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RÉSUMÉ

Ouvriers chinois dans l'industrie du textile en Afrique: Implications de l’envoi des travailleurs à contrat sur le mouvement ouvrier international

Monina Wong

Cet article porte sur l’intégration des ouvriers chinois dans la mondialisation du marché du travail à travers le système d’envoi de travailleurs à contrat et son impact sur le movement ouvrier international et les rapports de travail en Chine. L’article revisite la manière dont la réforme des enterprises d'État et la libéralisation des capitaux nationaux et étrangers a déplacé la main d’oeuvre chinoise, autant dans les zones urbaines que rurales. L’envoi des travailleurs à contrat à l’étranger est considéré ici par le gouvernement chinois comme un élement stratégique capable de permettre de surmonter la pression croissante de la production généralisée par la mondialisation. En même temps, ce gouvernement doit aussi trouver un expédiant pour rediriger le capital afin de faire face aux contradictions financières provoquées par la réforme économique. Ce système sert à prolonger le mécanisme politisé de contrôle des travailleurs Chinois à l'étranger - un contrôle qui est basé sur l’individualisation de la législation en matière de travail et le prolongement de l’interdiction de l’organisation indépendante des travailleurs. Des exemples spécifiques ont été repertoriés dans les cas des travailleurs immigrés chinois employés dans l’industrie du vêtement dans deux pays africains que sont l’Ile Maurice et la Namibie. En examinant les revendications des ouvriers chinois dans ces deux pays africains, l'article met en sellette l'importance de ces luttes contre les syndicats d'Etat puisque ceux-ci ne peuvent les protéger contre l'exploitation par le capitale mondiale. L’on peut, à la lumière de ces cas, tirer deux importantes conclusions. Les rélations de travail chinois et le système de contrôle ouvrier ne peuvent pas subsumer l'activisme collectif et spontané des travailleurs. Les contradictions au sein des réformes économiques et des rapports de travail pourraient offrir une réelle possibilité de replacer l'activisme des travailleurs chinois au coeur du mouvement ouvrier mondial. En somme cet article démontre qu’il existe bel et bien un rapprochement entre les ouvriers chinois et les ouvriers de partout dans le monde.

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Chinese Workers in the Garment Industry in Africa: Implications of the contract labour dispatch system on the International Labour Movement

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Abstract

This article examines the integration of Chinese labour into the globalized labour market through international dispatching, and its impact on the international labour movement and the Chinese system of labour relations. It begins by tracing the way state-owned enterprise reform and the liberalization of domestic and foreign capital displaced Chinese labour in both urban and rural areas. International labour dispatching as one of capital's strategies aimed primarily at overcoming increasing pressure from globalized production, and is issued by the Chinese government to relieve the financial and labour contradictions brought about by economic reform. The system serves to extend the politicized Chinese labour control mechanism abroad - one that is based on the individualization of legislative protection and persistent prohibition of independent labour organizing. Specific examples are drawn from the cases of dispatched Chinese workers employed in the garment sector in two African countries – Mauritius and Namibia. By examining the last-ditch protest actions taken by the Chinese workers in the two African cases, the article demonstrates the importance of Chinese workers' struggles in reaction to the failure of the state and institutionalized trade unions to protect labour against exploitation by global capital. The cases draw two important conclusions. Chinese labour relations and control systems cannot subsume spontaneous collective labour activism. The contradictions within China's economic and labour reforms could open the possibility of reintegrating Chinese labour activism into the global labour movement as this article demonstrates the increasing commonality between Chinese workers and workers all over the world.

Introduction

Labour is increasingly being moved around by globalized capital to the point of becoming globally mobile. In order to overcome the pressure of organized labour and competition for profit-making and market share between each other, capital has successfully transformed itself by restructuring the organization of production, spatial location and financial composition (Beverley, 2004: 4-5). By doing so, not only has labour entered into the global production chain by working at different nation-based nodal points (Dyer-Witheford, 2002), but it is moving internationally as never before to directly enter into foreign labour markets, making the labour market a truly globalized one. The result is a recomposition of social relations which no longer stops at the borders of national economies but directly relates to and impacts on each other. In one sense, the direct integration of foreign labour is regarded as a threat to national labour movements. In another sense, the creation of a transnational alignment of labour, corresponding with the mobility of capital, is anticipated, since the simultaneous recomposition and integration of social relations within and between different economies will make the increasingly similar conditions faced by workers today more obvious. The integration of the socialist Chinese economy ito the global capitalist system has further strained the ability of the labour movement to overcome divisions within the global working class. The entrance of Chinese workers into the global labour market, whether directly or indirectly, is viewed more as a threat than a blessing to the national and global labour movement. Not only do the sheer numbers of Chinese workers put pressure on the global labour market, but the particularity of the socialist labour relations system with 'Chinese characteristics' and the critical role of the Chinese state in mediating it are seen as possibly creating an implosion of the global labour movement, negatively impacting labour solidarity.

This article examines the impact of the integration of Chinese labour into the globalized labour market through international dispatching. International dispatching of Chinese workers refers to the employment of Chinese workers in foreign countries through mainland-based labour dispatch companies which, after the launch of economic reforms in 1979, became liberalized and experienced rapid growth. Labour dispatching was previously either state-organized or state-approved. With the liberalization of the labour market, labour contracting was deregulated. Private and government-run labour contracting companies mushroomed to provide paid services to Chinese workers that were seeking overseas employment. The article will discuss the effects of Chinese labour dispatching on the international labour movement and the Chinese labour relations system. To illustrate the ‘liberated' mobility of Chinese workers, the article begins by tracing how economic reforms achieved the displacement of Chinese labour, in both urban and rural areas, from socialist production units and reintegrated them into a reformed national economy that has been increasingly subjected to the logic of the global capitalist system. The economic reform was launched out of the need to improve the productivity of state capital and was quickly seized upon by individual capital to reduce the cost of production and to expand market share. The displacement of Chinese labour and the reinvigoration of labour mobility were accomplished through the reform of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the urban sector, and rapid economic development supported by foreign direct investment (FDI) and liberalized domestic capital that prolaterianized rural migrant labour. The combined effect was a generalized informalization of employment and labour relations that replaced the socialist labour protection system prior to 1979. Increased pressure was levied on the socialist state since the mid-1980s through mass unemployment, economic disparity and social inequality as well as increasing challenges to the government's liberalization policies. The Chinese government attempted to resolve such contradictions by deepening economic reform and further integrating both Chinese capital and Chinese labour into the global capitalist system. This was epitomized by its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. As a result, not only has Chinese capital and Chinese labour regained mobility which was once lost under the socialist system, this new mobility is now global.

The article will also evaluate how this new mobile Chinese labour is directly integrated into the global labour market through international dispatching. Specific examples are drawn from the cases of dispatched Chinese workers employed in the garment industry in two African countries, Namibia and Mauritius, activities undertaken by Asian investors seeking tariff-free access to the international market under the African Growth Opportunities Act (AGOA) and the Multi Fibre Arrangement (MFA).

The article will demonstrate that by viewing international labour dispatching as a method used by capital primarily to overcome increasing pressure from globalized production on the one hand, and by the Chinese government to relieve the financial and labour contradictions brought about by economic reform on the other hand, the international dispatch system serves to extend the politicized Chinese labour control mechanism that is based on individualization of legislative protection and persistent prohibition of independent labour organizing. The system works to isolate workers from the institutional protection of the state and trade unions in the home and host countries.

Finally, the article will examine the public protest actions taken by the Chinese workers in the two African cases and demonstrate the importance of Chinese workers' struggles, given the failure of the state and institutionalized trade unions to monitor their exploitation by global capital.

The cases draw two important conclusions. While the Chinese labour relations system was transformed from one based on collective rights to a system of legislated individual labour rights, new forms of collective labour activism have emerged. The contradictions within China's economic and labour reforms could open the possibility of reintegrating Chinese labour activism into the global labour movement as it becomes obvious, by examining the case of international dispatching, that Chinese workers and workers all over the world increasingly share common interests and face similar working conditions.

