



The most Gothic description of Capital is also the most accurate.

Capital is an abstract parasite, an insatiable vampire and zombie-maker; but the living flesh it converts into dead labor is ours, and the zombies it makes are us. There is a sense in which it simply is the case that the political elite *are* our servants; the miserable service they provide from us is to launder our libidos, to obligingly re-present for us our disavowed desires as if they had nothing to do with us.

Mark Fisher,  
*Capitalist Realism* (2009)

## Spectral Revolutions

### Occult Economies in Asia

Mostly analogies drawn from the gothic imaginary are common in the Marxist canon, with the most famous case in point being the incipit of Marx and Engels's *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, where readers are told that 'the spectre of communism' is haunting Europe. Far from being considered curious aberrations, these preternatural metaphors have given rise to a whole literature on spectral capitalism that spans to our present stage of late capitalism. In the 1980s, Aihwa Ong made waves with her study of spirit possessions on the shopfloors of modern factories in Malaysia, in which she argued that these spectres represented a form of resistance by workers otherwise powerless in the face of capital. In another instance from the 1990s, Jean and John Comaroff introduced the idea of 'occult economies' to make sense of the wave of episodes in which real or imagined magical means were deployed in pursuit of material gains that occurred in South Africa after the end of apartheid. While both conceptualisations received a fair share of criticism—not least for presenting the ghosts of capitalism as dreams and the anthropologist as the psychoanalyst instead of dealing with the proper social and historical context of these phenomena—this issue of the *Made in China Journal* cuts the Gordian knot by focussing on how individuals in China and other contexts in Asia live and interact with the supernatural. In some cases, ghosts, fortune-tellers, shamans, sorcerers, zombies, corpse brides, and aliens merely assist people to get by and cope with the difficulties they face in their daily lives; in others, these beings play subversive roles, undermining the rules that underpin contemporary society. In both cases, they challenge the status quo, hence the title 'spectral revolutions'.

The special section opens with five essays in Chinese settings. **Emily Ng** draws from her fieldwork in Henan to explain the cosmological role of Mao in ritual and spirit mediumship in rural China, highlighting the cosmic reverberations of Mao's earthly rule. **William Matthews** describes how Chinese fortune-tellers use the classical text of the *Yijing*, contending that their naturalistic worldview provides an excellent method for people to navigate day-to-day economic decisions by forecasting fortune in a way that is trustworthy and morally blameless. **Chris K. K. Tan** retells some stories reported by Chinese media about criminal grave robbing and murder for the purpose of selling the corpses for use in 'ghost marriages', arguing that the cadavers perform a sort of macabre affective labour. **Malcolm Thompson** excavates the strange history of UFOlogy in post reform China, asking if there is, or ever was, revolutionary potential in the movement. **Sylvia J. Martin** analyses the 2002 Hong Kong–Thai movie *The Eye* within the context of the occult economies of organ transplantation, contending that through the genre of a horror film cultural meanings of vision are highlighted and heightened that go beyond the political economic analysis of extraction and exchange.

The remaining four essays are set in different contexts in Asia. Drawing from his fieldwork in Bangkok, **Andrew Alan Johnson** reflects on the relationship between economic 'development' and new religious movements, refusing the popular explanation that attributes this increasingly de-centred religiosity to the vicissitudes of new economic regimes, and positing it instead as an acknowledgement of a shared world in flux, with humans and nonhumans alike struggling to come to terms with what existing in a changed present might mean. Against the backdrop of Bangkok's skyscrapers, **Edoardo Siani** delves into the role of fortune-telling in contemporary Thai society and how the practice relates to Buddhism and the widespread desire to accumulate wealth. Moving to Cambodia, **Ivan Franceschini** looks back to several episodes

of people in Cambodian being murdered or evicted from their villages over suspicions of sorcery, arguing that these events hark back to a primordial conflict between fields and forests that has been exacerbated by the country's development in recent years. Finally, **Konstantinos Zorbas** probes the revival of shamanism in a Siberian city, identifying a new type of shamanic detective and entrepreneur, whose techniques of counter-cursing cut across the state's operations of security and justice.

