrimination are used against women, reminding them of their inferior status to men.

In the highly masculinized environment, what happens to the shaping of femininity? As we discussed before, femininity is ignored and invisible in management practices. Some line supervisors even criticize female characteristics such as sensitivity and tenderness and thinking these characteristics do not fit masculinized management. Despite management practice, some girls, to protect themselves and fight back, also get rid of some feminine qualities—gentleness, obedience, sensitivity and tenderness—and become more rebellious and bold. In the workplace, the boundary of conventional gender discourses is constantly challenged by woman workers’ “improper” behaviors, such as yelling, cursing, fighting and speaking dirty words. A female worker Lian describes: *“I learned nothing in Foxconn except the word ‘fuck’ (laugh)! In Foxconn, every girl knows how to quarrel, and almost every girl’s pet phrase is ‘fuck’!”* Another female worker Chun said: *“Some girls, when they first arrive at Foxconn, didn’t know how to fight or curse, but the environment on the shop-floor affects them. Actually, they learn all the dirty words here. No matter what a tender girl you used to be, you will know how to fight and curse people after staying here for two months.”*

However, it is accepted by most boys and girls that girls shouldn’t speak dirty words; especially if they imply sexual assault. Once, Yufang, a 19 year-old girl from Guangxi

province, shouted “*Fuck you father!*” to a male worker in the workplace. Seeing this, Lily was totally shocked: “*Oh my heaven! She is a girl. How could she even utter something like that?*” And after work, Lily talked to Yufang: “*You shouldn’t speak dirty words. You are a human (ren).*” It is interesting that when girls cross the boundary of “traditional women”, it is male and other girl workers (rather than management) that address their female identity.

To defend themselves, girls on the line also stress their economic independence and equal work status as male workers. One night, I heard an interesting debate between male and female workers. During work, Xiaohei and Jinshi complained how hard their life is, for they have to support their girlfriends and future wives. And women are a huge burden in their lives. Aiqi quickly replied: “*We don’t need you to support us. Women can go out and work by themselves, as long as you don’t need them to have babies.*” Other girls on the line laughed. The boys ask Aiqi not be so strong and tough. Xiaohei even quoted a traditional common saying: “*Mediocrity is the virtue of women (nvzi wucai bianshi de)*”. Then Aiqi said: “*Didn’t you just complained about the heavy burden of supporting your wife? Now your wife could support herself, just like you do here. But you are complaining about her capability.*” By stating they could work and earn money like men, females attempt to challenge the existing gender discrimination system and achieve a more equal gender system in and out of workplace.

In brief, responding to supervisors’ non-gendered practices and inhuman managements, male workers constitute the *diaomao* identity. This identity, based on class and the gendered experience of male workers on the shop floor, opens a perspective for us to explore the making of working class masculinity in today’s global factory. However, this identity is also based on gender discrimination and the subordination of women, which can be demonstrated in the use of dirty words

involving gender discrimination. On the other hand, female workers, in order to fight back against masculinized management and gender discrimination, become more rebellious and aggressive, and actively redefine themselves as equal work partners of male workers. In this condition, worker subjects who emerge—male and female alike—are masculinized rather than feminized.

3.2 The politics of flirting and sexual harassment

Flirtation is another vital re-gendering process. Contrasting with de-sexualized work on the shop floor, flirtation is a significant situation for male/female workers reconstructing and celebrating their masculinities/femininities. In the situation of flirtation, gender has replaced “labour” and becomes the core site constructing feminine and masculine identity.

In Pollert’s (1981) study of a British tobacco factory, she suggests that women often react to looser disciplinary control by flirting with male co-workers. Based on a study of Mexican workers, Salzinger (2003) argues that men and women actively engage in casual sexual relations to alleviate the boredom of routine and hard work, and redefine and claim a legitimate masculinity/femininity on the shop floor. The situation is very similar on Foxconn’s shop floor. For Foxconn workers, flirtation is a central stage to perform and reshape their gender differences in the workplace.

Hong is a romantic 20 year old boy from Sichuan province. In the workplace, he likes to sing romantic songs, such as “I honestly love you” and “love song of a bachelor” in the workplace, sometimes even daydreams of a beautiful beach where he “*can hug my lover for a life-long, and we will go to see the sunset together.*” During work, Hong was always flirting with girls. Several dialogues are as follows:

-“*Guess what I did after I returned to my dormitory last night.*”

-“*Taking a shower?*”

-“No. I found a painter and I asked him to paint your portrait on my blanket, so I could hold you to sleep every night.”

Another example is:

-“Give me one!”

-“What?”

-“Your sweet kiss!”

Hong is not alone. Many workers—males and females alike—engaged in flirtation. For example, during the night shift, when a female QC (quality control staff) comes to the line, several boys will whistle and tease her: “*Hey, pretty! Come here! You big brother (da gege) is waiting for you!*” While the girl blushed and replied: “*Screw you!*”, all the boys and girls on the line laughed.

It is evident that the flirting is inter-connected with the experience of working. Hong explained to me: “*I would bore myself to death if I don’t sing or speak in one hour. Keeping silent and working is too lonely.*” Another female worker Shanshan also told me that: “*You can’t survive 10 hours work without talking. If you don’t chat, you would become a real machine.*” As mentioned above, the work on the assembly line is mind-bogglingly boring and the management style is highly coercive and inhumane. In this condition, flirting becomes significant entertainment for both young men and women on the shop floor, which distract them from production and relieves the experience of alienation.

Additionally, flirting is also a way to shape masculinity and femininity on the shop floor. For female workers, since their femininities are depreciated and ignored by masculinized management, flirting is a nice experience for them to enjoy their role as women, feel adored, gazed upon and admired again. As for male workers, while their

masculinities have been constantly challenged during work, flirting is also an occasion for them to rebuild their maleness. Although both male and females engage in flirtation, there are obvious differences between male and female roles. To be specific, the flirtation game is obscurely male-dominated (Salzinger, 2003), which situate women as objects for male eyes and desires. While males initiate and unequivocally control flirtation, females actively participate in it. It is generally accepted that girls do not lead sexual jokes and talking with men. Thus, through sexual language and flirting, male workers claim the work place as masculine territory.

It is worthy to note that supervisors have actively participated in the flirtation game. After the suicide wave in 2010, Foxconn relaxed the “*no talking*” policy on the shop floor. When I worked in Foxconn, it is normal for workers to chat with each other as long as this did not affect production efficiency. Moreover, some supervisors themselves also flirt with production workers. For them, flirtation with workers could ease the tense management-worker relations, relieve workers’ dissatisfaction, and decrease conflict. Besides, flirtation can also draw workers’ attention from alienated production work to pleasurable social interaction. However, if flirtation causes product defects or lower production efficiency, irate line supervisors will interrupt the flirtation and make workers focus on production.

However, in the masculine workplace, flirting might turn into aggressive sexual harassment—touching, obscene language and movement. Compared to flirtation, sexual harassment is more aggressive towards female workers.

Dirty jokes with strong sex suggestions fly on the shop floor. Aiqi said: “*I think the most troublesome thing is the boys tell erotic jokes to us. Some of the jokes are so dirty that I can’t possibly repeat it.*” According to my observation, several male bosses even brag about their prostitution experiences on the shop-floor. After one

male supervisor Wang went to clubhouse for prostitutes, others asked him: “*Did you have a good time last night?*” And they discussed about it in the presence of female workers.

Male supervisors or security guards are the major group harassing females sexually.

