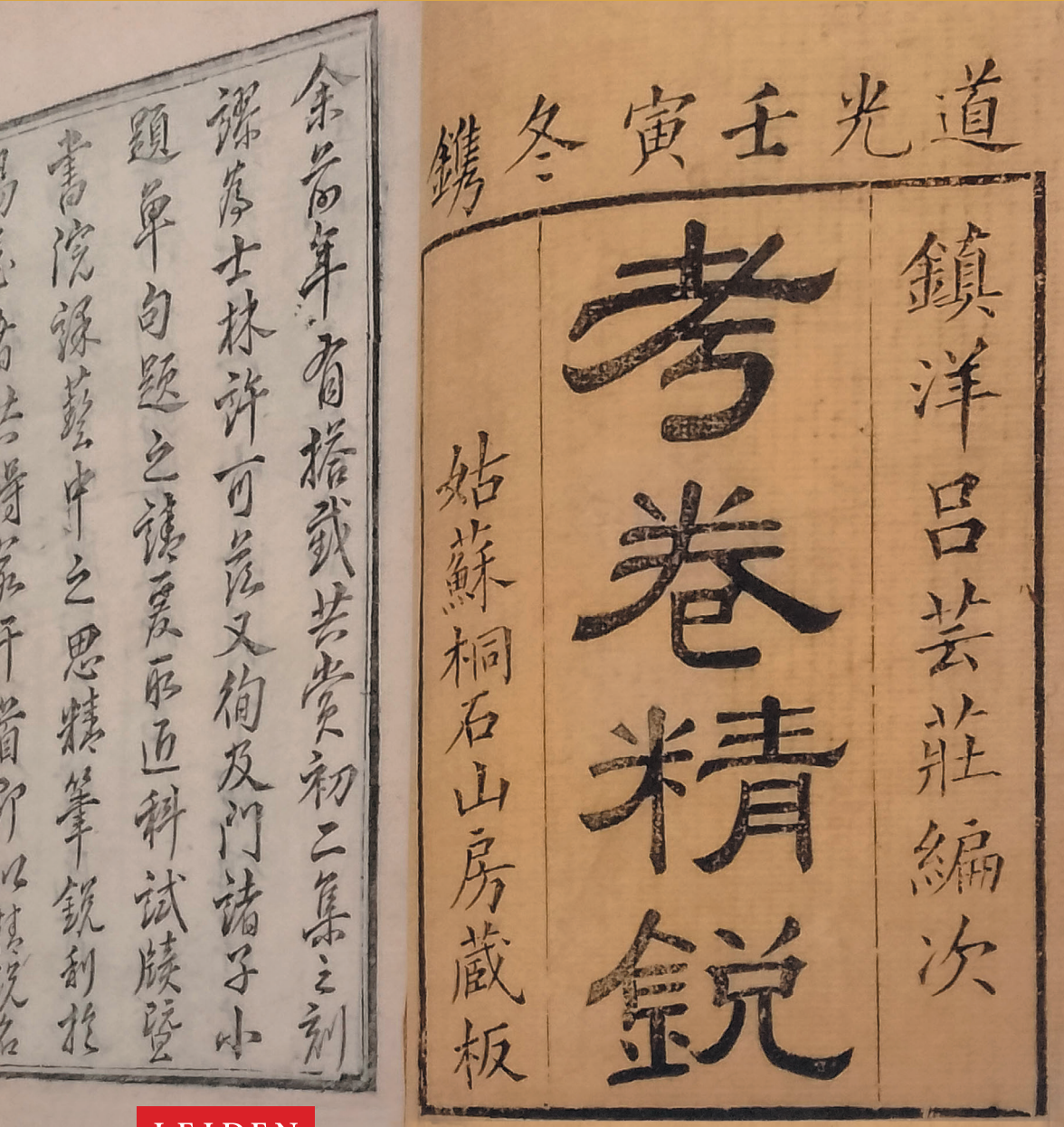


Global Knowledge Production about China

JULIE YU-WEN CHEN



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Cover design: Andre Klijsen

Cover illustration: A Chinese book in Matteo Ripa archive. 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. For example, in 1732, the missionary priest, Matteo Ripa (1682–1746), created the first Sinology School on the European Continent, 'The Chinese Institute,' the first nucleus of what would become today's 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. This is a book entitled Kao Juan Jing Rui (考卷精銳) preserved in Matteo Ripa's archive at the University of Naples L'Orientale; the book was used to help Chinese learn about the essentials of Christianity. The image is the first page of the book. Today, researchers specializing in the Latin and Chinese languages are working to sort out ancient documents preserved at the Matteo Ripa archive.

