

“Eating at the Factory. Workers’ Meals and Industrial Canteens in a Transnational Perspective (20th Century)”.

Seung-joon Lee

Canteen, Seeing Like an Engineer: The Politics of Working-Class Diets in Republican China.

This new technoscientific viewpoint, which gathered momentum in the late 1920s and early 1930s throughout the world, profoundly influenced all those who were concerned with the industrial problems facing China. Encouraged by such a new perspective, government officials, industrial elites, and intellectuals came to reconsider the significance of industrial provisioning at the canteens. The factory meal was more than a welfare issue; rather, it could and should be an important energy source for the working body, which was in a sense the most readily available industrial energy source in the context of China’s still nascent industrialization. It was against this backdrop that Chinese industrialists and intellectuals offered a new assessment of “manpower” in terms of energetics.

How did the workers respond to the new initiative that the state and management alike launched? They interpreted their dietary problems as a new form of occupational disease (*zhiyebing*), which was a new buzzword. There is no dearth of labor history, in particular, on militant contestations between labor and management. Unlike conventional narratives, this paper argues that canteen issue, seemingly trivial, generated a new political dynamics in industrial China in the first half of the twentieth century.

François-Xavier Nérard

Kitchens for factories and factory-kitchens: the industrial canteens during the years of hunger in the USSR (1928–1935).

Hundred of thousands of factory canteens were opened during the first five-year plans in Stalin’s USSR. They became an almost unavoidable feature of Soviet factories and formed a prominent part of the official discourse on the industrial transformation and the modernization of the Soviet Union.

Canteens were considered as a tool for industry and industrialization. But the times were also of industrialization of food proceeding: the canteens themselves were industrialized! The flagships of this Stalinist policy were called factory kitchens. Furbished with top-end technic bought at high cost from abroad, they materialized the supposed concern for workers’ well-being.

Heavily photographed, these expensive masked a dire reality. Everyday canteens lacked everything, beginning with spoons, the basic utensil of the Soviet eater. The years of industrialization were in fact times of hunger and shortages. Rationing was the rule in the USSR from 1928 to 1935. Eating at a canteen was often a way of survival. The ambition of modernity was therefore far from the concerns of most actors. It was actually a race against time to feed

people, to keep them working at any costs.

The consequences of this stark contrast between the promise of modernity and the reality of shortages will be at the core of this paper which will look at practices from different points of view: government, customers as well as middle management.

Tadeusz Czekalski

Factory canteens in the fight for progress and modernity. Ideological and social aspects of application of the model of factory collective feeding in the realities of the People's Republic of Poland.

The postulate of developing mass canteens for employees reached Poland in the end of 1940's, along with political changes and adoption of models of the Soviet economic policy. The Six-Year Plan, implemented from 1950, accelerated the process of ideologicalisation of the discourse on collective nutrition, which was dominated by the notions of 'nutritional value' of meals accessible to all workers.

The "canteen revolution" implemented in Poland, the concept of which originated in the Warsaw Institute of Mass Nutrition, was aimed at the creation of industrial production of meals for workers. The "inefficient and anachronistic" home kitchens were to be replaced by central, mother-kitchens following the Soviet model, delivering ready meals to factory canteens for the final reheating. The success of the project was to be guaranteed by the use of mechanical equipment on a massive scale in the kitchen, but also by the commitment and dedication of the canteen workers, who engaged in a movement of strike workers.

At the peak of canteen development in Poland, in 1954, there were 9513 canteens, used by more than 500,000 workers. Against the background of the "canteen improvisation" prevailing in workplaces, model canteens, being an example of practical implementation of the idea of progress and modernity, located mainly in the largest cities, accounted for less than 1% of all facilities. By the end of the 1950s, the rate of regular use of canteens placed Poland on one of the lowest positions among the countries of the socialist bloc.