

The Structure where China Watchers Operate

Continuities and Ruptures in Knowledge Production about China

Abstract

The historical legacy of European colonialism affected Brazil's approach to China. European orientalism became Brazilian orientalism. It is not easy to decolonize the orientalist legacy in Brazil. The example of Costa Rica adds nuance to the complication of inherited orientalism in various Latin American countries. However, knowledge production about China can either be continued or ruptured. We see the contrast between the politicalization of China watching during the Cold War with de-politicalization in the post-Cold War era where knowledge production about China in the USA, Russia, South Korea, and Hong Kong experienced ruptures.

Keywords: Decolonization of knowledge, politicalization, de-politicalization, China watching, Brazil, Costa Rica

Individual and institutional agency affects the epistemology of China, but the other direction can also be true: the collective epistemology of China could affect the development of individuals and institutions. Epistemology can be sustained or ruptured in different contexts. Chapter six begins with examples of continuity via three related forces: the legacy of colonialism, traditional culture, and institutionalized bureaucracy.

First, concerning the legacy of colonialism, in this chapter, we will summarize several examples that have been examined in earlier chapters. We will also particularly examine the case of Brazil because we can see the influence of the three forces at play therein. We will see how the historical legacy of European colonialism affected Brazil's approach to China. European orientalism became Brazilian orientalism. Even contemporary Brazilian scholars are conscious of the problem of orientalism; they sometimes still voluntarily or involuntarily reinforce orientalism in their work.

Second, concerning traditional culture, Brazil's strong Christian culture has affected its intellectuals' tendency to understand Confucianism through the lenses of Christianity, which ultimately leads to inaccurate interpretations of Confucianism.

Third, concerning institutionalized bureaucracy, we will see how the educational system's appropriation of Asia and China in its curriculum could become institutionalized and thus complex to change. In addition to Brazil, I show the

example of Costa Rica, a Central American country, to add nuance to the complication of inherited orientalism in various Latin American countries.

After the continuity of epistemologies, I move on to examine the ruptures of epistemologies. During the Cold War era, China watching and Chinese studies were politicalized. This stands in contrast with the post-Cold War era when Chinese studies had more open and fertile ground to prosper. One may argue that the de-politicalization or normalization of Chinese studies and China watching in the years following the Cold War altered the epistemological approaches and methods of understanding China. This tendency will be demonstrated using the United States of America (USA), South Korea, Hong Kong, and Russia as examples. In terms of method and data, I mostly use Shih's oral history data as sources to discuss the situations of continuities and ruptures of knowledge productions. Shih's data further inspired me to check the publications of André Bueno to know more about the development of Brazil's sinology. I also use my own new interviews with young and mid-career scholars in Costa Rica and Chile to enrich the discussion. All things considered, the conversation in this chapter will prepare us for the seventh chapter, which will address the resurgence of politicalization in our current times.

6.1 Hard to eradicate orientalism

At the outset of this book, we mentioned the European expeditions to the Orient that resulted in the birth of European Chinese studies, thus giving Europe certain advantages in developing the knowledge realm. The 'China watchers' of the era were not strictly academically trained sinologists but consisted of travelers, geographers, and missionaries. In addition to documenting their discoveries in Asia, the missionaries' main task was to evangelize. Their scholarly or non-scholarly work regarding China mainly was for the purpose of explaining the cultural differences between Eastern and Western beliefs with the ultimate objective of evangelizing the Chinese. The origin and foundation of sinology or the more broadly defined oriental studies are rooted in colonialism. Even though there have been efforts to denounce orientalist discourses on Asia and China, it is not easy to altogether jettison the epistemological traditions upon which China or Chinese studies were founded (Bueno 2021). I do not try to argue that all imperialist or colonial influences necessarily lead to negative impacts. But the issue of concern here is whether we can develop China studies using local theories, concepts, methods, and talents to speak to local needs on their own terms. In academia, this is now known as decolonization of knowledge production.

Decolonization of knowledge production should have come with the collapse of many colonial powers in the 20th century, although reality speaks to the opposite.

We see contrasting examples around the world. Take Central Asia for instance: as we have seen in Chapter four, the Russian or Soviet legacies still influence the development of oriental studies in the region deeply. To this day, whether any Central Asian sinology exists at all is still a subject of heated debate. Senior experts tend to think that there is none. There have been a lot of voices about decolonizing Central Asia from Russia, particularly after the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. This desire is not limited to the domain of politics but is also presented in various aspects of life. Academically, there have been voices calling for studying Central Asia's foreign policies and international relations in a decolonized way (Dadabaev 2022), meaning that each Central Asian state can exercise its agency and power to navigate international politics without always being subject to Russian influence or the baggage of historical relations with Russia. Academic writings should talk about Central Asian countries' agency in global politics. Similarly, the aspiration of some China watchers to form Central Asia's own school of sinology, despite the multitude of challenges and debates, can be seen as part of the overall Central Asian desire for greater autonomy and capacity to understand China on their own terms and for their own needs.

Kemper and Kalinovsky (2015) observe that Kazakh archaeologists, who had received training at academic centers in the old Leningrad, gradually developed their own research projects in Kazakhstan. This led not only to the birth of a Kazakh school of Orientalists/archaeologists in Alma-Ata (today's Almaty) but also to a reinterpretation of certain aspects of Kazakhstan's history (Kemper and Kalinovsky 2015). Sinology, archaeology, and other fields are lumped together in oriental studies, but sinologists in Kazakhstan have not achieved what their archaeologists have.

In contrast to Central Asia, we may find the field or sub-field of Chinese-African studies more capable of decolonizing knowledge production about China. Scholars in and beyond Africa have started to use the lens of African players to look at contemporary relations between China and African countries. So, we see researchers writing about Africa's cooperative projects, such as those under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) banner from the African perspective, and talking about African actors playing a vital role in initiating and framing cooperation with China to garner Chinese financing and investment (e.g., Chen 2020; Chiyemura, Gambino, and Zajontz 2023). Moreover, African players are depicted as active players in resisting Chinese influence (Pepa 2020; Alden and Large 2018; Mohan and Lampert 2013). Chiyemura, Gambino, and Zajontz's 2023 paper further cautions against a reductionist conceptualization of African agency to the vague notion of state or political elites. There is, in fact, a polymorphy of practices through which various African actors, both state and non-state, influence the terms and conditions as well as the design and construction of infrastructure projects.

In addition to Confucius Institutes (CIs), which tend to impart only positive knowledge about China (Benabdallah 2020; Aukia 2025; Gukurume 2025),¹ there are some African institutions that have taken up the role of imparting knowledge about China with a much more analytical and reflective approach to understand China's presence in Africa (Hoeymissen 2021). For example, at the University of Botswana, there is an undergraduate program in Chinese studies different from the university's CI. This program is the only Chinese studies program in Botswana, and it uses local resources to hire staff to teach and work for the program. There are even more local than international teaching staff in this program (Bolaane 2025).

In order to show respect for the African lens, many analysts and researchers have also started to use the term 'Africa–China' instead of 'China–Africa' in their writings (Zheng and Carayannis 2023). For instance, at the Wit Centre for Journalism of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, there was a Wits China Africa Reporting Project that aimed to improve the quality of reporting on African and Africa–China issues by training journalists. The project's name was changed to the Africa–China Reporting Project in 2016 to emphasize that its home is in Africa and its focus is on Africa (Website of Africa China Reporting Project 2024; Zheng and Carayannis 2023). This is in contrast to the locally known 'brown envelope' journalism financed and trained by China to steer African journalists to write about China in predominantly positive ways (Aukia 2025).

Compared with Africa, Latin America appears to struggle more with decolonization of knowledge production about China. Maria Montt Strabucchi (2023), a Chilean historian specializing in Latin American studies, has examined how contemporary Latin American novels depict China. Her research reveals that authors such as Colombian Santiago Gamboa (2002, 2008) and Uruguayan Gabriel Pervoni (2013a, 2013b, 2014) have incorporated themes related to China into their works. These literary pieces often aim to connect with the Latin American commercial market by emphasizing both the differences and similarities between China and their own cultures. Moreover, these narratives frequently reinforce a Latin American viewpoint shaped by orientalist views, presenting China as an exotic figure while recognizing its rise as a significant global economic force (Strabucchi 2023). In the following, I use the example of Brazil to highlight the problems in Latin America.

¹ There are around sixty-two CIs in forty-seven African countries, with Kenya and South Africa having the most (Aukia 2025).

6.1.1 Brazil: From the Iberian to the American worldview

Brazil, the largest country in Latin America, has inherited its orientalism from Europeans or, as Longobardi (2022) coins it, “an Iberian worldview.” Chinese studies in Brazil grew out of the context of European exploration of the world. Brazil was ruled by Emperor Pedro II during the period entitled ‘*Segundo Reinado*’ (‘Second Reign’ 1840–1889). During the time of the Portuguese empire, Brazil was part of a vast network of intercolonial trade and cultural contacts that connected Europe, America, Africa, and Asia (Bueno 2023). Pedro II himself was a proto-scholar and orientalist. He inspired the interest of Brazilian intellectuals in ‘Eastern’ civilizations but with orientalist views inherited from Portugal. In the 19th century, the discussion about China in Brazil was centered on the issue of Chinese immigration. Intellectuals had different views and vigorously debated the merits and problems that would arise from Chinese immigration to Brazil. These intellectuals were not strictly sinologists per se, but they used what they could gather at that time, from travelers’ testimonies about China and the Chinese to reports about Chinese laborers in various countries to substantiate their positions in the debate (Bueno 2021). It was not uncommon to see orientalist perspectives about China in these discussions.

Fast-forward to the 20th century: in 1908, Japan brought migrants to Brazil and installed the largest Japanese colony in the world (Lee 2018). As Japan and China were in conflict, this stimulated the production of publications on the international relations of China. Again, these were not strictly professional sinological works (Bueno 2021).

During the Second World War, Japan aligned itself with Germany. In 1944, Song Mei Ling (宋美齡), wife of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) even went to Brazil to ask for help in their fight against both the Japanese and the Chinese communists (Bueno 2023). In that context, the Brazilian public became aware of China again and was politically sympathetic to the anti-communist ideology. Chinese culture began to be known to the Brazilian public. For instance, the translations of Lin Yutang’s (林語堂, 1895–1976) works were popular among the public (Lin 1945, 1958; Bueno 2021). Lin was then a world-famous author and played a unique role in explaining Chinese culture to the West. Nearly all of Lin Yutang’s works were translated into Portuguese by the publisher, Pongetti, which was quite successful and sold out of copies very fast. Lin supported a Christianized and anti-communist vision while attempting to explain traditional China to the West (Bueno 2023). This has led to his success in Brazil. We will return to this issue in Section 6.2.

In the wake of the end of the Second World War, Brazil followed the Americans in rejecting communism and recognized the Republic of China (ROC) on the island of Taiwan as the official representative of China (Longobardi 2022). However, Brazilian governments did not support Chinese studies, believing that this was

a domain reserved only for diplomats. Nevertheless, this did not stop individual Brazilian intellectuals from venturing to the Chinese mainland to investigate what went on there themselves (Bueno 2021).

Academic fields and educational programs in Brazil have been late in including China in the subject of studies. It is only with the contemporary importance of Brazil's international relations with China that China studies start to emerge in different disciplinary studies (Longobardi 2022). Adventurous intellectuals who went to China without Brazilian governmental support in the early days eventually came up with a so-called China-as-Model approach that impacted Brazil's development of sinology. This approach is a practical one, contending that if China was able to lift its country to achieve better development, Brazil, which had similar socioeconomic conditions, could adjust the Chinese model to help Brazil develop (Bueno 2021). These intellectuals are not professional sinologists because Brazilian universities did not have regular courses on China at the time, and most translated work was from Europe. These individuals, nonetheless, did their best to share their observations in China and proposed ideas for Brazil's own development. This practical approach has affected the development of Brazil's own sinology (Bueno 2021).

André Bueno is an important Brazilian sinologist who introduced Confucianism to Brazil (Ciglić 2016). My description of Brazil's situation relies largely on André Bueno's publications because he appears to be the dominant figure in detailing the development of Chinese studies in Brazil. In Bueno's view, while the China-as-Model approach is well intended, it suffers from an epistemological problem. As Bueno (2021: 558) observes,

Many scholars involved in this idea of "China-as-Model" continue, in a way, to reproduce orientalist stereotypes, believing that they can understand China through literature and theories of Western experts, without needing to learn the Chinese language or analyze the studies done by the Chinese themselves.

Orientalist perspectives are pervasive because Brazilian intellectuals draw their inspiration from translated works from North America and elsewhere without necessarily having a profound grasp of Chinese culture, society, and practices (Bueno 2021; Longobardi 2022). This often leads to the reproduction of orientalist views from the source countries of the translations. Henry Kissinger's (2013) work, for example, is widely read by Brazilian intellectuals, even though he was not a sinologist.

