

MASTER'S THESIS

Guarding the territory of labor rights protection: a "socialized" approach by the Yiwu Federations of Trade Unions

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**Guarding the Territory of Labor Rights Protection:
A "Socialized" Approach by the Yiwu Federation of Trade Unions**

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ABSTRACT

In the context of deteriorating industrial relations, China's trade unions have assumed more responsibilities of labor rights protection in recent years. As the Chinese state has become willing to escalate labor rights protection, the unions are presented with new opportunities to advance their abilities and adapt their strategies. In particular, the local trade unions which are faced with workers' increasingly confrontational actions have eagerly sought changes.

By examining the endeavor of the Yiwu Federation of Trade Unions (YFTU) in adapting to the changing political economy, this study depicts the distinctive evolutionary trajectory of Chinese trade unions in a time of intensifying labor-management relations. Such a trajectory is characterized by a goal of territory-guarding, an approach of "socialized" resource-seeking, and a tactic of intergovernmental coordinating. In the course of adaption, the YFTU has demonstrated its ability to guard its territory of labor rights protection via legal mobilization. Yet, the unions' attempts to protect labor rights have scarcely affected labor relations within the local enterprises. The inherent vulnerability of the unions remains due to the structural dilemma it faces.

In the long run, it is doubtful that the socio-political resources now the union manages to access and exploit will continue to be available to it, particularly when various changes of the economic landscape took place. Furthermore, as workers demand more rights and interests while the Party-state reclaims its leading role in social protection, the prospect of trade unions in China is unpredictable and rather bleak.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1 Research Question	3
1.2 The ACFTU: An Overview.....	5
1.3 Literature Review: The Evolutionary Path of the ACFTU.....	13
1.4 The Analytical Framework.....	21
1.5 Research Method: Case Studies.....	24
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	28
1.7 Structure of the Study.....	29
Chapter Two: Understanding the Evolving Roles of China’s Trade Unions	31
2.1 The Evolving Roles of China’s Trade Unions.....	32
2.2 The Empowered Migrant Workers.....	43
2.3 Understanding Forces Driving the Changes of China’s Trade Unions	47
Chapter Three: “Socializing” Labor Rights Protection: Context and Prelude	51
3.1 Yiwu’s Political Economic Environment.....	51
3.2 The Turbulent Industrial Relations in the Late 1990s.....	54
3.3 The Yiwu Federation of Trade Unions.....	57
3.4 Establishing the Unions’ Association in Suxi Town.....	60
3.5 Forces Driving the Changes of the YFTU.....	63
3.6 Competing for Territory and Resources.....	67
Chapter Four: Guarding the Territory of Labor Rights Protection:	
Legal Mobilization	71
4.1 Seeking An Alternative Platform for Labor Protection.....	71
4.2 Establishing Yiwu Workers’ Legal Aid Center.....	73
4.3 Legal Mobilization of the YFTU.....	79
4.4 “Socializing” Labor Rights Protection.....	88

Chapter Five: Conclusion.....94
5.1 Recent Developments.....94
5.2 Implications of the Evolutionary Trajectory of the YFTU.....97

APPENDICES.....104

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....107

CURRICULUM VITAE.....119