

GILDED AGE

According to the Chinese zodiac, 2017 was the year of the ‘fire rooster’, an animal often associated with the mythical *fenghuang*, or ‘August Rooster’ (*kunji*). According to Chinese legend, the *fenghuang* is a magnificently beautiful bird whose appearance is an auspicious sign, as it marks the beginning of a new era of peaceful flourishing—such as in 1368, when the bird was allegedly last sighted on the grave of the father of the founder of the Ming dynasty. This legendary creature represents a moment of great hope and potential: it only remains during the harmonious reign of a righteous ruler, and disappears during times of unrest and chaos. It is worth noting that the previous year of the fire rooster began in 1957—a period marked by the unleashing of new freedoms and the hope for a new society defined by collectivism, followed quickly by repression and ultimately resulting in tragedy.

Considering the auspicious symbolism surrounding the *fenghuang*, it is fitting that on 18 October 2017, President Xi Jinping took to the stage of the Nineteenth Party Congress to proclaim the beginning of a ‘new era’ (*xin shidai*) for ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ (*zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi*). In his words:

This new era will be an era of building on past successes to further advance our cause, and of continuing in a new historical context to strive for the success of socialism with Chinese characteristics. It will be an era of securing a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and of moving on to all-out efforts to build a great modern socialist country. It

will be an era for the Chinese people of all ethnic groups to work together and work hard to create a better life for themselves and ultimately achieve common prosperity for everyone. It will be an era for all of us, the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation, to strive with one heart to realise the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. It will be an era that sees China moving closer to centre stage and making greater contributions to mankind.

Xi also made a point of reiterating that the reverberations of this change would go far beyond the boundaries of China, insisting that this ‘new era’ presents ‘a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.’

It did not take long to discover that, in spite of such ecumenical proclamations, not all would be able to partake in this ‘new era’ of Chinese socialism. Migrant workers, for one, remain disposable. Barely one month after Xi’s speech, on 19 November, a fire broke out in a popular housing block inhabited mostly by migrant workers in Beijing’s Daxing district, killing nineteen. Citing the need to ensure safety, in a matter of days the local authorities forced thousands upon thousands of ‘low-end people’ (*diduan renkou*) to abandon their dwellings in the suburbs of the Chinese capital, showing absolutely no regard for their livelihoods. Families who had moved from all over China—and had, in some cases, lived in Beijing for years—were effectively thrown out on the street and left to their

own fate in the freezing northern winter. In just a few days they lost everything, a cruel reminder of the precarity inherent to the life of the Chinese migrant. Lawyers, activists, and even ordinary citizens who dare to express critical views also hardly find a place in Xi's brave new world. In the past year, they have been silenced one after another through disappearances, arrests, and forced public confessions, as a newly revamped public security apparatus gears into motion. They have been labelled as disturbers of the public order, betrayers of the Chinese dream, mere tools in the hands of 'hostile foreign forces' always eager to wreak havoc in an otherwise harmonious society.

It is in this increasingly repressive context marked by rapid economic growth, uneven wealth creation, and China's expanding global reach, that we have titled this second volume of the *Made in China Yearbook* 'Gilded Age', alluding to the classic novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner that satirises the endemic contradictions underpinning the rise of the United States of America at the end of the nineteenth century. There are many parallels that could be noted between that era and the one we now find ourselves in. The most relevant for our purposes is the fact that in both of these ages dramatic economic and technological advancements have been underpinned by the exploitation of workers, and the violent silencing of those who advocate for the subjugated and marginalised segments of society.

In this *Yearbook* we trace China's stark new 'gilded age' through the articles that appeared in our open-access *Made in China* journal in 2017. We have regrouped the essays into six thematic sections. The first, entitled 'Balancing Acts', examines different declinations of precarity. We open with two chapters that frame precarity in general terms—'A Genealogy of Precarity and Its Ambivalence', in which Francesca

Coin presents a brief conceptual history of precarity, and 'Work Precarisation and New Inequalities', in which Fabio Perocco looks at the vicious circle that links precarity and migration. In 'Making Class and Place in Contemporary China', Roberta Zavoretti contends that in China today, the state-sponsored discursive production of migrant labourers as a homogeneous social group sustains the promotion of the hegemonic social model of an ideally emerging 'middle class'. In 'Class and Precarity in China', Chris Smith and Pun Ngai question the nexus between class and precariousness, demonstrating that the boundary between regular and non-regular work is far from static. In 'From Dormitory Regime to Conciliatory Despotism', Kaxton Siu adopts a long-term view to probe the new social, technical, and gendered divisions of labour inside Chinese garment factories. In 'The Precarity of Layoffs and State Compensation', Dorothy Solinger looks into the policy processes that have led to the emergence of urban poverty in China and at the prospect of poverty alleviation. These pieces are followed by two essays that consider the situation of collective bargaining in China—first, in 'Collective Bargaining Is Dead: The Situation Is Excellent', Eli Friedman argues that the recent decline in discussions about collective bargaining in China is not necessarily bad news, as it paves the way for public debate about other meaningful policies, such as universal basic income. This is followed by a response from Kevin Lin with 'Collective Bargaining and Universal Basic Income', in which he compares the two strategies in relation to the empowerment of Chinese workers. Moving on to the realm of worker protests, in 'Counting Contention', Manfred Elfstrom explains why it is so difficult to find accurate data about strikes in China. To conclude, in 'Migrants, Mass Arrest, and Resistance in Contemporary China', Ma Tian looks into how Chinese migrants

are commonly perceived as criminals and assesses how this bias is reflected in mechanisms of crime control, as well as in the judicial and correctional systems.

