

CHRONOLOGY

The following outline chronology covers some of the key events touched on in this book.

2015

1 January: China's updated Environmental Protection Law comes into effect. The law emphasises the importance of transparency and for the first time imposes daily penalty fines for polluters that exceed their permitted quota of emissions. Most notably, the new law gives certain Chinese environmental NGOs the right to bring environmental public interest lawsuits against polluters. Two environmental NGOs do so on the day the law goes into effect.

6 January: The Ministry of Agriculture announces a plan to nearly double the

farmland devoted to cultivating potatoes by 2020 as part of an effort to ensure food security.

29 January: Education Minister Yuan Guiren 袁贵仁 calls for vigilant 'ideological management' in order to keep Western values and other perceived threats to the CCP out of classrooms.

16 February: The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) investigation into Su Rong 苏荣, vice-chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and former party chief for three provinces, concludes that he 'violated organisational

discipline' and 'used his position of power to seek gain for others'. He is expelled from the Party, a 'big tiger' in terms of the anti-corruption campaign.

28 February: Former investigative journalist Chai Jing 柴静 releases *Under the Dome*, a documentary on pollution in China which garners over 300 million views online within two weeks but is blocked within a week by censors, who also prohibit mention of it in Chinese media.

6 March: Five women activists, Li Tingting 李婷婷, Wu Rongrong 武嵘嵘, Zheng Churan 郑楚然, Wei Tingting 韦婷婷, and Wang Man 王曼, are arrested for 'picking quarrels and stirring up trouble' on the eve of a planned public campaign to raise awareness about sexual harassment on public transportation. The 'Feminist Five' become a global cause célèbre. On 27 April, the five women are released on bail.

16 March: CCTV America releases 'The 13 What', an English-language propaganda video explaining the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan to a foreign audience, becomes a minor online sensation. Unlike most propaganda aimed at the outside, the video is light-hearted and witty. Media inquires reveal that a

Western PR company was involved in the production.

20 March: Chinese media celebrates the detention of Xu Gang 徐钢, the vice governor of Fujian, as the 'Ninety-ninth tiger' to fall since the Eighteenth Party Congress.

1 April: The *People's Daily* publishes an op-ed dismissing warnings that a bubble, fuelled by marginal financing, might be forming in China's stock markets, telling investors '4000 points is just the beginning'.

30 April: The Politburo formally endorses the Jing-Jin-Ji Co-operative Development Outline Plan for the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region 京津冀协同发展规划纲要.

5 May: The National People's Congress (NPC) releases the second draft of the Foreign/Overseas Non-Governmental Organisations Management Law of the People's Republic of China. The draft proposes stringent controls over foreign non-governmental organisations, including foundations and universities.

18 May: The Communist Party convenes the first national United Front

work conference in nine years. During his speech, Xi calls on Party officials to 'befriend' non-Communist Party intellectuals and bridge the divide between other parts of society and the Communist Party.

19 May: During a joint meeting of China's national security agencies, President Xi Jinping 习近平 calls for 'absolute loyalty' to the Communist Party as a necessary condition for national defence.

1 June: Beijing municipality rolls out a strict anti-smoking law that prohibits smoking in public, including in restaurants, offices and on public transport, imposing steep fines on offenders. Highlighting the government's new tough stance on smoking, the provision's successful enforcement is carefully monitored by authorities, and state media signals the law could be rolled out nationwide in the near future.

1 June: The Yangtze River cruise ship the *Eastern Star* 东方之星 capsizes in fifteen-metre-deep water in Jianli County, Hubei Province, killing 442 people.

11 June: Former head of China's state security Zhou Yongkang 周永康 is sentenced to life in prison for abuse of power and bribery during a closed-door trial, marking the first time a former member of the Politburo Standing Committee is convicted of corruption-related charges. State media heralds the fall of a major 'tiger' and suggests the corruption drive is entering a new stage.

16 June: Share prices on China's stock exchanges drop, triggering a series of extreme market fluctuations that destroy trillions of renminbi (RMB) in wealth before the end of the summer.

1 July: Yang Jisheng 杨继绳, a former Xinhua journalist and the celebrated author of *Tombstone* (about the three-year famine from 1958–1961), is forced to step down as editor-in-chief of the embattled liberal magazine *Yanhuang Chunqiu*.

