The background of the entire page is a dense, overlapping pattern of large Chinese characters. The characters are rendered in a halftone or dithered style, giving them a textured, almost woven appearance. The colors of the characters are primarily blue, red, and white. The characters visible include '喜' (Xǐ, meaning joy or happiness) in red, '發' (Fā, meaning to develop or prosper) in blue, '財' (Cái, meaning wealth or money) in blue, '生' (Shēng, meaning life or to grow) in blue, and '財' (Cái, meaning wealth or money) in red. The overall effect is a complex, abstract composition that suggests themes of wealth, prosperity, and life.

INTRODUCTION

Money, money, money!
Source: Shell zor, Flickr

The background is a collage of various elements related to money and finance. It features large, stylized Chinese characters in red and blue, including '發' (Fā), '喜' (Xǐ), '興' (Xīng), and '財' (Cái). There are also images of banknotes, including a red one and a blue one, and a green one. The overall theme is money and its impact.

MONEY CHANGES EVERYTHING

Jane Golley and Linda Jaivin

The Donald Trump Rooster, Shanxi province

Source: YouTube

Days before the clock ticked over into 2017, and a month before Chinese New Year, a giant statue of a rooster sprang up outside a shopping mall in China's northern Shanxi province. The statue's designer reportedly intended its egg-shaped body and distinctive golden hair to convey a message of prosperity. This message was enhanced by the rooster's unmistakable likeness to Donald Trump, the newly elected billionaire president of the United States. In what may or may not have been 'fake news', CNN reported that the 'Donald Trump Rooster' had 'taken China by storm'.

China was well on its way towards prosperity before 2017 began. But Trump's performance throughout the year — retracting America from its global commitments to free trade, foreign aid, and the environment, emphatically (and in bold type) tweeting that he would 'MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN', and ruffling the feathers of even America's closet allies — was like gifting a golden egg on a golden platter to Chinese President Xi Jinping. And Xi was ready to receive it.

Prosperity was a prominent theme in a string of significant speeches delivered by President Xi during 2017. In his January speech at the World

Economic Forum in Davos, he called for a doubling of efforts to ‘enable all countries to achieve inter-connected growth and shared prosperity’.¹ In May, at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, he presented the Belt and Road Initiative as China’s plan for ‘common prosperity’, which would boost mutual respect, mutual learning, mutual understanding, and mutual trust.² At the Nineteenth Party Congress in October, Xi declared that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would deliver a ‘decisive victory’ in building a ‘moderately prosperous society’ *xiaokang shehui* 小康社会 by 2020, leaving the goal of achieving the status of a fully developed nation until 2049 — the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).³

The confidence of the CCP in Xi’s capacity to deliver on these pledges was evident in the decision to incorporate Xi Jinping’s Thought for the New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics as a ‘guiding ideology’ in China’s constitution — the only Chinese leader since Mao Zedong to be honoured in such a way during his own life time. Xi himself confidently stated that only by following the path, theory, system, and culture of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (his Four Confidences), would the CCP succeed in taking China beyond ‘standing up’, as it did under Mao, and growing rich, as it did under Deng. If the promises and affirmations contained in his 205-minute speech to the Party Congress can be taken at face value, 2017 marked the beginning of a new era of greatness for China — no longer a rising, but now a risen, global power.

Not everyone shared Xi’s confidence or his vision, however. As the year progressed, there was growing anxiety across the globe, and in the West in particular, about how China’s wealth and power were challenging the global status quo and the ‘rules-based order’ that was defined and led for many decades by the United States. ‘China anxiety’ in Australia reached heights not known since the Cold War era, sparked by an ABC *Four Corners* episode in June called ‘Power and Influence: The Hard Edge of China’s Soft Power’, which contained far-reaching allegations about how the Communist Party and its purported agents were taking advantage

of their rising affluence to influence Australian policy outcomes, and threaten freedom of speech in its media and academic institutions. China, our ‘best friend in Asia’ according to the 2016 Lowy Institute Poll of Australian public opinion, ranked Australia as ‘the least friendly country toward China in 2017’, the *Global Times* reported. The year 2017 marked a new era for us all, in which Chinese money did seem to change everything.

From Billionaires to Beggars

Four decades of rapid growth had already transformed the Chinese economy into the world’s second largest when 2017 began, and, if current trends continue, it will overtake the US to become the largest by 2030. In 2017, among many other remarkable feats, Alibaba eclipsed Amazon as the world’s biggest e-commerce company, and the ride-hailing service Didi overtook Uber in market valuation. China’s artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and other high-tech industries made significant advances, underpinned by globally competitive and innovative Chinese enterprises that would have been inconceivable even two decades ago.