This issue also includes a forum titled 'Viral Loads: China and the World after Covid-19' in which we offer a few reflections on the pandemic. **Chenchen Zhang** describes how the Chinese Communist Party managed to get over a potential 'Chernobyl moment' in the early stages of the pandemic, after the death of Doctor Li Wenliang had caused widespread outrage, by employing a set of 'hard' and 'soft' tools to suppress dissent and overcome the trust crisis. In a similar vein, **Christian Sorace** notes how in the midst of the pandemic, both in China and abroad, expressions of gratitude were everywhere, and argues that the *politics of gratitude* ensnares us in a complicated logic of sovereignty, indebtedness, and depoliticisation that ultimately benefits the ruling authorities while also exposing their vulnerability. **Carwyn Morris** discusses surveillance, biopolitics, and social imaginaries related to governmental responses to Covid-19, considering why, in a period where virus and censorship converged to create a legitimacy crisis for the Chinese government, technologies that may otherwise be considered repressive came to be desired as 'technologies of vaccination'. **Flair Donglai Shi** considers the surge in anti-Asian racist incidents in the wake of the pandemic, arguing that Covid-19 has brought about substantive changes in Western Sinophobia and proposing a possible way out for diasporic communities. **Ivan Franceschini** interviews historian **Michael G. Vann** about his recent book *The Great Hanoi Rat Hunt*, which details how the French authorities (mis-) managed a plague outbreak in Hanoi in 1903,

highlighting uncanny parallelisms and possible lessons that can be drawn from that experience. Finally, **Mara Benadusi** and **Andrea E. Pia** interview anthropologist **Frédéric Keck** about his recent monograph *Avian Reservoirs*, in which he challenges the idea of zoonosis as an Asian problem, and shows how attending to the wild and domesticated behaviours and physiology of birds reveals the multiple and often contradictory ways in which virologists and citizen scientists make sense of epidemics.

The issue includes two op-eds, the first by **Ivan Franceschini** and **Nicholas Loubere** about the whataboutism and essentialism that have become so widespread in current discussions of China, the second by **Gerald Roche** and **James Leibold** on the threat that ‘second-generation ethnic policies’ pose for so-called Chinese ‘minority nationalities’. In the China Columns section, **Rian Thum** documents the Chinese state’s programme of religious and historical destruction in Xinjiang, outlining its significance for affected Uyghurs, and placing it in the wider context of government efforts to transform the Uyghur built environment, both historically and in contemporary times. **Nitasha Kaul** examines the cases of Kashmir and Xinjiang, showing how both regions have witnessed political power as exercised by India and China, including systematic human rights violations in the name of curbing separatism and terrorism. **Matthew Robertson** engages with a recent high-profile paper classifying the Chinese state’s coercive actions against Uyghurs as ‘preventive repression’, using it as a window into fundamental questions in the social scientific project. **Zhang Yueran** examines the decade-long labour organising strategy implemented by the Maoist activists behind the Jasic struggle of 2018. **Anita Chan** describes how, although Hong Kong historically has a weak trade union culture, in early 2020 activists in the protest movement turned to demanding union representation and began forming dozens of small unions from the ground up. Finally, **Mengyang Zhao** challenges the common misperception of diaspora activism as limited to activists’ involvement

in topics directly related to their homelands, often non-democracies with repressive systems, arguing that this perception trivialises the potential interaction and mutual learning between Chinese activists abroad and their local peers.

The cultural section features three review essays by **Ivan Franceschini**, respectively about the uneasy relationship between academia and espionage, William Somerset Maugham’s writings about the Far East, and Ling Ma’s prescient zombie novel *Severance*. In the Window on Asia section, **Alvin Camba** looks into the impact of Chinese online gambling capital on Philippine society. Finally, we wrap up the issue with conversations with **Au Loong-Yu**, **Erin Y. Huang**, and **Robert Cliver** about their recently published books. ■

The Editors

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