



Suicide as Protest for the New Generation of Chinese Migrant Workers

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Suicide as Protest for the New Generation of Chinese Migrant Workers: Foxconn, Global Capital, and the State

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Abstract

A startling 13 young workers attempted or committed suicide at the two Foxconn production facilities in southern China between January and May 2010. We can interpret their acts as protest against a global labor regime that is widely practiced in China. Their defiant deaths demand that society reflect upon the costs of a state-promoted development model that sacrifices dignity for corporate profit in the name of economic growth. Chinese migrant labor conditions as articulated by the state, are shaped by these intertwined forces: First, leading international brands have adopted unethical purchasing practices, resulting in substandard conditions in their global electronics supply chains. Second, management has used abusive and illegal methods to raise worker efficiency, generating widespread grievances and resistance at the workplace level. Third, local Chinese officials in collusion with enterprise management, systematically neglect workers' rights, resulting in widespread misery and deepened social inequalities. The Foxconn human tragedy raises profound concerns about the working lives of the new generation of Chinese migrant workers. It also challenges the state-driven policy based on the use of internal rural migrant workers, whose labor and citizenship rights have been violated.

Key words: suicide, protest, new generation of migrant workers, global labor regime, migrant wages, electronics manufacturing service (EMS) industry, Foxconn, international brands, citizenship, China

To die is the only way to testify that we ever lived

"Perhaps for the Foxconn employees and employees like us - we who are called nongmingong, rural migrant workers, in China - the use of death is simply to testify that we were ever alive at all, and that while we lived, we had only despair." - a worker blog (after the 12th jump at Foxconn)

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