Private jets are the ultimate symbol of personal wealth and social status, with Hurun’s Business Jet Owners 2017 report identifying 114 Chinese business people owning 164 private jets.

Source: YouTube

Nor could it have then been conceived that of the world's 2,257 billionaires in 2017, 609 would come from China (in first place), compared with 552 from the United States (in second).⁴ According to the Hurun Report's China Rich List, released in October 2017, China's 2,130 richest individuals enjoy combined assets of

Xu Jiayin
Source: Baidu

US\$2.6 trillion — a figure comparable to the GDP of the United Kingdom. China's newly anointed richest man, real estate mogul Xu Jiayin 许家印, has a net worth of US\$43 billion — falling well short of Bill Gates's fortune (at world number one) of US\$81 billion, but making Rupert Murdoch seem somewhat of a pauper with just US\$15.3 billion. The Rich List also revealed that the 200 richest members of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress have combined fortunes of RMB3.5 trillion, or US\$507 billion. The wealth of the richest 100, all of whom are dollar billionaires (a person with a net worth of at least one billion US dollars), increased by a whopping 64 per cent in the four years since Xi Jinping rose to power — accounting for RMB3 trillion.⁵ If to 'get rich is glorious', as Deng Xiaoping famously claimed, then 2017 was a ridiculously glorious year, for some Chinese citizens at least.

Rapid growth has not only benefited those at the top end of China's income spectrum. In 1981, 88.3 per cent of China's population lived on less than US\$2 a day; this figure dropped to less than 6 per cent in 2017. This phenomenal accomplishment is due to the extraordinary resilience and resourcefulness of a population that has taken advantage of every opportunity provided by the scaling back of Mao's centralised command economy to lift themselves, their families and communities out of poverty and on to the road to prosperity. In the five years since Xi Jinping rose to power, a further 60 million Chinese people rose from poverty — an accomplishment Xi rightfully celebrated in his NPC address. Yet with a

population of 1.41 billion, even 6 per cent is some 84 million people. And despite close to two decades of policy effort — on paper at least — to rectify the inequalities that Deng knew his reforms would create, and to ensure that ‘all would prosper eventually’, stark income disparities exist between city and country, coastal and inland areas, men and women, and, above all, those with political connections and those without.

In his Nineteenth Party Congress address, Xi Jinping explicitly recognised this point in what he called the ‘principal contradiction’ of China’s society — unbalanced and inadequate development set against the need for people to live better lives. He also celebrated the Party’s ‘firm action’ in taking out ‘tigers’ (high-level corrupt officials), ‘swatting flies’ (low-level corrupt officials), and ‘hunting down foxes’ (corrupt officials who have absconded overseas) — while being clear that more remained to be done in the anti-corruption campaign that has become one of the hallmarks of his leadership.

Two stories from 2017 illustrate just how much has changed in China during the last four decades, and the challenges that lie ahead as Xi sets out to achieve his domestic and global goals. In April 2017, Yicai Global reported that beggars in tourist areas of Jinan, Shandong province, were using QR codes to solicit alms via mobile payment systems such as Alipay and WeChat Wallet — some were even using point of sale machines. Beyond the fact that beggars were using such modern technology to conduct their ‘transactions’ — surely only in China! — there are at least two other remarkable features of this story. The first is the news source. Yicai Global is the English-language arm of Yicai, China’s leading financial news group. Forty years ago, China did not have financial news groups, much less ‘leading’ ones. It had the Xinhua News Agency feeding tightly controlled information and opinion to the tiny handful of propaganda broadsheets such as the *People’s Daily* and the *Workers’ Daily*, and the China News Service producing similar content for overseas Chinese publications. Now, China has a number of financial news groups including one launched by Xinhua itself in 2017: the new China Fortune Media Corporation Group,

which will expand into financial services including wealth management. This may seem only natural for a country that is home to three of the world's ten largest stock exchanges in the world — Shanghai (at number four), Hong Kong (at number five), and Shenzhen (at number nine).⁶ Wind back the clock four decades and any Communist Party official would have denied the possibility of the country even having one.

