Special Issue: Contemporary Haunting: How Ghosts Reconfigure Space, Memory, and the State in East Asia
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INTRODUCTION

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The three articles in this collection all approach haunting as a contemporary phenomenon. In a sense, such an approach is paradoxical: as evident in the English verb, haunting refers to the persistence of the past; it denotes a set of habitual spaces and repressed but ever-present memories. However, it is in this sense of an accretion of memories, habits, and stances in space that ghosts and haunting offer a unique vantage to explore the making of a lived world, with all of the perils that attend such a task in the present. With their stubborn adherence to a world that human projects would transform, ghosts perform gestures of restraint or refusal. At the very least, they mark a limit, an uncanny sense that, as Marx noted, humans do not make the world as we please. If ghosts seem too light to weigh on our projects "like a nightmare," we might consider their intermittent presence among us as an uncanny entanglement. And, like the workings of other forms of "occult agency" described in the anthropological literature (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999a; Ferguson 2006; Geschiere 1997; Jones 2012; Moore and Sanders 2001; Weiss 1996; Weller 2001), haunting provides a culturally specific means to distribute responsibility. Through their entanglement with space, memory, and action, ghosts thus figure in the ways that those who engage with them give form to their relationships with themselves and their responsibilities to others, what we might call an ethical imagination.

Despite all promises of secularization, ghosts remain an important part of the contemporary Taiwanese landscape. As a feature of Taiwan today, contemporary haunting traces a set of conflicts, complicities, and contradictions. Ghosts serve as both medium and index of such entanglements: ghosts are entangled in urban planning, national commemoration, interurban competition, quality of life discourses, and economic rationality, sometimes as a form of subtle cultural resistance but often

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in ways that do not sit easily within anthropological categories.[1]

Perhaps this lack of fit or ambivalence derives from ghosts' structural position within the southeastern Chinese cosmology that informs Taiwanese religious beliefs. In his work toward a theory of ghosts in *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, David K. Jordan (1972: xviii) argued that "ghosts, it develops, are often shades of family members involved in irregularities in the structure of the family." In other words, ghosts tend, from the structure of Chinese kinship, to be anomalous. This ambivalence has implications for our understandings of gender and power, among other issues. As women have no enduring structural position in their natal families and live as guests in their husband's household (M Wolf: 1972), we might expect that events surrounding women's marriage and childbirth—or rather the lack thereof—produce more anomalous persons, hence more ghosts. Indeed, most of the ghosts that Jordan encountered were unmarried daughters, whose situation required means of redress. Resonating with this finding about ghosts and gender, Maurice Freedman (1966) discovered that in the New Territories, the graves of mothers and grandmothers were most likely to become the focus of exhumation and elaborate secondary burials. Although demographic and other social changes in Taiwan have led to different expectations about the afterlife and a corresponding decline in the ghost marriages described by an earlier generation of anthropologists (Jordan 1972, Harrell 1986), women ghosts continue to haunt folklore and, increasingly, feminist discourses. In this volume, women ghosts feature prominently, whether looking for a son-in-law in a small town (Lin) or provoking disputes over the best form of commemoration in the regional metropolis and industrial center, Kaohsiung (Lee and Tang). In each case, the ghosts disrupt gendered moral and political categories, in both domestic and public domains. If anything, their current entanglement with (post)modernity has made ghosts even more ambivalent.

Yet, ambivalence has its own set of powers. Both Arthur Wolf (1978) and Steven Sangren (1987) noted in their research that one's own ghosts might be another's ancestors, and vice versa. Of course, when they are no one's ancestors, they become public problems and, at times, common resources. Ghosts, to use vocabulary

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derived from Victor Turner, are *liminoid* figures. They thus can provide a source of possibilities, what Robert Weller has called "saturated potentials" of meaning and of social action (Weller 1994b). It's in this sense that some ghosts seem to take up a mediating role between upright, powerful, but disinterested gods and a purely malevolent pandemonium (Sangren 1987); practices directed at these ghosts, who develop a following, serve as a source of creativity, bringing new "little gods" into the vantage of popular religious practices (Harrell 1974). This creative process has been transformed and accelerated by features of contemporary political economy, which has changed the practices and meanings of accumulation and value in both economic and ethical domains (Weller 1994a, 2001).

