

## PREFACE

This book grew out of some years spent living and working in China. There I experienced the complexities, challenges, frustrations and richness of communication, affection and work across differences of various kinds. One does not have to go to other places for such experiences, although it helps. But at moments I also stumbled across what was not really recognisable, despite the threads of similitude upon which one draws. (I am not referring here to any acts of abuse, which often seem strangely cross-cultural.) These in a sense shocking moments offered a glimpse not so much of another world as of the vast cloudy constructions of one's own collective universe.

While in China I worked for the Australian Government. One of my tasks was to regularly raise matters of human rights with officials in relevant Chinese ministries. These were strange encounters in quite a different way, and some time after returning to Australia I decided to reflect on the questions that they raised for me. This book grew, first as a doctoral dissertation, out of those questions. In some ways it is a continuation of conversations with friends, colleagues and interlocutors that took place in China, Australia and elsewhere – it is at least written as an offering in a larger conversation and a moment in a longer exploration.

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my father Leslie, whose way of being in the world was perhaps an early inspiration for it.

