

# Introduction

*China and the Human*

---

**David L. Eng, Teemu Ruskola, and Shuang Shen**

Whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat.  
—Carl Schmitt

China is everywhere in the news. Most of the stories we hear about it in the Western media seem to fall into one of two categories: China's astounding economic development (it eclipsed Japan as the second largest world economy in 2011) and its equally astonishing human rights abuses. These political violations of the human include the country's imprisonment of political dissidents such as the 2010 Nobel Peace Laureate Liu Xiaobo, its detaining of "rights protection" (维权 *weiquan*) lawyers and activists, its putative support of the human organ trade, and its Internet censorship, otherwise known as China's infamous "Great Fire Wall." In media representations, China remains a figure of profound ambivalence. With the end of the Cold War and with the astronomical growth of its economy—which gives rise to concerns about environmental degradation and global warming—China is perceived as the next great competitor of the United States on the world stage. Paradoxically, as it turns into a global economic powerhouse, China's relationship to political rights and freedoms seems to have an almost inverse relationship to its economic success.

This is not to say that the Chinese government does not have its own distinctive notion of human rights, reflected in a ubiquitous discourse of "harmonious society" (和谐社会 *hexie shehui*), for example. However, in the media clashes between liberal and socialist (or Confucian) political epistemologies, the problematic relationship of "China and the Human" is rarely addressed. Both China and the human have their specific histo-

ries, which have shaped China's relationship to the rest of the world as well as its internal boundaries between center and periphery, and nation and diaspora.

This two-part special issue of *Social Text* consists of eleven articles and a visual dossier divided between the current issue, 109 (part I), addressing broadly the subject of cosmologies of the human, and the next issue, 110 (part II), exploring questions of Marx, Mao, and the human. This special issue investigates the problem of China and the human from numerous disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. It gathers together scholars from anthropology, Chinese studies, comparative literature, law, cultural studies, film, history, and politics and from across four continents (North America, Asia, Europe, and Australia) to explore the long and uneven career of the human in, as well as in relation to, China.

It has been thirteen years since *Social Text* published its last (and, until now, only) special issue on China, "Intellectual Politics in Post-Tiananmen China."<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the critical importance, political stakes, and belated urgency of continuing the investigation of China, we offer this special two-part issue as a sustained meditation on the cultural politics and political effects of China and the human in several areas of critical debate.

## China and the Human

Why *China* and *the human* as two discrete categories? Surely the relationship between the two terms could not be more self-evident. We are quite confident that we know what human beings are, and by definition they are no more or less human whether in China or elsewhere. Indeed, linking China and the human through the simple conjunction *and* risks placing into jeopardy the self-evident humanity of the Chinese people. Yet what this special issue of *Social Text* hopes to accomplish is, precisely, to place in question the self-evident nature of *both* terms. By juxtaposing China and the human, we do not assume either concept as a pre-given object of knowledge.

It is indeed difficult to conceive of the human without including China in its definition. China constitutes nearly one-fifth of the population on the planet today, and it is said to form the oldest extant civilization in the world. Nevertheless, it is not at all obvious just what makes China such a seemingly solid object of knowledge. For one thing, there are multiple aspirants to sovereignty over the politico-juridical entity known as "China"—most notably, the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the Chinese mainland and the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan. Moreover, it is a remarkable though often unremarked upon fact that more than 60 percent of the territory claimed by the PRC consists of "minority" areas,

whose populations have at various times contested, and many of whom continue to contest, Chinese dominion. Equally importantly, a long history of transnational labor migrations from China to other parts of Asia, as well as to the Americas, Europe, and Africa, has produced diasporic populations across the globe, mixing with indigenous and other migrant groups and thus placing in question the location and meaning of both *China* and *Chineseness*.<sup>2</sup>

In this special issue, then, we do not use the term *China* to refer solely to either or both of the two main aspirants to sovereignty over the politico-juridical entity known by that name. In our transnational age, the nation-state no longer holds a monopoly over China. Moreover, China as a cultural and political idea has a long history in the West and elsewhere. This global imaginary has only intensified with the accelerated movements of people, culture, and capital. Therefore, we cannot take China for granted as a stable entity, whether referring to a people, a culture, or a national language or identity. China, as the various essays comprising this two-part special issue illustrate, exists in multiple locations and historical contexts and on several scales. These range from the contemporary representations in global media of China's human rights abuses (Gloria Davies, Ackbar Abbas) to the borderland regions of China's "barbarian" tribes and its liberal overseas counterparts (Magnus Fiskesjö, Petrus Liu); from its coeval existence in seventeenth-century theories of European cosmology (Eric Hayot) to its circulation in transnational discourses of alternative medicine (Mei Zhan); from its idealization in French structuralism (Camille Robcis, Shu-mei Shih) to Maoist epistemologies of democracy and popular sovereignty (Douglas Howland, Michael Dutton).

In short, our thematic focus on China and the human is meant neither to suggest that there is only one China to be apprehended nor to posit that all diasporic formations of identity and culture might be gathered under a totalizing category of Chineseness. To the contrary, our goal in this special issue is to question all naturalized ideas of China and Chineseness. Discourses of China are continually created and re-created in global encounters and interactions. The boundaries of China and Chineseness are, as they always have been, an open question—historically, politically, legally, territorially, demographically, economically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically.<sup>3</sup>

Admittedly, the ontological and epistemological status of the human might at first glance seem more secure than that of China. However, the term *human* is not a pre-given concept, either. It too has a long and evolving global history of interpellating subjects as living organisms, political actors, economic individuals, and cultural subjects, among other things. Even as it seeks to naturalize itself as incontestably universal, the notion of the human articulates different and distinctive ways of existing across

time and space, whether in terms of the privileged discourses of liberal humanism in Europe and a somewhat parallel Confucian humanism in China, or in terms of other discourses altogether. The historical crises triggered by colonialism, decolonization, postcoloniality, anti-imperialism, the Cold War, and globalization continue to erode any would-be universal definition of the human. Especially in our current era of indefinite war on terror, it is evident that not all nations and civilizations evince their humanity equally and coevally.

In the wake of two world wars, the global social movements of the 1960s, and the ascension of discourses of international human rights as a response to genocide and the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, we confront the limits of humanity today in the capitalization and biologization of human life, the poststructuralist death of the subject, and the emergence of the notion of the posthuman in the age of digitality. From these various perspectives, the human being—or, in less ontological terms, being human—can be regarded as a privileged status that is occupied in different ways, and to varying degrees, by various peoples and populations in the world, both inside and outside the West. Put simply, the terms by which we constitute the borders of the human are historically contingent and socially articulated. Neither the human nor China is as self-evident a concept as it might initially seem.

To be sure, recognizing the contingent nature of both China and the human as historical categories does not necessarily trouble their relationship to each other. Presumably, even the most ardent poststructuralist would not wish to exclude China from humanity's scope, even if she or he believed neither category to be foundational. Nevertheless—and this is what ultimately motivates the thematic pairing of the two terms organizing this special issue of *Social Text*—in much of Western history, political thought, and cultural discourse, in the past as well as in the present, China *is* in fact excluded from full participation in humanity.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, such sentiments are rarely stated expressly any more, but they are all the more insidious given the silent, and often unconscious, nature of the ways in which such exclusions continue to take place.

In the project of universalizing European liberal humanism—whether in the form of political rights and citizenship, capitalism and the free market, or individual reason and subjectivity—China constitutes one important limit. Ever since the Enlightenment, China has played a central role as Europe's civilizational other. Early idealizations of China, first by Jesuits and subsequently by Sinophile Enlightenment philosophers, were largely displaced over time by increasingly Sinophobic attitudes, which in turn ultimately turned into modern anti-Chinese racism. From stereotypes of the undifferentiated yellow hordes to the figure of the Chinese coolie, from the contemporary Chinese transnational laborer inured to physical pain

to the flayed corpses of putatively executed Chinese criminals comprising the notorious *Body Worlds* exhibit, the failures of Chinese humanity are insistently figured as a receding horizon that, in Eric Hayot's words, "marks the limit of the universal as a transcendental field."<sup>5</sup> In Western imaginations of the universal human, China constitutes one paradigmatic site of the inhuman, the subhuman, and the humanly unthinkable.

