Warning: Uninterruptible power supply
Source: Matt & Bea Mason, Flickr
POWERING UP

Paul J. Farrelly, Jane Golley, and Linda Jaivin
On 18 December 2018, Xi Jinping, the most powerful man in an increasingly powerful People’s Republic of China (PRC), marked the fortieth anniversary of the Reform Era with a speech reaffirming China’s commitment to the path of economic reform and opening up to the outside world. Describing the reforms as a ‘great reawakening’ of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Xi credited the Party, of which he is the chairman, with ‘the most profound and the greatest social transformation in Chinese history’.

The speech was peppered with phrases for power, from ‘irresistible and magnificent power’ to ‘modern socialist powerful nation’. There are many words and phrases for power in Chinese, each with its own unique history and significance. That significance changes from place to place and time to time — in Taiwan and Hong Kong, for example, a ‘person from a powerful nation’ can be an ironic or satirical reference to mainlanders, especially those who are boorish or don’t follow local rules and customs. The four characters on the cover, which can be combined either left to right or top to bottom to form phrases indicating various kinds of power, don’t even begin to exhaust the
vocabulary of power, as seen in a number of contributions to this Yearbook (see Paul J. Farrelly’s essay in the opening forum ‘Powerful Words, Powerful People’ and the chapters by Michael Schimmelpfennig, ‘Immunity to Temptation — “Power” in Chinese Language’, and Gloria Davies, ‘Talking (Up) Power’).

Power has many definitions. These include the ability or capacity to do certain things or behave in a certain manner; physical strength or prowess that in national terms can be military or economic, for example; personal or institutional authority; a large quantity of something; and energy. It can be a verb as well as a noun, meaning to supply something with energy or to move with great speed or force.

In 2018, mainland China was, by most measures, more powerful than at any other time in its modern history and one of the most powerful countries in the world. Its economy, while facing serious challenges, including from the ongoing ‘trade war’ with the US, still ranked as the second largest in the world. A deft combination of policy, investment, and entrepreneurship has also turned it into a global ‘techno-power’, and it aims, with a good chance of success, at becoming a global science and technology leader by 2049, the one-hundredth anniversary of the People’s Republic. (See Andrew Kennedy’s chapter ‘Technology: Rapid Ascent and Global Backlash’, and Natalie Köhle’s forum on the controversial medical experimentation possibly leading to the world’s first human head transplant.) Its military continued its course of rapid modernisation, beginning construction on a large-scale pier at its first overseas base in Djibouti (see Zhang Jian’s chapter on China’s progress ‘Towards a “World-Class” Military’, and the forum by Olivia Shen on ‘China’s Base in Djibouti: Who’s Got the Power?’). Its investments in Africa and elsewhere, particularly in areas earmarked for the Belt and Road Initiative, though often controversial, continued to expand (as discussed in Beyongo Mukete Dynamic’s chapter on ‘China’s Power in Africa: Rhetoric and Reality’, and forum essays on Cambodia by Ivan Franceschini, Alibaba in South-East Asia by Qian Linliang, and Chinese mining interests in Ghana by Nicholas Loubere). China also increased its
Powering Up
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involvement in the international refugee protection regime, becoming one of the world’s most ‘potentially influential actors’, according to the forum by Song Lili.

Xi’s December speech made it abundantly clear that China’s path to becoming globally strong and powerful could only possibly be achieved under the banner of his own leadership, wisdom, and thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics — a term mentioned twenty-eight times in the speech. While this was less than the seventy-five times he mentioned it in his first major speech as PRC President back in 2012 (discussed in Jane Golley’s chapter in the 2013 Yearbook), it has become increasingly evident that during his reign, the state will triumph over the market if and when he, or the Party, deems that necessary. This can be seen in Ben Hillman’s chapter on ‘the state advancing and the private sector retreating’ 国进民退, and in Carolyn Cartier’s chapter on the extensive state planning that underpins urban development — giving ‘anthropomorphic’ cities a power all of their own.

Such empowerment has not been granted to some of China’s most impoverished rural citizens, providing a clear example of where the state has instead retreated and the private sector advanced, with mixed results. Chen Mengxue looks at the relationship between town and country, wealth and poverty, and the future of the delivery of health services in China in her forum ‘Towards a Healthier Future’. As Xi noted in his speech, quoting Comrade Deng Xiaoping 邓小平: ‘Poverty is not socialism. We must catch up with the times. This is the purpose of reform’. Xi will need to get the balance between state and market right if he truly wants Deng to be proven right on this point.

