

history, especially with regard to the humanities.

In 1952, a nationwide restructuring of institutes of higher education began and Tsinghua became a multidisciplinary polytechnic university specialising in training engineers. All researchers in the humanities and sciences were moved to either Peking University or the Chinese academies. Soon after that the university realised that the study of engineering was not possible without a proper education in the sciences and humanities. From the 1960s, some broader subjects were already reintroduced. In 1999, I was invited by Tsinghua's leaders to rebuild a philosophy department. So I moved from Peking University to Tsinghua and switched from being a pure philosopher with a career in the field of ethics to being an administrator who also has to think about organisation and manpower. There are many stories to tell about this process of rebuilding, but the full support of the University enabled me to hire the most excellent faculty members from China and even abroad. This has led to a very international group of researchers that I am proud of. China is experiencing a dramatic economic transition and there are many new social and philosophical problems for Chinese contemporary philosophers. As a moral philosopher, I feel the urge to learn Western theories while maintaining faith in Chinese traditions. My contact with colleagues at Harvard, the UvA and other universities worldwide has shaped my views and perspective.

I participate in and encourage current contacts between the humanities faculties at the UvA and Tsinghua, funded by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), which are highly appreciated by the

Tsinghua University management. My personal experience is one of intellectual benefit, shared insights and friendship. Last year, the School of Humanities was re-established, and it now consists of philosophy, Chinese language and literature, foreign languages and literature, and history. Being the Dean, I am conscious of the new challenges ahead of me. Remaining open-minded and emphasising international collaboration has been one of our major policies. As long as we keep sharing opinions with our international colleagues, I can judge what to do. We are determined to further strengthen our current ties with Amsterdam and expand it to literature, history and other subjects in the future.

## Convivial China

### JEROEN DE KLOET



Jeroen de Kloet is professor of Globalisation Studies and Director of the Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies at the UvA. His work focuses on cultural globalisation, in particular in East Asia. Recent publications include *China with a Cut – Globalisation, Urban Youth and Popular Music* (2010) and, with Yiu Fai Chow, *Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image* (2013).

Received wisdom about national cultures erodes fast in contacts with China, especially when conviviality builds trust. 'The freedom to experiment, to start anew, to move ahead, fills Beijing with energy that is increasingly lacking in Western Europe.'

My first visit to China was, as a student, to Xiamen, in 1992. I envied scholars who had witnessed the Cultural Revolution, and other historical events. By now, 1992 is something more like a narrative, or a legend. Students born around that year are curious to hear about the 'Foreign Exchange Certificates' and 'Friendship Stores' for 'foreign friends.'

Mentioning 1992 also looks like a claim to knowledge: if I was there back then, and so frequently since, I must know a lot about China! Such claims are to be deeply mistrusted. Not only from a theoretical perspective (think of Foucault and Said) but also in the light of my own experiences.

Back in 1992, I found China authoritarian. I considered rock music, the topic of my research, the sound of revolt. I became confused when freedom turned out a slippery notion, and revolt was soaked in boredom. The ease with which my friends in Beijing start businesses, move elsewhere or change jobs contrasts with the slow and highly regulated paths of change in Amsterdam. The freedom to experiment, to start anew, to



move ahead, fills Beijing with energy that is increasingly lacking in Western Europe.

I frequently work with Chinese colleagues. In the mid 1990s, with the Communication University of China I set up a large survey into the lives, media habits and values of China's youth, with 650 youngsters in Beijing, something I could never have done on my own. Ten years later we worked with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to grasp Internet uses in China. Recently, intensive contacts in Hong Kong have resulted in a co-authored book on Hong Kong Pop culture, and one forthcoming on youth in China. In all this, I work closely with research assistants for many days and months. This makes new friends, but also enriches research, adding complexity, inserting doubts, and generating better questions.

In fact, with each statement about China, its inverse pops up. Chinese care more about their family? I doubt it, thinking about some of my friends' complex family problems and eventual escape. China is deeply Confucian? More Chinese are guided by Taiwanese pop and Korean drama. Journalists may dislike nuances, and politicians prefer clarity. Yet, I value doubt. It enables my friendships, it allows me to place people outside their cultural frame. I doubt my friends' Chineseness as much as my own Dutchness.

Writers of popular books thrive on fixed cultural ideas: name cards offered with two hands, the head of a fish facing the door, and personal relations so important that a Chinese term is needed: *guanxi*. I wish to protest! Such assertions harden cultural differences, rendering personal engagement more difficult.

Instead, I have learnt that national cultures matter less than one might expect. My Beijing friends get up in the morning with questions like 'What to wear today,' 'Should I quit my job,' 'What to eat tonight,' 'Am I still in love'... This may be disappointingly mundane, but beyond the exoticizing orientalist gaze, China proves gezellig, or convivial.

This mundane observation also relates to my research. Conviviality seems pivotal for successful cooperation, as it brings trust, commitment and fun. Joint research relies on individuals, not institutions. Conviviality is an underestimated factor, and it depends on people, much less on culture. This may inspire future research: How can we, with our Chinese colleagues, move beyond simplistic East versus West binaries, and think culture as contingent and relational?