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NO BORDERS

JOURNEYS ACROSS ISLANDS AND CONTINENTS

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JOURNEYS ACROSS ISLANDS AND CONTINENTS

WANG GUNGWU



Australian National University

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Dedicated to my Wang family,
whom Margaret also loved,
and all of whom loved her dearly



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The Australian National University acknowledges, celebrates and pays our respects to the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people of the Canberra region and to all First Nations Australians on whose traditional lands we meet and work, and whose cultures are among the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

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Reminders

What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present

TS Eliot, Four Quartets

名不正，则言不顺

《论语：子路》

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Foreword

As the Director of the Australian Centre in the World at ANU, it is a great honour to introduce the autobiography of one of this university's most impactful scholars. Wang Gungwu came to ANU in 1967 as Chair of Far Eastern History. Known for his work on pre-modern China and Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, Professor Wang spent his first years at ANU studying developments in mainland China, where the Cultural Revolution had recently broken out. Professor Wang stayed at the ANU until 1986 as Head of the Department of Far Eastern History and Director of the Research of Pacific Studies, building the university's strength as a national hub for China Studies.

From 1986 to 1995, Professor Wang served as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong and then Director of East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore from 1997 to 2007. Among his many contributions to intellectual life, he has been a longstanding member of the editorial board of *The China Journal*, the world's top-ranked China Studies journal, and a flagship publication of the ANU.

Professor Wang's scholarship has illuminated centuries of Chinese history, most notably the different experiences of overseas Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia.

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His autobiography shows us how much his personal experience has shaped his scholarship and insights. Wang lived through Asia's twentieth and twenty-first century dramatic upheavals and transformations – from colonialism and decolonisation to war and revolution, and the making of Southeast Asia.

Reading *No Borders* is to accompany Wang on a lifelong journey across Asia's shifting borders and to see how these experiences enlarged the moral and intellectual horizons of a great thinker. Along the way, Wang learned many languages: English, Malay and multiple Chinese dialects, which enrich his scholarly observations with context, perspective and empathy. His achievements are testimony to the importance of studying other languages and cultures – a scholarly enterprise that has sadly lost too much cachet in recent decades.

His autobiography is a meditation on belonging and identity across Asia's shifting borders. It infuses scholarly insights with personal reflections. Many of us know Wang Gungwu as a historian, public thinker and university leader, but in these pages we get to know him as a student, son, migrant, colleague, husband and father. Despite the displacement, personal struggles and political disappointments Wang experienced, he writes with the same measured calmness and balance that characterise his scholarship.

Wang's years of study and teaching across continents, friendships formed across cultures, and sustained engagement with Asia's changing political landscape have shaped a worldview grounded in humility and historical perspective. Travelling with Wang Gungwu on his remarkable life journey, we learn from

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someone who has devoted his life to the study of history. Wang also shows us how to live thoughtfully and meaningfully as history unfolds.

At a moment when many societies are turning inward – when anxiety and division are testing our sense of identity and belonging – Wang Gungwu's life reminds us that identity does not fit neatly within rigid political or ethnic boundaries. Heritage matters, but it is enriched by connections across the boundaries that too often separate human beings from one another.

Prof Benjamin Hillman

Director, Australian Centre on China in the World, ANU

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