

China Watchers: The Agency and Diversity

Knowledge about China Is Epistemological

Abstract

Knowledge about China is produced by China watchers who come from many different disciplinary, social, political, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Where China watchers come from and how they are trained affect what they think the narration about China should be like. Their personal context influences what they think is important to study and what the necessary components for studying China should be. Generational differences also play a role because this impacts the training which China watchers undertake as human beings living within a particular historical and political context. When China watchers study and produce knowledge about China, the acts constitute efforts to (re)connect the China watchers with China. In this vein, knowledge about China itself is epistemological.

Keywords: China watchers, knowledge production about China, academic disciplines, re-sinicization, epistemology

One of the privileges and dangers of youth, as I think, is over-estimation of yourself though the results of it are not always a total disaster. After reading almost everything in our family huge library, which included all the Russian and European classical literature, I came to an erroneous conclusion, that I had already understood the spirit of Russian and Western cultures ... my choice in favor of Chinese studies was also an understandable continuation of the desire to understand the East, as China for me, was undoubtedly the quint-essence of all that you call East.

(Russian sinologist Alexander Andreevich Pisarev (2017: 83–84))

Knowledge about China is produced by China watchers who come from many different disciplinary, social, political, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Where we come from and how we are trained affect what we think the study of China should be like. Our personal context influences what we think is important to study and what the necessary components for studying China should be. Generational differences also play a role because they impact the training that we undertake as human beings living within a particular historical and political context.

At first glance, acknowledging the unneutral production of China knowledge might seem somewhat controversial in academia. We like to think that our professors can produce neutral knowledge in their writing and impart neutral knowledge

to their students. Our current academic practices do give us guidance on how such neutrality and impartiality of knowledge can be produced, normally and in the name of ‘science.’ We, as human beings, can nonetheless never be 100% neutral. Our family, society, culture, the environment where we grow up, traveling experiences, the people we encounter in life, education, and so much more, contribute to who we are today. We follow scientific guidelines and ethics in order to produce valuable knowledge. But this still does not take away from the fact that our professors and researchers are human agents. Each of us has a unique story that makes us who we are—and leads us to study China from a certain perspective, which in turn leads us to present and teach about China in certain ways.

Beyond the narrow field of China, it is commonly known that the term ‘research’ itself is linked to European imperialism and colonialism, in which knowledge about certain studied indigenous peoples are collected, categorized, and then presented to the West. Edward Said’s (1978) famous critique of orientalism rightly pointed out that our concept of the Orient as different from the Occident was forged through the process of imperialism. In that sense, Western scholarship about the Eastern world has always been servile to Western power, and hence knowledge production is political and conditioned in a certain historical context. This also applies to the development of sinology or Chinese studies in many countries (Bueno 2021; Vukovich 2012; Ryckmans 1984).

I should caution, though, that non-Western countries might have different experiences from the West. For instance, Korea has had a long sinological learning tradition dating back at least two thousand years, when Chinese characters and texts were introduced from China (Shim 2023). That was a time when the contemporary conceptualization of nations and nation-states did not exist. During that long period of time, Korean intellectuals conducted academic studies that would belong both to Korean studies and sinology. There were also transnational scholars at that time, such as Korean Buddhist scholars who would travel to the West, to China and India, to learn about Buddhism and even help develop sinology (Shim 2023). Korean intellectuals did not perceive Chinese culture and history clearly as the ‘other’ as Western scholarship did. In fact, it was not until Japan’s colonization of Korea in the early 20th century that prompted Korean intellectuals to look at China as clearly as the other (Shim 2023).

Differently, the origin of Western sinology or Chinese studies began with Western missionaries wishing to spread Catholic Christianity among the Chinese people, an effort that dates back to the 16th century. These Jesuit missionaries are often considered as proto-sinologists who facilitated cultural exchanges between China and Europe (Paternicò 2023). In 1732, the missionary priest, Matteo Ripa (1682–1746), created the first Sinology School on the European Continent, ‘The Chinese Institute’ or ‘a College of the Chinese,’ the first nucleus of what would

become today's lay institution, the University of Naples L'Orientale (Università degli studi di Napoli L'Orientale). Ripa had worked as a painter and copper engraver at the Kangxi emperor's imperial course between 1711 and 1723. He returned to Naples from China with four young Chinese Christians and established the Institute, sanctioned by Pope Clement XII to teach Chinese to missionaries in 1732 (Paternicò 2023).

Orientalism, born out of imperial actions, has been the predecessor of more regionalized terms such as 'sinology' and later 'Chinese studies' or 'China studies.' The discipline includes the study of the history, languages, societies, economies, and political systems of the 'Orient' and geographically covers any place that is opposite of the 'Occident,' such as even from the Maghreb (i.e., Western and Central North Africa) to Japan (Kemper and Kalinovsky 2015).

Fast forward to the 20th century: Paris's sinology dominated learning about China until the Second World War. Paul Pelliot, a French sinologist known for his exploration of Central Asia and discovery of many important Chinese texts, such as the Dunhuang manuscripts, was skilled not just in Chinese but also other Central Asian languages. This allowed him to engage in academic writings on diverse topics. Across the Eurasian continent, the Russian school of sinology was also reputable and focused on the impartation of classical Chinese, such as the work of Julian Konstantinovich Shchutsky (Юлиан константинович щуцкий) whose translation of the *I Ching* (or *Yijing*, meaning 'Book of Changes') was considered the best at the time of its production. As Senior Kazakhstani sinologist, Konstantin Syroyezhkin (Константин Сыроежкин) asserted, "it must be admitted that the Russian school of sinology was the strongest in the world [...] this is recognized by both Western and Chinese scientists" (Syroyezhkin 2015).

The early days of sinology focused on historical phonology, classical religion, philosophy, and linguistics. For example, Latvian sinologist, Peter Schmidt (1869–1938), was a linguist and ethnographer (Dunajevs 2023). Swedish sinologist, Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978), was a linguist. Someone who studied the 'contemporary issues' of China would have been considered shallow. Contemporary issues were only what diplomats and journalists were interested in: not at all "scholarly"! (Brødsgaard 1996; Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 2022). In West Germany's case, Weigelin-Schwiedrzik (2022: 47–48) particularly notes that '*Sinologie*' was chosen as the name of the academic field and integrated into 'ancient studies' (*Altertumswissenschaften*) after the Second World War because of the academics' desire to show their separation from Germany's Nazi past, when academics were used for political purposes. The preference in sinology in West Germany was to engage purely with classical Chinese, and scholars were considered to engage solely in studying ancient China. Universities were not believed to be the place for teaching Mandarin Chinese nor researching contemporary developments.

However, as times changed, new generations of sinologists began to hold different views. In Germany's case, Hamburg and Munich, for example, have opted for starkly divergent approaches. The philological tradition of sinology is still preferred in Munich while some sinologists in Hamburg encourage the field to interact with other wider academic fields and do not exclude contemporary China as an academic focus either. In North America and Europe, as academic disciplines flourish and develop relatively well in higher educational and research institutions, there have inevitably been debates, reforms, and resistances against reforms over how the study of China should be organized at the academic level. Various paths were chosen and developed by different institutions accordingly.

As the times evolved, public interest in the contemporary issues of China grew. With sinology moving closer to the wider fields of social sciences in general, nowadays we can find China experts in various disciplines, including development studies, political sciences, sociology, anthropology, law, business management, economics, and cultural studies. Today, traditional sinologists still exist, but we also see scholars from other disciplines joining in a much wider exploration of China. In a way, such pluralization is in line with the general development of academic disciplines throughout history. Recalling the 17th century, when universities or similar institutions were set up in Europe and America, education was mostly focused on religion, particularly the Christian faith and training ministries. But with time, more disciplines were added and higher education became closer to various aspects of everyday life and social realities.

Traditional sinologists and China experts from other disciplines operate in different worlds with different theoretical, methodological, and empirical focuses. They are not necessarily in conflict with each other, but it is not easy for them to form a unified scientific community either. Take Germany again as an example. Berlin and Bochum have nurtured the birth of the study of contemporary China. In recent years, think tanks in Germany have also begun to fill the gap by engaging in policy-oriented research that is tied closely to the study of contemporary China.

In Europe, as different kinds of sinology develop, some adhere stronger to the philological tradition of sinology while others are bringing themselves closer to social scientific disciplines. One example would be French sinologist and sociologist, Marcel Granet (1884–1940), who used methods from Durkheimian sociology for his research. Similarly, in the United States of America (USA), there has been a trend to draw sinology closer to social sciences. The famous scholar, John King Fairbank (1907–1991), went so far as to dismiss the philological tradition and advocated developing the study of China using the 'area studies' approach (Blitstein 2017). One of the earliest American scholars of Cold War China and Sino-American relations was Chinese-American Tang Tsou (鄒譚, 1918–1999) of the University of Chicago. Tsou

stressed the importance of academic objectivity in sinology and the continuation of exchanges between China and the West in order for both sides to understand each other better. Tsou was seen as an authority on modern China in the fields of both China studies and political sciences in his time.

There is a tension as academic disciplines encounter each other, integrate, converge, and diversify. Scholars, having individual agency, also face the question of how they identify themselves with their discipline and their work. Whether one calls oneself a sinologist or a political scientist, for instance, shows that person's inclination. This tension is for example acute in the US academia where scholars conducting research on Chinese politics have increasingly become more integrated into the discipline of political science, particularly as part of comparative politics and international relations. With American political scientists having strong empirical and quantitative preferences, researchers can nowadays present much more sophisticated data, theories, and modeling to analyze and interpret Chinese politics. However, the general trend is towards contributing to political sciences rather than understanding Chinese politics. In addition, scholars tend to work on narrow topics within the political science disciplines, and this again leads to the questions if and how the research can speak to the larger questions of how Chinese politics would work. The tension between disciplinary boundaries is visible in other parts of the world such as Europe and Asia too. But the US's huge and vibrant China-watching community, particularly scholars working on Chinese politics, face the challenge after the discipline(s) become advanced and specialized, that the development might paradoxically lead scholars to see 'trees' clearly but not the 'forest' (O'Brien 2006, 2011, 2018).

A China watcher's identification with a particular discipline will affect how that scholar studies China and draws conclusions for his readers. In the US case, this is further complicated by the fact that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is an important country for the US politically and economically. The national strategic importance of China leads the growth of a plethora of China watchers in various professions. But as McCourt (2022) illuminates, their educational, personal, and career backgrounds influence these experts to harbor different stances on US policy towards the PRC. McCourt (2022) discerns four major types of China watchers in contemporary America: the Strategic Competitors, the Engagers, the New Cold Warriors, and the Competitive Co-existers. While McCourt (2022) admits that sometimes the boundaries between these four labels can be fuzzy, he notices that these four major groups do hold different stances. The China-watching community in the US as a whole shows a tendency towards polarization and politicalization as experts do not see eye to eye on US policies towards China (McCourt 2022, 2024).

2.1 Knowledge about China is conditioned by epistemological relationships with China

While the aspiration for these two goals—academic objectivity and continued exchanges—sounds commonsensical for China watchers, the US’s China-watching community’s struggles to reach consensus on China policies indicates that this is not always easy. The kernel of this book is to sketch out the struggles, contradictions, and difficulties in implementing them. To start with, objectivity is hard to achieve, as all knowledge about China is conditioned by the scholar or researcher’s epistemological relationship with China. It has been this way historically and in our contemporary era. This pattern is pervasive and has unique local features in various countries around the world. In Germany and other European countries, for instance, many senior sinologists who are now retired or have passed away began their study of China because they were attracted to the Chinese Communist Party’s ideals (Lodén 2016). The famous German sinologist, Rudolf Wagner (1941–2019), of Heidelberg University was one of them. Looking at the European societies where they came from, they were critical of Western or capitalist developments, and Maoism was an inspiration for them to study China. As Klotzbücher (2023) demonstrates, China was anti-modernity or offered an alternative modernity for these intellectuals in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. But personal experiences of living in Maoist China later in their lives had shattered some of their utopian views of the perfect society of China.

Moving beyond Europe, Modibo Bah Kone, a retired professor who has played a significant role in fostering Chinese educational collaboration at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Education at the University of Bamako in the Republic of Mali (Website of Beijing Foreign Studies University 2024), similarly conveyed that since his high school days, he has had “a lot of admiration for Chairman Mao Zedong. Because we inherited a classical left-wing background, it was the period of socialism and Modibo Keita (the first president of Mali)” (Kone 2024).

Scholars elsewhere have also been prompted by various personal reasons to study China in certain fashions. Caroline Sy Hau (born 1963) is a Chinese-Filipino author and scholar, currently working as a Professor of Southeast Asian literature at Kyoto University, Japan. She is known for her book *The Chinese Question: Ethnicity, Nation and Region in and beyond the Philippines* (Hau 2014). She confessed that,

My interest in things Chinese was a way to understand myself, my family, what sort of community I grew up in, and also to understand ethnic Chinese relations in Southeast Asia. It was less about China, and more about Chinese in the Philippines and Southeast Asia [...] I am using the Chinese in the Philippines and Chinese in Southeast Asia as a kind of ground or framework to understand the Chinese in China, rather than the other way around. (Hau 2016)

Hau expressed that she approached China through literary studies. But she confessed that

disciplines can also be limiting too, because they tend to narrow your focus. In my case, my frustration has always been that many of the people in my field tend to concentrate on textual analysis, and they never really look outside the text. I think area studies can help bridge disciplines by allowing us to learn from each other [...] I also admit that we need to have a disciplinary base before we can actually cross disciplines. (Hau 2016)

Individual researchers' study of China has always been conditioned by the larger political and social structure in which they exist. The Prague school of sinology in the Czech Republic illustrates this point. Scholars in this Prague School are known for their specializations in modern Chinese literature, field research on popular theater, storytelling, and the philosophy of the Han dynasty, combined with innovative research methods, such as semiotics and Marxist theory (Lin 2022; Cheng 2014).

In the 1950s, the Czech Republic was still part of Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia and China had frequent contact, nurturing the first generation of the Prague school of sinology under the leadership of Professor Jaroslav Průšek (Cheng 2014; Lin 2015, 2022). During the Prague Spring in 1968, the then Czechoslovakia tried to liberalize its politics, and the Soviet Union stopped the political movement by invading. For about twenty years after the Prague Spring, Czech sinology was isolated from the world (Lin 2015). Sinologists were forced to give up their jobs, and some of them stopped conducting research on what they were interested in. Czech sinologist, Zdenka Heřmanová, for instance, was forced to make reports about China to the government at that time (Lin 2015). She had to translate Chinese daily newspapers, which was irrelevant to Chinese literature, her true love (Lin 2015). This period coincided with the Sino-Soviet split. Under the influence of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia's relations with China soured.

Zbygniew Slupski, another Czech sinologist, shared that the situation of the sixties was unique. The political atmosphere was negative towards China and in fact, sinologists at that time also had dismissive feelings towards China. But even so, sinologists at that time did not want to write negative things about China, "although everybody knew there was nothing positive to say about the Chinese revolution" (Slupski 2010–2011).

Clearly, Slupski's account was full of contradictions and uncertainties, and so were his feelings towards China. He struggled with the distance or relationship that he wished to maintain with China, its people, and other relevant subjects. This is also an issue for many China watchers in the contemporary era, which we will illuminate in this book later.

Contact with China finally resumed after 1990. The revival of sinology since the 1990s in the post-communist Czech Republic and Poland does not mean that sinology has returned to its past position. For one thing, China today is different from the China of the past. Contemporary sinologists have been moulded by an atmosphere of liberation and democratization in post-communist societies. New generations of sinologists see a different China—or different Chinas. Today's sinologists ask themselves, of their studies and teaching, whether they want to focus on studying the China that has a rich culture, or the China that has developed itself economically, becoming a world leader in technology, or the China that is authoritarian (Brødsgaard 1996). These diverse choices will lead researchers and teachers to different routes and ways of studying, teaching, and narrating about China.

2.2 Different Chinas and different routes to understanding Chinas

After belated and uneasy beginnings, French studies of contemporary China have recently matured. Thirty years ago, the field was almost non-existent in France. Most sinologists carried on the once celebrated philological tradition or concentrated on philosophy, religion, classical literature and ancient history. Few were happy to see the sacred field encroached upon by modern historians, whose secular interests they seemed closer to those of reporters than of scholars. (Written by famous French historian and sinologist, Lucien Bianco (1995))

I have overseen most of the Nordic part of Chih-yu Shih's oral history project. Chinese studies as a scholarly discipline in the Nordics began with Bernhard Karlgren's studies of Chinese phonology. Karlgren played an enormous role in the establishment of sinology as an academic discipline in the region. He brought up an entire generation of students who were to set the agenda for the development of Chinese studies in the Nordics, from the late 1950s almost up to the present (Brødsgaard 1996). Completing the global project is not easy as the interviewers are racing against time, and we often lose. It is not uncommon for us to identify a senior sinologist to be interviewed only to learn not long after that this person has just passed away. Writing emails to experts and receiving an automatic reply of "Sorry, this is the email of Prof X, who has just passed away," is sadly normal. It is also not unusual to learn that the China expert we had just interviewed passed away soon after.

In 2016, Göran Malmqvist (1924–2019) was still the most senior sinologist in the Nordic countries. When I contacted him in 2016, he refused to be interviewed. He said: "I am a very old man, educated in a tradition where the definition of sinology

was quite different from that of today. I therefore fear that my recollections would seem irrelevant to most readers.” He used huge fonts in his email. At one point, I noticed that some of my very senior scholar friends also used super-sized fonts, and I guessed that this was because it was easier for them to read. Not willing to give up so easily, I enlarged the size of my fonts in my reply email. To make a long story short, Malmqvist later agreed to have the interview. But then his health took a turn for the worse and eventually it was his wife who was replying to my emails. In 2019, he passed away in Sweden. I have never managed to meet him, although I tried for three years.

The initial reluctance of Malmqvist to accept the interview depicts the generational and disciplinary divide that exists in the Chinese studies community at large. The new generation of scholars is interested in contemporary topics, which were considered superficial in Malmqvist’s era. Disciplinary divides persist in the contemporary era. Whether you are trained specifically in Chinese studies, or whether you were originally an economist, political scientist, anthropologist, historian, or sociologist who uses these disciplines’ theories and methods to analyze China, makes a huge difference as these disciplines have different epistemic cultures. Political scientists, for instance, tend to treat China as a country that can be examined through various social science theories. In this process, they might also compare China with other countries. In other words, political scientists are prone to look at China comparatively, and do not care solely about China. They care about what China, as a case study, can tell us about social science theories. As another example, Jack Gregory, emeritus professor and a general historian at La Trobe University in Australia confessed that, “although I am a generalist, I have been very pleased to be included in the community of China scholars!” (Gregory 2018). This is not just a contemporary phenomenon. The aforementioned Frenchman, Marcel Granet, would see himself as a Durkheimian sociologist whose research focused on China, not a traditional sinologist *per se* (Blitstein 2017).

Differently, experts trained in traditional area studies, such as Chinese studies, might not bear as much of a theoretical burden as political scientists, economists, or sociologists. Their focus on China tends to lead them to believe that China is a unique country with a unique civilization and culture that cannot be easily compared with other cases. Their emphasis is thus on a thorough examination of China, inside and out. They would not care much about what social science theories, which are mostly products of the West, might say.

In October 2015, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences held a conference called ‘Intellectual History of International China Studies: Communication and Conversations’ in cooperation with Chih-yu Shih’s global project. There are teams in charge of the collection of oral histories in various countries and regions of the world. During that October conference in Beijing, team representatives from

different parts of the world shared their current findings and discussed future work. At the conference, there was a professor of Chinese studies. She was an ethnic Chinese, who was born in Malaysia and grew up there. As an ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, she wanted to preserve her roots. This pushed her to learn classic Chinese literature, and eventually she became a professor of Chinese studies.

Halfway through the conference, she made a confession to the rest of the participants. She said that she realized that she had come to the wrong conference. She did not know that most of the participants were part of a global project, and that we were meeting in Beijing to share the development of ‘China studies’ in various parts of the world. While traditional sinology programs still exist, there are more and more study programs that focus on the contemporary society, culture, economics, and politics of China. But for many scholars, such study programs are ‘China studies,’ not ‘Chinese studies,’ as the two are not considered the same thing.

For this scholar from Malaysia, China studies cannot be confused with Chinese studies. Chinese studies should focus on literature and linguistics and other humanities-related subjects. This was what her focus was on. In her Malaysian university, they mainly recruit students who are ethnic Chinese. They do not need much training in basic Mandarin and focus instead on learning advanced levels of Mandarin and literature. In other words, their students are similar to students of Chinese studies in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. In Chinese studies, a lot of advanced literature study is engaged in.

In the broadly defined West, however, ‘Chinese studies’ is sometimes used interchangeably with the term ‘China studies,’ but the two terms have a different foundation from the ones created in China or Malaysia. The education at the university level in the West usually entails teaching Mandarin from scratch, and then introducing various aspects of China to students. Some programs might stress the language element more than others. Those that place more emphasis on the language requirement and element can be more suitably termed ‘Chinese studies’ while those focusing more on comprehensive knowledge of Chinese culture, society, politics, and economics can be more suitably termed ‘China studies,’ but one cannot be dogmatic about this distinction because different universities may define and craft their own programs differently.

2.3 The agency of China watchers

With the rich oral history interview data that Chih-yu Shih has managed to collect with collaborators from all over the world, he further developed a theory of post-Chineseness (Shih 2022). This book does not specifically engage with Shih’s theory of post-Chineseness. However, Shih’s work has inspired me and helped

me to develop concepts that are relevant for my own research in this book. What interests me most is the concept of Chineseness. Who possesses Chineseness? What are the traits of Chineseness?