As discussed above, contemporary debates on the status of human rights violations in the wake of the PRC's rapid economic expansion reflect in part this long and uneven genealogy of China and the human—a story of European Enlightenment in which the "Declaration of the Rights of Man" (1789) is transformed into human rights on a global scale. On the one hand, contemporary human rights discourses serve to discipline, judge, and exclude Chinese from humanity, freezing the "authoritarian state" and "oppressed masses" in a kind of perpetual Hegelian master-slave dialectic.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, they serve to interpellate Chinese into the universal subjectivity of individual rights. It is important to emphasize that this special issue does not advocate a particular position on either China or the human. It should not be read as pro-Chinese or anti-Chinese, humanist, antihumanist, or posthumanist. Rather it explores the critical relationships and historical interactions among these terms.

The juxtaposition of China and the human also entails an important disciplinary intervention. Knowledge about China, conventionally categorized under area studies, is considered to be constitutive of, yet decidedly apart from, the self-reflexive metropolitan studies of the human as such. This division of labor between area studies and the humanities, as Naoki Sakai suggests, implies an asymmetrical distinction between *anthropos* and *humanitas*.<sup>7</sup> The former constitutes a subject of empirical inquiry; the latter, a transcendental one. In short, area studies is a field defined by ethnic, regional, and linguistic particularities. In contrast, the idealized model of the humanities constitutes a critical mode of self-reflection that is elevated to the status of universal theory. Stated differently, China is *universally particular*, while the West is *particularly universal*.<sup>8</sup>

The eleven essays and visual dossier comprising this two-part special issue challenge this hierarchical distinction between *anthropos* and *humanitas* while also resisting the self-containment implied by the term *area* in "area studies." They deconstruct the question of both China and the human, historically as well as today, in a comparative context that examines Western, Chinese, and transnational itineraries of the human and their multiple global crossings. In these analyses, China often operates, as Petrus Liu notes in part II of this special issue, as a site of *différance*: it produces a set of geopolitical specificities that have the potential to undo the universalizing claims of Western idealized norms of the human. At the same time, these essays refuse to reify a Chinese otherness that would

merely re-essentialize the human from an alternate perspective. Instead of simply substituting one set of idealized Western norms with another set of Chinese universals, the essays in this special issue seek neither to prove the ultimate sameness of humans qua humans nor to provide a static description of essential human differences between China and the West. To reiterate, without assuming a singular China with fixed borders in either space or time, these essays consider a series of comparative episodes and examples in the epistemological career of the human. They do so by examining both China and the human as sets of relational, differential, and contrapuntal events in particular historical and geopolitical contexts.

It is important to insist from the outset that such analyses are not “merely” of historical or sinological interest. Our aim is not to retrieve Chinese or Confucian conceptions of the human in the name of authenticity or to write what Nietzsche calls, pejoratively, “antiquarian history.”<sup>9</sup> Rather, our concern for the past—whether it is the history of the state or subaltern pasts—is motivated by the mode of history that Nietzsche designates as “critical”: a history that considers the past as a resource for action (or “for life,” in Nietzsche’s phrase) but also recognizes the limits of historical thinking and the need to break out of received historical categories. As many of the essays underscore, the status of history in China remains of crucial political importance and is being continuously invoked—and contested—in the service of contemporary political goals. What humanity means in China today, and what it will mean in the future, is part of an ongoing struggle over the meaning of the past and the politics of the present.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, we consider China not only a *subject* of study but also a *method* of inquiry.<sup>11</sup>

### **Cosmologies of the Human**

What, then, are some of the competing universals that underwrite Western and Chinese conceptions of the human? Given the central role of the state in so many aspects of modern social life, is it possible to conceptualize the human outside nation-states’ modes of political control, economic management, and cultural production? Indeed, does the concept of the human exist only in a dialectical relationship to the state? If not, what new forms of human being—and being human—might emerge beyond such dialectic encounters on translocal, transregional, and transnational scales?

This special issue adopts a transnational and comparative framing in order to pay attention to the circulation of ideas of between China and the West. Many of the essays here analyze the human as a cosmological construct, part of a larger metaphysical order. These multiple cosmologies of the human all exist in, and draw meaning from, interactions among

China, the West, and other civilizations and cultures. It is this planetary history of circulation of ideas about both China and the human that makes it productive to address them together as part of a shared *problématique*.

In this sense, all of the essays in part I of this two-part special issue explore what may be described as cosmologies of the human, even though, historically, European conceptions of the human are routinely assimilated to the universal, while competing Chinese understandings are regarded as particular. Without rehearsing the entire Eurocentric career of the human—*humanitas* versus *anthropos*—one useful way to characterize the notion of the human is to regard it as a regulative idea in the Kantian sense. In conventional Western political and moral psychology at least since Plato, the human describes a normative subject with a conflicted interiority where reason ultimately reigns, or ought to reign, supreme over passions. In terms of its exteriority, the material limits of the human are circumscribed by a defensible body—“a body worth defending,” in Ed Cohen’s suggestive phrase.<sup>12</sup> While connections among human beings are possible and necessary, individuality and subjectivity precede association and intersubjectivity.

European colonial and neocolonial ventures in turn have been justified in part by characterizing colonized populations as lacking reason and a sense of individual subjectivity. Allegedly lacking these human capacities has historically deprived colonized groups of their rights to self-determination and property, and it continues to be used to subject them to legal and economic development projects that aim to create the conditions of possibility for the cultivation of normative political, economic, social, and legal subjectivities. In an important sense, full humanity for such populations remains in abeyance, as they are consigned to what Dipesh Chakrabarty describes as the “waiting room of history.”<sup>13</sup>

In his contribution to part I, Eric Hayot explores the encounter between Europe and China at a crucial moment *before* the decisive expansion of European colonialism in Asia. Focusing on the seventeenth century, he examines Europe and China as two coeval civilizations marked less by hierarchical distinctions and historical divisions than by simply differing cosmological approaches to the world and the human condition. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Jesuits sought to reconcile Christian universalism with Chinese time; Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) wished to preserve the compatibility of European and Chinese thought through the mode of translation; and Baruch Spinoza (1632–77) demarcated a shared plane of immanence upon which all bodies and minds equally rest. Together, such philosophical efforts constitute “quite a different perspective on the idea of the human and its relation to China from what we have if we remain fully within the intellectual ambit of the nineteenth century’s version of the East/West problem,” one centered on Hegel’s gap of history configuring China as an empire of space, not time.

Hayot argues that another plane of immanence is today reemerging in the cosmology of globalization, one that encodes this significant transformation of temporality into a dominant worldview. He offers a provocative reading of Sixth Generation Chinese director Jia Zhangke's *The World* (2004), a film about a group of itinerant rural workers—China's "floating population" (流动人口 *liudong renkou*)—employed at Beijing's World Park (北京世界公园 Beijing shijie gongyuan), an amusement ground where numerous wonders of the world (from the Eiffel Tower to the Pyramids of Giza to the no longer extant World Trade Center) are gathered together in one spectacular and flattened plane. Space and time, politics and economics, history and life all appear on this flattened plane of action, calling attention to the inhuman conditions of neoliberal policies that drive globalization, while bringing the gap of history back down to earth and into the lives of ordinary people.

