

Carmelina Bilotta

My tarnished iPhone

Apple, Child miners in DRC & Sweat shop workers in China are all partners in a high-tech assembly process, however , shares between them are poles apart.



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When you step into an Apple store to buy the latest version of the iPhone, you'll find a display of glossy surfaces, clean screens and an array of luxury tech appliances. This scene is a far cry from the overcrowded dormitories, toxic fume filled factories and the dark and dangerous mines where Apple's underage suppliers are collecting and assembling the iPhone.

Printed on the back of every iPhone you will read "Designed by Apple in California Assembled in China", might I add, assembled 'by hand' in China. Part of Apple's global success lays in its ability to seize 85% of the value of the iPhone even though the entire production process is outsourced from its manufacturers at the Foxconn factory in China. The asymmetries of power in the buyer-driven supply chain are extremely evident in this case, as the labour costs in China equal to the smallest share of the iPhone, only 1.8%, or nearly \$12 of the \$700 retail price of the iPhone 6s. Apple's power enables them to dictate the price and the timing

of product delivery, resulting in an intense amount of pressure for factory workers.

Many of the staff perform repetitive tasks like wiping down screens or shaving aluminium from the edge of the Apple logo for ten tedious hours at a time. The life-threatening conditions inside the factory, where 18 people have committed suicide, include over-crowded dormitories, improper waste removal and toxic dust. Reports have claimed that workers have been forced to stand for 24 hour shifts, until their legs were swollen and were unable to walk. In 2009, the factories installed suicide nets outside all the buildings to stop over-worked and stressed workers leaping to their deaths.

In 2007 when Steve Jobs decided to strengthen the glass on iPhone, just four weeks before it was scheduled to shelf in stores, it required a production speedup and a revamp of the production process.

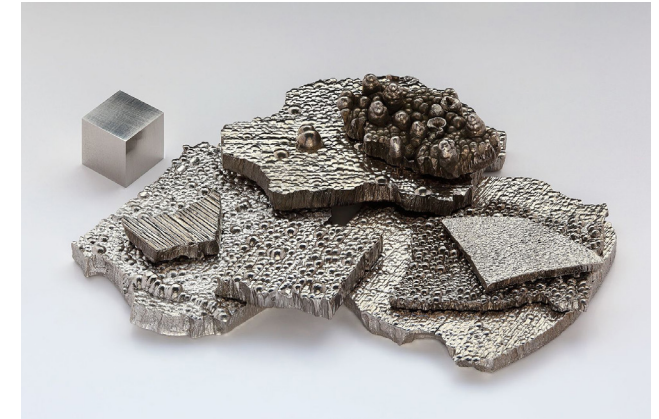
Predictably, Apple's supplier code on worker safety and workplace standards and China's labour laws went straight out the window. In result of this overhaul in July 2009, Sun Danyong, 25 years old, committed suicide. When he was held responsible for losing one of the iPhone 4 prototypes, he jumped from the 12th floor to his death. Apple's short delivery deadline, secretive culture and business approach, centred on creating surprise in the market creates puts a lot of pressure on their workers.

Another alarming case of Apple's association with human rights and child labour violations can be noted in their sourcing of Cobalt. UNICEF estimates that about 40,000 boys and girls work as artisanal miners in southern DRC, many of who extract cobalt. Children as young as 7, endure up to 12 hours a day, working at the mines hauling back-breaking loads of between 20 and 40kg a day. All this labour amounts to \$1 a day in addition to being subjected to violence, extortion and intimidation. According to Oeko-Institut, there are 6.3 grams of cobalt on batteries per iPhone.

Danny, a 15-year-old cobalt miner in DRC
" THERE IS LOTS OF DUST, IT IS VERY EASY TO CATCH COLDS, AND WE HURT ALL OVER."

Apple says they're unsure of where their cobalt originates from, this statement coming from such a large tech-giant as Apple seems a bit outlandish. Couldn't they work with suppliers to make this information more clear?

In conclusion, Apple may not totally control their supplier's processes, however being one of their biggest clients, they have an enormous influence over their conduct. (Approximately 40% of Foxconn revenues are from Apple, its biggest client) Nonetheless, sales seem to remain at the forefront of Apple's priorities when considering the terrible quality of life for their manufacturers. Thus, Chinese factory workers and artisanal miners in the DRC will continue to fall victim in this cycle of global mass manufacturing for the iPhone.



