

To my parents, parents-in-law, grandparents,  
and great grandparents for escaping communism  
in Russia, China, and Czechoslovakia  
and for teaching,  
by example, the importance of not compromising  
the values of family, freedom, and liberty.



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## Preface

We were filming a family who was torn, both emotionally and physically, between California and Northern China. One woman, our main character, was a former high-ranking journalist for Communist Party of China (CPC) state-run media. Now living in exile, she was trying to free her brother who was serving a thirteen-year Chinese prison sentence for ‘printing pamphlets’, while simultaneously trying to prevent a morgue in China from cremating the remains of her sister, who had been murdered by the CPC.

It was a complex story.

A year into filming, the story suddenly became more intriguing and far more complex when this woman’s husband (also a high-profile Chinese journalist, but who was still living and working in China) decided to secretly film a visit to the labour camp where the sister had been killed. And then he gave his undercover footage to our small documentary film-making team.

It was a score for us. Not only had we gained access to the private life and archives of a family with high-ranking

connections in China and a compelling story, but we now had exclusive and rare footage from China, including clear footage and audio of a meeting with the director of a Chinese labour camp, who provided shocking admissions about the ordeal of inmates not only in her camp, but in correctional institutions across China.

This windfall forced us to expand our movie project from a short ten-minute portrait of one courageous woman to a feature-length documentary about this woman and her family's tragedy and triumph against the world's largest and most brutal totalitarian regime—the CPC.

But there are many sides to every story.

After many long days of interviews with our story's protagonist—Yifei Wang, the former Chinese journalist—despite her riveting tale and all the evidence we had to prove her case, we had no one to tell the other side of the story—the story of the antagonist, the CPC.

I already knew from experience that it would be next to impossible to get an interview with any of the existing CPC leadership about any human rights abuse in China. And with much of Yifei's story being related to the persecution of Falun Gong—the popular spiritual group that the CPC targeted for elimination in 1999—it would be absolutely impossible. Because, while Chinese officials are able to mention some of the CPC's conflicts by name, the persecution of Falun Gong is an absolutely forbidden subject in China.

I had a deep fear that without including the CPC's motives and actions in the film, Yifei's courageous story might be sidelined by critics as 'one-sided', or worse, mislabeled as 'propaganda'. That fear drove me to pore over scores of official CPC documents—speeches, books, television news,

newspaper reports, advertisements—anything I could get my hands on, and could get translated into English, to look for a solution. I had to find a voice for our story's bad guy.

But all the official CPC words were an immense disappointment. I found them to be thickly veiled in a sticky sugar coating that hid the truth behind lies so big that the general public will not look past the shiny outer layer before swallowing them whole, like poison-filled candy. I found no CPC words I could use in the movie that revealed the truth in a way that could be understood by a Western audience, without a huge amount of dull context and boring explanations that would send them to sleep before Yifei's story ever had the chance to enthrall them.

Over and over again, I watched the undercover interview with the labour camp director that Yifei's husband had smuggled out of China. I had never seen anything like it. The director was a real CPC representative in a CPC uniform. She spoke without a script. She yelled at Yifei's family with CPC authority, but she also stumbled and fumbled and became lost for words. Like all CPC members and officials, behind all the pomp and bureaucracy of the party, she was a human being and I found her words to include more truths than all the official CPC speeches and documents. And even more so after I was able to verify her testimony via eyewitness accounts, photographic evidence, published media reports, third party analyses, or other sources.

So I decided to look for more CPC officials like that labour camp director.

We did find a few CPC insiders in China who were willing to speak to us, but the risk to them and their families was far too great. Their lives could be taken at any moment by the

CPC. So despite their willingness, we refused, and we began to seek out regime defectors who had already left China.

We did find many, but they refused to be interviewed for a variety of reasons, including personal safety and the safety of their family members who were still in China. But surprisingly, a vast majority of them seemed to see little value in their stories and could not understand how their words would be helpful to our film, which was being made for a Western audience. However, with luck on our side, over a period of 18 months, we found and interviewed close to thirty CPC insiders, including a handful of particularly high-ranking officials.

I had expected their interviews to help bring a close to the story of Yifei and her family in our movie *Finding Courage*—which it did—but meeting them presented a whole new problem. They introduced me to the *Walking Dead*.

The stories and revelations that came from these CPC insiders constantly challenged all my assumptions and turned my years of research upside down. Then, after watching our movie, viewers were not only moved by Yifei and her family's courage, but also by the courage of the small number of CPC insiders who appeared for only a few minutes in our film. And our viewers often wanted to know more about their stories too.