Hayot returns us to the seventeenth century in order to think about both the human and the inhuman conditions that constitute China and globalization today. Other essays in this special issue disrupt conventional Eurocentric narratives of the human in more recent historical encounters. Collectively, they might be characterized as examinations of *competing* cosmologies of the human, abraded by the legacies of colonial encounters among China, Europe, the United States, and Japan. Before turning to these essays, it is useful to begin by describing some of the basic contours of what we might call Confucian humanism, roughly equivalent in importance to the European tradition of liberal humanism. (The comparison between the two humanisms is of course based only on a loose analogy; the symmetrical construction of the terms ought not to obscure their important historical and conceptual differences.)

We must first note that, while Confucianism was the state orthodoxy until 1911, by no means does it exhaust the entire range of earlier conceptions of the human in Chinese history. Its centrality to Chinese history notwithstanding, there have been several other traditions of the human—or perhaps, more accurately, traditions that do not privilege the human, such as Daoism and Buddhism. As one might expect, the Chinese state has always been deeply suspicious of such traditions, as they have often provided ideological backing for antistate and antidynastic uprisings. Given the existence of multiple traditions of Chinese Islam and other religious and political traditions as well, from Mongol shamanism to twentieth-century Marxism and Maoism, it is evident that there is no single history of Chinese humanism, or antihumanism, to be contrasted with Western humanism—liberal or otherwise.

Turning, then, to what we might broadly describe as Confucian humanism, it is by definition no less universalistic in its aspirations than European liberal humanism. Its agenda, however, is notably different. What



makes a Confucian subject normatively human is not *reason* as such, as a primarily intellectual capacity, but *morality*, or man's capacity to adhere to the Way, as it was established by the model dynasties of a lost Confucian Golden Age. Significantly, Confucian thinkers locate man's intellectual as well as moral evaluative capacity literally in the *heart* (心 *xin*—usually translated only as “mind,” sometimes more accurately as “heart-mind”). Equally significantly, the morally discerning human of Confucianism is a *man*, not a woman. At the same time, as Wang Xiaoming notes in his concluding essay to this special issue (part II), classical Confucian notions lay great stress on human agency, conceptualized in terms of the “human heart” (人心 *ren xin*) as a motivator of both history and politics.

Yet the Confucian human is by no means a purely ethical transcendental subject of the heart-mind but a highly embodied one as well. Even the metaphysically oriented neo-Confucians of the Song (960–1279 CE) and Ming (1368–1644 CE) Dynasties located the spiritual and moral principle (理 *li*) in the material substance of the body (氣 *qi*), and they theorized the relationship between *li* and *qi* as one of interaction—rather than, say, that of a Cartesian-style “ghost in the machine.”<sup>14</sup> As far as the significance of the body itself is concerned, in the orthodox Confucian view it is not something that *separates* humans and constitutes their individuality—something that a self-identical subject possesses as its own property, in Lockean terms. Instead, the body is a metaphor for intergenerational continuity and the body politic, more generally. In short, it is what *connects* humans to other humans.<sup>15</sup>

It is this sense of interrelatedness that underwrites, for example, the contributions from Wang Xiaoming as well as Mei Zhan (part I), both of which emphasize distinctive political, material, and philosophical aspects of this dynamic. Wang considers classical Confucian beliefs in the efficacy of human action and agency in relation to the “Great Unity” (大同 *da tong*) during the late Qing period, when the centrality of the Confucian worldview was put into explicit crisis by Western modernity and imperialism. Constructed by late Qing intellectuals such as Kang Youwei, the discourse of the Great Unity, Wang emphasizes, comprises an ideal collectivity marked by commonality (同 *tong*) rather than separation (隔 *ge*). The human under Confucianism has never simply referred to a singular individual (個人 *ge ren*). Instead, it can mark the formation of a collective subject (集體 *ji ti*) as well as the combination of many individual subjects (個體 *ge ti*).

In the face of modern China's mounting political, economic, and military failures in the nineteenth century, the only reliable force that could be mobilized for revolutionary reform was the human, which meant, Wang argues, the awakening and transformation of millions of “ignorant Chinese” (愚民 *yumin*). Western individuals could be interpellated into larger

social groups, most notably the nation-state as an imagined community, through discourses of opposition and defense. Redemption of the social in China, however, intimately depended on a foundational vision of the world underwritten by the Great Unity and on an expansive, open understanding of relationality as that which defines and connects human beings, as something bridging humans and their Others, as the link between humans and the world, to paraphrase Wang. Discourses of opposition and defense central to Enlightenment modernity cannot exhaustively convey how humans have thought, and do think, about the vitality of their social interactions as well as political relations.

Zhan's article on the global circulation of traditional Chinese medicine shifts the idea of political unity into a different register: that of "oneness." A concept also concerning human vitality, oneness braids a long history of Daoist thinking with Confucian humanism. Modern Western notions of science and medicine are predicated on the singular nature of the defensible body, a humanist trope itself paradoxically predicated on a series of divisions and hybridizations giving rise to the separation of the human from the world, of the sciences from philosophy, of religion from secular society, and of the mystical from the mechanical.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, traditional Chinese medicine approaches the body through the idea of human oneness with the world (天人合一 *tianrenheyi*). This oneness, however, is in fact not "one." Rather, it is premised on constant shiftings of environment both inside and outside the body: the changing seasons, stresses in work and home life, pollution, diet.

Gesturing to Martin Heidegger's philosophical debt to Daoism, Zhan observes that oneness "worlds" human *being* by privileging relationality, process, and creativity over division, opposition, and hierarchy. As contemporary transnational medical practices have sought to absorb traditional Chinese medicine into Western bioscience, they continue to characterize Daoism as an indigenous religious practice that does not fully qualify as a science, philosophy, or metaphysics. In this regard, Zhan's analysis of traditional Chinese medicine as it circulates transnationally rethinks Daoism and its approach to the human as not just an object of knowledge to be mastered and exploited in a global information economy but a necessary form of critical analysis in its own right.

While Daoism has a distinctive view of the human, with a strong sense of the relativity of social status, which is in turn contrasted with Confucian insistence on hierarchy, it is crucial to recognize that even Confucian moral hierarchies are in fact premised on a strong sense of human equality and an express rejection of hereditary privilege. Indeed, in the Confucian political world of East Asia—consisting, apart from China, of Korea, Vietnam, and to a lesser degree Japan—the Confucian ideal did exercise a genuine attraction at least for some, and it did possess a certain

progressive potential in each of these locations.<sup>17</sup> Of course, it would be naive to take Confucian moral humanism at face value, just as it would be a mistake to regard the tenets of liberal humanism as a transparent sociological description of Western political practices. As a political ideology, Confucian humanism was always also a state-building project. It served to justify the authority of governing elites as they expanded state power to regulate those below and outside who were less than fully civilized—and, by implication, less than human.

In the end, Confucian humanism, like Western liberal humanism—and like perhaps all humanisms—was predicated on a binary distinction between human and not-human. This distinction cast a long and dark shadow; the universalization of Confucian humanism had a sharp and often violent limit as it came to define the center and the periphery. The “barbarians” on and beyond China’s territorial borders were consistently associated with bestial qualities. Because of the ideal socio-moral constitution of the Confucian human, the Chinese animal other was not defined so much by its dumbness and its incapacity to reason as by its lack of ethical relations, living in undifferentiated herds rather than in accordance with Confucian kinship norms.