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For my family

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables	11
List of Abbreviations	13
Preface	15
Chapter 1. Introduction	19
1.1 The perpetuated interactions between politics and knowledge about China	20
1.2 Geographic scope	26
1.3 Methods and datasets	28
1.4 Structure of the book	32
1.4.1 <i>Three major parts</i>	32
1.4.2 <i>Overview of the next nine chapters</i>	34
China Watchers: The Agency and Diversity	37
Chapter 2. Knowledge about China Is Epistemological	39
2.1 Knowledge about China is conditioned by epistemological relationships with China	44
2.2 Different Chinas and different routes to understanding Chinas	46
2.3 The agency of China watchers	48
2.3.1 <i>China experts who cannot speak Chinese?</i>	50
2.3.2 <i>China experts who have never been to China?</i>	51
2.3.3 <i>Translating Chinese as a step towards sinicization</i>	54
2.3.4 <i>Ethnic Chinese China experts' diverse sinicization experiences</i>	58
2.3.5 <i>Journey to the East: education and travels</i>	60
2.3.6 <i>Journey to America</i>	64
Chapter 3. China Studies in Southeast Asia	67
3.1 Scientific Chineseness vs sinological Chineseness	68
3.2 Uneven development of China studies across Southeast Asia	70
3.3 Cross-fertilization of China studies and Southeast Asian studies	71
3.4 Chinese diaspora and Thai knowledge production about China	75

Chapter 4. Void of China Studies in Central Asia?	83
4.1 Political needs drive Central Asian knowledge production about China	86
4.1.1 <i>The search for Central Asian roots drove research on China</i>	88
4.1.2 <i>Central Asian China watchers could tackle sensitive topics</i>	89
4.2 The deep influence of Russian sinology	90
4.3 Central Asian Studies of China struggle to take off	93
4.3.1 <i>The study of China is largely confined to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan</i>	95
4.4 Comparing Central Asia with Southeast Asia	99
Chapter 5. Revolving Doors Between Research, Journalism, and Politics	101
5.1 Hendry Jurnawan: An Indonesian politician, journalist, and scholar	102
5.2 Mette Holm: A Danish journalist and wife of a VIP	107
5.3 Institutions	111
5.3.1 <i>Pakistan-China Institute in Islamabad</i>	112
5.3.2 <i>East Asian Institute in Singapore</i>	114
The Structure where China Watchers Operate	119
Chapter 6. Continuities and Ruptures in Knowledge Production about China	121
6.1 Hard to eradicate orientalism	122
6.1.1 <i>Brazil: From the Iberian to the American worldview</i>	125
6.2 Brazilian imaginary of Confucianism	127
6.3 Further obstacles: institutionalized educational systems	128
6.4 Ruptures: from Cold War politicalization to post-Cold War de-politicalization of China watching	130
Chapter 7. Securitization of China Knowledge	135
7.1 Appropriation of China as risky	137
7.2 Securitizing knowledge production about China	139
7.2.1 <i>The EU and member states</i>	142
7.2.2 <i>Like-minded states' securitization efforts</i>	146
7.2.3 <i>China's policy reforms and securitization measures</i>	148
7.3 Chinese ethnicity and Confucianism as risks in Indonesia	150

