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**Eli Friedman, Zhongjin Li and Hao Ren (eds) China on Strike: Narratives of Workers' Resistance Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016.**

**Book review by Xuebing Cao, Keele University, UK**

China on Strike is a unique piece of oral labour history, not only for its intriguing narra­tives about Chinese workers’ resistance in the first decade of the 21st century, but also for its historical value in documenting these captivating stories. Told by strike workers them­selves and translated by renowned scholars in the field, the book provides a first-hand witness of workers’ struggles against capitalist exploitation in modern factories in China’s Pearl River Delta region. Unlike most other contemporary literature in China’s labour movement, the book particularly focuses on strikes from the participants’ viewpoints. Given the lack of published oral history about Chinese labour, this timely edition is help­ful for those who want to make sense of the reasons, processes, and settlements of work­place conflict in the country’s export-oriented, foreign-invested manufacturing industry.

The book’s arrangement reflects the editors’ scholarly endeavour to piece together these isolated incidents, with the help of a number of insightful commentaries in the preface, general introduction, pre-chapter introductions, and postscript. Within the book, 15 stories are grouped into three parts. The first part has two cases about strikes against factory closures, while the second covers 10 strike stories relating to wage cuts, with the third including three strikes for wage increases. Part I illustrates how in the early 2000s migrant workers were forced to use road blockage, detaining goods, and other measures, to fight against so-called ghost factories that tried to escape paying wages by relocating frequently in the name of bankruptcy.

The bulk of the book is in Part II, with its first half containing five strike participants’ stories on how young migrant workers gradually became conscious about their situation, and how they stood up with spontaneous struggles against exploitation, coercion, dis­crimination, and insult. Chapter 3 explains the dark side of the factory regime in Guangdong and workers’ passive resistance. The emergence of negotiation representa­tives is demonstrated in the next chapter, which shows workers’ awareness of, and the ability to, learning strike strategies in practice. Due to the brutality of the production process in these labour-intensive factories, migrant workers had to suffer poor, hazard­ous working conditions as described in Chapter 5, and highly intensified and unrealistic work targets as shown in Chapter 6. Workers’ reflections on using strikes to force management to make concessions are recorded, although the last chapter of this half does show strike workers’ worry about employer’s revenge.

The second half of Part II tells the stories of grassroots strike leaders in Guangdong, a rare glimpse of the extent to which these home-grown agitators led fellow workers without the support of a proper institutional organization (e.g. a trade union). Chapter 8 tells how a female worker became more conscious and experienced after taking part in and leading a number of strikes, while Chapter 9 reflects a strike leader’s growing confi­dence in using strikes as an effective measure if there was sufficient fellow workers’ support. Both of the two following chapters are about unsuccessful strike cases in the eyes of leaders, who showed how collective bargaining and the victorious settlement could be jeopardized by the government in the end, and the fact that activists must bear the risk of losing jobs. Yet one leader was optimistic about the future, because workers could always learn lessons from unsuccessful strike attempts, as described in Chapter 12.

Part III encompasses how workers used strikes, as well as the knowledge of labour legislation, to make positive, more offensive moves in fighting for wage increase. Still lacking clear consciousness and strategy, they were nevertheless able to use legal weap­ons such as the labour contract to ask for deserved compensation (Chapter 13), minimum wage (Chapter 14), and inflation to argue for pay rise (Chapter 15).

The sequence of these stories shows the progress made by migrant workers’ collective resilience - from defensive to offensive, and from passive to voluntary, struggles. It embodies heart-rending personal reflections about the reality of management-labour confrontation, unorganized strike activity, and the learning process of the new generation of migrant workers who gradually become aware of using legitimate actions to protect themselves. Linking the subsequent strike waves in 2010, the editors point out that the more recent labour unrest can be better understood as continuous resistance following the intermittent, occasional struggles that are exemplified in this collection.

The book could improve if each individual story was linked to the existing strike lit­erature closely. However, despite the isolated stories that are disconnected between each other, the book reflects some of the pivotal moments in China’s recent labour history, showing workers’ desperate attempt to improve their appalling employment conditions. While many strikes end up with failure, workers are still hopeful for a better future through their own effort. The point of showing these stories is not only to demonstrate how Chinese workers are brave enough to lodge strikes, but also to bring hopes for the development of a labour movement in an economy of profit maximization and market competition. With these compelling stories opening a door of the recurrence of scattered, unorganized worker resistance, more documentaries about the contemporary Chinese labour history should follow.