

## MASTER'S THESIS

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

Zou, Chen

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

**ZOU Chen**

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**Principal Supervisor: Prof. CHEN Feng**

**Hong Kong Baptist University**

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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.

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