As Bueno notes,

The dominant assumption of this theoretical line is that China, as an epistemological object, must respond to Brazilian demands in a specific way, without manifesting an active attitude. These stances provoke countless disappointments for the followers of the

China-as-Model since occasionally China “does not behave” according to its forecasts and analyses. (Bueno 2021: 558)

There have been reformed efforts by Brazilian scholars to suggest that they should prioritize the study of original Chinese sources in their analysis. This does not mean that researchers in this approach would abandon knowledge from the West. Instead, the aim is to develop a new ecology of knowledge that combines Western (in this case, Brazilian) and truly Chinese experiences and views. As the focus is on reading Chinese thoughts directly, it mitigates the problem of being mediated by second-hand orientalist productions. In this vein, it is believed that researchers can find real ‘Chineseness’ in knowledge. Bueno (2021) laments, however, that even though individual scholars have sought to provide ideas to help Brazilian sinology escape the Western orientalist influence, they have not been entirely successful. In universities, the structures and design of the curriculum are still run by professionals influenced by embedded colonialist thinking. Teachers and students are hindered by the system and cannot find creative space for healthy Chinese studies to thrive (Bueno 2021). We will return to this problem later in this chapter. This sub-section has shown readers the pervasiveness of orientalist views in Brazil’s attempt to understand China. The sources of orientalist views are not single. It started with an Iberian influence and added a layer of American influence in modern times. In the following, I intend to show another layer, the traditional culture of Brazil, and how that influences Brazilian intellectuals’ (wrong) approach to understanding China.

6.2 Brazilian imaginary of Confucianism

Another obstacle for Brazil’s Chinese studies or China watching to decolonize truly is that Brazil’s intellectuals and public have projected too much of their history, culture, and contexts into their views of China. A notable example is how Brazil’s traditional Catholic Christian culture has affected Brazilian intellectuals’ ways of perceiving Confucianism. Brazilian intellectuals are prone to use a kind of religious imaginary to see Confucius and Confucianism. In reality, this means that Confucius has been treated as a kind of biblical Old Testament prophet who knows God but does not know Jesus. Primary ideas of Confucianism are often compared with Christianity in a positive way, as if they share commonalities (Bueno 2015).

As noted earlier, Lin Yutang’s work was translated into Portuguese and was well received in Brazil. To name two examples, in 1945, Lin Yutang’s Chinese work *Wisdom from China and India* was translated into *Sabedoria de China e Índia*. In 1958, his work *The Wisdom of Confucius* was translated into *A sabedoria de Confúcio*. Both books introduce the Chinese culture and thoughts to Brazilians. One of

the reasons why Lin's translated work was popular was that Lin himself was a Christian. This fact was crucial because it tapped into the Brazilian mentality to see Chinese Confucius and Confucianism as something comparable to the Brazilian religious imaginary. The Chinese were believed to be 'proto-Christians' who would become true Christians one day (Bueno 2015).

In addition, as noted previously, Chiang Kai-shek had sought to elicit support from Brazil in his fight against the Communist Chinese. Around the time when Lin Yutang's work began to be published in Portuguese, a Chinese Catholic priest, Kao Se-Tsien (or Gao Shiqian, 高師謙), also known as Father João Batista (Jean Baptiste), visited Brazil. His Catholic priesthood gave him even more authority than other Chinese figures in the Brazilian context to sustain the claimed linkage between Confucianism, Christianity, and the cause of Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Republic of China (ROC) in order to fight against atheist communism. However, the eventual victory of the communist Chinese on the Chinese mainland rendered Kao's efforts a failure. The Brazilian conception of 'China' thus became a failure both in a political and religious sense (Bueno 2015).

In the 1960s, Bueno (2015) explained that there was a time when Confucius and other Chinese philosophers were picked up by some Brazilians again, and with a different kind of religious imaginary. In the hippie movement in the West, some Brazilians, along with other Westerners, looked into Eastern religions for inspiration. Chinese Daoist philosopher Laozi (老子) and Indian mysticism were lumped together to become a kind of 'New Age guru' (Bueno 2015). Some Brazilians saw these Asian figures as a counterforce to the Catholic institution or an alternative belief. Although a different kind of reasoning was used to understand philosophy from the vaguely conceived East, the result is similarly erroneous, barring Brazilians from truly understanding Chinese philosophies, cultures, and religions. This is overall not conducive to the development of the academic discipline of sinology in Brazil.

6.3 Further obstacles: institutionalized educational systems

Although individual scholars have attempted to offer suggestions to help Brazilian sinology break free from the Western orientalist influences and wrong epistemological lens, Bueno (2021) regrettably notes that their efforts have not been entirely successful. Professional administrators and managers with imperialist ideologies still oversee the structures and curriculum design of universities. The system prevents educators and learners from finding innovative spaces that foster the growth of healthy Chinese studies (Bueno 2021).

Other Latin American universities face the same challenge. David Ibarra, a professor trained in China and teaching in Costa Rica, expressed that China is not an

important subject for his country. Due to the university's structure and curriculum, he can only teach general history, nothing specific about China. This curriculum has been handed down from earlier generations and it is difficult to change it.

The immigrant-receiving country of Costa Rica started to receive Chinese immigrants around the 19th century (Mok, Villaneuva, and Esquivel 2013). In the city of Puntarenas, which was the entry port for travelers arriving by ship before there was an international airport in Costa Rica, Hilda Chen Apuy Espinoza (1923–2017) was born the daughter of a Chinese immigrant and a local Costa Rican woman. At a time when it was difficult for a young female to study abroad, she managed to do precisely that and was at one point cultivated at *El Colegio de México* (The College of Mexico), where she learned about general oriental studies. At that time, the Orient for Latin Americans covered not just Asia but also Africa and the Middle East—in other words, anything that was ‘oriental’ from the Latin American geographical perspective. One of Chen's students, Rina Cáceres, later became known for his scholarship in the study of Latin America and the Middle East. David Ibarra was a student of Rina Cáceres, who asked him to focus on China. So, in a way, one could say that David Ibarra was one of the first generation of Costa Ricans who really started to attend to China. After Ibarra's master's study in the same *El Colegio de México* (2009–2011), he went back to Costa Rica to teach. Later, Ibarra continued his PhD at Beijing Normal University in China, specializing in contemporary Chinese history (2014–2017). Upon his return to Costa Rica in 2018, he began teaching at the University of Costa Rica (*Universidad de Costa Rica*), where Hilda Chen Apuy Espinoza had taught before. The syllabus for teaching general history and Asian history has remained similar from Espinoza's era to Ibarra's (Ibarra 2024). In the teaching-focused university, he has to follow the structure and design of existing studies. There is not much chance for him to teach about China.

In terms of research, David Ibarra has worked with colleagues such as Lai Sai Acon-Chan, a professor with a Chinese immigrant background, to study Chinese immigration to Costa Rica (e.g., Soto-Quirós, Chan, and Ibarra 2023). He has also attended events organized by the language-focused CI in his university as well as the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (*Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales*, FLACSO), a regional international governmental academic organization headquartered in Costa Rica. This region-wide organization has cooperated with Chinese institutions, such as the Institute of Latin American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, to facilitate exchanges for scholars in China and Latin American countries. In 2024, for example, the two institutions co-published an edited volume titled *China y América Latina y el Caribe: Relaciones Multidimensionales y Multinivel* (China and Latin America and the Caribbean: Multidimensional and Multilevel Relations) to explore contemporary relations. But beyond scholarly exchanges and research publications on Chinese immigrants and

contemporary relations, Costa Rica has not developed research outputs centered truly on Chinese studies per se (Ibarra 2024). We will return to this issue in the concluding section of this book.

While the cases of Brazil and Costa Rica are used to show how epistemology can be sustained via inherited orientalism, traditions, and institutionalized educational systems, the following section turns to examples of how epistemology can be ruptured, as in the cases of the US and Russia.

6.4 Ruptures: from Cold War politicalization to post-Cold War de-politicalization of China watching

Politicalization of China watching and Chinese studies has occurred in many countries, although the exact period has varied in different countries. At the outset of this book, I mentioned that the term ‘China watching’ may have a negative connotation due to its Cold War legacy. During the Cold War, the US dedicated a great deal of resources to watch the communist world, including China and the Soviet Union. The methods and purposes of such China watching can hardly be termed serious sinology. But contemporary Chinese studies and sinology cannot be completely separated from that era of China watching either, as people did move between the political world, academia, and journalism. Knowledge about China was generated and exchanged between these professions. In John Gittings’ (1972) recollection of what happened in Hong Kong during that era, he noted that the former British colony was the center of information gathering about the Chinese mainland.

The gathering of intelligence has been almost a monopoly of the British and the American, at whose tables the diplomatic China-watchers of other nationalities gather for crumbs. In a way all too familiar elsewhere in the Third World, there has been a considerable over-lapping between the journalists, academics and intelligence experts in Hong Kong, in a supple and informal relationship well lubricated by the funds for the subsidy of institutions, publications and free excursions. “Who else is he working for?” is the natural question to ask about the China-watcher. (Gittings 1972: 416)

In that era, both China watching and Chinese studies were simply politicalized. This was not only in the US but also in countries that had close relations with Washington. For example, during the Cold War, South Korea’s security strategy, political development, and international relations were strongly influenced by Washington. Most prominent South Korean publications on China at the time focused on understanding communist China and aspects of its international relations that could affect Korea (Moon 2007).

In Russia, which has a longer history than the USA, politicalization was also the main feature of Chinese studies. The conquest and assimilation of Siberia and Central Asia into the Russian Empire meant that the empire needed knowledge to understand these areas. So, funding was provided to finance geographical expeditions, usually headed by well-educated military men such as Vladimir Obruchev (1863–1956) and Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim (1867–1951)² to explore Russia's relationship with the East. These talented military men were known for their geographic, ethnographic, political, and economic analyses of these faraway lands through their military expeditions. Thus, the concept of being interdisciplinary was already present at that time but it was understood as combined geographical, economic, military, political, and ethnological knowledge about the East (Voskressenski 2014). These military men may be considered as proto-orientalists.

Previously, when we discussed Central Asia, we noted that Chinese studies, as part of oriental studies, has been treated by the Russians as a kind of practical knowledge needed for diplomatic purposes to help the country's foreign policy actors understand how to deal with non-Western societies diplomatically and commercially. When the Soviet Union was created, its political ambitions to expand the Russian sphere of influence to Eastern Europe, Mongolia, China, and later Vietnam, Korea, and Cuba further resulted in the development of non-Western studies. In Chapter four, I mentioned that the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the Leningrad State University, which is the current-day Saint Petersburg University, is where Chinese Studies in Russia was founded. Sinology was also developed at major geographical centers in Moscow, Novosibirsk, Chita, and Vladivostok (Voskressenski 2014). Kuznetsov (2014) also notes that during the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) decided to increase the number of students who could study Chinese in Soviet universities because the USSR hoped to send them to China to help in China's modernization.

Soviet sinology has been highly affected by the political ideology of its time (Kirby 1975; Pisarev 2014). Pisarev (2014) notes that Lenin reformulated Marx's views on socio-economic formations and laid the theoretical foundations for sinology.

² Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim was working for the Russian Empire but he later became Finland's most famous military leader and statesman. His expedition in Xinjiang inspired the development of an early generation of sinologists in Finland. His work has also been translated and published in China and commented on by Chinese scholars. For example, the Heilongjiang Education Publisher published an edited book called *Finnish Explorer Mannerheim's Xinjiang Expedition and Research* (芬兰探险家马达汉新疆考察研究) in 2007 and Xinjiang People's Publisher released a translated book called *Collection of Mannerheim's Expedition and Research in Western China* (马达汉中国西部考察调研报告合集) and *Personal Statements of Finnish Explorer Who Went to Western China Hundred Years Ago: Documentary of Mannerheim's Xinjiang Expedition* (百年前走进中国西部的芬兰探险家自述:马达汉新疆考察纪行) in 2009.

According to Lenin, early-20th-century China's mode of production was feudalism (Pisarev 2014). In order to modernize China, Lenin believed that Chinese society needed a bourgeois revolution against their feudal landlords. All Soviet scholars were forced to use Lenin's thinking and anti-feudal approach to understand the historical realities of China, which eventually proved to be a failure (Pisarev 2014).

Like the US and South Korea, with the Soviet Union, we may check the development of Mongolia, which was not formally part of the Soviet Union but had a close relationship with it during the 20th century. Mongolia was a satellite state of the former USSR. After it gained independence from China in 1921, Mongolia established a communist government with strong support from the USSR. As oriental studies started to grow in the Soviet Union, Mongolians who wanted to learn about China also went to the USSR for training. Noosgoi Altantsetseg, a professor at the National University of Mongolia, was trained in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the Leningrad State University. Chojjamts Battsetseg, another scholar at the National University of Mongolia, was trained at the National University of Uzbekistan, when Uzbekistan was part of the USSR. Battsetseg's studies at the National University of Uzbekistan were formed in cooperation with the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Academy of Sciences in Mongolia. When the relationship between the PRC and the Soviet Union gradually worsened, Mongolia had tense relations with China too. Hence, at the beginning of the 1970s, it was not possible for Mongolian academics to be trained in the PRC at all (Altantsetseg 2022).

