FROM CRISIS TO CONTRADICTION:

NEW NORMALS

Linda Jaivin and Esther Sunkyung Klein

At the end of 2020, a year of multiple crises, the world breathed a (surgically masked) sigh of relief. All hoped that 2021, the Year of the Ox, would be more stable and less fraught than the wildly scurrying, disease-bearing Rat Year that was 2020. The first vaccines for COVID-19 were in production. In the United States, a new president was about to move into the White House, prompting optimism that, among other things, frictions between Washington and Beijing could be managed better. While countries like Australia, with its coal-addled leadership, still dragged the chain on climate action, the People's Republic of China (PRC) appeared to be getting serious about it, with a new Five-Year Plan giving practical shape to its goals of reaching peak carbon by 2030 and net zero by 2060.

The relief was short-lived. As the year progressed, crises hardened into contradictions. Vaccines saved lives, but not enough of them got into arms around the world in time to prevent new, viciously transmissible variants from arising. The Biden White House did not do crazy talk, but its China policies were not so different from those of Trump's administration. For all China's talk about peak carbon, it continued to rely on coal when it came to the crunch. Other long-standing contradictions involved economic trade-offs between market vitality and government intervention. There was also considerable tension between State and Communist Party Leader Xi Jinping's 习近平 desire for Chinese culture and civilisation to flourish, and once again achieve the global recognition for brilliance they once had, and his insistence that artists, writers, filmmakers, and intellectuals take direction from ideologues.

Contradiction: conflict, clash, paradox, incongruity, disagreement, rebuttal, opposition, negation. In Chinese, all these can be translated as *maodun* 矛盾 — a spear opposing a shield.

COVID Zero, Delta Dawn

The defining crisis of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, evolved into one of the messier contradictions of 2021. Countries with the means to do so acquired, produced, and distributed newly available vaccines. Insufficient attention to the needs of the developing world, however, left poorer nations unprotected — an unjust situation that predictably fostered new variants of the virus. The PRC did better than most in both vaccinating its population and helping others; by the end of December 2021, according to the *Global Times*, 85.64 percent of its total population, or nearly 1.3 billion people, had received two shots of a vaccine.[1] Beijing also supplied 1.2 billion doses to more than 100 countries and international organisations including COVAX, either commercially or as donations.[2] Of these, around 200 million went to African countries and, in November, Xi revealed he would be donating 600 million more while also setting up joint production facilities on the continent to manufacture another 400 million.

The spread of the highly transmissible Delta variant, which emerged in late 2020, however, outpaced the global vaccination effort. The arrival towards the end of 2021 of the even more transmissible Omicron variant showed the pandemic was going nowhere (or rather, everywhere) fast. But even as other governments abandoned the goal of suppression, the PRC continued to pursue 'COVID Zero'. When Zhang Wenhong 张文宏, China's leading infectious disease specialist, suggested China might have to learn to live with the virus, official media and online 'Little Pinks' attacked him as a 'traitor' and even accused him of 'colluding' with Western forces to undermine China's COVID-19 response. The Communist Party of China (CPC) does not like to be contradicted.

The Party-State ramped up already stringent quarantine regulations and imposed strict snap lockdowns, including one in October at Shanghai's Disneyland. High-speed trains literally stopped in their tracks when crew members were identified as close contacts.[3] Towards the end of the year, the authorities locked down the entire city of Xi'an.

Big data was at the core of the PRC's response, with a mandatory phone app controlling citizens' access to shopping centres, transport, and other public spaces through a traffic light system: green meant good to go, yellow signalled contact with a case and the need to test and isolate, and red indicated a positive COVID test result. The use of technology to monitor and control the spread of COVID in 2021 provided a foretaste of a broader push for 'smart governance', as Sue Trevaskes and Ausma Bernot discuss in their chapter 'Smart Governance, Smarter Surveillance' (pp.17–30) — a story that is certain to grow in significance in coming years.