Xi also took the opportunity in his speech to remind the world that ‘no one is in the position to dictate to the Chinese people what should and should not be done’. The Party had the right and duty to ‘control all tasks’, he said. But there were some things, of course, that the Party simply did not have the power to control on its own. The trade war that US President Donald Trump had been threatening began in earnest on 22 January with
him imposing tariffs worth US$8.5 billion on imported solar panels and US$1.8 billion on washing machines. By March, Trump had authorised tariffs of twenty-five per cent and ten per cent on steel and aluminium, and, by 1 April, the PRC began retaliating with tariffs affecting US$3 billion of American goods. And on it went, with US tariffs on Chinese imports skyrocketing to reach US$200 billion by September, when China’s retaliatory tariffs on US imports reached US$60 billion. The ninety-day ‘truce’ reached by the leaders of the two superpowers in Buenos Aires in December amounted to an agreement to halt further escalation of tariffs, with negotiations on the final deal ongoing — not the agreement that Xi Jinping would have wished for in a world in which he was in complete control.

**Power Walking**

Taiwan and Hong Kong, meanwhile, continued to feel both direct and indirect pressure from Beijing in 2018; in this *Yearbook* we focus on Taiwan (in forums by Mark Harrison and Graeme Read), and how global ‘tectonic forces’ have influenced power politics there in some surprising ways, resembling a kind of ‘politics with Taiwanese characteristics’ that is distinctly more democratic than the PRC’s. See pp.xxii–xxiii for an infographic of things that were banned in Hong Kong in 2018.
Taiwan and Hong Kong were not the only places feeling the pressure of China’s growing power in 2018. Despite Xi’s insistence in his December speech that ‘Chinese development will never constitute a threat to any other country’, international concern that it was using its power to influence the politics and policies of other countries, from Australia to Zimbabwe, grew as well (see David Brophy’s chapter on Australia’s China debate and also Beyongo Mukete Dynamic’s chapter on China’s power in Africa).

In December, Canadian authorities detained Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou 孟晚舟: the US wants her extradited to the US to face criminal charges for alleged dealings with Iran. John Demers, the head of the US Justice Department’s National Security division insisted the warrant was based on years of investigation and not politics — Trump undercut this with a suggestion he might intervene to help boost a deal with China. But Demers, speaking on Bloomberg TV, said that the US had been very patient with Huawei and others despite China adopting what he described as a ‘rob, replicate and replace approach to economic development’. Over the next three weeks, Chinese authorities arrested three unrelated Canadians in what seemed like a politically motivated retaliation.

Beijing’s soft power, perhaps not surprisingly, lagged in 2018, with the PRC dropping a few places to number twenty-seven on the Global Soft Power 30 index; in cultural soft power, it fared better at number nine, but was still down one from the previous year (see Linda Jaivin’s forum ‘Soft Power, Hard Times’).

**Power Giveth and Power Taketh Away**

Star power couldn’t save internationally famous Chinese film actress Fan Bingbing 范冰冰 from the consequences of tax fraud. She was ‘disappeared’ in June and then reappeared in October, contrite and owing the Chinese government some US$97 million. Her first act back on social media was to criticise pro-independence statements made by a Taiwanese winner at the Golden Horse Awards in November. Another surprise
disappearance was that of Interpol’s first Chinese president, Meng Hongwei 孟宏伟, a former vice-minister of security, who sent his wife an emoji of a knife to let her know that he was in danger, after returning unexpectedly to China on 25 September. He is currently in detention under investigation for taking bribes. Xi has made fighting corruption in the Party and government a hallmark of his rule — and a bulwark of both his and the Party’s legitimacy in power (see Tobias Smith’s forum on China’s new national supervisory commission), designed to up the ante on tackling corruption.

One of power’s greatest objectives is its own maintenance. In his speech, Xi stated that the first lesson of the last four decades of reform was that ‘the Party’s leadership over all tasks must be adhered to, and the Party’s leadership must be incessantly strengthened and improved’. That includes the power to determine how to read the Marxist canon: in 2018, self-identified Marxist students on university campuses were ‘disappeared’ for activism on the part of workers’ rights (see William Sima’s forum on ‘Passing Marx’); Party power also trumped ‘Girl Power’ in 2018 (the title of Jane Golley’s chapter). The power of God was also no match for the power of the Party, with religions coming under increasing pressure to ‘Sinicise’ (discussed in a forum by Xie Shengjin and Paul J. Farrelly, ‘Raising the Flag: Loving Religions, Loving the State’) — and in the second half of the year, even the Pope genuflected after a manner, agreeing to share with the Party-state the authority to appoint Chinese Catholic bishops (see Paul J. Farrelly’s forum on ‘Rapprochement with the Vatican’). Nowhere did the Party wield the sharp end of its power.
more forcefully in 2018 than Xinjiang, consigning an unknown num-

ber of Muslim Uyghurs — reportedly hundreds of thousands, or even

millions — to punitive ‘re-education centres’ from which few have thus

far emerged, and ramping up policing and surveillance throughout the

‘autonomous region’, even forcing Muslim Uyghur families to host Han

Chinese who monitor what goes on and what is said in their own homes

(the topic of Gerry Groot’s chapter this year).