The second remarkable thing about this story is the beggars' target: Chinese tourists. They are the ones with Chinese mobile payment systems on their smartphones, and disposable wealth, a

yuan or two of which might be spared for the down and out. Forty years ago, China had virtually no domestic tourism. Only at Chinese New Year did anyone enjoy a holiday of more than one day. People needed official permission to travel and, besides, with per capita incomes of 134 yuan (US\$20) in the country, where over eighty per cent of the population lived, and 343 yuan (US\$50) in the cities, there was not much money to spare. What there was went on 'luxuries' such as meat, radios, and bicycles. Domestic tourism only got going in the 1990s, with rising incomes and more holidays. It has been on the up and up ever since. In the first half of 2017 alone, Chinese citizens made 2.53 billion trips around their own country, spending 2.17 trillion yuan — about US\$336 billion — along the way. Chinese tourists have also become major contributors to international tourism, including the luxury tourism market in diverse destinations from Paris to the Arctic.

A far more prominent story in 2017 featured Chinese billionaire Guo Wengui 郭文贵, also known as Miles Kwok. Guo made global headlines

Chinese beggar with WeChat QR code
Source: Numismatic Bibliomania Society
(NBS), Flickr

following his largely unconfirmed revelations — via tweets, YouTube and Facebook — of a web of corruption among the highest levels of the Chinese leadership. By the end of 2017, he was identifying himself an ‘exile’, ‘whistleblower’, and ‘dissident, and had applied for political asylum in the US. Meanwhile, in China, the *Global Times* was referring to him as a notorious criminal; while Xinhua news declared him to be ‘one of China’s most-wanted fugitives’. The Chinese government demanded that the US deport him back to China, following a failed attempt by Chinese security agents to escort him back there of his own accord. In the first instance, Donald Trump appeared willing to help China, but was apparently talked around by his staff, who reminded him that Guo was a member of his own Mar-a-Lago club. Among the many dramatic headlines that prompted by Guo’s dramatic situation, was one that appeared in *The Diplomat* in December, asking if he was ‘A Ticking Time Bomb For US–China Ties in the Trump Era?’

The (unfinished) story of Guo Wengui illustrates just some of the quandaries that prosperity has brought to the Chinese Communist Party. One is that in a political system in which both transparency and accountability are limited, and wealth precarious, corruption flourishes. In 2017, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection announced that since Xi launched the anti-corruption campaign in 2013, it has punished 1.34 million lower ranking officials (‘flies’) for corruption. Among the high-level ‘tigers’ who fell from power in 2017 were Sun Zhengcai 孙政才, the Party Secretary of Chongqing and youngest member of the Politburo, and General Zhang Yang 张阳 of the Central Military Commission, who committed suicide in November, less than three months after being put under investigation for bribery. Guo, they allege, is a fox — and certainly not the only one.

A second quandary is that while the pursuit, maintenance, and enjoyment of wealth (at any level) seems to keep many of China’s people relatively content with the political system, it can also empower others to pursue change; prosperity is a double-edged sword that not only aids

control, but also threatens it. As with the story of the techno-beggars above, none of this would have been conceivable ten years ago, never mind forty.

A (Moderately) Prosperous Age with Chinese Characteristics

Some observers might consider it unusually humble that Xi Jinping only wanted China to become a ‘moderately prosperous society’ by 2020. The earliest appearance of the phrase *xiaokang* (‘small’ and ‘health’) was in the classic *Book of Odes* 诗经 (11th–7th centuries BCE), in which it indicated a fairly basic standard of living. In Confucian thought, as developed over succeeding centuries, it also came to stand for an ideal standard of social harmony and order, political righteousness, and general economic wellbeing. Xi is not the first post-Mao leader to use the phrase — Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin also cited it aspirationally — but he is the first to have the goal in sight. *Xiaokang* is indeed a more humble concept than that of a ‘Prosperous Age’ *shengshi* 盛世. The historical concept of *shengshi*, as Geremie Barmé described in the 2014 *China Story Yearbook*, refers to ‘universally acknowledged periods of remarkable social grace, political rectitude and cultural richness’. If the contents of this book are anything to go by, it appears that Xi Jinping made a sensible choice — a truly prosperous age will have to wait.

That said, ‘Prosperity’ seemed an obvious choice for the 2017 *China Story Yearbook*, because it so well encapsulated the multi-faceted developments in Chinese society, politics,

‘Comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society’
Source: qstheory.cn

culture, and economy over the course of the year, as well as some of its biggest news stories. We might have chosen to represent this English term on the cover using the Chinese characters for ‘moderately prosperous’ 小康 *xiaokang*. But we instead decided to represent prosperity by two Chinese characters, 富 and 福, both of which are pronounced in Modern Chinese as ‘fu’ (one in the fourth, and the other in the second tone).

