

# States of Emergency

## The Sichuan Earthquake Ten Years On

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On 12 May 2008, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake hit Wenchuan county, Sichuan province. Felt as far as Beijing, the tremors caused horrific damage: 69,229 people died and 17,923 went missing. Yet, the aftermath of the seism was also a time of hope. Chinese citizens from all over the country outdid each other to show solidarity with the victims, not only donating money and goods, but also rushing to the disaster zones to provide assistance. Young volunteers from all walks of life poured into Sichuan to help, with many of them going on to establish their own social organisations. As local governments began to recognise the importance of NGOs in providing disaster relief and social services, 2008 was widely seen as a ‘Year Zero’ for Chinese civil society.

At that time, hardly anybody could have foreseen the wave of repression against civil society that was to come and that is today the norm. Indeed, there were worrying signals even then—the threats against the parents of children who had died in the disaster and the trial of Tan Zuoren, for instance—but the general atmosphere remained forward-looking and optimistic. On the 10th anniversary of the earthquake, this issue of *Made in China* revisits the optimism of those early days and examines what is left. In **Be Grateful to the Party!**, Sorace probes how the Chinese Communist Party has used propaganda and other means to boost its ‘affective sovereignty’ in the wake of the disaster. In **The World Is Yours!**, Xu describes the moral dilemmas that afflicted him as a scholar and volunteer in the earthquake areas. In **Sichuan, Year Zero?**, Kang offers a retrospective on NGO development in Sichuan since 2008, challenging the idea that it was a ‘dawn’ for Chinese civil society. In

**Civic Transformation in the Wake of the Wenchuan Earthquake**, Sun examines the evolution of state-society relations by looking the interactions between state, society, and individuals. In **The Power of the Square**, Gao explores the specific case study of an emergency shelter in Mianyang. Finally, in **Documenting the Sichuan Earthquake**, Svensson analyses the most significant Chinese documentaries portraying the catastrophe to audiences around the world.

This issue also includes a new op-ed section, with pieces from Hurst, Lin, Fiskesjö, and Cliff weighing in on current affairs. In the China Columns section, we feature **Beijing Evictions, a Winter’s Tale** an essay by Li, Song, and Zhang about local civil society and the evictions in Beijing at the end of 2017; **Justice Restored Under Xi Jinping**, in which Nesossi reconstructs two decades of miscarriages of justice in China; and **The Global Age of the Algorithm**, in which Loubere and Brehm look into the development of the social credit system in China. Finally, we include a conversation between Elisa Nesossi and Eva Pils about human rights in China.

In the Window on Asia section, Sorace explores the political implications of Ulaanbataar’s chronic pollution. The cultural section comprises two essays. In **Figuring Post-worker Shenzhen**, O’Donnell introduces several works of art that depict the post-worker demographics of Shenzhen, and its emergence as a ‘creative’ city. In **Rural Migrant Workers in Independent Films**, Florence examines how the representation of migrant workers in China has evolved over the years through the lens of independent Chinese movies. We conclude by interviewing William Hurst about his new book on legal regimes in China and Indonesia.

The Editors