Aiqi told me her experience:

“The line supervisor is a ‘sex wolf’ (selang), and he always sexually harassed girls on the line. One day, he suddenly lifted my clothes up. I got furious and scolded him: ‘Son of a bitch! You are asking for trouble!’ I wanted him to know that I am not that kind of girl. But after this incident, he treated me bad. I have to do a lot of hard work, and my year-end bonus is still lower than other girls.”

Most of the harassments lead to dissatisfaction and struggle for women. Yufang has long-black beautiful hair. When boys touch her hair or face, she fights back ferociously. She even grasps the boys’ faces and hands with her fingernails, and yells at them: “*I hate you touching me! You smelly man (chou nanren)!*” Yufang is proud of her bravery and she told the other girls: “*I dare to bully males, do you? If you really have guts, go and fight the boys!*”

Yet, not every girl rejects sexual harassment. Some girls, in order to get benefit from the male managers, decide to manipulate their sexualities. According to other workmates, Hua is one of the most “*casual (suibian)*” and “*open (kaifang)*” girl on the shop-floor. She likes to flirt with boys and bosses on the shop-floor. When she wears skinny pants to work, some boys try to grab her ass. Chun told me that several months ago, at the lantern festival party, “*several bosses hugged her and kissed her in turn, and she let them do that*”. Girls said that even when bosses leave her alone, she would find the boss, touching his face and flirting with him. By doing this, she got an easy job in the office. However, in other girls’ eyes, Hua’s action is very brazen and

shameful. Aiqi commented: *“You know, she has capital—her beauty. But I would never do something like that—trading your body for an easy job. I despise her.”*

In fact, Foxconn has no official policy regarding sexual harassment on the shop floor. For most male managements, sexual harassment is a “natural” expression of workers’ maleness. When Yufang reported her experience to the male group supervisor, he just replied: *“It’s nothing. It is a joke. They (male workers) are just being young. Don’t be so old-fashioned, okay?”* Zebing, an 18-year-old girl also has a similar situation: *“At one time, I asked the boss to stop the boys talking about dirty jokes. But it never works, and my boss criticized me: ‘Why are other girls fine but you can’t stand this? You are a woman. If you can’t endure this, it might be difficult for you to have normal social intercourse.’”*

Here, I viewed the maintenance of sexual harassment as an agreement between management masculinity and worker masculinity. Male management and male workers gain pleasure and satisfaction by harassing girls and keep existing male-dominated gender relations on the shop floor. Moreover, for management, the tolerance of gender harassment can win the support of the majority of male workers, and guarantee production orders to some extent. However, this agreement is based on the “double exploitation” of female workers. For girls on the line, they not only have to suffer the extraction of surplus labour by capital, but also have to endure the objectivisation of their sexuality and body by male managers and workers.

In short, by creating the *diaomao* identity, flirtation and sexual harassment are three significant ways for workers to shape the gendered discourse on the shop floor as well as their gender identities. Moreover, workers gendered language and practices explicitly reject the “de-gendered” practices of management in Foxconn. While the production discourse attempts to describe workers as obedient, disciplined,

de-gendered subjects, the workers gendered discourse is interested in being attractive, outgoing vibrancy. The conflicting discourses make the gendering process of workers become more varied, fragmented and full of uncertainty.

4. Struggles on the shop floor

The low paid, high-coerced global assembly plant is usually connected with female labour in developing countries. While males (replacing females) become the majority on the line, the work in Foxconn is not structured to be relatively autonomous and well paid. For male workers on the line, the workplace environment becomes even more despotic and oppressive and payment provides no solid basis for them to support a family in the future. As a result, the shop floor is a space full of worker's dissatisfaction, anger and conflict between them and supervisors.

A major terrain in which individual struggles are ongoing and formative is the inhuman management. In the workplace, both male and female workers repeatedly assert their basic human rights to respectful treatment and autonomy. Yet, their individual struggles have specific gender differences.

For male workers, conflicts between them and line supervisors are daily masculinized practices. Every day, we can hear angry male workers quarrelling with frontline supervisor in the workplace. When workers got scolded for minor mistakes, they fight back with harsh words or threaten to use physical violence. If the situation spirals out of control, male workers can be dismissed in most cases, like my co-worker Wangfa. One afternoon, he forgot to scan one product, and then he was cursed by the line supervisor for five minutes. Finally, he couldn't stand it. He suddenly stood up and yelled: *"Fuck. I quit! No one wants to work on your fucking line!"* And the line

supervisor dismissed him immediately. This incident is not uncommon in Foxconn. Numerous workers leave because of harsh management.

Although female workers seem to be relatively docile in workplace, they are also determined to claim their rights and justice. While few of them seek direct conflict with frontline supervisors, they tend to struggle in more subtle and covert ways. According to my observation, some girls damage products or machines deliberately for revenge. For example, Yufang told me that when she is angry with supervisors, she draws scratches with her finger nails on the surface of the products, making them defective. She even calculated how much money Foxconn could lose due to her act of sabotage. Another girl, Lily, would distort the rectangle button to degrade products on purpose. Since the product will pass many workstations, it is hard for supervisors to find who did the damage. Thus, their resistance is more safe and strategic.

As we can see, the anger of workers can affect production efficiency and quality. While the high turnover rate can disrupt production, the damage to products can lead to increasing rates of defective products and materials costs. Moreover, workers' feelings of discontent and anger, rooted in the daily experiences of inhumane management, can push workers to forge collective actions towards management, as we will discuss in the next paragraph.

On the shop floor, work quota is one of the major aspects triggering worker resistance. It is necessary to mention that the production quota changes constantly. When we first worked on line, the production quota was 220 per hour, and three days later it is raised up to 360. Although the group supervisor asks every line to assemble 360 Kindles in one day, line supervisors, to get more opportunity for promotion, push workers to assemble more, which results in continuous struggle.

On the second week we worked in Foxconn, girls spent the moments before work together, and several girls were chatting. Yufang reminded us: *“Let’s slow down. Why are we doing so fast yesterday? If we work too fast, they will increase the production quota very soon, and then we will be exhausted. We can get nothing from this.”* Other girls agreed that we should work slowly together. We asked Juan who worked at the beginning of the line to stop feeding on the dot of 7:50, so that we could also start getting ready to get off work. On the line, several workers called restricted output “self rescue”. After girls made an agreement and persuaded the boys to join them in the slow-down.

During that night, we all slowed down and tried to keep the production output to a restricted number. After three hours, the line supervisor Li found out: *“I ask you to assemble 380 products every hour. It’s been three hours, and you only made 360 per hour. What’s the matter with you? Hurry up.”* Another half hour passed by and the production efficiency remained the same. The supervisor started to lose his temper, and he threatened us: *“You are trying to screw with me? Fine! But if you made my job difficult, I will make your lives miserable!”* Nobody answered him. Everyone just bowed their heads and worked, but didn’t increase their working speed. Wangfa whispered: *“If we are in a good mood, we will work faster. If he keeps yelling at us, then we continue to loaf on our job. He (the line supervisor) can do nothing to us about that.”* After a moment, seeing his threat did not work, Li threatened us again with sarcasm: *“if you keep doing this, I will not give you any overtime work. All of you will only have 1350 per month. It doesn’t matter if you have overtime payment, right? You won’t be starved to death.”* After Li’s words, the working speed became even slower. Without saying, everyone on the line slowed down and we didn’t finish the production quota.²⁷

²⁷ After this incident, the line supervisor was dismissed. The assembly line which I worked was broken up. All 80 workers were organized into more than 20 groups and sent to the 23 lines in the workplace separately. I am not certain if this arrangement is directly linked with the struggle.