As ambivalent and anomalous as they may be, ghosts are nonetheless embedded in space and spatial practices. Ghosts have specific places of worship that correspond with the values assigned to different parts of houses and to social categories (A Wolf 1978). Their commemoration occurs in structures that mark ghostly identities and that ironically, configure their haunts as temporary rest places (Weller 1994, see Lin in this volume). Some ritual exchanges aimed at ghosts point out their menace and the need to police communities against outside forces (Jordan 1966, Feuchtwang 1992); others map places of particular danger or trauma, creating sites of anti-pilgrimage (Hatfield 1997, see Lee and Tang in this volume). Periodic worship of ghosts, such as that during the seventh lunar month, also demonstrates kinds of solidarity and conviviality expressed in ritualized conflict and role reversal (DeBernardi 1992, Sangren 2000, Deglopper 1995).

From the standpoint of spatial practices, it is obvious that ghosts often mark particular historical traumas and can thus constitute communities (Mueggler 2001, Hatfield 1997). Yet ghosts are more than a mirror of that other negative value that constitutes communities against it, witchcraft. Recent ethnographic work in southern China, for example, has shown that ghosts feature in discourses concerning domestic space and social mobility and even in transnational networks (Chu 2009). In her current research in Shanghai, Lucia Huwy-min Liu (Liu personal conversation) has found that discomfort surrounding human remains and spirit tablets in cramped

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apartment spaces traces anxieties about privacy among contemporary urbanites, who find life beside ancestors "inconvenient." Meanwhile, Julie Chu's work on elderly Fuzhounese who desire green cards points out the interpenetration of technologies of normalizing identity, such as green cards, with the bureaucratic management of death (as in death certificates and cremation administration) and cosmological schemas: mandatory cremation in China "disrupted the temporary sequence of ritual practices for directing the newly dead to the afterlife" (Chu 2009: 207). Because a green card could avert mandatory cremation, green cards were desired for entrance into a Western Paradise, indeed—but that of Amida Buddha, not America.

Both qualities of ghosts, their ambivalence and their spatial embeddedness, have made ghosts particularly relevant agents in Taiwan's contemporary cultural landscape. During the emergence of a highly speculative economy in the late 1980s, for example, ghost cults formed part of an experience of an "unpredictable amoral market instead of a clear set of shared morals" (Weller 1994a: 162); this ambivalence, moreover, captured many of the anxieties of Taiwanese people facing the end of martial law. Here we confront an irony: Ghosts are amoral agents that may, in fact, encourage forms of moral critique. Thus while it might be possible to interpret ghosts as a projection of social categories, we might want to look at the irony of ghosts' ethical position more closely and ask, if ghosts index some sort of lack (of wholeness, goodness, coherence), just what is that *want*? how does it articulate with ongoing social life? What do ghosts want from those that they haunt?

While the authors approach the problem of haunting from the vantage of different subfields of cultural anthropology, including urban anthropology, the anthropology of religion, and material culture studies, they begin by asking a question not normally posed to ghosts: that of desire. All three authors set out by posing the problem, *"What do ghosts want?"* In other words, the authors interrogate the various desires that ghosts animate and objectify, aware that these desires often conflict. Lee and Tang (this volume) describe this question succinctly: "[…] as meanings are constantly contested, so is the nature of the deceased's requests." The authors situate these conflicting desires within frameworks of public space and action,

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bringing an awareness of the spatiality of haunting that has appeared in anthropological accounts of Taiwanese and Chinese ritual practices but has until recently remained undertheorized. Indeed, it is in haunting's relationship to places—sometimes destructive, but also constitutive—that ghosts seem to intervene in human social life and, in turn, ground an ethics of locality.[2]

Working from this connection to desire and spatial practices, each article shows how ghosts are not just icons or metaphors of contemporary social processes but often come to act as catalysts and even agents. Just to name a few of the kinds of ghostly agency that the articles pinpoint, ghosts provoke stances on ongoing urban development (Hatfield, Lee and Tang), promote ethical critique (Lin), produce a town's centers and peripheries (Hatfield, Lin), provide counter-narratives of historical progress (Lee and Tang), and point out the complicity of government and opposition (Hatfield, Lee and Tang). It turns out that ghosts not only reflect the amoral or spectral economy of "millennial capitalism" (Weller 2001); they also find their way into the heroic narrative of the Taiwan Miracle and its rewriting in contemporary Taiwan. Their desires might show where this narrative is lacking. Of course, however, ghosts might want nothing more than attention; and, if nothing else, haunting compels us to mind what we might otherwise have forgotten. In this fashion, ghosts are less interpretive figures than interpellative ones, more stance motivating than they are sense making.