As James Scott observes, in Europe as well as in Asia the designation *barbarian*, and the unequal distribution of humanity that it implies, has always been an epithet that has been applied perforce to peoples who live outside states.<sup>18</sup> Hence, the civilizing, and by definition also humanizing, project of Confucianism has always been directed not only at the morally deficient strata within China but also at the nomadic peoples outside. Their grave offense was the fact that they seemingly had no need for Confucian civilization at all and thus represented a genuine political and existential alternative to the Middle Kingdom.<sup>19</sup> In fact, over time a number of the peripheral “barbarians” did come to adopt various aspects of Chinese civilization and state organization, sometimes with the perverse (that is, perverse to the Chinese) result that they began referring to themselves as a “Middle Kingdom”—a designation that China obviously reserved for itself. This was true of Korea, Vietnam, and Japan at various times, testifying to the universalizing potential of Confucianism.<sup>20</sup> Neighboring nonstate peoples that could be assimilated were ultimately included in the civilizing project of Confucian humanism, and those that could not be were either bribed or ignored, to the extent possible, or else simply exterminated. (The eighteenth-century genocide of the Central Asian Zungharians was perhaps the most notable example of the latter strategy.)<sup>21</sup>

In his contribution to this special issue (part I), Magnus Fiskesjö examines one specific way in which China’s barbarians were reduced to animals: their animality was literally inscribed in their ethnonyms, which used symbolic classifiers (radicals) signifying “dog” and “insect” rather

than “human.” Historically, these written classifiers played a crucial role in not only reflecting but shaping how China positioned barbarian tribes in relation to the political center. Fiskesjö thus examines how the replacement of animal classifiers with human classifiers in ethnonyms by Chinese ethnologists in the early twentieth century constitutes a key moment in the transformation of barbarian tribes into ethnic and indigenous minorities that can then be conscripted as citizens into a modern Chinese national imaginary.

This outcome was neither necessary nor obvious, as both the Nationalists and the Communists could easily have denied the ethnic particularity of the former barbarians and simply forced them to assimilate into a mono-ethnic China, on the model of various other Asian states. The continuing utility of the *figure* of the barbarian—even in its sanitized, modern form as an ethnic minority in need of development rather than “civilization” as such—is the same for both modern regimes as it was for the imperial state. As Fiskesjö argues: “It serves to enable the perennial justifications for the state and its violence—with continuing appeal into modern times.” As an empire, China needed barbarian others to naturalize its imperial ambitions. As a modern nation-state, China now needs its humanized ethnic and indigenous minorities to naturalize its sovereign borders as well as to validate its governing authority.

Paradoxically, both the democratic and the imperial tendencies of Confucianism can be traced to its egalitarian view of human nature. Historically, what unites Confucian thinkers of various schools is their unshakeable moral optimism—their shared belief that there are no innate differences among people and no innate obstacles to moral learning. Mencius (372–289 BCE), the leading Confucian—second only to the Master (551–479 BCE) himself—insisted that anyone can become “a Yao or a Shun,” referring to two legendary sage-kings of old.<sup>22</sup> Everyone, even the barbarian, has the potential and the innate capacity to become humane (仁 *ren*) and thus fully human (人 *ren*). Tragically, it was precisely this view that was used to justify the Confucian civilizing mission among “barbarians.”

Unfortunately, in a decayed moral world, many if not most people are raised in inferior environments, with insufficient education and inadequate ethical models. Consequently, they are unable live up to their innate moral potential. It is therefore not sufficient for a Confucian society to police itself solely against barbarians outside. It must always also have a strong moral hierarchy within, based on the degree to which different members of society have realized their moral capacity as humans. Importantly, this hierarchy is still a meritocracy, in theory—no less so than an economically stratified liberal society is a meritocracy, in theory. The criterion of human merit is of course vastly different in traditional Western liberal and

Confucian moral schemas, but it is vital to recognize that the principles of meritocracy and equality are not.<sup>23</sup>

It is this sense of Confucian moral drive and capacity to be humane that powers Gloria Davies's essay opening this special issue (part I): her fascinating reading of the famous tank man image, captured on 5 June 1989 in Tiananmen Square. Depicting a lone male figure standing down a line of military tanks, the image instantaneously captured the imaginations of Western audiences. The "only . . . streetscene in China worth remembering in Western eyes," in Michael Dutton's words, it has come to symbolize an individual's struggle against an autocratic Chinese Communist regime.<sup>24</sup> Without excusing the repressive apparatuses of state power, Davies points to the fact that the tank man image had comparatively little appeal to the Chinese public imagination. Instead, she analyzes the picture of three kneeling students who earlier, on 22 April 1989, brought a seven-point petition of protest to the Great Hall of the People during a memorial service for Hu Yaobang, the progressive and popular former Party leader whose death the week before catalyzed the protest movement. Ignored by officials (all three later served jail sentences), the three kneeling students quickly inflamed the Chinese public imagination. Davies thus presents us with an alternative image repertoire of China: this corollary image to the tank man, widely circulated in China, is hardly known in the West.

The three students' action took its significance against a long tradition of petitioning as a form of moral virtue and political protest in China. A tradition unwritten by Confucian humanism, it is not predicated on a Western opposition between the individual and the state. Rather, it invoked the posture of loyal Confucian subjects remonstrating with the emperor. As Davies comments, it not only "conjured up a powerful association with ancient moral exemplarity but triggered memories of May Fourth [1919] and other patriotic movements of the modern period." In post-1989 China, revolutionized by socialism with Chinese characteristics, the turn to Western conceptions of the human and the rule of law marks what Davies, following Helen Dunstan, describes as the reemergence of "convenient Confucianism" in the figure of celebrity bloggers such as Han Han, as opposed to "inconvenient Confucianism" leading to the jailing and silencing of Chinese dissidents such as Liu Xiaobo. Like the global circulation of the tank man image, the global circulation of Liu's Internet petition, Charter 08, embeds a long tradition of protest—of Confucian decorum and propriety—in new virtual spaces, neither East nor West, of Chinese civil society in cyberspace.

Even if the precise nature and significance of Confucian inflections in contemporary Chinese politics may be subject to debate, it is illuminating to examine the contrast between certain strands of liberalism and the general moral optimism of Confucian humanism. Consider, for example,

Thomas Hobbes's utterly dark political anthropology, based on the bestial axiom *homo homini lupus* (man is a wolf to man). The rhetoric of a fictional social contract aside, for Hobbes the state is in the final analysis a cage that must be built for human animals in order to stop them—to stop *us*—from killing each other. Moreover, the Leviathan to which Hobbes likens the state is itself a beast, quite literally a biblical sea monster. Subsequently, gentler versions of liberalism from Hugo Grotius to John Locke and up to John Rawls have sought to restrain this sovereign beast by turning the liberal human into a subject of rights. In fact, in the modern political ontology, to be human *is* to be a bearer of rights. What those rights—human rights—are is a matter of urgent debate, but there is a resounding consensus that certain rights, and the idea of rights itself, are universal, and that they are indeed the very stuff of which humanity is made. Yet while this conception does take a more positive view of the moral and political subject of rights as something more than a caged animal, it still maintains a dark view of the sovereign, the state.

Orthodox Confucianism, in contrast, interpellates its subjects ideally not through rights but rites (禮 *li*), a complex institution of ritual, convention, etiquette, and custom. Yet even the optimistic moral epistemology that underlay this system—a faith in the ritual educability of all those qualifying as humans (defined tautologically by their very educability into Confucian *li*)—had its dark side. On the one hand, it imposed a great moral burden on the state, as the ruler was always ultimately responsible for moral decay in society. On the other hand, it justified extreme actions by the state to educate and improve its subjects—and those actions in turn easily became a form of Confucian authoritarianism.