Wealth, fortune, happiness, success, opportunity, dreams, achievements, and celebrations: these are recurring themes throughout the *Yearbook*, suggesting there was plenty for Xi Jinping to feel confident about during the course of 2017. But power, control, corruption, crime, punishment, inequality, poverty, and anxiety are recurring themes as well. Together, they reveal the many complexities and conundrums surrounding China’s prosperity as it enters a new era: with far-reaching implications not only for China’s own 1.41 billion people, but for the rest of the world as well.

Prosperity

Prosperity is the sixth volume in the *China Story Yearbook* series. It contains a series of nine chapters that focus on (some of) the year’s hottest topics, beginning with Brian Martin’s analysis of the Nineteenth Party Congress, which he sees as confirming President Xi’s ascendancy to a position of supreme power, and China’s emergence as a global economic and strategic power. Jane Golley and Adam Ingle examine the Belt and Road Initiative through the lens of geoeconomics, a relatively new discipline that is concerned with the interaction between economic and political power on a global scale. Sang Ye and Richard Rigby provide insights into Chinese perspectives on North Korea, while Hugh White reflects on the evolving power dynamics between China and America, and the panic this has set off in Australia — a country that has benefited so hugely from China’s rising wealth in the past. Gerry Groot describes the ‘precarious wealth’ of China’s jet-setting billionaires, and their search for status and

The complexities and conundrums of China's prosperity will have implications for China's own 1.38 billion people and the rest of the world

Source: Jon Bratt, Flickr

security as they navigate the Communist Party, the global economy, and a fast-news media cycle that does not always discern truth from facts. Next comes Carolyn Cartier's depiction of the contradictions underlying China's unique approach to urbanisation, seen vividly in the plans for the Xiongan New Area announced this year. Gloria Davies then contrasts the artists and writers who are flourishing in Xi's China — those who demonstrate their eagerness to study his thought — with those who have perished, most prominently Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo 刘晓波, whose death was mourned by millions in 2017. Elisa Nesossi and Ivan Franceschini explore the deterioration of China's human rights record in 2017, a year Human Rights Watch has described as the worst since 1989. And Anthony Dapiran looks at the dilemmas facing Hong Kong in its twentieth year since returning to Chinese sovereignty — a year in which official Chinese celebrations of the anniversary were awkwardly juxtaposed with a stagnant economy, rising income inequalities, and growing anxiety about the loss of autonomy and freedom in the Special Administrative Region.

These chapters are interspersed with Information Windows that highlight particular words, issues, ideas, people, and events — for example, the unfortunate fate of Beijing’s ‘hole-in-the-wall’ businesses, by Zhang Yichi; the ultra-modern phenomenon of dockless bikes, by Gao Yu; Yang Qin’s description of the anti-corruption television series *In the Name of the People* 为人民的民意; and Nicholas Loubere’s take on the Cambridge University Press debacle and the challenges facing academic publishers in China’s lucrative market.

Chapters are complemented by a number of Forums, which expand on the contents of the chapters or discuss a topic of relevance to the *Yearbook*’s theme. Chen Jingjing and Mark Strange review the fascinating evolution of the characters 富 and 福; this is coupled with a piece by Christopher Rea, who literally/figuratively turns 福 upside down in his examination of the ‘toppling’ of Liu Xiaobo. A Forum on the ‘Culture of Money’ includes Linda Jaivin’s piece on the cultural confidence engendered by prosperity in 2017, on display in the patriotic smash hit film *Wolf Warrior 2* 战狼 II, and William Sima’s take on *Ode to Joy* 欢乐颂, another television hit from the year that explores the plight of ridiculously wealthy ‘left-over women’ *shengnü* 剩女. Prosperity takes on a multicultural flavour in Forum pieces about the failing dreams of Chinese migrants in Papua New Guinea, by Graeme Smith; and Arabian traders pursuing their own ‘Chinese dreams’ in the Zhejiang city of Yiwu, by Wen Meizhen. Power plays among the Asian powers — India, China, Japan, and Korea — are apparent in the pieces by Andrew Chubb and Brittany Morreale.