From Immobility to Mobility – the Recommodification of Chinese Labour

International labour dispatching is a phenomenon that has gained wider significance in China since the launch of economic reforms in 1979 (Tan, 2003; Wang, 2005) although the migration of Chinese workers to other countries has a history dating back to imperial times. The propagandist literature of the Chinese Communist Party defined labour migration, before the establishment of Communist China in 1949, in terms of human trafficking and bonded labour caused by colonial and capitalist exploitation (Liu, 1985; Wang, 1994).[2] Workers were sent to various countries by labour contractors as a form of property to work in mines and plantations or to build roads and railways. The establishment of Communist China was to eradicate labour exploitation by replacing all forms of capitalist labour, including mobile labour, self-employment, irregular labur and overseas employment, with the non-commodified socialist labour relations system. Domestic labour and capital became highly immobile as they were collectivized and nationalized under the planned economy into state-owned enterprises, rural communes and brigades which determined production and social redistribution. The mobility of labour was restricted by the state administration, even for the purpose of changing employment or migrating from the rural to the urban areas. Emigration and overseas employment was prohibited, except in the form of state dispatching which was a political activity rather than a commercial undertaking. Workers were sent abroad either in conjunction with a foreign aid project serving diplomatic purposes; or as part of trade and technology exchanges known as 'foreign economic cooperation projects', undertaken by a number of exclusive SOEs that were granted import-export trade status (Tan, 2003; Wang, 2005). Employment, particularly in urban areas, was most restricted and formalized between 1949 and 1979 as Chinese workers were employed and provided with job security, social security and labour protection by the socialist state. However, it was exactly the lack of efficiency of this socialist economic and labour system that the post-Mao economic reform launched in 1979 sought to tackle in order to stimulate economic development and reinvigorate labour mobility and productivity. Economic liberalization largely lifted state control on capital and recommodified labour by displacing workers from socialist production units and launching them into the globalized capitalist market. It set up an unavoidable contradiction as the reform reverted labour back to the pre-1949 period, returning workers to an informalized existence that did not guarantee employment security and labour protection.

Displacement and Informalization of Rural Labour

Rural labour mobility was highly restricted under the socialist planned economy in order to stabilize agricultural supply and support urban industrialization. Such restrictions were enforced by organizing rural labour into communal production units and segregating the rural and the urban populations under the household registration system. The first phase of the economic reform, between 1979 and 1985, was aimed at liberating labour productivity. Rural communes were decollectivized and replaced by the household responsibility system while brigades were reformed into township and village enterprises (TVEs). This allowed the individual households and labourers to retain profits and decide their after-quota production (Ghose, 2005). Other parts of the system were eventually reformed as well, including the lifting of food rationing requirements and state control over commodity prices, all aimed at reducing state control over the market. At the same time, there was an urgent need for the economic reform to reinvigorate state capital by making use of FDI in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the southern and eastern coastal provinces. Initial foreign investment came from Hong Kong and Taiwan who were fleeing from high production costs in their respective countries. However, as urban labour mobility still remained low prior to the SOE reforms launched in the mid-1990s (Ghose, 2005), the displaced rural peasants became the main labour supply for the growing number of joint ventures (JVs) and foreign invested enterprises (FIEs) locating in the SEZs. To regulate relations between rural migrant peasants and non-state-owned capital in the JVs and FIEs and to delegate greater managerial control to employment decisions in the SOEs, a labour contract system was introduced nationwide in 1986 on an experimental basis.[3] The real implication of the system, however, was recommodification of labour within the socialist system by reverting individual labourers back as 'free' wage earners in the market.

Deregulating capital ownership and investment created a generally informal system of labour in the urban sector. Formal employment is strictly defined by the socialist government to refer to workers, known specifically as 'zhi-gong', that are employed in the SOEs and collective-owned enterprises (COEs). The 'zhi-gong' was entitled to employment and legislative labour protection and job security as rural peasants were barred from urban employment. The informal sector, however, is defined much more broadly. Informal labour covers all other forms of employment, both registered and un-registered, in the non-state-owned and non-collective-owned enterprises, including the self-employed sector (Hu, 2006) where the socialist labour system is not enforced. Displaced from the rural collectivized production units and barred from entering the urban formal sector, a mass of rural labourers directly entered the informal sectors either as individual migrant job seekers or through a network of workers com-ing from a common place of origin. The movement of rural labour in the eighties and nineties, therefore, led to the de-facto collapse of the socialist residence control mechanism and workers largely filled the jobs created in the urban non-state-owned sector, thereby making the urban informal sector, as definied by the socialist government, the largest source of employment and GDP growth after 1995 (Hu, 2006). Between 1990 and 2004, the growth in informal employment was said to be 133% of the national increase in employment, providing jobs for 125.55 million people (Hu, 2006). The informal sector now represents more than 40% of the total urban workforce and contributes to 45.88% of the total non-agricultural GDP of the economy (People's Daily, 18 October 2006).

Before the extension of the Labour Law in 1995 and the Trade Union Law in 2001, to cover all labourers and not only the 'zhi-gong' in the SOEs and COEs, migrant workers were a legally transient group. Their employment had been informal and highly mobile due to their exclusion from legislative and trade union protection. The informality was reflected in the social discrimination against the peasant-workers or 'nong-ming-gong.' They were used as 'helping hands' to supplement the 'zhi-gong' as the SOEs underwent labour contractualization and supplied labour to the private and foreign invested enterprises. The lack of labour protection of migrant peasant-workers, even after the extension of the labour laws, further subjected them to the flexible needs of short-term FDI in export-processing, thereby increasing their already high mobility. By 2004, the number of rural migrant workers reached 80 million and another 100 million surplus workers were still available in the rural areas (Zeng, 2006). Indeed, the presence of such a reserve labour army in the rural areas and its mobility in the informalizing labour market eventually created huge pressure on the urban formal sector. However, as the state-capital reforms intensified to reduce surplus workers from the mid-1990s onwards, the boundary between the rural and urban as well as that between the formal and informal labour sector began to disintegrate.

The Displacing of Urban Labour under the Enterprise Reform

Urban economic reform, under the Planned Commodity Economy phase (1986 – 1990), started with the separation of state and capital in the SOEs. Greater autonomy was delegated to the local governments and enterprises as the state eventually ceased direct subsidies and decentralized production planning, price controls, profit retention and labour management. To break the tenure and recruitment system in the SOEs, the labour contract system, introduced in 1986, allowed contractual labour such as seasonal and temporary labour in the SOEs, depending on the needs of production. All the new SOE workers were to be recruited on a contractual basis. The 1986 regulation effectively precluded the further expansion of the largest employment sector by reducing the number of new workers entering into the sector from 5.36 million or 67.6 per cent of the total urban industrial population in 1986 to 3.63 million or 47.4 per cent of the total in 1991 (Tomba, 2002). Despite the ideological debate over the paradox of liberating labour mobility and commodifying labour (Tomba, 2002: pp100-3), it later proved irrelevant compared with the pragmatic consequence created by labour contractualization which not only succeeded in redirecting the flow of the labour force but shifted command over the use of labour from the state to the private sector.

The withdrawal of the state from SOEs, however, was met with resistance from both workers and the bureaucracy (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett, 2005). The SOEs were still carrying the accumulated economic and labour redundancies (Ghose, 2005) as loss-making SOEs could not declare bankruptcy due to administrative barriers and the protection of bureaucratic interests which pushed the state to rely increasingly on market incentives to eliminate enterprise inefficiency. Therefore, 'administrative bankruptcy' was implemented in 1994[4] to allow the unprofitable SOEs to close down and retrench workers. Full-scale restructuring was pushed in 1998 as the state allowed for massive closures, sell-outs, mergers, privatization and semi-privatization of the SOEs into enterprises such as privatized and semi-state-owned shareholding companies, limited liability companies, foreign enterprises and joint ventures. Therefore, between 1997 and 2000, the number of registered SOEs incurring losses was reduced from 6599 to 3100 (SETC, 2000). Concomitantly, social relations were reformulated as urban workers were displaced from state employment to become unemployed, self-employed, or re-employed by private enterprises or privatized SOEs. Displacement from 'zhigong' status was both social and economic as workers lost the status of ‘masters of the socialist country’ and took up informal jobs, thus expanding the size of the urban informal sector. Yet, the socialist legacy of all-encompassing labour dependence on the enterprise for social redistribution (Walder, 1986) still attached laid-off workers to the enterprise through the ‘xia-gang’ system.[5]