Ironies of ghostly desire inform Lin Wei-Ping's article, "Ghost Mother Wants a Son-in-Law," which explores the spatial separation of humans and ghosts and their mutual desire to penetrate each other's boundaries. These desires have ironic implications, as both humans and ghosts attempt to connect with each other in exploitative ways, with humans asking for winning lottery numbers but ghosts desiring a proper place in normative kinship structures. Perhaps, the Ghost Mother of Lin's essay resembles an amoral agent willing to conspire with gamblers so degenerate as to trade their posterity for present wealth; however, the Ghost Mother's desire for a son-in-law is conventional, even conservative, from the vantage Taiwanese moral codes. The Ghost Mother's complicity with gamblers thus might

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provide some resource for ethical critique, depending on how one understands and lives with ghostly desires. Indeed, the Ghost Mother seems both to abet and to condemn the kinds of relationships that gamblers would form with her as they pursue unearned wealth.

Hatfield explores a different relationship between ghosts and forms of ethical critique in his article, in which he investigates what he calls (ghost) objects—implements of accidental death or suicide, human remains, and pieces of clothing—to show how ghosts become entangled with redevelopment and anxieties about demographic transformations in Lukang, an important Taiwanese historical site on the periphery of Taichung. His ethnography focuses on a municipal park and government office building, both of which were reputed to harbor the shades of those displaced from a cemetery once on the site. Avoided in conversation but made present in a variety of material practices, ghosts provide grounding for stances on the town's storied history and current realization as a tourist attraction. Playing with the "elided presence" of ghosts in his writing—he places "ghosts" in brackets even in the title—Hatfield argues that the ambivalence of such stances reflect a subtle awareness of one's own complicity with the forms of alienation that ghosts reveal, even as Lukang people tend to mention ghosts primarily through elision.

Anru Lee and Tang Wen-Hui also approach ghostly interventions in urban redevelopment, showing in the case of the Twenty-Five Ladies' Tomb in Kaohsiung how the retelling of the story of the dead (as a strategy to construct a romantic past about a locale for tourist purposes) was adopted by the city government in the name of economic development and interurban competition. The tomb, home to the remains of 25 young women who died in 1973 on their way to work in Kaohsiung's Export Processing Zone, was long considered a fearsome or unsavory place, complete with eerie stories of apparitions and gamblers hoping to collect riches. With the remaking of Kaohsiung's image during a period of deindustrialization, the city government hoped to reconfigure the site for tourism, attempting to engage the 25 through divination blocks and other means to gain their approval. Yet, these desires to mediate the "voice" of the deceased were haunted by opposing interests, including

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women's groups, labor organizations, and the families of the deceased. In this case, ghosts configured a set of conflicting desires that seem to remain unsettled.

Viewed together, the papers show how ghosts are agents whose desires open new terrains of contestation, both for the memory of the past and for rights and obligations in the present. As such, the articles point out a different inflection and possibly different category of what recent anthropological scholarship, particularly of Sub-Saharan Africa, has called "occult economies" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999a, 1999b; Ferguson 2006; Geschiere 1997). This work has shown how the working of contemporary political economy, with its sites of production and decision making invisible from most places within its grasp, has led to anxieties surrounding economic production and accumulation. These anxieties, evident in new diseases, such as "plastic teeth" and rumors of "electric vampires" who make a living selling other's blood (Weiss 1996), also emerge in beliefs and practices surrounding witchcraft (Ashforth 2005, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, Ferguson 2006, Geschiere 1997, Moore and Sanders 2001).