Chapter 8. China as a Knowledge Co-Producer	155
8.1 Interlocking between China and the Indo-Pacific	156
8.2 Human rights dialogues where China is involved	160
8.3 Scholars in the EU–China human rights dialogues	162
8.4 Socially engaged scholars and their dilemma	165
8.5 Transnational connections	167
 Back to Transnational Knowledge Production about China	 171
 Chapter 9. Taiwan	 173
9.1 Chinese studies in Taiwan	174
9.2 Taiwan studies	178
9.3 Interlocking with the Indo-Pacific	181
 Chapter 10. Knowledge Production about Global China	 185
10.1 Reclaiming knowledge production about global China	185
10.2 Cross-fertilization of China studies and Global South studies and limits	 191
 Acknowledgements	 195
Bibliography	197
Index	217

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 3.1 Publication numbers on 'South China Sea' in Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure.	73
Figure 5.1 Mette Holm and Mogens Lykketoft in Shanghai in 2017.	111
Figure 8.1 Publication numbers on 'Indo-Pacific' in Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure.	158
Figure 10.1 Poster for the Master's Program on Sinophone Societies and Cultures at the University of Vienna, Austria.	189
Table 10.1. Strong Examples of Interlocking of Knowledge Realms between Chinese Studies and Other Disciplines.	188

List of Abbreviations

ASAIHL	Association of Southeast Asian Institute for Higher Learning
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BKPBM	Badan Koordinasi Pendidikan Bahasa Mandarin (Indonesian Coordinating Board for Mandarin Language Education)
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CABAR	Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting
CI	Confucius Institute
CIEF	Chinese International Education Foundation
CLEC	Centre for Language Education and Cooperation
CNKI	Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure
CPEC	China–Pakistan Economic Corridor
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
EAI	East Asia Institute
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FLACSO	Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales)
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IIR	Institute of International Studies at National Chengchi University
NSF	National Science Foundation
NSP	New Southbound Policy (of Taiwan)
NIAS	Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
PBM	Pusat Bahasa Mandarin (Mandarin Language Centre/Confucius Institute in Indonesia)
SBKRI	Official Letter of Indonesian Citizenship
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London
SSRC	Social Science Research Council
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
USSR	Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic

Preface

This book is a testament to my personal struggle as a researcher on China, a teacher who imparts knowledge about China and a public person who must express my views on it. My occasional appearances in local Finnish TV documentaries that expose ‘Chinese influencing activities’ in Finland, have led me to question how I, as a researcher in the ivory tower, got drawn into the *realpolitik* of the so-called China threat in Finland. I strive to comprehend the intersection of *realpolitik* and the knowledge realm that people like me may face in our profession. China in this book mainly refers to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as we know it today, but I do acknowledge that the meaning of China can be broader than this. Taiwan and Hong Kong are also subjects of exploration in this book.

Another burning issue that I seek to problematize is how to treat the fact that the field of China watching and the studies of things ‘China’ has a colonial and imperialist root. Inter-imperiality is a common problem facing many countries’ production of knowledge about China. Brazil, for instance, has historically been affected by European colonialism to treat China as part of its broadly perceived ‘Orient.’ In more recent decades, American epistemology has also affected Brazil’s perceptions of China. In addition, readers can find ample examples of Russian and then Soviet imperialist influence on its former republics and satellite states’ development of sinology or Chinese studies in this book. Another notable example of inter-imperiality would be Taiwan with its different layers of colonial imprints on the island’s development. Selective attention to decolonize either European, Chinese, Japanese, or American (neo-)colonial influences would lead to the incomplete decolonization of knowledge production. I also complicate the matter by checking the rising political currency of the term ‘Indo-Pacific,’ both as a *realpolitik* reality and a knowledge realm to be imagined and constructed. When Indo-Pacific intersects with Taiwan, it exacerbates Taiwan’s selective approach to decolonization in several ways.

With that original sin of China watching’s imperial root(s), and with so many researchers and intellectuals’ efforts before me to confess that sin and find ways to redress it, very often, the question of how we can decolonize Chinese studies or other relevant sub-fields while still doing it comes to mind. If we place too much criticism on the discipline, it might turn against our profession or calling! So, the subversion from within the field does have its limits, just like decolonization has its own.