De-politicalization of Chinese studies came around the end of the Cold War in the US, which opened up space for researchers to work on topics that were not solely for political purposes. Studies about China were highly influenced by the general advancement of social sciences in the US too (Mertha 2024). This is not to say that the old China hands went obsolete. But new generations of China experts have more freedom to choose topics of their own interests. The development of modern social sciences, with the birth of many new innovative methodological tools and software that could be used to study both contemporary and ancient China, has also helped these new generations of researchers to create interesting and new perspectives on China. The opening of the Chinese market and society to the outside world further expanded the opportunities for field trips in China. On the one hand, the field is developing well in the US. On the other hand, some American scholars feel that the field has become so specialized that it paradoxically leads scholars to see the 'trees' well but not the 'forest' (O'Brien 2006, 2011, 2018; Mertha 2024).

Meanwhile, in South Korea, Seoul's desire to improve relations with communist countries after the end of the Cold War spurred new interest in China and prompted further development of the field too. The US rapprochement with China in the 1970s encouraged Koreans to further develop the discipline, resulting in

more China-related research publications and the establishment of Chinese studies in Korean universities. But in the 1970s, most Korean researchers still did not have good first-hand data, so they relied primarily on foreign publications from places such as the US or Japan, sorting, revising, and translating them into Korean knowledge production about China. At that time, due to the limited access to the Chinese mainland, Taiwan was the alternative place for watching China (Shim 2023). From 1979 onward, South Korea witnessed the opening up of China to the world and the formal establishment of diplomatic relations of the two countries in 1992 (Shim 2023). It prompted a steady stream of rigorous research on China. The problem of lacking first-hand information was solved with the opening up of China. There was no shortage of Korean students who went to China to receive their education in the new generation (Moon 2007). In fact, South Korea and the US share similar challenges in the contemporary era in the sense that scholars might work on excessively narrow topics as a result of over-specialization. While multifaceted apprehension of China and diversification of interests are positive signs of advancement, if there are too many narrow topics, the field becomes too fragmented (Shim 2023).

If we compare the situations in the US and South Korea with those in the Soviet Union and Mongolia, de-politicalization of Chinese studies came later in the USSR. It was only after the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s that less ideology-driven research could be performed. Contemporary Russian sinologists are more interested in understanding the realities of the pre-modern society of China without having to think about the applicability of any theoretical foundation such as the one imposed on Soviet sinologists beforehand (Pisarev 2014). The new political elites and researchers in Russia have relatively aligned views on China's importance, as after the collapse of the Soviet version of socialism, China appears to be the only country that is still largely socialist and able to modernize well (Voskressenski 2014). Sino-Russian relations were normalized. Later, this further evolved into a Russo-Chinese partnership and nowadays there are even discussions about their over-reliance on each other (Voskressenski 2014; Shakhanova 2024).

With this geopolitical transformation, there have been voices calling for a break from traditional methods of research on China and the start of a new kind of integrated field or interdisciplinary research for Russo-Chinese studies, linking international relations, international political economy, and strategic studies (Voskressenski 2014). It is unclear how Chinese studies, which is still quite a traditional discipline in post-Soviet Russia, can meet the modern challenge of becoming more integrated with other disciplines (Voskressenski 2014). Although new generations of Russian scholars have benefited from the advancement of social sciences in general and the relatively more open environment in which to conduct research, they still face an outdated administrative structure that cannot

facilitate an innovative revolution in Chinese studies. Previously, I mentioned Brazil and Costa Rica's challenges in the same domain. Clearly, like in many other places in the world, research funding has constantly been slashed, partly resulting in a brain drain. There are always talented people who would then prefer to move to more profitable or stable professions. Pisarev (2012) lamented that "Russia has lost its status as one of the most active and serious centres of sinology in the world." We will return to these common challenges for Chinese studies in the concluding chapter, Chapter ten of this book. For now, let us summarize this chapter by concluding that politics has partly, although not entirely, driven continuities and ruptures in knowledge production about China in various parts of the world. Of particular concern in this chapter is the politicalization of China watching and Chinese studies. Geopolitical transformation in the second half of the 20th century caused a break in politicalization, allowing the normalization of China watching and Chinese studies. But de-politicalization is not the same as decolonization. In fact, orientalist thinking is still pervasive and is harder to break free from.

In the next chapter, we will witness the return of a new kind of politicalization in the contemporary era. Although it is unlike the Cold War type of politicalization, its emergence and the ensuing securitization of various China-related research and initiatives pose a new challenge to the China-watching business.

Securitization of China Knowledge

Abstract

Securitization is a concept developed by Ole Wæver to examine international politics, known as the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. To apply the concept of securitization in the field of higher education and knowledge production, we see historical examples in Thailand where imparting knowledge about China was disrupted by the state amid a highly anti-communist atmosphere and great suspicion of Chinese education's threat to the Thai nation-building process. In our contemporary era, securitization of knowledge production about China has intensified, particularly in Europe and North America. This is partly related to China's rising uneasy and sometimes conflictual relations with the West and partly related to the increasing authoritarianism and censorship of academic freedom and exchanges in China.

Keywords: Securitization, higher education, China, research security, knowledge security

Chapter seven is another attempt to provide information about the context where the broadly defined China watchers operate and how it has changed in the current era. The primary driver of the new change is securitization. Since many China watchers would feel uneasy talking about this current and widespread issue in public, I have chosen not to use a lot of oral history interviews in this chapter. Fortunately, there are enough media reports and policy papers to support the background information that I plan to present.

My position statement would be relevant in this chapter too, as I have been a scholar working on China in Finland. I have experiences in discussing securitization issues and being asked for opinions in Finland and at the wider EU level. I hear views from university administrators, university leaders, government officials, diplomats, and journalists, as well as broadly defined colleagues, who are researchers in many countries around the world. So, I could have written this chapter from an insider perspective, but that would put many people in potential danger. So, my approach is to write it mostly from a third-person perspective.

To start with the discussion of securitization, I return to something that was left undiscussed in Chapter four when looking at China experts in Central Asia. The career development of Central Asian China watchers is driven by the needs of the countries that offered them chances to advance. Some of them had the opportunity to contribute their views to the country's policymaking. For example,

in Kyrgyzstan, three former foreign ministers (Muratbek Imanaliyev, Kadyrbek Sarbayev, and Erlan Adbyldayev) were sinologists. The current Kazakhstani president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, is also believed to be a sinologist with the ability to speak Mandarin (CABAR 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). The highly respected Kazakhstani sinologist, Konstantin Syroyezhkin, was the main scientific consultant for President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan. In the past, when Tokayev was prime minister, Syroyezhkin gave advice to Tokayev when China negotiated the demarcation of borders with Kazakhstan (Radio Free Europe 2024).

What is striking is the news of Syroyezhkin being arrested by the Kazakh authorities in 2019 and sentenced to ten years in prison on the charge of violating Part I of Article 175 of the Kazakh Criminal Code, which is ‘high treason’ (Radio Free Europe 2019; Grove 2019). This book will not speculate on the intriguing case of Syroyezhkin as this is beyond its scope, but the issue that I try to cope with here is whether this is related to the mounting securitization of China research and knowledge production about China in Kazakhstan as elsewhere in the world.

Syroyezhkin was the author of more than one thousand publications on China and Sino-Kazakhstani relations, written in Russian, Chinese, and English. Oral history interview data revealed his in-depth expertise and experience with China. His views of China are generally believed to be critically grounded in in-depth observations. When Syroyezhkin was arrested in 2019, he was sixty-three years old. The charges were not made public. Local and Western media have speculated that he was accused of passing classified information on to Chinese nationals. A Kazakhstani law adopted in 2017 enables the authorities to strip a person of citizenship for ‘damaging vitally important interests of Kazakhstan’ (Radio Free Europe 2019; Grove 2019). Hence, in addition to his sentence, which would be served in a maximum security prison in Kazakhstan, he was stripped of citizenship. Reports indicated that he would be barred from being in Kazakhstan for five years after he served the sentence. There was a possibility that he would be involuntarily deported to Russia after his release (Radio Free Europe 2019).

In 2024, he was released on parole (Radio Free Europe 2024). He reportedly went back to Almaty after that. Since his release, he has been living with his sister because his own flat was sold while he was behind bars. Since his release and subsequent presidential pardon,¹ he has stayed in Kazakhstan, and there is no indication that he has gone overseas (Orda.kz 2024).

Syroyezhkin is not now employed by the government in any official capacity. As an independent expert, he has been interacting with the public and media

¹ In September 2024, Syroyezhkin received a full pardon from President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. This effectively lifted all remaining penalties from his conviction, erased his criminal record, and restored his civil rights.

instead. For instance, he spoke in-depth about Kazakhstan–China ties, his experiences, and the facts of his case in an interview with a Kazakh news organization in January 2025 (Orda.kz 2025). In these public remarks, Syroyezhkin continues to claim his innocence in relation to the treason accusations and insists that he has never betrayed Kazakhstan. Instead of holding an official position, he now mostly shares his knowledge of China and Central Asia through comments and interviews.

Various rumors and speculations about Syroyezhkin's case also point to the possibility that Syroyezhkin was actually spying for Russia, not China. As there is not enough public information for journalists to report about this case, this news appears mostly in local and regional news (e.g., KazTAG 2024). It is not highly visible internationally except for reports from the *Wall Street Journal* and *Free Radio Europe*. Thomas Grove's (2019) article in the *Wall Street Journal* suggests that this detention was a signal to Beijing from the Kazakhstani political establishment, showing the red flags of what is allowed and not in the country when it comes to China cooperation (CABAR 2019c). It is very difficult to write about this case due to the lack of public information. However, whatever the truth might be, Syroyezhkin's case definitely shows that there is some kind of 'appropriation' of China as risky, and hence any research that has to do with it has the notion of 'risk.' The risk could be so high that it is seen as violating some kind of national security, hence the need to securitize the study and the researcher.

7.1 Appropriation of China as risky

Appropriation of China has been a constant phenomenon throughout history. Even China watchers who are supposed to be neutral have been doing this, consciously or unconsciously (Klotzbücher 2023). In different historical periods, however, China has been appropriated differently. In the 20th century, many European sinologists have approached China because of their interests in Maoism. These sinologists have imagined China as a kind of anti-modernity or alternative modernity, offering answers to the ills of the Western or capitalist societies that these China watchers did not appreciate (Klotzbücher 2023; Holm 2020). Later on, in the late 20th century, when China underwent reforms to open up, China watchers and people working for educational institutions in Europe looked at China as a potential market (Klotzbücher 2023; Lee 2023). A growing materialistically affluent society was imagined and appropriated as 'China' (Klotzbücher 2023). Contemporary courses on China and expertise had been growing in Europe.

In the United States of America (USA), China has been appropriated differently in different historical periods too. There was a plethora of resources for China watching during the Cold War, as noted previously. Many old China hands there

would remember how China was appropriated as a risky option in the McCarthy era. Anti-communist fervor pushed them to show loyalty to the US government by opening displaying hostility towards any communist regime (Wei 2016; Wong 2016a, 2016b). They had to be politically correct in their work for fear of being deemed as communist sympathizers. The post-Cold War era eventually de-politicalized the study of China, giving the younger generation of China watchers more freedom to decide what to study about China and how to talk about China.

Sometimes risks are associated with communism. But at other times, there have also been cases where some sort of racism or fear of the other have pushed China to be seen as risky. The fear about China in a broader context has always been present throughout history in various parts of the world. The fear of the 'yellow peril' is nothing new.

In the more contemporary era and in Central Asia at least, I have noticed that outsiders may find it hard to ask Central Asian scholars to share their views about China. There is some kind of mystical secrecy surrounding 'the discussion about China,' as if 'China' is not public knowledge to be shared easily. Perhaps because most Central Asian states have had no real experience with democracy and freedom of expression, and perhaps because the discussion about China would involve commenting on their respective governments' often opaque handling of China relations, there is a sense of fear and thus a taboo against talking openly about China.

As this book is being written, education on China, and anything that has to do with Chinese studies and China studies, is being seen through the lens of risk again. There is a growing fear that cooperation with Chinese educational partners, involving either individual experts or institutions or both, involves risks of various sorts. The types of risks vary depending on the disciplines involved. They could cover intrusion on academic freedom, increase of (self-)censorship, intellectual property theft, espionage, and other forms of hostility (Baum and Ma 2023). This section does not aim to cover all of these potential risks in detail as there are numerous policy papers, academic articles, and media debates on them. What this book seeks to highlight is the general trend of securitization of knowledge production about China in some parts of the world in our current era.

This trend arises in a much more unique context than in other past periods. With globalization and the unprecedented economic rise of China, China is becoming part of 'us' in many societies. What does this mean? Back in the 1950s to 1990s, China was studied as an object 'out there.' Nowadays, with China's growing international outreach and interactions, China is no longer as isolated as it was before. It is no longer sufficient to study China as an object of investigation, without any relationship to 'us.' China has become part of 'us' or wants to be part of 'us' (Klotzbücher 2023), such as the pervasive presence of Huawei and its 5G development in various countries of the world. Huawei's presence has increasingly been seen as a risk, and

it is thus subject to various degrees of securitization in different countries (Kroet 2024; Berman, Maizland, and Chatzky 2023; US Government Information 2018). We can look at securitization of knowledge production about China in similar ways too.

