

Editors' Introduction

On 22 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. The ongoing war has not only brought devastation to the region, but has also profoundly impacted the international community. The UK has strongly denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine, joining the United States and other countries in Europe and around the world in attempts to isolate Russia politically and economically, creating a geopolitical stand-off reminiscent of the 20th century Cold War. These developments have put a spotlight on how Chinese political leadership will choose to approach this new situation, navigating its relations with Russia, as well as with the UK, US, and other NATO members. The war in Ukraine may well exacerbate already heightened Sino-Western tensions and increase anxiety about cross-straits relations in Asia.

Following the outbreak of war, the *British Journal of Chinese Studies* issued a call for position papers, asking the Chinese studies academic community to lend its expertise to reflecting upon these issues. The submissions we received focused on two crucial questions. The first concerns how best to understand the PRC government's position on the war in Ukraine. The PRC government can be notoriously opaque, with China watchers reading into ambiguously phrased policy statements, exaggerated propaganda pieces and, at times, meaningful silences, to interpret and anticipate PRC actions. Because of this difficulty, commentators on China's position often resort to simplistic binary thinking, adopting a dangerous "us versus them" narrative reminiscent of Cold War mentalities. Such a narrative, while potent for achieving certain political ends, only serves to muddle the picture further. The papers solicited for this call demonstrate how to read between the lines of PRC statements on the war and China's relationship with Russia, while looking to Chinese just war theories and international engagement with China in other political arenas – such as on human rights issues – as important background, to enrich both our understanding of the PRC's position on the Ukraine war and advocate more efficacious forms of diplomatic communication.

What other Chinese voices can we amplify that provide complex and alternative perspectives to the war in Ukraine? This was the second question addressed by contributors. Here the problem of censorship in Mainland China weighs heavily, with social media raised as a potent tool for accessing trends in public opinion that depart from official PRC government lines. Of course, Chinese heritage communities are found all over the world as well, and these communities have had varied responses to the Ukraine war and China's role in the ongoing geopolitical crisis it has fostered. Situating Chinese studies through a global lens in this way allows for an appreciation of the diversity of Chinese heritage communities and their interests, while also revealing how disparate socio-political and cultural contexts can shape alternative worldviews.

With the turn of the new year, as of January 2023, sadly Russia's invasion of Ukraine carries on unabated. The position papers published in this volume offer crucial background and analysis for Chinese perspectives on the war. Yet many questions remain, including how the war in Ukraine – with the disruption of academic exchanges, the displacement of scholars in the region, and politically motivated censorship – has and will shape Chinese studies itself.

The five essays in response to our call for papers in this issue are preceded by four excellent research articles by early career researchers. Opening this issue in the Year of the Rabbit is Fei Huang's piece on stay-at-home fathers (SAHFs), which was the winning paper of the 2022 BACS ECR prize. Part of her PhD research at the University of Westminster, Fei Huang's article investigates the discourse of masculinity embodied by SAHFs in TV dramas, providing a new perspective to academic debates about the cultural production of gender and hierarchy in contemporary China. Her analysis focuses on three popular TV programmes (*Marriage Battle*, *A Little Reunion*, and *Super Dad and Super Kids*) and

reveals a paradox at the heart of the media representation of stay-at-home fathers who seem to embody a new model of caring and sensitive familial masculinity while sustaining patriarchal ideologies. Congratulations, Fei Huang, on a prize-winning paper!

Sheng Qu, runner-up in the 2021 ECR prize competition, also focuses on Chinese TV shows. Specifically, his paper explores the ways in which China's reality talent shows have rearticulated dream narratives surrounding the Chinese Dream discourse. His analysis is framed within the ideological connotations of this discourse and revolves around a "public interest" talent show called *Chinese Dream Show*. Employing discourse analysis, Qu argues that the show narrates dream-realising stories that satisfy the needs for both political correctness and market interests.

While Huang and Qu both focus on contemporary China, the other two articles take a historical approach. Ling-chieh Chen's piece focuses on China's first state-organised nationwide postal censorship during World War I, which may have been the first time that mail was subjected to censorship in China. Chen's research, based on the Diplomatic Archives, establishes how the nationwide postal censorship was implemented and how it impacted the public during the war. He argues that the censorship was not only regarded as a strategy to prevent information leakage but was also a useful political and diplomatic tool. Lance Pursey takes us further into the past with his exploration of the Liao court's "imperial itinerance" which saw it moving around a number of urban centres all labelled "capitals" in a loosely seasonal pattern. Based on a detailed examination of the frequency and purpose of imperial visits by the Liao court, Pursey argues that, despite their naming, none of these capitals can be considered to have been primary. Instead, the Liao court exercised "urban ambivalence", defined as a selective attitude to the role of capitals in statecraft, inviting us to question our assumptions about the roles of cities and the diversity of imperial culture in Chinese history.

We hope you enjoy this latest instalment of the *British Journal of Chinese Studies*, free of charge and fully open access thanks to financial support by the British Association for Chinese Studies and voluntary labour by part of our editorial and production teams, with special thanks to Mariane Bignotto for her continued support and the most efficient and beautiful pdf production!

Gerda Wielander and Christopher Foster (guest editor)