


Introduction to Belief in Contemporary Global Capitalism

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**Abstract:** This special issue addresses the broad and complex nexus among three topics: belief, subjectivity, and contemporary global capitalism. It explores the intersection of material practices, ideational dimensions, and the subjective dynamics of global capitalism. The interdisciplinary contributions in this special issue come from authors in Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, South Korea, Turkey, and the United States. And the articles gathered in this issue are to explore a wide range of topics, varying from entrepreneurship and digital capitalism to neoliberalism and postfeminism; from fundamentalism and terrorism to Protestantism and contemporary homosexual identity; from body and ableism to mind and New Age spiritualism; from ecologies of racial capitalism to transnational adoption. Engaging multimedia texts including memoir, novel, film, critical theory, speech, drama, and performance, their works together open up new avenues of examining the juncture of belief, subjectivity, and global capitalism.

## Fu-Jen CHEN

### Introduction to Belief in Contemporary Global Capitalism

This special issue of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* is part of an ongoing effort to investigate an urgent issue in today's global capitalist world that requires more dialogue among scholars within and across disciplines—"Belief in Contemporary Global Capitalism." As an interdisciplinary conversation, this volume addresses the broad and complex nexus among three topics: belief, contemporary global capitalism, and subjectivity. What belief systems emerge from, correspond to, or fit contemporary global capitalism? What specific beliefs serve as supplements to or even fuel the expansive global economy in our allegedly "post-ideological" era? How can today's capitalist system be thriving on these either concomitant or counter-capitalist beliefs? In addition, how do today's beliefs alter our relations to the other, to nature, and to the world? And how are some beliefs reshaping the notion of subjectivity, affecting the way we think and feel? Most of all, what might subjectivity mean in the matrix of today's belief and the disciplinary power of global capitalism? The thematic issue explores the intersection of material practices, ideational dimensions, and the subjective dynamics of global capitalism.

The interdisciplinary contributions in this special issue come from authors in Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, South Korea, Turkey, and the United States. The articles gathered in this issue explore a wide range of topics, varying from entrepreneurship and digital capitalism to neoliberalism and postfeminism; from fundamentalism and terrorism to Protestantism and contemporary homosexual identity; from body and ableism to mind and New Age spiritualism; from ecologies of racial capitalism to transnational adoption. These articles engage multimedia texts including memoir, novel, film, critical theory, speech, drama, and performance, working together to open up new avenues for examining the juncture of belief, subjectivity, and global capitalism.

The opening essay—Collin Chua's "Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and the Spirit of Digital Capitalism"—lays out the groundwork of the general picture of global capitalism. He calls critical attention to the two fundamental beliefs regarding the spirit of contemporary capitalism: innovation and entrepreneurship. On the one hand, he argues, innovation—rather than genuine experimentation—becomes more like a rhetoric or ritualistic performance. On the other, entrepreneurship, concomitant with the belief of innovation, provides modern subjects with a sense of agency and a promise of wealth-creation. In addition, everyone can be an entrepreneur, the agent of innovation, profiting from the new economy. Chua emphasizes that our beliefs in the myth of innovation and the fantasy of entrepreneurship help to manage epidemic anxiety provoked by today's unceasingly disruptive capitalist world, but too often this is at the expense of our submission to these new modes of oppression, albeit disguised as liberation and autonomy.

In "The Rise of Neoliberal Chinese Female Subject in *Go Lala Go*," Su-lin Yu offers a feminist critique of how neoliberal beliefs have interpellated a newly emerging female subject in post-socialist China. Through an analysis of the film, *Go Lala Go!* (2010), Yu shows how contemporary Chinese women, represented by the female protagonist Du Lala, embrace the neoliberal rhetorics of self-care, self-empowerment, and self-investment to negotiate their positioning in the post-socialist market coexistent with the contradictory logic of global consumerism and patriarchal hegemony. Yu's feminist critique draws fresh attention to the on-going debate over the relationship between feminism and neoliberalism in Chinese cultural contexts and conditions.

In "Changez/Cengiz's Changing Beliefs in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*," Valerie Kennedy exemplifies a subjective struggle in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*—the struggle between global capitalist enterprises and local Pakistani communities; between the disciplinary power of neoliberalism and the humanist tradition; between a vision of self as self-interested, globally mobile and one more traditionally and domestically determined; between the mutually suspicious gaze along the axes of East/West. Over the course of the novel, the protagonist, Changez, under the influence of the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath—Kennedy argues—evolves into a reluctant "fundamentalist"—a term troublingly read through a religious and capital lens. Kennedy concludes that the protagonist's ultimate counter-capitalist beliefs and acts do not pose a threat to global capitalism because he himself falls into orientalist stereotypes of Pakistan and because he fails to criticize his privileged class and the class exploitation in his own country.

