

Last-mile delivery: Labor and Logistics in China

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Abstract

Capitalism relies on an interlinked infrastructure of production and transportation networks to produce and circulate goods, which are comprised of factories, warehouses/distribution centers, ports, rail terminals, airports, and information grids. These physical nodes are linked by logistics and transportation workers. In retail-dominated commodity chain, the lead firms (such as Walmart, Amazon, and JD.com) are competing on customer service by speed, cost, and quality. This study examines the rise of precarious work in the growing logistics sector of China. Using fieldwork data and company documents collected between 2017 and 2019, the author seeks to explain the flexibilization and informalization of last-mile express delivery work. Logistics workers' *potential* power—derived from their structural position in the just-in-time economy—is well noted in the supply-chain literature. But there are many other contextual factors that are shaping the possibilities for workers to organize. Domination, resistance, and compliance are played out in the specific regulatory environment.