7.2 Securitizing knowledge production about China

Securitization is a concept developed by Ole Wæver (1995) to examine international politics, known as the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. Security issues are not simply ‘out there’ but require certain actors and stakeholders to raise awareness of the issues, articulate them as problems and threats, and then further promote measures, regulations, and actions to securitize the issues which are the subject of debate. For instance, immigration as an issue can be securitized to become a topic of high political concern (e.g., Ceyhan and Tsoukala 2002; Bello 2022). When some securitizing actors address certain issues to a particular audience group, push them to agree on the nature of the threat, and support taking measures to tackle the threat, they do not always succeed immediately. There will be an audience that refuses to securitize the matter. Hence, a process of articulation, communication, and negotiation among supporters and opponents is expected. Underlying securitization theory is the belief that not all issues are threatening in themselves. However, if there are efforts to refer to them and frame them as security issues, these issues might become security problems (Pinna 2024).

To apply the concept of securitization in the field of higher education and knowledge production, we see historical examples in Thailand (see Chapter three), where conducting research on and imparting knowledge about China were disrupted by the state amid a highly anti-communist atmosphere and strong suspicion of Chinese education’s threat to the Thai nation-building process. In our contemporary era, securitization of knowledge production about China has intensified, particularly in Europe and North America, or the so-called vaguely conceived ‘West.’ This is partly related to China’s rising uneasy and sometimes conflictual relations with the West and partly related to the increasing authoritarianism and censorship of academic freedom and exchanges in China (D’Hooghe and Lammertink 2020). Greitens and Truex (2020) conducted an original survey of over five hundred China experts and reported that repressive research experiences are rare but real (Greitens and Truex 2020). Visiting China has become a problem for many China watchers. Some of them have experienced being denied visas, invited to tea (i.e., being invited to be interrogated by Chinese security officers), denied access to archives, and other unpleasant experiences (Greitens and Truex 2020).

In the US, geopolitical tensions have not just affected US-based China experts but also had a chilling effect on collaboration with China in various ways. The US

is one of the earlier countries to have tried to scrutinize Confucius Institutes (CIs). From the Obama to Trump and the Biden administrations, there have been intensifying efforts to restrain the operation of CIs, as evidenced in the enforcement of the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (US Government Information 2018), the 2021 Innovation and Competition Act (US Congress 2021a), and the 2021 Confucius Act (US Congress 2021b). Essentially, US universities were forced to make a choice between substantial US governmental funding or China's smaller CI funding. American universities that have received federal funding need to prove that they do not use federal funding to fund Chinese language education. This is practically difficult as usually federal funding covers the overheads of the entire university, which normally would also cover support for Chinese language instruction (Li 2024; Li and King 2024). The US pressures on CIs was followed by similar measures in India, Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom (UK). Besides Chinese language instruction, scholars have noted that general US collaboration with China and Chinese experts have been put in peril due to various securitization measures from the US government (Baum and Ma 2023; Tsai 2023).

In Europe, similarly, D'Hooghe and Lammertink (2020) illustrate that in comparison with 2018, today's higher education and research cooperation takes place in a political climate where there is far more criticism and skepticism of Chinese policies and behaviors. Some of these criticisms are based on evidence, but others could be based on imagination or distorted facts.

The COVID-19 pandemic and political spats between China and the West regarding the origin of the pandemic and its management did not help improve relations either. From technology transfer and investment to higher education, China is not just deemed as a competitor in North America and Europe. Western governments, societies, and media have also noted dubious, if not entirely illegal, actions from China in influencing different spheres of their societies, one of them being education and the production of knowledge about China.

But China is not entirely to be blamed for this development (Cai 2024). Without the consent and cooperation of certain European stakeholders, China cannot just exert its influence on European soil. Even in the economically more developed parts of the West, a lot of higher education institutions have struggled to meet their mandates with limited resources. Various higher education institutions are involved in research and dissemination of knowledge on contemporary China in Europe and North America. However, there is a gigantic inequality of resources among these institutions in different countries, resulting in unequal competence, expertise, and distribution of knowledge at the country level. Moreover, many junior and junior-to-mid-career researchers live in uncertainty as contracts are not secured for the long term. Constantly having to worry about job changes and career alternation does not help them focus on improving their research quality.

This challenge was reflected in the European Commission (EC) document 'Upgrading China Knowledge in Europe' (2020). This document uses data to show that European knowledge about contemporary China is mostly produced and upgraded in the UK, but has become less accessible (due to Brexit) in Germany, the Netherlands, and France, with Eastern and Southeastern European universities having the least capacity to contribute to the cause. Nordic countries such as Finland and Denmark have an impressive corpus of publications on China in natural scientific fields, but not in humanities and social scientific research on China. Humanities and social sciences in Nordic countries face similar resource constraints as in Eastern and Southeastern European countries.

Excluding the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and France, few higher education institutions in the European Union (EU) member states are truly well endowed with rich resources for sustainable research and education. Well-endowed actors can more easily obtain even more resources, which results in persistent inequality of resource distribution. Actors with fewer resources struggle to meet their mandates for education, research, and social impact. Very often, the quality of delivering these results is compromised, hampering advanced development of European knowledge about China.

This uneven competence in China expertise in the educational sector affects international politics too, because it weakens the position of the entire EU when certain member states lack the capacity and know-how to properly evaluate, analyze, and manage China relations.

This leads to the second challenge, which is that some institutions have relied on Chinese state funding, mostly through CIs, China-sponsored cultural centers, or less institutionalized Chinese funding to support their study programs. It has been pointed out by the aforementioned EC document 'Upgrading China Knowledge in Europe' (2020) that the commonly known problems related to CIs are actually experienced differently in different institutions. One cannot overgeneralize and over-politicize the problem. However, independent European resources are believed by European policymakers to help minimize the potential problems associated with Chinese state funding and help European institutions become more mature in their development of education and research on China.

Similar voices can be heard beyond the West as well. In Chapter three, we mentioned the prominent Thai sinologist, Prapin Manomaivibool. She similarly expressed,

I doubt if our country is developing in the right direction in terms of Chinese language education. We willingly embrace all volunteer teachers and accept every offer from China indiscriminately. This is why when the Office of Basic Education wanted to improve the quality of three hundred Thai teachers to teach Chinese in public schools, I willingly went

in to help, right from the process of selecting three hundred Chinese major graduates to spending one year studying in China and returning to teach in schools. (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021)

Returning to Europe, one has to understand that CI funding is not mainly for research or education on contemporary China. In most cases in Europe, it is for supporting Chinese-language education with free tuition by language teachers and resources from China. CI funding can only partially support academic activities such as seminars on China, at least in quite a lot of (albeit not all) European countries. But of course, the nature of such funding means that academic topics and discussions can be censored if Chinese state interests become involved (e.g., see Pedisic's 2025 report on Croatia), and educational institutions may lack full autonomy in organizing academic events in the CI context. In the whole of Europe (not just the EU), there are also CIs that directly fund and operate as an academic unit to offer degree programs (e.g., in Iceland, which is not an EU member state). The teachers sent from China are normally not academically trained at the doctoral level, but they offer courses in degree programs. Universities in these countries do not seem to have strong incentives to move away from Chinese state funding or to even think about at least building up a parallel independent knowledge capacity on China.

To summarize, the causes of the lack of (advanced) independent knowledge on China and capacity to conduct research on China are complicated. Not all of them can be blamed on China. However, as international relations between China and the West have become more contentious, more discussions in the West have arisen regarding how to fix these problems. International politics generates the need to 'independently' study China. In conjunction, there is a surge of securitization of knowledge production about China.

Specifically, not only has the soft power problem in relation to CIs become more visible in public debates, but there are also more serious problems being identified as related to China and other authoritarian states. They are framed as 'foreign interference' in a country's education, including illicit technology and knowledge transfer, disinformation spread in education, espionage in relation to students, researchers, and staff, and other types of influencing and lobbying by foreign actors in the educational sector.

7.2.1 The EU and member states

In the EU member states, the aforesaid risks and challenges are not unknown to people working closely in areas of higher education and research collaboration. However, several notable catalysts have exacerbated the issues and pushed for wider debate and even securitization in recent years. For instance, regarding CIs in

particular, the Free University of Brussels (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, VUB) decided not to extend its CI agreement after a former Chinese director, a renowned former professor at Renmin University of China, was accused by Belgian security services of being a recruiter for Chinese intelligence in Belgium (Galindo 2019). Although the accused later appealed and was able to change the verdict (Januzi 2020), the reputational damage to CIs had been done in Europe, and CIs are now seen to pose a high potential risk to European security. In another incident in 2019, the Czech-Chinese Centre at Prague's Charles University had to close because of the accusation that the university had received secret payments from the Chinese embassy to the Czech Republic (Prague Post 2019). Examples like these were watched closely by higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe and in the wider West.

Gradually, several actors have been pulled in to engage in defining these risks associated with China collaboration and knowledge production about China, prompting them to brainstorm on how to tackle these problems. The major players are the EU, member states' governments, member states' funding agencies, research institutes like the Leiden Asia Centre, HEIs, and research-performing organizations, and scholars. To a lesser extent, civil society, think tanks, investigative journalists, and the media have also played their due roles (D'Hooghe and Lammertink 2020). Several developments were notable in this process.

In 2018, the EU published *EU-China: A Strategic Outlook* (European Commission 2019). This document redefined its relationship with China. It is a shift in the sense that the EU clearly defined China as a systemic rival in that document. And such development has gradually spilled over to EU-China higher education and research cooperation, resulting in greater awareness of the challenges and risks in cooperation (D'Hooghe and Lammertink 2020; Pinna 2024). Subsequently, the Joint Communiqué following the fourth EU-China High Level Innovation Cooperation Dialogue, which was held in April 2019, tried to cover issues such as research integrity, intellectual property protection, research ethics, and reciprocity (European Commission 2019). In response to the EU's 2019 Strategic Outlook, the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation organized an event on knowledge cooperation with China. This event prompted ideas for a comprehensive approach to tackling foreign interference in European higher education and research institutions. This meeting also stimulated the preparation of EU guidelines to deal with foreign interference in higher education and research environments (European Commission 2020). EU member states and many higher education and research institutions, such as the League of European Research Associations, an association of twenty-three European research universities, have supported such development (D'Hooghe and Lammertink 2020). In 2022, the European Commission published *Tackling R & I Foreign Interference: Staff Working Document*. The document offers a non-exhaustive list of mitigation measures to help stakeholders to develop a

comprehensive strategy regarding so-called ‘foreign interference’ in the research and education environment.

While the above depiction seems to reveal a smooth process of securitizing China-related higher education and research cooperation, stakeholders held different views and underwent processes of negotiation and compromise. Not every stakeholder agreed to emphasize the risk aspect. In fact, if any reform entailed great change to the current cooperation and arrangements to conduct research on China and cooperate with Chinese partners, most HEIs were initially reluctant to reform. Some held the view that too much emphasis on risk would create a harmful environment for doing anything further with Chinese collaborators (D’Hooghe and Lammertink 2020). Views were mixed and even though there were proposals to harmonize the efforts, stakeholders commonly believed that there is no one-size-fits-all approach (D’Hooghe and Lammertink 2020). This resulted in different and uneven actions being taken in EU member states (Pinna 2024). Even though the EU has issued different recommendations, not all member states’ policies are aligned with those of the EU’s. For example, the issue was less debated in France. Even though there was an understanding of the problems, no guidelines were issued in France (D’Hooghe and Lammertink 2020). Italy’s approach is nuanced, seeking to balance between the EU’s securitization measures, national interests, and historical ties with China (Pinna 2024). Hungary sees China cooperation as opportunities in general and does not see any risk and thus no need for securitization (Pinna 2024).

The Netherlands is one of the pioneering countries in regard to aligning itself closely with EU recommendations (Pinna 2024). The Dutch government released its China policy paper in 2019. In addition to noting the government’s political and economic approach to China (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019; D’Hooghe and Lammertink 2020), the Dutch China policy paper noted risks in higher education cooperation, such as political interference, lack of academic integrity, and unwanted technology transfer. The Leiden Asia Centre, an independent research center affiliated with Leiden University in the Netherlands, also published several detailed reports on this topic (D’Hooghe, Montulet, de Wolff, and Pieke 2018; D’Hooghe and Lammertink 2020). In 2019, the Hague Center for Security Studies published a *Checklist for Collaboration with Chinese Universities and Other Research Institutions* based on the findings of the 2018 Leiden Asia Centre Report. Following this, Dutch universities and later other universities in the EU started to follow suit. Prior to this, European research universities generally did not have specific policies in place for China (D’Hooghe, Montulet, de Wolff, and Pieke 2018). In 2020, a report by a Dutch think tank ‘Clingendael,’ also known as the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, further showed the increase in Chinese censorship in academic publishing and self-censorship with regard to China among Dutch scholars (D’Hooghe and Dekker 2020). In 2021, the Dutch General Intelligence and

Security Service issued a report warning of cooperation with China. In 2022, the Dutch National Contact Point for Knowledge Security (2022) issued the National Knowledge Security Guidelines, and in 2025, the Knowledge Security Screening Law to protect against foreign interference in research came into effect.

Elsewhere in the EU, in 2020, the German Rectors' Conference, a group that includes more than thirty German HEIs, adopted a document called *Guiding Questions on University Cooperation with the People's Republic of China*. In 2020, the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education published *Responsible Internationalization: Guideline for Reflection on International Academic Collaboration* (Shih, Gaunt, and Östlund 2020). In 2021, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture published *Recommendations for Academic Cooperation with China*.