Wild Times

The origins of COVID-19 remained a mystery. By year's end, most scientists and intelligence agencies around the world considered highly credible the theory that it had arisen as the result of zoonotic (species-to-species) transmission, probably from a horseshoe bat to another as-yet-unidentified species to humans, and that it had spread from a Wuhan wet market. The politicisation of the issue by right-wing China hawks in the US and Australia, who promoted the theory that it had leaked from a Chinese virology lab (also a possibility, although less likely) and might even have been a biological weapon (highly unlikely), infuriated Beijing. In January, the Chinese authorities tightly restricted a World Health Organization investigation team's access to information and resisted efforts by scientists around the world to access data crucial to understanding the origins of the virus. Such secrecy further energised the production of florid conspiracy theories on all sides. We may never know the answer.

Close contact between humans and animals of a different kind is the subject of Becky Shu Chen's 'Roaming Elephants and a Conservation Wake-Up Call' (pp.107–111). She writes about the herd of wild elephants that went walkabout in south-western Yunnan Province and the humans who looked out for them — or had their crops smashed or eaten

by them — along the way. There are charming elements in the story, but it also points to a darker contradiction, between the human desire to cultivate land and wild animals' need for natural habitat.

The tale of the elephants is one of three stories in a special Focus section in this year's *Yearbook* on Environment. Natasha Fijn's 'Pastoralists, Zoonotic Diseases, and the Anthropocene across Inner Asia' (pp.101–105) surveys the impact of climate change on traditional herding practices and public health on the Mongolian steppe. Uchralt Otede's 'Ulagai Wetlands: A Dry and Thirsty Place' (pp.113–116) exposes the contradictions among policy, rhetoric, and reality in a fragile Inner Mongolian wetland. It remains to be seen how quickly and well China's new Wetlands Protection Law, passed in December 2021, will work to resolve such conflicts.

In late 2021, the Chinese government set aside 231,000 square kilometres of land for national parks, and enormous new renewable energy farms were in the works. Beijing also launched a US$232 million fund for biodiversity protection in developing countries. And the PRC, which generates 53 percent of the world's coal-fired power, pledged to stop building new coal plants overseas. But in October, after a national electricity shortage rationed heating and electricity to homes and factories in parts of the country, the state rushed to finance and facilitate coal-mining, production, and supply. Total coal-fired capacity under consideration or construction in the PRC in 2021 exceeded that already online in the United States.[4]

In July, excessive rainfall in central Henan province led to catastrophic flooding, resulting in more than 300 deaths. Enduring images from that crisis included harrowing scenes of packed subway cars in Henan's capital, Zhengzhou, slowly filling with water. The contradiction between continued economic growth and climate change mitigation is not unique to China, but according to the China Meteorological Administration's own *Blue Book on Climate Change* 中国气候变化蓝皮书, released in 2021, rising temperatures and other effects of climate change, including extreme weather, are affecting China more than the global average.[5]

Contradiction from Ancient Times to the Present

As Esther Sunkyung Klein explains in 'Contradiction and the Stubborn Bystander' (pp.3–6), the Chinese expression for contradiction, *maodun*, comes from an ancient parable about a weapons seller in a marketplace boasting that his shield could repel any spear — and his spear could pierce any shield. It is a story with philosophical and political resonances.

The expression acquired fresh layers of meaning around the turn of the twentieth century. Chinese intellectuals used it in translating the ideas of Hegel, Marx, and other revolutionary thinkers who perceived contradictions in terms of opposing forces creating a dynamic for change. Mao Zedong 毛泽东 distinguished between 'antagonistic' and 'non-antagonistic' contradictions. Only revolution or war could resolve the first, which existed between the exploited and the exploiters — for example, the working class and capitalists, or colonised peoples and imperialist powers. 'Non-antagonistic contradictions', by contrast, could be resolved through synthesis and, when appearing within the Communist Party itself, by 'criticism and self-criticism'. In Maoist times, the process of 'criticism and self-criticism' — never gentle — grew increasingly violent, until it exploded into the street warfare and mass 'struggle sessions' of the Cultural Revolution.