Concerning decolonization, technically, we cannot undo what has been done in the past. Because colonization has left legacies and marks on different generations

and layers of cultures, decolonization always has its limits. Another limit of decolonization is that if the decolonial project is strongly identity based, it might create new kinds of epistemic injustice and inequality. Using the example of Taiwan again, the rising awareness of the so-called Taiwanese identity and the ensuing intellectual and political endeavors to form the so-called Taiwan subjective sovereignty in producing knowledge about Taiwan prompts different kinds of Taiwan-centric worldviews or imagination. The locals in Taiwan (in reality, this mostly means the political and intellectual elites) were presumably given more power to reclaim knowledge production about their history. This resulted in educational reforms that revised curricula and textbooks; locals were given the chance to view themselves and their relationships with China and other countries in Asia in a new light. Nevertheless, in this process, a new kind of Taiwanese nationalism might be formed. Nationalism always has its positive and negative sides. Towards the end of this book, I mention that I am worried about the anti-Chinese-based de-sinicization reforms taking place in Taiwan. Treating Southeast Asian countries and Pacific Island countries and their peoples purely functionally for Taiwan's diplomatic and political gains is not in line with the decolonial spirit. The political and intellectual elites in Taiwan are confronted with different kinds of priorities here, which might contradict one another to some extent: geopolitical interests (that can be vital for survival), decolonial values (which support local agency-based knowledge production), and epistemic equality and justice.

The PRC is undergoing a divergent kind of transformation but similarly wishes to reclaim knowledge production about China. This goes hand in hand with China's desire to have its perceived 'correct' narrative about China, to counter what it perceives as the dominance of Western knowledge production and thus biased narratives about China. While there are PRC scholars who are writing continuously about China and publishing internationally, a parallel trend that is occurring in China is some institutions' preferences to encourage Chinese scholars to write more in the Chinese language and publish in domestic publications. Being able to publish in journals listed in the English-dominated social science citation index is no longer rewarded in these Chinese research and educational institutions as before. This may be read as a kind of decolonial effort, that is, to decolonize China from Western knowledge and practices. However, overly scientific nationalism, motivated partly or entirely by *realpolitik*, is not conducive to the healthy development of knowledge production.

My teacher, Shih Chih-yu, is a giant with visions. Shih is currently Visiting Chair Professor of Tongji University and Professor Emeritus of National Taiwan University. He has published prolifically about the intersections between *realpolitik* and knowledge production on China. The global oral history project, which he started decades ago and to which I have partly contributed, has inspired me tremendously while penning this book. Although our perspectives do not always

align, Prof. Shih's generous support and guidance have been a beacon of light for me. His data was funded by the Research and Educational Center for China Studies and Cross Taiwan-Strait Relations, Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University.

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The University of Helsinki and its faculty of humanities (formerly faculty of Arts) have also provided funding for the research and open-access publication of this book. Considering that Finland is now facing a financial and geopolitical crisis, leading to severe cuts in support for education and research, I am exceptionally grateful for my university's incentive funding that has made this publication possible.

My work on Southeast Asia benefits more than from the visiting scholarship that Mahidol University has endowed me. Without the friendship of Morakot Meyer, her colleagues, and assistants, including finding books for me in local libraries, I would have been lost in the Thai language. Morakot's kindness always touches me.

Special thanks are expressed for Donatella Guida and Federico Brusadelli's invitation to visit Matteo Ripa's archive at the University of Naples L'Orientale in 2023, which deepened my understanding of the origins of European sinology. I also wish to thank the anonymous external reviewers, colleagues at Leiden University Press, Dusica Ristivojević, Martin Lavička, Kristina Kironska, Gerald Jackson, Obert Hodzi, Duncan McCargo, Muhammad Tayyab Safdar, Sara Park, Al-Sharmani Mulki, Bokyung Kim, Wasiq Silan, Chingduang Yuyayong, Sami Honkasalo, Andrew Logie, Melani Budianta, Mu Pirvali, Zion Qin, Sara Van Hoeymissen, Dana Dūda, Liyu Chen, Malika Issabayeva, and Yevgeniya Ni for offering help both great and small during my research. Lastly, this book could not have been completed without the backing of my dear family members, my husband, and son! Their invisible support is highly appreciated.