Some of these guidelines are specifically focused on China cooperation, such as those produced in Germany, the Netherlands, and Finland. But the Swedish approaches are different in the sense that their documents can apply to other countries that might raise risk concerns as well. They are not solely about China. It is also worth noting that not all of these guidelines were directly produced by their governments. Some were produced by large university associations, such as the German one. Hence, one cannot say that all of these documents are directly related to government policies. Furthermore, some documents go into greater detail while others are more general in language. Who has the responsibility to implement the guidelines is often left undefined, as these are not legally binding documents (D'Hooghe and Lammertink 2020).

Securitizing measures are in practice hard to carry out not just because not all of these documents are legally binding. University administrators and government officials also have a steep learning curve and need to adjust to the new 'culture' of trying to regard cooperation with China as a risk. There are also concerns about overt and mistaken racialization of the issue, labeling everything Chinese as a risk. In addition, some university administrators and researchers are hesitant about further securitization, arguing that if more control measures are put in place, academics will lose some of their academic freedom because they will have to disclose many things to the university and governmental authorities (de Bruijn 2023).²

Nevertheless, in the broadly defined Europe, including the EU, member states, and the UK, the discussion and coordination of policy improvement to enhance research security or knowledge security is ongoing. In 2024, the EU member states further adopted a recommendation to ensure that "international research and

² In November 2024, there was news about Australian secret services asking Australian scholars to spy on Chinese students in Australia, which led to a discussion about the counter-productive effect of over-securitization (Dziedzic 2024).

innovation cooperation can take place in a way that is both open and safe” and that measures would be put forward to “protect research and innovation from misuse” (European Commission 2024).

The US has keen interests in persuading and helping like-minded countries in Europe and elsewhere to step up the securitization of various kinds of research and educational cooperation with China. In particular, as the US–China rivalry in science and technology heats up, the US has asked that its allies monitor technology transfer more carefully, control Chinese acquisition or illegal theft of sensitive technologies, and limit dual-use technologies. Although the scope of these securitization measures is beyond the issue of China watching that this book explores, I believe that we need to address them because securitization has many uncertain impacts that will hinder research cooperation with Chinese researchers and access to China, which will ultimately limit China watchers’ capacity to analyze, write about, and narrate China in the long run. In the following sub-section, I look into other non-European countries’ similar efforts and see how securitization measures have been diffused to other parts of the world.

7.2.2 Like-minded states’ securitization efforts

In the US, there is already a security clearance system that restricts those who can work on sensitive research topics. Universities and research organizations that do not report funding from foreign sources will be cut off from governmental funding. In 2024, the US National Science Foundation (NSF) further announced a five-year plan to set up an NSF SECURE Center, led by the University of Washington with support from nine institutions of higher education to “serve as a clearinghouse for information to empower the research community to identify and mitigate foreign interference that poses risks to the US” (US National Science Foundation 2024). Similar securitization ideas have been diffused to countries such as India, Japan, Australia, and Canada. But each country is at a different stage of policy discussion and preparation for actual measures. The years of 2019 and 2020 are generally the time when many countries started to have some securitization documents. The examples below are not exhaustive, but they do give us an idea of how the diffusion occurs across countries.

In the broadly defined West beyond the EU, the UK has also experienced greater tension in the sphere of higher education cooperation with China as a result of overall geopolitical tension between China and the West, let alone its stance on supporting Hong Kong, which has also caused a schism with China (Brown 2020). Universities UK (2020), a collective universities group voicing British universities’ interests, released a document called *UK-Managing Risks in Internationalization: Security Related Issues* in 2020. The document was updated in 2022. In Australia, the Department of Education published *Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in Australian University Sector*

in 2019. In the same year, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (2019), a think tank, launched the China Defence Universities Tracker, to allow open access checking of Chinese institutions that are engaged in military or security-related science and technology research. A university decision maker can thus, for instance, check the tracker before deciding on whether to cooperate with certain Chinese institutions.

Beyond the West, India, for example, has also started various securitization discussions in higher education. In October 2019, the Indian government's University Grants Commission issued a circular asking universities to obtain approval from the central government before offering courses in association with any Chinese institutions. In early 2020, based on Indian security agencies' warning about Chinese influence in higher education in the country, the education ministry further announced that it would review CIs as well as fifty-four Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) signed between India's prestigious educational institutions, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology and the National Institutes of Technology, and Chinese institutions (Gupta 2020; Kamalakaran 2020). This came in the context of, first of all, similar heightened discussions about securitizing educational cooperation with China in other parts of the world, and secondly, due to intensified conflict along the Indian–Chinese border that aroused strong anti-China sentiments in India (Gupta 2020; Kamalakaran 2020).

In 2021, Japan was reported to be using new measures to prevent the theft of advanced technologies by foreign countries like China. This is considered part of Japan's efforts in boosting national security. Japanese and foreign researchers would have to seek government approval before they could access civil–military or so-called dual-use research and technologies. In addition, there would be tighter visa scrutiny for Chinese students and researchers.

Tokyo's increased monitoring of Japanese and foreign researchers is set against the background of the US government accusing Beijing of using generous funding schemes such as 'Thousand Talents' and other programs to attract foreign talents to work in China or work on research projects while affiliated with Chinese institutions. Through these schemes, Beijing has brought many Chinese scientists who were working on cutting-edge technologies back to China. In a report written by Kakuchi and Sharma (2021), around forty-four Japanese scholars have been involved in the Thousand Talents scheme and some reported pressure to produce publications while affiliated with Chinese institutions and that the Chinese universities were constantly checking their performance. In international practice, it is not rare for grant-receiving scientists to be under pressure to publish and report their performance to grant-giving and/or grant-administrating entities. But the controversy around the Thousand Talents schemes here seems to be around China's motive in using the grants to force scientists to share the results of cutting-edge technological findings and know-how, thus leading to Tokyo's decision to tighten controls.

Kakuchi and Sharma's (2021) report also points out mixed views from Japanese researchers about the new securitization measures. While the Japanese government might have good intentions, in reality, it is hard to detect all the problems. The Chinese system and tactics are opaque. Japanese scientists express appreciation of their Chinese peers' work and their desire for continuous collaborative work. There is a recognition that China is already a leading player in several scientific fields and that cutting the collaboration will only harm Japan's development (Kakuchi and Sharma 2021).

Securitization continues to diffuse to other countries. In 2024, the Canadian government released a new security policy which was believed to be the most detailed policy in the West so far to counter the same perceived challenge (Government of Canada 2024). Canada released a narrower initiative back in 2021, focusing on engineering council grant applications. The new 2024 policy aimed to be much broader. It denies federal Canadian funding for 'sensitive' research projects linked to any of 103 foreign universities and institutions in China, Russia, and Iran that Ottawa said would pose a national security threat. These institutions are on the government's so-called 'Named Research Organization List' (Government of Canada 2024). Grant applicants are required to disclose more of their work, and the Canadian security service will randomly double-check cases in the future. A broad range of academic disciplines is covered in the regulations, including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and biomedical technologies. The measures include actual punishment mechanisms such as the axing of a researchers' present and future funding if they are found to be non-compliant with the regulations (Boutillier 2024; Greenfield 2024).

The Canadian initiative can be considered part of the so-called Five Eyes' recent efforts in coordinating actions on research security. The Five Eyes countries consist of the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Five Eyes is an intelligence-sharing arrangement between these five English-speaking countries that evolved from Cold War agreements but their recent coordination has included protecting research security (Boutillier 2024; Greenfield 2024).

7.2.3 China's policy reforms and securitization measures

The Chinese government has taken various measures in response to Western criticisms, skepticism, and securitization. Concerning CIs, many cooperating universities received a notification from the CI headquarters, Hanban, about a drastic change in the operation of CIs around 2020. The message was that the longstanding headquarters would be closed and two ostensible non-governmental organizations in China would take up the task of leading future CI cooperation, namely the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF) would become the brand holder of CIs, while the former headquarters would be dissolved and replaced by the Centre

for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC). This dramatic change was later reported in various Chinese and Western news outlets (e.g., see Chen's 2020 report in *Global Times*). The decision from Hanban has received mixed reactions from collaborating universities. For many, this would entail legal re-arrangements concerning the cooperation agreement in different countries and universities. Li (2024) considers this decentralization part of the Chinese government's intention to de-link CIs' political connections and improve their image. While the rebranding and restructuring of CIs might aim to give CIs a more non-governmental aspect, there have been voices of skepticism. For instance, it has been revealed confidentially by some anonymous informants that the new non-governmental organizations are still strongly linked to the Chinese government. Former Hanban staff have moved to work for the new non-governmental organizations.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government seems to be securitizing the higher education sector's international connections too. Researchers and universities from many corners of the world have reported this trend. The news is widespread (e.g., see Sharma's report in *University World News* 2023). An anonymous interviewee compared his experience of being in China in 2013 and the current situation.

In 2013, they (Chinese professors) were not completely free to discuss Chinese policies, but they did engage with us. But this time, they all kept their distance, and the fact is that all professors were forced to attend the politburo meeting at the amphitheatre. We couldn't visit our Chinese colleagues because they were forced to travel there. They also advised me to be cautious when discussing government, to avoid criticizing Chinese government policy, and so on.

This anonymous interviewee mentioned that his movement in normal places in China was monitored. A formal degree program involving a foreign university and a Chinese university in which he was involved could not continue anymore. The same interviewee expressed that he came from a non-Western country that has a good relationship with China in general. But he cannot be exempted from the stringent measures placed upon all foreign researchers in China nowadays.

The impact has spread through not just purely academic research but also journalistic reporting. Previously, we mentioned Danish journalist, Mette Holm. She lamented that,

It is sad that present day China makes research and reporting so difficult for foreign researchers and correspondents, because the result is an incomplete, misleading, and often lop-sided picture of this great country, which is bad for both China and the rest of us. It is sad that international journalism has to rely on second-hand reports and impressions. (Holm 2024)

The Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the largest academic database on China, has reportedly notified various universities and research institutions in Europe, the US, Taiwan, and Hong Kong that their access will be limited from various points in 2023 onward (Sharma 2023). With limited possibilities to conduct fieldwork in China, and restricted access to even online databases such as the CNKI, conducting research on China is becoming challenging (Brussee and Von Carnap 2024). The impact is significant across various academic disciplines beyond sinology, Chinese studies, and China studies.

With restricted access to academic freedom and opportunities to co-produce knowledge about China with Chinese colleagues and institutions, there have been reports of decreasing student enrollment in China studies or Chinese studies programs in the West. Some HEIs also have trimmed budgets for their relevant study programs. Writing about the US experiences, Baum and Ma (2023), however, cautioned about extrapolating too much from this development. This is because this development is part of a larger trend of reducing support for humanities disciplines in many parts of the world (Baum and Ma 2023; Thelle 2020; Lodén 2016). It is not necessarily aimed at reducing Chinese studies or other relevant fields only. There have also been reports about scholars changing their research trajectory and study subject so that they do not directly touch upon China or require fieldwork in China. Martin Lavička (2025), an assistant professor at the Department of Asian Studies at Palacký University Olomouc in the Czech Republic, for example, indicated that the politicization of the field of Chinese studies has resulted in significant polarization in actual politics across various European countries, including his own. The tension in both academia and politics can be intense regarding matters related to China or collaboration with China. This situation poses considerable mental and emotional challenges for scholars. He sees a kind of sanctuary in returning to more historical research in the near future, partly distancing himself from contemporary research. There are also scholars and students who have decided to use Taiwan as the place for Mandarin training and fieldwork (Baum and Ma, 2023).

7.3 Chinese ethnicity and Confucianism as risks in Indonesia

In non-Western countries such as Japan and India, research and higher education cooperation with China has been more securitized too, sometimes to the level of being of risk to national security.³ In Indonesia, however, cooperation with Chinese

³ Depending on the country, not all reduction in bilateral educational collaboration can be ascribed to governmental securitization against China. For example, in South Korea, the number of students pursuing studies in China has significantly decreased since 2017 due to various factors, such

partners is deemed to present a risk of violating Indonesian national identity. Because this is a unique case, I have decided to talk about it here.

There have been several reports about the challenge of setting up CIs in Indonesia. Indonesians' perceived potential problem with CIs is different from those of the rest of the world as it touches upon Indonesian sensitivities concerning the country's local Chinese community and the issue of Confucianism. Indonesia has a well-documented ingrained anti-Chinese sentiment. The root of this racism can be traced back to centuries ago, when Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch. Fast-forward to the Cold War era, some Indonesians have perceived some ethnic Chinese's potential links to communist China and their success in business in Indonesia as problematic. In the mid-1960s, hundreds of thousands of suspected communists, some of them of Chinese descent, were killed after the military alleged that they had attempted a coup. Indonesian Chinese were also the main victims of the 1998 riots that accompanied the fall of Suharto, scapegoated for the country's economic downturn during the Asian financial crisis: many were murdered or raped (Toshio 2019; Rakhmatand Pashya 2020; Tanasaldy 2022).

