Journal of Contemporary China

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjcc20

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To cite this article: David Shambaugh (27 Jul 2023): The Evolution of American Contemporary China Studies: Coming Full Circle?, Journal of Contemporary China, DOI: 10.1080/10670564.2023.2237918

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2023.2237918

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA
https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2023.2237918

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The Evolution of American Contemporary China Studies: Coming Full Circle?

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ABSTRACT

In the nearly 75 years that the People's Republic of China has been in existence, the field of contemporary China studies in the United States has developed and evolved through six distinguishable 'generations' of scholarship. The evolving social science scholarly analyses of contemporary China have paralleled the changes in the PRC itself over time, but they have also reflected paradigmatic changes in scholarly disciplines in the United States. Other stimuli which have also impacted the field include domestic politics in America and shifts in US-China relations. This article traces the evolution of field (as observed and interpreted by the author); it concludes that while the field is generally very healthy, diverse, and enjoys great breadth and depth of knowledge, it faces significant new challenges for source material and research in Xi Jinping's China.

KEYWORDS

Chinese studies; Sinology; US-China relations; public intellectuals; American China studies; China specialists; People's Republic of China; Cold War; Xi Jinping; Mao Zedong; Deng Xiaoping; Jiang Zemin; Hu Jintao

Introduction

In this article I review and reflect on the past seven-plus decades of scholarly/academic 'China watching' to provide an overview of how the field of 'contemporary' (post-1949) China Studies has evolved in the United States, primarily in the social sciences.[1] This is a very lengthy period of time—thus, inevitably, depth is sacrificed in the interest of breadth. While I do my best to capture the main trends in different periods and 'generations' of scholarship, no doubt I have missed a number of research foci and individual scholars. My intended purpose is to provide an overview of the evolution of the field—mainly to provide the current and future generations of China scholars with some historical perspective on how the field has developed. I also conclude with a brief appraisal of the challenges the field faces today and how it might evolve in the future.

Previous Assessments

This is by no means the first attempt to describe the evolution of contemporary China studies. Over the years several assessments of American China studies have been

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

*This article had its genesis as a Director's Distinguished Lecture at the University of Oxford China Centre, October 28, 2022. I am most grateful to Professors Todd Hall and Rosemary Foot for the invitation. I am also particularly grateful to Robert Ash, Bruce Dickson, Terry Lautz, Andrew Nathan, and Andrew Walder for very insightful comments on earlier draft versions of this article. The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

[1]These are, of course, my own reflections and interpretations; no doubt other colleagues will remember the past differently and may well disagree with my interpretations.

published,[2] as well as of other countries. One volume contrasted studies in the U.S. with Europe and Japan,[3] two focused on the Soviet Union,[4] and another edited volume contained individual chapters on contemporary China studies in Japan, northern Europe, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and United States.[5] Another unusual volume assembled essays by Central/East European Sinologists during their communist era, at a time when they were permitted to live, study, and work in China.[6] More recently, one study surveyed China studies across the Global South.[7] *The China Quarterly* has also previously published a series of assessments of contemporary China studies in different nations.[8]

There have also been a number of published assessments of the study of Chinese politics, Chinese society, China's economy, China's foreign policy, and China's military. In 2003 *Issues & Studies* (published in Taiwan), surveyed several different disciplinary studies of contemporary China (as well as containing an interesting section assessing the six leading journals in the field).[9]

But these previous surveys of the contemporary China field are now all dated. Such 'state of the field' studies are not as common as they once were. The decline and recent dearth of such surveys no doubt has to do with the increasing complexity of China itself. Indeed, one of the conclusions of this article is that precious few scholars today are comfortable generalizing about 'China'. This is quite understandable, as China is a big and complex country and everyone has their own special area (and sub-areas) of research. Micro analysis has long since replaced macro analysis. While understandable, I also find this to be a regrettable trend. The field needs to see *both* the 'trees' and the 'forest'.