9 July: A two-month crackdown on human right lawyers begins with the detention of Zhou Shifeng 周世锋 and Wang Yu 王宇 of the Beijing Fengrui Law Firm 北京锋锐律师事务所. By the end of August, public security officials have detained over 250 lawyers and legal staff.

16 July: Months after authorities launch an Internet anti-porn campaign, a video of a young Chinese couple having sex in a Uniqlo fitting room in Beijing goes viral on WeChat and Sina WeChat. Police detain four people in connection with the video, but not before the video becomes a cultural sensation, inspiring t-shirts and fan visits to the Beijing Uniqlo where it was shot.

2 August: Nearly a thousand Taiwanese turn out to protest 'China-centric' changes to the high school curriculum in Taiwan. The protest started on 24 July with a break-in to the Ministry of Education by thirty protestors, many of them high school students.

12 August: Two explosions at the port of Tianjin create a fireball visible from miles away and are strong enough to register as seismic activity by China's national earthquake centre. The accident, caused by illegal storage of dangerous chemicals at a nearby warehouse, kills 173 people.

24 August: Shanghai's main share index loses 8.49 percent of its value, leading Xinhua to dub the day 'Black Monday'.

25 August: Ken Liu's translation of Liu Cixin's 刘慈欣 *The Three Body Problem* 三体 wins the international Hugo Award for best science fiction, becoming the first Chinese science fiction novel to win the prestigious prize.

25 August: Police detain *Caijing* financial reporter Wang Xiaolu 王晓璐 for an article he published on 20 July, in which he suggested the China Securities and Regulatory Commission (CSRC) might stop propping up share prices. On 31 August, CCTV airs footage of Wang apologising for 'spreading rumours' and adding his 'own subjective judgment' to the report.

3 September: The Chinese government holds a large military parade, showcasing China's military might along Tiananmen's Chang'an Avenue to commemorate the nation's victory over Japan. Billed as an international celebration of the world's triumph over fascism, it is attended by heads of state from twenty-nine countries, including Russia and South Korea. A number of other world leaders, wary of the parade's militaristic overtones, stay away. In China, the parade is nonetheless a major propaganda coup for the Party-state at a time of economic uncertainty.

8 September: China marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) 西藏自治區 with a massive public celebration. Politburo Standing Committee member Yu Zhengsheng 俞正声 oversees the celebration, stressing the importance of inter-ethnic harmony and economic development.

21 September: Authorities announce the launch of a national emissions trading system in 2017.

23 September: Xi Jinping meets with American business executives in Seattle before heading to Washington DC to meet with President Obama. After two days in DC, he flies to New York City to deliver a speech at the UN General Assembly, in which he pledges US\$100 million in aid to the African Union.

5 October: Tu Youyou 屠呦呦 becomes the first Chinese national to win a Nobel Prize in Medicine for her work on the discovery of artemisinin and its use in the treatment of malaria.

10 October: Politburo Standing Committee member Liu Yunshan 刘云山 visits North Korea for the seventieth anniversary of the ruling Worker's Party in an attempt to reset relations

after a period during which relations between the Kim regime and Beijing had been turbulent.

15 October: State media releases the transcript of President Xi Jinping's speech on cultural production at 'Forum on Art and Literature' that had been delivered the previous year. Officials are told to diligently study the speech and state media draws parallels to Mao Zedong's 1942 talks on the same subject, which guided state cultural policy for nearly forty years after.

17 October: A hundred days before Taiwan's general election, and in light of strong anti-China sentiment among voters, the governing Nationalist Party recalls its hardline presidential candidate, Hung Hsiu-chu 洪秀柱, who called for closer relations—and possible unification—with mainland China. Hung's replacement is New Taipei Mayor Eric Chu 朱立倫.

19 October: Xi Jinping and Peng Liyuan 彭丽媛 receive a royal welcome during their state visit to the UK, the first of a Chinese president to the UK since 2005. Both sides herald the trip as the start of a 'golden age' in Sino-British relations, but there are frictions and

some British commentators criticise the Cameron government for not putting human rights on the agenda.

21 October: The CCP releases a revised disciplinary code, which for the first time applies to all CCP members. It bans the playing of golf and emphasises moral conduct.

