

## Rules and Regulations in Chinese Factories

What set of rules and regulations determine workplace practices in China? Is it the 13 chapters and 107 articles of the Labor Law of the People's Republic of China? Or is it the codes of conduct designed, implemented, and monitored by transnational corporations? While both are important, the translations that follow indicate that a third set of rules is far more important. These are the rules devised, implemented, and enforced by the factories themselves, and these are the regulations that truly rule workers' lives.

These real regulations are not, with few exceptions, occupational health and safety laws, but sets of rules workers should observe at all times, whether on the factory floor, in the dormitories, or in the canteen. As such, they are often extensive and control all aspects of workers' lives, down to the most personal and mundane. Unlike the implementation of Chinese Labor Law and codes of conduct, these rules are strictly enforced and breaches carry stiff penalties for workers.

The examples below, drawn from a number of manufacturing facilities in the Pearl River Delta (PRD), demonstrate the control factory management wields over its workforce by way of such rules.

From the rulebook provided to all workers entering Elegant Top Shoes in Dongguan (which lies in the heart of the delta region) come the following rules (courtesy of China Labor Watch).

*All employees must obey these regulations carefully. Any breaches will be punished.*

The rules are unambiguous and responsibility often rests solely with individual workers, particularly with regard to health and safety:

*If a worker is injured either through his own fault or by mistake, no medical leave is permitted.*

Safety on the production line in this rulebook includes 35 items, one of which states:

*No chatting is allowed during work hours, no matter whether workers are engaged in single-machine production or line work.*

Dormitory rules are equally strict:

*After the Human Resource Department has allotted beds, workers must not switch or exchange them without permission. To share one's bed with others is forbidden.*

*Admittance of outside personnel is not allowed. Workers not staying in the company dormitory will not be issued with a bed.*

*The following behavior is not allowed: the use of unauthorized lights, candles or coal/oil cookers, playing poker or chess, hanging posters, and smoking.*

*No fighting, gambling or consumption of alcohol. Workers are obliged to take a noontime nap, during which talking, chatting or playing radios is not allowed. After the lights out whistle at night, all activities must cease and personnel should move to their beds. When lights go out, all workers must be in bed.*

*Night shift employees must be in bed by 9 o'clock in the morning, after which time there should be no reading, talking or knitting. Before going to bed, the area should be clean and tidy.*

*Night shift workers are not allowed to get up for lunch.*

Similar rules apply for the canteen.

*Employees must enter the cafeteria in line. Each employee is allowed to take one bowl and one pair of chopsticks only. Rice should be taken first and followed by other dishes.*

*Workers should not talk loudly whilst eating. Employees should be seated in a queue. It is forbidden to eat or drink soup while standing.*

Compensation levels are dealt with in a comparable manner.

*Workers in receipt of verification from the hospital are limited to medical compensation as follows:*

<i>General workers:</i>	<i>3,000 yuan</i>
<i>Staff:</i>	<i>4,000 yuan</i>
<i>Group/team leaders:</i>	<i>5,000 yuan</i>
<i>Managers and above:</i>	<i>60,000 yuan</i>

Penalties are graded into "warnings" (which carry a fine of RMB 10–30), "minor mistakes" (RMB 30–90), and "major mistakes" (RMB 90–170). Workers in the facility earn on average RMB 500–800 per month and such penalties are clearly significant. There are 68 actions that generate "warnings." The following are a representative sample:

*Switching or changing beds*

*Pulling together curtains [that hang from bunk beds] for privacy*

*Picking when choosing dishes, and talking loudly during meals*

*Failure to meet quality requirements*

*Failure to form to a queue when leaving work*

Thirty-three actions are regarded as “minor mistakes,” including:

*Without permission, using electricity, lights, candles, playing poker or chess, hanging posters, and smoking*

*Brushing one’s teeth on the balcony*

*Failing to switch off the electricity after work*

*Reckless work and concealing defective items*

*Desultory work practices and disobeying the supervisor*

Management lists 18 rules that warrant penalties under the category of “major mistakes,” including:

*Sleeping during the ten-minute break.*

*Ignoring quality control guidelines, leading to defective products.*



Dormitory and recreation area of a 5,000-worker sports shoe factory in Longguan. Migrant workers from western China live and work in the factory complex in the Pearl River Delta on the southeast coast. Workers, separated by sex, live 12 to a long, narrow room (10 feet by 25 feet) with toilets at either end of the 8-to-10-room floor. (Photo by Garrett Brown)