This small episode suggests that workers do have the power to influence and even control the production on the assembly line to some extent. Workers understand that if they take actions, they can challenge and break the rigid discipline and control in the workplace. Moreover, as we can see, this action is initiated by girls on the line, and both boys and girls participated in it. Conflicts like this surpass the division between male and female workers and reinforce solidarity between them.

By describing individual or collective struggles, I don't mean to exaggerate their importance or influence. It is true that most of these actions are small-scale, short-timed and loosely organized. However, the struggles remind us that workers' do have the capacity for collective resistance, and its potential impact on production should not be ignored.

5. Summary

In the first decades of reform, transnational production on Mainland China was organized around the image of "*dagongmei*"— young female labourers migrating from rural areas and willing to work in despotic factories for low wages. However, with the expansion of global capital, the increasing demand for young female workers has in turn caused exactly the shortage of such subjects. Because of this, young male workers have gradually constituted a large part workforce in light industries. This shift really brings significant changes to the structure of work organization as well as workers' subjects.

Firstly, in management practice, gender distinctions between male and female are downplayed. Contrary to feminized labour strategy in the 1990s (Lee 1998; Pun, 2005), managers attempt to construct de-gendered assembly lines in Foxconn. Specifically, both male and female are addressed within the category of "ordinary

worker”, who works exhausted on assembly line, getting the same low payment and suffering “inhuman” management. Since the assembly line is not marked by femininity anymore, is it not abnormal for men to work on the assembly line.

Secondly, the management in Foxconn is highly masculinized which is best exemplified by security guards and frontline supervisors. The offensive masculinized management exerts strict discipline and despotic punishment. Due to inter relations between masculinity and management, it makes females unsuitable for management, which further legitimates the male-dominated gender hierarchy in the plant. Moreover, the construction of management masculinity develops alongside construction of working-class masculinity as well as femininity. While management can develop and reinforce its masculinity through command and control of others, working-class masculinity and femininity are constantly questioned and degraded.

It is worth noting that workers also actively participate in the making of gendered subjects on the shop floor. While Foxconn management attempts to categorize workers as de-gendering subjects, male workers try to redefine and reconstruct their masculinity through “*diaomao*” identity, flirting, and even sexual harassment. Female workers can gain pleasure and confidence by participating in male-dominated sexual play. However, girls also suffer gender discrimination and sexual harassment on the masculinized shop floor, forcing some girls to become de-feminized and aggressive. As a result, the complex struggles over gendered meanings disrupt managerial control and make the gendering process more fragmented, conflicted and full of uncertainty.

Furthermore, I suggest that there is inherent conflict between the Foxconn factory regime and the male-dominated workforce. Although males have replaced females and become the majority on the line, work in Foxconn is not organized to be independent, autonomous and well paid. It is instead more despotic and oppressive, and payment is still meagre. While coercive work organization and management

undermines male workers' feeling of confidence, competence and control, low salaries provide no basis for families—both aspects damage the foundation of working-class masculinity and results in anger and conflict in male workers' lives.

Regarding female workers, the situation is also severe. Girls on the line have to endure two aspects of oppression: capitalist exploitation and male sexual harassment. Moreover, woman workers defeminize in the relatively masculine workplace, making their gendering process more complex and conflicted. As a coping strategy, female workers become more aggressive and rebellious, which challenges the production order as well as conventional gender discourse.

In short, the shop floor is a crucial space where worker's femininity and masculinity are (un)made, (un)emphasized, challenged and redefined. Moreover, gender identities and practices are shaped and reshaped in interactions between management and workers. However, when we understand the making (unmaking) of working class masculinity and femininity, we should not only check gender performances in one specific workplace, but also in everyday life and living history as a whole. Therefore, in the next section, particular attention will be paid to individual life situations, entertainment in the city and workers' own decisions and expectations concerning love, sex and marriage.

CHAPTER 4

Politics of Love, Sex, and Marriage

In the last chapter, we discussed gender politics on the shop floor. In this chapter, we go beyond the scope of the factory gate and attempt to explore workers' gender practices in the industrial community and everyday life. The formation of gender identities will be examined in love, sexual and family life.

In addition, this chapter will also focus on the gender practices of a new generation of migrant workers²⁸. According to the All-China Federation of Trade Union (ACFTU), there are about 89 million young migrant workers²⁹ in 2009. Since they are between the age 16 and 30, most are in the periods of courtship and marriage and special attention will be paid to their gender ideologies and practices which might be different from those of the previous generation of workers.

Specifically, the following questions will be closely examined: for a young generation of migrant workers, what are the expectations and practices regarding love and sex? How do they shape their femininity and masculinity in everyday life? How does factory life affect their expectation and practices about marriage and family?

These puzzling questions are related to each other, as we shall see in the following stories.

²⁸ According to the All-China Federation of Trade Union, the new generation of migrant workers (xin sheng dai nongmingong) refers to migrant workers who born after 1980 and above the age of 16.

²⁹ See ACFTU: *The research report of ACFTU on the new generation of migrant workers*, 2009. (in Chinese).

1. Love, sex and expectation of marriage

According to Lisa Rofel (2007), the “desiring” subject is at the centre of modern “human” nature. Compared to socialist de-feminized class ideology, the operation of post-socialist society is characterized with positive encouragement and the elaboration of citizen’s sexual and affective self-interest. That is to say, love, sex and marriage have gradually replaced labour and class and become the major terrain constituting people’s sense of identity. It is evident that romantic relations and sexuality have a significant role in workers’ factory lives. Moreover, as migrant workers in developing countries, workers’ gendered practice is different from middle class men or woman or urban residents, as we will discuss in the following pages.

1. 1 The stories of Tian

The importance of love and sex

I met Tian the first day I came to Foxconn. She is a vibrant 19 year old girl with big eyes and a round face. After we became familiar with each other, she asked me whether I had a boyfriend. I told her no, and she looked very surprised: *“You are 24 years old, yet you still don’t have a boyfriend! Well, you are a good girl. Usually good girls don’t have boyfriends. I am not one of you. I am a bad girl!”* She said this with a naughty smile.

For Tian, a “bad girl” is one who boldly seeks love and sex and who challenges the traditional image of Chinese women. Tian met her ex-boyfriend in the garment factory the first year when she went out to dagong. She and her boyfriend had known each other for three years and had lived together for six months and her parents did not know anything about it. Whenever her parents asked about her personal life, Tian lied to them: *“I’m a daughter. Of course I am well-behaved and I will not get boyfriends outside.”* According to Tian, her parents forbid her to make

male friends outside and wish her to marry a local boy. However, Tian apparently has no intention to live up to their wishes. As soon as she left the village and her parents' supervision, she pursued love and fun in the city.

