

Smashing the Bell Jar

Shades of Gender in China



Sun and moon have no light left, earth is dark;
Our women's world is sunk so deep, who can
help us?

Jewelry sold to pay this trip across the seas,
Cut off from my family I leave my native land.
Unbinding my feet I clean out a thousand
years of poison,

With heated heart arouse all women's spirits.
Alas, this delicate kerchief here
Is half stained with blood, and half with tears.

Qiu Jin, 1904
(translated by Jonathan Spence)

As she bode farewell to China in the summer of 1904, early revolutionary Qiu Jin penned these words to bemoan the fate of herself and of uncountable Chinese women. She was leaving behind her husband—whom she had married out of obligation—and two young children to go to study in Japan. Having returned to China, she

would continue to engage in revolutionary activities, and was ultimately beheaded by the Qing authorities in July 1907 at the age of 31. Martyrdom made her into a legend. More than a century later, bound feet belong to another age and kerchieves stained with blood and tears have become an overused trope in revolutionary literature. Still, Qiu Jin's spirit is more alive than ever in a whole new generation of Chinese feminists who are fighting for women's rights—a renewed attempt to smash the bell jar of China's patriarchal society.

This issue of the *Made in China Journal* offers a series of perspectives on the plight and struggles of women and sexual minorities in today's China. In the special section, **Dušica Ristivojević** reflects on how Anglophone media have been reporting on women's activism in China over the past three decades and the implications of such coverage for our understanding of the phenomenon. **Yige Dong** considers the class composition of the Young Feminist Activism in China, asking whether this movement is really an elitarian urban project or if it represents a feminist movement from the left. **Nuala Gathercole Lam** in conversation with feminist activist **Zhang Leilei** discusses the dynamics that led to the emergence of a #MeToo movement in China, as well as the shortcomings of the campaign. **Séagh Kehoe** argues for increased attention and social mobilisation to address the complex and often brutal ways in which gender and ethnicity overlap in China, in particular in the borderland areas of Tibet and Xinjiang. Feminist activist **Zheng Churan** recounts her relationship with her husband Wei Zhili, detained at the end of March for assisting migrant workers affected by pneumoconiosis. **Tiantian Zheng** looks back at the plight of sex workers in China since the beginning of the economic reforms,

highlighting the tragic consequences of the existing repressive policies. **Nicola Macbean** describes the ‘accidental’ activism of the wives of rights protection lawyers arrested in the crackdown of July 2015. Finally, **Bao Hongwei** in conversation with leading queer feminist filmmaker **He Xiaopei** talks about the formation of queer identities, communities, and activism in China since the 1990s.

The issue includes op-eds on the rise of transnational carceral capitalism in Xinjiang by **Gerald Roche**; the latest crackdown on labour activists by **Kevin Lin**; the implications of the recent detention of the former Interpol chief Meng Hongwei by **Maya Wang**; the ethical and practical risks that Western universities face in dealing with China by **James Darrowby**; and the role of ideology in Xi Jinping’s China by **Christian Sorace**. In the China columns section, **Jie Yang** looks into the workings of ‘hidden norms’ in the Chinese bureaucracy and how they affect the psychological well-being of Chinese officials. **Jude Blanchette** traces the history of the policies adopted by the Chinese Communist Party to exert influence within private companies in China. Finally, **Robert Walker** and **Yang Lichao** analyse a recent official report that offers an assessment of progress in poverty reduction and candidly discusses contradictions within the current strategy.

The Window on Asia section offers two essays. **Milford Bateman**, **Nithya Natarajan**, **Katherine Brickell**, and **Laurie Parsons** discuss the consequences of the expansion of Cambodia’s microcredit sector, where indebted people have been forced to accept exploitative labour conditions in the garment and construction industries and, in the worst cases, have been forced to sell themselves as bonded labour to brick kilns owners. **Yi Xiaocuo** analyses a new Sino-Kazakh coproduction that recounts the time that celebrated Chinese musician Xian Xinghai spent in Kazakhstan in early 1942, shedding light on the dark side of the cooperation between China and Kazakhstan under the aegis of the Belt and Road Initiative. In the cultural

section, **Martina Caschera** reanimates the artistic production of Lu Zhixiang, a master cartoonist whose work offered insight into the plight of the underclasses in Shanghai in the 1930s, and **Zeng Jinyan** and **Tan Jia** talk with director **Wang Nanfu** about her documentary *Hooligan Sparrow*.

We wrap up the issue with a conversation with **Daniel Vukovich** about *Illiberal China*, his latest book on the ideological challenges that China poses to liberal values and ideas.

The Editors