[2]See David Shambaugh (ed.), *American Studies of Contemporary China* (Washington, DC and Armonk, NY: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and M.E. Sharpe 1993); John M.H. Lindbeck, *Understanding China: An Assessment of American Scholarly Resources* (New York: Praeger Publishers 1971); Tai-chün Kuo and Ramon H. Meyers, *Communist China Studies in the United States and the Republic of China: 1949–1978* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press 1986); Ramon H. Myers and Thomas A. Metzger, 'Sinological Shadows: The State of Modern China Studies in the United States', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 4 (July 1980), pp. 1–34; Elizabeth Perry, 'Partners at Fifty: American China Studies and the PRC', *Harvard Asia Quarterly* (Autumn 1999); Andrew G. Walder, 'The Transformation of Contemporary China Studies, 1977–2002', in David L. Szanton (ed.), *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2004; Michel Oksenberg, 'Politics Takes Command: An Essay on the Study of Post-1949 China', *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987), pp. 543–590; Harry Harding, 'From China with Disdain: New Trends in the Study of China', *Asian Survey* (October 1982), pp. 934–958; Richard Wilson, 'China Studies in Crisis', *World Politics*, vol. 23 (January 1971), pp. 295–317; Edward Friedman, 'In Defense of China Studies', *Pacific Affairs* (Summer 1982), pp. 525–266; Andrew Mertha, 'A Half Century of Engagement: The Study of China and the Role of the China Scholar Community', in Anne F. Thurston (ed.), *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press 2021). There have also been a considerable number of subject- and discipline-specific state-of-the-field articles published in *The China Quarterly* and other journals.

[3]Robert F. Ash, David Shambaugh, and Seiichiro Takagi (eds.), *China Watching: Perspectives from Europe, Japan, and the United States* (London: Routledge 2007). This volume contains parallel chapters on the study of domestic Chinese politics, China's economy, and China's foreign and security policies.

[4]E. Stuart Kirby, *Russian Studies of China: Progress and Problems of Soviet Sinology* (London: MacMillan 1975); Gilbert Rozman, *A Mirror for Socialism: Soviet Criticisms of China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1985). Also see Robert Michael Gates, *Soviet Sinology: An Untapped Source for Kremlin Views and Disputes Relating to Contemporary Events in China*, PhD. Dissertation, Department of Government, Georgetown University Government Department, 1974 (note that Dr. Gates went on to a distinguished career in U.S. public service, including serving as Director of the CIA and Secretary of Defense).

[5]Kuan Hsin-chi (ed.), *The Development of Contemporary China Studies* (Tokyo: Center for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, The Toyo Bunko 1994).

[6]Marie-Luise Näth (ed.), *Communist China in Retrospect* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Publishers 1995). This volume is unusual because it contains first-hand impressions of China by East European students and diplomats who resided in the PRC during the 1950s-1960s. Another study of Sinology in the former Soviet bloc is Antonina Luszczykiewicz and Michael C. Brose (eds.), *Sinology During the Cold War* (London: Routledge 2022).

[7]Social Science Research Council, *Asia-China Knowledge Networks: State of the Field* (New York: Social Science Research Council 2022): https://www.ssrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Asia-China-Knowledge-Networks-State-of-the-Field-SSRC-Dec-22.pdf.

[8]When I served as Editor of *The China Quarterly* (1991–96) I created dedicated sections of the journal for 'State of the Field' and 'Concepts and Methods'. See, for example, Ryosei Kokubun, 'The Current State of Contemporary Chinese Studies in Japan', *The China Quarterly*, no. 107 (September 1986), pp. 505–518; Lucien Bianco, 'French Studies of Contemporary China', *The China Quarterly*, no. 142 (June 1995), pp. 509–520); Mark Sidel, 'The Reemergence of China Studies in Vietnam', *The China Quarterly*, no. 142 (June 1995), pp. 521–540; Graham E. Johnson, 'The True North Strong: Contemporary Chinese Studies in Canada', *The China Quarterly*, no. 143 (September 1995), pp. 851–866; Gilbert Rozman, 'Moscow's China Watchers in the Post-Mao Era', *The China Quarterly*, no. 94 (June 1983), pp. 215–241; Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard, 'Contemporary China Studies in Scandinavia', *The China Quarterly*, no. 147 (September 1996), pp. 938–961.

[9]'Special Issue: The State of the China Studies Field', *Issues & Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4/vol. 39, no. 1 (December 2002/March 2003).

Scholars need to aggregate data and analyses where possible. This would also suggest the need for more interdisciplinary and multi-author publications.