Indonesian institutions have imposed various discriminatory measures against the Chinese, with the aim of curbing Chinese domination of the Indonesian economy. The cultural and social rights of Indonesian Chinese have also been restricted. In Chapter five, we met Hendry Jurnawan (2017) whose careers as an academic, politician, and journalist have helped elevate the life of Indonesians of Chinese descent and preserve Chinese traditions in Indonesia. Jurnawan (2017) explained that he had to tread cautiously in his work in order not to be accused of lacking loyalty towards Indonesia.

In conjunction with Indonesia's uneasy relations with its Chinese community, the treatment of Confucianism, which is a common heritage for many Chinese, has become a sensitive issue. Throughout various historical periods, Confucianism has been recognized and de-recognized by different governments in Indonesia. Confucianism had been practiced in Indonesia prior to the nation's independence, but it was not officially recognized as one of the six state-sanctioned religions—alongside Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Protestantism, and Catholicism—until 1965. However, that same year marked the onset of civil unrest in Indonesia, fueled by the broader context of the Cold War, which pitted Western powers against communist nations. Leftist activists, including some individuals of Chinese descent, were viewed as threats, leading to a campaign to sever ties with communist

as a decline in the school-age demographic, a change in the perceived economic advantages of studying overseas and increasing anti-China sentiment. This anti-China sentiment is complicated because it is not solely arising from diplomatic disputes. Perceived economic coercion and air pollution from China also exacerbate anti-China sentiment (Song 2024).

China. As noted above, Indonesia's authoritarian government under President Suharto alleged that China supported the unsuccessful coup attempt reportedly orchestrated by the Indonesian Communist Party. This resulted in a mandate for Chinese Indonesians to abandon their Chinese names and assimilate culturally, which included the suppression of their customs and traditions. Consequently, Confucianism was affected by these political shifts, and in 1967, it was removed from the list of officially recognized religions (Budianta 2000, 2007; Sutrisno 2018).

That said, during Suharto's New Order era, only five religions were recognized. During that time, Chinese or 'Tionghoa' commonly worshipped their ancestors without believing in a specific religion. Chinese people who did not want to create conflict in society would put Buddhism on their identity cards even though they were not Buddhist. It was still better than claiming that they did not have any religious belief. Had they claimed that they did not have any religious belief, they might be mistakenly conceived of as atheistic communists, who were not welcomed by the state.

Some Chinese fought hard for Confucianism, known as *Konghucu* in Indonesian, to be recognized as an official religion. According to the Indonesian government, a religion needs to fulfill three requirements. It must have something to be worshipped as 'gods,' and it needs to have prophets and scriptures. For Confucianism to be recognized, some Tionghoa had mobilized to advocate that Confucianism did meet the three requirements. In their argument, they mentioned that the god that is worshipped is Heaven itself, the holy scriptures are the Confucian classics *Sì Shū* (Four Books), and that their prophet is Confucius. Despite the mobilization, they failed (Suryadinata 2023; Setiawan 2024).

In the modern era, most discriminatory policies are no longer in effect, even if they have not been officially lifted (Rakhmat and Pashya 2020; Tanasaldy 2022; Theo and Leung 2018).⁴ Confucianism is currently recognized again as one of the six official religions. It is important to clarify that Chineseness should not be equated solely with Confucianism. In reality, most Chinese Indonesians practice Buddhism, followed by Christianity and Catholicism, while those who adhere to Confucianism as a religion represent a minority.

Nowadays, Chinese culture is prominently displayed in public spaces. A notable instance occurred in 2001 when the Chinese New Year was designated a national holiday, leading to widespread performances of dragon dances (Budianta 2000, 2007; Sutrisno 2018). Cultural expressions such as dragon dances and Chinese

⁴ Nonetheless, unofficial and societal anti-Chinese sentiment persists. During the recent Covid pandemic, for example, we could find ample evidence on social media of ethnic Chinese being termed viruses (Rakhmat and Pashya 2020; Tanasaldy 2022).

puppetry are performed not only by the Chinese community but also by various other ethnic groups (Budianta 2000, 2007; Sutrisno 2018).

The increasing prominence of China on the world stage is contributing to the growing popularity of the Mandarin language in Indonesia. As a result, many private language centers and schools were founded. This period also marked the entry of the CIs into Indonesia, further promoting cultural exchange (Theo and Leung 2018: 6).

Because of this extremely sensitive and complex issue of Chinese identity and Confucianism in Indonesia, when Chinese and Indonesian universities were negotiating to set up CIs in the early 2000s, the Indonesian government could not accept an institute that used 'Confucius' in its name on the ground that this would not work well with other state-recognized religions in Indonesia. Theo and Leung's (2018) study detailed the difficult negotiations between the Chinese and Indonesian sides that took nearly two years. The Chinese side initially could not accept any alternative name because CI is the official brand. In a visit of Hanban officials to Indonesia's minister of education, the Indonesian minister explained that "If we set up a Confucius Institute, what will happen when the Muslims also want to establish a Mohammad Institute, the Christians a Jesus Institute?" The Chinese side eventually conceded and indicated that the Indonesian side could offer alternative names for consideration. The Indonesian Coordinating Board for Mandarin Language Education (*Badan Koordinasi Pendidikan Bahasa Mandarin, BKPBM*) had to act as mediator and offered five alternative names for the institute (Theo and Leung 2018). The Chinese embassy in Indonesia rejected two of them. The remaining three were left to the Indonesian Ministry of Education to decide. In the end, the term 'Mandarin Language Centre' (*Pusat Bahasa Mandarin, PBM*) was chosen over options such as the Mandarin Language and Cultural Centre (*Pusat Bahasa dan Budaya Mandarin*) and Tionghoa Language Centre (*Pusat Bahasa Tionghoa*) (Theo and Leung 2018). Since then, PBM has been used consistently in Indonesian, while CI is still used in English communications (Rakhmat and Pashya 2020; Theo and Leung 2018). For instance, the CI at the University Al-Azhar Indonesia is officially called *Pusat Bahasa Mandarin Al-Azhar* in Indonesian, but in English, it is referred to as CI Al-Azhar Indonesia. Another example is the CI at Universitas Negeri Malang being called *Pusat Bahasa Mandarin UM*.

In some cases, the local Chinese diaspora has been helping to advocate for the introduction of CIs and promoting the Chinese language and culture in Indonesia in the hope that they can build bridges to minimize misunderstandings and anti-Chinese sentiment in society. This is generally in line with the Chinese aspiration to project friendly and benevolent images of China to many parts of the world as a form of soft power. However, in the Indonesian example, local Indonesian partners still must walk a fine line to ensure that the existence of CIs, their names,

and their functions would carefully take society's deep-rooted uneasiness with anything Chinese and Confucian into account. It is hoped that the placement of the Indonesian case in this chapter provides nuance to the discussion on the securitization of knowledge production about China.

China as a Knowledge Co-Producer

Abstract

Securitization seeks to de-link China from knowledge production about China. But China knowledge without China is not China knowledge anymore. For example, in contemporary geopolitical competition, China appears to be at the core of the whole construction of the Indo-Pacific geopolitical concept by Japan, the USA, Australia, and other countries, but Chinese actors find themselves excluded. Differently, China has been invited by various European actors to engage human rights dialogues. The comparison shows that whether China is included or excluded by the West in the knowledge production about Indo-Pacific politics or human rights or not, Chinese actors have not been absent in knowledge co-production about China.

Keywords: China, Indo-Pacific politics, human rights dialogues, socially engaged scholars, knowledge co-production

So far, this book has utilized a lot of space describing the historical and contemporary conditions under which knowledge about China has been generated. Politics, both domestic and international, has often affected China watchers' ability to produce knowledge about China. In this chapter, we discuss a relatively recent phenomenon that is equally political: that is, the creation of the Indo-Pacific politics and the knowledge production about it, where China appears to be at the core of the whole matter of constructing a new geopolitical concept called 'Indo-Pacific,' but the People's Republic of China (PRC) government finds itself missing or excluded from the process. Where does knowledge production about the Indo-Pacific interlock with knowledge production about China? Can China be a knowledge co-producer of this concept even though it did not initiate the concept? At the more concrete level, we may further ask how Chinese officials, scholars, and think tank analysts perceive Indo-Pacific politics. Do they believe that the Indo-Pacific strategy presented by various countries is an attempt to contain and exclude China? How does *realpolitik* interlock with knowledge production in this situation?

Because the issues concerning the 'Indo-Pacific' are new, they are not captured in Chih-yu Shih's oral history interviews, which this book has relied heavily upon. I hence use qualitative analysis of existing publications written by Chinese authors and Chinese media reports to understand how PRC scholars look at this new rising knowledge realm and China's role in this. This will be the major approach for the

first part of Chapter eight. In the second half of Chapter eight, I move on to compare PRC actors' role in the Indo-Pacific knowledge realm with a relatively older knowledge realm on 'human rights in China.' As human rights in China were covered in Shih's oral history data, I will then be able to refer to oral history interviews again for analysis.

8.1 Interlocking between China and the Indo-Pacific

As many scholars have rightly observed, the concept of the Indo-Pacific and thus the politics and strategies that connect with it are constructed and imagined (Pan 2014; Li 2022). This concept was coined by German geopolitician, Karl Haushofer, in the 1920s, but it did not attract much attention then (Pan 2014). In the much more contemporary context, it is the American "geopolitical imagination about the world in general and the rise of China in particular" (Pan 2014: 456) that has given the concept political currency (Li 2022). Ever since the concept was revived by American, Japanese, and Australian politicians in the last decade, academic literature on these countries' policies and approaches towards the Indo-Pacific have mushroomed (Pan 2014; Medcalf 2020a, 2020b; Calabrese 2022). There is also no lack of literature on other countries that has been grouped under the banner of the 'Indo-Pacific' and how they look at the opportunities and challenges presented to them by the emergence of Indo-Pacific politics (Krishnamurthy and Ghiasy 2020; Ghiasy, Chen, and Panda 2025). Geographically, these cover the views of Southeast Asian countries, South Asian countries, Taiwan, South Korea, and even countries in the broadly defined Europe and the European Union (EU). Each of them has a different view of the precise boundary of the Indo-Pacific. Rory Medcalf (2020a, 2020b), an Australian scholar who has been crucial in defining Indo-Pacific politics, sees the Indo-Pacific as the accelerating economic and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean region. The matter here is an interlocking between *realpolitik* and the construction of a new knowledge field, the Indo-Pacific, in academic and political debates. Despite variations in different interlocutors' conception of the Indo-Pacific, no one denies the existence of China in the Indo-Pacific. Many China watchers, including China-based observers, believe that the concept and policies around the concept are aimed at excluding or containing China. Medcalf (2020b) corrected this impression by arguing that this new construct sends messages to both China and the United States (US). To China, it is that Beijing "cannot expect others to accept its self-image as the centre of the region and the world" (Medcalf 2020b:7). To the US, the message is that "China and America are not the only two nations that count" (Medcalf 2020b:7).

Even though, politically and conceptually, the Indo-Pacific concept entails exclusion or containment of China, Chinese scholars, officials, and media outlets have

discussed and debated the concept, thus contributing to the knowledge production about the Indo-Pacific studies as well. As Pan (2014) points out, both Indo-Pacific alliances and China feed on mutual anxieties. Thus, even though China's actions are more reactive, Chinese actors contribute to the knowledge production of the Indo-Pacific too. Here, it is not easy to clearly distinguish the knowledge production realms of Indo-Pacific studies and Chinese/China studies. While they are essentially not the same, there are also overlaps in this particular case. I am inspired by Kemper and Kalinovsky's (2015) use of the concept of 'interlocking' in their studies on Soviet and Russian oriental studies. Hence, I borrow the term 'interlocking' to mean the direct and indirect interactions between different knowledge realms or sub-realms. China watchers around the world have contributed greatly to the discussion on the new realm of Indo-Pacific politics. There is a close link between *realpolitik* as well as knowledge production about Indo-Pacific studies and Chinese/China studies. They are thus interlocking. What is equally important is that PRC-based Chinese analysts have actively contributed views to this new realm. The fact that Indo-Pacific politics excludes China in name but has China at its heart has prompted the PRC-based experts to investigate the matter. However, as we know, China experts are also bounded by their political conditions and generally create analysis and views that would deny the emergence of any Indo-Pacific political alliances.

Figure 8.1 shows the trends of Chinese academic publications on the Indo-Pacific issues from the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the largest academic database on China. Scholarly publications normally appear after real-life events and news coverage. Back in 2013, there were already some Chinese academic writings on the topic, but the numbers were few (Chen, Pandan, and Ghiasy 2024). When the US started to offer more concrete policies and plans for the Indo-Pacific framework around 2018, Chinese publications on this topic also grew. Since then, the numbers of publications have risen significantly (Figure 8.1).¹

Not surprisingly, Chinese scholars share many similar views with official state media.² This is particularly evident on US motives in containing China, on dismissing the US's success, and on finding faults with the US's traditional and potential allies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2022; Liu 2013; Liu and Ma 2022; Tian 2022). Interestingly, compared with the state media,

¹ The keyword 'Indo-Pacific' (印太) was used in CKNI for the search of publications on February 13, 2025. As it was in early 2025, the numbers in 2025 were not complete.

