GLOBAL PRODUCTION, COMPANY CODES OF CONDUCT, AND LABOR CONDITIONS IN CHINA: A CASE STUDY OF TWO FACTORIES*

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As China becomes integrated into the world economy, most of the manufacturing there of Western brand-name goods has been produced under contract by Hong Kong, Taiwanese, Korean or, increasingly, privately owned PRC companies. These, and not the brand-name Western transnational corporations (TNCs), own and run factories inside China in what has become a global production chain.¹

In the past two decades, these Asian companies have come under attack for labor violations numerous times in the international media and in academic studies.² These reports have fueled an anti-sweatshop movement in the West to put pressure on the famous-brand corporations to oblige their suppliers to upgrade labor standards in China and in other developing countries.³ This push

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² On the latter see, for example, the writings of Anita Chan and in particular her China’s Workers under Assault: The Exploitation of Labor in a Globalizing Economy (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2001); Ching Kwan Lee, Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Hsing You-tien, Making Capitalism in China: The Taiwan Connection (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³ The anti-sweatshop campaigns have been run by NGOs such as the National Labor Committee and the Worker Rights Consortium in the US, Labor Behind the Label in the UK and the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) in Europe. Some of the organizations have been quite moderate, such as the Ethical Trading Initiative, which even includes governments and corporations.

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