Is global capitalism responsible for increasing precarious work around the globe, or is the rise of informal and precarious work a newly emerging trend in the West but a long-standing reality for the rest of the world? This talk enters debates about precarious and informal work using the case of China, and in doing so, challenges our West/Rest binary. It shows how informal work in China is not a new phenomenon, but rather was the norm during China’s early industrialization, from 1898 to 1949. Even during the Maoist period, full-time standard employment under the danwei system was a privilege reserved for “urban” workers, in part made possible by a reliance on the rural population as a source of flexible labor. During the contemporary post-Mao period, not only has informal work flourished, so have other new forms of precarious work. However, while scholars of Chinese labor and labor politics have carefully documented the rise of precarious work and its impact on labor politics, informal precarious workers have remained largely invisible and are absent in most analyses. Expanding our framework in a way that includes rather than eliminates these workers from our analysis has significant ramifications for how we understand this historical moment.