Perhaps it is logical to think that an ethnically Chinese person would possess some Chineseness, although it is also logical to think that not all ethnically Chinese persons would possess or manifest the same kind of Chineseness. The definition of Chineseness is not fixed and we might never find perfect agreements on the definition. It might indicate the level of possessing Chinese language skills, degree of appreciation of the Chinese culture, or period of living and immersing oneself in Chinese culture (be it in the PRC or outside), just to name some imperfect examples.

The definition of Chineseness also involves partly self-identification of Chineseness versus non-Chineseness by a China watcher as well as others' perceptions of a China watcher's Chineseness. A Caucasian American, for example, can potentially be an owner of Chineseness as long as there is recognition of him or her possessing something that is Chineseness, such as having lived in China for years, speaking fluent Chinese, or practicing Confucian rituals regularly. In this vein, China watchers can comprise ethnic Chinese or non-ethnic Chinese experts, as long as they are recognized as or they believe that they possess some vaguely conceived Chineseness.

Chineseness is something that is not always fixed. It can be fluid, and in practice, it can be improvised (Shih 2022). A person can spontaneously or strategically decide to add to or decrease his or her own Chineseness. Most relevant for my book here is the act of engagement in knowledge acquirement, production, or reproduction of knowledge about China. Shih (2018a, 2019b) opines that when China watchers study and produce knowledge about China, the acts constitute efforts to (re)connect the China watchers with China and thus obtain some level of Chineseness. Knowledge about China is produced through China watchers' (re)connecting efforts or '(re) sinicization.' Sinicization is the process by which non-Chinese societies, groups, or individuals (such as China watchers) are acculturated or assimilated into Chinese culture, particularly the language, societal norms, culture, and ethnic identity of the Han Chinese—the largest ethnic group of China. In this vein, knowledge about China is itself epistemological. Furthermore, as there are dynamic processes of (re) sinicization through different practices, such as education and travel, each China watcher would first (re)sinicize himself or herself through conducting these practices and then further enable themselves to make meaning of their (re)sinicization by producing knowledge.

Each China watcher has his or her agency. He or she might strategically position himself or herself via his or her scholarship on China for various reasons (e.g., to define his or her expertise, career advancement, or personal ideological convictions). This view is in line with German sinologist, Sascha Klotzbücher's

(2023) observation, and many anthropologists in general, that the positionality of a researcher and a studied object, the distance of his or her relationship from that subject, and the intensity of that relationship would determine how a study would develop. If one researcher's achievement has flourished greatly and more researchers and students follow a similar path, the discipline will develop further. The initial positionality of a researcher toward his or her studied object of China would affect how the discipline evolves and how his or her readers and followers form their knowledge about China. One can think of an academic discipline such as Chinese studies as a milieu in which researchers, their readers, and followers interact and engage with one another in order to (re)sinicize.¹ In the following sub-sections, I extract data from Shih's oral history projects to give concrete examples of China watchers who believe or who are believed to possess some Chineseness. I describe their careers and how they have interacted with other actors in their own fields or societies to contribute to China watching and knowledge production about China.

Our readers will meet China experts of various sorts in the following sub-sections, including those who do not speak Chinese or have struggled to learn Chinese, non-ethnic Chinese China experts whose translation of Chinese literature is a way of sinicizing themselves, and ethnic Chinese China experts who struggle to understand their own Chineseness. I use these 'surprises' not only to show the diversity and non-conformity of the China-watching communities in the world, but also to strengthen my arguments that one must check any China watcher's agency deeply to understand how he or she contributes to knowledge production about China. I have no doubt that some readers might also raise a few eyebrows at my choices of China experts. I have done this on purpose, specifically to challenge the Global North mentality and practices in defining what a China specialist should be like. It is in this vein that this study also speaks to the growing scholarly interests in decolonial scholarship that critiques the hegemony of Western or other forms of colonial knowledge systems. The last two sub-sections further deal with two important mechanisms that may sinicize China watchers: education and travel.

2.3.1 China experts who cannot speak Chinese?

It might sound ludicrous that a China expert cannot speak Chinese. But even during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, when Europe started to have

¹ Standard Western epistemologies treat meanings as something given 'out there.' Following this line of thinking, knowledge about China is just 'out there.' But this study treats knowledge about China as constructed by China watchers through experiences and relations, as a kind of (re)sinicization process. Some of my thoughts are inspired by Tim Ingold's (2000) 'The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill,' although Ingold's work does not deal with China specifically.

different sorts of orientalists conducting research and imparting knowledge about the broadly defined Orient, it was not always easy to clearly discern sinologists, Japanologists, Indologists, and other orientalists from one another. Paternicò (2023) indicated that in Italy, there were many scholars who could read and teach Classical Chinese, but they might not be able to use Chinese language in China for daily communication. However, there were indeed Italian sinologists who were well versed in the Chinese language. In our contemporary era, it is much easier to receive an education or go on exchange or fieldwork and deepen one's language skills than it was centuries ago. If someone is a sinologist, the chances are that this person will have a good command of Chinese language skills. But if a scholar is not a sinologist per se, and his or her disciplinary focus is instead on other fields, such as political science, economics, or law, it is possible that this person does not have advanced Chinese language skills.

Chinese diaspora who have been advancing knowledge production about China in their host countries might also not necessarily have a high command of Mandarin Chinese skills. It is possible that he or she might speak a certain Chinese dialect at home, but there is little support for Chinese language education in the educational system of the host country to help advance their skills. For example, in Chapter five, we will encounter Hendry Jurnawan (赖民裕), a Chinese diaspora in Indonesia. His career has straddled academia, journalism, and politics, and he helped raise awareness of Chinese Indonesians' rights in various ways through his three careers. Jurnawan's family in Indonesia is located in Pontianak, where the Chinese diaspora tends to speak dialects such as Chaozhou (or Teochew, 潮州話) and Kejia (or Hakka 客家話). At home, Jurnawan (2017) also spoke the Fuzhou dialect (福州話). But as Chinese language education in Indonesia ceased to exist due to a policy change, he could not continue formal education to improve his Mandarin. It was only later in life that he was able to improve his language skills. He even studied in China to improve his Chinese (Jurnawan 2017).

2.3.2 China experts who have never been to China?

Can one become a China expert without having lived in China and being immersed in the culture for a period of time? Political, financial, and various other reasons have hindered young and even senior researchers from visiting China more than we can imagine. At the outset of this chapter, I quoted a self-narration by Professor Alexander Andreevich Pisarev (Александр Андреевич Писарев), a Russian sinologist and historian, about his choice to study China in his career. Pisarev was born in 1950 in Vladivostok when his parents were sent to Sakhalin, the most extreme end of the Soviet Empire, as punishment for their unmarried relationship, which was deemed to go against the Communist party members' ethics at the time

(Pisarev 2012). Due to the birth of Pisarev, his parents had to make a short stop in Vladivostok and later continued to the eastern end of the empire. Pisarev (2017) expressed that many would associate his birthplace, the Eastern part of the Soviet Union, with his interest in China. But his motivation was due to a reckless miscalculation: he thought that he had known a lot about Russian and European cultures. To understand ‘the East,’ which was mysterious to him, he had chosen China because China meant the East for him (Pisarev 2017).

In the early part of Pisarev’s career, he confessed that he had not been to China although he was already teaching about China and giving lectures about China in various places (e.g., universities, factories, collective farms) in the Soviet Union (Pisarev 2017). China was a hot topic at that time even though relations between the Soviet Union and China were in a bad shape. Part of this inability to travel to China was related to the Soviet system, which restricted foreign trips to only certain political elites and through governmental channels. Even though China had become a bit more open towards admitting foreigners to visit after Mao Zedong’s death, because relations between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and China had been deteriorating, it was nearly impossible for him to visit China. The souring of Soviet–Chinese relations in the 1960s–1970s with the armed clashes along the Far Eastern section of the Russian–Chinese border put all cultural and educational exchanges between the two sides to an end. It was also hard to find any Chinese people in the Soviet Union to make contact with. Students of China in that era had hopelessly understood that they might not ever travel to China even though they had dedicated their lives to studying the country (Pisarev 2017).

Pisarev recalled that when he toured the USSR to talk about China, he sometimes failed to answer very simple questions. For instance, a local farmer once asked him about the shape of a beer bottle in China. He could not answer. That also reflected the odd situation at that time, when China was a contested topic but there was a dearth of knowledge about everyday life in China among everyone from lay persons to intellectuals (Pisarev 2012, 2017).

It was only later, when Pisarev had the chance to finally visit China, that he realized that the shape of a beer bottle in China was similar to the beer bottles that he could find in the Soviet Union. That year was 1984, when Soviet Sinologists were admitted to China for research and educational purposes after a long break in cultural and educational exchanges between the two countries. At that time, Pisarev had already taught about China in the Soviet Union for nearly a decade and been promoted to associate professorship (Pisarev 2012, 2017).

In other words, Pisarev’s early years of sinicization came through education and books in the absence of actual contact with any Chinese persons and culture or visiting China. He also recalled that in his early years of contact with the Chinese language in the university, he had difficulty in pronouncing the Chinese tones. His

mother, who was good with music, had to use their home piano to help him figure out the four *mā-má-mǎ-mà* tones in the Chinese language (Pisarev 2012, 2017).

It goes without saying that during Pisarev's first journey to China, he experienced cultural shocks, in addition to the challenge of having to adjust to listening to Chinese languages with accents and dialects from different regions of the huge country. Pisarev (2012) recalled that he could not understand anything when the first Chinese person he met opened his mouth! It was precisely the initially unsuccessful relationship between him and the real living Chinese language in China that gave him a stomach ulcer within a month (Pisarev 2012, 2017).

But the challenge was greater than that. One interesting example which he gave was when he had a joyful dinner with a Chinese professor in China discussing Chinese and Russian classical literature.

We were eating sliced chicken and there were a lot of bones that I collected patiently on a tiny plate. My friend spat that stuff freely on the table and, after that, brushed the bones directly onto the floor. When my plate was overloaded, he simply threw what it contained on the floor as well. I was really shocked, as in our culture we never did this kind of things. (Pisarev 2017: 95)

Pisarev (2017) explained that his Chinese host was equally shocked and commented, "You foreigners are strange people, I do not understand, why do you collect all those useless bones on your plate? You have no place left for more food" (Pisarev 2017: 96). One could argue that these encounters would further sinicize him to the Chinese cultures at least at the comprehension level, although he might not totally agree with and adapt to all things Chinese in his life.

In 1994, Pisarev became a professor at the Department of Chinese History at Moscow University. In 1996, he went to Taiwan with the thought that he would not stay too long there. But as it turned out, he worked for more than a decade in Taiwan after he resigned from Moscow University. "Working in Taiwan allowed me to live the way Taiwanese live," Pisarev expressed (2012). Several of the China watchers who will be introduced in the following sub-sections have also been able to compare their encounters with the PRC and the Republic of China (also known as Taiwan) in their intellectual journeys. We will come back to the site of Taiwan, being an alternative hub for China watching, in Chapter nine of this book. For now, let us move on to compare another non-ethnically Chinese expert's different routes towards sinicization.

2.3.3 Translating Chinese as a step towards sinicization

Mohsen Sayed Fergani (محسن سيد فرجاني, born 1959) is a professor in the Chinese Department at the School of Languages at Ain Shams University in Cairo, Egypt. Prof. Fergani is also a member of the Translation Association of the Supreme Council of Culture of Egypt. He is an important scholar, primarily contributing to the translation of Chinese literature into Arabic and promoting knowledge of Chinese literature and civilization in the Arab world (Hindawi Foundation 2024). The Chinese Department at Ain Shams University was founded in 1964. It was the first Chinese Department in the whole of the Arab world. It used to be the only department teaching Chinese in the Arab world, but a number of universities in the region have founded similar institutions since then.

In 1966 and 1976, recruitment by the department was suspended, and Fergani suspected that this might have been related to the frequent wars in Egypt during these years (Fergani 2017). When the Chinese Department reopened in 1997, Fergani became one of its first students and completed his undergraduate studies in 1981, master's studies in 1987, and then doctoral degree in 1995 at the same university. Since his undergraduate studies, he has been teaching at Ain Shams University. In the Egyptian context, he was also able to work as an assistant professor. In addition, he has been a key person in the translation of Chinese classics from Chinese into Arabic in the Arabic world. In the past, the early Chinese classics in the Arab world had to be translated through English and French as intermediary languages. None of them was directly translated from Chinese into Arabic. Fergani's main contributions lie in translating both modern and classical literature. In terms of modern literature, examples are Mo Yan's (莫言) 'Cow' (牛), *Dreams and Bastard* (梦境与杂种), *Selected Short and Medium Novels by Mo Yan* (莫言中短编小说选), Ma Yuan's (马原) *The Enticement of Gandisi* (风底斯的诱惑), as well as Liu Hong's (榴红) *Liuhong Humorous Satirical Novel* (榴红幽默讽刺小说). In terms of Chinese classics, Fergani has translated *Tao Te Ching (or Dao De Jing)* (道德经), *The Warring States Chronicles* (战国策), 'Liezi' (列子), and *The Book of Odes* (诗经). In 2013, Fergani won the China Book Special Contribution Award, which is an annual award established by the State Press and Publication Administration of the PRC to recognize foreign translators, writers, and publishers who have made significant contributions to introducing China and translating and publishing Chinese books. In 2016, the Chinese government further gave him the China-Arab Friendship Outstanding Contribution Award.

Fergani's first contact with China was in high school, through a book written by an American journalist, which recorded his experiences in East Asia, including China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and other countries. The American journalist had entered Vietnam by land. To this day, Fergani still cannot forget the impression

of China described in that book: roads, temples, billboards written in Chinese, and children. It was filled with vignettes of rural Chinese areas, but there were not many descriptions of large, prosperous cities (Fergani 2017).

Many elements of that book were familiar to Fergani and most Egyptians, especially the large-scale population migration caused by the chaos back home. For example, in 1967, his family had to move from his own region of Ismailia to the Fayoum Oasis, a remote rural village in central Egypt, to escape war. Fergani was in the third grade of elementary school that year, and his family stayed in Fayoum for four years. To this day, some uncles from the clan still live in Fayoum. Therefore, when he later read the American reporter's description of rural China, scenes of his childhood living in Fayoum came to mind. He believes that this was key to his passion for China. In 1977, when he graduated from high school, he happened to read in the newspaper that the Chinese Department of Ain Shams University was recruiting students again. Because of the catalyst of that book, he joined the Chinese Department without hesitation (Fergani 2017).

Like many other learners of Mandarin Chinese, pronunciation was not easy for Fergani in the beginning. Arabic does not have tonal distinctions like Chinese, so it took him a lot of effort just to identify the tones. The second challenge was that it took him a lot of effort to remember each Chinese character. The Russian professor, Pisarev, mentioned in the previous sub-section, shared the same challenge in learning the Chinese language. Fergani (2017) admits that even though he is a full professor now, a position which he has held since 1995, he still finds writing Chinese characters difficult. He thinks that his language proficiency is limited and his work focuses more on reading. "So, my eyes understand more Chinese than my tongue," as Fergani (2017) expressed.

Fergani's renowned novelist friend, Gamal El-Ghitani (الغيثاني جمال), was the editor-in-chief of the literary periodical of *Akhbar Al-Adab* (أخبار الأدب) or *Literary News* (alternatively, *Cultural News*) in the English translation until 2011. Gamal El-Ghitani hoped that Fergani could translate some famous Chinese classics for the magazine, so Fergani gave him his translated manuscript of *The Analects*. Thereafter, El-Ghitani started to issue *The Analects* in a series. After the series ended, the next was the translated work of Laozi's *Tao Te Ching*. Although Fergani also translated contemporary literature, what El-Ghitani wanted for his periodical was the series of Chinese classics (Fergani 2017).

El-Ghitani himself was an award-winning writer, the winner of the 1980 Egyptian National Prize for Literature, as well as the 1987 French Chevalier 'de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres,' literally meaning 'Order of Arts and Letters' in English. His work has been translated into several languages, including French, German, and English. El-Ghitani has a strong affection for Chinese classics because when he was in France, he read the French version of *Book of Changes*, also known

as *I Ching* or *Yijing* (易經). El-Ghitani had always expected Fergani to give the Arab world a truly directly translated version of the *Book of Changes*. But because the ancient Chinese used in the *Book of Changes* is too difficult, to this day Fergani feels that he cannot translate the book well. Fergani has expressed that the barrier between modern Chinese and ancient Chinese is difficult for Arabs to overcome (Fergani 2017).

El-Ghitani himself is deeply influenced by Sufi philosophy and has written many books on Sufism. Therefore, El-Ghitani once asked Fergani if there are any thoughts similar to Sufi philosophy in Chinese classics. Fergani (2017) answered that there are, but they are not equal to Sufism. In Fergani's (2017) view, Taoist mysticism is not completely consistent with Sufism. Taoism is still more of a philosophy and way of thinking, while Sufism is a religious practice.

The translated *Tao Te Ching* for the *Literary News* received great acclaim. Muhammad Hassanein Haikal (محمد هيكال حسنين), a well-known journalist in the Arab world, called El-Ghitani and asked about the translator. Haikal had previously read the English and French versions of *Tao Te Ching* but he found the translation of Fergani to best embody the essence of Laozi's thoughts. Given Haikal's prominence in the Arab world and the West, Fergani was encouraged, leading him to believe that the translation of *Tao Te Ching* was an important milestone in his translation career (Fergani 2017).

Maybe translation is a process of sinicization for Fergani. But sinicization as a uni-directional process on a personal level does not make his work complete. In fact, he sees that he is embedded in a wider political institution and context, and he has to work closely with actors (e.g., universities, the Ministry of Culture, the National Translation Center) from both the Chinese and Arab sides to complete his job. Thus, Fergani believes that his work is both cultural and political.

When I translate Chinese into Arabic, I also establish a relationship between China and Arab countries. Such cultural exchanges will likely make the relationship between the two parties operate more smoothly. Of course, politics also includes aspects of power and conflict. It is a kind of language, but culture can also act as another language. (Fergani 2017)

Therefore, "in addition to the cultural role, I play a political role. I not only carry out cultural exchanges, but also exert political influence. There are traces of translators in universities, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Education" (Fergani 2017).

In a news interview, Fergani called for the creation of institutions in the Arabic world to deepen the learning of the Chinese language and civilization. He lamented that there had been no cultural relations between Egypt and China until 1956. "Due to the lack of awareness of Chinese civilization, culture and heritage, so you find that many agreements are not completed [...] we do not find this on the

Chinese side, which has allocated centres for studying Arab civilization” (Fergani interviewed in Fahmy in 2018).

Fergani added that Chinese literature has benefited from Arabic literature more than Arabic literature has benefited from Chinese literature, as there are those who can translate from Arabic to Chinese perfectly. “China has reached the fifth generation of translators and we have not established the first generation yet” (Fergani interviewed in Fahmy in 2018). In his view, the need for a specialized center on China is imperative.

In addition to Fergani, there are other Egyptian scholars who are contributing to the Arab world’s growing capacity to impart knowledge about the Chinese language, culture, and literature. Hassanein Fahmy Hussein, for example, used to work at the same Ain Shams University but has moved to Saudi Arabia to help the country build its architecture for teaching Chinese in schools and universities (Mahmoud 2022). Before Hassanein Fahmy Hussein went to Saudi Arabia, the Riyadh institution was the only Saudi university teaching Chinese and had very few students. He took up a position as an associate professor of Chinese Studies at King Saud University to help expand the China literacy of the university and the overall kingdom because the kingdom aspires to greater cooperation with China. Particularly after Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s visit to China in February 2019, the countries signed bilateral agreements on education, culture, publishing, and translation. Thereafter, Saudi Arabia decided to include Chinese in public schools, which led to an expansion of Chinese language programs and departments at universities. Hassanein Fahmy Hussein has developed a study plan for teaching Chinese in Saudi universities and is a member of the Ministry of Education’s committee to include Chinese language study in public schools. The aim is to cultivate young talents in the kingdom to meet the future need for more translated work between Chinese and Arabic languages (Mahmoud 2022). Amidst these changes, there has also been a unique decision to make Chinese studies available to students of both genders rather than for men only, as it had been before in the kingdom.

Hassanein Fahmy Hussein won the Sheikh Hamad Award for Translation and International Understanding in 2021 for his translation of the book *Chinese Food Culture* by Xie Ding Yuan (谢定源). The book explains the culture of Chinese food and drink, and the special place that food has in the history of Chinese civilization. Egypt’s National Centre for Translation has published it in two parts. The Sheikh Hamad Award was established in Qatar in 2015 with the aim of honoring translators who encourage links between cultures (Mahmoud 2022). Egyptian academics appear to be at the heart of the Arab world’s efforts to learn about China in the contemporary era. In the next sub-section, we will explore the diverse experiences of ethically Chinese China experts.

2.3.4 Ethnic Chinese China experts' diverse sinicization experiences

Knowledge production about China in the Philippines was initially not driven by university researchers. Instead, it was promoted by the Chinese diaspora who were active in the Chinese community and wider society to preserve and promote Chinese heritage in the Philippines. They also had the mission to facilitate the integration of the Chinese into mainstream Filipino society. The Kaisa Heritage Centre (Kaisa para sa Kaunlaran), for instance, is a leading organization where activists, Teresita Ang See, Go Bon Juan, and Joaquin Sy, were active (Website of Kaisa Heritage Centre 2024). The early pioneers played a significant role as a bridge of understanding, acceptance, and cohesion between Filipinos and Tsinoy (colloquial term for Chinese Filipinos). Bringing unity and cohesion in the midst of diversity is an important task to them (Website of the Association for Philippine-China Understanding, Inc 2024).²

Teresita Ang See has formerly served as President of the prestigious International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas and the Philippine Association for Chinese Studies. She has also given lectures in local and international fora and written extensively on issues of Philippines-China relations, ethnic identities, culture, race relations, and integration, with the goal of enhancing the understanding of such issues. See firmly believes in the credo of Kaisa (Heritage Centre): "Our blood may be Chinese but our bonds grow deep in the Philippine soil and our bonds are with the Filipino people" (Website of the Association for Philippine-China Understanding, Inc 2024).