Ideally, Confucian ritual was supposed to work much like a liberal education in the humanities in the West, as characterized by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak—namely, by effecting an “uncoercive rearrangement of desires.”<sup>25</sup> The proper functioning of Confucian *li* would make people want to be, and become, human(e) in the normative moral sense. Yet in practice the imperial state could hardly trust government to Confucian moralists alone. Confucian humanism therefore became a pedagogical and moral practice *and* a regime of terror, backed not only by rites but also by law and state violence.<sup>26</sup>

## Marx, Mao, and the Human

The fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 witnessed the acceleration of a series of ongoing political, social, and military crises, while the relationship between China and the human entered another era, marked by the continuing precariousness of both. These unending crises—from the Opium War to the Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese colonization of Taiwan and

Korea, the Boxer Rebellion, the Russo-Japanese War, and ultimately the dissolution of the dynastic state—were perhaps most potently symbolized in the writings of Lu Xun, China’s great literary modernist. Lu Xun’s gory images of flayed bodies, dead infants, and cannibalism rendered vivid the problem of a self-annihilating Chinese body, and body politic.<sup>27</sup> As Wang suggests in his concluding essay (part II), in Lu Xun’s hands the continuing crisis of China and the human came to stand for the very problem, idea, and promise of a modern Chinese revolution.

The multiple revolutions that gripped China in the twentieth century (dynastic, Republican, Communist, postsocialist, neoliberal) have rendered the problem of China and the human only more complex. Dai Jinhua observes in her contribution to this special issue (part I): “At the turn of the twentieth century, the discourses of modernity and social criticism were constructed upon an alignment between the human and a modern China and an opposition between the human and the real China. The genesis of the modern human is coterminous with the birth of modern China, but the historical and real China represents everything that is inhuman or antihuman.” In Dai’s formulation, the two dominant motifs of Chinese modernity—an antifeudalism directed at China’s Confucian past and an anti-imperialism directed at foreign aggressors—were hopelessly at odds with one another, with significant implications for the problem of the human. On the one hand, the repudiation of “feudal” Chinese culture (as it was problematically characterized in terms of European history) demanded a rejection of Confucian humanism in order to construct a modern China that, in turn, was built on a conflicted desire for westernization. On the other hand, the new Republic’s anti-imperialism implied a repudiation of Western modernity. In other words, to borrow Sakai’s succinct formulation, the modernization of China entailed the impossible task of “negating both the West and its own past.”<sup>28</sup> In the resulting intellectual and political vacuum, modern Chinese society was left with few philosophical traditions or political resources from either East or West upon which to draw and build a modern nation-state and a new vision for Chinese humanity.

Under such constraints, the problem of China and the human grew out of China’s alienation from its traditional Confucian humanist tradition and from an obsession with building a strong and sovereign Chinese nation-state, in accordance with Western norms of liberal self-determination and progress through the back door. As Jenny Edkins observes, “The narrative of human being as a common essence risks the same exclusionary practices that produce the sovereignty of the nation-state, with its narrative of national identity, and produces the same dehumanized and depoliticized subjects.”<sup>29</sup> As the “sick man of Asia,” China was continually placed by its critics in a discourse of lagging development.

The elusive goal of Chinese sovereignty and the problem of the human became only more vexed by the Cold War partitioning of China into the PRC on the mainland and the ROC in Taiwan, as official state communism in the PRC and official state capitalism in the ROC created distinct trajectories of development. These histories of competing socialist and capitalist modernities on the mainland and in Taiwan are further entwined with those of other capitalist US client states of Cold War Asia (Japan and Korea, in addition to Taiwan). Kuan-Hsing Chen's exhortation to develop "Asia as method"—akin to the call of this special issue to use China as a method—provides a useful point of departure for analyzing China and the human in the larger context of Asia. More specifically, Chen calls for an account of history that starts from the perspective of Asia itself, rather than viewing Asia as a pawn in a Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup>

The immediate political gains and economic advancements following the establishment of the PRC in 1949 were followed by a number of setbacks: not only the external conflicts polarizing Cold War Asia but also a series of internal traumas including the Great Leap Forward (1958–61) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Mao Zedong decisively turned Chinese society away from the category of "the human" to the category of "the people." On the one hand, Mao believed in harmony among the people, contradictions among whom were deemed nonantagonistic. On the other hand, the contradictions between the people and its enemies were antagonistic and irresolvable, which was precisely why the enemies were cast outside the category of the people altogether. The dialectic of Marxist humanism and antihumanism in Maoist thought inspired a number of important global debates, many of which are the subject of essays comprising part II.

In his contribution to this special issue (part II), Petrus Liu outlines a significant dispute concerning the early, "humanist" Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and the late, and putatively more mature, "antihumanist" Marx of *Capital*. Noting that the early and late Marx need not be irreconcilable, as various orthodox interpretations suggest, Liu recuperates a different notion of the human in Marx, one that is grounded neither in an "essence of man" (the subject of humanism) nor in the structural and metahistorical movements of capital (the "objective" basis of the mode of production). Instead, Liu observes, "Marx's 'scientific contributions' come from a standpoint based on the moral equality of human time." That is, the labors of all human beings, measured by units of time, are presumed to be morally equivalent, and no account of the human or the mode of production would be complete without recuperating this insight as the basis for social justice. This equality of human time, emphasized by Mao's championing of the peasants, is largely forgotten today in



the interpretation of human rights abuse in the PRC by its global critics as a problem of political freedom rather than economic equality.<sup>31</sup>

Turning to the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) endorsement of "queer human rights" in Taiwan as a significant political counterpoint to this genealogy of the equality of human time in Marxist thought, Liu observes that the category of the queer does not describe the empirical existence of a social group. Rather, it functions as a "sign of natural difference" between Taiwan's liberalism and the PRC's lack of human rights. The legitimizing of homosexual rights in Taiwan constitutes the latest step in the globalization of queer liberalism.<sup>32</sup> In this vein, the championing of queer rights by liberal state practice and gay social movements in the ROC distinguishes its political subjects (as well as those in Hong Kong and the diaspora) from those in the PRC as human. But while the DPP in Taiwan exploits this distinction to heap moral opprobrium on the Communist Party (as well as on the previous Kuomintang dictatorship it ousted from power in March 2000), it has also systematically persecuted sexual minorities who do not conform to accepted norms of sexual respectability. In this way, the DPP gets to have both pro-gay human rights and its own homophobia as well. What is lacking in the global perception of the ROC as the liberal counterpart to the authoritarian PRC, then, is an account of the precise conditions—political, social, and economic—through which a nonnormative sexual subject comes to qualify as human. Liu's account of the subject of queer human rights in Taiwan focuses critical attention on the complex dynamic between the means and relations of production, one indebted to Louis Althusser's structural analysis of Marxism and the subject of ideology. Althusser's analysis, we come to discover, in turn is curiously indebted to Mao's China. In her contribution to this special issue (part II), Camille Robcis examines humanist and antihumanist disputes in 1968 France in terms of their complicated relationship to China. Robcis traces how a series of crises in the French Communist Party, notably its lack of support for Algerian decolonization and independence, came to be managed by a turn to China on the part of numerous French thinkers, most notably Althusser. China became a screen on which to project, debate, and negotiate these crises.

In Althusser's view, unveiling the mechanisms of ideology and politics depended on the emphatic repudiation of humanism. Humanism was a virulent bourgeois ideology, and Marx's radical antihumanism was the absolute condition for scientific knowledge and for a real transformation of politics. Rejecting Jean-Paul Sartre's humanist Marx, Althusser turned to Maoism as the paradigmatic example of a theoretical antihumanism in action, a Marxist science that would be able to graph the contradictions inherent in all societies. In this regard, Althusser also embraced the Cultural Revolution as an attempt to eradicate humanist ideology and to

conduct a truly antihumanist revolution. Indeed, Robcis speculates, it was this turn to Mao through which Althusser was in part able to critique the metaphysics of wholeness. Even if ideology had no history, Robcis writes, “Althusser’s concept did have a history, a history that passed through China.” The problem of the human and human rights, the French Communist Party, and French colonialism was negotiated through China as a displaced site of idealization.<sup>33</sup>

With Mao’s death in 1976 and the end of the Cultural Revolution, the subsequent opening up of China to the West, and the beginning of economic reforms, it is perhaps unsurprising that the human returned as a subject of political and social controversy.<sup>34</sup> A series of Chinese debates in the 1980s and 1990s concerning alienation, humanism, and the humanist spirit offered new analyses of both China and the human. These discussions, echoing prior debates from the early 1960s, were critical of Marxist reformers who wanted to call attention to inhuman practices in the Chinese Communist Party under Maoism, especially after the shattering violence of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>35</sup> In the process, they also resurrected the figure of Sartre, who had endorsed the humanist Marx in his existential writings.