Another reason for the dearth of state-of-the-field studies in recent years is because of the vast proliferation of professional institutions that analyze China. Think tanks have become very important centers for the study of China (most think tanks in Washington, DC have *several* China specialists on staff). Considerable China expertise also now resides in financial services institutions (banks, investment funds, private equity companies). The knowledge base in these institutions is quite considerable, very granular, and while primarily proficient on Chinese economic topics, these analysts also pay broad attention to demographic, social, political, transportation, environmental, and many other factors. A number of American law firms also have considerable expertise on Chinese law (not surprisingly), and several have offices in China (although these have been considerably reduced in recent years). Of course, the eighteen intelligence agencies of the US Government also possess an enormous cadre of full-time China analysts (a reasonable estimate would be approximately 2500), while an even larger number of intelligence analysts work on China 'part-time' via their 'functional' subjects of expertise.[10] American journalists based in China (a shrinking cohort since 2018) also know a great deal about China, but it is questionable as to whether their reporting should be counted as part of 'China studies'. For the purposes of this article, I will limit discussion to those in the Academy.

Broad Influences Affecting American Contemporary China Studies

In the United States I would observe that the contemporary China studies field has been primarily a *reactive* field, in at least five ways:

- reactive to events in China;
- reactive to theories and changes in the social science disciplines;
- reactive to domestic American politics;
- reactive to the state of US-China bilateral relations;
- reactive to major events in the world (such as the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and disintegration of the Soviet Union and East European communist systems).

The first feature illustrates the 'demand' from the media, government, NGOs and civil society, and the general public for informed analyses and explanations of events unfolding in China. This offers opportunities for scholars to assume their appropriate 'public intellectual' role. China is a complex place, has a proven capacity to surprise, and has become more and more important in world affairs. For all of these reasons, China scholars are called upon to interpret current events for multiple audiences. To do so effectively, however, they must leave their academic jargon behind, describe complex phenomena in intellectually understandable terms, and explain the real-world implications for their audiences.

Not many academics can do this. But it is important for them to try. Many senior China scholars from the 1970s-1980s performed this public intellectual role quite effectively—individuals such as A. Doak Barnett, Ezra Vogel, Robert Scalapino, Michel Oksenberg, David M. Lampton, Kenneth Lieberthal, Richard Baum, Harry Harding, Thomas Robinson, and Susan Shirk come to mind. Some of the generation that entered the field during the 1990s carried on this tradition, but beginning in the 2000s the new generation of China scholars seemed much less inclined to engage with public audiences or government policymakers. This was the rationale and impetus for the 'Public Intellectuals Program' (PIP), undertaken since 2005 by the National Committee on US-China Relations.[11] Now in its seventh cohort, 140 fellows have matriculated through the program.

[10]This number does not include the FBI or other law enforcement agencies (which have their own in-house China officers).
[11]See: https://www.ncuscr.org/program/public-intellectuals-program/.

Secondly, like all fields of study, the analytical tools of different academic disciplines have had a significant impact on their object of study.[12] This has very much been the case with the study of China. As discussed further below, since the 'behavioral revolution' of the 1960s China has been something of a 'laboratory' for different disciplinary scholars to 'experiment' and 'test' out theories and methods developed in their disciplines. Whether this has helped to clarify or obscure the object of analysis (China) remains debatable.

One principal reason for this trend is that academic scholars are now hired and promoted on the basis of contributions to their *discipline*, and thus Chinese studies per se are *not* considered to be a separate field of study. There are no departments of Sinology in the United States (as in Europe). Area studies scholars must be hired by, exist in, and be promoted by their disciplinary departments. This has produced a longstanding professional and intellectual tension between many area studies scholars and their disciplinary brethren (although many others find the synergies to be very positive). The relationship between the social science disciplines and area studies in the United States (and elsewhere) has long been a subject of debate.[13] Over time the divisions and differences have seemingly narrowed, but many area studies scholars still remain more comfortable analyzing 'their countries' through what disciplinary scholars have dismissively described as 'thick description' rather than through theoretical prisms or utilizing 'large N' surveys.

One consequence of these features is that, for American China specialists, the country and its governmental system are not entirely seen as *sui generis*. Rather, as Figure 1 illustrates, China has been studied as a sub-set of other systems The result has been that contemporary China studies has drawn on patterns and insights generated in the study of other societies and systems.

