

Talk with Wang Ch'un-ling (王春玲)
Carpet Worker
Tientsin No.1 Carpet Plant
submitted by Gene Cooper

I began work at the age of 14. My father was a hired agricultural laborer with no land to support our family. I was placed in the house of a laopan to be an apprentice. (Although it was often common practice for such placement to be made by a relative, in Wang's case the person who introduced him was unrelated to his family). I served for 3 1/2 years as an apprentice with no pay--receiving only meals and a place to sleep on the floor of the workshop. After 3 1/2 years I was fired and had to look for work elsewhere, which I finally found for \$6/month. (It was common practice for newly graduated apprentices to be fired since a laopan was reluctant to pay out wages to a full-fledged worker when he could simply take on a new apprentice who after a month or two would provide the laopan with a new source of labor for which no wages had to be paid). At my new job, food and a place to sleep was provided by my new laopan, and the \$6/month was just enough to keep me clothed. If anyone got sick and went to the doctor he was docked. If you stayed out more than two days you were fired. We worked 11-15 hours/day.

I continued working in this shop till WWII when the Japanese closed down the industry and I was sent to Tungpei to cut trees. Just before the end of the war I was married and my wife and I now have 5 children, the oldest of whom is 27 and the youngest of whom is 15. My wife no longer works. None of my children work in the carpet industry.

My boss was a Chinese, although there were also shops under the control of an American, named Nichols, where working conditions were about the same as they were elsewhere.

After Liberation, under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Communist party, workers have achieved political power and a guaranteed livelihood. Our lives have been completely revolutionized.