In her contribution to this special issue (part II), Shu-mei Shih extends Robcis’s history of Althusser and Mao by examining this humanist revival in the context of China, France, and the United States. Examining various overlapping discourses of “post”—postsocialism, postcoloniality, poststructuralism, and posthumanism—Shih attempts to sort out their unacknowledged intersections and cleavings from the global 1960s to the present. Starting with the observation that the postsocialist human in China is decidedly not posthumanist, she returns us to a Marxist humanism championed by Sartre that cuts across the first, second, and third worlds. Fredric Jameson has lamented the linguistic turn in France as the beginning of depoliticization in French thought through a turn to post-structuralism. This poststructuralist turn, Shih asserts, is an attempt to bury the historical ghosts of colonialism and socialism by ushering in the death of the subject and the figure of the posthuman dissociated from agency and action. In the same breath, it dispenses with a history of Marxist humanism in China that Sartre championed.

Today, this history of Marxist humanism remains part of a larger cultural zeitgeist that we do not recognize. An account of Marxist humanism helps us to make links, for instance, between Mao and Frantz Fanon, Asia and Africa, in the context of both postsocialism and postcolonialism. From another perspective, Mao and Fanon are connected through their mutual influence on decolonization in Algeria, U.S. civil rights movements, and other third-world and anticolonial struggles. That is, the work of scholars in U.S. ethnic studies and critical race studies may also be seen as broadly Marxist humanist endeavors. Suspicious of both the human subject of lib-

eral modernity and the antihuman subject of poststructuralism, underwriting Western modernity and postmodernity, these critics conjoin a history of socialism and humanism with significant consequences. “When certain people [have] not been considered and treated as humans,” Shih writes, “posthumanism serves as an alibi for further denial of humanity to these same people.” A focus on a tradition of Marxist humanism in the PRC, in postcolonial societies, and in a multicultural United States maintains a space of critical analysis that disallows the usual separation between postsocialist/postcolonial and poststructuralist/posthuman that dictates our current framings of global history.

The considerable attention that these debates have garnered in the Chinese public sphere underscores the continuing significance of the problem of the human.<sup>36</sup> Yet, as Wang Hui has argued persuasively, the ideological critiques of Mao and the turn to liberal humanist ideals in the context of the 1980s reforms reflected a limited grasp of the new social contradictions in the postsocialist era: they only “took the practices of the socialist state as . . . [the] target of opposition,” without considering the limits of liberal humanism as well.<sup>37</sup> In his essay (opening part II), Douglas Howland provides one critical examination of those limits by turning to the history of popular sovereignty and democratic centralism under Mao. Western liberalism conceives of political representation in an individualistic fashion, with elections as the ordinary means of aggregating diverse and conflicting individual political preferences. In contrast, Mao’s notion of democratic centralism is premised on a desire to represent class interests, which *can* be determined objectively. The goal of this form of popular sovereignty was not, as Howland explains, simply to devise a procedure for collective decision making in a politically conflicted world but the substantive one of arriving at political unity. Stated differently, in this understanding, popular sovereignty—the constitution of a group of people as a single “people”—is an *effect* of democratic centralism, not an a priori assumption on which democracy is based.

With this distinction in mind, Howland analyzes the contemporary introduction and expansion of village elections in China. He evaluates them not against Western assumptions about the purpose of voting but against a prior Maoist history of the “mass line.” According to Howland, the “goal of elections in China is not majority rule per se, arrived at through a representative vote based in personal interests,” but rather “the attainment of unity.” Without an understanding of such fundamentally differing goals of electoral reform and representation, rooted in distinctive conceptions of popular sovereignty, Western liberal observers of China typically ask which form of representation will compromise democracy the least, while a better question might be, in Howland’s suggestion, what forms of democracy will compromise the people’s interests the least? Each ques-

tion represents a different set of assumptions about political personhood in China and about the politics of humanity more generally.

### **The Futures of China and the Human**

Although Gloria Davies's essay in this special issue is undoubtedly correct in finding significant discursive continuities between Confucian and contemporary practices of politics in China today, at least as a formal, juridical matter the modern centralized state has been quite successful in colonizing the political field, in China as elsewhere. The (neo)liberal imagination that provides the dominant global cosmology today is remarkably barren. The only authentic subjects it seems to be capable of recognizing are individuals and states. This is precisely what made the image of the tank man instantly legible for a Western audience, as there could hardly be a starker depiction of the solitary encounter between the two main protagonists of the liberal political universe. (To be sure, beyond the state and the individual, the corporation is another vitally important neoliberal actor; however, at least as a legal matter, the corporation is fictionally a "person"—a designation that makes it possible for certain individuals who control and invest in corporations to amass great wealth.)

Indeed, it is perhaps one effect of our increasingly impoverished political imaginations that even in China the notion of the modern secular state seems to have won over its competition. Even the PRC claims, to borrow Mayfair Yang's term, only a "disenchanted" sovereignty—in contrast to, say, Confucian or Buddhist political cosmologies that once vied for supremacy over the territory to which we refer today as China.<sup>38</sup> And something like the notion of the liberal human seems to have captured the political imagination and subjective desire of many if not all Chinese—signified by the emergence of a growing rights consciousness in the realm of criminal law, for example.

Such developments are nothing to be belittled, especially so long as there remains a strong, authoritarian state in China, even if the state is not as all-powerful and inevitably repressive as Western media tend to imagine. As countless journalistic accounts describe, there are numerous brave, indeed heroic, "rights protection" lawyers and activists, as they are known in China.<sup>39</sup> Again, the agenda of this special issue is neither to criticize nor to praise the conception of humanity that such rights advocacy assumes and enacts. The risks that rights lawyers and activists take are real, and the discourse of rights seems to be, lamentably and incredibly, the *only* language we have that is intelligible to the modern state and has at least some prospect of holding it at bay.

Even so, it is important to recognize both the power and limits of that

discourse, as it positions a lone individual against the state—precisely like a man facing a tank in an empty square, with no context, history, or a community of others. As Anne Orford puts it with reference to human rights more broadly, “By adopting the liberal programmatic vision of human rights, the shape of the politics of our time seems predetermined—all over the world, the individual confronts the all-powerful apparatus of the state.”<sup>40</sup> Perhaps at the current historical moment we find ourselves in a political bind in which there is no other vocabulary available. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the subject position into which the discourse of rights interpellates those who invoke it—a position that Orford describes as “the tragic subject of human rights.”<sup>41</sup> It most certainly is not a discourse simply of empowerment but also of profound inequality of lives, understood in a humanitarian calculus of helpless victims and their helpers.<sup>42</sup> And all too often it is a discourse that presumes, as Liu notes in his essay, “that liberalism or the discourse of human rights is the motor behind every form of social progress ever achieved by mankind.”