Since in today's globalised and interconnected world, Chinese labour issues have become much more than merely a local matter, we have dedicated the second section—'Chinese Labour in Global Perspective'—to a series of essays that either frame Chinese labour comparatively or examine its transnational implications. In 'Chinese Multinational Corporations in Europe', Zheng Yu and Chris Smith challenge the widespread perception that Chinese investments are undermining labour standards in Europe. In 'Liquid Labourscape', Antonella Diana looks into the governance experimentations in a Chinese special economic zone in Laos. In 'Outsourcing Exploitation', Ivan Franceschini compares the wages, expectations, and needs of Chinese and Cambodian garment workers, examining how these factors are likely to impact labour activism. In 'Trade Union Reform in Two One-Party States', Anita Chan assesses the prospects for union democracy in China and Vietnam. In 'Prospects for US-China Union Relations in the Era of Xi and Trump', Katie Quan reconstructs the bumpy history of exchanges between American and Chinese unions, and suggests possible ways to foster mutual engagement in the current political climate. Finally, in '#iSlaveat10', Jenny Chan reviews ten years of struggles at the infamous Taiwanese-owned Apple supplier, Foxconn: a company that transcends all national boundaries. To conclude, in the spirit of adopting a 'global' line of inquiry, we include 'Treating What Ails the Study of Chinese Politics', an essay in which William Hurst makes an argument for freeing political studies of China from isolation by engaging in comparative research.

The year 2017 saw the implementation of the Foreign NGOs Law and other regulations, which the Party-state has used to claim back control over civil society. In the past, there has been great eagerness to salute every small victory by Chinese NGOs and activists over the powerful Party-state as evidence that the authoritarian tide was finally receding, and that grassroots forces were stepping up to take a new role in Chinese politics and society. Now, with the arrest of yet another activist, the airing of yet another public confession, the closure of yet another NGO working for the weak and disenfranchised, and the passing of yet another repressive law, the world has come to view Chinese civil society as if it were on its deathbed. For sure, the *ideal* of Chinese civil society is ailing. But, if we consider the swiftness with which the Party-state has tamed these forces (at least for the time being), we wonder whether this civil society was ever there in first place. Could it be possible that we were simply projecting our hopes onto a handful of Chinese grassroots organisations and activists? Mourning the death of an ideal, in the third section—'The End of Civil Society?'—we overcome our sorrow to look at the momentous changes that are currently taking place in the realm of Chinese civil society. In 'Conceptual Confusion in the Research on Chinese Civil Society', Taru Salmenkari highlights the biases and lack of clarity that undermines much of the discussion of Chinese civil society. In 'Chinese Grassroots Organisations after the Charity Law', the late Karla Simon and Holly Snape consider how the new legislation is likely to break down the old order and establish a new system of governance. In 'The Rise of Foundations', Jessica Teets examines the role of Chinese foundations in providing financial assistance to local NGOs now that foreign sources of funding are drying up. Shifting the focus from the realm of legislation to activism, in 'What Future

Is There for Human Rights Lawyering in China?', Fu Hualing analyses the practices of Chinese human rights lawyers and examines the prospects for their survival in Xi Jinping's new era. In 'The Mental Health Costs of Repression', Nicola Macbean looks at the toll that the latest crackdown is taking on the psychological wellbeing of human rights lawyers in China. In 'Snapshots of China's "Uncivil Society"', Børge Bakken describes how the attempt by the Party-state to prevent a civil society from organising itself has led to the emergence of a rather uncivil type of society. Finally, in 'Slaving Away', Ivan Franceschini looks back at the 'black brick kilns scandal' that took place in China ten years ago and attempts to draw some lessons from those horrific stories of forced labour.