Pure (99.9 %) cobalt chips, electrolytically refined, as well as a high purity (99.8 % = 2N8) 1 cm³ cobalt cube for comparison.

By Alchemist-hp (talk) (www.pse-mendelejew.de) (Own work) [FAL], via Wikimedia Commons

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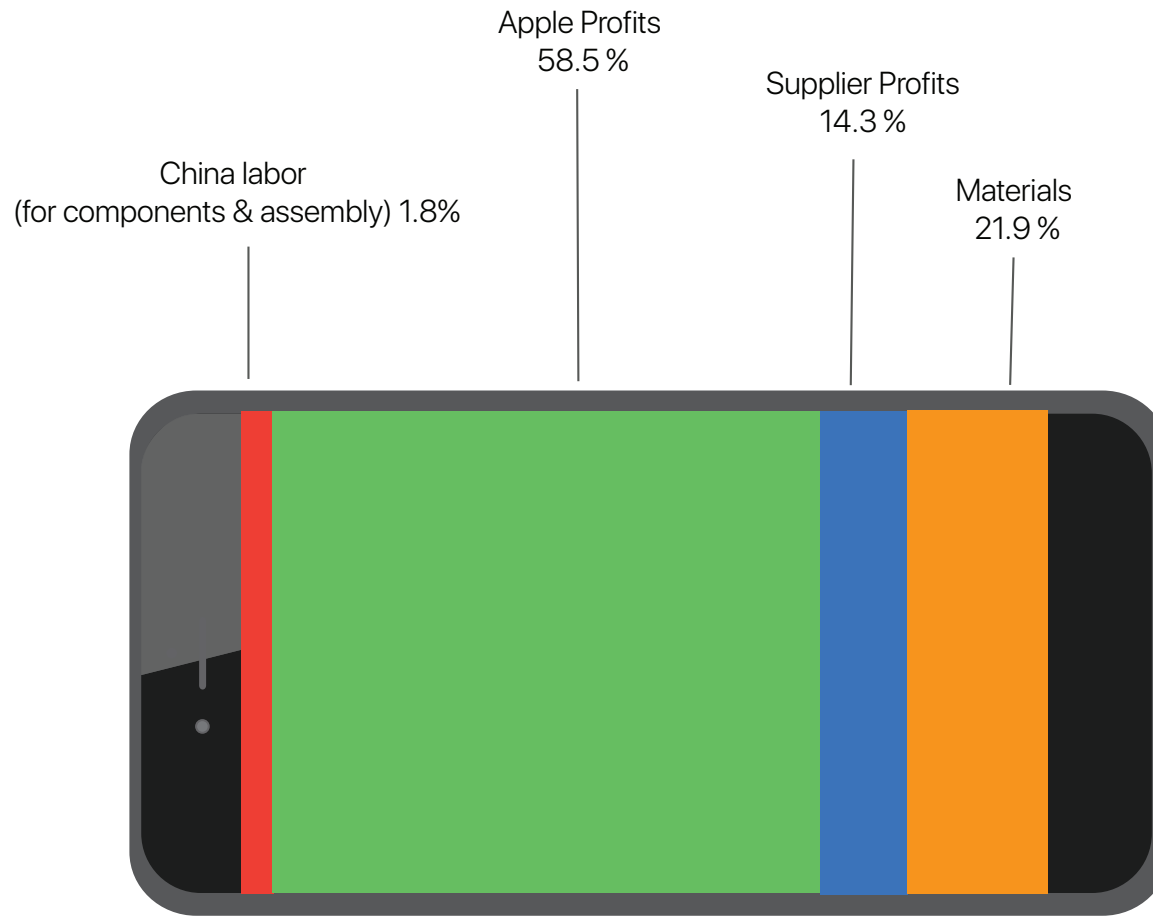
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Distribution of value for the iPhone

This Figure shows the breakdown of value for the iPhone between Apple and its suppliers. *"Apple's strength is well illustrated by its ability to capture an extraordinary 58.5 percent of the value of the iPhone despite the fact that manufacture of the product is entirely outsourced. Particularly notable is that labour costs in China account for the smallest share, only 1.8 percent "* - Sacom, (2017). The politics of global production: Apple, Foxconn and China's new working class.

Timeline of events at Apple Factories