American scholarship on contemporary China has thus long been a 'borrower field'—borrowing concepts and methodological techniques developed for the study of other countries— but it has never really been a 'producer field'. China studies have been importers but not exporters. Precious few concepts developed in the study of China have been picked up more broadly in comparative politics or other social science disciplines. Two examples, though, are Andrew Nathan's concept of 'authoritarian resilience' and Susan Shirk's concept of the 'selectorate'.

Another negative side-effect of the disciplinary dominance in China studies is that scholars trained in one discipline have few real incentives or the time to delve into how China is studied in disciplines other than their own. As natural as interdisciplinary studies of China should be, it is remarkable how few truly interdisciplinary research projects co-authored by scholars in different disciplines there actually are. This 'silo effect' in each discipline has been an unfortunate impediment to bringing multidisciplinary scholarship to bear on the study of China. It was not always so.

Third, as in some other countries, the domestic political climate in the United States has, at various times, had real (and often deleterious) impacts on the field. China studies has certainly not always been walled off in an Ivory Tower from broader trends in American politics and society.[14] Perhaps the most notable, and negative, example were the early-1950s when the witch-hunts of the House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee, chaired by Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, impugned or destroyed the careers of a number of China specialists, cast aspersions on the entire profession, and stunted the growth of field—precisely at a time when knowledge about the new People's Republic was needed. Only a handful of 'conservative' China specialists endured the general purge of the field. A second time occurred during the Vietnam War of the 1960s when some China scholars were accused of active or complicit cooperation with the US Government, and hence the war effort and 'American imperialism' in Asia. These critics formed, and used as a platform, the

[12]See David Szanton (ed.), *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, op cit.
[13]In the case of China see Lucian W. Pye, 'Social Science Theories in Search of Chinese Realities', *The China Quarterly*, op cit. More broadly, among the huge literature on the subject, see Szanton, ibid.
[14]In 1986 Michel Oksenberg authored a short but insightful essay on this topic: 'Can Scholarship Flourish When Intertwined with Politics?' *APLS Newsletter* (Winter/Spring 1986), pp. 48–59.