The *Basic Living Protection System of Laid-Off SOE Workers* was passed in 1998 and mandated all restructuring SOEs to set up employment centres for the continuous delivery of social welfare and social relief for a transition period of three years. The cost of capital restructuring and maintaining the ‘xia-gang’ labour relations system was, however, largely borne by individual laid-off workers and the state. The state became the ultimate absorber of all the unpaid debts, delinquent loans and unpaid social security benefits of the bankrupt and restructured SOEs. Between 1994 and 2004, 6.7 million SOE workers were laid off in 3484 cases of registered bankruptcy which involved a swapping of enterprise debt as high as 237 billion yuan (21st Century Economics News, 21 March, 2006). In order to close down 725 state-owned mines and enterprises in heavy and military industry, the state paid a subsidy of 62.7 billion yuan for funding and compensation to 1.9 million dismissed workers (21st Century Economics News, 21 March 2006). By 2004, an accumulated 240 million laid-off SOE workers were reported to have received assistance from the employment centres (MOLSS, 2004). The financial burden of providing assistance to unemployed workers forced the government to transform the SOE-based welfare system to a society-based public social security fund in 2000. This eliminated the dependence of SOE workers on the enterprise as the sole welfare delivery unit for social security and housing and education benefits. The new system standardized only four social types of insurance: unemployment, work injury, medical and maternity, covering all types of enterprises and urban labourers.[6] The system deflated the privileges of the ‘zhi-gong’ leading to their ultimate displacement from exclusive state protection and subjected them to market competition.

Nevertheless, state finance was still heavily burdened by the cost of restructuring despite the government’s intention of achieving multiple-source funding. The pension fund averaged a growth rate of 4.04 per cent which lagged behind the 6.64 per cent growth rate of the retired and laid-off workers (MOLSS, 2004) and was estimated by the World Bank to be carrying a hidden deficit of 3000 billion yuan per year (Deng, 2006). In 2003 alone, the state subsidized a total of 54.4 billion yuan to the public social security fund for pension payment (MOLSS, 2004). In order to extricate the state from the huge financial burden, the concurrent relief-based SOE labour reform had to be replaced with one based on employment, necessitating more aggressive strategies of consolidating and streamlining state capital for terminating old labour relations and creating new ones. Under the 'Grab the Big Ones and Let Go the Small Ones' (*Jua Da Fang Shaio)* policy launched in the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1996-2000), 520 SOEs were selected to develop into state-owned, transnational enterprises (Zhou, 2003; SETC, 2001). These were SOEs, such as China Petroleum, BaoGang Steel, Legend (or Lenovo) Computers and China Telecom, China Mobile, considered competitive in the most strategic sectors. More flexibility was granted to the relatively less competitive SOEs under the policy called 'Separation of the Core and Subsidiary Business' (Z*hu Fu Feng Li*) implemented in 2002.[7] The smaller or less successful SOEs were given autonomy and economic incentives to better utilize state capital in the mother companies or core businesses for focused expansion while subsidiary companies were privatized or closed down. Smaller SOEs were entitled to three-year subsidies and tax exemptions under the condition that 30% of the laid-off workers were streamlined into new jobs or rehired.[8] The policies, in practice, allowed the SOE management to terminate formal labour relations, change contracts and dispatch workers to existing subsidiaries and newly created ones. The laid-off and 'xiagang' had no choice but to directly or indirectly re-enter the labour market as informalized workers.

(Re-)Entering into Labour Informalization Through Labour Dispatching

The enormous pressure faced by the Chinese government to increase employment is clearly reflected in the employment policies adopted after 2002 which focused on generating high numbers of flexible employment rather than on providing high-paying and stable work.[9] State promotion of flexible forms of employment not only led to a change in the structure of work but also the informalization of labour relations, creating a boom in the labour agency sector. On the one hand, direct creation of new and flexible jobs such as temporary, daily, hourly and seasonal work was encouraged. The service sector was a major absorber of surplus urban labour. Public services including public health and hygiene, urban cleaning and security became the main target of privatization and new job creation. On the other hand, the socialist legacy that both forced and encouraged the reformed SOEs to rehire or continue providing social security to the xia-gang workers resulted in the proliferation of indirect and informal employment. Labour dispatching, therefore, became the main strategy for the SOEs to lower the labour cost of restructuring while at the same time privatizing state assets and earning state subsidies. In the name of internal dispatching, SOE workers were transferred to the privatized company without carrying over seniority and severance. In most instances, internal dispatching was just a transitional pretext before actual dismissal. Moreover, local governments and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in the rural and inland provinces were encouraged to either directly organize or subsidize private labour agent companies and vocational schools to train and dispatch young rural workers directly to enterprises in coastal industrialized cities and the international labour market.

Not only had labour dispatching emerged as a new employment trend in the private and SOE sector, but after 2002 it was increasingly integrated into public employment policy, becoming a major strategy for the state to achieve higher employment. By 2005, dispatched workers numbered 25 million across various sectors (People's Daily, 7 January 2006). In one sense, the resurgence of informal labour and dispatching is reminiscent of pre-1949 times. But the high level of direct state participation due to the vast unemployment pressure incurred by the socialist government's economic reform and its encroachment in different sectors and industries is indeed unique. Of the 26,000 dispatch companies formed all over the country, half of them are directly operated or approved by the local Ministry of Labour and Social Security or local government (People's Daily, 7 October 2006). The Suzhou Industrial Park, a joint venture between China and Singapore, hosts more than 70 of the global top 500 enterprises, particularly in the information industry. About one-fourth of the workers are dispatched, making labour dispatching a ten-million-dollar industry in the city (Li, 2006).

The state-capital reforms of Socialist China have restored labour mobility. Such mobility is, however, increasingly mediated by the struggle between marketization and the legacy of the socialist state. SOE workers have increasingly begun to protest against the state for their loss of economic and social status, thereby challenging the legitimacy of the market reform of the socialist government (Li and Selden, 2005; Cai, 2006). Labour unrest from migrant workers is also rising due to their social discrimination and weak bargaining position in a labour relations system that is now based on individual legislative protection rather than collective protection under the socialist labour relations and trade union system.[10] The creation of the present system was the mediated result of the socialist state's withdrawal from enterprises and its continuous exercise of political control over labour. Collective protection through the party-affiliated trade union and collective contract negotiation was not mandated in the non-state-owned sectors and workers' self-organizing was not allowed. The state attempted to protect labour and increase the cost of capital exploitation by establishing high legal labour standards, which included revising the Labour Law (1995) and promulgating new ones such as the Social Security Ordinance (2000), the Occupational Disease Prevention Law (2002), the Safe Production Law (2002), the Work Injury Insurance Ordinance (2003) and the Labour Contract Law (2006). The contradiction, however, in negotiating market efficiency and 'Chinese socialist characteristics' has resulted in the paradox of high protective standards and yet flexible implementation.

Different strategies have been used by capital, ranging from overt violation of regulations and relocation, to productivity-oriented human resource management practices and labour dispatching to continue maintaining the low cost of labour exploitation. Labour dispatching is a strategy that has been used by capital to further weaken the implementation of the labour laws which have become the most important devices used by Chinese labour in the absence of collective labour rights protection. The unclear nature of labour relations in dispatching effectively raises the cost of individual labour protection and achieves divide-and-rule amongst labour in litigation (Nanjing University, 2006). Yet, the pressures of enormous unemployment and the financial burden incurred from the economic reform mitigated the exploitative implications of labour dispatching, allowing it to be a flexibile employment measure.