27 October: The US destroyer, *USS Lassen*, passes close by the China-controlled Subi Reef in the Spratly Islands in a ‘Freedom of Navigation Operations’ (FONOP). China calls the move a ‘deliberate provocation’.

29 October: Two environmental NGOs, Friends of Nature and Fujian Green Home, win China’s first-ever environmental public interest lawsuit, against an illegal mining operation in Fujian.

2 November: The editor of the *Xinjiang Daily*, Zhao Xinwei 赵新慰 is removed from his post and expelled from the Party for ‘improperly’ discussing government policy towards Xinjiang.

7 November: President Xi Jinping meets Taiwan President and head of the Nationalist Party, Ma Ying-Jeou 马英九 in Singapore, the first face-to-face meeting of leaders from main-

land China and Taiwan since 1949. The highly choreographed meeting provides memorable images for both international and domestic media, but results in no substantial breakthrough in cross-strait relations. Taiwanese media criticise President Ma—who is, functionally, a lame duck president—for taking the trip in the first place.

18 November: The Islamic State executes Chinese national Fan Jinghui 樊京辉, posting photos online, and sparking an outpouring of grief and anger in China. President Xi Jinping and China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi 王毅 promise justice for the victim in strongly-worded statements.

26 November: The Beijing municipal government announces that the city will cap its population at twenty-three million.

8 December: The Beijing municipality issues its first ‘red alert’ for air pollution since the introduction of the environmental emergency response in late 2013. A red alert places temporary restrictions on the city’s cars, factories, and construction sites, and closes schools.

14 December: Jack Ma's 马云 Alibaba announces that it will buy the *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong's premier English-language paper, for US\$266 million. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Ma's second-in-command, Joseph Tsai 蔡崇信, vowed to preserve the SCMP's editorial independence, though he said he looks forward to more news reporting that will provide 'the Chinese perspective'.

16 December: Chinese officials, foreign dignitaries and tech industry leaders meet in Wuzhen, Zhejiang for the Second World Internet Conference. In his keynote address, President Xi Jinping outlines China's vision for strict and broad Internet governance and 'rectification' 互联整理.

22 December: Human rights lawyer Pu Zhiqiang 浦志强 is given a suspended three-year sentence for 'picking quarrels and inciting ethnic hatred'. Pu was detained the previous May for posting criticism of government officials and China's policy in Tibet and Xinjiang on Weibo.

25 December: President Xi posts his very first Weibo message while con-

ducting a media tour of the *People's Liberation Army Daily*.

25 December: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) opens for business, with thirty-seven regional and twenty non-regional Prospective Founding Members (PFM). The bank has a founding capital of US\$100 billion, equivalent to two-thirds of the capital of the Asian Development Bank and nearly half that of the World Bank. It is the first significant multilateral lender dominated by a developing country.

27 December: The National People's Congress adopts the two-child policy, a major change to the country's stringent family planning policy which had imposed, with some exceptions, a one-child limit on most families for almost four decades.

28 December: China passes its first anti-domestic violence law.

30 December: Lee Bo 李波, a Hong Kong bookseller, is seen pushed into a minivan while delivering a book order. He is next heard from days later, when he telephones his wife to say that he had to go to Shenzhen for urgent business—but Hong Kong's Immigration

Department has no record of Lee's departure, which suggests an abduction. Lee is one of five people associated with the publishing house Mighty Current which specialises in scandalous accounts of the private lives of Party leaders, all of whom were abducted by mainland authorities between October and December.

2016

1 January: China's two-child policy goes into effect.

8 January: Chinese security officials acknowledge that they have detained Hong Kong bookseller Lee Bo. The message, sent to Hong Kong Police,

was just nine words, and contained no other details.

17 January: Voters in Taiwan elect Tsai Ing-wen 蔡英文 of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive People's Party as their president. China reacts swiftly and negatively to her election. China's Taiwan Affairs Office warned that it would treat Taiwan as an issue of national sovereignty and oppose any move towards independence. She voices a commitment to maintaining the status quo and ensuring peace.

17 March: The Thirteenth Five-Year Plan (2016–2020) is formally adopted by the annual plenary session of the NPC and CPPCC.

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