Caroline Sy Hau notes that she was lucky enough to have had a chance to meet the aforementioned three very influential people in Kaisa who shaped her life and her thinking about her place and other Tsinoy's places in the Philippines. As noted earlier on, Hau is a Chinese-Filipino author and scholar, currently working as a Professor of Southeast Asian literature at Kyoto University. At first glance, her job title might disqualify her from being included in this book. In Chih-yu Shih's oral

² There are many different types of Chinese people in the Philippines. The Spanish called the Chinese *sangleys* (later known as *Chinos*) during their dominion over the Philippines (ca. 1565–1898), and in 1769 they established the official legal category of 'Chinese mestizo' to distinguish between mestizos and locals (*indios*) in reaction to the islands' growing mixed-race population. Like the Peranakan Chinese in Malaysia and Indonesia, these are the children of a Chinese man and a Filipino woman. With time, however, it became hard to discern who was a Chinese mestizo. For instance, mestizos were driven out of the professions that they had historically controlled, such as wholesale and retailing, starting in the middle of the 19th century by a growing number of new Chinese immigrants. Nowadays, they are viewed as Filipinos which is similarly another mixed-race group. Chinese mestizos include the late Manila Archbishop Cardinal Sin Jaime and former President Cory Cojuangco Aquino (Suryadinata 2021; Kung 2022).

history interview, Hau indeed expressed hesitation at being considered a China expert. However, she has been included in the interview because her case exemplifies another way of sinicization that ethnically Chinese diaspora may go through.

Hau grew up in Chinatown on Lavezares Street, in what is now called the Binondo district in Manila. Her parents are professional painters who belong to the Linang School of Chinese Painting, and they teach traditional Chinese painting in the Philippines. Her father even founded the Philippine Chinese Art Centre in 1975.

Hau's high school, St. Stephen's High School, was actually a Christian Chinese school established by the American Episcopal Mission along Magdalena (now Masangkay) Street. She graduated from high school in 1986 and then entered the University of the Philippines at Diliman as an English major, graduating in 1990. Then she went on to Cornell University in the US to do her master's and doctoral studies.

Growing up in a Chinese family in the Philippines with parents deeply involved in Chinese painting, Hau has childhood memories of her parents teaching her to paint bamboo, and of hanging out at the Galerie Bleue, where her parents conducted Sunday afternoon classes in the early seventies, before they decided to do full-time teaching. She remembers joining group exhibitions organized by her parents and their students. One of the first paintings that Hau ever exhibited—two cats with a bowl of food between them—was bought by Philippine National Artist Jose Joya for 500 pesos.

Hau's background naturally sinicized her to a degree. This continued during her time at university, where she studied Asian history, Chinese language, and art. While doing her PhD in the US, she also began to read a lot of books on ethnic Chinese and Southeast Asia.

However, Hokkien was the language spoken at home. Her native mother tongue is Hokkien, code-switched with Tagalog and English. Her sinicization process was not as smooth as outsiders would imagine, because she also faced challenges when it came to learning Mandarin Chinese. Although she went to a Chinese school and had all the support from her parents, she never felt that she had achieved sufficient Chinese proficiency to be able to conduct research that would qualify her as a real Chinese scholar (Hau 2016).

So in a sense, I don't really consider myself a China scholar...inasmuch as my interests touch on ethnic Chinese issues in Southeast Asia and in the Philippines, in that sense – and in a very narrow sense – I work on China. (Hau 2016)

Hau's interest in things Chinese or in other words, her motive for sinicization, was a way to understand herself, her family, what sort of community she grew up in, and also ethnic Chinese relations in Southeast Asia. It was less about China, and more about Chinese in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

In later chapters, I will mention more about the concept of interlocking, which essentially means the direct and indirect interactions between different knowledge realms or sub-realms, sometimes within asymmetrical relations of power. In Hau's case, she has interlocked quite a lot of her specialized interest in Philippine literature with her interests in things Chinese. The main angle through which she approaches Chinese studies is ethnic Chinese issues in relation to Philippine nationalism. Moreover, she also enjoys cinema and popular culture. Thus, part of her research focuses on how literary or cinematic works help people understand issues pertaining to ethnic Chinese in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

Most of Hau's books contain at least one chapter on the Chinese. For example, her first book, a monograph called *Necessary Fictions: Philippine Literature and the Nation, 1946-1980*, has one chapter on the kind of problematic relationship between Chineseness and the Philippine nationalism. Most of her books touch on issues of Chineseness and the fraught relationship amongst ethnicity, nation, and nationalism. Another book of Hau (2014), *The Chinese Question: Ethnicity, Nation and Region in and beyond the Philippines*, represents a summation of all the research that she has done, because it includes one of her earliest published articles on the kidnappings of ethnic Chinese in the Philippines, as well as other articles on the ethnic Chinese that she had published before. As her work is strongly anchored in literary studies, she tends to view the Chinese question through literary lenses.

Hau also writes fictions. She draws inspiration from the stories heard from her parents for her early writings, including stories of her paternal grandfather who was a guerrilla who was active in Laguna and Quezon during the Second World War. Some of her earliest stories were published when she was still an undergraduate student, in *Tulay*, a Chinese-Filipino digest, and a lot of these stories in fact were stories about the Chinese in the Philippines. Fiction was one way through which Hau started to make sense of the issues pertaining to Chineseness. And then later on, she started to do academic work on the Chinese, again in snatches, and it was never a sustained effort, as she confessed (Hau 2016).

2.3.5 *Journey to the East: education and travels*

Travel is intrinsically a method of China studies and also a methodology of re- or de-sinicization. (Shih 2014: 86)

Previously, I mentioned that Korean intellectuals have had a long history of engaging in Chinese studies. Pre-modern Korean Buddhist monks had traveled to the west (of Korea), to China and India, to learn about Buddhism and Confucianism. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Korean intellectuals participated in the tribute mission trips to Beijing, the so-called 'Yŏnhaeng' (燕行), which means trips to

Yanjing. Yanjing was the old name of Beijing. These encounters with Chinese literati were documented, demonstrating international friendship through intellectual exchanges (Shim 2023).

While Korean intellectuals have traveled to their west, most Western China watchers have traveled to their east. These trips to China are part of their process of sinicization. Even the aforesaid Russian expert, Pisarev, eventually visited China after many years of losing hope of ever going there due to the souring of Soviet–Chinese relations. These trips involved more than tourism. Scholars tended to study for some time in China, and some even had the chance to teach or work in China before returning home. Education and trips are important milestones for many China watchers' sinicization processes, although the results of sinicization differ from person to person. In this sub-section, I use the examples of two Iranian scholars' journeys to the 'east' to show how the experience has helped them in their intellectual growth and career development. Interestingly, these two scholars also visited Taiwan. Their comparative reflections about Taiwan will be briefly noted, while a more detailed discussion about Taiwan can be found in Chapter nine of this book.

These two persons do not hold academic titles in Chinese studies. At first glance, one might consider them unqualified for analysis here. However, I stress the importance of understanding the context of Global South countries. Using the yardstick of the Global North measurement will not help us understand the diverse nature of China-watching communities on the global scale.

Behzad Azarhoushang teaches at a liberal arts college in Germany, while Zahra Karimi Moughari is a professor of economics at the University of Mazandaran in Iran. Their academic trajectories are quite different, but they have in common their Iranian origin and working on topics involving China in their research.

Azarhoushang holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Babol Noshrvani University of Technology in Iran. He went on to a master's program in Germany, which offered a dual master's degree with a Chinese university, and this paved his way to study in China in 2013. He then earned his PhD in Political Economy from Germany's University of Kassel in 2017. His PhD project was on the effects of foreign direct investments in the industrial sectors on regional inequality in China. He also conducted research on Sino-German trade.

Azarhoushang (2021) expressed that for an Iranian like him, his major interest in China was the success story of China and how it might inspire Iran's own development. He struggled to decide between deepening his study of economics or learning the Chinese language while in China. Eventually, he opted for economics. Thus, learning the language was not the main way for him to get to know China. The living experience and his interactions in the university and in society were the key.

Zahra Karimi Moughari, a female Iranian associate professor of Economics in one of Iran's state universities, University of Mazandaran, has worked in the same university for more than twenty years. She received her education in various Iranian universities, all focusing on economic topics. China first appeared in her life around 1995 when she worked as advisor to an Iranian private company. They wanted to import some machinery from a Chinese company. She was in China to translate the business negotiations. She traveled to Beijing and Hangzhou for seven days. China was an interesting country for her because Iran was importing many products from China.

I worked in a company that produced office furniture, and in this furniture, they used Chinese locks. All locks were imported from China. It was interesting for us to see how they could produce such cheap goods that no Iranian company could compete with. The owners of the company where I worked were interested to know whether they can produce these locks in Iran [...] Ultimately, I asked one of the Chinese lock manufacturers to invite us to visit China to see how they produce these locks. They accepted and invited us to go directly to the factory and see the production procedure. (Karimi 2021)

The first visit was not related to academic research at all but the second was. Her second visit was in 2019, when she was invited as a professor to visit a state university in Chengdu, China, for three months. The Chinese side generously sponsored her trip and even helped her obtain a ten-year cost-free visa that allowed her to visit repeatedly. The second trip allowed her to study the causes of China's economic miracle deeply. "On my first trip the streets were full of bicycles. But on the second trip there were no bicycles on the streets. It was the sign of a big change in China," as Karimi (2021) recalled.

Both Azarhoushang and Karimi had expressed that their intention to learn from China was to help develop Iran, although they understood that Iran could not simply copy Chinese policies in the Iranian context. Karimi's first book about China was published around 2020–2021. Entitled *How Did the Dragon Wake up?*, the book explores how Iran can learn from China's experiences. At the time of her interview in 2021, she was translating a book entitled *How China Escaped Shock Therapy*, written by Isabella M. Weber and published in 2021. Karimi wanted to translate the book from English to Persian in order to share the knowledge with readers in Iran.

Both Iranian scholars have also had the chance to visit Taiwan. The process of visiting Taiwan appeared to be more difficult than for China as there was a lack of formal diplomatic relations, making it hard to obtain a visa. While they recognized the different degree of liberal atmosphere between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland, for both Iranian scholars, the Chinese culture was still strongly shared by Taiwan and the Chinese mainland. When they said this, they had the

comparison in mind that Iran and China lack cultural connections (unlike those between Taiwan and China); Sino-Iranian relations are seen in economic terms, mixed with aspirations for cooperation and fears of competition.

Contemporary China experts from Iran clearly have practical and functional motives for conducting research on China. Their perspectives on China are not from traditional sinological views nor Chinese studies views. Rather, their disciplinary training is in economics and other practical fields. One can find a similar functional approach in some Global South countries.

Because of that desire to learn from China to modernize Iran, some critics might immediately label these Iranian scholars as ‘not critical enough.’ I discussed this issue already in the methodological section of this book presented in Chapter one. However, an anonymous external observer, whom I have consulted to assist in evaluating the oral history data gathered in Iran, has observed that Karimi’s functional perspective on China is highly representative of a significant segment of Iran’s academic community that is knowledgeable about China. This viewpoint can be regarded as an independent stance that, crucially, does not conflict with the official position of the government. In a sense, it presents the current Iranian establishment with a possible avenue to navigate its crises. The conservative faction among academic elites in Iran, who operate within the existing system, has consistently favored internal, top-down reforms rather than subversive measures such as regime change. Thus, her perspective should not be misconstrued as that of a government spokesperson. Upon reviewing her other interviews, it becomes evident that she consistently regards the internal reforms of the Chinese Communist Party under Deng Xiaoping as the most effective model for enhancing the conditions in Iran, demonstrating admiration for China’s methodology. From a realist standpoint, these Iranian scholars recognize that Western-style democracy has seldom produced favorable results in the Middle East, particularly for Iran, which has a longstanding history of top-down authoritarian governance. As a result, they contend that reforms initiated from above are more pragmatic than pursuing the ideal of Western democracy, which lacks the requisite historical and cultural underpinnings in Iran.

Connected to this functional desire to learn from China and to benefit from the bilateral relations is the promotion of Chinese language learning in Iran. Without surprise, Confucius Institutes have played a significant role. The Iranian government endorsed Chinese language as an optional language in Iranian basic education from 2023 on (Qi and Wang 2023). Like the Saudi Arabia case mentioned above, the purpose is to enable young talents to meet the rising needs amid the warming of bilateral relations.

As a final note, the discussion above does not mean that Iran has only researchers doing studies that are practical, such as economics, and no researchers who

are interested in sinology. There is, for example, assistant Professor Hamed Vafaei (2022) who teaches Chinese language and literature at the University of Tehran. It is interesting to note that his master's thesis was about the various Persian translations of *Tao Te Ching*. There are estimated to be twenty translations of *Tao Te Ching* in Iran, and its popularity has led to its republication. Vafaei (2022) discussed how the existence of common roots and cultural thinking has led Iranians to embrace the Chinese classic.

Vafaei's work is not purely academic, as he also plays leading roles in fostering higher education cooperation with Chinese and Taiwanese universities. The Iranian government's 'Islamic Republic News Agency' (2024) has a Chinese edition. Vafaei (2022) has played a key role in launching the Chinese edition of the news agency. His work, like that of the Egyptian peers whom we mentioned before, is both cultural and political.

The importance of travel and education in China as a means of sinicization will appear again and again throughout this book. In the next chapter (Chapter three), we will move on to Southeast Asia, which has a vibrant group of China watchers, although each country still has its own path of development unlike others. We will also mention a Thai princess whose travels and studies in China have inspired Thai people to embrace China, contributing to (overly) positive knowledge production about China. Before we do that, however, I feel that it is imperative to add one more sub-section on journeys and travels. This time, the journey is not to the emblem of 'the East,' that is China, but to the symbol of 'the West,' the USA.

2.3.6 *Journey to America*

Chinese immigrants in the USA have contributed significantly to the foundation of Chinese studies there. The USA has one of the largest China-watching communities in the world, and its reputation has attracted talented students from abroad to study there, thus cultivating experts who would then return home to contribute their knowledge about China. For instance, several giants of sinology in Thailand received their education in the USA. We shall meet them in Chapter three of this book. Here I add the case of Irene Eber (1929–2019) because of her difficult and unique journey to achieve her professional goal as a scholar of Chinese studies. When she retired from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Israel, she was Louis Frieberg Professor of East Asian Studies at the Department of East Asian Studies. But she had a difficult starting point as a Jew in Poland. Her Jewish father had encouraged her to read, which was not normal for a father at the time. Her father was unfortunately killed by the Germans during the Second World War while her mother and sister survived on Schindler's list. She was in hiding during the war and had no chance to go to school. At the time, Jewish children were not permitted

to go to school either. When the war came to an end, she felt that she would like to read and learn, but she simply knew nothing about reading. Her sister was eight years older and could already read various books. So, she tried to read her sister's books. But eventually her strong desire to study pushed her to go to the USA. She was fifteen years old, not even an adult, alone, without her mother and sister; she had to begin by earning a living to survive. Without even a high school diploma, it was not easy to find a university. But she managed to find Pomona College in California, which would allow her to pass its entrance exam and obtain a scholarship to study. She did her undergraduate degree in Asian studies there, went on to study a master's in history at the State University of California, and then a PhD in Asian Studies at Claremont Graduate University (Eber 2015).

At Pomona College, Eber met Professor Chen Shou-Yi (陳受頤, 1899–1978), a Chinese American scholar known for his groundbreaking contribution to the comparative cultural studies of modern China and historical studies of Sino-Western cultural exchange. Irene Eber was guided by Chen during her undergraduate studies and then the PhD. Chen was a close friend of famous Chinese intellectual and politician, Hu Shih (胡適, 1891–1962). He awakened Eber's interest in the intellectual life of the 1920s–1930s and led her to write her dissertation on Hu Shih (Gamsa 2019).

In addition, Chen was the first person to tell her about the Jews in China. She later embarked on the study of Jews in China as well as researching the Chinese translation of the Old Testament of the Bible and its translators. Her interest in the Bible was not for religious but literary reasons. Eber (2015) mentioned that for example, Lu Xun's (魯迅, 1881–1936) brother, Zhou Zouren (周作人, 1885–1967), who was also a Chinese writer, had been keen on studying the Old Testament as literature.

So, I have become increasingly interested, if they were interested in the Old Testament as literature, then what is this literature like? and I started reading it also as literature. It is often a magnificent study in human behaviour. If you take the story of Joseph, those brothers are a nasty bunch (laughing). (Eber 2015)

According to Eber (2015), there was a Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky (1831–1906) who did good work in translating the Bible into Chinese, but he is unknown in China. What interests Eber is how, through translation, a piece of work can move from one culture into another. For example, olive trees were not known of in China. In the old days, Chinese people used fat from plants of other sorts, but they did not eat olives. Yet olive trees are important in the Old Testament. Schereschewsky lived in China, and he wanted his translation to be reader friendly. So, according to Eber (2015), Schereschewsky had translated olive trees into “the fat from the fruit of the tree” in Chinese so that a Chinese reader would not get stuck on the concept

of olive trees. Eber (2015) had studied other translators' work and believed that Schereschewsky's contribution should have been recognized more than it is now.

In sum, the USA as a country has attracted and cultivated numerous China watchers to the present day. Irene Eber had hoped to move to Israel after her PhD education. She thought that if her father had survived, Israel would have been the place where he wished his daughter would go, particularly since Israel became a state after the Second World War. In the 1960s, there was a man named Harold Zvi Schiffrin (1922–2024) who was an American-born Israeli sociologist and intelligence officer. He had a vision that The Hebrew University of Jerusalem should have a Department for Chinese Studies. He had worked hard to convince people to set up the department as people in Israel did not immediately understand its importance. With the support of the president of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, this department gradually took shape. When Russian immigrants began to arrive in Israel after the birth of the Israeli state, there was a person among them who had studied Chinese in Russia, and he was given the chance to teach Chinese language. When Eber finished her PhD in the late 1960s, she could not find suitable positions for her in Israel. She first went on a fellowship in Taiwan and then in 1969, when Schiffrin established the Department of East Asian Studies, she joined the department. This department is thus the oldest department of its kind in Israel. Later, similar institutions were born in other cities such as Tel Aviv and Haifa. One of Eber's students, Gad Isay, founded the Department of Chinese Studies in Tel-Hai Academic College in northern Israel. The department in Jerusalem began with very few students but it has grown greatly. Even though its size is not comparable to some departments in the USA or Europe, given its humble starting point, this achievement is laudable. Their researchers work on various topics, including history, culture, and politics. They publish widely in English and Hebrew; the latter is crucial as it has become an essential gateway for Hebrew readers to understand China (Eber 1996).

China Studies in Southeast Asia

Abstract

Southeast Asia is historically, geographically, and culturally adjacent to China. China watchers in Southeast Asia are composed of both ethnic- and non-ethnic Chinese. In their endeavors to (re)connect with China or (re)sinicize China as China watchers, each has different strategies, resources, and intellectual trajectories. The China knowledge that they consume for (re)connecting China and the China knowledge that they produce also diverge.

Keywords: Knowledge production about China, China studies, Southeast Asia, scientific Chineseness, sinological Chineseness

Southeast Asia is an important and interesting testing ground because there are many ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. The region is historically, geographically, and culturally adjacent to China. Non-Chinese people may see overseas Chinese as a single homogenous group. However, in reality, there are many differences within this collectively imagined group, and they demonstrate various attitudes toward the People's Republic of China (PRC) and its contemporary rise. Of particular interest to this study, China watchers in Southeast Asia are composed of both ethnic- and non-ethnic Chinese. In working assiduously to (re)connect with China or (re)sinicize themselves as China watchers, each has different strategies, resources, and intellectual trajectories. The China knowledge that they consume in (re)connecting China and the China knowledge that they produce also diverge. This chapter draws on examples from Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines, where there have historically been relatively large Chinese diaspora communities, to show the rich development of China knowledge production. It is used strategically to contrast the case of Central Asia, which will be explored in Chapter four.

3.1 Scientific Chineseness vs sinological Chineseness

There are experts whom Shih Chih-yu described as possessing scientific Chineseness (2018a, 2018b).¹ China watchers of this type tend to see China as ‘the other’ that must be objectively studied and handled. Think tank analysts and Marxists in Vietnam, for instance, tend to fall into this category. They are not engaged in classical Chinese studies. They are inclined to see China in comparative perspectives. Hence, their intellectual energy tends not to focus on studying Chinese languages and cultures but on comparative analysis of China in relation to other countries.²

Shih (2018a, 2018b) points out, however, that scientific Chineseness requires Vietnamese experts’ adoption of Russian social science discourses. This is because, in Vietnam, knowledge about China used to come mainly from Russian sources. As the study of China developed and flourished in the West, some Vietnamese also used English-language sources produced in the West. The younger generation sees the importance of engaging with the Western academic communities to exchange views or foster research collaborations (Anderson 2018). These types of experts tend not to use Chinese language sources to explore China.

Unlike scientific Chineseness, there are China watchers who can be termed as exhibiting sinological Chineseness. These experts tend to value having a solid grasp of China, starting from understanding its language, culture, history, and society. That is why Shih uses the term ‘sinological’ to depict this category of experts (2018a, 2018b). We can see this group of experts as more like conventional sinologists, who would most likely engage with original Chinese-language sources. They would translate various China-related texts, as they believe that the translation itself will help boost comprehension of the Chinese way of understanding certain issues. In Vietnam, there are even China watchers in this category who have never been to China. But they cultivate empathy towards certain traits of the Chinese cultures through translation, thus enhancing their ‘sinological Chineseness.’ As Anderson (2018) observes, language is the lynchpin for “understanding elements of the shared Sino-Vietnamese tradition, as well as an important tool for distinguishing the strong differences between Vietnamese and Chinese societies” (Anderson 2018).