Falling in love, as Goodison (1983:63) argues, is a "*stratagem for survive*" and being in love is a "*process of repairing low self esteem*" (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1984:134). As we mentioned in the previous chapter, for young workers, romantic relations can distract them from the hard and tedious work, and provides a form of respect and self-esteem. The situation is the similar for Tian. For her, courtship can help her to make a new gendered self which is more confident, charming and attractive. "*Dagong is too hard,*" as Tian explained: "*In the factory, you are nobody. So it is important to know that there is someone who can cherish and respect you, even though others see you as dust.*"

Tian is not the only one who noticed the importance of love in factory life. Foxconn also actively interfered in workers' romantic relations outside the workplace. After the series of suicides in 2010, Foxconn established an internal dating website called "*Magpie Bridge Dating Website (queqiao zhiyue wangzhan)*". Foxconn employee can register on the website and seeking partners. Huge banners and colorful leaflets are posted in the plant, encourage workers to find "true love" on the website. By the end of March 2012, more than 250,000 Foxconn workers had become members of the website. Additionally, the trade union holds the "*Magpie Bridge Dating Party*" every year, and broadcasts the party live on the internal television channel, attracting the attention of many Foxconn workers.

It seems that Foxconn has "mass mobilized" workers to fall in love and get married. The romantic articles and stories in the internal dating website, newspaper and parties constantly delivery these messages, such as: "*love should speak out loudly (ai yao*

dasheng shuo chu lai)”, “if you have a lover, then speak out your love; if you don’t have one, then pursue your love (you ai shuo ai, wu ai zhui ai).” Another article published on the dating website reads: “Before love and happiness, everyone is equal. As long as you have enough courage, you will have your true love eventually.” It seems Foxconn favor men and women as modern, independent working people with the capacity to make decisions about their life to challenge conventional courtship relations.

Having the appearance of encouraging the workers to fall in love is in effect a new mode of governmentality at Foxconn. Here, dating and entertainment have become a method to cover the harsh, boring and inhumane work on the production line, and further makes the extraction of the surplus value invisible to some extent. In other words, with the celebration and exaggeration of “equal” love, the unequal and exploitative production process can be overshadowed. Moreover, dating parties and activities have been mobilized as sensual proof of improvement, providing Foxconn with a chance to demonstrate itself as not a “sweatshop”. Nevertheless, the Foxconn strategy does not always work smoothly, exemplified by Jinshi’s sarcastic comment:

“It is a fashion in Foxconn—to love each other. No matter how ugly you are, no matter how poor you are, you will be loved by someone. And there is love everywhere in the plant. Actually, it is not really about dating or falling in love. The real aim of these activities is to prevent us from committing suicide.”

Commercial institutions, in particular gynecology hospitals, also engage in the making of workers’ sexual ideologies. To promote business, gynecology hospitals have issued a large number of magazines to female workers. When I lived in the factory communities, I received magazines issued by gynecology hospitals almost every afternoon. Although these magazines are issued to factory girls, they don’t talk about the love or life of “*dagongmei*” (working girls) at all. In fact, these magazines

are edited from an overwhelmingly urban perspective and concentrate on the lives of middle class females. For example, on the cover of the magazines are the images of pretty fashion models and popular stars rather than factory girls. Moreover, the main characters in the stories of these magazines are young, beautiful office girls or upper class ladies. It is evident that, in public discourse, modern femininity is often associated with middle-class women in urban areas. Factory life, migrant experience and the love lives of *dagongmei* are invisible to these magazines. For many Foxconn girls, the magazines are like handbooks about how to be like office girls: smart, elegant, attractive, independent modern women who control their love and fate.

Moreover, one of the major contexts in these magazines is about sexuality, including how to get a man, attracting him sexually, and have a good sex life. Articles use strong sexual suggestions, such as “*how to have perfect sex*”, “*the favorite sex lie of men*”, “*the Guinness world records of sex*”, “*don’t just listen to your husband in bed*” and “*revealing woman’s false sexual ideas*”. From these magazines, we can see that women are encouraged to control their own bodies and even take advantage of her sexuality, be more active and take initiative in sexual activities, instead of being old-fashioned passive sexual object waiting for men.

As a matter of fact, pre-marital sex is very common among Foxconn workers. For Tian, there were also sexual relations between her and her ex-boyfriend. In her eyes, “*it is common to have sex before marriage in this sex liberated age (xing jiefang de niandai)*.” Sexuality has become a terrain where tradition and modernity are divided and elaborated. While everyone in her village is feudal (*fengjian*) and can’t tolerate pre-marital sex, nobody in modern Shenzhen can interfere in Tian’s personal life or restrict her freedom to have sex.

When I worked in Foxconn, I noticed the explicit yearning for sex womens’ toilet wall, such as “*do you know how making love feels like? It is a feeling! It is passion!*”;

“I want sex!”; “I am a lesbian. I love girls!” “I have sex with my boyfriend’s best friend, what should I do?” For many Foxconn girls, *dagong* life before marriage is a short time for them to have “free” sex with the one they love. Kong, a 30-year-old married woman, persuaded the young girls on the line:

“I envy you single young girls. Before you get married, you can sleep with anyone you want at night. But after getting married, you have to sleep with the same man whether you like it or not (laugh), so you should never get married too early.”

In addition to these sexual yearnings, Jinshi told me that about 50 percent of Foxconn workers lived in rented flats rather than Foxconn dormitories and many live with their partners. The opening sexual practices of young migrant workers were also documented by Hu and Cheng. Based on the investigation of 1,589 young migrant workers in Chengdu’s service industry, Hu and Cheng (2008) find that only one quarter of the respondents are opposed to pre-marital sex. Moreover, 51.1 percent of male workers and 34.4 percent of female worker have pre-marital sex experiences and the average age of their first sex experience is 20.5.

The high rate of pre-marital sex is no doubt a challenge to the traditional patriarchal order which tries to confine sexual activities within the structure of family. However, this challenge has distinct consequences for male and female. When Tian actually crossed the line of patriarchal order, she felt great anxious and under pressure. After Tian broke up with her boyfriend, she was afraid that her next boyfriend would not cherish her for she was not a virgin anymore. She wondered whether she should tell the imagined future boyfriend the truth. Tian commented about the unequal gender relations in sexual activities:

“I think this society have so many unfair things. If sex is not important at all, then both men and women should not get hung up on virginity. But if sex is important, then men and women should not have sex before marriage, right?”

But this society is not fair. If boys have sex before marriage, people think he is just playing around. But if girls do it, people call her 'broken shoes' (po xie)'."

Like gender discrimination in the workplace, gender relations in sexuality are also unequal. Female workers usually have to endure more pressure for their sexual activities such as male workers. Hence, compared to their male counterparts, female workers have more conflicted feelings towards pre-marital sex.

“I don't want to get married”

Although Tian thinks love is important in dagong life, she has a very different opinion towards marriage. In fact, the reason she broke up with her boyfriend was that they had different opinions about marriage. According to Tian, her boyfriend is four years older than her. He wanted to settle down and get married soon, but Tian did not want to. For Tian, getting married is just “*asking for trouble (zi zhao mafan)*”:

“I am still young. Why would I get married so early and bear the burden of family? After you get married, you have to take care of the family; after you have children, you have to take care of the child. And that's it. Your life is over. I want to have fun for another couple of years before marriage.”

Tian is not unusual. Many girls in Foxconn do not want to get married. If we say marriage is one of the central goals set for the first generation of migrant workers, this goal has been constantly questioned and challenged by the second generation of migrant workers. Like Tian, working girls in Foxconn know the patriarchal nature of family clearly. For them, traditional married life means losing independence, being subordinate to husbands and being compelled to give birth to baby boys. For instance, Zebing told me:

“I don't dare to think about my life after marriage. I don't want to live like my mum, my sister and other girls in my village. My older sister gets married at the age of 23, and she gave birth to three kids in three years, one

after another, until she gave birth to a baby boy. This is the life of woman. I don't want to have a baby."

