

bare the deep structural forces of state-driven modernization and capital accumulation. Her book implies that the deservedly ballyhooed objective of eradicating rural poverty has been “achieved” in part by propelling its denizens out of the countryside altogether. And it elucidates the absolutely direct linkage between China’s gleaming new cities and the farmers who, once expropriated, built them. It is also that rare thing among academic monographs—a great read.

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Dying for an iPhone: Apple, Foxconn, and the Lives of China’s Workers,
by Jenny Chan, Mark Selden, and Pun Ngai. London: Pluto Press, 2020.
xvi+273 pp. £75.00 (cloth), £14.99 (paper), £7.99 (e-book).

Factory investigations have a distinguished history stretching from Friedrich Engels’s *Conditions of the Working Class in England* to Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle*, to the sweatshop exposés of the late 1990s and early 2000s. In *Dying for an iPhone: Apple, Foxconn, and the Lives of China’s Workers*, Jenny Chan, Mark Selden, and Pun Ngai add to this tradition with an in-depth study of the manufacture of iPhones, a product fetishized both in the popular sense of being a consumer obsession and in the Marxist sense of being an object divorced from the web of social relationships that produced it. The book takes the shine off this glitzy accessory and introduces readers to the hundreds of thousands of people who work for Foxconn, Apple’s main supplier in China. *Dying for an iPhone* captures the intense pressures the workers feel under the impatient supervision of Foxconn and its famous corporate client. For evidence, the authors draw on a decade of detective work, including scores of interviews in twelve cities and a careful reading of company reports. The result is an unusual volume that lies somewhere in between an academic study, a social compliance audit, and an activist call to action. At a time when Silicon Valley’s role in politics and society is coming under renewed criticism, the book should be read not only by labor scholars and organizers but also tech writers, economists, and policy makers.

Foxconn has already received plenty of attention. It has been in the crosshairs of journalists and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for years. Chan, Selden, and Pun themselves have written extensively about Foxconn in other forums. Nonetheless, *Dying for an iPhone* manages to generate fresh insights. For instance, the book provides a detailed account of how the company has become increasingly reliant on student interns and how its symbiotic ties with local governments in China have led to a stream of teenagers joining iPhone assembly lines for bogus “educational” purposes. A chapter on worker unrest is especially revealing,

both in terms of the degree to which Foxconn workers have been able to coordinate collective actions like slowdowns despite close monitoring and how limited these mobilizations have nonetheless proved: contained within particular workshops in sprawling Foxconn factory compounds (as in Zhengzhou in 2012) or limited to a night of chaos followed by a “special day off” and then resumed production (in Taiyuan the same year). Other points are not new but still striking, such as the extremely small portion of an iPhone’s price that goes to its suppliers like Foxconn (14.3 percent in 2010) and the minute portion that goes to its China-based workers (1.8 percent).

Most of all, the book conveys powerful human stories of injuries, suicides, explosions, and isolation. The story that most stands out (at least to me) is that of an equipment and facility technician, Zhang Tingzhen, who was electrocuted and fell when repairing a spotlight at Foxconn’s Shenzhen complex. Half of his left brain lobe had to be removed because he had lacked a hard hat, safety belt, or electrical gloves. The wealthy company’s lawyers fought tooth and nail to ensure that Zhang was counted as an employee of its Huizhou rather than Shenzhen factory division, apparently because Huizhou’s work injury insurance benefits are lower (his family eventually settled). An interview with a suicide survivor, conversations at the Chengdu Foxconn plant shortly before airborne aluminum dust caused a deadly explosion, and portraits of lonely migrant workers navigating an unwelcoming Shenzhen are also compelling.

What this otherwise excellent book lacks is a systematic explanation of how Foxconn and Apple’s operations fit into the bigger story of outsourcing and Chinese labor. It is not that *Dying for an iPhone* does not try to contextualize its subject. The discussion often expands from an anecdote to the broader phenomenon: for example, from the legal battle of the aforementioned Zhang family to the limits of labor arbitration in China more generally. And the last chapter looks ahead and explores emerging developments in Chinese industrial relations writ large: the movement of capital to inland provinces from China’s coast, the aging of migrant workers, and the repression of labor NGOs. However, it is unclear whether Chan, Selden, and Pun ultimately believe the manufacture of the iPhone is typical of the current stage of global capitalism or instead see it as representing an extreme form of exploitation, one driven by a unique combination of the Steve Jobs cult of perfectionism, Foxconn founder Terry Gou’s scrappy ambitions, and the aspirational buying of millions of would-be upper-middle-class customers around the globe. At points, the authors take note of protests by workers assembling other electronic devices like the Amazon Kindle or in other sectors like automobile manufacturing or discuss the environmental cost of the electronics industry as a whole. More focused comparisons between different brands and areas of the economy would test the importance of the various causal factors suggested by the book. But then, the book might lose some of its punch as an advocacy tool.

In this regard, the authors share a dilemma with groups such as Hong Kong's Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior (SACOM), which have similarly made the iPhone a focus of their campaigns, as described in the book's epilogue. Targeting a giant like Apple "is strategically important" (202), because a change for the better in iPhone manufacturing has the potential to yield "long-term change in an entire industry" (202), with improved standards trickling down to smaller firms. But the tactic also risks, paradoxically, divorcing the multinational from the longer-term trends of which it is ultimately only a part, albeit a very big part—making a fetish of the iPhone to some degree again. There are no easy answers here, either for academics or activists. But *Dying for an iPhone* has done a tremendous service by adding a wealth of valuable material to a vital discussion.

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Chinese "Cancer Villages": Rural Development, Environmental Change, and Public Health, by Ajiang Chen, Pengli Cheng, and Yajuan Luo. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 304 pp. €109.00 (cloth, e-book).

This book is an important contribution to China studies and scholarly research on environmental health. Comprising 10 chapters, several of which were first published in 2013 in Chinese, the publication of this English-language edition provides a detailed and informative collection of reports on collective medical claims about China's rural population living in deteriorating environmental conditions.

Jennifer Holdaway and Wang Wuyi set the framework of the book in the preface. Peering into the phenomenal growth of "cancer villages," Holdaway and Wang describe how the three Chinese authors of this book draw on empirical findings from the medical and social sciences to evaluate the causality, from numerous perspectives, between environmental degradation and the health of rural citizens.

The edited collection starts with Chen Aijing's chapter, "Retrospective Thoughts on the 'Cancer Village' Phenomenon." As an introduction to the chapters that follow, Chen provides a detailed overview of the economic and social changes that form the backdrop to the emergence of "cancer villages" as both social and scientific problems.

Chapter 2, "The Ins and Outs of a Cancer Village," again written by Chen Ajiang, discusses the complexity behind identifying the causes of cancer. Chen questions the attention that the public and media have placed on targeting