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REVIEWS

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Jenny Chan, Mark Selden, and Ngai Pun. *Dying for an iPhone: Apple, Foxconn, and The Lives of China's Workers*. Haymarket Books, 2020. 273p.

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Dying for an iPhone discloses the real lives of Chinese workers at Foxconn, one of the worlds' leading electronics workshops, especially well known for manufacturing Apple products such as iPhones, iPads, iPods, and Macs. While consumers worldwide are quite familiar with the trending and high-tech digital devices sold by Apple, they hardly know the suffering of the Chinese workers who spend day and night assembling iPhones and other electronic products. *Dying for an iPhone* thoroughly portrays the pain, violence, and struggles encountered by Foxconn workers. It accuses Foxconn of inhuman management and treatment towards its employees, as well as Apple's negligence and labor violations. It further calls for domestic and international action to protect workers' rights.

To investigate Foxconn's labor issues, the scholars did many years of firsthand research and fieldwork in Foxconn's primary manufacturing bases in nine cities in mainland China. They not only interviewed different groups of people, including "Foxconn employees, student interns, teachers (who monitor the internship programs of their students), managers, and government officials," but also collected many documentary materials such as "poems, songs, open letters, photos, and videos" (12).

Chapter 1 focuses on the story of suicide survivor Tian Yu, a 17-year-old girl who was half-paralyzed after jumping from the Foxconn Longhua factory dormitory. Tian Yu's own narrations of her experience and feelings about working at Foxconn unveils how workers like her become submerged by desperation due to exhausting workdays, strict

supervision of line leaders, social isolation, and delayed salary payment.

The following chapter introduces the history and business of Foxconn, originally a plastic and metal processing company set up by Terry Gou in Taiwan that later became the largest electronics manufacturer in the world as well as the “biggest private sector employer” in China (26). Foxconn’s development is heavily dependent on low labor cost in China. The rural migrant workers employed by Foxconn are trained as “harmonious men” or “Foxbots” who are expected to work tirelessly like robots. Chapter 3 discusses the intimate relationship between Apple and Foxconn. It further shows how Apple has been damaging the welfare of Chinese workers in various ways that have violated China’s labor laws and Apple’s “own supplier code of conduct” (33).

Chapter 4 examines Foxconn’s management system and concludes that instead of developing effective methods to increase wages or improve workers’ wellbeing, Foxconn continues to enforce strict regulations over its employees, who are considered “animals” by Terry Gou. Chapter 5 focuses attention on the experience of abused student interns. Abundant statistics demonstrate how Foxconn cooperates with the Chinese government, vocational schools, and teachers to use the student labor force to save money.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 delineate various challenges that migrant workers have encountered at the workplace. In addition to low wages, Foxconn workers are also put in physical danger. For example, polishing workers have to breathe toxic aluminum dust while working in the airtight environment. The metallic dust can also be ignited and lead to fire and explosions, which happened in 2011 and caused the deaths of four workers. Chapters 7 and 8 use poems written by Foxconn workers to show their unsettled lives in big cities. As individuals who left their hometowns in rural areas to make a living in a strange land, young workers often feel lost and hopeless for their future. Some fail to gain a sense of belonging and to deal with “fantasy” and “reality” while working in the modern city (98).

After briefly discussing the environmental crisis caused by Foxconn, Chapters 10 and 11 concentrate on workers’ efforts to protect their legal rights. Even though they applied various strategies to fight against unfair treatment from Foxconn, such as labor arbitration,

appealing to the courts, work slowdowns, labor actions, suicide threats, riots, and seeking help from unions, they failed to change or improve their situation.

The final chapter and epilogue summarize the causes of the unsuccessful worker protests and provide deep insights on labor issues. Importantly, Chan, Selden, and Pun point out that under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, worker's actions in China have been severely constrained or monitored. As a result, those who aim to engage in strikes and protests can face more challenges. However, even though currently worker activists cannot achieve the goal of strengthening labor rights, the authors believe that labor activism in China still plays a significant role of supporting Foxconn workers as well as inspiring global labor activists.