Tom Cliff reflects on the ‘art of not smoking’ for Uyghurs in Xinjiang, while Ben Hillman focusses on Shangri-la, where Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption campaign has brought about the demise of a once-thriving tourist industry. Uchralt Otede takes us to Kangbashi, the ‘richest ghost town in China’, and Zhu Yujie considers the shared destinies of the Dungan and Hui Muslims along the old Silk Road. We see cases of conspicuous consumption in China’s rising demand for ivory and ‘donkey hide glue’, as told by Craig Smith and Natalie Köhle respectively, along with an account

of wealthy Chinese travellers seeking ‘extreme-luxe’ experiences, by Linda Jaivin. Stories of generosity in life and death are explored by Paul Farrelly and Benjamin Penny, while the challenges of deriving happiness from wealth are evident in the rise of psychotherapy, as told by Huang Hsuan-Ying in ‘Psycho Boom’. In a Forum on ‘Those Less Fortunate’, Susan Trevaskes covers death penalty reform, Shi Xinjie considers challenges in agricultural development, and Børge Bakken depicts an underworld economy of ‘crime villages’. Lorand Laskai focusses on the Party’s latest efforts to control uncivilised Internet content — no mean feat given rapid advances in the algorithms used by online news services to give their readers what they want. We close with two stories from Taiwan — one on the contested (seventieth) anniversary of the 28 February Uprising by Mark Harrison, and the other by Paul Farrelly on the constitutional ruling to rewrite the marriage laws to include same-sex relationships — a first in Asia, calling for rainbow celebrations.

To get rich may well be glorious, but there is clearly more to prosperity than mere money!

Acknowledgements

The *China Story Yearbook* is a project initiated by the Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW) at the Australian National University (ANU). We are interested in ‘The China story’ 中国的故事 not only as it is portrayed officially, but also from various other perspectives. 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, and that is illuminated by language and history. We are extremely grateful to Geremie Barmé, CIW’s Founding Director, for his inspiration in creating the *Yearbook* series.

The *Yearbook* is a truly collaborative effort that begins each year with a meeting of the CIW Management Group, a collection of China scholars from across Australia who come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds,

but are each deeply engaged in the Sinophone world. An initial brainstorming of topics considered essential for any given year culminates in an agreed overarching theme for that year. From this point, the Management Team solicits contributions from a wide range of authors spanning the globe, many of them connected with CIW through our Postdoctoral fellowship and PhD programs and with the broader community of China scholars at the ANU. The editorial team of Jane Golley and Linda Jaivin are deeply grateful to the Management Group for their years of effort in building up the *China Story Yearbook* series, and to all the contributors who have brought such breadth and depth to this volume in as timely a fashion as we could have hoped for. We thank Lindy Allen for copyediting the book. Above all, we are indebted to Sharon Strange, for her tireless work in managing the entire process — from corresponding with the many authors to typesetting and design — with such grace and good cheer.

The Cover Image

The character in the centre of this *Yearbook's* cover is *fu* 富, which has had the meaning 'prosperous' from at least the third century BCE. (For more information on the etymology of the character, see Forum 'Wine, Gods, and Morning Dew', pp.5–7.) It is written in a cursive script known in Chinese as *xingshu* 行书, or running script, which was developed as a faster way to write characters.

The book cover has been designed to look like a Chinese red envelope, or *hongbao* 红包. Red envelopes contain gifts of money which are given at social and family gatherings, such

Cover of the *China Story Yearbook 2017*
Artwork: CRE8IVE, Canberra

as weddings and Lunar

New Year. On the cover flaps of the *Yearbook*, there are two Chinese decorative knots 中国结, which symbolise good luck and prosperity. Traditionally, knots were tied using one piece of thread and are generally red or gold, which are both regarded as ‘lucky’ colours. Inside the knot, the character *fu* 福, meaning ‘good fortune’ — including in the sense of wealth — has been turned upside down. This custom is based on an aural pun: the verb 倒 — meaning to turn upside down — is a homophone of 到, to arrive. To turn prosperity upside down is to wish that prosperity will arrive. (For more on this, see Forum ‘Toppling Liu Xiaobo’, pp.9–12.)

A cascade of gold *yuanbao* or sycee 元宝 flows down the back cover. These were a form of gold ingot currency used in imperial China from the Qin dynasty. In present-day China, gold sycees remain a symbol of wealth and prosperity and are commonly depicted during the Lunar New Year festivities.

This text is taken from *China Story Yearbook 2017: Prosperity*,
edited by Jane Golley and Linda Jaivin, published 2018 by ANU Press,
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/CSY.04.2018.00