But the insiders' stories are hard to show on camera, and without access to film independently in China, visuals are extremely scarce. So, like our movie, this book first began as a single article about what we had learned from CPC insiders during the making of our movie, and eventually it grew to a full length book about the culture created by the CPC and its effect upon those who carry out the CPC's operations.



In the eyes of ordinary Chinese citizens, CPC officials have status, power, and money to get things done in China. Without their consent, nothing will be done. And with their consent, almost anything can happen.

But in the eyes of the officials themselves, day-to-day living is like being slowly boiled alive. Behind the stars of CPC officialdom, life is a human pressure-cooker that has, over decades, hardened the skin of many and destroyed the flesh of many more. And the souls that do remain often barely recognise themselves.

Each chapter of this book is a thread that ties together the insights and experiences of these CPC insiders around one subject—from China's astounding environmental and food problems to the unexpectedly glaring interiors of China's CPC prison camps. But while one thread binds each of the chapters together, other threads unwind and unravel the opaque veil that shrouds the bizarre reality of the CPC's operations, as these insiders reveal the ghostly world of CPC culture and officialdom from within its Marxist core.

**Kay Rubacek**

New York



## Foreword

As we approach the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, this is a timely book unravelling the absolute powers that the communist party had acquired in China since 1949. It is a well-researched topic reflecting on the absolutist powers of China's communist party (CPC) that are derived from its seizure of state power with the army's help and enshrined in the successive party and state constitutions. Socialism has been the official ideology in China and the party-state control over politics, society, economy, diplomacy, media, culture (and NGOs) has been absolute. While political factional struggles, reform and opening up, spread of internet, rise of a middle class, relative freedoms in property, religion, legal remedies and other developments may at times created soft or fragmented authoritarianism in China – as some scholars argued – the author of this book, Kay Rubacek discounts any chinks in the party's armour.

In academic, media or policy studies, China's politics is predominantly dissected through the CPC literature,

‘Pekinology’ (paraphrased to the previous Soviet scholarship on Kremlinology - that is focusing on elite conceptions and individuals), important political leaders’ statements and actions, tussle for power among ‘interest groups’ and others. Several ‘models’ were applied including Leninist party state model, elite politics model, informal politics model, state-society relations, bureaucratic politics model, political culture theories, institutional theory, modernisation, System Theory, factional politics model, corporatism and others. Doyens like Roderick MacFarquher, David Shambaugh, Frederick Teiwes, Elizabeth Economy, Willy Wo Lap Lam, Frank Dikotter, Minxin Pei, Dali Yang, Anne-Marie Brady and others have enlightened us on various facets of China’s political dynamics. Rubacek, however, followed an unconventional method.

This book is focused on exploring the lives of CPC officials through a psycho-political explanation of the workings of the communist party’s inner world through interviews of scores of officials from China, including security officers, judges, doctors, journalists, diplomats, detainees and others. It decodes the politics, political statements and political phenomena in China with a keen sense of the communist politics since Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and others – partly influenced by the author’s family experiences in the then Soviet Union and in China.

In the process, Rubacek dissects the cultural language of the CPC through its ‘two skins of cultural thinking’. While the seven million CPC officials are the inner party members with absolute powers, the 98 million members are the outer party members, and the masses - the general public with no meaningful rights - are the Proles (-proletariat p.140).

Rubacek applied this model to explain the unbridled powers that the CPC officials have acquired to trample on the rest. Reminding one of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's Gulags of the then Soviet Union, the Nazi concentration camps and Harry Hongda Wu's Laogai prisons in China, the focus of this book is on the inner workings of countless prisons, labour camps, black prisons, detention centers, brainwashing centers, re-education centers and others. The author highlights the crack down on two major protests in China – the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989 and the repression of the Falun Gong practitioners since 1999 through special detention centres like 6-10 (established on June 10) to counter the Falun Gong activists and re-education institutions like Masanjia in Shenyang.

What also stands apart in Rubacek's work is how the narrative and public posture of the CPC is at variance with the actual implementation of the policies. Reminding one of Nobel Laurette Liu Xiaobo's *egao* (double-meaning words), the text below depicts an Orwellian dystopia. As the CPC decided to export this party-state 'model' to the rest of the world, through police stations and influence operations, it poses concerns not only to the Chinese citizens but also to the rest of the world.

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## Meeting the Walking Dead

‘WE LOST TRUTH a long time ago,’ he said. He then laughed. ‘It is extremely miserable.’

I returned his laugh with a broad smile until the English translation of what he had said came into my ear a few seconds later. My smile disappeared.

‘People there do not live like real humans,’ he continued, ‘they live like walking corpses. It is a world for ghosts, not for humans.’

‘Hold on,’ I interrupted, doing something that I religiously avoid doing when conducting an interview. ‘Translator,’ I called out loudly so they would hear me through the interviewee’s microphone. ‘Did you translate his last sentence? I am not getting his meaning.’

