A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE: THE LABOR SUBCONTRACTING SYSTEM AND COLLECTIVE ACTION BY CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN POST-SOCIALIST CHINA

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The glamorous skylines of Shanghai and Beijing today seem to crystallize Chinese dreams of modernity and global status.¹ These modern cityscapes, however, are underpinned by a construction industry steeped in a culture of violence. This culture arises from the political economy of the industry and the politics of labor resistance among migrant construction workers.

The rapid development of the industry has enabled a highly exploitative labor subcontracting system to emerge.² This labor system includes two processes: the rapid commodification of labor through non-industrial social relations organized by a quasi-labor market in the rural villages; and the expropriation of labor during the production process of the construction sector in urban areas. These two processes shape a labor subcontracting system that is specific to reform-era China, resulting in

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