



Core units: Key understandings – Years 7–8

Illustration 1: Internal migration in China

Bo Zhang the noodle seller's story

Jordan Pouille reported on the Taiwanese company Foxconn, an enormous factory enterprise in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province.

Bo Zhang charges 3 yuan (about 50 US cents) for a plate of fried noodles and, working alone, he cooks over 1,000 portions a day: 'The bosses don't want the workers going too far from the factory during their meal break. When we come along, the bastards cut the canteen price to 1.5 yuan; usually it's 4 yuan.'

Bo used to work for Foxconn, laminating the metal casings of Apple MacBook laptops. He remembers the suffocating heat, the poor ventilation, the noise, and the aluminium dust that stuck to his hair and skin. During his time, the workers had no contact with the Taiwanese bosses. (Even the Chinese management avoided all contact with their Taiwanese counterparts, who actually made the decisions.) He asked for a transfer, but was turned down and left a year later, in May 2010. Now he's working under better conditions, despite the rats running among the plastic stools and the factory smoke blending with the aroma of soy sauce.

The workers prefer the sociable atmosphere of Bo's stall, where there are no security guards watching. According to them, the foremen stopped handing out humiliating punishments after the suicides in 2010. 'The managers are much more discreet now. In fact, we hardly hear from them any more. If you've got your head screwed on properly, it's OK. I work standing up, but I get a 10-minute break every two hours,' said Yang, 21 and thin as a rake. His friend Cao Di remembered the way things were: 'If you didn't meet your production target, you had to stand facing the wall for six hours, reflecting on the error of your ways.' But discipline remains strict: 'You still have to leave your phone at the entrance, and you can't go to the toilet, or talk or take a drink of water while you are working.' Between them, Yang and Cao wrap 8,000 iPads in a day that lasts from 8am to 7pm. They are proud to have been doing it since the launch of the first-generation iPad in 2010.

Terry Tai-Ming Gou, Taiwanese founder of Foxconn, built his first factory in mainland China at Longhua in 1988. It's a bunker-like structure with a floor area of 3 sq km, surrounded by dormitories. About 350,000 people work here day and night, making printers and cartridges for Hewlett Packard (HP), computers for Dell and Acer, Kindle e-book readers for Amazon, PlayStations for Sony and all of Apple's product range. To meet the insatiable global demand for Apple products, Foxconn has built two more factories, making iPads in Sichuan Province and iPhones in Henan Province. The first began production in September 2010, the second in August 2011. Each employs around 200,000 workers.

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