

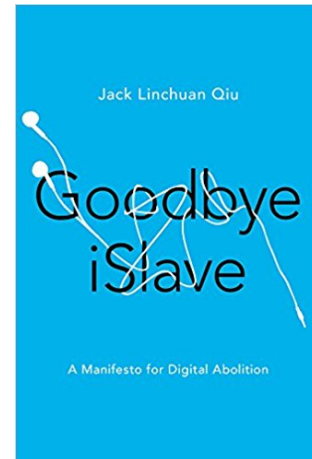
Jack Linchuan Qiu, **Goodbye iSlave: A Manifesto for Digital Abolition**, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016, 248 pp., \$24.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by

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Jack Linchuan Qiu's book **Goodbye iSlave: A Manifesto for Digital Abolition** addresses the rising inequality around the world and explores the alienating consequences of digital technology. As a communication scholar, the author brings new findings from his fieldwork in Asia to examine the digital media industry as a system of domination and exploitation in the global economy. The book's thesis revolves around two types of modern-day forced labor: the "manufacturing iSlaves" who work in Apple's assembly lines in China, and the "manufactured iSlaves" of the Apple Cult who engage in addictive digital labor in the hegemonic consumption culture. Qiu draws on historical materials regarding the transatlantic slave trade since the 17th century to parallel with "iSlavery" in the digital era, supporting the parallel with participant observation, interviews, news analysis, and social media research conducted since 2010. While painting a chilling picture of a "brave new world of profit making, propelled by high technology, guarded by enterprising authority, carried forward by millions of unfortunate fellows being deprived of their souls" (p. 5), the book also seeks alternatives to that picture by examining, through empowerment activities such as cyber mobilization with worker-generated content, potentials of "abolitionist" social movements of resistance.



Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the book challenges digital consumers to venture beyond their "cocoon of social media and the associated modes of individual consumption" (p. 7) to ponder "questions of serious intellectual and moral challenge" (p. 7). A large portion of the research data focuses on the Taiwanese corporation Foxconn, the world's largest electronics manufacturer with more than 1.4 million employees, which assembles most of Apple's i-products. Qiu argues that the series of employee suicides and other scandals in Foxconn's factories in China since 2010 are embodiments of a pandemic infecting the global IT industry of transnational production. In drawing a comparison between a typical Foxconn worker dormitory building equipped with antijumping nets and 18th-century slave ships equipped with antijumping nets, Qiu makes a compelling argument that technology does not guarantee progress in human conditions.

Qiu's critique of the "malicious consequence of Apple fandom" (p. 91) is supported by appalling cases in the news such as that of Yang Ni, a young man who, after stumbling into an organ-trafficking network in China, sold his kidney for a new iPhone and iPad. Qiu argues that the iPhone is thus a symbolic representation of global socioeconomic inequality and the brutal exploitation of young people's material desires in poverty-stricken areas. Scholarly publications have rarely examined the obsession with high-tech gadgets among youth in tandem with the organ trade in developing countries; however, attention to

the connection is increasing (e.g., Huang & Li, 2017) as part of a scholarly inquiry into ethics and social justice.

With stirring interviews from workers, including a young female who attempted suicide, the book raises questions of how the state regulates working conditions in global factories, as well as questions of individual agency among the collusion of corporations and governments. As part of his envisioned landscape of potential digital abolition, Qiu boldly connects the student-initiated Umbrella Movement (Bush, 2014) for legislative autonomy in Hong Kong with labor protests in south China. While this may sound rather optimistic to some readers, Qiu offers empirical data—for example, social media posts—that document working-class use of digital media for empowerment, grassroots networking, and solidarity building for the purpose of collective resistance.

The book is comparable to other critiques of digital capitalism in the context of the conflicted global political economy, such as *Digital Depression: Information Technology and Economic Crisis* (2014) by Dan Schiller and *Culture and Economy in the Age of Social Media* (2015) by Christian Fuchs. Qiu's book would be beneficial to scholars and graduate students studying globalization, communication, and cultural studies, or to general readers interested in issues of digital culture.

### References

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