In each phase of revolution, the CPC identified a 'principal contradiction' in society. This changed from class struggle under Mao to 'the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people versus backward social production' under Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 — the first leader of the post-Mao reform age. This shift justified Deng's program of economic Reform and Opening Up to the outside world, which began in the late 1970s. In 2017, Xi identified the new 'principal contradiction' as the tension 'between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life'.[6] In 2021, he revealed a

program of ‘common prosperity’ to address it, while insisting there would be no return to Mao-style egalitarianism.

In her chapter ‘A Kaleidoscope of Contradiction’ (pp.43–53), Delia Lin shows the ways in which the CPC’s definition of contradiction breaks with that of the ancients — rejecting an earlier empirical tradition in favour of ‘monolithic belief’ in Leninist dialectical contradiction. This new approach to contradiction, she argues, shapes and limits the range of policies and solutions to problems available to the Party-State.

When Xi announced it was time to ‘clean up and adjust excessively high incomes and rectify income distribution’, billionaires and CEOs responded with a frenzy of conspicuous donations to causes including agricultural development, universities, and poverty alleviation. Evergrande, the property development behemoth that had symbolised seemingly unstoppable economic growth, meanwhile, teetered on the brink of collapse for much of the year, bringing into sharp relief some of the structural contradictions casting shade on China’s growth model.

This *Yearbook* includes a special Focus section on Labour, with a look at the fallout from the contradictions between labour and capital that the revolution supposedly put right but which economic reform restored by stealth. Katherine Whitworth paints an intimate portrait of a group of migrant workers living on the edge in ‘The Sanhe Gods’ (pp.57–63). Kevin Lin’s ‘Overwork, Pointless Work, Avoiding Work, and Legal Work: The Contradictions of Labour’ (pp.65–73), meanwhile, highlights the role of big tech in labour issues, from the desire of tech workers to ‘lie flat’ to the ways in which gig workers are organising to fight exploitation.

Despite big tech’s centrality to the PRC’s ambitions for superpower status in science and technology, the sector has been in the firing line since November 2020. The Party-State began applying largely dormant antitrust and other regulatory laws to companies such as TenCent (creators of the ‘everything app’ WeChat) and the ride-hailing platform Didi. In 2021, the government also expressed concern about tech companies’ collection and use of citizens’ private data, and the vulnerability of that data in the

context of companies trading on foreign stock exchanges. In November 2021, China's first Personal Information Protection Law entered into force. Governmental bodies as well as private companies now have obligations under the law to obtain consent for the collection and use of individuals' data — albeit with plenty of exemptions for official bodies, especially on questions of national security and law enforcement.[7]

The Party-State's campaign to rein in 'the barbaric growth of capital' 防止资本野蛮生长[8] aims to rectify social as well as economic problems. Hence the clampdown on the for-profit tutoring sector, which reinforced the privileges of wealth. Authorities in Beijing announced plans for a free online tutoring platform that would come with time limits, thus simultaneously addressing another concern of parents about the burden of school-related pressures on their children's mental health. The Party also launched the Clear and Bright campaign to clamp down on 'idol' fan clubs and other aspects of celebrity culture, and it severely restricted the access of minors to online gaming, concerned by the effects of both on young people's cultural tastes, self-discipline, and study habits.[9]

Social engineering remained an important tool for the Party in 2021 in other areas as well. Fertility rates in the PRC today rank among the lowest in the world, partly thanks to the restrictive One-Child Policy introduced in the 1980s. The Fourteenth Five-Year Plan called for a new strategy to address the looming demographic crisis of an ageing population and promote population growth, including a Three-Child Policy. The Party needs young people to marry and reproduce. But for young women, who have fought hard for social and economic independence, having children could jeopardise their ability to advance in or even keep their jobs. Despite men being able to access fourteen days of paternity leave, the burden of childrearing (and housework generally) still falls primarily on women. A Communist Youth League survey of around 3,000 unmarried urban young people aged between eighteen and twenty-six, found 44 percent of the female respondents were either unwilling to marry or simply not keen. The most cited reason, at 69 percent, was not wanting children.[10] In

'How the "Garlic Chives" Grieved: A Song for China's Three-Child Policy' (pp.171–177), Annie Luman Ren translates and annotates a viral song parody, based on an eighteenth-century novel, that responds to the Three-Child Policy from a young woman's point of view.