**Power Lifting**

Xi’s own power, already formidable, grew even
greater in 2018, weathering media and other
speculation that China had reached ‘peak Xi’. In
March, the National People’s Congress (NPC) con-
firmed his reappointment and, as signalled late
the previous year, abolished the ‘two-term rule’
that had been in place since Deng’s time to en-
sure that no single leader would rule indefinitely
as Mao had done, and with devastating conse-
quences. No one at the NPC actually said that, of
course, but rather noted that the rule had never
been part of the actual Constitution. It has been
some time since there has even been public dis-
cussion of the Party’s 1981 declaration that Mao
had been ‘seventy per cent right and thirty per
cent wrong’; the Party under Xi has used its pow-
er to suppress not just internal dissent but any
discussion of history that does not accord with
its own, selective telling and interpretation of
events. It is little wonder that some are asking ‘Is Xi the new Chairman
Mao?’, the opening to Bryce Kositz’s forum on two of the most powerful
men in the PRC’s history.
There are still those brave enough to speak up about abuses of power, however. In 2018, no one did so as eloquently as Tsinghua University law professor Xu Zhangrun 许章润, who wrote a scathing essay called ‘Imminent Hopes, Imminent Fears: A Beijing Jeremiad’, which went viral in July. Xu begins with the point that ‘people throughout China — including the entire bureaucratic class — are feeling a sense of uncertainty, a mounting anxiety in relation both to the direction the country is taking as well as in regard to their own personal security’. He then expounds on the CCP’s attack on the personal freedoms of ‘absolutely powerless’ Chinese citizens and the lack of political reforms, asking questions such as ‘Will you be bankrupted if you happen to fall foul of one of the Power-Holders?’ Geremie R. Barmé, who translated three of Xu’s essays in China Heritage, commented that

Xu Zhangrun’s powerful plea is not a simple work of ‘dissent’, as the term is generally understood in the sense of samizdat protest literature. Given the unease within China’s elites today, its implications are also of a different order from liberal pro-Western ‘dissident writing’. Xu has issued a challenge from the intellectual and cultural heart of China 文化中国 to the political heart of the Communist Party.

For the time being, however, Xi and the Party are firmly in control of the narrative, and the ‘political heart’ of the Party does not look like softening any time soon.

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As Darren Lim and Victor Ferguson point out in their forum on ‘Power in Chinese Foreign Policy’, ‘the pathways to power are numerous, diverse, and complex’. This is also evident in James Reilly’s forum on China’s diplomacy in North Korea, and indeed in many of the topics covered in this book. In presenting the constituent elements of power as embodied by the Chinese state, we hope readers develop a sense of how it has developed and is deployed, both in China and abroad. As with previous editions of
the China Story Yearbook, here we place important developments in the context of themes that are unfolding over periods of time much longer than one year, and adopt a cross-disciplinary approach. We believe that such things as the discourse around popular television shows (seen in Zhou Yun’s discussion of the hit TV historical drama series of 2018, The Story of Yanxi Palace 延禧攻略), for example, may be as illuminating as official rhetoric in 2018. In the final forum in the book, Peter Connolly looks at the relationship between blockbuster films and reality, reflected in the growing need and desire of Chinese citizens for protection overseas. This is just one of the diverse reflections in this Yearbook, which explores from myriad angles how the nature of Chinese power manifested in 2018.

Acknowledgements

This is the seventh book in the China Story Yearbook series, initiated by the Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW) at The Australian National University (ANU). Our ongoing reference to ‘The China Story’ 中国的故事 reflects the principle of CIW’s Founding Director, Emeritus Professor Gere-mie R. Barmé: that China’s story is not just as it is portrayed by the Chinese Communist Party, but should also be seen from the diverse perspectives of a multitude of others who are dedicated understanding the complexities of China through its language, history, culture, politics, economics, society and, most importantly, its people.

