

## **Dancing with the State: Welfarist Incorporation in China**

### **Abstract**

State-labour NGOs relations in China have been particularly fraught. In 2012 these took an interesting twist, as some local governments made overtures to labour NGOs to co-operate in providing services to migrant workers. In subsequent years, and particularly in late 2015, repression of labour activists in Guangdong intensified, alongside a more general clamp-down on a range of rights activists across China. How are we to understand these seemingly contradictory moves? This lecture examines how the shift towards inviting certain labour NGOs into co-operation with the state is part of a broader strategy of 'welfarist incorporation' to redraw the social contract between state and labour. There are two key elements to this: first, the relaxation of the registration regulations for social organisations; second, governmental purchasing of services from social organisations. These overtures have both a state and market logic to maintain social control and stabilise relations of production. The concomitant intensification of repression of selected groups points to a distinctly sanitised vision of citizen organising on the part of the state.