

Collectivism and Conformity ♦ → ♦

The bamboo that grows too high gets chopped off.
-Chinese maxim

There is a strong collective impulse in China, with an emphasis on stability and conformity. People from a collective tradition value process, consensus, cooperation and harmony; personal goals take second place to the betterment of the whole.

The *danwei* is perhaps the single most important organization in the life of almost every urban Chinese worker. Along with a job and salary, it provides housing, schooling, medical care, a percentage of salary in the event of lay-off, a retirement pension, a social structure, friendships, food supplements and subsidies, and sometimes even meals. The list of benefits goes on. The *danwei* is a comprehensive, paternalistic provider to the Chinese people.

Many changes have taken place since the beginning of the 1990s when China began dismantling the "Iron Rice Bowl" (an euphemism describing the all-encompassing *danwei* system and the paternalistic role it plays in people's lives). China began the slow process of modernizing its huge, cumbersome and largely stagnant economy following the Cultural

Revolution and the ascendancy of Deng Xiaoping. As these changes (known in China as the development of a "Socialist Market Economy") accelerated, Chinese leaders began to dismantle the "Iron Rice Bowl."

In some cases, this dismantling has meant the *danwei* has laid-off staff, opened up the housing market and, increasingly, required people to buy their existing homes or find other accommodation. Food subsidies have been cut back to the point where almost all commodities are now priced on a market system. User fees for special services have crept into the medical system and education costs have risen. Lay-offs have increased in some areas as state-owned and state-managed industries struggle to become profitable. In some cases where workers have been laid off, there has been rioting, resulting in property damage and personal injury.

Increasingly, Chinese people are opting for more profitable, sometimes more autonomous, free market jobs. Since Deng Xiaoping toured South China at the beginning of January 1992 and commented "to get rich is