As with all preceding books in the series, this Yearbook is a collaborative effort that brings together scholars from across the globe, but concentrated in — or with connections to — Australia. The co-editors of the China Story Yearbook 2017: Prosperity, Jane Golley and Linda Jaivin, independently came up with the ‘power’ theme for this year — before beginning a brainstorming session with the two new editors, Paul J. Farrelly and Sharon Strange. From this point, we solicited authors to write on the range of topics found in the contents of this book, and were, time and again, thrilled with the quality of material that came our way. We wish to express
our genuine gratitude to all those have contributed to this *Yearbook*, and
to doing it with such aplomb. We also thank Lindy Allen for copyediting
the book, and two anonymous referees for taking the time to read and
comment on it prior to publication.

**The Cover Image**

The characters in the centre of this *Yearbook*’s cover are 权势威力. The four
characters on the cover can be combined either left to right (权势 and 威力), top
to bottom (权威 and 势力), or diagonally (权利 and 威势). All combinations form
phrases indicating various kinds of power. For more information on the
etymologies of these characters, see Chapter 1 ‘Immunity to Temptation —

The book cover has been designed
to echo *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* 毛主席语录, more commonly
known as Mao’s *Little Red Book*. Most editions were published with a
printed red vinyl cover and were pocket size so that they could be used at
any time for easy practice, learning, and application.

The imagery on the front cover all depicts symbols of power used by
the People’s Republic of China in its state propaganda.

The building in the centre is Tiananmen — the southernmost gate of
the sprawling 72-hectare Forbidden City in Beijing. Due to its historical
significance, Tiananmen appears on the National Emblem of the People’s
Republic of China. Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders stand on its
rostrum to view military parades, give speeches, and meet with foreign
dignitaries.
A hammer and sickle appear above Tiananmen. It was first used in the Russian Revolution to symbolise proletarian solidarity. Since 28 April 1942, the Communist Party of China (CCP) has used them as its symbol.

The five stars are taken from China’s flag, also known as the Five-starred Red Flag. It was officially adopted on 1 October 1949. The largest star is said to represent the CCP; the four smaller stars connote the social classes of the Chinese people (the proletariat, the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, and the ‘patriotic capitalists.’) Other explanations of the stars' symbolism suggest that the large star may stand for China and the smaller stars for its many ethnic groups.

Clouds are associated with the celestial realm. Multi-coloured clouds are associated with good fortune. From at least the Zhou dynasty (circa. 1046–221BCE), cloud motifs were cast on bronze ritual vessels; they later appeared on furniture, porcelain, jewellery, and clothing. They are often used in literary metaphor. More recently, in 2008, a cloud design was used on the Beijing Olympic torch.

The circle and star motif comes from the ceiling of the Auditorium of Ten Thousand People in the Great Hall of the People. The Great Hall of the People is the political hub of Beijing. It is used for legislative and ceremonial activities. It was here, in March 2018, that Xi Jinping and the rest of China’s legislature unanimously voted to remove the presidential and vice-presidential two-term limits.
**November**

The venue hosting Chinese-born British writer (and Hong Kong permanent resident) Ma Jian 乌进 cancels his event for the Hong Kong International Literary Festival. After receiving assurances that Ma would not promote his personal political interests, the event proceeded.

**December**

Taiwanese politician and vocalist for the extreme metal band Chthonic 道音, Freddy Lim 林敬玲 is denied a work visa to perform at music festivals because he lacks a ‘special skill, knowledge or experience of value to and not readily available’ in Hong Kong.

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**November**

An exhibition featuring the work of Chinese-Australian artist Badiucao 巴天球 is cancelled by the organisers — the Hong Kong Free Press, Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders — following threats made by the Chinese authorities relating to the artist.

**October**

Former Financial Times editor Victor Mallet is denied a work visa. No reason is given, but the Foreign Correspondents’ Club surmises it is in response to his August interview of then-convenor of the Hong Kong National Party, Andy Chan Ho-tin 陈卓文. In November, Mallet is denied a tourist visa.

**October**

E-cigarettes, an alternative to conventional tobacco smoking methods, are banned.
January
Legislators vote to phase out the sale of ivory by 2021. Hong Kong is the world’s largest ivory market.

July
Japanese author Haruki Murakami’s new novel *Killing Commendatore* is removed from display at the Hong Kong Book Fair due to ‘indecency’. It is sold in bookstores with a wrapper and warning and only those over 18 can borrow it from public libraries.

September
The pro-independence Hong Kong National Party is banned for posing a threat to national security.

September
The American warship *USS Wasp* is banned from docking in Hong Kong. It was, however, allowed to dock there in November.