¹ Shih Chih-yu’s work seeks to place different China watchers into categories such as ‘scientific Chineseness,’ ‘experiential Chineseness,’ ‘ethnic Chineseness,’ ‘cultural Chineseness,’ ‘sinological Chineseness,’ and ‘civilizational Chineseness.’ China watchers may move from category to category as their strategic choices of expertise change and their intellectual journeys evolve. These categories give birth to jargon that might confuse readers. For the purpose of this study, I simplify Shih’s framework by pointing out jargon-free features that will demarcate China watchers. But one must bear in mind that one China watcher might possess several features at the same time.

² For detailed information on the development of China studies in Vietnam, please check Mark Sidel’s 2009 article.

Like those in the category of scientific Chineseness, experts in the category of ‘sinological Chineseness’ care about Vietnam’s relationship with China. But they are prone to take a more positive view, believing that a deep understanding of Chinese culture and appreciation of the shared humanity between Chinese and Vietnamese cultures would allow both sides to find better solutions to mitigate differences and conflicts. In the eyes of others, these experts might be viewed as ideologically pro-China when it comes to bilateral relations. But these sinologists argue that this is a misunderstanding. They contend that their closeness to China is due to their understanding of the Chinese language and culture, which makes them look more like China watchers who have pro-China political postures. They do not necessarily agree with such a judgment or their ‘pro-China’ labeling.

Vietnam’s political relationship with China, formally established in 1991, has been normalized and deepened over the years. However, unresolved territorial disputes in the South China Sea (known as the East Sea in Vietnam or the West Philippine Sea in the Philippines) continued to be a major point of contention. Within the Southeast Asia context, Vietnamese people’s perception of China is among the most negative. The Vietnamese government is aware of its lack of military and economic power to counterbalance China. Hence it has applied a carefully calculated hedging strategy towards China while also not joining the US-led anti-China counter-alliance (Gerstl 2022). Vietnamese experts in the category of ‘scientific Chineseness’ have a better match of quality of expertise for policymaking to serve the country’s interests regarding China. But even so, the government occasionally does listen to experts in the category of ‘sinological Chineseness’ for advice, despite their being seen as more pro-China (Shih 2018b).

Shih’s (2018a, 2018b) studies of China watchers in the Philippines and Vietnam allude to a remarkable trend. That is, it does not matter if an expert is of Chinese descent or not, sinological Chineseness is a tendency for some scholars to be able to attain sympathetic capacity to see things through the *Weltanschauung* (worldview) of the Chinese people, society, culture, and government. Ethnic Chinese scholars are, comparatively speaking, more capable of attaining such *Weltanschauung* than non-ethnic Chinese experts.³ But such closeness to China tends to be seen in a rather negative light in the country where the experts reside, work, and serve. It might disempower them in the academic community or larger society where they develop their careers. China watchers are hence pushed to learn to distance themselves from forming indigenous Chinese perspectives on China and to learn to practice watching China from the outside. Hence, overall, there is a trend for

³ Shih (2018a) does note that an expert who has trained himself to adopt a “sympathetically internal perspective” to understand China is still different from someone who watches China from “an innately internal position” because “an exit is relatively easily available” to the former (Shih 2018a).

China watchers of ethnic Chinese descent to move from an in-group to an out-group position. This thus also shows the strategic choices of experts in their production of knowledge about China. Not only China watchers in Southeast Asia exhibit this tendency. This can be observed in Europe, the United States of America (USA), and other parts of the world too. We will return to this later.

3.2 Uneven development of China studies across Southeast Asia

Southeast Asian societies and countries do not have the same level of development of China studies or Chinese studies. Singapore's universities rank highly in international competitions. It also has a high percentage of ethnic Chinese in terms of population among Southeast Asian countries, allowing them to contribute to the advanced development of Singapore society.⁴ Before Singapore became an independent republic in 1965, it used to be a bastion for Chinese language education in Southeast Asia, even without state support. In 1955, Nanyang University was set up as a Chinese-speaking university outside of China, completely with private efforts (1955–1980). This university later became the Nanyang Technological University that we know today (Website of the Nanyang Technological University 2025).

After Singapore's independence, however, Singaporean leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew did not particularly promote Chinese education. Chinese newspapers, such as *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商報) and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* (星洲日報), were even considered hotbeds for spreading communism and Chinese nationalist sentiments, which would destabilize the multi-racial society in Singapore and were subsequently suppressed. English was chosen as the medium for education, leaving Chinese, Malay, and Tamil to be taught as mother tongues at home (Wei 2016; Wong 2016a, 2016b).

Malaysia has a high percentage of ethnic Chinese in the overall population as well. Malaysians of Chinese origin tend to have a higher sense of Chinese cultural identification than, for example, Chinese in Indonesia. The majority of them can still speak some Chinese dialects (Suryadinata 2021). Malaysia enjoys a good

⁴ Zhuang (2021) estimates that there are currently around 10.7 million Chinese living abroad, and if we include their descendants, there are roughly 60 million. Depending on various estimation techniques and sources, the numbers and proportion of Chinese people living abroad in Southeast Asia and the rest of the world vary. Even the Chinese government has conflated the terms 'huaren' (foreigners of Chinese descent) and 'huaqiao,' which refer to Chinese residents living abroad. This has resulted in different kinds of statistics (Suryadinata 2021). Even some recent studies have estimated the numbers using statistics that are relatively outdated (e.g., Suryadinata 2021). I am unable to provide current and precise statistics. This chapter's overview of Southeast Asia's ethnic Chinese population only shows a broad trend.

standing in China studies in general. But those who study China in the universities are usually ethnic Chinese themselves. Malaysia has a longstanding preferential policy favoring its Malays, and during the Cold War, it was politically sensitive to display any penchant towards communist China. Thus, Chinese people in Malaysia have tended to focus on studying topics that are narrow and well-delineated, such as the Chinese diaspora or ‘traditional China’ (in distinction from communist China) (Zheng, Yang, and Elsherif 2022).

Like Malaysia, Indonesia is another Muslim-dominated country. In fact, Indonesia is the world’s largest Muslim-majority country by population and is the largest economy in Southeast Asia. China has placed a strong emphasis on Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in Indonesia and thus prompted interactions between the two sides on many fronts. But due to the longstanding discrimination against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia (Suryadinata 2021), most Chinese people in Indonesia no longer speak Chinese well. Chinese studies as an academic field is embedded in a structure that is not particularly conducive for its development. Hence, Indonesia’s research capacity in producing knowledge about China is moderate (Zheng, Yang, and Elsherif 2022).

Previously, we have noted Vietnam and the Philippines. There are experts and institutions in Vietnam that can support the studies of China due to the country’s long history with China. By contrast, the Philippines’ capacity is lower as there are fewer scholars working on China studies. Historically, it has often been activists and social workers who have disseminated understanding of China through community practice (see Chapter two). China studies is rather marginalized. Only in recent decades, due to China’s rising claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea, which has sparked conflict with the Philippines, has China studies received more funding. So, the support for research capacity is aimed to meet the country’s political needs (Zheng, Yang, and Elsherif 2022). In the least developed countries in Southeast Asia, namely Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, the research capacity is understandably limited.

3.3 Cross-fertilization of China studies and Southeast Asian studies

As Southeast Asia and China are geographically and historically interlinked, one might expect vibrant development of Southeast Asian studies in China, thus promoting exchanges between scholars in China and Southeast Asia. Scholars engaging in China studies and Southeast Asian studies would exchange more, encouraging the studies of China–Southeast Asian relations and blurring the lines of these two knowledge realms. In other words, China–Southeast Asian studies could cut across two knowledge realms, becoming a borderline theme that would help cross-fertilize both China studies and Southeast Asian studies.

Nonetheless, looking back at the Chinese mainland, this potential has not been fully realized. On the one hand, the discipline has grown significantly since China's opening up to the world in the 1980s. There has been a sea change in financial support from the Chinese government. By early 2000, the discipline had matured into a more coherent field in China. In spite of this positive development, several challenges remain. They are not just related to funding and institutional development, which certainly matter. But the heart of the issue is politics.

Southeast Asian studies programs in China have mostly been driven by China's political needs. Geographically, the PRC universities that began Southeast Asian studies were those situated near the Chinese Southeast coast as they are closer to Southeast Asia and have seen frequent exchanges between overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and China. With China's open-door policy and reforms, the China Southeast Asian Studies Association was founded in 1979 and Chinese scholars started to attend to Southeast Asian Studies. Later, with the proliferation of Chinese connections to Southeast Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the field expanded further (Ku 2006). Initially, these scholars were inclined to locate their base of operations in southern coastal cities close to Southeast Asia, but they gradually spread to inland provinces in China.

A lot of PRC scholars are working on topics related to China's relations with Southeast Asia (e.g., diaspora's influence, China's influence). There are contemporary political and economic needs to monitor and analyze the relations constantly (Ho 2006). The academic interest from the Chinese side meets China's practical needs (Zheng, Yang, and Elsherif 2022). Take research on the South China Sea as an example. The studies on the issue are highly connected to China's national interests and perceived rights (Zou 2006). When the PRC government increased its territorial claims over the South China Sea, PRC publications on the issue rose significantly. Both natural scientists and social scientists have studied the South China Sea issues. In the PRC, South China Sea studies are structured either within the Southeast Asian Studies framework or within the oceanic studies framework (Zou 2006). Figure 3.1 shows the trends of Chinese academic publications on the South China Sea issues from the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the largest academic database on China. It strikingly corresponds to the real political needs and conflicts surrounding these contested issues. Publications continued to increase and peaked in 2016.⁵ The context was that in 2013, the Philippines instituted arbitral proceedings against China under Annex VII to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In 2016, the arbitral tribunal adjudicating the Philippines' case against China in the South China Sea ruled overwhelmingly in favor of the Philippines,

⁵ The keyword 'South China Sea' (南海) was used in the CKNI for the search of publications on February 16, 2025. As it was in early 2025, there was no data of any publications in 2025 yet.

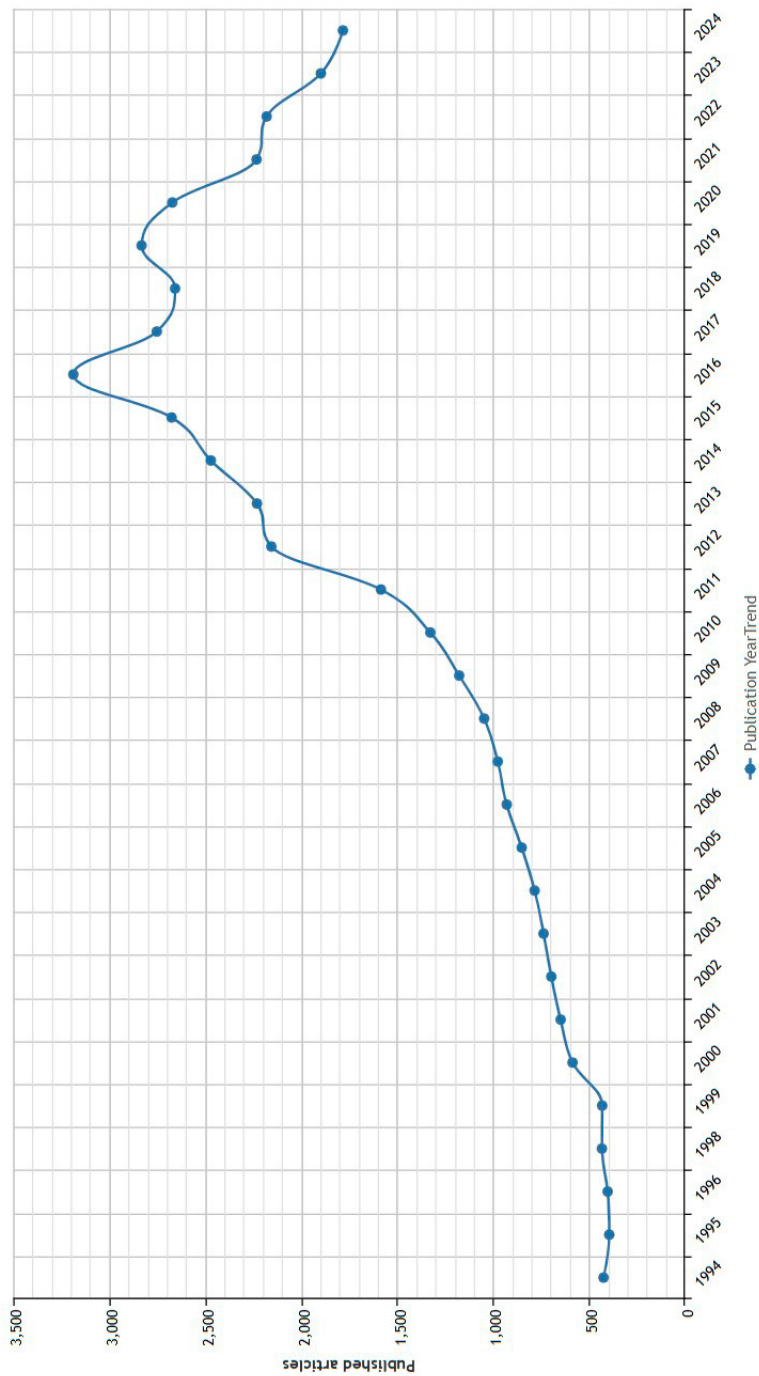


Figure 3.1. Publication numbers on 'South China Sea' in the CNKI.
Source: Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) online database (<https://oversea.cnki.net/index/>).

determining that major elements of China's claim were unlawful. Predictably, the PRC government reacted negatively to the ruling, maintaining that it was 'null and void.' Chinese publications in the CNKI on the issue peaked in that year. Chinese scholars' increase in work on this topic aims to deepen the analysis of this contested issue, and most importantly support the Chinese government's political claims, blurring the lines between academic work and politics (Zheng, Yang, and Elsherif 2022).

With the political needs of China came the China-centric impulse in Chinese scholarship, comparable to the problem of Eurocentric Western social science's approach to studying the broadly defined Asia in the past (Ho 2006). Western scholarship has started to reflect critically on how their centrism affects intellectual paradigms. More scholars trained in the West are willing to try to write consciously about the studied regions' local perspectives and recognize the local agency. Chinese scholars are in the process of awakening to the need to curb Sino-centrism in their approach to studying Southeast Asia (Ho 2006).

In conjunction with this, there is of course a question of which language is used to study Southeast Asia. Not all PRC scholars working on Southeast Asia can master Southeast Asian languages (Ku 2006). Hence, Southeast Asian studies in the PRC relies heavily on secondary sources for research. This would also become a barrier to understanding and representing indigenous perspectives in academic research.

Also, even though the exchanges between China and Southeast Asia are frequent and important, these do not necessarily result in the rise of concrete research collaboration. To contextualize, academic exchanges between China and Southeast Asia had already begun in the early Cold War era. In 1956, for example, the Association of Southeast Asian Institute for Higher Learning (ASAIHL) was founded with the blessing of the then Thai prime minister, Plaek Pibulsongkhram. Among the founding members of ASAIHL, other than Southeast Asian universities leaders, there was also the then vice chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, Dr. Lindsay Ride, an Australian physiologist (Website of ASAIHL 2024; Zheng, Yang, and Elsherif 2022). The network later expanded to other regions of the world. In the more contemporary era, there are also various other kinds of networks. For example, in 2015, the Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies in Asia was formed, including institutions from Southeast Asia, Japan, Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan with the aim of increasing regional coordination. China also led the formation of the Network of ASEAN-China Academic Institute in 2017 with a permanent secretariat based at Fudan University in Shanghai (Zheng, Yang, and Elsherif 2022).

Individual Southeast Asian countries also have their own networking initiatives. For instance, in Thailand, there is a Thai University Network for Chinese Studies, involving several Thai universities such as Mahidol University and Mae Fah Luang University. At Thailand's oldest university, Chulalongkorn University, there is a well-respected Institute of Asian Studies, founded in 1967. It opened its

own Confucius Institute (CI) with Peking University as the Chinese partner in 2007. The New York-based Social Science Research Council (SSRC) has reported that Thailand's strength in China studies is built on such university research centers and their intra-and-inter university networking (Zheng, Yang, and Elsherif 2022). As noted, networking and exchanges might still not be able to reach the point where concrete research collaboration within and beyond national borders can be carried out. However, with these exchanges, knowledge about China and its relations with Southeast Asia can at least be updated and discussed.

3.4 Chinese diaspora and Thai knowledge production about China

In 2021, the Asian Research Centre at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand cooperated with Shih's oral history's project to publish their oral history interviews in a book called *A History of Chinese Studies in Thailand Told from the Perspective of Senior Thai Scholars* (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021). Thais of Chinese origin are the largest minority group in Thailand and one of the largest overseas Chinese community in the world, with a population of around seven to ten million people. This group is also the oldest and most prominently integrated overseas Chinese community, with a history dating back centuries. They are highly assimilated into Thai society and are different from the new waves of Chinese immigrants (since the 1990s) who may be less assimilated (Siriphon 2015). The senior China experts in Thailand who were interviewed in the aforesaid book all have ethnic ties with China. But they have all adopted Thai names, and hence it might be hard to understand their ethnic ties at first glance. Among them are Professor emeritus Khien Theeravit (เขียนธีระวิทย์, born 1935) of Chulalongkorn University, who is seen as the symbol of Thailand's Chinese studies,⁶ Professor Sarasin Viraphol (สารสิน วีระผล, born 1946),⁷ Professor Prapin Manomaivibool (ประพิน มโนมัยวิบูลย์, born 1942), and others. Their family background and ethnic ties had motivated their study of China (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021).

Schools where Chinese diaspora can learn Chinese and other relevant topics started to emerge at the beginning of the 20th century, when the late Qing dynasty

⁶ In 1976, Khien Theeravit published a book entitled *Government and Politics of the People's Republic of China* which was the first book ever published in Thailand that offered detailed information about the PRC up till the Cultural Revolution. The book received high praise in Thailand.

⁷ Sarasin Viraphol received his PhD from Harvard University. His doctoral research was about historical Sino-Siamese trade (Viraphol 1974, 1977). After spending eight years in academia, he worked for twenty years in the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, attaining the rank of ambassador. He is currently Executive Vice President for business development at Charoen Pokphand Group, Thailand's largest private company, which was founded by Thai-Chinese Chia Ek Chor in 1921 (Manomaivibool 2015).

fell into political turmoil (Wongsurawat 2019). Chinese political leaders with different political ideologies to reform or revolutionize the declining dynasty toured around Southeast Asia, garnering support and promoting unified stances on political issues back home. For instance, the famous reformer, Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858–1927) visited Chinese overseas communities and realized that the communities were divided and lacked strong identification with the Chinese motherlands. He hence advocated that Chinese education in Southeast Asia was imperative to forge a stronger national identity and patriotic sentiments towards the motherland. Siam, the predecessor of the current Thai state, used to work closely with Chinese schools within its borders to train and modernize bureaucrats (Wongsurawat 2019). But as Chinese schools became places to nurture Chinese nationalist identities and ideologies of various strands (e.g., communism), the Siamese state became increasingly uneasy with Chinese schools as such trends ran against the Siamese nation-building process (Wongsurawat 2019; Lertpusit 2023). This similar fear of Chinese education can be seen in other Southeast Asian countries too. Over different periods of the early 20th century, the Siamese state exercised various degrees of control over the operation of Chinese schools (Manomaiviboon 2004; Wongsurawat 2024). This prompted many parents to send their children to study outside Thailand, such as in Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Taiwan. The numbers of Chinese schools thus dwindled (Wongsurawat 2019; Taiwan Today 1957). After the Second World War, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Thai state was anti-communist. Accordingly, Chinese schooling was also limited. The senior China experts interviewed in Thailand were mostly born in that particular historical context where some of them received limited Chinese schooling in Thailand or were sent by their families to study Chinese overseas. Chinese schools in Thailand were required to fall in line with the official discourse of curtailing pro-communist ideologies.

However, some segments of the Chinese community in Thailand were still sympathetic to the communist cause and operated in secretive manners inside certain Chinese schools and circles of journalists or intellectuals (Lertpusit 2023). Prior to 1975, one could say that this left-leaning force led the production of knowledge about China through Chinese schools in Thailand (Wongsurawat 2024).

Senior China experts in Thai academia recorded in Shih's project can all be seen as possessing traits of sinological Chineseness in terms of their ethnicity and intellectual journey to reconnect with China. However, one can observe traits of scientific Chineseness in them too, because they all seem to be able to discuss and present China from indigenous Thai perspectives. During the Cold War, the US treated Thailand as a bastion of anti-communism in the region. The strong anti-communist political posture of the Thai government in the early days prompted this distance between the senior China experts and their studied subjects. These experts all had to show that their research on China did not mean support for the Chinese political regime and ideology. In the days when it was hard to visit China, some of

them visited Taiwan and Hong Kong to collect research materials (Manomaivibool 2015; Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021).

Sawai Wisavanan (ไสว วิสวานนท์, born 1932) was senior researcher at the Chinese studies center, Chulalongkorn University. He was born during a similar period as Khien Theeravit. He is also an ethnic Chinese Thai and he recalled that when Chinese language education was restricted as noted above, his Chinese parents sent him to Singapore. So, he left Thailand aged six or seven and returned at the age of fifteen. At the time, Chinese schooling was forbidden by Thai law. But Wisavanan observed that this was not implemented evenly. Some Chinese schools were considered leftist or communist and were closed, while other schools were controlled under the law under the ten-hour or five-hour teaching per week rule.

Traveling to China was politically incorrect at that time too. Sawai Wisavanan noted that someone only had to return from a trip in China to be considered communist by the Thai government. Thus, people with good funding would tactfully stay in Hong Kong for a while to circumvent the problem before returning to Thailand (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021).