Another female worker, Aiqi, explained why she did not have a boy friend yet:

"I don't like the boy who chases you just because he wants to marry you. I met two boys before. They are nice and mature, but they just want to get married and give birth to a baby. I want to live for myself, and I don't want to depend on men. Getting married, taking care of children, washing clothes and cooking rice, this is not the kind of life I want. Actually, I don't want to get married. I want to love someone without the burden of marriage. How wonderful could that be!"

More importantly, there is little possibility for Foxconn girls to marry themselves out of their class. In most cases, working girls can only marry someone whose class status is similar to her. In this situation, getting married and having a baby means reinforcing and reproducing existing class relations. As Ouyang, a 21 year-old girl argues:

"If you are a Foxconn worker, the best you could do is to marry another Foxconn worker. If you have a line supervisor as boyfriend, others will think you take advantage of him, and you don't deserve him. This is the reality: if you are a dagongmei (working girl), then you will marry a dagongzai (working boy), and it is likely your son will also be a dagongzai. Then future generations will never rid themselves of being dagong!"

In contemporary metropolitan society, as Connell argues (2009: 82), marriages are supposed to be established on the foundation of "romantic love"; that is, "*a strong emotional attachment between two individual persons*". This ideal is the basis of most television dramas and Hollywood films. Whereas, in the eyes of many working girls, it is clear that class location determines who she marries to and lives with. Marriage,

far from being pure terrain, is a new site on which the distinctions between working-class and middle-class, rural and urban are demonstrated and remade.

As coping strategies, some girls attempt to negotiate with their family to postpone their marriage as late as possible. In this condition, working in factories becomes another way for them to avoid a coercive married life (Pun, 2005:154). Moreover, many working girls prepare themselves for a future beyond being dependent housewives after marriage. During the dagong period, they attempt to learn computer skills, typing, Cantonese and English. For these girls, with this knowledge, they might be find relative highly paid job even after they get married, and further improve their economic and gender status in the family.

In short, from Tian and other girls' stories, we could see new love and sexual practices and new marriage expectation of the young generation of migrant workers. Compared to their predecessor, working girls are more active in exploring new forms of romantic, sexual and marriage relations. For most of them, factory work is a way for them to construct their modern gender identities and change their gender status in both family and society.

1.2 Wei: another story about sex and marriage

Work and entertainment

Wei is a 20 year-old boy from Hubei providence. He is the only child in his family, and his parents are self-employed in the hometown. Wei graduated from senior high school in 2010, and was recruited by Foxconn in 2011.

Wei was allocated to the stamping workshop, a most unpopular department due to its harsh working environment. There is no air conditioner in the workshop, and the temperature in there can reach 37 degrees in the summer. Moreover, the mould

polishing process produced metal dust in workplace, and some dust particles can clog workers' lungs and cause occupational disease. Besides, cleaning moulds uses chemicals, such as thinner and paint-remover. While Wei has dealt with them for more than one year, he has never been told the danger of these chemicals. Due to the dangerous and awful working conditions, the work is considered "men's work" and most workers in this workshop are men, making the workplace highly masculinized.

On the other hand, works in the stamping workshop is not organized by assembly line and supervision is relatively loose compare to assembly lines; workers have more control and autonomy in their jobs and have more freedom to chat and joke with each other. Apparently, the most common topic among boys is about girls and sex. As mentioned previously, males talked about their sexual activities in the workplace. According to Wei, it is not unusual for male workers to have casual sex with girls. When I asked him about whether male workers having pre-marital sex, he replied: *"Are you kidding me? It is very common in Foxconn. This is the thing in Foxconn. A lot of my coworkers have one night stands (yiyeqing). Sometime I get off work with my best friend Xu, and he disappears on the way. Where did he go? Go after pretty girls. He doesn't have a steady girlfriend. His girls constantly change."*

Located near the south gate of Foxconn Longhua factory, Youfu is a compound community characterized by the proliferation of sex talk and female images. This community consists of collective dormitories, rental rooms, a shopping mall, supermarkets, a discotheque, a skating rink and restaurants. Thousands of Foxconn workers live in this area in factory dormitories, and many married worker couples or cohabited lovers live in rented rooms. In addition, many workers go to this area for consumption or entertaining after they get off work. Many entertainment places are marked by exaggeration and celebration of sexuality, in particular female sexuality. Wei introduced me to the entertainment place which provides sexual service around Foxconn:

“There is a washing feet clubhouse (huisuo) and a Karaoke house in the community. And near the south gate of Foxconn, there is a Longxiang clubhouse. Do you know what a clubhouse is? It is the brothel (qinglou) in old times! There are many girls in there, and they provide different services; each of them has a clear price (ming ma biao jia). If you are unsatisfied with the girl, you can change to another one.”

In the summer of 2010, I went to a skating rink in Youfu and wrote down field notes as follows:

September 21, 2011. I came to the “Dajiale skating rink” near the south gate of Foxconn at 9:00 pm. It cost me 8 RMB to enter the skating rink. The light is dim, and the sound of pop music is loud enough to wake the dead, so my friends and I have to cover our ears. Behind the colorful neon lights, the central room is a disco dance hall. On the stage, three female dancers wear heavy makeup, and dress in sexy bikinis. They shake their almost naked bodies along with the rock music exaggeratedly. Dozens of men and women look at the dancers or shaking their bodies like them. In the skating rink, many workers skate at high speed. I think skating with pop music in such a high speed must be very stimulating and also a little dangerous. Most players are single men and several girls in here are accompanied by their male friends. While whistles and exciting screams fly in the room, there is seldom communication between workers.

Many entertainment places in Youfu use sexual and seductive female images to attract customers and business. Pleasure houses like the skating rink reinforce the masculine culture of objectivising women. Consumption spaces are full of female images but no space belongs to women themselves. Indeed, these spaces are essentially male-dominated, situating women as objects for men’s eyes and desires. Capitalism

not only commoditize female labour in production, but also “*directly commoditize the bodies, sexualities and images of women*” in consumption (Yang, 1999:52).

Compared to Tian’s experience, Wei’s engagement in sexual relations was basically for pleasure. He told me that he is definitely going to “*play around (dao chu wanwan)*” before getting married, to experience all fun things and enjoy all the fun services with prostitution being one of them. Wei described his experience in the “*clubhouse*”:

“I went to the clubhouse alone in the first time, but I didn’t experience that kind of service. She was giving me a foot massage. I don’t know what she was doing, and I felt embarrassed, so I fled away afterwards. I didn’t have (sexual) experience for the first time, but it still cost me 150 RMB. I was stupid; I also paid the girl another 100 RMB in tips. I don’t know the rules. I just learn from the TV that you have to pay tips in that kind of clubhouse. After this experience, I went to there with four or five of my friends, and I do not feel embarrassed anymore in a crowd.”

Sex is important in male workers’ daily life. According to Donaldson (1991:26), the sex act is important in the despotic labour regime, for “*capital does not directly control masculine sexuality and this is one of the few areas left to working men to develop and express.*” For the male worker, sexual activity is a way to seek release, assert power and a sense of control, and further sustain his identity of masculinity.

Moreover, sex is not only inscribed with inequalities between males and females but is also marked with economic discrimination between rich and poor. In Wei’s words: “*This is the reality of the society: if you have money, then you can play all sorts of things, including women. Am I right? If you have money and power, you will get anything you want!*” Here, consumption of female sexuality is a new site that expresses hierarchy and distinction among different men in China. Therefore, commercialized sex becomes a way for Wei to feel the controlling power and money, and reduce the disparity between him and upper class males.