But however critical one may be of the discourse of human rights, it is impossible not to recognize its enormous global appeal. It is a phenomenon that today far exceeds the bounds of the juridical. Although there are numerous and acrimonious debates of just *what* human rights are, to be opposed to human rights altogether is no longer a valid position: even the worst human rights offender must pay lip service to human rights. And surely it is not illegitimate for anyone today to yearn to be human. As Arjun Appadurai characterizes the “self-fulfilling and self-justifying” nature of modernity, “Whatever else [it] may have created, it aspired to create persons who would, after the fact, have wished to have become modern.”<sup>43</sup>

Yet the human in the context of contemporary China proves surprisingly resistant to categorization. Ackbar Abbas’s visual dossier concerning the human (part II) consists of images of China that tell us less and less about China. Assembling a battery of images drawn from art, media, and performance, Abbas presents a series of figures of the human that do not appear necessarily as human figures. Those images are not so much representations of new social types as they are “hysterical symptoms of a new society,” which Abbas carefully unpacks and analyzes. Past ideals and images of the Chinese human—including the Confucian gentleman, the literatus, or the revolutionary hero—are quickly erased and replaced by clichéd figures of the tank man, the media person, the communications expert, the celebrity, and the entrepreneur—clichés not because there is no truth to be found in them but because their intelligibility fits so well with preconceived notions about an inhuman China that defies deeper analysis.

In response, but also in concert with this visual logic, filmmaker Zhang Yimou offers his opening ceremony at the 2008 Beijing Olympics,

the first “digital” Olympics, marking China’s meteoric rise on the contemporary global stage. Here, Zhang choreographs a spectacular media event, a “mass ornament,” to borrow a term from Siegfried Kracauer, of 15,000 synchronized human bodies through which 5,000 years of Chinese history are presented to a world audience as a seamless narrative of uninterrupted progress.<sup>44</sup> As Abbas observes, the Tiananmen massacre has not been and cannot be excised from history, “but its ghosts can be *exorcised* in a spectacle. The exorcism begins by giving us something else to remember, so that we can learn to forget.” With this decisive hijacking of representation, Abbas queries how we can remember a catastrophe and its human implications.

Dai Jinhua’s essay (concluding part I) on director Lu Chuan’s film, *City of Life and Death* (2009), answers Abbas’s questions about memorialization and the image in terms of the Nanjing Massacre. We remember catastrophe and its human implications with extreme difficulty, the film suggests, for the Chinese victims of this Japanese massacre cannot be witnesses, only survivors. Lu’s blockbuster film is largely framed from the perspective of a Japanese soldier, Kadokawa, and a German priest, John Rabe, also known as the Chinese Schindler. (Rabe’s diaries provided an important historical source for Iris Chang’s 1998 *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, which brought the massacre to the attention of the English-speaking world.) In this regard, the film asks, who can be a human witness? In suggesting that it is the perpetrators rather than the victims who hold a monopoly on this role, Lu’s film proposes that the human indeed resides elsewhere—outside China—even today.

Dai’s analysis of *City of Life and Death* and the Nanjing Massacre elucidates a larger crisis of humanity that stretches across twentieth-century China into the present and for present political purposes. With the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, China began its official career as a modern nation-state, whose anti-imperial stance on the West and anti-feudal repudiation of traditional Confucian culture left it with little in the way of foreign or indigenous resources for philosophical thought or political action. If the old society of China turned humans into ghosts, the problem of the new society in China was how to turn these ghosts back into humans. (Indeed, this problematic is the subject of the Ji Yun-fei cover image for part I of this special issue.) This was, and continues to be, the impossible dynamic under which national salvation for China is pursued. It not only fueled China’s postwar partition—the splitting of national salvation into capitalist and socialist modernity under the dark clouds of the Cold War—but also leads a legacy of Marx and Mao that places us on the doorstep of contemporary postsocialist China today. This is China not only as history but also as a method of inquiry, and it is a contemporary condition that begs greater analysis.

In this spirit of excavating modernity's past in the present, Michael Dutton turns to another lost history, and method, of Chinese politics. In the process, like Abbas, he links the politics of history, and the history of politics, to aesthetics. Dutton's contribution to this special issue (part II) outlines a history of the political that proceeds through a tour of what he calls the Three Towers of Modernity—the Eiffel Tower, the Ferris wheel, and Tatlin's Tower (which was never built)—and ends in China in the Rent Collection Courtyard. While the Eiffel Tower in Paris ushered in the age of modernity through a twisted garden of iron and glass in the air, the Ferris wheel built for the 1893 Chicago Columbian World Exposition stood for an alternative aesthetic of industrial modernity, one that domesticated politics by transforming human desire into consumption. In contrast, Tatlin's Tower—a postrevolutionary Russian constructivist art project designed to embody the political architecture of the Comintern—was addressed to the revolutionary subject of socialism. Its aesthetic of estrangement was also meant to channel human desire, much like the Ferris wheel, but in the service of incitement to revolution.

Bringing this analysis to China today, from industrial settings to the countryside, Dutton arrives at the Rent Collection Courtyard: an art project of life-sized clay figures, produced under Maoist sponsorship during the Cultural Revolution, depicting the exploitation of peasants by a despotic landlord in Sichuan Province in southwestern China. The opposite of streamlined industrial aesthetics, these mud statues were designed to serve an explicitly pedagogical purpose. Their human verisimilitude sought to inspire tears for peasants and absolute enmity toward landlords, leading to the inevitable conclusion: it is right to rebel. Assessing the significance of the Rent Collection Courtyard against the Eiffel Tower, the Ferris wheel, and Tatlin's Tower, Dutton concludes that “as a telluric reenactment of a claim to an understanding of the political, it stands alone.” Moreover, its political intensity reveals to us something not only about China but also about another side of modern political subjectivity—namely, “how we dispose of wonder, how we attempt to satiate desire, and how we channel emotional excess.” Indeed, Dutton suggests, it points to “another way of imagining politics”—and humanity, we might add, as we believe that whatever else it may entail, to be human is to be able to imagine otherwise.

Beyond that, the human is a contested ground whose fate remains undecided. Yet this is nothing to lament, for as Marx put it, “All history is nothing but the continuous transformation of human nature.”<sup>45</sup> This observation is surely as true in China as anywhere else.

## Notes

The romanization of Chinese characters in this special issue is not consistent, and it cannot be. While PRC pinyin is standard, older forms of romanization, such as Wade-Giles, are sometimes used, especially for historical concepts before the post-1949 PRC standardization and simplification of Chinese characters. Because of this, our authors and we use both traditional and simplified Chinese characters to accompany the romanization.

We would like to thank Ed Cohen, Gloria Davies, Michael Dutton, Eric Hayot, Douglas Howland, and the *Social Text* coeditors, Anna McCarthy, Neferti Tadiar, and Brent Edwards, as well as *Social Text* managing editor Livia Tenzer, for their helpful feedback on this editors' introduction and this special issue.

1. See "Intellectual Politics in Post-Tiananmen China," ed. Xudong Zhang, special issue, *Social Text* 55 (1998).

2. See Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

3. The indeterminacy of "China" before 1911 has been elaborated by a number of the so-called new Qing historians. For a representative although by no means exhaustive sample, see Pamela K. Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); James Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); James P. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759–1864* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 2005); Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

4. Consider the discourse of human rights law—presumably the one place where the idea of a universal humanity is unchallengeable. A few years ago one of us (Ruskola) was invited to a conference organized by international and comparative lawyers, to address a panel with the following title: "Asian Values: A Counterpoint to Human Rights?" Self-evidently Asian values are *not* a counterpoint to human rights. To concede the silent premise of the question would be to concede that Asians are somehow not already included in the category of the human. (It bears noting that, for better or worse, Chinese political culture tends to stand metonymically for "Asia" in the Asian values debate as well as more generally.) Needless to say, there was no panel at the conference posing the question, "European Enlightenment: A Counterpoint to Human Rights?" For an elaboration of this problematic, see Teemu Ruskola, "Where Is Asia? When Is Asia? Theorizing Comparative Law and International Law," *UC Davis Law Review* 43 (2011): 102–19.

5. Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8.