In the university, as Khien Theeravit alludes to (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021), when he began his teaching career, Thailand had banned China politically and barred all information about China. “One had to be brave to speak about Chinese issues because, at that time, anyone who studied communist China was suspected of being a communist,” explained Theeravit (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021).

Professor Sarasin Viraphol also noted that during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, scholars like him found themselves in another sort of cultural revolution—the anti-communist movement in Thailand. The Chinese studies center at the university was considered negatively due to the poor political relations between the PRC and Thailand. The center’s publication, *Chinese Studies Journal*, was banned. Copies of it were confiscated and burnt.

In addition to the pervasive anti-communist atmosphere, another interesting fact that might further contribute to these senior experts’ further distance from China is that some of them were educated in the USA. Khien Theeravit and Sarasin Viraphol were the first and second Thai recipients of Harvard–Yenching scholarships to embark on their studies of China at Harvard University, under the instruction of the famous scholar, John King Fairbank (Manomaivibool 2015). Prapin Manomaivibool was educated at the University of Washington, under the instruction of Chinese American linguist, Li Fang-Kuei (李方桂, 1902–1987). In other words, American educational institutions and constructions of China knowledge played a prominent role in their learning of China. Manomaivibool shared in her oral history that when she had questions about teaching Chinese, she would contact her former professor in the US for help. For instance, in Thailand, students

and teachers sometimes would mistakenly think that her Chinese was not correct because she used the Mandarin spoken in northern China. In Thailand, what is most known is the Mandarin used in Southern China. When in doubt, she consulted her former Chinese American professor in the USA and her professor would assure her that her accent was all right. But later in life, when she established contacts in China, she also would seek help from Chinese colleagues in Beijing. It is quite notable to see how a Thai China expert sought legitimacy from colleagues in the USA and later China to assure her continued development in Thailand.

Khien Theeravit similarly expressed that due to the Thai government's anti-communism policy in his time, he could not find many communist-China-related data in Thailand. Hence, the sources which he collected during his study at Harvard University became vital for his teaching back in Thailand (Manomaivibool 2015).

Besides the aforesaid anti-communist environment and the American influence in these senior China experts' intellectual journeys, they faced another task in their time, which was to use the study of China to explore and discover the origin of the Thai people. The purpose of this research was to construct an understanding of the Thai nation. Khien Theeravit noted that "Chinese studies in Thailand is virtually inseparable from Asian studies and Thai studies. Context-wise, they are all intertwined" (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021). There are many theories regarding where the Thai people came from. Some have postulated that the Thai were people driven out of Tibet. But the most accepted theory was that the ancient kingdom of Nanzhao (南詔) used to be the Thai state. Theeravit contacted Yunnan University in China to conduct cooperative research on the true origin of the Thai people. Sawai Wisavanan also went on the trip even though, as mentioned, it was not easy to make trips to China in those days (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021).

Naturally, the early years of disruption had a negative impact on the overall development of Chinese studies in Thailand. American Cold War knowledge construction of the world also affected a great deal of the Thai's knowledge construction of the PRC (Eaksittipong 2017). In fact, the US and the Asia Foundation, which is an American non-profit international development organization played important roles in buttressing Asian studies and China studies in Thai universities in those days. Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Political Science, for example, received some support from them to establish the Institute of Asian Studies under its Department of International Relations in 1967. Khien Theeravit was one of the founding members of this institute (Manomaivibool 2015).⁸

⁸ The Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University has played a vital role in disseminating knowledge about China. In the early 1990s, the institute further set up a center of Chinese studies. Khien Theeravit and other scholars had played instrumental roles in setting up the center. Sarasin Viraphol was one of the members of the founding committee. The Chinese studies center was eventually created under the umbrella of the Institute of Asian Studies on the occasion of celebrating the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-Thai diplomatic relations in 1995 (Manomaivibool 2015).

The critical overture came after 1975, when the US attempted rapprochement with communist China. In that context, the US had hoped that Thailand would similarly come to recognize the PRC. In 1972, US president Richard Nixon visited the PRC. In 1975, Thailand and China established formal diplomatic relations before the US did the same in 1979. The implications of such change were felt not only in international politics but also in Chinese schooling in Thailand. After 1974, the right wing of Thai society, also known as the royalists, composed of members of the Thai royal family and prominent businessmen of Chinese Thai descent, ‘hijacked’ the agenda to foster Thai understanding of China. This was in drastic contrast to past developments in the country (Wongsurawat 2024).

Princess Sirindhorn of Thailand has become a patron of Thai–Chinese cultural and educational exchanges, although other royal family members and societal elites in Thailand have also been promoting similar exchanges (Skaggs, Chukaew, and Stephens 2024). The princess might not be typical of the China watchers whom we are examining in this book. But her role in producing a positive image of China and knowledge about it for Thai people is highly significant. Bearing in mind the context of the early Thai resistance against communism in history, the princess’s visits to China, including studying and travels, and the way that her trips have been portrayed and broadcast by various Chinese and Thai media, helped turn around the Thai public’s earlier antagonism and skepticism towards China. Hence, the next few paragraphs will cover her contribution.

Born in 1955, Princess Sirindhorn is the second daughter of King Bhumibol Adulayadej and the younger sister of King Vajiralongkorn. Thais often call her ‘Phra Thep,’ meaning ‘princess angel.’ The title ‘Maha Chakri’ was conferred upon her by King Bhumibol, signifying her elevation to the position of the first female Crown Princess. Following her brother’s accession to the throne, she received a new royal designation, ‘Krom Somdej Phra,’ from King Vajiralongkorn in 2019. This title represents the highest royal rank attainable by appointment. In English, she continues to be widely known as the Princess.

The princess’s image in the kingdom has been positive due to her dedication to philanthropic work. She is widely acknowledged as a princess who possesses a profound passion for knowledge and is extensively recognized for her proficiency in history, culture, and the arts. Many consider her a patron of the arts and music from the royal family. Her various educational initiatives constituted a significant aspect of her royal responsibilities throughout her father’s reign.

According to a report from a Chinese state-sanctioned media outlet, the *Global Times* (2021), the princess knew China at a very young age, even before Thailand had a formal diplomatic relationship with the newly established PRC. When formal diplomatic relations were formed in 1975, the princess started to learn the Chinese language, as advised by her mother. The *Global Times* (2021) report quoted the

princess as saying, “My mother said that the Chinese people enjoy reading and learning, and that I could learn more knowledge if I could understand Chinese. She was right.” A more balanced account would need to mention that the princess is known to be fond of foreign languages and literature from both Thailand and abroad. She is said to be versed in several languages, including English, French, Khmer, Sanskrit, Latin, Pali, and Chinese.

The princess studied at Peking University and paid many official and private visits to China. As part of her interest in writing and translation, she has published several of her travel diaries based on her traveling experiences in China, such as *Treading the Dragon Land* (1981), *Forward A-Far the Sand Streams* (1990), *Snowflakes in Mist Streams* (2000), *A Student Abroad* (2001), and a book called *A Return to the Motherland of China* (1998a) to share with the Thai people the historic moment of Hong Kong’s return to China in 1997.

Moreover, the princess has published her translation of poems of the Tang and Song dynasties in the book *Verses of Clear Jade* (1998b). She has also written articles on topics such as the eternal fraternity of Chinese and Thai (Thai Chinese Culture and Economic Association 2012). As the Chinese diaspora has been a sizable and important group in Thai society, the princess’s annual offering of new year greetings to the local Chinese community similarly shows her dedication to being a bridge between the Thai and Chinese cultures. In 2019, when the PRC celebrated its 70th anniversary, the princess was awarded China’s Friendship Medal, an award bestowed upon foreigners who have made significant contributions to China.

Chinese state media deliberately portrays the princess’s crucial role as a patron (Xinhua Thai News Service 2019). Her 2021 Chinese language study at Peking University was widely broadcast in Thailand, which inspired more Thais to learn Chinese (Manomaiviboon 2004). Princess Sirindhorn also helped bring PRC funding into Thailand to boost Chinese studies there. For example, Chulalongkorn University, the princess’s alma mater, has received significant funding to run its Chinese studies. She was instrumental in helping to set up the CI at Chulalongkorn University, in cooperation with her Chinese alma mater, Peking University. Thailand currently hosts the highest numbers of CIs in Southeast Asia. In total, there are 16 CIs and 21 Confucius Classrooms as of 2024. Chulalongkorn University’s CI even offers Chinese studies degrees. The princess serves as a patron for these institutions in Thailand.

Western articles and analysis tend to depict CIs and Chinese cultural power in Thailand as a kind of soft power influence (e.g., Skaggs, Chukaew, and Stephens 2024). In that logic, the princess’s role becomes rather contested. However, it is fair to say that the princess has played an important role by bringing Thai people to know more about China and change Thai attitudes from the historical anti-communist sentiment to an appreciation of Chinese culture and people. The princess’s participation in cultural events organized in collaboration with the Sino-Thai community,

especially in Chinatown, holds significant importance. Notable Sino-Thai business tycoons have also played a crucial role as financial backers of royal projects. Her involvement not only contributed to the enhancement of Thai–China relations but also conveyed a wider message of inclusive acceptance from the monarchy towards the Chinese diaspora in Thailand—an essential element intricately linked to her diplomatic and cultural responsibilities in promoting Thai–China connections.

Chinese language ability has been deemed vital for maintaining the vibrant economic ties between Thailand and China, and thus, Thai people value the princess's efforts in pushing more opportunities to learn the Chinese language (Manomaiviboon 2004; Lertpusit 2023; Skaggs, Chukaew, and Stephens 2024). It is worth mentioning that when the Chinese language was allowed again and became popular at the beginning of the 21st century in Thailand, there was generally a lack of qualified teachers, let alone a proper syllabus to facilitate the education. Senior China experts raised problems such as deficiencies in funding, human resources, knowledge, skill, and coordination and integration in the country to advance Chinese studies (Manomaiviboon 2004). Everyone acted on their own without any central institution (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021). Prapin Manomaivibool notes that each of the levels of education, namely primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary, begins teaching the language from zero. The Ministry of Education has no unit that oversees Chinese language education directly. Prapin Manomaivibool has opined that there should be a Chinese language teaching institute under the Ministry in the same way that there is a Thai language institute, to supervise and provide support to the language teaching in schools (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021).

In Prapin Manomaivibool's oral history interview, she implicitly referred to the issues related to Chinese-government-sponsored education and CIs that had raised similar concerns in many parts of the world. She was vocal in her caution about hidden agendas from China. Using parallels of the US sponsorship of Thai students in the early years to study in the US, she expressed that Thailand cannot embrace China indiscriminately. "We should move forward on our own, independent of others, but most importantly, we must find our own people who have the potential and then groom them to be the core of the next generation," according to Prapin Manomaivibool (Tantraporn, Manomaivibool, and Wright 2021). This is reminiscent of the question of 'independent knowledge of China' sought by the European Union's (EU) Horizon Europe program (European Commission 2021). We will return to this topic in the seventh chapter of this book titled 'Securitization of China Knowledge.'

If we consider Southeast Asia as China's neighbor with rich historical linkages, the presence of large Chinese communities, and longstanding development of Chinese studies, Central Asia is similar in terms of geographic proximity and historical linkages. But Central Asia has developed its unique path of Chinese studies. In Chapter four, we will discuss the development of Chinese studies in Central Asia.

Void of China Studies in Central Asia?

Abstract

Central Asia is very unknown to the outside world. Studies about Central Asia and China are growing but are still comparatively understudied and under-published in the international market. There is a strong legacy of Russian sinology in the development of Central Asia's knowledge production of China. But what is under-appreciated is the uniqueness of Central Asia, where ethnic minority scholars of Uyghur, Dungan, and Kazakh backgrounds have played roles in building the foundations of Central Asian sinology.

Keywords: Central Asia, Russian sinology, Uyghur, Dungan, Kazakh

Back in 2003, internationally renowned Chinese expert on international relations, Yan Xuetong (阎学通 2003), pointed out the secondary if not tertiary importance of the region of Central Asia in both China and Russia's foreign relations. "Russia considers itself a European country, while China's focus is East Asia. Neither is interested in the other's regional issues" (Yan 2003). Much has changed with China's unleashing of various Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in the region since 2013. While it is true that the Asia-Pacific region (including Southeast Asia) is the main arena in which China competes and cooperates with other regional powers, Central Asia can be considered China's 'second region,' in which Japan and South Korea also have their own development initiatives therein, as observes Professor Emeritus Brantly Womack (2023) of Foreign Affairs of the University of Virginia. The Russo-Ukrainian war since 2022 has made Central Asia a crucial region for Russia as it searches for international support. As China and Russia both face an increasingly unwelcoming international environment, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin have usually chosen to meet in Central Asia to manifest their cooperative relationship and support for each other since 2022 (Chen 2023).

Central Asia's geopolitical importance is on the rise. Nonetheless, the New York-based Social Science Research Council (SSRC) reported that this region is lagging behind in its research capacity on China (see also Chapter one). Is there a void of indigenous research on China and education on China in Central Asia? Actually, before the first ever China-sponsored Confucius Institute (CI) was established in Seoul in South Korea in November 2004, there was a pilot institute in Tashkent

in Uzbekistan in June 2004. In 2005, the first CI in Central Asia was established in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, which was one of the first CIs in the world.

As of 2023, China has set up 13 CIs and 24 Confucius Classrooms in Central Asia since 2004, with over 18,000 students now studying at these places (Confucius Institutes Website 2023; Liang and Jiao 2011). As Western media and scholarly narratives about CIs in general are often formed under the Chinese soft power framework, CIs' existence is often seen from alarmist perspectives (Rashidov, Mullojonov, Rashidova, and Lemon 2024). Reasoning from the fact that China research in Central Asia is wanting and that CIs are providing knowledge about China in Central Asia, the conclusion is that overly one-sided funding from China is hampering Central Asia's ability to produce 'independent' knowledge about China. Politically and policy-wise, observers in the West and even in Central Asia have concluded that there is a need to support Central Asian institutions to enhance their own capacity for conducting research and imparting knowledge on China without CIs (CABAR 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

This conclusion seems justifiable. Even indigenous voices from Central Asia have also expressed similar concerns. The Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting (CABAR), a not-for-profit regional platform, has organized meetings inviting Central Asian experts to address their indigenous needs for improved capacity to study China. As Muratbek Imanaliev, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan and former Secretary General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) noted in the CABAR meeting, "the paradox lies in the fact that we have a thousand-kilometre border with China, but unfortunately, have no idea about China" (CABAR 2019a, 2019c). The CABAR report (2019a) further mentioned that Imanaliev has expressed that Kyrgyzstan needs to develop its own knowledge of modern and historical China and the East. Domestic publications and textbooks on such knowledge are needed. "This allows formulating a more accurate, professionally verified concept of Kyrgyz relations with China and the rest of Asian East countries" (CABAR 2019a).

While I do not disagree with the current observation that Central Asian countries need to beef up their capacity to study China and use the knowledge for better policy formulation, I wish to question the assumption that sinology or research on China does not exist in Central Asia. A *longue durée* perspective is needed to generate a holistic picture of Central Asia's capacity to produce knowledge about China. The oral history interviews of senior sinologists and China experts in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan conducted by Shih's oral history project, partly through cooperation with the author of this book, enable us to understand this matter better.

My attempt is in line with recent intellectual and civic awakening in Central Asia concerning the need to decolonize knowledge production about Central Asia

(Dadabaev 2022; Marat and Kassymbekova 2023). While it is true that the Russian influence is deep-rooted in the region culturally, politically, and economically, the region cannot just be seen as a sub-set of any Russian sphere of influence, as international relations observers tend to perceive Central Asia. Historically, the current states of Central Asia acquired their present shape and form when they were first created as republics of the Soviet Union from 1917 to around 1936. The founding of the Soviet Union had some decolonizing effect because these regions were made into semi-self-governed republics. But the Soviet Union 'neo-colonized' them under the Marxist ideological influence (Dadabaev 2022). In more recent years with China's rising presence in Central Asia, China watchers' attention is on China's various initiatives and engagement with the region, often looking at the region as slowly being under Chinese influence, and then inevitably there is a discussion about whether Russia opposes or cooperates with China in the region. In addition to this, there are a lot of geopolitical discussions about how Russia treats Central Asia as part of its Eurasian imagination and identity, thus affecting Russia's policies in regard to its neighboring countries. If we place this historical perspective in our analysis, I think that the challenge here is not just that Central Asian countries need to beef up their capacity to study China. The real question here is whether and how Central Asia can exercise agency to decolonize knowledge production about the region and its relations with other outside powers. We will examine the Central Asian case carefully first and then come back to this question at the end of this chapter.

We are limited to studying oral history interviews collected in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan because it is practically impossible and dangerous for interviewers to conduct interviews in Turkmenistan. Where there is a lack of senior sinologists alive for interviews, mid-career experts were interviewed. Their memories and connections with those experts who have passed away can still help us construct a picture (albeit incomplete) of the development of China or Chinese studies in Central Asia. As a result, two senior sinologists, Klara Shaysultanovna Khafizova (Клара Шайсултановна Хафизова, born 1939) and Konstantin Syroyezhkin (Константин Сыроежкин, born 1956) were interviewed by Russian legal scholar, Olga Adams (Ольга Адамс), back in 2015. In 2023, the author of this book interviewed senior sinologist, Abdul-Ahad Ablat Khodjaev (Абдул-ахад Аблат ходжаев, born 1942) and two mid-career experts, Shoazim Ibragimovich Shazamanov (Шоазим Ибрагимович Шазаманов, born 1964) and Anri Abdullaevich Sharapov (Анри Абдуллаевич Шарапов, born 1967) in Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, two mid-career experts, Fatima Khavaza (Фатима Хаваза, born 1958) and Ali Dzhon (Али Джон, born 1951), were interviewed in 2023. Tajik scholar, Muzaffar Olimov (Музаффар Олимов, born 1954), was interviewed in Finland in 2024.

I do not claim that our list of interviewees is complete, but it is what we could achieve, taking into consideration our budget, the availability of experts, and the

safety of the interviewers and interviewees. Galina Pavlovna Suprunenko (Галина Павловна Супруненко, 1940–1997) was a renowned sinologist in Kyrgyzstan but passed away in 1997 (Tchoroev 2022; Central Asian Archaeological Landscapes 2023). Another important figure, Murat Auezov (Мурат Ауэзов, 1943–2024) was based in Kazakhstan. Auezov had not been able to accept my interview due to health reasons and eventually passed away in 2024. These are examples of people who should have been interviewed, but we did not manage to do so. Most transcripts of the oral history interviews can be found on the website of Shih Chih-yu's project, situated at the Research and Educational Center for China Studies and Cross Taiwan-Strait Relations at National Taiwan University (2025). Due to the limited resources and language skills of the interviewers and availability of interpreters, transcripts are in different languages, ranging from Russian and Chinese to English. There were also interviewees who did not give consent to be recorded and published on the website. Whenever personal safety and privacy is involved in writing up this book, I use the term 'anonymous interviewee' in the text.

Finally, before I continue, I would like to present a position statement regarding myself in this chapter, as is customary in various chapters of this book. My previous research has included the examination of Xinjiang, which has kept Central Asia at the forefront of my thoughts until I had the chance to serve as an associate professor at Nazarbayev University (NU) in Kazakhstan for a year back in 2014. This opportunity arose shortly after Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled his ambitious initiative, the BRI, directly at NU in September 2013. During this period, I observed a notable surge in Chinese educational delegations visiting NU to explore potential collaboration. Shih's oral history project utilized various funding sources to support both myself and a Russian legal scholar in conducting oral history interviews. The Kazakh segment was managed by the Russian legal scholar, while I concentrated on other Central Asian countries. My interviews were all conducted after I left NU. My approach to writing this chapter is predominantly from an outsider's viewpoint. Despite having spent time in Central Asia and continuing to visit, I do not consider myself an insider. Additionally, my limited proficiency in Russian and Central Asian languages necessitated my reliance on translators and interpreters, unless the interviewees were able to communicate with me in Chinese or a related dialect.

4.1 Political needs drive Central Asian knowledge production about China

The analysis of these oral history interviews shows that, first of all, although their personal passion for learning about China did affect these Central Asian China watchers' dedication to their research, most of them were also highly motivated by the needs of their countries at the time (CABAR 2019c). Their countries had the

political need to understand China, and thus offered chances for these researchers to start to learn about China. Once they had advanced their careers, their research was steered in the direction of serving the practical needs of their countries. This is a feature common during the Soviet era (Kemper and Conermannn 2011; Kemper and Kalinovsky 2015), and persists to this day, when their countries have been independent from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for decades.

Take Kazakhstan, the largest Central Asian country, for instance. Sinology arose in the second half of the 1980s in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (Kazakh SSR, 1936–1991), one of the republics of the Soviet Union. It began with the establishment of the first Oriental center in the country (CABAR 2019b). Up until then, sinologists had all been trained in various cities of Russia or in neighboring Tashkent, which is the capital of today's Uzbekistan.

Konstantin Syroyezhkin, a leading Kazakh sinologist, was born in the south-eastern Kazakh city of Almaty during the time of the Kazakh SSR. He received his education in the Higher School of the Soviet Committee for State Security, Foreign Intelligence, and Domestic Security Agency of the Soviet Union, commonly known as the KGB (Комитет государственной безопасности, КГБ). Syroyezhkin observed that the lengthy Soviet border with China necessitated that the majority of cadets from the Oriental Faculty focus on Chinese studies. Although they did not have Chinese teachers from China at the time, he had the chance to study from the best-known experts in the discipline, i.e., legends of sinology. For example, the ancient history of China was taught by the famous sinologist, Lev Petrovich Delyusin (Льва Петрович Делюсин, 1923–2013).