The contradiction between prosperity and control is not easily resolved; it has deep roots. In 1983, after Deng launched his Anti–Spiritual Pollution campaign to swat the 'flies and mosquitoes' of Western liberal behaviour and culture that had flown through his 'open door' from the outside world, Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW) founding director Geremie R. Barmé wrote words that still resonate today:

> To fling the doors of economics wide open and still expect to retain control of the people's minds by using methods from the 1950s is the essential paradox of contemporary China, and the dilemma of her leaders. The Communist Party sees its main enemy in Western influences, heedless, for the moment, that China's economic cure may well be the root-cause of her ideological disease.[11]

Controlling History

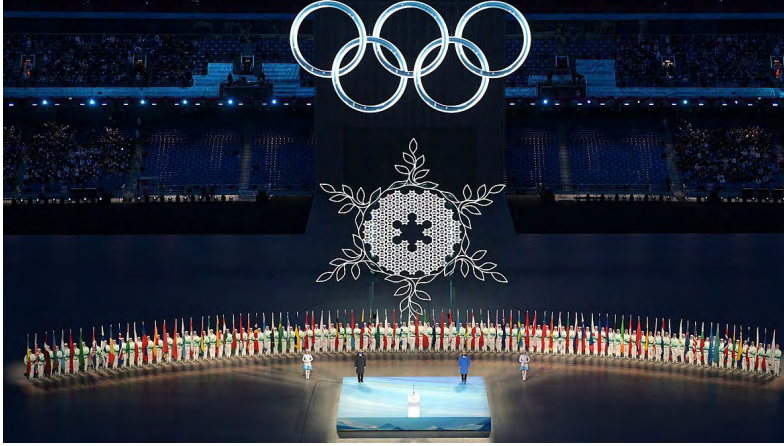
Among the symptoms of 'ideological disease', one that attracted much attention in 2021, was 'historical nihilism' 历史虚无主义 — in essence, telling the China story (and the CPC's story in particular) in any way that deviates from the official line. To combat 'historical nihilism', the CPC persevered with its long-standing program of rewriting history. In June, on the eve of the 100th anniversary of the Party's founding, the *People's Daily* published a summary titled 'Major Events of the One Hundred Years of the Communist Party' 中国共产党一百年大事记. When the CPC celebrated its ninetieth anniversary, it published a similar list. But as David Bandurski of the China Media Project has pointed out, the 2021 version was 'more than just an update'; it was a 'revision'.[12] The idea of

'political reform' — mentioned twice in the previous document — did not rate a single mention in 2021, and most references to human, civil, and political rights also vanished.

Several months later, the Party produced a 'resolution' on the 'Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century'. It was only the third such resolution adopted by the party. The first, issued in 1945, secured Mao's central position in the CPC. The second, in 1981, did the same for Deng. Two-thirds of this third resolution was devoted to Xi Jinping, naming him twenty-two times, versus eighteen mentions of Mao and six of Deng. Xi's power continued to grow in 2021. State media broadcast the Standing Committee of the Politburo taking an oath of loyalty to both the Party and Xi personally. He appeared well on track to assume a historic third term as state president and party leader in 2022 (ending a post-Mao tradition of limiting party leaders to two terms).