Marriage as a trap

When it comes to marriage, the first thing Wei mentions is about the enormous wedding expenses in his village (See Table 12). According to Wei, the wedding costs contains the following items: first, since the bridegroom is responsible for building a new house for the couple, Wei's family had to spend at least 170,000 RMB to build a two-floor house in the village (including basic construction, decoration and workers); second, the wedding will cost about 20,000 RMB for the ceremony and feast; third, 30,000 will be given to the bride's family as a gift. Therefore, the whole cost of the wedding will reach a total of more than 220,000RMB.

Table 12: The Expense of a Wedding in Wei's Village

House	150,000
Decoration	20,000
Wedding ceremony and feast	20,000
Bride-price	30,000
Total	220,000

Unit: RMB

In this situation, Wei thinks marriage is a heavy burden instead of a desired event in life. He even describes marriage as a “*trap*”, in his own words: “*I won't even think about marriage until I am 25 years old. I have no money, and neither does my family. All marriage does is burdens me. I have to work myself to the bone to earn such a large sum of money.*” As Wei told me, his parents have a little business in their hometown in Hubei province, and the annual balance of Wei's family is about 20,000 RMB. That means they have to spend no less than 11 years to accumulate enough money for a wedding.

Furthermore, for male workers, getting married means you need to obtain a stable income to support family members. However, low wages at Foxconn provide no such condition. According to FSG in 2010, the average salary of Foxconn workers was 1687 in 2010, while average expenditure is 1087, which means only 600 RMB (about 95 USD) can be saved for other costs. Since more than 90 percent of respondents are single, the expenditure is largely for workers' daily reproduction, not for family members or generational reproduction. Evidently, the slender wage in Foxconn, far from being a "family wage", can only provide the basis for individual workers' daily reproduction in a city like Shenzhen. This is exemplified by a popular saying: "*working in Foxconn, you will never expect to marry a wife, and the occasional prostitution can cause you economic tension*"³⁰."

Due to the low wages, most Foxconn workers assume that they will only work in Foxconn temporarily, and will need to seek better paying jobs after getting married. However, Wei is very confused about his future. Since Wei does not have skills or high-level education, there are limited chances for him to get a high paid work.

"Working in Foxconn is only temporary. I don't plan to work here long. In Foxconn, I almost lost every day, waiting to get paid at the end of the month. Maybe I should work hard in here. If I work hard, and have a good relationship with the boss (refers to the line supervisor), I might get a promotion. If I don't, I could leave Foxconn. I have a relative who works on a construction site, I could work with him. Or, I could join the army temporarily (silent for a moment). Actually, I don't know what to do in my future. I am not sure."

The unstable work and low pay may directly lead to declining interest in marriage and decreases in family size. According to Hu and Cheng (2008) investigations into young

³⁰ 富士康工人的俗語：“打工富士康，休想取婆娘；偶爾嫖嫖娼，經濟就緊張。”

migrant workers in Chengdu, more than 33 percent of migrant workers don't want to get married or think marriage is not important. This percentage is much higher than university students (16.8 percent), and is also higher than the teenagers in urban areas who think "being single is better than getting married" or "marriage is terrible" (which is 11.9 percent). More importantly, about 20 percent of migrant workers don't want to have a baby after marriage, which is very distinct from the birth practice of the first generation of migrant workers.

In brief, for male workers, sexual activity and marriage is an important sphere to sense power and control, and sustain identity of masculinity during *dagong* life. Nevertheless, their sexual and marriage practices are obviously constrained by meagre wages and disadvantageous class position. Since men are supposed to carry more economic burdens of the family, Foxconn male workers have to work really hard or seek another relatively high-paid job to get married and have a family. Yet, even if they establish a family finally, the traditional family structure and relationship are undermined by highly exploitive global capital, as we will discuss in the next section.

2 Wage, masculinity and working class family

According to western research, masculinity is tightly links to the role of breadwinner (Donaldson, 1991; Livingstone and Luxton 1989). Andrew Tolson (1977), for example, points out that "*in our society the main focus of masculinity is the wage*". For labouring men, his capacity to bring home a 'decent' or 'living' wage is central to his male identity (Livingstone and Luxton, 1989). The situation is similar to today's China. When market values penetrate all realms of social life, masculinity is largely determined by how much the man earns, what he owns, and his ability to provide respectable living conditions for his family. Whereas, as mentioned above, low wages at Foxconn are far from being a "family wage". In this condition, what happens to the

making of male workers' masculinity? In this part, I will try to analysis the inter-relations between wage, masculinity and family life by telling the story of Lan.

Lan has worked at Foxconn since 2002 when he was 22-years-old. He worked in the Metal Polishing Department, which is infamous for its harsh work and terrible working conditions. Every day, Lan and his colleges have to polish the metal surface of products in the workplace full of dust. In Lan's own words:

“The ventilation is bad, and there have dust in the workplace. After work, my hair and body were full of dust. And my whole body is black, like a coal miner. Although we have a mask, we still breathe in tiny dust particles into our lungs.”

Most workers in this department are young males, due to the masculine ideology that tough or dangerous jobs can only be done by men. For Lan, although he worked like a “man”, he didn't get paid like a “man”. In fact, his wages were low over the past ten years (see table 13).

Table 13: The Composition of Lan's Salary (2002-2012)

Year	Basic Salary	Overtime Pay	Total
2007	700	Around 900	1600
2009	960	Around 800	1760
2010	1200	Around 900	2100
2011	1530	Around 400	1930

Unit: RMB

There is no doubt that the absolute level of Lan's basic salary has increased from 700 in 2007 to 1530 in 2011. However, the salary is still low in local terms, and provides no basis to maintain a family in urban areas. In Shenzhen, the per capita monthly

consumption expenditure is 1900.55 RMB³¹. Lan's salary is only 2100 RMB in the year of 2010, only sufficient to support himself. More specifically, in 2011, Lan's wage (including basic salary and overtime pay) is 1930 RMB (about 315 USD) per month. Lan has to spend 375 RMB on rent and electricity, 100 RMB for internet access; at least 350 RMB for food; about 100 RMB for social insurance and 100 RMB for his mobile phone (see table 14). In the end, he only has 905 RMB for surplus. Besides, he needs to keep another 200 RMB for social activities and other expenditures. In the end, he could only save at most 700 RMB for his family.

Table 14: Monthly Consumption Expenditure of Lan

Consumption Items	Cost
House Rent and Electricity Bill	375
Food	350
Social Insurance	About 100
Internet Access	100
Mobile phone bill	100
Social activities and emergency	200
Total expenses	1225

Unit: RMB

What does an income of 700 RMB mean to Lan's family? According to Lan, his family includes four people: himself, his mother, his wife Mei, and a four year old son. Regarding the expenses of this family in a rural village (see table 15), they usually have to spend about 600 RMB on food (rice, vegetables, meat, fruit, drinks and snacks), 200 RMB on milk for the little boy, at least 50 RMB for the phone bill, 50 RMB for electricity and another 200 RMB for social activities (such as family parties, wedding or funerals). It is evident that merely relying on Lan's wages, this family cannot maintain a basic standard of living. Since Lan's mother is nearly 60

³¹ See Shenzhen statistic yearbook, 2011, P378

years old, she is not able to cultivate paddy fields anymore, so there is hardly any income from the land produce. The burden of supporting family relies on Lan's wife, Mei's shoulders.

