

EDITORIAL

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The title of this special issue, *Culture/China* is as elusive in its possible meanings as it is general. It indicates broad fields of interest and experience, but does so without any suggestion of how they might be defined. It draws on but challenges the well-known formulation, 'Cultural/China', initially associated with an article by Tu Wei-ming published in *Daedalus* ten years ago. The term 'Cultural China' is commonly associated with an underlying political and ethnic centrism, according to which different practices of Chineseness are collapsed into a homogeneous and regionally fixed notion of 'Chinese culture' as a unifying signifier. *Culture/China* sets out to critique and explore some of the ideas associated with this earlier term, without any necessary reference to them, through a collection of essays about different experiences and representations of 'Chineseness'. Our juxtaposition of terms suggests a process of re-evaluation, of re-appropriation, as well as of acknowledgement. Tu's concept is inimical to the positions expressed in this collection. Nevertheless, the fact of the concept, and its organising power, cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Culture/China is then in many ways a political project which acknowledges - without engaging in - controversies of ownership and location. Where one reader might see the discrete words of the title as linked, even mutually supportive, others will identify one or other ... *culture* ... or ... *China* ... as the key to understanding its framing of the essays that follow. The term suggests links and divides, it invites reflections on the areas of the imagination where the notion of 'cultural China' might have some meanings. It neither identifies nor excludes, hence it can incorporate in its meanings the variety of migrant and settler experiences of people of Chinese ethnicity. It can also countenance the problematics of Chineseness without culture - without language, without ethnicity in some circumstances. Tu Wei-ming's coining of the term 'cultural China' in the late 1980s was a statement of economic and political centrality in the context of a centred Confucian version of being Chinese outside China.¹ As Ien Ang has argued, the trouble with any centre is that it immediately needs a periphery in order to function.² In Tu's version of 'Cultural China', the periphery consists of those who determine multiple ways of being in and out of cultural China at the same time.

Negotiations with China, with Chineseness and with the politics of not *being* Chinese - in whatever sense one may understand that - inform the essays here. Those negotiations are investigated as they work through cultural forms: language, the Internet, television, metaphor, food, painting, fashion and film. Finally we return to the geopolitical centre and diasporic periphery

1. Tu Wei-ming, 'Cultural China: The Periphery as Center', *Daedalus*, 120(2): 1-32, 1991; see also Audrey Yue/Gay Hawkins in this issue.

2. Ien Ang, 'Can One Say "No" to China', *boundary 2*, vol 25, no 3, 1998.

of the mainland, the state of China. The domestic politics of periphery are discussed in relation to women, and to internal migrants in particular. Cultural China does not come out as a liberating concept in these arguments, although it retains some currency as an organising trope in reflection and debate. The question of who may speak to and from such a space is unresolved. The concerns around assimilation versus annihilation, fearfully realised in Indonesia in 1998, can be spoken through and against 'cultural China'. The antagonisms of politics and style experienced between nation states: China, Singapore, Taiwan and proto-national claimants; Hong Kong and again Taiwan can be complicated by the supposed ties of 'cultural China'. Yet cultural China can also remind the supposed multicultural societies of the world that dominant cultures arrest the development of their constituent others. In those cases, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the USA and the UK (and China itself) are some of the examples that emerge here, cultural China (s) still have a role to play.