In its classical anthropological locus, witchcraft was already considered both a system of explanation and a form of moral discourse. Although witchcraft was often considered a byproduct of jealousy in small-scale, face-to-face communities, Evans-Pritchard's work (1976) suggested its economic basis and, at least parenthetically, indicated that witchcraft accusations among the Azande, with whom Evans-Pritchard worked, had increased as a result of the economic transformations brought to the Azande through colonialism. In other words, the distribution of economic benefits through wage labor or other engagements with the colonial economy may have intensified anxieties surrounding witchcraft. In the post-colonial context, anxieties surrounding political economy have blossomed as the sources of wealth have become less transparent and everyday life more tenuous. Practices guarding against witchcraft have thus responded to these anxieties through attempts to discover the real sources of unexplained wealth in zombies, sorcery, or other occult forms; in the absence of an intelligible moral order surrounding political economy, witchcraft beliefs are part of an attempt to "establish a public sphere in which moral order may be negotiated"

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(Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 309).

Although Taiwanese political economy and cosmology differ greatly from those with which scholars of "occult economies" have engaged, Taiwanese ghost beliefs share some important similarities with these cases. These similarities merit our attention.[3] Most importantly, like witchcraft beliefs, ghosts set in motion (or are identified through) a diagnostic process to determine responsibility, usually for some misfortune. Ghosts are also matters of public conversation, inquiry, and interest: In addition to the circulation of ghost stories, their discovery is often confirmed through divination sessions at temples; ghosts also create patterns of avoidance or elision, which we can trace through ethnographic observation of language and place making. Moreover, and again like "occult economies," contemporary haunting is entangled with the demographic, political, and economic transformations of Taiwan that have followed in the wake of democratization and deindustrialization. Although the causes of haunting are not always to be found in political economy, we can consider ghosts as figures in a moral discourse that (1) distributes responsibility and (2) has some connection to economic processes, including domestic (re)production and, often speculation. In this regard, ghosts likely belong to a category closely related to, but different from, that explored by scholars of witchcraft and other forms of occult agency.

These similarities suggest an interesting possibility for scholarship on Taiwanese ghosts. We might, through careful ethnographic work, envision a project that seeks to explore topologies of occult agencies, ranging from witchcraft and ghosts to fate. I would suggest that ghosts present a different class of occult agent, because in the distribution of responsibility in which ghosts can be blamed for misfortune, humans act primarily as interpreters of ghostly desires; whereas witches are generally understood as conscious human agents. In other words, when ghosts act, they show the relationship between a human lack of care or attention and misfortune; alternatively, they show relationships between sources of wealth and some lack, often moral, among those who make deals with ghosts. In the case of witchcraft, human malevolence creates wealth for some at the expense of others' misfortune. As ghosts

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and witchcraft differently assign responsibility for (mis) fortunate events, the contrast of these different distributions of agency (one in which misfortune comes from ghosts reminding humans of a lapse or lack versus one in which misfortune comes from the inherited or acquired agency of a human acting malevolently) would, if explored further, contribute to anthropological understandings of ethics as well as agency.

The authors' desire is that Taiwanese ghosts provide useful concepts for ongoing research in the discipline, but to return to our question: *What do ghosts want*? Ghosts point out unsettled, unfinished, or unstable business, but they often act because a particular lapse of memory or lack of care among the living. This lapse is, as shown in these articles, already entangled with the rationalized care and due diligence (not to mention the lack thereof) of commercial, governmental, and non-governmental agencies, as well as families. The articles in this volume begin to wend a path through these entanglements, which inspire much current anthropological work. We hope that by continuing to ask about contemporary haunting, scholarship on Taiwanese ghosts will inform these broader conversations about agency, ethics, political economy, and material culture. The three articles presented here represent an important step in that direction.

NOTES

1. See also Weller's (1994b) Resistance, Chaos, and Control.
2. By "ethics of locality," I refer to the mediating role of place in an ethical formation—defined following Foucault (1990, 1997) as the set of practices, objects, and discourses through which people create a critical relationship to the self—the way that place serves as an objet of ethical practices or as a figure in ethical discourses.
3. Weller (2001) converses with this work on occult economies in useful ways.

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