International Labour Dispatching of Chinese Workers and Global Capital

The reinvigorated mobility of Chinese labour was concomitant with and also much needed by reformed Chinese capital to overcome intensified competition. With the Chinese economy increasingly embedded into the global capitalist market and confrontation with global capital unavoidable, pressure mounted for Chinese capital to be globally mobile. The success of the economic reform in informalizing Chinese labour has led to escalating cumulative FDI to China, one result of which has been the accumulation of excess capital at the state-owned banks. By 2001, the state-owned banks were reported to have capital excess as high as 3200 billion yuan (Zhong, 2003). Pressure grew for Chinese capital to seek efficient investment outlets which became increasingly problematic with the anticipation of greater competition from foreign capital entering the domestic market after China's integration into the WTO. The accession committed China to remove protective tariffs and subsidies and open the domestic market to foreign capital in a number of strategic and closed sectors. To maintain the competitive edge, the 'Stepping Out' (*Zhao Chu Chu*) strategy launched in the Fifteenth Plenary of the National People's Congress in 2002 was aimed at liberalizing outward direct investment from state control (Cao, 2005). Hurdles to capital mobility, such as state monopoly and administration, credit and foreign exchange control, were removed as the state took the lead in encouraging competitive Chinese enterprises in the energy, international contracting (including labour contracting) and highly protectionist sectors to 'step out'.[11] The growth of outward FDI from China was remarkable, rising from US.4 billion in 1980s to US2.3 billion in the 1990s and reaching an outward FDI stock of US41 billion by the end of 2004 (Fortin, 2005).

The newly acquired international mobility of Chinese capital was supplemented with that of labour through systematic promotion and liberalization of international labour dispatching. Accounting for less than 1% of the world migrating population, international dispatching is increasingly viewed, alongside domestic dispatching, as a means of relieving unemployment pressure in the rural areas. Government-run dispatching or 'labour export bases' have been set up in direct collaboration with the Chinese International Contractors' Association[13] (CHINCA) in populous provinces such as Sichuan, Hubei and Henan (CHINCA 2005). This is also shown in the high dispatch figures of Shandong, Liaoning and Jilin provinces which were heavy industry bases now suffering from massive SOE lay-offs (Table 1 Appendix). By the end of 2005, more than 3.47 million Chinese workers had been dispatched overseas and the value of international labour dispatch contracts was USD40.36 billion (MOFCOM, 2005).

The destination and sectoral distribution of internationally dispatched Chinese workers is determined by trade, the boom and bust of the global capitalist economy and the government's bilateral relations with strategic foreign countries and the 'stepping-out' strategy of individual Chinese enteprises. More than 50% of the workers dispatched between 1990 and 2003 went to Asian countries (Table 2 Appendix), particularly the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South Asian countries which are expected to have increased economic integration with China, lowered tariffs (for Chinese products to less than 5%) with greater access to the Chinese market starting from 2009-2013.[14] Due to close Sino-African diplomatic and foreign aid ties, 82,000 workers were dispatched to Africa in 2005, two-thirds of whom were construction workers. Vulnerable sectors anticipating intense competition from foreign capital after the accession to the WTO were the most active in outward investment and dispatching. The construction sector has shown a steady increase in international dispatching rising from 16.5% of the total number of dispatched workers in 2002 to 26.3% in 2004 (Table 3 Appendix). The low value-added, labour-intensive manufacturing industries, such as the garment and electronics industries, that are vulnerable to both anti-dumping measures in the international market as well as intense competition and over-production in the domestic market (Wong, 2005), are also active in seeking outward investment. Therefore, despite the reduction from 42% in 2002 to 37.6% in 2004, manufacturing was the most active sector in international labour dispatching[15] (Table 3 Appendix). Becoming transnational was increasingly viewed as a solution to western protectionism (Hou, 2005). China has, by now, contractual projects and labour dispatching arrangements with over 180 countries. International contracting and international labour dispatching amounted to USD156.3 billion and USD30.8 billion in the same year (English People's Daily, 12 July 2005). By the end of 2005, there were

3.47 million Chinese workers dispatched abroad.

The participation of newly mobile Chinese capital and Chinese labour in the global capitalist economy has certainly hastened the speed and broadened the scope of globalization. The globalized garment industry has manifested a hypermobility in transferring investment from the US and North Asian countries in the 1980s to South and South-East Asia, including China, in the 1990s and on to African and Central and Eastern European countries after 2000 (UN 2005).[16] Though limited by the politicized garment quota system, hypermobile garment capital creates new production sites where access to the US and European market can be gained from favourable trade agreements and the absence of quota restrictions as formulated under the MFA. It also moves labour across national borders to these countries in order to compensate for the low labour efficiency that is risked in new production sites. International labour dispatching, therefore, serves hypermobile capital by contributing to the hypermobility of labour, the ultimate purpose of which is to displace workers from the labour protection mechanism of both the home and the host country. By the end of 2004, the Chinese government reported having more than 60,000 expatriate workers employed in the textile and garment sectors abroad. These dispatched workers were comprised of both skilled laid-off SOE workers as well as young migrant workers from the rural areas. Through private commercialized labour agent companies or those operated through the local labour ministry, these workers were employed mainly in Chinese or other Asian invested operations in new production sites such as Saipan, Mauritius, Jordan, Lesotho and Namibia (Textnet.com, 2005). The indirect participation of unorganized Chinese workers in the global production chain is already viewed as causing job losses in other countries. Their direct integration into the national labour market in the new production sites is, therefore, considered a further threat to the already crisis-laden global labour movement.

Labour Dispatching in the Garment Industry in Mauritius and Namibia

The importation of dispatched Chinese workers to the garment industry in Namibia and Mauritius reveals a common challenge of globalization to post-independent economic development for the African trade union and labour movement which emerged in a period of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist political struggles for national independence. The integration of the post-colonial African economies into the global production chain is organized more and more by Transnational Corporations (TNCs), which undermine national sovereignty as well as the basis of the organized social forces inherited from past struggles. Shortly after independence in Mauritius in 1968, import substitution industrialization (ISI) was adopted to diversify the economy away from the traditional mono-crop sugar cane plantations for the accumulation of domestic industrial capital in the 1970s. ISI was soon limited by the requirements of the structural adjustment programs mandated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s after the oil crises. Instead, industrialization became export-oriented in the mid 1980s, replicating the export processing zone (EPZ) model of the newly industrialized East Asian economies (NICs). The EPZ sector became the main source of exports, generating GDP growth as well as employment in the manufacturing industry. In 2000, the EPZ sector contributed about 49 per cent of the manufacturing sector's overall GDP contribution to the national economy and 82 per cent of the gross domestic export of the country (MIDA, 2005). Even more, during its boom period in 2000, the sector employed about 30 per cent of the country's total workforce (MIDA, 2005). The EPZ model also deepened the dependence of the economy on foreign capital, particularly the Asian garment manufacturers whose mobility was highly structured by profit margins gained from cheap labour costs and quota-free access of African countries to the ex-colonial powers in Europe and to the US under the AGOA.[17] In the mid 1980s, about two-thirds of the cumulative FDI was in the form of manufacturing capital from Asian garment companies (UNCTAD, 2001) and 65 per cent of all equity within the clothing sector, founded between 1983 and 1985, was Hong Kong-owned (Lamusse 1989). Vulnerability of the industry to FDI and export-processing started to emerge during the 1990s in reaction to the near full employment in the industry (Ancharaz 2003) and pressure from trade unions for wage increases. Wages were only USD35 a month, including overtime in the 1980s (Joomun, 2006). Monthly wages rose by nearly half in real terms between 1989 and 1992, from 2625 Rupee (USD78.6) to 3850 Rupee (USD115) (Gibbon, 2000; Table 4 Appendix). That forced foreign investors in the garment industry to either close down or pressure the Mauritian government for restructuring. In 1989, 107 factories closed, leaving only 481 facilities operating in the EPZ by 1999 (Gibbon 2000). Cumulative FDI in the manufacturing sector also dropped from US$12.8 million (1985-1989) to US$8.4 million (1990 – 1997) (UNCTAD, 2001).