There are 16 actions that will result in instant dismissal, including:

*Fighting, making noise, and organizing strikes.*

Under a section devoted entirely to dismissal, the following rules stipulate procedures under which employees may resign:

*Employees who quit will not be paid wages owing, which will instead be withheld as compensation for the loss incurred by the company.*

*Employees wishing to resign must provide one month’s written notice. A supervisor must permit the resignation. If permission is not provided, then the wages remaining will be held as compensation for the loss incurred by the company.*

From the “Hygiene Charter” [*Weisheng gongyue*] posted in all toilet blocks of a factory in the PRD producing for some of the world’s largest toy companies are the following stipulations:

*Do not spit anywhere, and do not litter. The punishment for your first offence is to copy the hygiene regulations in their entirety 30 times. If you offend again the punishment will be to copy the hygiene regulations in their entirety 100 times. If you offend a third time, you will be expelled from the factory.*

*Keep the toilets clean. It is imperative you keep the toilets clean, cherish the facilities, obey management, and adhere to regulations. If you damage the facilities, you will be required to compensate according to the cost. If you intentionally damage them, then severe punishment will result. If you violate any of the following items whatsoever [five items follow, which instruct workers on prohibitions concerning toilet paper, sanitary napkins, flushing, hand washing, and graffiti] you will be fined between 5–50 yuan. In addition, you will be required to clean the toilets for a day (the time for which will be arranged by the general services section). Disgusting violations will be punished by expulsion from the factory.*

Another toy manufacturing facility in the delta region issues a nine-page booklet entitled “Worker Regulations” [*Gongren shouze*]. The opening paragraph states:

*Welcome to the X Toy Company. This is a big family. From now on you are in an even better place to work and live. Please read the following bylaws carefully so that you understand and observe them.*

Under the sub-heading “Day-to-day procedures,” the booklet outlines procedures for entering the factory:

*New workers arriving at the factory should report to the Administration Section to undergo all formalities. There is a charge of 77 yuan to enter the factory (which consists of a fee of 36 yuan for a Certificate of Temporary Residence for six months, 5 yuan for the cost of production for the factory certificate, 8 yuan for your photograph, and 28 yuan for a medical examination).*

Management at Mattel's Number Two Toy Factory at Chang'an issued a booklet published in 1999 consisting of 11 chapters and 93 pages. It opened with the following exhortation:

*Uphold the legal rights and interests of factory personnel, establish and uphold the socialist market economy's enterprise system, promote economic growth and social progress, and on the basis of national laws and regulations formulate one's own rules.*

Other rules are more precise.

*Anyone who applies to work in the plant must provide authentic and valid documents. If documents are falsified, you will be held fully responsible. In the case of serious infractions, guilty persons will be handed to the local public security bureau. A worker's probation period is for three months. If during this period, the management ascertains that communication with any worker is impossible, or determines that the worker has a physical problem, or that the employee is not suited to the work assigned, the plant has the right to propose that worker's dismissal.*

*During work hours the following behavior is prohibited: leaving one's work station to meet with friends and visitors; reading magazines and books; eating, laughing and shouting; leaving one's work station without permission; or preventing others from carrying out their work.*

*Workers in this plant bear the responsibility to manufacture products according to the plant's quality control system in order to ensure the quality of the products. If employees do not produce according to these requirements, and as a result, the products are not up to standard, they will be punished according to the degree of damages inflicted.*

*If you have entered the plant through proper procedures and been allocated a work position and subsequently wish to resign, then the management retains the right to withhold monies paid.*

[New workers must pay]:

- RMB 4 per month for the electricity and water they use in their dormitory

- RMB 5 for their factory ID card
- The cost price of the handbook (that is, Mattel's Number Two Toy Factory at Chang'an);
- A deposit for equipment provided by the management;
- RMB 2 per month for the medical fund.

Unlike national laws and codes of conduct, factory rules are pervasive and transgressions result in immediate penalties, some of which are severe. These are the real rules by which Chinese workers live their lives.

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Workers lining up to enter a cafeteria in a dormitory building at the 5,000-worker sports shoe factory in Longguan. There are three levels of cafeterias—with different qualities and quantities of food—one level for production workers, another for line supervisors, and a third for managers and executives. (Photo by Garrett Brown)