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## Rojas, C. and Ralph A. Litzinger. Ghost Protocol: Development and Displacement in Global China. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2016.

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**Rojas, C. and Ralph A. Litzinger. *Ghost Protocol: Development and Displacement in Global China*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2016.**

As editor Carlos Rojas writes, “Specters of Marx, shades of Mao, and the ghosts of Global capital” (p. 4) have haunted mainland China for the last four decades. The contributors to this volume deliver an excellent illustration of the ramifications of this haunting, in tensions between capital and labor, governmentality and biopolitics, and regionalism and globalism. Depictions of the peculiar practices and procedures associated with these realms, termed “protocols,” are organized into three sections: Urbanization, Structural Reconfigurations, and Migration and Shifting Identities.

“Urbanization” explores the urban built environment as both a physical entity and an imaginary space. The public-private partnership responsible for demolition and (re)construction offers both a vision of the future and a justification of present hardship. In response to hardship, individuals appeal for their right to spaces imbued with a socialist legacy and neoliberal self-motivation. “Structural Reconfigurations” investigates how social groups currently position themselves in response to decades of geopolitical and sociocultural marginalization in the Maoist period. Finally, “Migration and Shifting Identities” explores migrant workers’ understanding of their present and future in a transformed socioeconomic and sociopolitical system.

Three themes stand out in the discussion of “protocols” and the “haunted” everyday practices associated with them. First is the language barrier for civic, political, and socioeconomic participation among marginalized groups. Second is the compromised ethics of government officials and academics. Third, and most consequential, is the shift of public perceptions, across the entire spectrum of cultural and political life, toward party cadres and entrepreneurs. Hailed during the Maoist-era as righteous, Chinese Communist Party cadres now represent corruption and inspire low morale. Replacing them at the center of public admiration are private entrepreneurs, who are seen as hardworking and self-reliant, rightfully earning economic success.

Employing the concept of a palimpsest—a writing parchment on which original text was all or partially replaced by new writings—Braester investigates a fragmented and layered Qianmen district in central Beijing. Juxtaposing images posted around a construction site with the superimposed images of visitors’ gazes, digital camera screens, LCD screens showing the area’s gentrified future, and a glimpse of the site itself under construction, the author reveals both a two-dimensional Beijing—the result of a spatial-temporal “compression” of the city as a tourist destination—and a more complex, dynamic Beijing, which serves real social, political, and economic purposes. The author also highlights the contrast between the abundance of views within the Chinese populace and the lack of control ordinary people have over what they view; thus, the palimpsest hides the reality of community demolition and displacement.

Robin Visser’s ambitious case studies of Tongzhou outside Beijing, Lingang in previously rural Shanghai, and Dujiangyan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site outside Chengdu in southwest China, reveal the hidden agenda in China’s eco-city and suburbanization planning. The rhetoric of eco-city development<sup>1</sup> rationalizes and facilitates the often informal and illegal rural-urban land transfers, bypassing the land rights system inherited from the Maoist era. Rich in secondary data, combined with qualitative interviews, Visser’s essay illustrates how the eco-city strategy is but a new phase of neoliberal production of space and creation of property values, and has little to do with ecological and social sustainability, or local heritage and conditions (pp. 42-3).

The last chapter of the first section is Alexander des Forges’ sharp critique of the integrity of academia and public intellectuals based on his content analysis of an essay collection titled

“New Shanghai People” (NSP), which, together with an associated conference, was sponsored by an investment group with strong interest in real estate and the stock market (p. 77). Pondering “the future of Shanghai identity in a time of renewed in-migration to the city” (p. 62), Des Forges exposes the collection contributors’ prejudice against the urban poor and ordinary Shanghai natives. Juxtaposed with this extremely narrow view, Des Forges examines a film, *Beautiful New World*, in which the protagonist’s rural origin, odd-job employment trajectory, and ambition to succeed in Shanghai resembles the experience of many current Shanghai natives’ parents and grandparents. Contrasting this with the exclusion of full membership of New Shanghairen,<sup>2</sup> Des Forges calls out the authors of the NSP collection, which includes prominent figures in Chinese academia, and warns against the encroachment of ghosts of global capital in the academic realm.

The second section focuses on the negotiations and strategies of marginalized social groups, when they confront neoliberalism marked by Chinese characteristics and structural constraints inherited from the Maoist era. Drawing on data collected through review of government and corporation policies, survey and qualitative interviews with more than four hundred households in the Nu River Valley in southwestern China, Bryan Tilt illustrates how different constituent groups disagree on what outcomes of massive dam constructions are proper, just, or desirable (pp. 89, 97). Economic incentives in the official rhetoric justify the projects as means to overcome economic and social disparity and provide clean renewable energy. However, Tilt warns that in exchange for unguaranteed wage labor, ethnic minority villagers with limited official language and non-agrarian skills forfeit their access to land used, via either farming or foraging, to supplement household income (p. 98). Compellingly, Tilt argues that these hydropower developments represent a blend of capitalist greed, sweeping state power, and propaganda (p. 100).

