

*Reclaiming “Territories”: Two Case Studies of Trade Union Innovation Projects in South China**

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Abstract

This article examines the relations between official trade unions and labor NGOs in South China. Previous studies on Chinese labor NGOs have focused on their roles in empowering workers (optimistic vs. pessimistic views) and the strategies of the party-state to deal with them (exclusion and incorporation), but one important point has been missing from the literature: the pressure labor NGOs place on the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) to reform itself. Based on two case studies of local trade union innovation projects in South China, this article demonstrates how the local branches of the ACFTU have innovated in their ways of servicing and organizing migrant workers, including taking initiatives similar to those of labor NGOs. These innovation projects have attempted to reclaim the “territories” of trade unions, which have been deeply contested by labor activism in the past two decades.

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