During the era of the Kazakh SSR, research on China had a strong focus on Xinjiang as this was the borderland area with China. The need to study China prompted the birth of the Institute of Uyghur Studies, which was created from the Department of Uyghur Studies of the Institute of Linguistics of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR. It was headed by the former head of the Department of Uyghur studies and member of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, Gozhakhmet Sadvakasovich Sadvakasov (гожахмет садвакасович садвакасов, 1929–1991). Although the main direction of the institute's work was related to Uyghur philology, there were efforts to study historical, social-economic, and socio-political issues related to Xinjiang. Syroyezhkin, whose scientific career began with this institute, had approached his research by examining historical, social-economic, and social-political issues of China as a whole, but with an emphasis on their ramifications and connections with Xinjiang.

Political needs also prompted Uzbekistan-based Abdul-Ahad Ablat Khodjaev's (2023) research career. Khodjaev notes that part of his work looked into the history of the Silk Road. This is highly relevant to contemporary politics, as both China and Central Asian countries have used the concept of the ancient Silk Road to evoke an

imagined discourse of the ancient past in which territories, peoples, cultures, and civilizations collided and connected. This kind of discourse tends to romanticize a past that humankind might have shared, conjuring up an imagined coexistence and peaceful interactions between cultures, peoples, and powers along the vaguely conceived Silk Road (Winter 2021). The negative parts of the past, such as plague, war, and famine, tend to be dismissed in this discourse (Winter 2021). This Silk Road concept works well for both China and Central Asian countries in general. At the symbolic level, it is a strategic narrative that connects China with Central Asia from the past through the present to the future (Roselle, Miskimmon, and O'Loughlin 2014; Chen and Günther 2016; Chen 2024). Khodjaev (2023) noted that his research was to find out how, in this context, Uzbekistan can use the banner of the Silk Road to maximize its interests: in particular, if a Silk Road kind of connection is about to be revived in the contemporary era, how should Uzbekistan develop, bearing in mind that it is a doubly landlocked country?¹ How should Tashkent respond to China's BRI in this context?

4.1.1 The search for Central Asian roots drove research on China

Central Asian China experts connected their research to the needs of the countries, which are not just about understanding how to help their countries manage relations with China. Several of them have also worked on understanding the historical connections and relations between China and Central Asia, in an attempt to help their newly independent states' search for their ethnic group or nation-states' roots and identities. The late Kyrgyz sinologist, Galina Pavlovna Suprunenko, for example, used Chinese sources to examine the diplomatic and economic relations between the Tang Empire and the Kyrgyz Khaganate. In the 1970s, Suprunenko translated several Chinese sources of the Qing Dynasty, which are still a valuable source for the history of the Kyrgyz Khaganate of the 18th century. In the 1980s, Suprunenko further deciphered inscriptions in Chinese on stone steles found in the settlements of AK-Beshim and Krasnaya Rechka, which made it possible to clarify the dating of some events that occurred in the current-day Kyrgyzstan in the early Middle Ages (Tchoroev 2022; Central Asian Archaeological Landscapes 2023). The Uzbekistan-based Abdul-Ahad Ablat Khodjaev (2023) and the Kazakhstan-based Klara Shaysultanovna Khafizova (2015, 2022) contributed similar efforts to search for their respective new countries' roots. Khafizova mentioned that this is related to Soviet-style classical sinology, where scientists studied the history of Central

¹ Uzbekistan is not just landlocked. It is also surrounded by other landlocked countries such as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan.

Asian peoples using Chinese, Manchu, Mongolian, and Russian sources. 'China' was actually not the real focus of Soviet sinologists at that time (CABAR 2019b).

Khodjaev (2023) mentioned that during the Soviet era, while border issues with China were a problem, he was able to study such topics, which meant a lot for policymaking at that time. After Uzbekistan's independence, the new state desperately needed to find the origin of the Uzbek people to justify its nation-statehood. He hence redirected his attention to use Chinese materials to help trace the Uzbek people's origins (Khodjaev 1991; Dzhumaeva 2022). Recalling our discussion of Thailand in Chapter three of this book, part of the Thai sinologists' work was also to search for the origins of Thai people through their exploration of current-day Thailand's historical relations with China.

4.1.2 Central Asian China watchers could tackle sensitive topics

Several senior Central Asian sinologists have dealt with the ethnic issues of China in their research. This kind of research topic is considered politically sensitive, which has affected the ability of scholars in and outside of China to conduct research on it (Chen 2012). But when senior Central Asian sinologists started their careers, such topics were allowed. This is because there was a need to understand their own countries and peoples' histories with China and scrutinize the border issues with China. This inevitably led to the need to bring the ethnic dimension of the issues to the fore, as ethnic groups in Central Asia and China have intermingled for centuries. For example, Klara Khafizova explored the Qing strategies towards Xinjiang and the Kazakh world. Her findings were not uncritical of Chinese policies towards ethnic groups in its Western periphery and neighborhood (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012: 181).

Konstantin Syroezhkin (1997, 2003, 2006, 2015) is one of the few scholars in Central Asia who has dealt at length with interethnic conflicts between the Uyghurs and Kazakhs. He argued that Uyghurs should not regard Xinjiang as their own national territory by ignoring the existence of other Central Asian minorities therein (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012: 179). Just as the Uyghurs faced the pressure of being assimilated into the Han-dominated Chinese state, the Kazakhs in China faced the pressure of being Uyghurized (Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2012). Syroezhkin's (2015) work also offered different views from Chinese sources, such as that the Uyghur territory remained independent from China until the 18th century and then was transformed into part of China under the Qing. While the topic of Uyghur separatism has been politically sensitive both in the past and in the contemporary era, Central Asian scholars such as Syroezhkin were allowed to study such a topic because of its political importance (Kamalov 2006: 7).

In Laruelle and Peyrouse's (2012) research, they indicate that Central Asian experts were dismayed at the discovery of Chinese school textbooks that showed the

Chinese empire's territory stretching to Central Asia, including current Tajik Pamirs, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Such maps are not uncommon, particularly in China's early 20th-century cartography, in claiming that the proper shape of the real China was a combination of late imperial and modern understanding of territory, some of which was considered lost during China's century of humiliation, when foreign powers encroached on China (Callahan 2009). The Central Asian experts interpreted this discovery in negative ways for fear that China will one day reject its border treaty agreements with Central Asian states and expand its territory into Central Asia.

Murat Auezov, for example, voiced his concerns loudly. Auezov is a senior China watcher who should have been included in the oral history interviews, but we did not manage to do so before his passing away in 2024. Auezov was a public figure in Kazakhstan, a writer and former politician, and was among the first ambassadors of the independent Kazakhstan to be sent to China in 1992 (Ahkmetkali 2023). From 1959 to 1965, he studied Chinese philology at the Institute of Oriental Languages at Lomonosov Moscow State University, where he received his PhD. Auezov often publicly expressed alarmist views on China and was considered a Sinophobe. But looking more deeply into his career, he also opened a Chinese cultural center in the National Library of Almaty and launched a Kazakh-language journal called *Көрші* (*Korshi*, meaning The Neighbor). The journal was financed by Chinese companies in Central Asia, and by the Xinjiang Association for Cultural Exchanges with Foreign Countries (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012).

4.2 The deep influence of Russian sinology

Despite Central Asia's geographic proximity to China and historical interactions with China, as Sciorati and Silvan (2023: 49) comment, Central Asians are normally not familiar with Chinese culture, history, as well as political and business traditions. As various surveys and studies reveal (Chen 2023; Chen and Günther 2016, 2020; Chen and Jiménez-Tovar 2017), Sinophobia and Sinophila, fed by myth, imagination, and partial facts drive normal Central Asian peoples' perceptions of China. From the societal to political level, there is still a widespread perception of China's 'threat' to Central Asia. The main reason for this kind of development is that the Soviet and Russian understanding of China has directed how Central Asia should look at China. This understanding is mediated through Soviet and Russian perceptions (Sciorati and Silvan 2023: 49).² But it is important to highlight that recent

² For a more detailed and separate discussion on Soviet oriental studies, see Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann's 2011 'The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies' published by Routledge. That volume shows how Soviet orientology developed from the imperial tradition of Russian oriental studies and the Soviet Marxist framework.

research indicates corrective measures, including the efforts by the Kazakhstani authorities to reinterpret Soviet history and portray China as a supportive nation that has assisted Kazakhstan in fending off foreign invasions (Shakhanova 2025).

In the realm of China watching, and particularly academic studies of China in Central Asia, Russian sinology similarly plays an instrumental role in cultivating sinologists from Central Asia (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012; Meng 2011, 2013; CABAR 2019b). Central Asian sinologists in the early days were all trained in Russian cities or Tashkent, today's Uzbekistan. Almaty-based Syroyezhkin was educated in Moscow. Kyrgyz sinologist, Galine Pavlovna Suprunenko, who passed away in 1997, also graduated from the Faculty of Oriental Studies in Moscow. As Syroyezhkin explained (2015):

Pre-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union had the world's strongest schools of sinology. [...] As for the Soviet school of Sinology, it is also rich in world names. Although it is now customary to indiscriminately blame everything that was in the USSR, one cannot but admit that in those days, Oriental studies in general and sinology, in particular, were at a very high level, despite the notorious ideology, and in certain years, political demands. In any case, those who intend to seriously study China cannot bypass the huge layer of Soviet sinology literature. (Syroyezhkin 2015)

Klara Shaysultanovna Khafizova, another leading sinologist of Kazakhstan (CABAR 2019b), was educated in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the Central Asian State University (later renamed the Tashkent State University) in current-day Uzbekistan. Khafizova held high status as the Academician of the Kazakh National Academy of Natural Sciences. The Oriental Institute where she studied was founded in 1918 and in fact was the only such institute in Central Asia and Asia's oldest Oriental Institute of higher education. It is one of the largest schools of its kind in Asia and the former Soviet Union. Even though Khafizova was educated in Tashkent, not Moscow, she also noted the instrumental role of Russian sinology in their training of China experts (CABAR 2019b).

Hence, a comprehensive picture of the situation in Central Asia is that Russian sinology has been nurturing Central Asian China experts in history. As Russian sinology used to be internationally recognized and respected, older generations of China experts in Central Asia had been trained and equipped with advanced levels of Chinese skills to study Chinese materials directly. Interestingly, even though Soviet sinology was strong and could stand alone as a respectable force, its development was generally "inspired by the Western model of sinology," as Laruelle and Peyrouse (2012: 144) point out. During Soviet times, sinology was politicalized to serve the needs of politics. The discipline was also subject to the ups and downs of Sino-Soviet relations. If we want to understand the Central Asian development of sinology, we have to trace its current form back to the Russian influence.

One salient legacy of the Russian influence is geography. Why were Central Asian sinologists trained in either certain cities of Russia or Tashkent? This is because during the Soviet era, only Moscow and Leningrad were allowed to formulate discourse about the outside world. With regard to sinology, the only city that was able to form a school of sinology with a certain level of autonomy from Moscow and Leningrad was Vladivostok, and to a more limited degree, Irkutsk and Barnaul (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012: 144). The Faculty of Oriental Studies at the Leningrad State University (now Saint-Petersburg University) was where the Chinese Studies in Russia was founded and has a long history of Chinese studies in Russia (Altantsetseg 2022). The Central Asian departments of Oriental Studies were modeled on the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow. The training centered on historical, linguistic, and cultural questions. Most importantly, the oriental studies were not about studying Asia outside of the USSR. It was about the Russian-centered motive to understand Central Asia, the oriental part of the Soviet Union (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012: 145).

Another geographical dimension that reveals the Soviet influence was the regionalization of Soviet sciences. During the Soviet era, the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (Kyrgyz SSR, 1936–1991) was allocated to study the Dungan minority, an ethnic group known by a different name, Hui (回) or Huizu (回族) in China (Meng 2011, 2013; Jiménez-Tovar and Lavička 2020). The Hui are Sinophone Muslims in China. A small number of them who reside in today's Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are known as the Dungan. A Department of Dungan Studies was set up in the Kyrgyz SSR at the end of the 1930s. From the 1940s on, the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR also set up a department of Uyghur Studies within its Linguistic Institute. A tiny group of senior Central Asian sinologists was thus formed in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, some experts who were included in the oral history project were sinologists with expertise in these two ethnic minorities (i.e., Uyghur and Dungan) and the historical relations between ancient China and Central Asia. Their starting point for studying China is thus different from sinologists of other parts of the world. It is in this way that they are unique.

It is not easy for researchers to get access to study the situations in Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, another two Central Asian countries, because they are closed in nature and strictly monitored by their governments. According to Laruelle and Peyrouse (2012), neither country has real sinology studies. Take Tajikistan as an example. Their focus is on regions of cultural and geographic proximity, which would mean countries such as Iran and Afghanistan (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012: 146; Aini and Maltsev 1988). China studies were not prominent, neither in the Soviet era nor today. In Soviet times,

the Sino-Tajik border being inaccessible, the Tajik Soviet Republic was never considered by Moscow as being close to China, in contrast to the Kazakh and Kyrgyz Soviet Republic,

and therefore never had any sinologists or any departments of Uyghur or Dungan studies. (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012: 146)

Professor Muzaffar Olimov (2024), the Professor and Head of the Centre of Regional and Comparative Studies at Tajik National University and a research consultant for the Research Centre Sharq/Oriens concurred that as of 2024, Chinese studies had not yet been developed in Tajikistan. “In Soviet Tajikistan, although the PRC was considered an eastern neighbour with a border of almost 500 kilometre, the great neighbour remained quite a distant country until the end of the 20th century,” according to Olimov (2024).

Independent Tajikistan has discovered the PRC only recently. It was only after the signing of a treaty on disputed territories under the SCO with the four neighboring republics, including Tajikistan, that China established more active ties with all of its new western neighbors. But there is no sinologist in Tajikistan, as one might find in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Currently, there is an Institute of Oriental Studies in Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, but again, its focus is more on Iranian and Afghan studies. The CI in Tajikistan does offer teaching in the Chinese language, but its main purpose is not academic research. CI’s task is to prepare interpreters to help Chinese businesses in Tajikistan (Olimov 2024).

4.3 Central Asian Studies of China struggle to take off

Laruelle and Peyrouse (2012: 145) consider the aforementioned Khodjaev as the founding father of sinology in Central Asia. Of Uyghur origin and born in Kashgar, he spent some of his childhood years (1955–1959) in China. Khodjaev (2023) learned some basic standard Mandarin and even Shanghainese in his early days in China. His family moved to Uzbekistan during the wave of Chinese migration from Xinjiang to the USSR in the 1950s and 1960s (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012). In the 1960s and 1970s, Khodjaev (2023) was given the task of directing sinology in Tashkent, and he was one of the very few academics at that time who was trained in Russian sinology and then continued his work in the post-Soviet time. He held a chair in this field in Uzbekistan. Compared with Murat Auezov, Klara Khafizova, and Konstantin Syroyezhkin in Kazakhstan, Khodjaev’s position was relatively more institutionalized (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012: 146), thus making him the founding father of sinology in modern Central Asia.³ In August 2025, Khodjaev received an

³ Khodjaev served as an interpreter for former Uzbek president, Islam Karimov, and later as Uzbek ambassador to the PRC in the 1990s, which gave him access to many official archives. He published his dissertation based on old Chinese archives in Moscow in 1979. He subsequently wrote more

honorary title for his accomplishments in a presidential decree on the occasion of Uzbekistan's Independence Day. His extensive service in teaching and mentoring young experts was recognized with the title 'Ўзбекистон Ўнубликасида хизмат кўрсатган ёшлар мураббийси,' which translates to 'Honored Youth Mentor of the Republic of Uzbekistan.' Uzbekistan bestows this prestigious state honor upon a select group of leaders in education, culture, and science (Website of the Joint-Stock Company 'National Electric Grid of Uzbekistan' 2025).

Nonetheless, a lack of consistent funding has been a persistent problem in the Central Asian development of Chinese studies. In Kyrgyzstan, some early specialists in the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences left because of this problem. Currently, the Dungan studies section, which remains in existence, includes only a few researchers. Their main tasks are to write textbooks of Dungan languages and literature for Dungan-speaking schools at the demand of the Kyrgyz government. But they do not really engage in wider Chinese studies. The situation was reported by Laruelle and Peyrouse in their 2012 book. In 2023, the author interviewed some researchers in Kyrgyzstan and confirmed that the situation had remained the same (Khavaza and Djon 2023).

Due to the Soviet legacy and shortage of funding, traditional sinology in Central Asia remains focused on scholars working on Uyghur and Dungan studies. Only in recent years have we seen some researchers working in political science or international relations begin to include China in their observations. Akin to what has happened to other parts of the world (see Chapter two), scholars in other non-sinology disciplines might watch China but they do not necessarily speak Chinese languages fluently nor have had cultural immersion experience in China.

The question of whether Uyghur and Dungan studies are part of sinology can be controversial. It is not uncommon for prospective interviewees to hesitate when approached for an oral history interview, on the grounds that they do not see themselves as sinologists or China experts. But this issue does not exist solely in Central Asia. As noted in previous sections, scholars from various disciplines could all have been involved in the study of China, but they are not sinologists. The oral history project opts for a flexible yardstick to include diverse kinds of senior China experts.

For scholars in sinology, my impression is that most of them will not doubt the inclusivity of Dungan and Uyghur studies in sinology. But for contemporary Central Asian scholars who are not in the field of sinology, they could have different views

about Chinese rulers in Xinjiang in the 18th century. The Presidential Research Institute of Uzbekistan had funded his studies, printed out only limited copies of each of his publications, and distributed them to various governmental agencies and university research institutes. These publications were originally not intended for general distribution, but he has shared some of his publications with the author for the sole purpose of research.

on this matter. Some would think that Dungan and Uyghur studies are Central Asian studies and have nothing to do with China. Apparently, political identities and views have affected the division of perspectives on this topic.

The Central Asia case is unique in the sense that because the traditional Soviet view has been that a native person is better equipped with the know-how to study his or her own culture than a non-native, the earlier scholars in Dungan or Uyghur studies have been people with those exact ethnic origins. And these scholars can mostly trace their ancestral lineage or family connections to varying degrees back to China. They can in a way be considered bridges between China and their Central Asia countries. Their unique ethnic background makes them potential candidates for possessing sinological Chineseness as defined by Shih (2018a, 2018b). But do they really exhibit sinological Chineseness? We will come back to this in the next section.

4.3.1 The study of China is largely confined to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

Due to the various forces of development mentioned above, the study of China in Central Asia has largely been confined to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This was noted in Laruelle and Peyrouse's (2012: 148–249) earlier finding and confirmed by the author in her recent interviews in 2023. Not much has changed. Uzbekistan, with Khodjaev, had its moment of glory as the chair of sinology in Central Asia. But Khodjaev has retired. He is sometimes called back to contribute to Chinese studies but there has not been a clear and well-established younger generation to continue his work. Chinese language training does exist in Uzbek universities, some of which receive Chinese government funding and others which do not. Informal discussions with language teachers in Uzbek show that the curricula and teaching methods are not well established. Relatively speaking, Kazakhstan has slightly more capacity to conduct research on China, but even so, scholars have different views on whether there is well-established sinology on contemporary China.

Today, major universities of Kazakhstan possess oriental studies faculties with Chinese philology departments. The Chinese language, along with English, is among the most popular languages for Kazakhstani students (CABAR 2019b). Syroyezhkin and Khafizova, however, have both expressed worries about the future development of Chinese studies in Kazakhstan. A worrying trend, in Khafizova's view is how "a lot of specialists appeared without knowing the language or without special scientific training, or even without both" (Khafizova 2015). This echoes Syroyezhkin's view that younger generations do not have enough language training and scientific background to qualify as proper scientists, even though they might have learnt the language in school.

The concerns over the lack of proficient Chinese language skill reflects similar situations in Europe. Gregory Lee, a Professor of Chinese Studies at the University

of St. Andrews in the United Kingdom, for instance, noted that the utility-oriented modern study program has misled students to believe that by taking some cursory language courses and other courses on economics, cultures, society, and others, they would be well equipped to 'do business' with China (Lee 2023). Although not all educational programs were designed for such practical aims, academic programs very often must at least sell some aspects of these practical implications so that they can attract students.

Returning to the case of Central Asia, while the Chinese language is certainly taught in Kazakhstan and Kazakhstani students have the chance to do internships in China, Syroyezhkin (2015) noted that

knowledge of the language does not yet make a specialist in the country out of yesterday's student. If the entire five-thousand-year history of China is studied at the Faculty of Oriental Studies for only two semesters, then we have what we have. I am not even talking about the basics of China's economy, culture, literature, psychology, etc. (Syroyezhkin 2015)

When Syroyezhkin was interviewed for the oral history project in 2015, he confessed that the school of Kazakh sinology had not been formed yet, despite the existence of experts in Kazakhstan. He mentioned that there were few experts who could really be counted as sinologists, who had both mastered the Chinese language and knew the country well. Deficient financial support for such a school was the main reason. Yet he mentioned that this challenge also applied to other area studies, such as Arabic studies, Iranian studies, and other areas of oriental studies. Turkology might have been in a better condition but even so, there was no scientific school for Turkology either. He was worried about the situation of an older generation of experts passing away and universities not giving sufficient attention to and investment in the study of China in the future.

Syroyezhkin (2015) observed that most young people in Kazakhstan have no craving for science.

I have had the opportunity to communicate with only five young people who wanted to do serious scientific research in the field of sinology. Here the reason is obvious – the prestige of the title of a scientist, and of science in general, has been lost. (Syroyezhkin 2015)

He expressed that the same situation can be observed in Russia and other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. An anonymous sinologist shared similar views of the younger generation's lack of Chinese training but differed in the view of the demands to learn the Chinese language and culture. This anonymous interviewee contended that what is most vital is for students to learn practical skills such as informational technology from China so that our

country can modernize. She lamented that PRC-sponsored educational programs do not actually aim to modernize Central Asian citizens but rather keep them as an agricultural country so that Central Asian countries can continue to provide cheap agricultural products to meet the needs of the Chinese market.