The Party's centenary celebrations included several major cultural productions, including the Korean War blockbuster film *The Battle at Lake Changjin* and the popular television series *The Age of Awakening* 觉醒年代, which was about the Marxist intellectuals who founded the CPC in 1921. Ideologues promoted 'the return of Red values, heroism, and unyielding mettle' 紅色回歸, 英雄回歸, 血性回歸.[13] The space for even polite differences of opinion, let alone actual dissent, continued to shrink in 2021: after journalist Luo Changping 罗昌平 dared to contradict *The Battle at Lake Changjin*'s interpretation of history, he was arrested and charged with defaming revolutionary martyrs.[14] New school textbooks issued in 2021 stressed patriotism, ideological education and the study of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. In 'Patriotic Language and the Popular Use of History' (pp.9–12), Qin Yang looks at the use and misuse of historical expressions of patriotism today.

The CPC has been trying with less success to control the narrative abroad about issues such as its industrial-scale repression of Uyghur culture, language, and religious practice in Xinjiang. More information emerged in 2021 revealing Xi's role; he personally told those carrying out



The Beijing Winter Olympic Games in Opening Ceremony
Source: Presidential Executive Office of Russia

'the struggle against terrorism, infiltration, and separatism' in the region to show 'absolutely no mercy'.[15] By 2021, a number of organisations and countries, including the US, were describing the Party-State's actions in Xinjiang as 'genocide'. David Brophy's chapter 'Purging Xinjiang's Past' (pp.77–89) looks at the 'history wars' in Xinjiang and their casualties. These include two Uyghur textbook editors who in 2021 were handed suspended death sentences for work that once enjoyed official approval. There were signs the practice of mass detention in Xinjiang was giving way in 2021 to formal incarceration for some, and forced labour for others. It remained to be seen the extent to which the new CPC leader in Xinjiang, Ma Xingrui 马兴瑞, would shift the focus from 'stability' (policing) to economic growth.

In December, the US put further Xinjiang-related sanctions into law. It also announced a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022, in which it was joined by Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian 赵立坚 condemned the boycott as 'grandstanding' and 'political provocation'. Yet thanks to tightly controlled official media and Internet censorship, as Yun Jiang explains in 'Sanctions, Boycotts and Counter-Boycotts' (pp.93–97), many Chinese citizens have been led to believe Western countries are inflicting economic punishment on the PRC simply out of hostility to and fear of China's rise.

Chinese media had a trickier challenge in controlling the domestic narrative around the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. For one thing, it had to smooth over the sharp contradiction between Beijing's desire to maintain good relations with the country's new fundamentalist rulers and its own ongoing attacks on Islamic religious expression in Xinjiang. In 'Joy and Fear: Chinese Media and the Taliban's Victory in Afghanistan'

(pp.249–253), Fengming Lu surveys the PRC media's coverage of this politically delicate issue.

One of the worst missteps in the PRC's official messaging occurred in May. India, with whom relations remained tense due to border conflicts, was struggling to contain a fierce and deadly second wave of COVID-19. A legal body of the CPC posted an image on its Weibo account of a recent Chinese rocket launch juxtaposed with a photo of the cremation of COVID-19 victims in India. The caption read: 'Lighting a fire in China vs lighting a fire in India.' The international backlash was severe and swift. Significantly, many Chinese citizens were appalled as well. Even the editor of the hyper-nationalist *Global Times* and original 'Wolf Warrior', Hu Xijin 胡锡进, criticised the post, writing: 'Hold high the banner of humanitarianism, show sympathy for India, and firmly place Chinese society on a moral high ground.' Had China reached peak Wolf Warrior? The following month, Xi instructed diplomats and others to promote the image of a 'credible, loveable, and respectable China'. With Hu Xijin retiring as editor in December, it is unclear whether the characteristically narky *Global Times* will become more 'affable' in the future; the PRC's messaging needs, after all, are frequently contradictory.

Across the Taiwan Strait in Taiwan, history was at the centre of a cultural reckoning with the legacy of trauma from the island's long period of martial law. Among other things, there was debate over what to do about all the statues of Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 and other symbols of the decades of oppression, as Craig A. Smith reveals in 'Making the Past into this Moment: Historical Memory in Taiwan' (pp.209–213).