6. We would like to thank Gloria Davies for this formulation.

7. See Naoki Sakai, "Theory and Asian Humanity: On the Question of *Humanitas* and *Anthropos*," *Postcolonial Studies* 13 (2010): 441–64.

8. We borrow this concept of China as universally particular and of the West/the United States as particularly universal from Teemu Ruskola's forthcoming book, "Legal Orientalism: China, the United States, and Modern Law."



9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980).

10. See Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 253–64.

11. It bears reiterating that the chief aim of this special two-part issue is to *problematize* the categories *China* and *the human*, not to provide an exhaustive, or necessarily even representative, account of them and their relationship. At the same time, we have of course sought to achieve as wide a coverage of the subject matter as possible. There are nevertheless some omissions that are more significant than others. While Fiskesjö's essay, for example, analyzes how the "ethnic" differences of China's "minority nationalities" have been represented in the past and today, the contributions to this volume do not address the status of China's *religious* minorities, or the specific historic and cultural processes by which religious differences have been transformed into signs of humanity and inhumanity. Likewise, while the essays as a whole analyze both China and humanity from transnational perspectives, most of the intercultural traffic in ideas takes place between China and Europe. A more complete global account would entail a comparative perspective that brings Chinese humanity in conversation with humanities in Africa and in the New World, whether in the context of nineteenth-century labor migrations or the contemporary inroads of Chinese capital into Africa and Latin America.

12. See Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). As Cohen reminds us, it was during the Enlightenment that being human first entailed being part of the human species scientifically.

13. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.

14. This classic characterization of Cartesian mind-body dualism is from Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1949; repr. London: Routledge, 2009).

15. The complex meanings of the body and bodily practices are explored at length in Angela Zito and Tani Barlow, eds., *Body, Subject, and Power in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

16. See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

17. It was precisely its egalitarian tendencies that caused leading Confucians in Tokugawa Japan ultimately to reject the Confucian idea of a universal human nature. Because it necessarily implied a political system based on moral merit, it posed a direct challenge to the hereditary, aristocratic structure of Japanese society and rule. See Benjamin A. Elman with John B. Duncan and Herman Ooms, "Introduction" in *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam*, ed. Benjamin A. Elman, John B. Duncan, and Herman Ooms (Los Angeles: UCLA Asia Institute, 2002), 1–30.

For the purposes of our analysis, we include Vietnam in our sociopolitical definition of a Confucian world of East Asia. The geopolitical logic of area studies would place Vietnam strictly in Southeast Asia, ignoring its location at the crossroads of both Chinese and Southeast Asian cultural influences.

18. James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

19. On Confucianism as a "civilizing project," see Stevan Harrell, "Introduction: Civilizing Projects and the Reaction to Them," in *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 3–36.

20. For specific instances of “traveling Sinocentrism” in East Asia, see Teemu Ruskola, “The East Asian Legal Tradition,” in *Cambridge Companion to Comparative Law*, ed. Mauro Bussani and Ugo Mattei (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

21. Perdue, *China Marches West*, 282–87.

22. See D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* (New York: Penguin, 1979).

23. For a forceful statement of the significance of moral egalitarianism in Confucian thought, see Donald J. Munro, *The Concept of Man in Early China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2001).

24. Michael Dutton, *Street Life China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17.

25. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Terror: A Speech After 9–11,” *boundary 2* 31 (2004): 81–111.

26. This is demonstrated perhaps best by the career of the illustrious neo-Confucian Wang Yangming (王陽明, 1472–1529 CE). In his philosophical capacity, Wang expressed extreme sympathy for the world at large, including a preparedness to weep even for a broken tile, while in his capacity as an imperial general he led extraordinarily violent campaigns to suppress rebellions in “unpacified” regions in the south. On Wang’s sympathy for “tiles and stones shattered and crushed,” see Chan Wing-tsit, trans., *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yangming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 272.

27. See David Wang, *The Monster That Is History: Violence, History, and Fictional Writing in 20th Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Wang’s description of modern China’s literature as a history of “hauntology” seems particularly apt. Scenes of beheading, figures of the ghost, descriptions of torture and trauma populate literary narratives from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, written by writers as canonical as Lu Xun and Mao Dun and as peripheral as the Sinophone Malaysian writer Huang Jinshu. This literary imaginary of monsters and monstrosity, figuratively embodied by the semihuman figure of *taowu* documented in classical Chinese texts, delineates the outer limits and the side of the other in Chinese imagination of the human.

28. Sakai, “Theory and Asian Humanity,” 443.

29. Jenny Edkins, “Humanitarianism, Humanity, Human,” *Journal of Human Rights* 2 (2003): 253–58.

30. See Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

31. For a discussion of this cleaving of political freedom and economic equality in liberal thought, see Etienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx*, trans. James Swenson (New York: Routledge, 1994), 39–59.

32. For a genealogy of queer liberalism, see David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

33. See also Shu-mei Shih, “Theory, Asia, and the Sinophone,” *Postcolonial Studies* 13 (2010): 465–84. Shih writes:

It may not be a gross exaggeration to say that there is an important link between Marx’s theorization of the Asiatic mode of production and the Marxist legitimation of Western imperialism, between Weber’s celebration of the Protestant work ethic and his critique of its apparent lack in Oriental religions, between Hegel’s conception of the dynamism of Western-led world history and his views on Asian stagnation, and between the arguments about European

racial superiority and the corresponding inferiority of Asians and blacks that we find in Kant's early work on anthropology. Using more recent examples, it is also possible, if somewhat far-fetched, to suggest that there would have been no Derridean grammatology without the Sinitic written script celebrated most famously by Fenollosa and Pound, no Foucaultian archaeology of knowledge without the Chinese encyclopaedia, and perhaps even no linguistic turn in later twentieth-century French thought without the disillusionment with Maoism. Perhaps Roland Barthes' work would not have transitioned from structuralism to poststructuralism without a trip to and a book about Japan, and Heidegger might never have learned about Daoism—which some claim is the basis of his notion of *Dasein*—without his conversations with the Japanese philosopher Kuki Shūzō, one of the founders of the Kyoto School of Philosophy. In all these examples, however, traces of Asia do not change the character of Western theory so much as function as illustrations or details which support it; and those details are often conjured up in the Western imagination with their residues of Orientalism more or less intact. (469–70)

34. See, for instance, Lisa Rofel's *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life under Socialism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

35. See Wang Ruoshui, *Wei Rendao Zhuyi Bianhu (In Defense of Humanism)* (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1986); Michael Dutton, *Policing Chinese Politics: A History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

36. For discussions of these two humanism debates, see Jing Wang's *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), esp. chap. 1. See also Xudong Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), esp. chap. 2.

37. Wang Hui, "The Year 1989 and the Historical Roots of Neoliberalism in China," trans. Rebecca E. Karl, *positions: east asia cultures critique* 12 (2004): 10.

38. Mayfair Me-hui Yang, "Postcoloniality and Religiosity in Modern China: The Disenchantments of Sovereignty," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 28 (2011): 3–44.

39. See Hualing Fu and Richard Cullen, "Weiquan (Rights Protection) Lawyering in an Authoritarian State: Building a Culture of Public-Interest Lawyering," *China Journal*, no. 59 (2008): 111–27.

40. Anne Orford, "Biopolitics and the Tragic Subject of Human Rights," in *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror: Living, Dying, Surviving*, ed. Elizabeth Dauphinee and Cristina Masters (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 221.

41. Ibid.

42. See Didier Fassin, "Humanitarianism and the Politics of Life," *Public Culture* 19 (2007): 499–520.

43. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1.

44. See Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" (1927), trans. Barbara Correll and Jack Zipes, *New German Critique*, no. 5 (1975): 67–76.

45. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, ed. C. P. Dutt and V. Chattopadhyaya (New York: International Publishers, 1936), 124.