After Kennedy's essay, the critical locus for this issue's nexus of subject, belief, and global capitalism shifts away from Shanghai, China, and Lahore, Pakistan, to New York, USA. In "A Sinful Reaction to Capitalist Ethics in *No quiero quedarme sola y vaca* (2006)," María Celina Bortolotto examines contemporary U.S. urban gay identities in a fictionalized autobiography by Puerto Rican author Angel

Lozada. Bartolotto explores how the characters' identities and desires are driven by a consumerist, capitalist values and belief system that awards subjective agency, physical perfection, and a gay lifestyle. The protagonist La Loca tries hard but fails to live up to the masculine ideal of the Hispanic/Latino male body and cannot maintain an upper-middle class gay lifestyle funded by consumer credit. Bartolotto insightfully elaborates La Loca's failure (or "sin") through critical reflection on the intricate relationship between Protestantism, capitalism, and contemporary homosexual identity.

The following pair of essays respectively highlight body, mind, or both within the configuration of subject, belief, and capitalism. In my contributed essay, "Adopting the Unadoptable/Disabled Subject in the Posthuman Era," I first consider three memoirs that demonstrate prevalent features of today's narratives by parents with adopted children of special needs. Next, I offer a theoretical and ontological investigation of disability to question the belief in the posthuman era that the body is seen to exceed existing boundaries of human topologies, reinventing itself permanently along with prosthetic connections, accumulations, and especially consumption. I argue that a belief in such a progress of "becoming," though diversifying against the norm, does not necessarily challenge ableism and could even be in tune with the logic of capitalism. Instead, I suggest that we have to change the way we relate to disability: to recognize it not as an external limitation but as an internal as well as a pre-existent division and also to re-orient ourselves to the ontological truth that we are always already "disabled/otherized."

In turn, Tsu-Chung Su's essay—"Mindfulness and Heightened Consciousness in Phillip Zarrilli's Psychophysical Approach to Acting"—centers on body/mind, exploring an integration of body and mind in Zarrilli's psychophysical approach to acting, a pedagogy fostered by today's interculturalism and New Age spiritualism. Though Zarrilli's experimental model, as Su assesses, offers a holistic, integrated view of body/mind, greatly impacts contemporary theatre, and possibly enable a paradigm shift in performance, Su finds it problematic at some points. Su questions its efficacy and quasi-religious dogmas, its disregard for cultural differences in body as well as energy, and its "cocktail" pedagogy only applicable to postdramatic theater. To further understand New Age Capitalism, readers can read this essay together with my recently published essay in *CLCWeb*: "Adoption, Cynical Detachment, and New Age Beliefs in *Juno* and *Kung Fu Panda*" (217).

The final pair of essays extends the theme of the special issue to ecologies of racial capitalism and transnational adoption. In "Unsettling Colonial Accumulation through Asian-Indigenous Relationality in Yamashita's 'Call Me Ishimaru' and 'Kiss of Kitty,'" Yu-Fang Cho examines two works by Japanese-American author Karen Tei Yamashita—"Call Me Ishimaru" (a talk/performance) and "Kiss of Kitty" (a short essay). In these texts, Yamashita imaginatively explores spatio-temporal atlases across national borders from Japan to Brazil and the United States over the span of two centuries. Cho coins the term "island epistemology" to explicate how Yamashita remaps racial and imperial cartographies and exposes connections between nineteenth-century settler imperial violence and twentieth-century ecological catastrophes created by global capitalism. To Cho, Yamashita launches new pathways for the reconceptualization of sites of knowledge production and subject formation within ecologies of racial capitalism. And finally, in "Decolonizing Adoption Narrative for Transnational Reproductive Justice," Sung Hee Yook and Hosu Kim analyze *Dreaming a World: Korean Birth Mothers Tell Their Stories*, a collection of letters by Korean birth mothers, women that are often rendered silent victims in the practice and discourse of transnational adoption. Their reading of the mothers' life writings counters a narrative of humanitarian/colonial salvation (in which the sense of victimhood is reinforced and the systematic exploitation of women is obscured) or a narrative of self-mastery (in which birth mothers are trapped in a neoliberal subjectivity of continual self-improvement and self-actualization). Rather, moving beyond a politics of pity and neoliberal agency, Yook and Kim engage an alternative reading to construct more complex visions of birth mothers' lives and to envision a new sociality for transnational reproductive justice.

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