

PLEASE CIRCULATE

Call for Papers: Special Issue of *Social Text*

CHINA AND THE HUMAN

Edited by David L. Eng, Teemu Ruskola, and Shuang Shen

We are soliciting essays that investigate critically the relationship between China and the human as subjects of law, politics, bio-politics, political economy, labor, medicine, science, technology, religion, and culture. By juxtaposing China and the human, we do not assume either concept as a pre-given object of knowledge. Though we place the terms in a comparative context, we 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—across space and time, through the global and the local. Instead, we hope to track the epistemological career and language of the human by thinking China as a set of relational, differential, and contrapuntal events. Without assuming a singular, pre-given China with fixed borders in space or time, we would like to analyze the invocation and articulation of the human in specific historical and geo-political contexts.

The term *human* interpellates subjects as living organisms, legal and economic individuals, and political and cultural actors. It helps to articulate the ways we exist within and across the boundaries that nation-states imagine as their natural and material grounds. Yet not all nations or civilizations evince their “humanity” equally or coevally. If the concepts of the modern nation-state and the human are two of the most important and totalizing categories of the European Enlightenment, how have Enlightenment conceptions of political subjectivity, the nation-state, and the human configured China historically, and how do they fit together today? While the nation-state persists as the dominant political model for the articulation of the universal, China remains a troubled and troubling subject both of and for this political legacy. Likewise, the human is regarded as both absolutely universal and utterly unique, yet the Chinese instance often disrupts these same assumptions as well. What “alternative” universals inform Chinese conceptions of the human and its political, economic, and social development? Given the influential role of the Chinese state in most aspects of social life, is it possible today to conceptualize the human outside of nation-states’ disciplinary roles and apparatuses? Indeed, does the concept of the human always exist in a dialectical or privileged relationship to the nation-state and/or between nation-states? If not, what new forms of the human might emerge beyond these encounters on translocal, transregional, and transnational scales? Again, we are less interested in substituting one set of idealized (Western) norms with another set of (Chinese) universals for understanding the human than in exploring those instances that challenge, exceed, and fall outside of these norms and universals in both locations.

Recent scholarship concerning genocide, statelessness, and terror in political theory; sovereignty, decolonization, and development in postcolonial studies; and bio-politics, disease control, and the human/animal divide in science studies and evolutionary biology have drawn renewed critical attention to the problem of the human, the inhuman, the non-human, and the humanly unthinkable as well as to predicaments of humanness, humanity, and humanism. The following queries cover a broad terrain, but what unites them is our desire not to take the notion of China or

the category of the human as given, but to consider them in constant tension to one other. Possible topics might address:

- Institutions of knowledge, regimes of authenticity, and technologies of dissemination that define and discipline the question of the human in the imperial and post-imperial Chinese context and elsewhere.
- The human as a traveling concept, a discourse of diaphora, a contact zone, an alternative mode of modernity, and a political, social, and aesthetic form with no singular referent.
- Scientific, religious, and cultural conceptions of the body and the mind that underwrite differential conceptions of the human, humanness, and humanity in China and the West.
- The human as subject of development, where development implies not just radical change in people's immediate natural or social environment, but the increasing incorporation of global capital and labor, the rule of law, and attendant ideologies of a new universalism and enlightenment.
- Historical and contemporary framings of Chinese humanity as particular and excludable from a (Western) international order beset by competing notions of space and time. Epistemological assumptions embedded in discourses that posit the West as universal and China as particular, and the constitutive political, economic, and/or cultural oppositions that make these categories intelligible in the first instance.
- The status of revolutionary, socialist, and capitalist modernity in China today, in particular the human as subject of emancipation in the (post-)socialist setting.
- The human as subject of law, science, and medicine in the face of political unrest, natural disaster, disease control, and contagion (SARS, AIDS).
- The human subject in a nationalist context where conceptualization of power, the body, sexuality, sexual difference, racialism, and disease increasingly exceed the boundaries of the nation-state. The multiplicity of these operations in regard to differences between the country and the city, the coastal regions and the hinterland, as well as different political and geographic "Chinas"—e.g. the Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the diaspora.
- The problem of human rights and/in China, one indexing a longer history that haunts an uneven genealogy of the human and its attendant universals, marking the clash of liberal and collective forms of political organization, and the cleaving of civil rights- from human rights-based claims.
- Strategies of the dominant Han majority to exclude "minority" and other subjects from full (Chinese) humanity, mobilizing the term to animate internal differentiations of class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, region, religion, and culture.
- Recourse to the rhetoric of "human" and "the humanistic spirit" as an index of the national, nationalism, national crisis, national ascension, and national resolution.
- The human as a concept whose manifestation is conditioned by specific historical incidents, but also reflected in long-standing Confucian, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and other religious and philosophical traditions.

In addition to standard academic articles, we are open to alternative forms of submissions, such as short essays, memoirs, reviews, photo-essays, and images (pending production approval). Essays must be no longer than 8000 words, and the deadline for submission is 1 July 2010, though the co-editors are happy to discuss abstracts and prospective topics beforehand with potential contributors. Submissions should be emailed to all three co-editors:

<deng@english.upenn.edu>, <teemu.ruskola@emory.edu>, <shuang.shen@att.net>