The significance of the EPZ sector to the economy and the mobility of FDI effectively made the competitiveness argument (for maintaining low wages and high labour productivity through importation of skilled foreign labour and industrial restructuring) the dominant one in order to coerce both the government and the trade unions into accepting liberalization of immigration and labour policies. The prevalence of neoliberalism as well as the myth of industrial upgrading festishizes capital's unwillingness to increase costs in a nearly full employment market where labour has been organized under 18 trade unions (Joomun, 2006). Confronted with large-scale factory closures and membership loss, the trade unions have been forced, in national tripartite platforms, to play the defensive role of fighting for severance payments, keeping factories open and preventing the anticipated lowering of labour standards resulting from labour importation (Joomun, 2006). Significant imports of foreign or "guest" workers started in 1990. About 16.3 per cent of the EPZ workforce is migrant labour, the ratio highest in garment assembly where for every one Mauritian worker, 8 foreign workers are imported (Gibbon, 2003). The foreign workforce grew more than 2.2 times that of the whole local labour force between 1996 and 2003 (Table 6 Appendix). China and India are by far the main labour exporting countries to Mauritius, representing 86 per cent of the total number of the foreign workforce in 2003 (Table 5 Appendix).[18] Importing foreign labour in the 1990s served to contain the wage hike, allowing the Mauritian garment industry to restructure itself, a decade later, by relocating the labour-intensive and low-end segment of garment manufacturing to cheaper production sites such as Madagascar, Mozambique, Botswana and Tanzania which could continue to benefit from the AGOA even after 2005 while achieving industrial upgrading in Mauritius. In the 2002-2004 restructuring, it was the foreign workers that suffered first and foremost. The number of Chinese workers dropped from a peak of 12,000 in early 1990s to about 5000 by the end of 2004. International labour dispatching, therefore, provided capital with the most flexible labour supply to achieve the dual purpose of cost reduction in the face of strong labour resistance during periods of boom and industrial restructuring during the bust periods.

The dilemma of post-independent economic development faced by the trade union movement was similar in Namibia. The ruling party, the South West Africa People's Organization of Namibia (SWAPO) which was closely affiliated with anti-colonial struggles in the mid-1980s, became increasingly incfluenced by globalizing pressures and eventually adopted neoliberal policies. National independence in 1990 did not bring national economic sovereignty to the African country where a large portion of GDP is derived from natural resources such as agriculture, mining and fisheries. A decade after independence in 2000, the economy was still largely agriculturally-based, accounting for 28.6 % (123,297) of national employment. More than 64% (78,000) of the agricultural workers were communal/subsistence farmers and 4% (4,354) were self-employed (FES and LaRRI, 2004). The unemployment rate was 31.3 % in the urban and 35.9% in 2000. Like other newly independent South African economies, Namibia was said "to be characterized by a socialist tendency which encouraged state capitalism and discouraged private enterprises and therefore needed assistance from multinational agencies to encourage liberal economic policies, provide domestic and foreign direct investment" (Iyanda, 1998). The urban formal sector was concentrated in public sectors such as public services, mining and energy, food, fishing wholesale and retailing; they were also the most unionized with rates of 83%, 75-80% and 65% respectively (FES and LaRRI, 2004). In the absence of capital investment to diversify the economy in sectors such as manufacturing and services, the Namibian government began to accept neoliberal policies such as privatization and deregulation. The organized formal sectors were most affected by restructuring through retrenchment and informalization of labour contracts. The mining sector, which was the most highly unionized formal sector (with a rate of 83%), lost more than 40% of its jobs between 1997 and 2000 due to privatization (FES and LaRRI, 2004).

The government enacted the *Foreign Investment Act* in 1990 and established the first EPZ in 1995 with the aim of attracting foreign and domestic investment, creating industrial employment, emphasizing export earnings and promoting technology and skills transfer (Iyanda, 1998). Asian garment manufacturing capital such as the Malaysian garment conglomerate, the Ramatex Corporation, was targeted as a source of foreign direct industrial investment. Established in 1982, the Malaysian company had already invested in China and South Africa where it could benefit from quota-free access to the US garment market as part of the AGOA.

In order to attract investment from Ramatex, which was attempting to avoid the strong labour movement in South Africa, the Namibian government offered concessionary investment packages in 2000. Concessions included the provision of free land, factory complexes, subsidized water and electricity supplies and laws banning strikes and lockouts in the EPZs for 5 years (LaRRI, 2003). The government was attacked by trade unions and labour organizations for sacrificing labour protection to FDI and failing to create the promised 25,000 jobs. Ramatex was furthermore criticized by the sectoral trade union, the Namibian Food and Allied Workers' Union (NAFAU), which represented 85% of the factory workforce, as well as by labour organizations for sex and age discrimination in recruitment policy, below-legal minimum wages, long working hours, lack of occupational safety and health provisions, abusive management practices and limited trade union access to the production facilities (LaRRI, 2003; So, Stanley and LaRRI, 2005).

Ramatex labour practices were met with resistance and wildcat strikes from the Namibian workers in the first two years.[19] Foreign labour was, therefore, introduced to the Namibian factory in 2003, after failed attempts to penalize striking workers and marginalize trade union activity through non-recognition of the union. Dispatched workers from the Philippines, Bangladesh and China, at one point, comprised one-third of the total workforce. The company and the government attempted to legitimize the use of foreign workers by claiming there was a lack of skilled labour in the local market. It soon became apparent, however, that the management intended to further exploit the unorganized migrant workforce. Skilled, unorganized workers from the Philippines and China were pitted against the local workers. Unskilled Bangladeshi workers, indebted Bangladeshi dispatch agents, were generally treated most poorly in order to maintain the downward pressure on wages and benefits.[20] The supply of migrant workers from Asia reduced management's dependence on the local workforce, thereby turning them into short-term contractual workers or informal workers such as long-term apprentices and trainees (LaRRI, 2003). Nevertheless, repeated protests by both local and foreign workers remained isolated and contained within one ethnic group, reflecting the trade union's inability to adequately represent the entire workforce. The differing management practices and the division among labour, therefore, allowed capital to effectively undermine the organizing base of the trade union and eventually led to the extension of deflated labour standards to other members of the workforce.

Labour Activism in New Sites of Production

As capital has successfully managed to use location, technology and financial resources to overcome the persistent resistance of labour (Beverley, 2004: pp4-5), the structure of exploitation in the global production chain is maintained, as it is between different nodal points of production (Dyer-Witheford, 2002). The profitability of manufacturing capital vis a vis financial capital can be maintained by fixing the investment location, which in the case of Namibia allowed Malaysian capital to avoid the pressure of strong labour movements in South Africa. Heavy dependence on FDI and export-led industrialization further subjected the garment industries of both Namibia and Mauritius to capital strikes and opening of the local labour market. Furthermore, international garment capital reduced the redistribution effect of the politicized quota system by using imported Asian workers in production centres of Sub-Saharan Africa. This allowed the garment capital to reap the dual benefits of quota-free access to western markets and high productivity derived from a precarious migrant labour sector. Migrant labour was relatively more productive due to its isolation and financial dependence, making labourers vulnerable to control from both employers and labour agents through the threat of repatriation.[21] The dispatched Chinese workers in Mauritius typically worked 18 to 60 per cent more than the legally allowed overtime in order to earn 1.5 to 5 times more than their basic wage which was below the national minimum (So and Wong 2005). Furthermore, the dispatching system succeeded in circumscribing the local labour and trade union resistance in new production sites by creating a division of workers along racial lines. Through systematic organization of work and management practices, Chinese migrant workers were depicted as competitors that were ‘favoured’ by the employers, given higher paid work to do but “did not care about their rights” and “loved to work overtime” (So and Wong, 2005).

The vulnerability of Chinese dispatched workers to exploitative practices was rooted in the Chinese labour relations system and control mechanisms which were transferred extraterritorially through the dispatching system. The economic and labour reforms in China had effectively collapsed the socialist collective labour relations system and replaced it with a different control system that exercised politicized control through creating labour dependence on legislative protection and the party-state dominated trade unions; at the same time, it suppressed freedom of association and the collective bargaining power of labour. Such labour control mechanisms are replicated in international dispatching through state agents such as the foreign embassies and the trade association, CHINCA; as well as through a number of state legislations and voluntary sectoral codes on labour dispatching in China.

State legislation on international dispatching regulates illegal dispatching of unauthorized labour agents and illegal practices such as non-standardized agent fees. A business registration system and a standard agent fee scale by country of destination have been created in an attempt to prevent human trafficking and bonded labour.[22] The dispatch relationship between the labourer and the agent is legalized as a status equivalent to that between the labourer and the user (i.e. employer in the host country), the terms and conditions of which should not be lower than those stated in the Chinese labour law and the labour law of the host country.[23] Allocation of legal responsibility for workers, however, is easily undermined due to the unclear nature of the employment relationship between the user and the employing agent. Moreover, privatization of international dispatching and state promotion of labour export, in order to reduce unemployment, has led to the expansion of an informal sector resulting in illicit practices such as charging illegal agent fees, illegal wage reductions, bonded labour and human trafficking.