Kazakhstani scholar, Khafizova, added that traditionally, the 'Orient' was educated in the Russian language. While the newly independent state of Kazakhstan wishes to enhance the use of the indigenous Kazakh language in various walks of life, Kazakh-speaking experts conducting oriental studies are not yet mature enough to present anything sufficiently groundbreaking to deserve national and international recognition (Khafizova 2015). There is a need for better integration between Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking China experts in the country in order to improve the quality of China research and education in Kazakhstan (CABAR 2019b). As Khafizova (2015) observes, most research outputs have been related to the history of Kazakh–Chinese relations, which again echoes the aforementioned point that there is a tradition in Central Asia that practical needs to manage political relations with their Chinese neighbors have led to this (narrow) direction in the development of sinology.

Overall, there have been few sinologists in Kazakhstan from a *longue durée* perspective, if we are strict with the level of language skills that the experts need to possess (CABAR 2019b). More and more people trained from other disciplines might encroach on the field of Chinese studies. They could study China due to their interests in political sciences, economics, sociology, or other fields, but their own disciplinary training would override training in the Chinese language. This is seen by the older generation of sinologists as 'superficial' and 'not qualified' to be a sinologist.

The Kazakh case challenges Chih-yu Shih's theoretical attempt to discern various kinds of China watchers. Do Khafizova and Syroyezhkin possess sinological Chineseness or scientific Chineseness as defined by Shih Chih-yu (2018a, 2018b)? At first glance, they can be categorized as sinological Chinese as they do command the Chinese language, value the skills, and use original Chinese materials for their research. But as both of them were pushed by the environment to conduct research to serve the political establishment's needs in their times, they often still appear to possess more scientific Chineseness in the sense that they seek to distance themselves from their studied subject, China, in exchange for being trusted as the right authority to objectively study China and offer useful policy suggestions for the country's needs. Moreover, the line between higher education and think tanks is blurred in Central Asia (CABAR 2019b, 2019c) in the sense that people can work between these two types of institutions. Most workplaces where Syroyezhkin has served are of a think tank nature, some of which are highly tied to the political establishment with clear state mandates. As such, he has demonstrated more

scientific Chineseness than Khafizova. The younger generation of China experts, whom Syroyezhkin and Khafizova both disapprove of, show even more scientific Chineseness than the older generation of China hands in Kazakhstan.

In Uzbekistan, Anri Abdullaevich Sharapov, an Uzbek scholar at the Department of International Relations, University of World Economy and Diplomacy is a political scientist, not a sinologist. Sharapov is in his mid-career development. In his oral history interview, he stated explicitly that his interest is in comparing Japan, South Korea, and China's influence in Uzbekistan. Geographically, these countries are close to Uzbekistan and share some cultural similarities. Among the three, China is the most influential, particularly in the realm of economics and trade. Sharapov received his education in Moscow State University from 1987 to 1992, spanning the last years of the Soviet period and the beginning of the period when Uzbekistan became independent. He has never visited China due to a lack of funding. Even though there is now funding for the younger generation to visit China, he expressed that he is not qualified to apply anymore. Sharapov demonstrates a more clear-cut case of scientific Chineseness as defined by Shih (2018a, 2018b).

Overall, coming back to the question of decolonization of knowledge production in Central Asia, when it comes to the study of China and China watching in general, the colonial legacy has deep imprints in directing how knowledge is structured and produced by certain intellectuals for certain political purposes. There is so far no systematic support from the top to form any formal school of sinology. But one cannot claim that there was no important research output coming out from Central Asia even given its limited condition. Khodjaev, Khafizova, and other names mentioned here are sinologists dedicated to their passion. Their work should be translated into other world languages to show how actually they have understood China from their Uzbek or Kazakh perspectives. This is to show that it is not true that there is an absence of indigenous scholarship and voices on China from Central Asia.

The real challenge is that academic freedom in Central Asia faces considerable obstacles due to censorship, political oversight, and bureaucratic limitations, particularly within the social sciences. Such pressures have the potential to hinder research endeavors and the expression of research outcomes. Also, indigenous scholarship lacks funding to sustain and further reach critical mass of disciplines willing to take up the same line of work. Funding shortage also leads to fewer opportunities for China watchers from different Central Asian countries to meet and have dialogues among themselves. Each country grapples with its own challenges to advance the field of China studies. Lack of funding is a real killer for any cross-country dialogue. It is not just a problem facing Central Asia; it is nearly everywhere, but in Central Asia, the scale is huge and warrants attention and efforts to redress the problem.

4.4 Comparing Central Asia with Southeast Asia

While Southeast Asia and Central Asia might be incomparable for many reasons, here we try to compare the incomparable. Southeast Asia's development of sinology and Chinese studies is normally deemed more advanced than that in Central Asia. The large population of ethnic communities in Southeast Asia has facilitated such a development as Southeast Asian scholars of Chinese descent were motivated to advance their knowledge and sustain links with China. Sinologists in Central Asia did not have ethnic Han Chinese roots, although some of them have ethnic ties, such as with the Uyghurs and Hui/Dungan in China. Unlike Southeast Asian China watchers, who may be motivated by their own ethnic roots to study China, Central Asia China watchers were motivated largely by their countries' political needs to understand and manage relations with their gigantic neighbor.

China watchers in both Southeast Asia and Central Asia are conditioned by the political environments of their societies and the academic space in which their countries allow them to work. Although each country and society have their own conditions, it is common that researchers' work should have practical applications, either in using the study of Chinese texts to help their own nation-state search for historical roots, or in managing contemporary relations with China. While one could argue that most China experts are not real politicians and have no power in policymaking, at least in Central Asia, one could contend that some senior China watchers there have been key components in shaping Sino-Central Asian relations insofar as they are assigned the task of making sense of their respective countries' political and economic relations with China, as shown in Syroyezhkin and Khodjaev's careers.

Although some experts might have traits related to sinological Chineseness as defined by Shih (2018a, 2018b), China experts in Southeast Asia and Central Asia tend to simultaneously show scientific Chineseness. Ethnic Chinese experts in Southeast Asia, specifically, could have claimed the authenticity of their ethnic Chineseness to support their status as experts of China in their current countries. Nevertheless, the majority had to navigate a delicate balance to ensure that they were not perceived as disloyal to their present countries. There is a trend pulling them towards even greater scientific Chineseness, detaching them from an in-group position. Too much in-group position would disempower them in their careers.

In Central Asia, Bulat Sultanov, Director of the Institute for International and Regional Cooperation of the Kazakh-German University and Chairman of the Board of the Belt and Road Expert Club, has expressed that it is safer to write works on Chinese history and culture, but not contemporary problems of China. And if one's public writing on contemporary China is found, the author "can immediately be labelled as Sinophobe or Sinophile" (CABAR 2019b). Both are subject to potential

public scrutiny and criticism. Sinophiles can be subject to more skepticism than Sinophobes. The same phenomenon can be seen in contemporary Europe and America too, particularly when the production of China knowledge becomes politicalized and securitized by governmental agencies and educational institutions, a topic which we will deal with in the seventh chapter.

Revolving Doors Between Research, Journalism, and Politics

Abstract

Hendry Jurnawan has a career that straddles academia, politics, and journalism in Indonesia, which has enabled him to raise awareness of Chinese Indonesians' rights in various ways in society. Mette Holm is a Danish journalist but she is also affiliated with academic institutions and non-government organizations. Her role as the wife of a high-level Danish and international politician has complicated her engagement with China. As agents cannot operate in a vacuum, we also examine two institutions that enable the connection between scholars, journalists, and politicians to create, disseminate, and support knowledge production about China: the Islamabad-based Pakistan-China Institute and the East Asian Institute in Singapore.

Keywords: Hendry Jurnawan, Mette Holm, knowledge production about China, Pakistan-China Institute, East Asia Institute, Singapore

China watchers involve more than scholars. This book covers proportionally more cases of the development of the academic field of broadly defined Chinese studies to look at how knowledge production about China is created in the higher education environment. This does not mean that I ignore the importance of journalists, politicians, and other types of agents who might have similarly become vital sources of information about China in various countries. It is also not uncommon to find cases where scholars move through the revolving doors between the academia, government jobs, business, journalism, non-governmental jobs, and others to extend their networks and influence. The assumption that someone does not have an education in classical sinology or advanced Chinese language skills and thus cannot be qualified as a China expert merits reconsideration.

This chapter looks at individuals whose lives have unintentionally or intentionally revolved in different realms and affected knowledge production about China in their countries. Hendry Jurnawan has a career that straddles academia, politics, and journalism in Indonesia. Mette Holm would probably define herself as a journalist but she is also affiliated with academic institutions and non-government organizations. Her role as the wife of a high-level Danish and international politician, a very important person (VIP), has also complicated her engagement

with China. I have selected only two examples but I am aware that there are a lot of fascinating examples that one can write about, such as Santa Romana of the Philippines, who was a journalist and public intellectual and later became even the Philippine ambassador to China, or Ramesh Nath Pandey, an Indian journalist active in Nepal and India, who later became active in Nepal's politics and its relations with China (Shih 2018a; Clemente and Combinido 2018). Or tracing back to the late 19th century and early 20th century, one could write about the journalist turned university professor, Naitō Konan (内藤湖南, 1866–1934), who is renowned for his periodization of Chinese history (Fogel 1984).

As individuals cannot operate in a vacuum, this chapter has selected two non-Western think tanks to look at their roles in facilitating the work between politicians, researchers, and other producers of knowledge about China. One is the Islamabad-based Pakistan-China Institute and the other is the Singapore-based East Asian Institute. Again, a lot of fascinating examples could also have been included (e.g., the Taiwan-based Institute of International Relations, the China-sponsored Budapest-based China-CEE Institute), but I have to limit myself to two examples in this book.

5.1 Hendry Jornawan: An Indonesian politician, journalist, and scholar

Unintentionally, I started professions in three areas all at once. Since graduating in 1983, I immediately became an economic lecturer of Panca Bhakti University, Pontianak. It was from 1984 until now, and at the same time I involved myself actively in politics. From 1984, I became one of Golkar's officers until 2009. In the same year, I moved to 'Nasdem' (NasDem Party/National Democratic Party), which is Surya Paloh's own political party until now. From 1986 until now I have worked as a journalist. I love these three professions – education, politics, and journalism. (Jurnawan 2017)

All of my three careers were useful for West Kalimantan Chinese people. (Jurnawan 2017)

Hendry Jornawan (赖民裕) was born in Pontianak in 1952, the capital of the Indonesian province of West Kalimantan, on November 24, 1952. The exact numbers of Indonesians with Chinese descent remain unverified, as many Chinese Indonesians choose not to identify as Chinese for various reasons that will not be explored in this book.¹ The Chinese community in West Kalimantan exhibits distinct characteristics compared to their counterparts in other regions of Indonesia. While

¹ Please check Ayrodiguno and Shih's work (2023) for further information.

the Chinese population is generally a minority in other islands, in the cities of West Kalimantan, they represent a significant portion, surpassing the Dayak, Malay, and other ethnic groups in the region. That said, West Kalimantan is the province with the largest number of Chinese people in Indonesia. In contrast to the predominantly Hokkien-speaking Chinese in Java, the Chinese in West Kalimantan are more diverse, primarily consisting of Chinese who speak Chaozhou (or Teochew, 潮州話) and Kejia (or Hakka 客家話) dialects, with smaller groups speaking Cantonese and Hainanese.

In Indonesia, the Chinese are often stereotyped as economically driven individuals, associated with significant wealth that contributes to social inequality. The wealthiest in Indonesia are frequently Chinese businessmen. Nevertheless, in West Kalimantan, the Chinese community is not limited to trade and business; they are also engaged in various occupations, including farming, mining, and fishing.

Jurnawan is an Indonesian of Chinese descent whose career has straddled academia, journalism, and politics, which has enabled him to raise awareness of Chinese Indonesians' rights in various ways in society (Aryodiguno and Shih 2023). His family has spent many generations rooted in Indonesia. While most Chinese in Pontianak can speak Chaozhou and Kejia dialects, Jurnawan actually spoke Fuzhou dialect (福州話) at home. Jurnawan's father worked for the Kuomintang as a civilian pilot, but he resigned in 1939 due to a vision problem as a result of his eye being struck by metal when he was repairing an airplane. In 1940, all civilian pilots were recruited to become military pilots. Because of his vision problem, Jurnawan's father could not fulfill the requirement to become an air force pilot. When the Kuomintang began to lose the civil war against the communists in China, his father left mainland China by ship for fear of being captured by the communists. Even with this retreat, Jurnawan expressed that his family's position was pro-Republic of China (ROC, also known as Taiwan today) as his mother's side also had connections with the Kuomintang.

Jurnawan's first education was in a Chinese-language school, ZhenQiang (振強小學) Elementary School, until it was closed down due to the Indonesian authorities' policy of restricting the rights of people of Chinese descent. Many Chinese in Indonesia, known as the *Tionghoa* people, did not like to go to an Indonesian-language school because they did not understand that lacking Indonesian language skills would affect their future. Most parents just let their children go into business instead of letting them continue their education in Indonesian schools. Jurnawan's father, a civilian airline pilot for the Kuomintang with rich travel experiences and several linguistic skills, had a different vision. His father believed in the importance of the Indonesian language for his son's future. So Jurnawan continued his education in an Indonesian-language school, despite the initial difficulty due to his lack of Indonesian language skills. Jurnawan eventually took a doctoral degree.

After completing his undergraduate degree, he started his career in the three areas of academia, journalism, and politics. Regarding academia, he was asked to

become a lecturer at the relatively new Panca Bhakti University in 1984. Panca Bhakti university was created in 1983. It was a private university where ninety percent of students were of Chinese descent. Within six years of the university's opening, it had accepted about one thousand students in four faculties: Law, Economics, Engineering, and Agriculture. In the beginning, Panca Bhakti University lacked Chinese lecturers, so when Jurnawan completed his undergraduate studies, he was asked to teach there, and then he established the Faculty of Economy in the same university. During his teaching career, Jurnawan mostly taught marketing and management. Occasionally, he gave a couple of public lectures on Chinese culture and history to the public and government officials. But in his capacity as a lecturer, his production of knowledge about China was not significant. He also intentionally refrained from conducting research on China's development because he was afraid that he would be perceived as being disloyal to Indonesia, and that would undermine his political career.

Interestingly, it is his role as a politician that has more direct connections with Chinese people, as he strove to raise awareness of Chinese people's various rights in the country. Jurnawan was appointed by the Mayor of Pontianak, Colonel Majid Hasan, to join politics after his undergraduate studies. He was given the understanding by the mayor that participating in politics required him to follow the mainstream. In practice, he would have to join the Golkar party, the oldest extant political party in Indonesia. In his view, the benefits of joining politics were that he would then have the opportunity to fight for the rights of the minority and hence help people of Chinese descent in the country.

The mayor of Pontianak at the time was Majid Hasan, of mixed Acehnese and Sundanese ancestry. He was not anti-Chinese. He agreed with Jurnawan that he should do more to help Chinese people who were facing difficulties in the region. At the time, Chinese people there who did not have a comprehensive understanding of politics often fell victim to the authorities' extortion. For example, many Chinese traditional healers practiced their healing work without certification and would often be blackmailed by the Health and Security authorities. Jurnawan tried to help some of the traditional healers to spare them from such extortion.

From 1984 to 1988, Jurnawan was elected to the executive board for the Golkar party at the municipal level of Pontianak. From 1992 to 1999, Jurnawan became a member of the Regional Representative Council in West Kalimantan. The period during which he served in politics overlapped with the so-called New Order era in Indonesia, during which Indonesian President Suharto reigned from 1966 to 1998.²

² Suharto (1921–2008) was the second and longest-serving president of Indonesia. In the New Order era under Suharto's regime, there were three Chinese board members of the Regional Representative Council in Pontianak and West Kalimantan. The first was Eddy Fajarai (Chinese name: 黎颜辉). He was twenty-one years old when he became the first person of Chinese descent to be elected as a board

Another contribution that Jurnawan made to the people of Chinese descent was helping them obtain Indonesian citizenship. The background was that even when people of Chinese descent had lived in Indonesia for a long time, they were still identified as foreign citizens in Indonesia, which made their lives more difficult. It was hard for them to get a job and have a proper education. “The people disliked us as if we suffered from leprosy,” Jurnawan recalled (2017). Jurnawan was able to obtain Indonesian citizenship in 1978, after which he started to pursue his undergraduate studies. In 1980, Suharto’s government circulated the Official Letter of Indonesian Citizenship (SBKRI) for foreign citizens to become official Indonesian citizens. The purpose of this policy was to allow the people to be able to vote in the General Election in 1983. At that time, news was not easily accessible. State announcements about the selection of citizenship were communicated only through the radio. In rural areas, radios were rare, let alone televisions. Chinese people were dispersed throughout remote areas of West Kalimantan, especially in Pontianak and Singkawang. The information was announced in the Indonesian language, and there were many Chinese people who could not understand Indonesian, so they knew nothing about this opportunity to obtain citizenship. The content of the announcement on the radio was that Chinese people who did not apply for Indonesian citizenship would remain foreign citizens. As a result, they remained Chinese citizens without realizing that they had had the chance to change such status.

When he was a student, Jurnawan joined volunteer groups to help local Chinese obtain Indonesian citizenship. When he became a member in the Regional Representative Council, he proposed more distributions of SKBRI. SKBRI continued to be distributed, but the quantity was not the same as the first time.

Jurnawan clarified that his work as a politician was not only for Chinese rights, but for all the West Kalimantan people.

Therefore, in my heart, I cannot be a pro-Chinese person and against non-Chinese. On the other hand, the Chinese are fully aware that I have become an Indonesian citizen and I am not a citizen of China. Of course, there exist boundaries for everything, things I am allowed and not allowed to do. The Chinese did not want to put me in a difficult situation either. (Jurnawan 2017).

member and he served as such in Pontianak for three periods from 1988 to 1997. Eddy Fajarai has already passed away. The second board member was Wijaya Tanda SH (Chinese name: Chen Yong Cheng 陳永城). He became a board member of West Kalimantan province for one and a half periods from 1979 to 1987. Jurnawan was the third and last person in the New Order era to become a board member, from 1992 to 1997. In the second period, 1997 to 1998, the Reformation Era took place after the anti-Chinese riots in 1998—the National Election was re-conducted. Jurnawan did not participate in elections anymore since people hated Suharto and his followers. Jurnawan knew that his chance to win election would be low.

Jurnawan treaded a fine line to make sure that he would not give the wrong impression to Indonesians that he was not loyal to the Indonesian state and people. He worked hard to gain the trust of the Indonesian regime. At the same time, he was a very important person for Chinese people in West Kalimantan. For example, when they were having a hard time in obtaining Mandarin books or magazines, he would use his capacity as a politician to help. The customs and immigration authorities of West Kalimantan permitted Mandarin books to enter because he argued that the books were important for all schools where Indonesians wanted to learn Mandarin. This would not just help the Chinese people in the region.

When Jurnawan was still a member of the Regional Representative Council, he recalled that he was asked by the government to explain why, in the 1980s, many Chinese females of Singkawang and Pontianak went to Taiwan to get married. He clarified that they only wanted to improve their families' financial conditions—rather than being brought to Jakarta to be deceived by criminals to work in the flesh trade. The lives of Chinese people living in West Kalimantan changed because many of them went to Taiwan to get married so that they could send money to their parents in Indonesia to improve their lives.³

Even though his parents had connections with the Kuomintang and thus his natal family was pro-ROC/Taiwan in that regard, Jurnawan expressed that in his heart, there was no difference between the old China (ROC/Taiwan) and the new People's Republic of China (PRC), or between Beijing and Taiwan, because he thought that every Chinese was a descendant of the dragon (龍的傳人). He tried to improve his Mandarin skills and even taught the Indonesian language at Guangdong University of Foreign Affairs, using the opportunity to improve his Mandarin. His choice to go to Guangdong was because many Indonesians of Chinese descent in West Kalimantan had come from Guangdong.

Jurnawan's neutral perspective on the new and old Chinas also affected his work as the first editor-in-chief and journalist for the *Kun Dian Ri Bao* (坤甸日報). This newspaper was founded in 2001 by Dhalan Iskan (余士干) of the *Jawa Post*. This newspaper was meant to be the first newspaper in Mandarin language during the post-reformation era, after President Suharto left office in May 1998.⁴ After being ruled by Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime for over three decades, Indonesia embarked on a new phase of governance called Reformation (*Reformasi* in

³ Eventually, the representative of Taiwan in Indonesia required those Taiwanese who wanted to get married to Indonesians to go to Indonesia and apply for visas for their future spouses and get married legally, preventing cases of human trafficking.

⁴ Under Suharto's regime, the Mandarin language was forbidden. In Indonesia, there was only one legal Mandarin newspaper under government supervision. It was called *Yin Du Ni Xi Ya Ri Bao* (印度尼西亞日報), and was published by the Indonesian intelligence agency (Jurnawan 2017).

Indonesian). *Kun Dian Ri Bao* aimed to be neutral and had no preference nor affiliation with the ROC or PRC. Jurnawan (2017) maintained that the newspaper did not spread propaganda against either the Taiwanese or Chinese government.

5.2 Mette Holm: A Danish journalist and wife of a VIP

Before, I was married to a photographer, and we were detained in China in 1991, and they separated us. And, you know how Chinese walls are very thin, so he was on the other side of the wall, and they were shouting at him in Chinese, and he spoke absolutely no Chinese, and he was coughing all the time. And that's probably the worst thing I've ever experienced, because I could hear him clearly, and it was not going well. And he didn't know what they were saying. That, of course, meant that I was basically willing to say almost anything in order to protect him. It was very unpleasant. We got out, both of us, in one piece, and much wiser. (Holm 2020)

Mette Holm (born 1953) was a Danish journalist, activist, and senior fellow at the now-defunct Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) in Copenhagen, Denmark. Holm studied anthropology at the University of Copenhagen between 1978 and 1983, where she took most courses related to China. Famous Danish human rights expert, Hatla Thelle, was her thesis supervisor. We will meet Hatla Thelle in Chapter eight of this book, where we will learn about Thelle's work for the Danish Institute for Human Rights, which was then one of the leading human rights institutions in the world. Hatla Thelle has been one of the most important individuals in the effort to do away with capital punishment and torture in China. Holm and her supervisor have kept in touch on and off over the years.