In June 2017, the government of the United States announced its intention to withdraw from the Paris Accord, severely undermining the global effort to contain climate change. Since then, China has attempted to portray itself as a world leader on environmental issues. Considering that China is currently the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, this development might appear paradoxical. Nevertheless, in recent years the Chinese authorities have become increasingly concerned with the toll that the many environmental catastrophes are taking on the health of the country's citizens, as this has the potential to spark unrest that could negatively affect governmental legitimacy. While global attention has focussed on China's top-down environmental efforts, in the fourth section—'The Good Earth'—we consider the engagement of Chinese citizens with state policies on the environment, and look into their potential for articulating workable grassroots alternatives. In particular, we examine the management of public resources—the so-called 'commons'. In 'A Chinese Water Commons?', Andrea Pia argues that there are places in rural China where water is already being managed as

a common resource. In 'Amateurism and Our Common Concern for Biodiversity', Timothy McLellan outlines his experience with a project aimed at introducing biologically diverse agroforestry in a county in southwest China, and puts forward a critique of professionalisation in the realm of international environmental cooperation. In 'Commons and the Right to the City in Contemporary China', Carlo Inverardi-Ferri tells the story of an urban village on the outskirts of Beijing, providing insights into the process of land commodification in today's China. In 'Burning Coal in Tangshan', Edwin Schmitt traces the history of coal mining in China, highlighting the nexus between the physical characteristics of energy resources and the development of the rules that govern them. Finally, in 'Protecting Sacred Commons', Brendan Galipeau explores how some Tibetan communities engaging in viticulture in northwest Yunnan province pursue an ecologically friendly agenda meant to protect 'common' sacred Buddhist landscapes. In this section we also include 'How China's Environmental Crackdown Is Affecting Business Owners and Workers', an essay in which Daniel Fuchs and Edwin Schmitt describe the human consequence of China's intensified environmental crackdown in Chengdu.

The fifth section—'Window on Asia'—offers a series of perspectives on the latest developments in the field of labour and civil society across Asia. In 'In the Absence of a Peasantry, What, Then, is a Hong Kong Farmer?', Loretta Lou ponders the reasons for, and implications of, the absence of a discourse about peasantry in the former British colony. In 'Burmese Civil Society Challenges China's Development Assistance in Myanmar', Jennifer Hsu analyses how Burmese civil society has reacted to the challenges posed by Chinese aid and investment in the country. In 'Boom or Bust in China's Jade Trade with Myanmar?', Henrik

Møller outlines the history of commercial exchanges of jade between China and its southern neighbour, and gauges the impact of the recent anti-corruption drive on this market. In ‘Indian Labour Movements under Modi’, Tom Barnes looks at the development of the worker movement in India under the right-wing government of Narendra Modi. Finally, ‘In the Shadow of Kem Ley’, Astrid Norén-Nilsson considers the politicisation of Cambodian civil society and the implications of this process in light of the latest authoritarian turn in Cambodian politics.

We wrap up the volume with a particularly rich cultural section titled ‘Work of Arts’. In ‘Ai Weiwei’s #Refugees’, Giorgio Strafella and Daria Berg offer their take on the latest endeavours of the Chinese artist. In ‘Bodies without Redemption’, Chen Shuxia retraces the life of the late photographer Ren Hang, who committed suicide earlier in 2017. In ‘Losing the World’, Christian Sorace reviews Gu Tao’s documentary *The Last Moose of Aoluguya*, about the forced relocation of the Evenki people in Northern China. In ‘Datong, Forever in Limbo’, Jonathan Kinkel reviews *The Chinese Mayor*, a documentary about a politician and a very ambitious plan. In ‘China’s Industrial Heritage without History’, Maris Boyd Gillette examines the public memory of China’s socialist industrial heritage. In ‘Collecting the Red Era in Contemporary China’, Emily Williams looks into the archival practices of Chinese collectors of Maoist memorabilia and how they relate to historical memory. In ‘Industrial Landscapes of Socialist Realism’, Craig Smith surveys the fate of a very peculiar form of socialist art in China and North Korea. Finally, in ‘Resurrecting the Dead’, Ivan Franceschini ponders the contemporary relevance of *Old Tales Retold*, Lu Xun’s final oeuvre of fiction.

This volume recaps the second year of our *Made in China* journal. Since the journal’s launch in 2016, the publication has grown

beyond our wildest expectations, and we are grateful not only to all the contributors who have taken time out of their busy schedules to write for us, but also our readers, who have read and shared widely. The aim of *Made in China* is to create a bridge between academia and a wider audience, to make the research and work of our authors accessible to everybody, especially to those who might make use of their findings and ideas. For this reason, we strongly believe in open access. As the Chinese authorities step up their attempts to censor academic publications and to influence global public discourse on China—and as commercial academic publishers all over the world capitulate to the demands coming from Beijing—we are convinced that open access publishing remains key to academic freedom and integrity. Take the profit motive out of the equation, and it will be much harder for anybody to influence the decision of an editor or a publisher regarding what can and cannot be published. It will also be truly possible to reach out to (almost) everybody, not only to the members of a limited elite who are still entitled to access now largely unaffordable academic publications. It is this belief that motivates us to keep *Made in China* going, and it is with this conviction that we have now entered our third year of activity. We believe that the conformity and sycophancy that are increasingly underlining the debate in and on China can only be fought through critical engagement and inclusion. It is from this standpoint that we look back on the dramatic events of 2017, hoping that they represent an auspicious new awareness of our shared challenges, and that the fiery August Rooster does not end up betraying its promise by burning everything to the ground.

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