The labour dispute handling mechanism in the host country operates through the local group of the CHINCA which is comprised of labour and state agents in the host countries.[24] The former are labour traders whereas the latter’s duty is to avoid mass protests and international scandals. The absence of labour representation is a result of the Chinese government's control over the right to freedom of association of its people and delegation of labour protection in international dispatching to a voluntary sectoral mechanism. Dispatched Chinese workers are explicitly banned from participating in trade unions and political activities in the host country both in the dispatch contracts as well as in the voluntary codes of CHINCA.[25] Although the labour laws and trade union laws in Namibia and Mauritius cover both local and migrant workers, the extraterritorial extension of the Chinese labour control mechanism through the dispatch labour system detaches Chinese workers from trade union protection of the host country as well. Yet in spite of the high risks, labour resistance is not completely absent in the host country. The Chinese workers at Ramatex have staged a number of strikes in protest against poor food quality. Chinese migrant workers instigated continual work stoppages in Mauritius to protest against poor labour conditions and job insecurity. This culminated in a wave of labour insurgency between 2002 and 2004 amidst factory closures occurring in anticipation of the phase-out of the MFA (Table 7 and Table 8 Appendix).

A CHINCA 2005 report discloses that a total of 20 disputes involving more than 2500 workers have occurred between Chinese workers and management in Mauritius (CHINCA, 2005). The figures do not include the unregistered cases. Chinese workers took to the street in Port Louis and surrounded the Chinese embassy, demanding state intervention in a number of incidents that took place between 2001 and 2004.[26] The largest dispute ended when the local police used tear gas to disperse thousands of protesters near the Chinese embassy.[27] The outburst of spontaneous collective public action amongst the dispatched Chinese migrant workers reveals how labour exploitation is exercised through international dispatching and demonstrates that Chinese labour control mechanisms are unable to contain collective labour activism.

A 'New' International Labour Movement Without China?

Given the nature of temporary work and the competitive pressure brought to local employment, organizing migrant workers has always been regarded by the institutionalized trade union movement as 'investment bearing little reward'. Integration of the Chinese dispatched workers into the local labour and trade union movement in the two African cases has yet to be realized. The labour insurgency of the Chinese workers has attracted the attention of some African trade unions in the garment industry where efforts have been made to explore the possibility of including dispatched Chinese workers in trade union organizing.[28] The similar forms of resistance taken by both Chinese and African workers deconstructs racial stereotyping, revealing a common reality faced by the working class as a whole. In that sense, the last-ditch struggles of the unorganized, the informalized and the foreign is pushing the trade union movement towards reformulating itself for more effective regulation of capital. However, the many crises already faced by the trade union movement in Africa as well as the tendency to blame foreign workers for taking African jobs always divides trade union organizing along cultural lines, cauing workers from different contries to view each other as the 'other'.

The trade union movement in Africa is indeed faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, trade unions and workers are confronted with the onslaught of neoliberalism within the nation as well as through regional platforms such as the South African Regional Poverty Network (SARPN) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In some countries, the pressure of unemployment and informalization of labour brought by globalization and neoliberalism has increasing bearing on the post-independent governments and political parties the trade union movement once affiliated with, making it difficult to resort to political mobilization (ALRN, 2004). The introduction of FDI increasingly put the once-militant trade union movement into a situation of engaging in a new role with government and employers under national tripartite mechanisms for achieving economic competitiveness and job creation (ALRN, 2004). On the other hand, grassroot trade unions are finding themselves confronted with union-busting, factory closures, as well as job and membership loss on a day-to-day basis. South Africa was said to have lost one-third of their garment workers since 2003 (Lloyd, Mail & Guardian, 2005). In Lesotho, the 56,000 worker-strong garment industry, which was born out of the AGOA, has already been experiencing 10 per cent unemployment and 20 per cent underemployment due to a factory closure in 2004 (Mutume, 2006). Governments in Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland, Nigeria, Ghana, Mauritius, Zambia, Madagascar, Tanzania, Malawi, Namibia and Kenya, which are expected to be hard-hit by the phase-out of the

MFA, are providing more incentives to keep the foreign-invested textile industry in the country.

The continuing adoption of neoliberal policies by governments has intensified labour flexibilization, eroded the organized base of the working population and thus indirectly supported employer hostility of trade unions and worker organizing (Klerck, 2002).The hypermobility of garment capital, however, has increasingly alerted the trade union movement of the need for a regional trade union movement and an alternative regional development model for Africa (Tandon, 2004). The international trade union movement is increasingly committed to seeking new means to recover their undermined bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the TNCs. Besides focusing on restrengthening grassroot organizing and union democracy of affiliates at multiple national production sites, the 'new' strategy seeks to align unions with Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in consumer campaigns. This new strategy aims to target the non-manufacturing brand TNCs into a forming a global collective bargaining framework based on voluntary labour regulation mechanisms such as corporate social responsibility and labour codes of conduct for subcontractors (ITGLWF website). Such approaches to rebuilding a global bargaining framework for unions is first of all challenged by the discrepancy in real-term labour relations between the targeted brand companies and workers in the global supply chain (Chang and Wong, 2005). Secondly, unorganized and informal workers from the developing countries, particularly China, very often cannot produce enough collective power to be of significance to the 'new' global collective bargaining 'position' that international trade unions attempt to claim itself representing in the voluntary governance structure. The non-representation and non-inclusion of Chinese workers in the international labour movement, therefore, easily pushes national trade unions back to the 'competitiveness' framework. This supports collaboration with governments and capital in calling for protectionism which defends the interests of members in the short term but undermines working class solidarity in the long term. While blaming the industry for creating 250,000 job losses after 2004, the international garment trade union was expecting an expansion of 2000 per cent in Chinese exports in some clothing categories, immediately after 2005. The union, therefore, called for safeguard measures and quotas against China (Mutume, 2006). The irony is that capital mobility succeeds in turning the new structural bargaining position that the post-independent trade unions have gained at the national level and that the international trade union movement is trying to gain at the global level to the interests of capital by reinforcing labour divisions and cornering trade union strategies to localized protectionism. This has resulted in the continuous fragmentation and weakening of the global labour movement.

Indeed China's rapid economic growth is increasingly regarded by developing countries as a threat, creating competition for investment, jobs and export opportunities. The low production cost theory not only blames Chinese workers and China imports for causing job loss and destruction of the domestic garment market in Africa, the 'stepping out' strategy of Chinese capital, particularly the state-owned and privatized conglomerates in natural resource extraction industries such as oil (in Nigeria, Angola, Sudan, Congo), platinum (in Zambia), and timber (South Africa, Gabon, Cameroon and Congo) is viewed by some as a new 'scramble for Africa' (Safos, 2006). The increasing significance of China in the African continent in terms of imports as well as aid and direct investment[29] is considered to make the continent more dependent, this time to a non-white nation.

The basis of such fear of the China threat, though partly constructed and reproduced by protectionists and employers to create division amongst workers, is rooted in the socialist state's increasing reliance on neoliberal policies; and the subordinated role of Chinese labour in national development initiatives. Despite continuous rhetoric concerning the necessity for third-world people's solidarity, the development-first principle held by the Chinese government is moving the socialist state towards supporting neoliberal global free trade.[30] Third world people's solidarity, rooted in the anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggles in the past, has been replaced with solidarity based on financial exchanges of trade and aid. Indeed, the integration of China into the global capitalist economy is the incorporation of one of the single largest neoliberalizing markets into the capitalist system, mediated by the integration of a vast number of unorganized workers into the world labour market. The missing link in the international labour movement is not the dearth of struggles of Chinese workers for, within the country, there have been more and more struggles of grassroot labour against the SOE reforms (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett, 2005); of peasants against the illegal seizure of land by capitalists; of migrant workers against absolute exploitation at the workplace in foreign invested enterprises; and citizens against civil rights abuses. Such labour struggles are dispersed within the country and are not yet articulated into an anti-neoliberal struggle in connection with that of the rest of the world. They are challenging, on a day-to-day basis, labour exploitation and the concrete realities of the neoliberal policies of the state. Despite the politicized state and high degrees of capital control, workers have only their own actions to resort to, and therefore labour activism has not always been submerged, although it can be and is isolated in the case of Chinese workers'. Yet, there is a difference between building a labour movement and defending the trade union movement from the position of institutional bargaining. The future of a new labour movement depends on the real dissolution of boundaries between the formal and the informal, the local and the foreign, the self and the other in the new sites of production as well as a different trade union movement rejuvenated by labour activism of different forms.

