

The Reflection of Labor in Chinese Migrant Worker's Theatrical Practice: We 2s: Labor Exchange Market (2019)

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The drastic social and discursive changes in the past decades have resulted in the superimposition of neoliberal exploitation of surplus labor, precarious work, coercive resilience, and silenced agency on Chinese migrant workers. In response to their vulnerability and socio-cultural trauma, many Chinese migrant workers resort to theatrical practices within their communities to construct subjectivity and call for cultural equality. From the perspective of cultural studies, this paper manifests how grassroots community-based theatre groups provide an illuminating lens for mapping the less visible cultural terrain in post-socialist China, in view of the challenges brought by state-backed neoliberalism and sociogenic fragility. Mainly focusing on *We 2s: Labor Exchange Market* (2019), this study analyzes the entangled relation between the experience and representation of these subaltern groups and the tension between the visible center and obscured cultural margins, arguing that their theatrical praxis develops critical resilience and possible counter-hegemonic narratives of labor. These narratives transform the cultural space dominated by neoliberal discourse and the state's ideology into a shared space that entails conversation, negotiation, friction, and collision with coercive forces from above. The community-based theatrical praxis empowers the agents to confront fragility and exploitation in their labor and work, and unceasingly challenges and reconfigures the cultural landscapes in contemporary China. *We 2s* invites migrant laborers to problematize their fragile, precarious labor, motivates them to reflect on social roles imposed on them, and encourages them to formulate new concepts of labor from below to revitalize and rebuild a culture that has long been silenced.

Biography:

Yunfei DU is a PhD candidate in the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University. He studies contemporary Chinese literature and culture, primarily focusing on underrepresented migrant workers' cultural practices, including the so-called dagong poetry and working-class theater in the post-socialist era. His research interests include critical theory, Marxism, and cultural studies. His doctoral dissertation situates itself at the point where social class stratification and creative aesthetic activities intersect, aiming to expose underlying conflicts between neoliberal reform ideologies, socialist legacies, and the state's post-socialist pandemonium. He is the Chinese translator of Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Global Left: Past, Present, and Future*.