During Holm's studies at the University of Copenhagen, she went to China as an exchange student. There were ten Danes studying with her in China at the time. The context was that Deng Xiaoping had introduced an exchange student system that sent eight hundred Chinese students overseas. Holm (2020) explained,

the best and brightest Chinese students at the time, the ten most clever went to the US, ten most stupid, which were none the less brilliant, went to Norway, and the next bottom ten, went to Denmark. They all got high degrees and most of them remained and became naturalized (citizens). One returned to China because she was very uncomfortable with living alone in Denmark. The others have remained to become Danish citizens. (Holm 2020)

In exchange, the Danish side sent ten Danish students to China. That is why there were ten Danes studying in China when Holm went on the exchange study (Holm 2020).

Initially Holm was impressed by Chinese culture and feats like the Great Wall and The Long March. However, she soon realized how lucky she had been to grow up in Denmark with all the protection of her rights and so many possibilities to choose from. The realization that in China people lacked these opportunities prompted her to pay attention to human rights issues. Being disillusioned by the lack of opportunities in the field of anthropology at the time, she switched to journalism in 1983 and graduated in 1987. After her studies, she immediately started work at the foreign desk at the Danish National News Agency. In Denmark, journalists are entitled to one week's educational leave a year, and journalists can accumulate those weeks. So, in 1988, she returned to China, traveling around to visit her old haunts. When she returned to Denmark, she was offered a job at the foreign desk of the National Television News. In the following spring of 1989, she went on another two-week course in Japan as part of her educational leave.

In May 1989, there was to be a summit between Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping in Beijing. A colleague and friend of Holm had covered all the summits. He had been a correspondent in the Soviet Union. He decided to pass the torch on to Holm, who was heading to China to assist in reporting on the upcoming summit.

This was one of the biggest events in international journalism in a long time. There were eight hundred journalists flying to China to cover the summit between Deng and Gorbachev, and it was also the first time that a Taiwanese government minister had gone to Beijing to attend the Asian Development Bank's first meeting ever in China. With these two major events, there were hundreds of journalists who would normally not be there.

Holm covered the news until late May, when the director of TV News in Denmark said that while he was pleased with her coverage, she alone had spent half of the annual budget of the foreign desk of the Danish National TV News. Hence, she had to return to Denmark. At that time, nobody knew that China was only at the beginning of a major transformation and that the Eastern European communist regimes would collapse one after the other in the autumn of 1989.

When the June 4 Tiananmen Square incident occurred less than a week later, Holm had to cover the news from Denmark. Some of her Nordic colleagues, such as Yrjö Lansipuro from Finland, remained in China. She kept in touch with her Nordic colleagues in China to get the news covered.

The 1989 reporting was the defining moment of her career. She was on TV news every day for two months (Holm 2020). She became famous in Denmark. As a result, she was able to basically do what she wanted professionally, so she suggested to a major Danish newspaper that she become their correspondent in China. This was the Danish newspaper with the biggest foreign desk at the time, with twenty full-time correspondents based abroad. Out of the twenty correspondents, there

were nineteen men and one woman. She mostly covered news about China, but also other Asian countries.

Clearly, as a journalist and a human rights-minded individual, Holm was not the Chinese government's favorite person. She also noted that the Chinese government did not trust foreign correspondents like her.

The Chinese think foreign correspondents are spies because their own correspondents might very well be. Many years ago, I visited the People's Daily, and I had this interesting conversation with the editor-in-chief and the head of the foreign desk. They said, ah, but we have correspondents all over the world, and only about twenty-five percent of what they report reaches the media. The main part goes to the foreign department. [...] That's just the way they work. So, they could never, and they still can't, get over the suspicion that someone like me is a spy. (Holm 2020)

However, Holm's role as the wife of a Danish VIP made it hard for the Chinese government to openly inhibit her work. Holm's second husband, Mogens Lykketoft, was a Danish minister, speaker, and president of the Danish Parliament as well as president of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).⁵ Lykketoft has been in government and politics for most of his life—and thus is considered a VIP by the Chinese government. Holm and Lykketoft met in China in 1993. He was then the minister for finance. He was on an official visit to China, and she was covering the news. They had a lot of interests in common, China being one of them, but also foreign affairs and the world at large. They eventually got married. When it comes to China, Holm said that she has always been on the ground, while her husband, being a high-ranking political figure, would always meet and negotiate with his counterparts in high office. They have written several books together, the first being on China.

When they got married, the Chinese government realized that they could no longer deny her access to China or detain her. It was difficult for the Chinese government to deny her entry to China, or at least Beijing would have to refuse both her husband and her, which they have done on occasion, such as for a trip to Tibet, although they have been allowed into Tibet twice. The only way for the Chinese side to hinder them is to treat them as VIPs in China. In practice that means,

we get picked up at the airport by a chauffeur driven Mercedes with the tinted windows, and get taken to big hotels, often placed somewhere far from the city. No public transport

⁵ Lykketoft was elected UNGA president on June 15, 2015. He presided over the UNGA from September 14, 2015 to September 13, 2016. At the time of his election, he was also speaker of the Danish Parliament, a position that he had held since 2011.

or taxis, so that we can't really move about on our own. And that's part of the very hospitable side of China, they are generous hosts. And it's also part, of course, of their control. If they place us some 20 kilometres outside Shanghai, in a fantastic resort so that we can't go anywhere. And that's just the way it is. (Holm 2020)

Besides being a well-known journalist and wife of a VIP, Holm worked with the China team at the Danish Institute of Human Rights, where her former supervisor, Hatla Thelle, dedicated her life to human rights causes in China. Holm later became an associate senior fellow at the Copenhagen-based NIAS, which worked very well for both sides. She met many NIAS experts and did a lot of interesting interviews. But she did not really produce academic papers. Her work was mostly freelance work with the Danish Institute of Human Rights and she kept up her connections with NIAS. But she mentions that between 2003 and 2006 she quit journalism to work for the Danish Institute of Human Rights as an information officer to support their work because there was a right-wing government in Denmark that wanted to close down the Institute. Eventually, the Institute survived the crisis.

Holm frequented China and gave lectures. She mentions that she has academic friends in China but sometimes she and her husband have to keep their distance when contacting them might put them in danger.

My husband and I talked about a good friend, whom we don't get in touch with right now, because maybe it's not the right time for him to be in touch with people like us. That's how it is, and that's terrible. Even if our relationship is totally legitimate, we can't be in touch. Things are not necessarily logical. It depends on the prevailing wind, doesn't it? (Holm 2020)

Despite all the challenges, Mette Holm has been an important figure in narrating and debating about China in the Danish media. She has written numerous books, and one of them has gone to second and third editions. This is an educational book for high school students, originally published in 2001. The book is entitled 'Kina – fra kejserdømme til kapitalisme,' which literally translates to 'China – From Empire to Capitalism' in English. She summarizes her contribution in Denmark as:

I have been told that it is the most commonly used book in high school in Denmark. Maybe 'the' book on China. [...] I have made several hundred public talks, lectures, media reports and the like over twenty years and more. So, I guess, I have contributed to the general knowledge of China. (Holm 2020)



Figure 5.1. Mette Holm and Mogens Lykketoft in Shanghai in 2017. Source: Private photo provided by Mette Holm and Mogens Lykketoft. The photographer is unknown.

5.3 Institutions

Individuals cannot operate in a vacuum. Rather, individual agency is affected by the structure it operates in and agency may further induce changes to the structure. There are always institutions and systems as an arena in which for individuals to operate. After giving examples of individual agents above, I aim to look at two institutions that enable the connection between scholars, journalists, and politicians to create, disseminate, and support knowledge production about China. There are numerous examples, including scholarly associations (e.g., European Association for Chinese Studies), journals and their publishers (e.g., *Orizzonte Cina*, a quarterly journal linked to the Italian University of Turin), and think tanks (e.g., Mercator Institute for China Studies). Due to limitations of space, I offer only two non-Western examples: the Pakistan-China Institute based in Islamabad and the East Asian Institute based in Singapore.

5.3.1 *Pakistan-China Institute in Islamabad*

Swaran Singh: China and Pakistan are seen as strange bedfellows. They have nothing in common. You are Islamic, they are atheists, they are regimented, and you are a chaotic democracy. Small country vs big country, weak economy vs strong economy. Even trade is so little, money-making is not the object. So, what is it that you see that makes China such an attractive country?

Mustafa Hyder Sayed: I think the same question can be asked between the biggest capitalist of the world, America, and communist China. They are the biggest trading partners in the world. [...] My point is foreign relations have been known to defy many norms. This agreement between China and Pakistan is driven by opportunity. Both states stand to gain from this agreement: China will obtain access and Pakistan will gain economic development. If the relationship between the biggest communist and the biggest capitalist is justified, the relation between Pakistan and China is also very understandable. (From oral history interview of Mustafa Hyder Sayed (2017) conducted by Swaran Singh)

Pakistan and China are known to have a warm relationship. Islamabad recognized the PRC almost immediately after its establishment. In 1989, when the UN sanctioned China after the Tiananmen Square incident, Islamabad singlehandedly spoke out against the UN's decision. Even though Islam is the main religion of Pakistan, Pakistan has not fretted about China's handling of the Uyghur issues in Xinjiang. Conversely, Xinjiang has become a vital component of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that will link Xinjiang with Pakistan's Gwadar Port (Shih 2022). Chinese media and publications describe Pakistan as 'iron brothers' (Li 2021) while Pakistanis describe their relations as "higher than the mountains, deeper than the sea, sweeter than honey, and harder than steel" (Chen and Xu 2022).

In this context, the Pakistan-China Institute was launched in 2019 as an Islamabad-based think tank with a lean team of ten to fifteen people in the Islamabad office and six to seven staff in their Chinese office based in Shenzhen, the Silicon Valley of China. The Pakistan-China Institute's operation is substantially sponsored by the Chinese government, although there is no transparent information on the exact numbers. Its executive director, Mustafa Hyder Sayed, comes from a well-connected Pakistani family and has received education in both the US and China. Sayed's first visit to China was in 2011, and he explained that since then, he has visited China many times, once every forty-five days on average (Sayed 2017). The Pakistan-China Institute is unique in being the only think tank created on the basis of Sino-Pakistani relations and working on missions that foster the bilateral relationship. In his capacity as the executive director of this institute, Sayed has become one of the main knowledge producers about China in Pakistan. The knowledge that the institute and himself produce is generally very positive

about China. China is not considered a risk or threat by such knowledge producers. This corresponds in general to criticism from outside of Pakistan and China that Pakistan's elites are zealously stamping out criticism of Pakistan's cooperative projects with China, despite evidence of challenges posed by these projects (e.g., Afzal 2020; Vinayak 2020).⁶

As part of Chih-yu Shih's oral history project, Prof. Swaran Singh from India conducted the interview with Mustafa Hyder Sayed. He is relatively young to be included in the oral history interview but his significance as a knowledge producer about China in Pakistan justifies this choice. Sayed's operation is embedded in Sino-Pakistani relations that have historically been generally positive. The two countries have strong connections even in sensitive areas such as defense. The motive for creating the Pakistan-China Institute was that there was a lack of consolidated relations between the respective civil societies, private sectors, and professional organizations. A platform was needed to bridge that gap. Mustafa Hyder Sayed's father is a prominent Pakistani politician named Mushahid Hussain Sayed, who sought to create the institute as a non-governmental think tank to bring professionals from both China and Pakistan together. Even though the institute is non-governmental in nature, it is clearly well connected through Mushahid Hussain Sayed, who is currently a senator in Pakistan while at the same time being the chairman of the Pakistan-China Institute.

The institute itself operates similarly to Western think tanks in some ways and differently in others. What distinguishes it from normal Western think tanks is that the institute has taken up tasks of cultural diplomacy between Pakistan and China. When Chairman Hussain visited China, he realized the importance of Pakistani universities including Mandarin in their curricula. Mustafa Hussain Sayed (2017) explained:

He (Mushahid Hussain Sayed) spoke to two or three aspiring teachers in China who agreed to come to Pakistan for this purpose. He then introduced these teachers to private schools that hired them, and that's how he started this initiative in Pakistan. Now many universities have adopted these language classes and we have also started livestreaming these Mandarin language classes.

The institute publishes a bilingual magazine called *Youlin Magazine*, which literally means 'friendly neighbors' in Chinese and basically promotes culture and society from both countries. It is the only magazine in Pakistan that is published in both English and Chinese (Website of Youlin Magazine 2024).

⁶ Chinese stakeholders view the strong consensus among Pakistani elites as positive signs, which potentially may protect them from changes in cooperations (Safdar 2024, 2025).

The CPEC project is well documented and actively debated in international media. The role of the Pakistan-China Institute is to facilitate the dissemination of information about this project. As Sayed (2017) articulates, they hope that the media can generate ‘a useful discourse’ on CPEC and raise awareness of the project in Pakistan.

With work starting on CPEC, the task at hand is how Pakistan can best capitalize on this historic opportunity. We need to make this development sustainable for Pakistan and Pakistanis. A lot of work needs to be done as this is a recent project and, as you know, the relationship is being defined by CPEC now. (Mustafa Hussain Sayed 2017)

The Pakistan-China Institute’s functions as a think tank, a cultural hub, and a link between various political and professional actors in both countries gives Sayed an opportunity to straddle various realms to produce positive images of Pakistan’s relations with China. Such knowledge producers are usually questioned in the Western media and academic publications. They are seen as being too close to the Chinese government, and thus lacking independent voices. But there are other non-Western institutions that have the ambition to garner influence in politics but still are highly respected as authoritative knowledge producers about China. The East Asian Institute (EAI) in Singapore is a superb example.

5.3.2 East Asian Institute in Singapore

The last institution to bring up is the EAI. Like the Pakistan-China Institute, the EAI defines itself as a non-governmental think tank. Based in Singapore, the EAI is considered one of the top think tanks in the world. The China watching offered by the EAI did not grow out of the Cold War context, as most think tanks in the US did. Its birth and operation have been affected by political considerations embedded in local Singaporean politics (Wei 2016; Wong 2016a, 2016b).

The EAI was founded by Goh Keng Swee (吴庆瑞, 1918–2010), former deputy prime minister and former minister of defense of Singapore. After Goh’s retirement from politics in 1985, he became a special economic advisor for the PRC’s State Council to open up China’s coastal cities and tourism (1985–1990). Goh was a politician, scholar, and public intellectual, and he used to have regular Wednesday lunchtime dialogues with the then senior minister, Lee Kuan Yew. He never claimed himself to be a China scholar nor did he ever publish formal academic writings on China. But his rich knowledge about China and insights drawn from his work and networks would qualify him to be an exceptional China expert or China watcher (Wei 2016; Wong 2016a, 2016b).

In 1983, Goh founded the Institute of East Asian Philosophies (IEAP) to conduct research and promote the values of Confucian ethics, which he contended were

the pillar of several Asian countries' economic success and should be promoted to strengthen Singapore. Goh had in mind that the young generation had equated modernization with Westernization and embraced Western values and lifestyles. In Goh's mind, this was a challenge that had to be addressed for Singapore to maintain its Asian origin and values (Wei 2016; Wong 2016a, 2016b).

In 1990, Goh appointed John Wong as director of the IEAP, steering the direction of the institute from researching Confucianism to the political, economic, and social development of contemporary China. As a result, IEAP was renamed the Institute of East Asian Political Economy (IEAPE). In 1997, IEAPE was renamed the EAI. While the IEAP and IEAPE were closed-door think tanks for the Singaporean government and kept their research results out of the public eye, the EAI was re-defined as an open academic organization with autonomy within the National University of Singapore. It produces academic research results that are relevant to policymaking (Wei 2016; Wong 2016a, 2016b).

Prof. Wang Gungwu (王赓武, born 1930) was appointed the first director of the EAI. EAI briefings are circulated to Singaporean government circles regularly. The government also seeks advice from the institute. Even if it has non-government status and autonomy, it clearly has had a strong link to the Singaporean government since its inception. The quality of its work is highly recognized in Singapore, Asia, and beyond (Wei 2016; Wong 2016a, 2016b). In Chih-yu Shih's oral history project, Wang (2010) clarified that the EAI's aim is to offer reliable and up-to-date information about China, but it is not the EAI's job to help the government deal with China or help China.

If the West wants to read the information we put out, it's fine if it can help them understand China. We are not just for the Singapore government. Indians are also very happy to read our information and use it to understand China. So, this is not a matter of stance, nor is it about helping the Singapore government or China. We just want everyone to understand China, and anyone can use this information. (Wang 2010)

It is interesting to note that the EAI published a book about the institute's history in 2016. In the book, it was mentioned that Goh had understood that the US had the largest resources dedicated to China watching, due to the US's Cold War work and legacy (Wei 2016; Wong 2016a, 2016b). Taiwan was also known to have the best China-watching facilities in Asia as it had a real, urgent need to understand its difficult neighbor on the Chinese mainland (Wei 2016; Wong 2016a, 2016b). Goh even sent a scholar to Taiwan to check Taiwan's major research outputs on China, including those produced by Taiwan's military intelligence unit, known as the studies of *Feiqing* (匪情) or 'bandits,' referring to the communists on the Chinese mainland. Goh reached the conclusion that despite the US and Taiwan's

capabilities, both failed to predict major changes in China, such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. This is because the Chinese inner political circles are opaque, and there are simply many known unknowns even for China watchers. What China watchers predict can only be considered speculative, based on whatever information that they could gather. Under the leadership of EAI directors, nevertheless, the EAI tries to recruit the best China experts from China, the US, and the world with the aim of offering empirically based evidence on China (Wei 2016; Wong 2016a, 2016b).

Unlike its predecessors and unlike the Pakistan-China Institute, the EAI does not promote Chinese culture, or anything related to it, although the IEAP initially did aim to promote Confucianism. In fact, promoting the Chinese language, culture, and Chinese-language education used to be a sensitive topic in Singapore. This is because the city-state wishes to promote a multiracial identity rather than any strong Chinese identity. Singapore, on the one hand, wishes to present the image that it understands China well due to many of its connections with China and its capacity to absorb Chinese talents to work for Singapore, while on the other hand, it keeps a careful distance from its Chineseness to prove its objectivity. EAI experts have both the scientific Chineseness and the sinological Chineseness that we talked about earlier on. But they have strategically used their in-between position and identity as neither Chinese nor the West, but with good relations with both, to carve out a niche in the global China-watching community (Woon 2023).

Chih-yu Shih (2019) has critically questioned this approach by arguing that Singapore will alienate itself from China if it continues to downplay its Chineseness. In the long term, this would affect Singapore's intellectual appreciation of China. In his work, Shih (2019) has compared Singapore with smaller states such as Nepal and Bangladesh. In Shih's (2019) opinion, these smaller states might turn out to understand China better because they "do not have to turn away from China culturally" (Shih 2019: 247). The Pakistan case can be a parallel here.

As we reach the conclusion of Chapter five, we can link this discussion to the overarching objective of the first major part of this book. As noted in the introduction of this book, the first major part of this book, 'CHINA WATCHERS: THE AGENCY & DIVERSITY,' is composed of Chapters two to five. We have observed the variety of China watchers that exists both within and outside of conventional perceptions. In examining the cases of Central Asia and Southeast Asia, we find both types of experts: those who embody sinological Chineseness and those who exhibit scientific Chineseness in their work. It is also evident that the distinction between these two categories is not always clear-cut, as even those experts who may lean towards possessing sinological Chineseness can strategically choose to display more scientific Chineseness in their work. Scientific Chineseness entails a conscious alienation from one's Chineseness to create that image of objectivity. The identity of being

recognized as a China expert seems to play a crucial role in the strategic decisions of many China watchers to exhibit scientific Chineseness. Ultimately, learning the language and immersing oneself in Chinese culture and society may simply serve as methods of signaling one's expertise. Demonstrating sinological Chineseness is one approach to conveying that expertise. In their professional endeavors, China watchers, especially those involved in research, often strive to distance themselves publicly from anything associated with politics, in contrast to politicians and activists. This serves as an additional means of establishing credibility as an expert. The performative aspects of the choices and actions of China watchers may stem from personal decisions, but they can also arise from the pressures and expectations of their work environments and society. They adapt their behavior to align with external expectations regarding the characteristics of China experts.

We confirm the hypothesis that it is not uncommon to see an individual or an institution display more scientific Chineseness to demonstrate objectivity and gain reputation. Singapore's EAI is deemed much more capable of showing this kind of scientific Chineseness than the Islamabad-based Pakistan-China Institute. Similar impulses can be observed in the European Union's (EU) Horizon Europe program's exercise of creating projects that can produce 'independent knowledge about China' (European Commission 2021).

But would 'independent knowledge' or scientific Chineseness hinder or foster a better understanding of China? Chih-yu Shih (2019) seems to believe that sinological Chineseness would work better than scientific Chineseness in helping a China watcher truly understand China. I do not take a stance on this situation but rather wish to invite readers to ponder this question. What is clear is that in the EU and other like-minded Western countries, there is a trend towards scientific Chineseness, and China watching is being securitized to meet that aim. I will talk about the securitization issue in Chapter seven. In the next chapter, Chapter six, I will explore the issue of politicalization of China watching and Chinese studies first. With the discussion in Chapter six, I think that this will better prepare readers to comprehend the question of securitization in Chapter seven.