Appendix

Table 1: Overseas Labour Dispatching in China by Province (2003)

Province Cities	*No. of workers dispatch*	*No. of workers overseas by end of year*	*Province*	*No. of workers dispatch*	*No. of workers overseas by end of year*
National Total	210,015	524,884	Heilongjiang,	3,969	9,263
Jiangsu	30,195	79,053	Inner Mongo-	3,346	3,093
Liaoning	24,328	44,494	Hubei	3,153	4,923
Dalian city	17,425	21,629	Sichuan	2,416	12,262
Shandong	22,944	52,077	Jiangxi	2,192	8,241
Qingdao city	3,443	10,293	Shaanxi	1,679	3,132
Fujian	17,664	52,586	Hunan	1,422	7,689
Xiamen	2,952	9,004	Beijing	1,343	2,097
Jilin	14,677	34,271	Yunan	1,336	2,818
Shanghai	12,837	31,337	Xinjiang	703	549
Zhejiang	8,907	25,228	Shangxi	491	1,338
Ningpo city	1,453	7,079	Qongqin	390	5,107
Guangdong	6,667	22,507	Gansu	341	723
Shenzhen city	137	882	Guangxi	221	641
Hebei	4,387	16,596	Xianing	173	168
Tianjin city	4,381	11,320	Hainan	95	302
Henan	4,338	11,694	Guizhou	1	103
Anhei	3,881	8,760	Xinjiang	0	20

Source: CHINCA, 2005

Table 2: Destination regions of Chinese dispatch labour (1990-2003)

Year	*Asia*	*Africa*	*Europe*	*Latin America*	*North America*	*Australia*	*Others*	*Total*
1990	27154	11989	7341	1026	5473	764	4192	57939
1991	50175	12528	10636	1364	7025	1123	6986	89837
1992	78410	13661	16876	1609	8098	1215	11115	130984
1993	113671	19361	20814	1836	7200	1467	9305	173654
1994	152657	25707	22637	2341	7792	3015	8429	222578
1995	186966	24303	26024	3050	9959	4980	9248	264530
1996	204134	24662	20804	2874	12574	8676	12039	285763
1997	239917	30447	20538	3376	19245	8363	11875	333761
1998	249695	43888	17958	7122	18295	9150	6021	352129
1999	280062	40113	22613	8337	18163	11199	1794	382281
2000	319381	43540	21772	9065	19007	9439	3563	425667
2001	369543	46819	21090	10648	17356	7265	2455	475176
2002	360559	61164	26723	13361	18633	7088	2094	489622
2003	381543	71372	32854	14078	16811	7138	1048	524844

Source: CHINCA, 2005

Industry	*2002*	*2003*	*2004**			
	No. of workers overseas	*%*	*No. of workers overseas*	*%*	*No. of workers overseas*	*%*
Agriculture, Forestry, Husbandry, Fishing	63,025	15.4	75,178	14.3	74,000	13.9
Manufacturing	174,640	42.5	195,188	37.2	200,000	37.6
Construction	67,909	16.5	132,417	25.2	140,000	26.3
Food	14,316	3.5	14,496	2.8	14,000	2.6
Education, Science, Clerical	2,774	0.7	2,821	0.5	2,000	0.4
Transportation	44,360	10.8	49,946	9.5	49,000	9.2
Design, Consultation, Management	1,165	0.3	3,095	0.6	3,000	0.6
Computer service	1,131	0.3	1,441	0.3	1,000	0.2
Others	41,051	10.0	50,262	9.6	49,000	9.2
Total	410,371	100	524,844	100	532,000	100

Table 3: Sectoral Distribution of Overseas Dispatch Labour from China (2002-2004)

Note: Figures for 2004 were taken by the end of November
Source: CHINCA, 2005

Table 4. Clothing industry earnings in Mauritius, 1989-99

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Monthly paid (MR/	2625	3010	3300	3850	4302	4956	5156	5463	5758	6452	6256
Daily paid (MR/	48	53	70	82	92	109	111	119	134	143	149
Piece paid (MR/day)	n/a	n/a	86	105	116	126	133	144	155	158	n/a
Hourly paid (MR/	n/a	n/a	8.1	9.7	11	12	12	12	13	14	n/a
CPI (i)	100	110.7	124.9	128.5	139.9	153.1	162.4	171.5	185	195.0	210.4
CPI (ii)			100	102.9	112.1	122.6	130.1	137.4	148.3	156.3	

Sources: Gibbon 2000 quoting *Digest of Industrial Statistics* and *MESI*
Exchange rate: 1Rp = 0.02998USD

Country	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
China	8343	12408	13486	10788
India	2843	4290	4977	6945
Madagascar	397	540	561	660
Bangladesh	521	984	599	539
Sri Lanka	404	370	388	500
South Africa	164	240	274	194
Others	1229	1297	1452	1337
Total	13901	20129	21737	20963

Table 5. Country of Origin of Foreign Workers in Mauritius (2000 – 2003)

Source: MLIRE, 2004

Table 6. Migrant Labour Statistics in Mauritius (1996 – 2003)

Year	*Mauritian*	*Foreign Workers*	*Total Labour Force*	*Unemploy-ment rate*	*% of Foreign Worker/Total*
1996	482,200	8,200	490,500	5.8	1.64
1997	490,800	8,600	499,400	6.6	1.7
1998	499,400	10,000	509,400	6.9	1.9
1999	506,600	12,900	519,500	7.7	2.5
2000	514,000	14,600	528,600	8.8	2.8
2001	522,000	16,500	538,500	9.1	3.9
2002	523,900	17,000	540,900	9.7	3.1
2003	531,300	18,200	549,500	10.2	3.3

Source: MLIRE, 2004

Table 7. Employment by Sector in Namibia (2000)

Sector	*Percentage of the workforce*
Agriculture	28.6
Community, social and personal services	11
Real estate, renting, and business activities	9.8
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles	9.2
Education	7.1
Public administration, defence and social security	5.4
Manufacturing	5.3
Domestic work in private households	5.2
Construction	5
Transport, storage and communication	3.3
Health and social work	3.1
Fishing	1.8
Hotels and restaurants	1.8
Electricity, gas and water supply	1
Mining and quarrying	0.9
Financial intermediation	0.8
Other	0.8

Source: Republic of Namibia Labour Force Survey, 2000

Table 8: Number of Work Stoppages by Dispatched Chinese Workers in Mauritius (2002 – 2004)

Year	*No. of stoppages*
2000	15
2001	7
2002	10
2003	37
2004 Jan-June	25
2004 July to Nov	2

Source: Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment of Mauritius, 2004

Table 9: Reasons for Work Stoppages by Dispatched Chinese Workers in Mauritius (2003)

Wages	16
Transfer of wages	3
Overtime	3
Dormitory	2
Molesting and ill treatment	3
Repatriation	2
Others	8
Total	37

Source: Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment of Mauritius, 2004

Endnotes

[1] Executive Director of Labour Action China

[2] The dispatched Chinese workers were generally portrayed as pioneers of working class and anti-colonial consciousness. Experiencing extreme exploitation and yet exposed to the radical working class philosophy outside the country, such literature reported that many of them became Marxist followers or supporters of the anti-colonial and anti-capitalist revolutions of 1911 and 1949.

[3] The *Provisional Regulations on the Establishment of the Labour Contract System in State-Run Enterpries* passed in 1986, introduced the labour contract system. The SOEs were allowed to use contract and short-term rural labour and at the same time new SOE workers were to be employed on a contract basis. All the labourers in the non-state-owned enterprises were also allowed to enter into labour contracts with the employers. The labour contract system therefore officially marked the change of labour relations in the socialist country from a socialist labour relations system to a marketized employment relations system that was largely based on capitalism.