² I cross-validate information gleaned from the *China Daily* with press releases and statements of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), as well as with information found in other state media sources such as the *People's Daily*, *Global Times*, *Xinhua*, and *China Central Television (CCTV)* to determine Beijing's centrally approved messages and narratives about Indo-Pacific politics. Since 2011, there have been more articles related to Indo-Pacific politics than before. This implies that Beijing increasingly feels the need to respond to and articulate its views on the emerging Indo-Pacific politics.

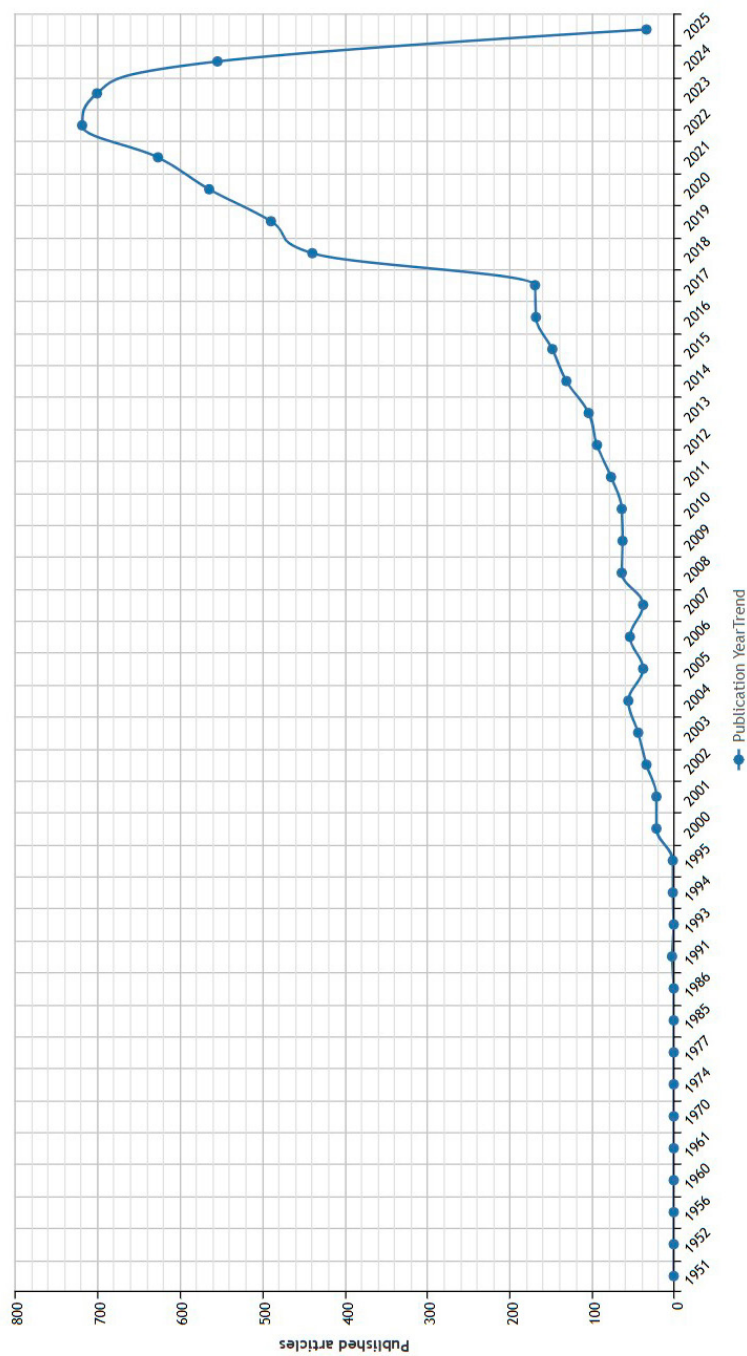


Figure 8.1 Publication numbers on the 'Indo-Pacific' in CNKI.
Source: Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) online database (<https://oversea.cnki.net/index/>).

Chinese scholars show more nuanced views when it comes to the issue of whether the US administrations have been consistent in the Indo-Pacific strategy and the issue of whether China and the US can have Indo-Pacific cooperation or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperation. Wang and Zhang (2022) believe that China should discuss how to start Indo-Pacific cooperation. Hence, instead of rejecting the Indo-Pacific concept, Wang and Zhang (2022) show willingness to seek cooperation with the US in the region. This view is similar to that of Yan and Li (2021) who believe that the US's open and free Indo-Pacific approach echoes the interests of some EU and Asian countries well. They believe that such an approach is not necessarily different from China's approach. Hence, they believe that China and the US can try to discuss more, linking up with each other's projects in the region to promote the development of the Indo-Pacific region. But not all PRC scholars hold such sanguine views. Numerous PRC scholars believe that the US will not work with BRI projects to realize regional connectivity and prosperity. They also criticize what they deem as the US counter-response, the Blue Dot Network, for being short of concrete actions (Zhou 2021). Different views are not being presented as clearly competing views in the PRC context. They merely reveal different interpretations of the development of US policies and the space for US–China cooperation.

Until today, the Chinese government, state media, and scholars in general still prefer to use the term 'Asia-Pacific,' while acknowledging the existence of the term 'Indo-Pacific.' For example, Guo Yanjun (2021), director of the Institute of Asian Studies at China Foreign Affairs University, has rejected the concept of Indo-Pacific, and argues that the Asia-Pacific framework is in jeopardy of being replaced by the Indo-Pacific one (Guo 2021). The discussion of the knowledge production about the Indo-Pacific, Asia-Pacific, and China, and how compatible these realms are, indicates that China is closely related to other knowledge production even in a concept from which it seems to be excluded. PRC-based observers and interlocutors have been highly active in contributing their views to this new geopolitical concept. After all, China is too globally embedded in *realpolitik* and in our daily lives.

In the next section, we will introduce another case for comparison: human rights dialogues where Western and Chinese actors have been involved. This can be contrasted with the Indo-Pacific case where the PRC and their China experts are somehow excluded but still contribute significantly, although by producing very different kinds of discourse and knowledge, to counter the Indo-Pacific politics. The example of human rights dialogues is interesting in that even though there have been Western efforts to engage with Chinese actors, the result remains modest.

8.2 Human rights dialogues where China is involved

Like the issue of Indo-Pacific politics, human rights issues concerning China are a highly sensitive and contested area where China has typically shown no interest in cooperating with the broadly defined West. Unlike Indo-Pacific politics, however, China has been invited by various Western countries and actors to engage in discussions on China's human rights situations and on how to improve the situation. In other words, if the Indo-Pacific is a knowledge realm where Chinese actors are excluded by the West in producing knowledge, Chinese actors have been, to some extent, invited by the West to produce knowledge about human rights in China. Chinese actors also wish to act themselves to intervene in the situation at home and ultimately believe that if they desire change, the forces have to mainly come from within China. Despite the long history of dialogue, Western and Chinese players have not reached a consensus on how they could improve China's human rights.

In the following, I use examples of researchers who have been involved in various human rights initiatives at official, semi-official, or grassroots levels, to shed light on how knowledge production about China, particularly its human rights situations, have been intertwined with *realpolitik*. For example, we will examine legal scholar-practitioners' participation in the EU-China human rights dialogues. These dialogues were the EU's approach to managing the thorny issue of human rights concerning China. It was largely triggered by the violent crackdown against student protestors during the June 1989 Tiananmen Square incident that brought China's human rights conditions to international attention. Despite the long history of dialogues, European and Chinese players have not reached a consensus on whether they should and how they could further push for China's improvement of human rights. We will also study the oral history of Western scholar-activists to comprehend how they see that their connection with Chinese scholar-activists can help improve women's situation in China and at the same time how such collaboration might affect their own career development in the West.

In the early 1980s, with the US diplomatic rapprochement with China and gradual establishment of diplomatic relations between China and various countries around the world, the international community was in a good mood to welcome China after the country had been internationally isolated for nearly thirty years. China's human rights issues were originally not the international community's concern. It is also worth mentioning that during Mao's era, China's human rights conditions were dire, but the issue did not come to the fore internationally either.

In the US, human rights issues in China became salient more or less around the time that the general human rights movements and human rights diplomacy in the West began to take off. The event that fixed human rights as a core US-China issue was the aforementioned Tiananmen incident. Since then, the US has been on the

offensive at both governmental and non-governmental levels, using tactics such as public shaming, quiet diplomacy, and having China criticized at the annual meeting of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

As Hatla Thelle (2020), a Danish scholar known for her research on China's human rights conditions, recalled,

I think that we shouldn't say "especially after 89". I think that it was only after 1989, after June 4th, that there was a total shift in the international recognition or the international attitude to China, because, as I remember, during the eighties, everybody was so excited about China coming into the market [...] But it was completely changed after June 4th, and that's actually strange because, not so much changed. I mean, all these human rights violations, they were also happening before. (Thelle 2020)

The US and the EU both imposed an arms embargo on China in the wake of the 1989 incident. These sanctions have not been lifted to date. Thelle (2020) recalled that during the 1990s and afterwards,

China was sort of branded as the most horrible government in the world [...] the human rights world, the UN circles where we from the (Danish) Human Rights Institute were involved was very hostile [...] it was difficult to work in the Danish setting, and I think in Finland, Sweden, Norway, and other countries too, it was difficult to work because you were easily accused of being collaborating with a brutal regime, and of blood on your hands, and things like that. (Thelle 2020)

The EU's approach to China's human rights has been to employ various levels of dialogue to foster mutual understanding and dialogue with the expectation of change (Kinzelbach and Thelle 2011; Taylor 2022). This is an approach that several other EU (e.g., Sweden, the Netherlands) and non-EU countries (e.g., Japan, Canada, Australia) have employed as well. In 1991, the EU issued its first official guidelines on human rights dialogues, in which the EU describes the dialogue concept as an instrument of the EU's external policy (Commission of the European Communities 1991). Academic networks have been embedded in the EU–China human rights dialogues. In the next section, I look at the views of legal scholars who have been participating in the EU–Human Rights Dialogues. As the content of the dialogues is meant to be classified, I mainly review the secondary literature produced by scholars who conducted confidential interviews to produce my analysis of the EU–China human rights dialogues. I also use oral history interview data, mostly collected by my direct colleague, Dušica Ristivojević, which was further integrated into Chih-yu Shih's global oral history interview project.

8.3 Scholars in the EU–China human rights dialogues

The EU human rights dialogues have been structured into three layers. At the top level, there are diplomatic dialogues. In the middle level, there are the so-called legal seminars sponsored by the EU, involving mainly academics, non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, and sometimes officials. The last and lowest level consists of various bilateral and multilateral technical cooperation projects sponsored by European governmental or private entities (Kinzelbach and Thelle 2011; Kinzelbach 2015). Conceptually and ideally, there should be clear linkages between the three levels. One may see the top level as Track One Diplomacy and the other two, particularly the middle level, as Track Two Diplomacy to foster discussion and change. The EU side has understood the so-called civil society as including both NGO representatives and academic experts, and hopes that NGOs and academics can add vigor to the rather stiff political dialogues at the top level. The EU expects that by involving NGOs, NGOs would become less critical of China's human rights situations. The EU also prefers that human rights activists with expertise on China join the meetings. Despite all the EU side's views and expectations, however, the Chinese side has openly rejected European wishes, and refuses to allow activists to participate in the dialogues (Kinzelbach and Thelle 2011).

Ideally, before the political dialogue at the higher level, there would be a legal seminar preceding it. Then, a joint statement or report could be issued as a result of the meetings. During the fourth seminar, held in 1999 in Rovaniemi, Finland, Morten Kjaerum (2000), a Danish lawyer and practitioner in human rights who once directed the Danish Institute for Human Rights and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, argued that there should be linkages between the political dialogues, dialogues with academics, and other technical cooperation projects. These were all ideals. In reality, the meetings had not always been held in such an order. Kinzelbach and Thelle's (2011) research shows that academic participants in the legal seminars had different views on whether their work should and could have an impact on the political dialogues. Manfred Nowak, director of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights in Vienna and Xin Chunying, director of the Institute of Law at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, for instance, mentioned that the legal seminars should have monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Nowak and Xin 2000: 14–15). But there were even European scholars who disagreed. As quoted in Kinzelbach and Thelle's (2011) paper, an anonymous interviewee expressed: "Why should an academic process impact on the political process? I am not concerned about the impact of our academic exchange. I do not have to justify my work in terms of impact" (Kinzelbach and Thelle 2011:71).

In legal seminars, Chinese counterparts, including officials, legal experts, and scholars had been principally included in the planning of these meetings. Hence, one

could say that China in general has been invited to co-produce knowledge or influence Western narration about China's human rights situations in these meetings. China's former Special Representative on Human Right Affairs, Shen Yongxiang, for instance, has said that the presentations made by Chinese experts can help Europeans understand China's efforts and accomplishments (Kinzelbach and Thelle 2011).

The main Chinese representative in legal seminars has been the Law Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, under the instruction of the Chinese MFA. The European side, however, has changed its representative or organizer for the legal seminars several times. The Irish Centre for Human Rights in Galway and the Belgium-based company, CECOFORMA, for example, have been contracted to organize the academic networks and legal seminars before. This has caused problems for the Chinese side because the Chinese MFA see this as privatization or contracting out of the legal seminars. Conflicts arose from this as the Chinese side felt reluctant to engage with the contracted European organizer. The Chinese side saw them as lacking legitimacy. It took strenuous diplomatic efforts to convince the Chinese side to continue engaging in the legal seminars (Kinzelbach and Thelle 2011).

