

acknowledge in the epilogue (added in late 2020), the National Security Law adopted in 2020 has largely undermined the conditions under which collective memory was previously sustained. Intergenerational transmission (education), mobilization (media) and institutionalization (social organizations) have all been targeted by the Law, not to mention the vigil itself, which has been banned since 2020. As envisaged by the authors (p. 328), the Alliance too has now been charged under the NSL. In this context, the collective memory is likely to increasingly resemble the “counter-memory” that survives in authoritarian contexts like mainland China.

Memories of Tiananmen is a landmark scholarly work, which adopts a social-science perspective to study a movement that was crucial to Hong Kong society for several decades. Clearly written and rigorously argued, it is recommended reading for anyone interested in Hong Kong and its complex connections with mainland China. Based on a wealth of data and always nuanced and balanced in its arguments, the book itself represents a kind of monument to the collective memory of 1989 that is now rapidly being erased under the new political circumstances.

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A Time of Lost Gods: Mediumship, Madness and the Ghost after Mao

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The “time” in *A Time of Lost Gods* is written in the singular, but Emily Ng’s study of the spectral Mao in spirit medium altars and in psychiatric wards actually shows us multiple times of lost gods. Gods, along with ghosts and other dangerous spirits, were literally lost during the high Maoist period. According to Ng’s interlocutors in what she calls Hexian County of Henan Province, all such spirits disappeared during the height of Mao’s power, because Mao’s sovereign power made them irrelevant. After the death of Mao and the beginnings of the reform period, however, they all came back. Yet, at least according to some spirit mediums, the spirits are now lost in a more figurative sense – even the gods came back as corrupt and untrustworthy beings so that the cosmic order is just as chaotic, immoral and untrustworthy as the human order on earth. Only a few gods remain as worthy exceptions, and the most important is Mao himself.

In addition to these two times of different sorts of loss of gods, Ng is also interested in the way that mediumship makes visible a multiplication of time by letting voices of the past speak in the present. As she puts it:

The vertigo of history, including the encounter of thought across times and spaces, is abbreviated and transfigured through the borrowed bodies of the mediums. Anticipations of end time and cosmological realignment reach forward and backward, resounding the very disjunctures of time collected across China’s long twentieth century and beyond, carving out a portion of intensified time that attempts to register the very meaning of the “now,” between catastrophe and eternity. (p. 144)

Here, she is drawing especially on Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (Routledge, 1994), where he discusses how Marx can haunt after the fall of socialism. In her

case it is Mao who haunts, but the approach, like Derrida's, unsettles any easy narrative of post-socialism.

One area in which she extends this analysis is into the understanding of selfhood. Spirit mediumship undermines confident assumptions about the unity of identity in a singular self, because a single body can house very different kinds of self. She thus approaches the person "in part as a psychic-corporeal host to a meeting of temporalities" (p. 10). For her, though, this fractured nature of selfhood is not just a characteristic of spirit mediums, but of everyone – or at least everyone living with the stigma of rural life in central China, where they are considered backward, uncultured and economically caught in the past.

The most innovative and richest parts of the book come in the second half, where Ng discusses spirit mediums who are patients in a psychiatric hospital. These chapters are never reductive: they do not reduce spirit mediumship to some kind of psychiatric symptom, and they do not reduce psychiatry simply to a misapprehension or repression of spirit mediumship. Ng instead does something far more interesting by letting psychiatry and mediumship speak to each other. Both, she suggests, offer a kind of spectral doubling, and both allow the juxtaposition of very different vocabularies for talking about experience through a history of mutual diagnosis (p. 137). The case of Xu Liying, discussed in some detail in chapter five, is especially interesting because her diagnosis as suffering from "culture-bound syndrome" allows for a fascinating interplay where we hear from her family and her psychiatrist, as well as from Xu herself about her complex and apocalyptic world.

My own recent work has been with spirit mediums in the very different context of rapidly urbanizing and wealthy southern Jiangsu. For a reader like me, the book raises important questions about regional variation. As with Ng's case, my interlocutors also insisted that the yin and yang worlds closely parallel each other, and often claimed that the yin world was currently in chaos (*yinjian luanle*). They seem to be referring to very different things, however. For Ng's mediums in central China, the problem is corruption after the reforms (and in chapter four, changing family relationships); in Jiangsu the chaos began instead two decades later, with the destruction of rural farms, villages, and temples to create a new urban district. In addition, unlike Hexian, Mao rarely appeared as a relevant figure in the southern Jiangsu spirit world after his death, while ghosts and gods remained important while he lived. Most of the older spirit mediums in fact said that they began to be possessed during the Cultural Revolution, because temple destruction at the time meant that the gods had no homes, and so had to occupy bodies. How can we explain these differences?

Ng is not really setting out to answer this question, but her implied answer (developed in chapter one) relates to the stigma of Henan as "China's China," that is, as the heartland of an old place that people say has been left behind. Yet, even in rural Suzhou people also suffered from being labeled as "peasants" and many still survive by doing terrible jobs. In fact, not all of Ng's interlocutors seem to agree on how corrupt the gods are or on the role of Mao, so even very local variation remains as an important question for future work.

A Time of Lost Gods is a most welcome addition to our understandings of religion and psychiatry in contemporary China. Perhaps even more importantly, it suggests ways of thinking beyond categories of socialism and market economies, of Maoist-era and reform-era China, and even of religious and secular. Instead, she shows us the interaction of different temporalities and different aspirational worlds to create a set of tensions that shape people's lives.

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