[4] The *Enterprise Bankruptcy Law* was first introduced in 1986 but the implementation was met with great difficulty. It was practiced n 1994 in a number of selected cities. The law provided the room for SOE close down and lay-off while giving priority to pay off worker compensation after liquidation. Such a provision was said to be flawed for helping little in alleviating the debts of the bankrupt enterprises. The liquidation that did not count the charged assets and properties of the bankrupt SOEs also meant transferring the outstanding payment and severance compensation to the state-owned banks and the government. The new enterprise bankruptcy law was promulgated in 2006 which put the rights of debtors before the rights of employees in the liquidation. The controversy involved explains the delay in revising the 2006 law.

[5] 'Xia-gang' literally means off from the workplace. The term is used to denote the termination of employment of SOE workers who are still nominally supported under the restructured or bankrupt enterprise through social security registration and priority re-employment later. Although the SOE workers are laid-off, the socialist state avoids using the term 'unemployed'.

[6] The *SOE Workers Pending Employment Insurance Regulation*

passed in 1993 and the *Basic Living Protection System of Laid-Off SOE Workers* implemented in 1998, initially developed the framework for the enterprise-based unemployment insurance system. Employment centres formed in the restructuring SOEs in 1998 continued to provide welfare to the laid-off workers until they were closed down in 2001 *(State Council of the CCP Notice (No. 10) About Improving Work in the Basic Living Protection and Employment of the SOE Workers, 1998)*. After passage of the Unemployment Insurance Regulation in 1999, a public social insurance system was implemented in 2000 which included a pension and unemployment, work injury, medical and maternity insurance (MOLSS, 2004).

[7] *Implementation Method About Separating the Core and the Subsidiary Business and Streamlining Surplus Workers in the Large and Medium Sized SOEs*, issued by the SETC, 18 November 2002.

[8] *Implementation Method About Separating the Core and the Subsidiary Business and Streamlining Surplus Workers in the Large and Medium Sized SOEs*, issued by the SETC, 18 November 2002.

[9] *Notice (No.12) About Improving Work in the Basic Living Protection and Employment of the SOE Workers*, issued by the State Council of the CCP, 1998.

[10] The collective socialist labour relations system was founded by mass organizations of the Communist Party such as the Communist Party branch, the party-affiliated trade union and the women's federation at the SOE level to protect labour and exercise political control. SOE workers were/are organized under the only legitimate trade union affiliated to the party and protected by collective contracts negotiated with the management. These mass organizations and collective contracts are not mandated in private and foreign-invested enterprises.

[11] http://fec.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/xiangmht/ar/200505/20050500368130.html

[12] http://big5.china.com.cn/chinese/2004/Nov/706684.htm

[13] CHINCA was formed in 1998 and supervised by the Ministry of Commerce for the promotion of international contracting and self-regulation through a number of country-specific voluntary codes and a worker complaint hotline services to prevent illegal practices and unfair competition (CHINCA 2005).

[14] http://fec.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/xiangmht/ar/200504/

20050400366145.html

[15] The reduction of international labour dispatching in the manufacturing sector between 2002 and 2004 in China was related to the phase-out of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (2005) which served to redirect capital mobility back to the former tariff-restricted countries such as China, resulting in a new round of factory closures in the newly emerging garment producing countries.

[16] 'The number of countries with significant apparel exports has increased sharply over time. In 1980, economies whose exports exceeded $1 billion included only Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Republic of Korea, China and the United States. A decade later, the list also included India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Turkey and Tunisia. By 2003, the list included Bangladesh, Mexico, Sri Lanka and several countries in Central and Eastern Europe (UNCTAD 2005:5).

[17] The AGOA was passed in 2001 in the United States with the aim of integrating the Sub-Saharan African countries into the globalized neoliberal economic system. It was to provide them with access to US credit and technical expertise, market opportunities and infrastructure cooperation projects that would facilitate the neoliberal reforms and privatization of the African governments and companies (AGOA website). The act offers duty and quota-free trade until 2008 for a number of apparel articles that are qualified for export to the US market. A total of 45 Sub-Saharan countries, which enjoy preferential trading for export to the US, are eligible to take part in the quota-free export scheme. Duty- free access is available for nearly 2000 products, including footwear and watches from Mauritius to the US (AGOA website; MIDA, 2001).

[18] Of the total 21,550 foreign workers reported in 2003, about half of them (11,232) came from China, followed by India (6795), Bangladesh (488), Sri Lanka (436) and Madagarsca (676) (PRC Embassy, 2003).

[19] In the first year of operations, the Namibian workers at Ramatex staged a wildcat strike in protest of their vague contract and unclear wage guarantee provision. It was followed by two more strikes in April and May of 2003 in protest of low wages; 416 workers were suspended from work, of which 5 were later fired (LaRRI, 2003).

[20] The Bangladeshi workers were paid the lowest. Compared with

the basic wage of N$360, received by Namibian workers, the Bangladeshi workers were paid N$120 and N$75 as they were imported in two groups, the second group replacing the first who were dismissed for taking part in the strike against the harsh pay and working conditions in 2003 (So and LaRRI, 2005). Bangladeshi workers were indebted about USD3500 to agents for the cost of dispatching. The NAFAU and the international garment trade union intervened when they became aware of the exploitation Bangledeshi workersin, in 2004.

[21] The high labour agency fee which turned the Bangladeshi migrant workers in Ramatex into qusai- bonded labour was revealed as a scandal. The Bangladeshi workers were paying US$3500 to the dispatch agent at home for a placement of 3 years at a basic wage of US$200 a month which was lower than the US$360 legal minimum in Namibia. Labourers had to work for at least 18 months before earning a real income. The Chinese migrant workers at Ramatex were paying between RMB13,000 and 18,000 to the dispatch companies, while those in Mauritius paid between RMB4000 and 8000 for a placement.

[22] *Rule on the Administration of Overseas Employment Agents (2002)* and *Administration Methods on the Operation of External Labour Dispatch Cooperation (2004).*

[23] *Notice About the Strengthening of Protection for the Legal Rights of International Dispatched Workers* jointly issued by the MOC and MOLSS in 1994 and *Rule on the Administration of Overseas Employment Agents* issued in 2002.

[24] *Notice (No. 249) from MOFCOM about Handling Foreign Labour Dispatch Conflicts and Related Problems Regarding Emergent Incidents,* issued by MOFCOM, 2003.

[25] *Methods on the Coordination and Management on Labour Dispatch Cooperation in Mauritius,* issued by CHINCA 2002; and *Methods on the Coordination and Management on Labour Dispatch Cooperation in Namibia* issued by CHINCA, 2003.

[26] These incidents included a mass protest action at the Chinese embassy in 2001 against the payment of below minimum-wage pay in a Hong Kong-owned factory. Thousands of workers took to the street to protest factory closures and the exploitation of the migrant workforce that became apparent when a Chinese woman died at the workplace in 2002.

[27] http://big5.chinabroadcast.cn/gate/big5/gb.chinabroadcast.cn/2201/2005/03/14/1425@480204.htm

[28] A project was initiated in Namibia and Mauritius with dispatched Chinese workers by the Africa chapter of the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers' Federation in 2003. In view of the persistent importation of foreign labour to the garment industry by Asian manufacturing capital taking advantage of AGOA, and the spontaneous industrial actions taken by the dispatched Chinese workers, the international trade union saw the need to study the conditions of the Chinese workers and initiated discussion with national trade union affiliates to explore the possibility of organizing Chinese workers. The author was part of the research team in the project and the field work was done in 2004.

[29] About 70 per cent of Sudan's exports and one third of Burkina Faso's exports, of which are most cotton, goes to China. In 2004, $900 million out of $15 billion of the continent's total foreign investment came from China (Safo 2006).

[30]The statement given by the Chinese embassy in South Africa commenting on the African garment trade unions' call for safeguard measures against Chinese imports declared, "The Chinese insist that the success of their textile industry can be attributed to the country's positive response and timely readjustment in the face of difficulties instead of flinching and resorting to self protection." The Chinese say the country's market expansion in the textile and clothing market is nothing for the rest of the world to worry about because it is the integration of world trade which brought China this right. "Any restriction aiming at China will be a distortion to the WTO's free trade principle which will definitely hurt Chinese people's confidence to WTO and their enthusiasm for the new round. These unfair and discriminatory doings will never be accepted by China", warned the statement." (Safo, 2006).

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