‘Walking corpses... walking ghosts,’ the translator stammered, obviously tired from well over an hour of continuous translation from Chinese into English. But now was not the time for a break.

‘Walking dead?’ I asked, trying to maintain a calm exterior while my mind was racing.

‘Yes, that is correct,’ replied the translator.

I looked back at the interviewee. He was the highest ranking communist official we had been able to get on camera so far. He was the first in charge of modernising the technology of the CPC’s Public Security System (that oversees police and citizen control). The technology has since helped turn China into one of the most highly controlled and surveilled countries on the planet.

He spoke without anger or remorse, but his tone showed a sense of disregard for those who he assumed would not or could not comprehend his experiences. For most of the interview he refused to make eye contact with me and would only look at my Chinese translator. Sometimes he rolled his eyes at my questions that were intended to illicit answers understandable to people of non-Chinese. Whether it was because I was Caucasian, or female, or didn’t speak Chinese, he often looked at me as if to say: You should understand what I’m talking about—you all should, but you don’t. And I don’t expect you ever will.

That was one of our first on-camera interviews with a former high-ranking CPC official in New York, back in 2016. In subsequent interviews with more officials and CPC members, I would casually mention how someone had used the term, ‘Walking Dead,’ to describe the state of Chinese people under CPC rule today. Then I would be closely watching for their response. And from former officials living on opposite sides of the world, who had never met each other, who worked in completely different departments in China, who were born in different generations and grew up in different regions, none of them batted an eye at the mention of the term. I had hoped it would be an anomaly and that I



could there by justify ignoring the term, but to my alarm, the concept of China's Walking Dead was a norm to them.

'Oh yes, I have published several articles about that,' said a Chinese professor, who is also a doctor of philosophy, and a former CPC model student.

'Yeah. Walking Dead,' nodded another CPC member in broken English. He leaned toward me, as if to avoid the cameras and to indicate we were now speaking off record.

'I have some thoughts,' he continued, 'but they are probably useless for your interview.' I encouraged him to continue.

'You know, in China, sometimes I was drunk and then did [heart] operations on people.' I gulped, but he nodded and shrugged his shoulders. He had been a heart surgeon and worked most of his life at a large, prestigious hospital in China, particularly famous for organ transplantation operations.

'And policemen—drunk, and then go to their job.'

I raised my eyebrows and lowered my chin. With wide eyes I searched his face for any hints to grasp his meaning.

'Yeah,' he said, 'drunk, play mahjong all night, the whole night, and then go to work.'

He was dead serious.

'Where was this?' I questioned.

'Everywhere, everywhere, everywhere,' he said waving his hands. 'Being in that environment is like being in a big vat of dye. Over time it will change you. Gradually you will lose your true self, your soul, or your spirit. That will die. That is the Walking Dead.'

He leaned back in his chair and began talking in Chinese again, talking and talking ...but at that moment I felt I had entered a world that I could not leave—not until I could

fully understand what he meant.

For the last five years I have tried to forget the Walking Dead. I could not bear to use such a ghastly term to describe my fellow human beings in any country, let alone the interviewees who had given me their trust. It was too difficult a term to unravel for an audience in a world of political correctness, and so full of cultural distortion and depravity that I chose to ignore it. And my decision felt justified because the Walking Dead did not fit the frame I needed from these interviews for our movie, *Finding Courage*<sup>1</sup>, which up until now, had been my task at hand.

But I feel a growing weight of responsibility bearing down on my shoulders. Scores of translated CPC documents and interview transcripts sit in boxes in my office. Over 50 hours of recorded interviews with former Chinese communist officials and CPC members and operatives have, until now, sat unused. It had been challenging to find willing interviewees, and it took time and patience during the interviews to build their trust and overcome cultural, knowledge, age, and gender differences. But eventually, the overwhelming majority warmed to my questioning and spoke sincerely and candidly. Their lived experiences, their truths, are rarely told in Chinese or Western media. Their stories are too foreign for those who do not understand, and too disturbing for those who do. And worse, their guilt, remorse, distress, failure, and despair, were overshadowed by an overwhelming hopelessness. And without hope, I felt obliged to hide these stories, rather than pour more sorrow upon the world. We already have enough.

But today I do see a hope and a purpose in sharing these stories.

At a time, when the communist China is expanding its influence worldwide, and as the beacon of the Free World, America, is on the brink of losing its foundation of personal liberties and succumbing to socialist control, understanding the poison that created China's Walking Dead may help us save ourselves from their fate. And I truly and dearly hope that it is not too late to awaken many of the Walking Dead from their poison-induced slumber.

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