

Trade union in market economy: the growth of union power in enterprises
— A case study on trade union XM
Wang Licheng
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Abstract: One of the main problems faced by China's official trade unions is that their organizational and operational mechanisms are not compatible with those of a market economy. There is a considerable discrepancy between workers' expectations of trade unions and the service these can provide. A large number of surveys show that workers and staff in China are dissatisfied with their unions. What prevents them from fulfilling their role? Do workers need unions in China? How can unions make a successful transition to meet the requirements of the market economy and answer the needs of workers? How can market-oriented trade unions develop? In China today, market-oriented trade unions are gaining ground step by step and becoming a leading factor in the transition to a market economy. The author carried out a case study on the grass-roots trade union in a joint-venture (company XM) in mainland China, by investigating its organizational structure and negotiation process. Through an examination of this union's growth process and pattern of growth, as well as the conditions for its development, the author extrapolates the general patterns and conditions in China's current market economy. Using this as a basis, the author examines in detail the prospects of trade unions' future growth and development in various types of enterprises in the country as well their impact on the entire trade union system as a whole and on the country's social, political and economic development. The study found that the trade union action in company XM evolved from individual to collective action and from spontaneous to organised. The establishment of the trade union provided the enterprise with a platform on which to negotiate labour relation and sort out conflicts. The implementation of a series of negotiation mechanisms not only helped the union to meet workers' demands, but also empowered the union itself. The power of XM's trade union was reinforced by the following factors: 1) the elections were held within the union, although not directly by all the workers; 2) the collective action was carried out by workers in company XM; 3) the principal union members have become leaders in union action.

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Wang Licheng



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