In Hong Kong, enforcement of the new National Security Law saw the near-complete suppression of dissent, as Beijing abandoned its promise of relative autonomy under the One Country, Two Systems arrangement for at least fifty years after the territory's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. 'Hong Kong: A Year in Contradictions' (pp.121–143) is a month-by-month chronicle highlighting the contradictions between the Hong Kong government's rhetoric and its actions. As editor Esther Sunkyung Klein

has noted, our anonymous Hong Kong–based contributor's technique echoes that of the Han-dynasty historian Sima Qian 司马迁, whose history of the autocratic First Qin Emperor juxtaposed the emperor's boastful words (preserved as inscriptions on stone steles) with the escalating signs of civil unrest in the empire. In 2021, Hong Kong ceased to be the centre of cultural and intellectual freedom and vigour it had been within the broader Sinophone world since the first half of the twentieth century.

Troubled Waters

Beijing's increasingly militant insistence on 'recovering' Taiwan in 2021 ran up against hardened Taiwanese determination not to be recovered. Taiwanese Defence Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng 邱國正 described Taiwan's situation in 2021 as the most dangerous he had seen in forty years of service. The strategic consequences of the tensions spread well beyond the Taiwan Strait, as Benjamin Herscovitch writes in 'Taiwan and the War of Wills' (pp.203–207). Taiwan is likely to remain a flashpoint into 2022 as the US and its allies, including Australia, continue to ponder the question of how far they would be willing to go to defend Taiwan's autonomy if the island comes under attack.

Because most Taiwanese perceived Donald Trump as a great friend to Taiwan, they greeted the election of Joe Biden with apprehension. The profound impact of Trumpism on Taiwan's political life and public debate is the subject of Wen-Ti Sung's chapter 'Taiwan: Renewed Faith in the Liberal International Order' (pp.187–199).

Taiwanese diplomacy suffered a blow towards the end of the year when Nicaragua switched its diplomatic ties to Beijing. Among the dozen-odd countries still maintaining formal relations with Taipei are several Pacific nations, but they are being heavily courted by the PRC. Denghua Zhang describes 'China's Quest for a Good Image: The Pacific Example' (pp.225–229) in his forum.

The depletion of fish stocks by the PRC's massive fishing fleet is not helping that quest. Graeme Smith's 'Fishy Business: China's Mixed Signals on Sustainable Fisheries' (pp.217–222) delves into the politics of seafood.

In South-East Asia, as Gregory V. Raymond writes in 'Seeking Stability Amid COVID and Civil Conflict' (pp.147–151), the picture is complicated, with South-East Asians neither 'passive observers' nor 'victims of a geopolitical tug-of-war between the two great powers', as some commentators would paint them.

Contradictions intensified in some areas — Australia and New Zealand, for example, as Jason Young writes in his chapter 'Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia in the "New Era of Chinese Diplomacy"' (pp.233–245) — and melted away in others, such as Russia, as Kevin Magee writes in 'China and Russia in the Era of Great Power Competition' (pp.255–261), providing valuable background to many contradictions the PRC would face in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which occurred just as this book was going to print. The PRC's relations with Canada thawed somewhat after that country allowed detained Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou 孟晚舟 to return to China and Beijing almost simultaneously released the imprisoned 'two Michaels', Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. In 'Controversial High-Profile Detention and Prosecution of Foreigners' (pp.30–38), Lili Song surveys what 2021 brought for foreigners held in China against their will as part of what is sometimes called 'hostage diplomacy'.