Table 15: Monthly Consumption Expenditure of Lan's Family in Rural Village

Consumption Items	Cost
Food	600
Milk	200
Phone bill	50
Electricity	50
Social activities and other expenditures	200
Total expenses	1100

Unit: RMB

After Mei gave birth to her baby, she went outside to make a living. Since she could not stand the tense work in Foxconn, Mei chooses to work in Guangzhou and start her little business: selling toys in the city. This situation is very common among working-class families. Nowadays, most working-class families cannot sustain the wages of women workers. Therefore, most women have to go out and work after marriage. For many working class families, it is normal to have the husband and wife work in two factories or even in two cities, and have their child (or children) raised by their parents. This arrangement changes the structure and inter-relations of family significantly.

It is evident that men in distinct social classes enjoy distinct levels of patriarchal dividend. For Lan, due to his class situation and family practice, he has lost most of the patriarchal benefits. In the first place, the gender division of labour in the household has changed dramatically. As Mei and Lan work in two cities, Lan had to provide his own domestic labour. After work, Lan has to go shopping, wash his

clothes, clean the room, and sometimes cooking rice and dishes. Second, Lan also cannot have a sex life with his wife most of the year. Moreover, Lan and Mei have to leave their baby boy to Lan's mother, as both have no time to take care of their child. This also challenged his role and right as a father to some extent.

In addition, since Mei went to Guangzhou and the contact between her and Lan becomes less frequent. Since they work in different cities and have fewer holidays, it is difficult for them to see each other. Due to the hard work and life, there are many conflicts between Lan and Mei, and they constantly quarrel over money. One year later, Mei left him and lived with another man. Lan explained why Mei left:

“She treated me with contempt, for I couldn't make enough money. She hoped I could make 3,000-4,000 RMB a month. But I can't. I used to think love is much more important than money. But I was wrong. This society is so materialistic. I have no house, and I have no car. And I seldom send money to Mei. So she left.”

In Lan's eyes, his love has crashed into the wall of reality. In his diary, Lan writes:

“...Have you ever missed me? I miss you right now. You said you are angry with me. You said I don't understand you. But has it ever occurred to you that I am the one who loved you the most? I miss you every day and night, but you broke my heart over and over. Watching you leaving me, the pain in my heart does not stop...”

Lan's experience is not unusual. For the working class, family structure and relations are highly flexible and unstable. Since many workers do not have a material basis to live with their spouses, they don't have an actual home in the city where they can perform daily production and generation production together. Moreover, the separate life damages the emotional and sexual relation between a wife and husband. It is

common for married workers to have another “lover” or life partner during dagong life and this phenomenon has further shaken the traditional family order.

As we mentioned, the role of the wage earner is central to the affirmation of manhood and to the structure of patriarchy. As Kleinberg (1979:126) argues, a working-class man is supposed to attain a steady job, education for the children, a home for the family and the freedom from the threat of poverty. Men who cannot support their families are pitied or scorned and feel themselves to be failures (Luxton 1980:45, 46; Kleinberg 1979:127). For Lan, Mei leaving hit his self-esteem as a man:

“I found myself useless. A man, when he faces the pressure of money, is very powerless. She hurt me a lot. I was very depressed and angry at that time. I stayed in the internet bar and played computer games, killing people (in the computer game), killing people.”

In this condition, the father-son relation—another fundamental aspect of patriarchal family relations—was damaged and undermined.

What is more, low level wage damaged his identity as a father, and further eroded the basis of traditional patriarchal family. In 2010, his son was supposed to go to kindergarten, but the tuition fee was 2,000 RMB per year and Lan could not afford it.

“I am a father. While my son reached the age of education, I don’t have the ability to send him to school. This is humiliation! This is so frustrating! To be honest, when I can’t pay for my son’s tuition, I would rather die than live. I really want to die.”

Facing the hardship and frustration of factory life, Lan nurtured the hope that someday he might save enough money to start his own little business (*xiao shengyi*). He even thought about moving to Hong Kong illegally to find a relatively high-paid job. However, it is evident that all of his plans are shaped by class deprivation. As a working-class man, he has little access to economic or political resources. He has

worked in Foxconn for more than 10 years and he still has not saved enough money to build his own business.

In short, Lan's story remind us that it might be helpful if we relook at the relations between capitalism and patriarchy. Existing studies have elaborated the perfect marriage between capitalism and local patriarchy (eg. Mies, 1998; Lee, 1998; Slazinger, 2003; Pun, 2005; Hanser, 2008). However, the study of Foxconn's male workers suggests that relations between capitalism and patriarchy are more complicated and contradictory. In fact, highly exploitative capitalism has undermined working-class masculinity, not only in the space of workplace, but also regarding family. For Foxconn male workers, if they couldn't bring home a "decent" or "living" wage—the material base of familial patriarchy—their patriarchal power and dividend can be challenged and undermined in the family as well as public space.

3. Summary

Concerning the love and sexual practices of the working-class, we cannot explore their gender practices without linking it to class. In my understanding, love, sex, family and production are inter-related aspects in workers' lives, all contributing to their contradictory and fragmented gendering process.

In contrast to the alienated experience in the labour process, workers regard love and sexual activities as processes in which they can redeem their alienation and achieve a sense of satisfaction as well as femininity and masculinity. Compared to precedents, the new generation of migrant workers is more active in making a new gendered self through the practice of courtship and sex. For both male and female workers, pre-marital sex is a way to control their own body and sexuality and resist the traditional patriarchal order. However, there is also obvious gender discrimination in

the terrain of sexuality. While males have more freedom to engage in pre-marital sex and even the sex trade, females will face heavy moral burdens for their inappropriate sexual behaviors. Furthermore, it seems that some young workers have less interest in marriage than previous generations of migrant workers for different reasons. For females, it is because they didn't want to be dependent wives in a patriarchal family. Through factory work and learning, young factory girls hope they can construct a more equal and mutual-respect family relationship with their future husband. For men, the heavy economic burden of weddings and family is a major reason why they postpone the marriage.

What is more, workers marriage practices and family relations are highly influenced by the accumulation of global capital. In Foxconn, as most married male production workers do not bring home a decent "family wage", their patriarchy power in families might be questioned and challenged to some extent. In addition, while most working class families rely on the wages of female workers, many women, after they get married, still go outside and work in factories. In this condition, females have more economic independence in families, which in turn improve their status both in the family and the public sphere. As we can see, the family structure of Chinese migrant workers is obviously distinct from the breadwinner-housewife family pattern in the western world. Since both male and females need to work to sustain their family, the husbands have to be responsible for some domestic work; if couples work in two cities, they might also find new sexual partners in the city, which in turn makes the family structure more flexible and unstable.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Based on the study of Foxconn workers, the thesis argues that the gender identities of workers are crucially formed in the experience of factory life. In previous chapters, we discussed the process of gendered subjectification in the workplace as well as in love, sex and family relationships. Both these distinct processes of subjectification contribute to the shaping of working class masculinity and femininity.

Previous studies show that gender is important in export-oriented industrialization in China's coastal areas. In the first decades of the reform period, global production in Mainland China was organized around the image of "*dagongmei*"— young, industrious and obedient female workers. However, as mentioned in the second chapter, after decades of capital expansion and labour absorption, there are reduced numbers of female workers willing to work for low pay in factories. For example, in Guangdong province, the percentage of female workers has declined from over 60 percent in 1987 to 42.7 percent in 2010. Due to the tight female labour market, young male labour has gradually become a crucial part of the workforce in labour-intensive industries.