In terms of topics, the Chinese and EU sides have divergent priorities. In general, the Chinese consider human rights as the collective people's right to developmental aspirations and prosperity, thereby elevating society from poverty (Grittith 2023), while the West tends to define human rights as individual rights to the expression of freedom, press, religion, and so on. In other words, when the Europeans look at China's human rights situations, they tend to focus on the political and civil dimensions of rights while the Chinese expect an emphasis on broader dimensions such as the economic and social rights of the Chinese (Freeman and Geeraerts 2012).

In the early days of the EU–China human rights dialogue, the European side prioritized issues such as the death penalty, torture, freedom of expression, and right to a fair trial. In the early years, the Chinese MFA typically chose racial discrimination as its focus because this would also help point to the EU's various challenges in regard to racial treatment. However, racial issues are as sensitive in the EU as they are in China. Later, the Chinese side opted for less sensitive topics such as the right to health, rights of persons with disabilities, women's rights, children's rights, and corporate social responsibility (Kinzelbach and Thelle 2011).

Has the inclusion of the Chinese side as a knowledge interlocutor and co-producer led to tangible outcomes in improving human rights conditions in China? It seems that activists, legal experts, and scholars have different views on the achievement based on their expectations. If one expected human rights in China to be significantly enhanced according to the general Western democratic definition, one might conclude that the dialogues have not achieved such results. However, as Hatla Thelle (2020) recalled from her work at the Danish Institute for Human Rights, they believed that the colleagues whom they worked with in China had

a certain level of influence. With transnational cooperation to give advice and support, she believed that they were able to make some slight progress. But she did mention that after 2008, the situation in China became more complicated, as such collaboration would be understood by the Chinese side as foreign influence, rendering it hard for meaningful and constructive cooperation between the West and China to occur (Thelle 2020). The Danish Institute for Human Rights believed that effective and lasting changes must come from Chinese society's own resources. This means that they worked in areas where there were already national initiatives. They had bilateral partnership programs with Chinese partners on specific topics funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the EU, and other bodies to work on issues such as fair trials in China and the awareness of international human rights standards among law enforcement personnel, academia, the judiciary, and the public in general. They also had a project to promote Chinese environmental NGOs' awareness and capacities to effectively use a rights-based approach through training in workshops, seminars, and Chinese study trips to Copenhagen. From 2007 to 2009, the institute also created an interdisciplinary human rights course in Northeast China funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Beijing (Nilsson, Tota, Nordquist, and Andreassen, 2016).

The challenge, however, as revealed in Philip Baker (2002) and Thelle's (2024) views of success in the dialogues, was that the Chinese and the European sides have had different motives in engaging in the dialogues and were not interested in really understanding each other's positions. The Chinese side saw the dialogue as a mechanism to ensure that the European side would not sign any co-resolution at the UN level to pressure China on human rights. The European side's expectation was to have effective measures to prompt China to enhance its human rights. Thelle recalled (2024),

It was a highly political process, where the Chinese side was under attack and therefore defended itself while the European side was interested in "forcing confessions" out of the Chinese scholars. The Europeans insisted that the Chinese comment on matters they were unable to talk about for political reasons. And the Europeans should have known the Chinese system well enough to understand the limits of what can be addressed in an open forum like the human rights dialogues. (Thelle 2024)

Thelle (2020, 2024) also reported that she had observed that some European scholars who took part in the legal seminar seemed to participate with the assumption that they were in a superior position to that of their Chinese counterparts.

Therefore, they had not prepared well, in the sense that they knew very little (in general) about the Chinese system, so their comments and questions were not useful for the Chinese

side. To have a dialogue you need to respect your counterparts and neither side respected each other: The Europeans saw the Chinese as serious violators of human rights and they were not able to distinguish between Chinese scholars and the Chinese government. And the Chinese felt humiliated and blamed for legal practices that many of them had in fact tried hard to improve. (Thelle 2024)

After depicting the background of how fora such as the human rights dialogues provided platforms for addressing and producing knowledge production about China, particularly its human rights situation, the next section explores how these scholars regard their experience of engaging in *realpolitik* and how this affected knowledge production about China.

8.4 Socially engaged scholars and their dilemma

Knowledge about human rights in China has often been produced by international networks of scholars, practitioners, and officials from both the Chinese side and the international community. The individuals mentioned in this chapter are mostly scholars who are also activists or practitioners. The lines between the two professions can sometimes be blurred in this particular context. Dušica Ristivojević, who has been involved in women's rights movement in China and abroad, has said, "I see myself as a socially engaged researcher, teacher, and activist who analyses and experiences the way in which global political currents influence social organizing in China and other post-socialist spaces" (Ristivojević 2021). It might be an exaggeration to contend that they co-produce knowledge about China, but they certainly interact with one another in the process of narrating China's human rights situations and practices.

Ristivojević (2021) shared that the academic space for organizing seminars and meetings can be used to achieve her aim of bringing activists to the discussion. The meetings can facilitate the actual discussion on how to improve women's rights, while at the same time allow scholars to collect data in writing up their analysis. However, Ristivojević (2021) confessed that in order to make the collaboration work, they need to exercise a certain level of self-censorship. She uses the term 'silence' to refer to her decision not to write about certain things to avoid the exposure of Chinese scholars and activists who have engaged in these academic meetings. As Ristivojević (2021) explains, the most common silence is joint agreement between her and her collaborators and friends to "keep certain types of research data out of the public gaze" (Ristivojević 2021). A negative example of how not adhering to such self-censorship may lead to catastrophes is the PRC arrest of human rights lawyers and activists in the July 9, 2015 crackdowns. This event has become known as the

709 crackdowns. It was a nation-wide action by the Chinese police after a Chinese court proved what it believed to be criminal activities of PRC activists visiting Taiwan. The court used data and reports gathered by (Taiwanese) participants in the Taiwan event as a basis to establish the verdict (Chiu 2018).

While this kind of silence has been deemed necessary to protect individuals engaging in activism, it harms junior scholars who need to publish in order to develop their careers. Ristivojević (2021) has sometimes wondered whether the opportunities for future collaboration might be closed if she writes about certain topics.

Thelle (2020) recalled that the Danish Institute for Human rights also had to exercise self-restraint. They would not openly invite the Dalai Lama to the institute's events for fear that the Chinese side would not collaborate with the Danes anymore. As she elaborated,

We were very often attacked because we didn't strongly condemn things in China, when various things were happening [...] Concerning the Dalai Lama, for instance, we wouldn't officially have him visiting the institute [...]. We wouldn't do that because we thought that it would be really counterproductive in relation to the work we were doing [...] it was all based on the premise that we believed that there were forces, groups, and institutions in China, which were seriously trying to improve the human rights situation. [...] And they were serious, and they were competent. (Thelle 2020)

The Chinese side was very cautious in collaborating too, because they understood the political and social boundaries clearly and saw certain issues as uncrossable. In order to continue the transnational collaboration, both sides had to respect the boundaries.

Another kind of silence that has been exercised by these socially engaged scholars has been to avoid misunderstandings and keep wrongful accusations against them away. Ristivojević (2021) shared her experience of being wrongly labeled as a Chinese nationalist during a peer review process by unknown but presumably Western colleagues because of her analysis, which criticized the Western approach to China, and “supposedly implied that I think China should have more power in international politics, regardless of its violation of human rights” (Ristivojević 2021). A Chinese scholar working in a European country also shared a similar experience in a blinded peer review process in which she was mistakenly considered a Chinese nationalist, while in reality she is known in the West as a critic of China's women's rights situation.

8.5 Transnational connections

Transnational connections where Chinese and non-Chinese experts, including scholars, officials, and activists meet have been a vital conduit for exchanging views on issues of human rights and sub-issues such as the death penalty and women's rights. Chinese women's rights and the activism around them have benefited greatly from overseas support. The Chinese state's permission for such interactions was vital in the beginning. For instance, the Chinese government supported state-sanctioned women's rights organizations such as the All-China Women's Federation to attend the UN World Conference on Women in 1995. This offered Chinese practitioners in the domain of woman rights a legitimate space in which to operate after the 1995 conference, under the banner that this was for China to connect to the world, at a time when China sought to make an international breakthrough in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen incident. Tapping into the Chinese government's interests, activists had some much-awaited windows of opportunity to operate and connect themselves with overseas organizations. Certainly, in the Chinese case, there is also a boundary that one has to observe. In this case of women's rights, self-censorship is needed to ensure that their work is not linked or framed together with 'human rights movements' or 'labor movements.' Their focus is on narrow but certainly daunting tasks of helping Chinese women gain more equality in a male-dominated society and culture. Thirty years have passed since 1995. Collaboration between scholars and activists in the realm of Chinese women's rights and the production of knowledge about it still faces daunting challenges.

As the Chinese state has a penchant for engagement with the Global South, including former Central and Eastern European socialist 'Second World' countries and the member states of the Non-Aligned Movement, scholar-activists have also worked around this concept to legitimize their events. In June 2019, for example, Professors Wang Zheng, Elisabeth Armstrong, and Kristen Ghodsee, three scholars who are researching post-socialist women's movements, organized a symposium at the University of Michigan, with the aim of fostering dialogues between scholars and activists from China, India, Bulgaria, Zambia, Poland, Vietnam, the former Yugoslavia, and Algeria. They discussed the histories of the experiences of women from the Second World and their unrecorded collaboration (Ristivojević 2021).

As previously discussed, the space for civil society is shrinking in the Xi Jinping era. Collaboration in and outside of China on Chinese women's rights has become difficult, as this can be easily framed by the Chinese government as having foreign connections and subjecting China to hostile foreign interference.

The so-called MeToo movement in China has faced particularly difficult challenges. If someone addresses issues of sexual harassment or domestic violence in the Chinese context, it is still permissible to some extent. But if the advocacy is

labeled part of the Western-bred MeToo movement, where female victims of sexual violence speak up to call attention to their plight and ask for solidarity, then it crosses the redline of the Chinese state. In other words, anyone who uses the MeToo label would expose herself in a completely different, highly politicized way and draw a direct reaction from the Chinese state.

Despite the taboo, in 2018, the term 'MeToo' was officially used in China. What happened in 2018? It began with a Chinese journalist who initiated a survey among some 250 female Chinese journalists. More than eighty percent of them answered that they had experienced some kind of assault by their bosses. After these surveys went public, one Chinese person, then living in Canada, opened up the stage for the official kick-off of the MeToo movement in China. She revealed how she had been sexually harassed by her famous Chinese professor when she was still in China. This was in a way the first rupture, the first in a line of women who spoke up one by one. In a way, the whole movement is a continuation of previous efforts, in and beyond China, that have been made in the past thirty years, but the rupture reached a different intensity (Xiong and Ristivojević 2021).

Unlike the previous state-sanctioned non-governmental activities to advocate for women's rights, the 2018 MeToo movement was mobilized in a decentralized way by women who had survived sexual harassment. It was sporadic, at times fragile, because there was no formal institution behind each individual's work, but a huge strength lies in the solidarity behind it. They created online archives to document these cases. Meanwhile, the Chinese government tried to delete these cases, thus erasing the memories of these victims. Some of these activists have now left China due to security risks at home. Those who remain in China do not have much space to operate anymore.

Dusica Ristivojević points out that these socially engaged scholars in China were much more directly involved in activism than is the case in Western academia (Chen 2021). The boundaries between academia and activism are very blurred. There is a group of Chinese professors and filmmakers who wish to continue to document and share their work in keeping memories of their activism alive for future generations and in minimizing the possibility of state manipulation modifying or erasing the memories and records. In a sense, the knowledge production about Chinese women's rights is a knowledge realm initiated by the PRC Chinese experts themselves. It is not, as the Chinese government has claimed, that they are produced and sponsored by wicked foreign or Western forces. The foreign label is only used by the Chinese state to discredit these Chinese scholars' efforts. A more accurate description is that China-based experts have generated and documented useful knowledge about Chinese women's rights, and they wish to continue to share and exchange views with similar forces outside China to seek inspiration and solidarity (Chen 2021). Their aim was originally not overtly political, but the

Chinese censorship system has made this aspiration a politically sensitive issue, placing it firmly under Chinese state control (Feng 2021).

As China is global in many ways, the globalness of China attracts transnational synergies. This book utilizes many pages talking about China watchers and their communities outside of China. Here the stories of Chinese women's rights scholars and activists lead us to see that knowledge production about China is transnational in nature. Although China is not included in the Indo-Pacific framework, the contributions of Chinese scholars, journalists, and officials in producing analyses and perspectives on this construct demonstrate their capabilities in global discourse and knowledge creation. China itself synergizes the ideas, talents, aspirations, and efforts of experts both in and outside of China. In the final chapter, Chapter ten, I will conclude with a discussion of the globalness of China and the importance of reclaiming the transnational nature of knowledge production about China. Before that, I will discuss the alternative China-watching venue of Taiwan in the next chapter.