Kabzung and Yeh bring us to Tibetan pastoral areas not far from the Nu River Valley to discover another ethnic minority group’s response to the transition to market economy. The authors present a fascinating study of the religiously motivated slaughter renunciation movement,<sup>3</sup> based on analysis of Buddhist religious leaders’ public speeches and ethnographic investigation in Rakhor Village in Sichuan province. Set against the backdrop of socioeconomic disparity between rural and urban, coastal and Tibetan plateau, Kabzung and Yeh’s contribution illustrates how religious beliefs converge with secular neoliberal development as Tibetan Buddhist leaders facilitate the transformation of traditional yak herders into neoliberal subjects through condemnation of traditional yak slaughtering as a sinful activity, and advocating for entrepreneurship in the market economy.

Next, Xiang looks at the northeastern corner of China. Through investigating an emigrant laborer dispute case in Liaoning province, the author illustrates the ambiguous relations between entrepreneurial and calculative individuals, self-interested bureaucratic local governments, and the central state, which is perceived to be an embodiment of moral principles (p. 134). At the intersection of the fading socialist legacy of the Maoist era and the strengthening neoliberal practices and global engagement, individuals’ political subjectivity comes into question. As Xiang finds, the answer to this question bears significant weight for the next step in China’s structural transformation. The last chapter in the second section is Leng’s analysis of literary depictions of queer bodies, utilizing the 1999 online novella *Huizi*. From the examination of queer identity, online community formation, and institutional restrictions, Leng finds significant space for self-expression online (p. 161). However, online censorship has increased under President Xi, and a re-examination of free expression online is needed.

The three chapters in the last part of this volume focus on migrant workers and their children’s experience when the path for upward mobility has narrowed and income disparity has

increased, as it has in the last two decades. Through interviews with migrant workers at three textile factories participating in the transnational Italian fashion supply chain, Rofel deepens our knowledge of subjects' resilience under horrible work conditions and self-motivated entrepreneurial practices through the anthropological lens of affective management. Rural impoverishment under Mao serves as the reference point for present hardship seen in urban factories, as migrants dream of future entrepreneurship infused with knowledge about the global commodity network (p. 189).

Litzinger focuses on films about the children of migrant workers. A Tibetan woman and her son wedged between a traditional lifestyle in the periphery and a future in Beijing; a teenager from an impoverished inland village longing to relocate to a city without the support of her migrant parents, whose vision clashes with her own regarding higher education and a life beyond factory work; and siblings' efforts to raise funds for their younger brother's education in Beijing's outer districts. Posing insightful and poignant questions about each film, his analysis uncovers the entanglement of traditional filial piety and androcentric social norms, and criticizes how the filmmakers' discriminative lens presents migrants' vulnerability.

In the last chapter of the volume, Rojas provides a close read of Liu Zhenyun's 2007 novel *I Am Liu Yuejin*. Rojas tackles migrant workers' marginalization and deprivation, which stems from the fluidity of their identity. Household registration status (hukou), national ID card, hometown connections, or their self-identification all compete in their contribution to identity formation. Rojas concludes that declining restrictions of the hukou system in the market economy notwithstanding, migrant workers are haunted by their rural origin and past identities after relocating.

The "protocols" of China's transition to a market economy, critically examined through a ghostly veil, present an extraordinary overview and much needed analysis of new practices in 21<sup>st</sup> century China. With the passing of Fidel Castro, and the presumably imminent, if not already encroaching, capitalist practices in Cuba, a global era has ended, and an uncertain new one has begun. What we have observed in China's transition may be useful in learning about what is left of the socialist legacy in a neoliberal world order, and future changes in Cuba and beyond. This book is an invaluable resource for students and scholars in anthropology, sociology, political science, and cultural studies, or for readers interested in post-socialism, China studies, and migration studies in general.

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<sup>1</sup> By 'eco-city development', the author meant the recent wave of urbanization, urban planning and redevelopment focusing on ecological sustainability in China.

<sup>2</sup> By 'full membership' I mean not only the legal and residential status granted by the central and local state, but also social acceptance into the local community and entitlement to social services and public space.

<sup>3</sup> It is a movement initiated by Tibetan Buddhist elites across the eastern Tibetan Plateau to persuade Tibetan yak herders to take oaths to stop selling their livestock for slaughter. It is the opposite of what the Chinese state officials urge herders to do, in order to become developed, to participate in neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics, and to better their material lives.