PhD dissertation: “(Re)making political space: Labor NGOs and migrant workers in China”

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The purpose of the dissertation is to analyze political space and political practices in an authoritarian context from a discursive perspective. The empirical focus is on migrant workers and labor NGOs in China, with the dissertation guided by the following two research questions:

1. What characterizes the political space for representing migrant workers in China?
2. Which strategies do labor non-governmental organizations (NGOs) use to remake this political space?

Political space is defined as the opportunities for- and restrictions on bottom-up political practices. The dissertation takes a discursive approach to studying politics that emphasizes the importance of analyzing how meaning is constructed and contested. The introductory part of the dissertation discusses four approaches to theorizing political space: literature on civil society organizations, literature on political participation in invited and invented spaces, social movement theory and public sphere theory. The analysis of political space in the dissertation combines two sources of data material: qualitative interviews with NGOs working with migrant workers, and textual material in the form of Weibo (microblog) posts and newspaper articles.

In addition to the introductory part, the dissertation consists of three articles that have been submitted to or accepted for publication in international journals:


2. ‘We are not an anti-government organization’: How Chinese labour NGOs legitimize their identity and voice. Accepted for publication in China Information. Date of acceptance: 03.06.2014.