In the US, some argued for a complete decoupling from the PRC, but it appeared there would be cooperation at least on the climate crisis after presidents Xi and Biden spoke by phone in September. The White House said the two leaders acknowledged 'the responsibility of both nations to ensure that competition does not veer into conflict'.[16] Beijing's report of the call stressed, by contrast, that 'engagement and dialogue' had to be based on respect for 'each other's core concerns'.[17]

How those 'core concerns differed became apparent in December, when Biden hosted a global 'Summit for Democracy'. Refuting Washington's

presumptive role as the defender of democracy worldwide, Beijing issued a White Paper titled *China: Democracy That Works*, which argued that dictatorship and democracy were not contradictory.[18]

Never Too Busy for a Culture War

In November, Wang Meng 王蒙, an eighty-seven-year-old writer who served as China's Minister of Culture under Deng from 1986 to 1989, published an impassioned and witty essay on WeChat. In it, he criticised the commercialisation of culture, the promotion of culture as spectacle, 'dragon worship', and other examples of 'cultural froth' that he said evinced 'an empty culture, a pallid and soulless culture, a lamentable culture'. He stressed: 'Culture is not about fanciful rhetoric and lyrical recitation, about tasteless posturing. It is not about flirting with your charms.'[19]

The following month, Xi called on Chinese artists and writers to have 'cultural confidence' 文化自信, 'firmly grasp' the theme of national rejuvenation, use their work to foster patriotism and promote 'reform and innovation'. He said they should 'serve the people and socialism and let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend'.[20] Those old enough to remember would know Mao used that same phrase in 1956, following it one year later with a huge purge of China's cultural and intellectual world that consigned hundreds of millions of people (including Wang Meng) to labour camps.

For all Xi's exhortations on 'cultural confidence', it became clear it was possible to have too much of it, especially if you were a member of the LGBTQI community, an 'effeminate' man, a feminist or even just a 'mouthy' woman. Pan Wang takes us into the trenches of the gender wars that ripped across the Chinese Internet in 2021 in her chapter, '(Wo)men's Voices, Rights, and the Vision of the State' (pp.155–167).

China's version of cancel culture claimed a victim in director Chloé Zhao
Source: Gage Skidmore, Flickr

China's version of cancel culture, meanwhile, claimed a victim in Chloé Zhao, the director of *Nomadland*, only the second woman, and the first woman of colour, to win an Oscar for directing. The *Global Times* initially called Zhao, who had immigrated to the US from China, 'the pride of China'. But when some netizens discovered a 2013 interview in which she described China as a place 'where there are lies everywhere', the censors scrubbed all news of her win, her film, and even the Oscars from the public record.

Another woman who went from official hero to zero — this time in a matter of minutes — was the tennis star Peng Shuai 彭帅. The #MeToo movement in China was much in the news in 2021, but there was little justice for women who dared to complain about sexual harassment by powerful men. None of the accused was more powerful than recently retired former vice-premier Zhang Gaoli 张高丽. Peng posted a detailed and agonised account of their relationship on Weibo, alleging Zhang had pressed her to have sex when she did not want to. The post disappeared within twenty minutes, then she disappeared as well. Her subsequent reappearances have been highly stage-managed; the more state media insists there is nothing to see here, the more people have seen.

A Note from the Editors

It would be remiss to conclude an overview of the year's events without mentioning the passing of one of the greatest China scholars of the contemporary age, Professor Jonathan Spence of Yale University, who died in December, aged eighty-five. Spence wrote accessibly on subjects ranging from the history of the Qing to the 'memory palace' of an Italian Jesuit in the court of the Ming. He was mourned across the Sinological world, and on both sides of the Taiwan Strait — no contradiction of views there.

The *China Story Yearbook* is a project initiated by the CIW at The Australian National University. It has always been the approach of the *Yearbook* to view political and economic developments as part of a greater picture that encompasses society, personalities, and culture — a picture that is illuminated by considerations of language and history. Our ongoing reference to the China Story 中国的故事 reflects the principle set out by CIW founding director, Emeritus Professor Geremie R. Barmé, that China's story is not only the version portrayed by the CPC, but also a story that includes the diverse perspectives of a multitude of others, within and outside the People's Republic of China who are dedicated to understanding the complexities of China through its language, history, culture, politics, economy, society and, most importantly, its people.

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