In order to cope with the male-dominated workforce, Foxconn management has rejected the feminized labour strategy. In the workplace, the gender distinctions are ignored and de-emphasized, and both men and women workers are addressed in the non-gendered category of "ordinary workers". Since the assembly line is not marked by femininity anymore, is it normal for men to work on the assembly line.

It is worthy to note that there are at least two kinds of masculinities on the shop-floor. One is the management masculinity, and the other is the male worker's masculinity. As discussed in chapter 3, the "*diaoren*" management style in Foxconn is associated with aggressive, ruthless and competitive managerial masculinity. In the meantime, male workers have developed their identity as "*diaomao*". This masculine identity illustrates the frustration and disappointment of male workers about their devalued labour power and humble existence in the global factory. Additionally, there are contradictions between the two kinds of masculinities. While management can develop and reinforce masculinity through commanding and controlling others, working-class men, being strictly commanded and controlled, find their masculinity constantly questioned, undermined and degraded. Nevertheless, there are also agreements between the two masculinities. For instance, in the workplace, male managers as well as workers engaged in flirtation and sexual harassment. Both of them could gain pleasure and satisfaction by flirting and harassing girls and keep existing male-dominated gender relations on the shop floor.

Furthermore, I argue that there are inherent conflicts between global capital and local working-class masculinity. Although Foxconn has hired a large number of male workers, it has no intention to re-organize the work to make it become more independent and autonomous. Instead, the work in Foxconn has become more despotic and oppressive, and payment is still meagre. This has sowed the seeds for fierce conflicts between capital and male/female workers. On the one hand, the highly exploitative capitalism has undermined working-class masculinity in the space of workplace. Work on the assembly line, which is repetitive and boring, provides no foundation for a sense of control, confidence or autonomy to male workers—which are fundamental parts of masculinity. Moreover, the quasi-military management, characterized by a set of strict disciplines and despotic punishments, further reinforces

male worker's feeling of powerlessness, alienation and degradation, and further undermines their masculinity.

On the other hand, the coercive forms of labour control generate male workers' anger and dissatisfaction, and lead to individual and collective actions. My ethnographic research finds that conflicts between male workers and line supervisors have become daily masculinized practices. Facing supervisor's aggressive management style, male workers fight back with harsh words, quitting, physical violence, sabotage and other forms of struggles. It is evident that capital-worker conflicts in Foxconn have become more violent and fierce, which in turn disrupt the production order and efficiency on the production line.

Since their masculinity was challenged in the workplace, some male workers attempt to repair and rebuild them in courtship, sex and family life. For male workers, sexual activity and marriage are vital spheres to sense power and control, and sustain identity of masculinity during *dagong* life. Nevertheless, their sexual and marriage practices are obviously constrained by meager wages and disadvantageous class position. Since the slender wages provide no condition for supporting family life, male workers' power in courtship and family relationships have been questioned and challenged, and they have also been deprived some of the patriarchal dividends. For example, since his wife need to work to sustain their family, the husband has to be responsible for some domestic work. Therefore, highly exploitative capitalism has undermined working-class masculinity, not only in the space of workplace, but also regarding family.

Regarding female workers, the making of gendered subjects on the shop floor is even more complicated and fragmented. While femininity is de-emphasized and ignored by management, male workers, through persuasion, flirtation and sexual harassment, attempt to remind female workers of their femininity. In spite of the management and

male workers' practices, some girls, to protect themselves and fight back the masculinized management and gender discrimination, get rid of some feminine qualities—gentleness, obedience and tenderness—and become more rebellious and aggressive. On the shop-floor, the boundary of conventional gender discourses is constantly challenged by woman workers' "improper" behaviors, such as shouting, cursing, fighting and speaking rough words. Besides, girls on the line also stress their equal work status and economic independence as male workers. By stating they could work and earn money like men, females attempt to challenge the existing male-dominated gender relations and achieve a more equal gender system in the workplace.

Furthermore, female workers actively participate in the project of making a new modern self through working (rather than forming a family), being single, engaging in pre-marital sex and postponing marriage. Through engaging in pre-marital sex and postponing marriage, they strongly seek to control their own body, sexuality and fate. For some, work instead of family is the central concern in their life. Therefore, some girls regard factory work as an opportunity to become economically independent and to challenge the patriarchal order. In addition, due to the slender wages of their husbands, many women, after they get married, still have to go outside and work in factories. As we can see, the family structure of Chinese migrant workers is obviously distinct from the breadwinner-housewife family pattern in the western world. Since females need to work to sustain their family, they have more economic independence in families, which in turn improve their status both in the family and the public sphere. However, in order to achieve more equal gender relations in the family, female workers have to provide labour power to be consumed by capita before and after marriage.

This study explores the complicated interplay between the gendered labour regime and the making of working class gendered identities. It indicates that the factory

regime has not only affect the making of gendered subjectivities of workers in the workplace, but also impact on workers' negotiation of love, sex, and family relationships in their daily lives. Moreover, workers themselves also actively participated in making their gender identities through using rough words, engaging in flirtation in the workplace, and being single, having pre-marital sex out of the workplace. Workers' gendered language and practices, which explicitly reject the "de-gendered" practices of management in Foxconn, attempt to make a more independent, attractive and modern self. Based on the case study of Foxconn, we could see that new scripts of femininity and masculinity are emerging in the second generation of migrant workers.

This study obviously cannot claim to be comprehensive. It is also lacks systematic analysis on the relations among worker's gender identities, the factory regime and the macro political-economic environment. Nevertheless I believe that more ethnographic researches and theoretic discussions in this direction will yield fruitful insights into the lives of the new generation of migrant workers as well as the changing patriarchal, economic, and social-political structure of reform China.

Appendix1: The basic information of respondents

Name	Age	Gender	Job and working years in Foxconn	Marriage Status	The number of Children
Aiqi	24	F	Senior engineer, 5 years	Single	0
Tian	19	F	Assembly worker, 0.5 year	Single	0
Ouyang	22	F	Assembly worker, 4 years	Single	0
Zebing	18	F	Assembly worker, 0.3 year	Single	0
Yufang	19	F	Assembly worker, 0.5 year	Single	0
Juan	21	F	Assembly worker, 0.5 year	Married	1 daughter and pregnant
Bai	22	F	Line supervisor, 3 years	Single	0
Shan	23	F	Secretary, 4 years	Single	0
Yu	25	F	Staff in the department of human resource management, 3 years	Single	0
Qing	17	F	Assembly worker, 0.5 year	Single	0
Lily	17	F	Assembly worker, 0.3 year	Single	0
Zhang	29	F	Senior engineer, 4 years	Married	1 daughter
Wei	20	M	Assembly worker, 0.3 year	Single	0
Hong	20	M	Assembly worker, 0.3 year	Single	0
Wangfa	17	M	Assembly worker, 0.3 year	Single	0
Jinshi	22	M	Assembly worker, 0.5 year	Single	0
He	23	M	Assembly worker, 4 years	Single	0
Li	25	M	Staff in the department of	Single	0

			human resource management, 2 years		
Hui	25	M	Assembly worker, 3 year	Married	1 son
Lan	32	M	Assembly worker, 10 years	Divorced	1 son
Yong	26	M	Skilled worker, 4 years	Married	1 daughter
Fei	18	M	Assembly worker, 1 year	Single	0

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