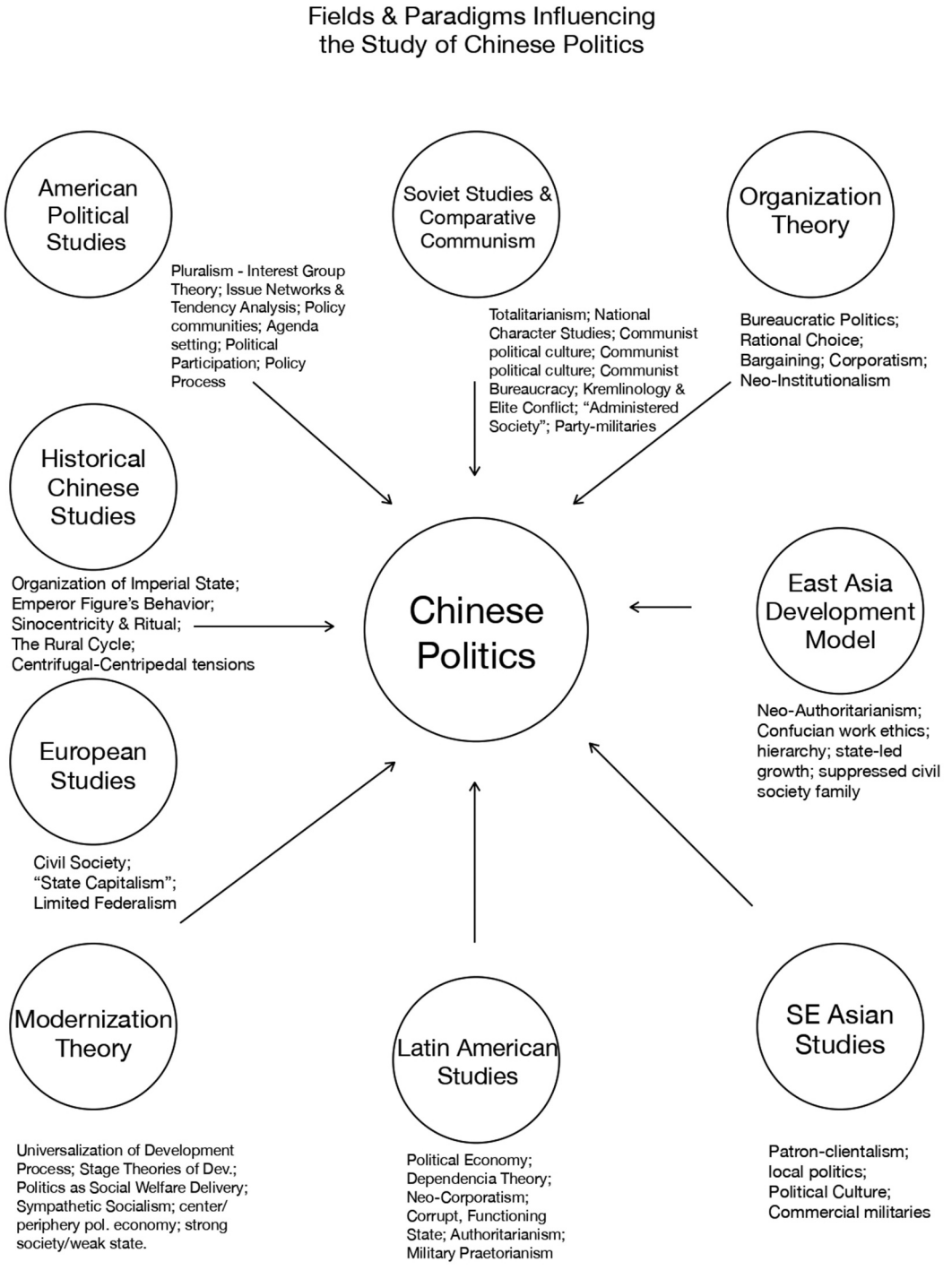

Figure 1. Fields and paradigms influencing the study of Chinese politics.

Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS).[15] Those who found themselves under attack from the left, notably the *doyen* of the China field, Harvard professor John King Fairbank, responded in kind and a five-year (1969–1974) polemic was waged. Whereas the China studies field had been attacked from the Right under McCarthyism during the 1950s, during the 1960s it was attacked from the Left.

After the Nixon opening to China in 1972 through to the late-1990s, the academic China studies field was not impacted much by domestic American politics. But during the late-1990s another round of attacks were launched from the Right against many China hands in Washington think tanks (the US scholarly community was not a target) for being naïve and 'soft on China'. This group self-described themselves as the 'Blue Team' patriotically resisting a 'Red Team' of China experts who were allegedly not alert to, or intentionally covering up, the 'China threat'.[16] Subsequently, this critique then morphed into a full-blown critique of, and movement against, the 'engagement policy' of several consecutive US administrations.[17] Many of those who had worked in favor of, or had benefitted from, 'engagement' were pilloried for allegedly being naïve about, capitulating to, and profiting from the Chinese Communist Party and state.[18] These critiques and attacks were met with rejoinders by those seeking to defend the history and record of engagement.[19]

Fourthly, but not surprisingly, the China studies field in the United States has paralleled and been impacted by the state of US-China relations at any given time. During the 1950s and 1960s China was an incipient enemy of the United States. During these two Cold War decades China was therefore studied as an adversarial object to be understood, countered, and undermined. As was the case with Soviet Studies and area studies more generally, the Cold War was a boon for China studies (this is described in greater detail below).[20] The four decades of engagement from presidents Nixon through Obama were generally very positive for development of the field, despite periodic crises and frictions in the relationship. These events did temporarily put a damper on exchanges and research opportunities in China, but they were not generally long-lasting. But once Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, as the broader Sino-American relationship has significantly deteriorated so too have research opportunities for American scholars considerably contracted inside of China. The country has not been as closed to research *in situ* as it is today since the 1970s (I return to this theme at the end of this article).

Finally, contemporary China studies in the United States have also been impacted by global events. As noted above, both the Cold War and the Vietnam War directly impacted the field and the ways in which the PRC was studied and viewed. The 1989 Tiananmen uprising followed by the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union similarly produced an 'end of history' interregnum during the early 1990s when many analysts focused on the fissures in the Chinese party-state and society, perhaps anticipating a similar implosion of the CCP and PRC. That passed by the turn of the century as China returned to a more reformist path. Since then, the 'rise of China' and its 'going global' have become phenomena to study in themselves. As a result, China studies has

[15]See Robert Marks, 'The State of the China Field: Or, the China Field and the State', *Modern China*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 461–509; Robert Moss, 'The Structure and direction of Contemporary China Studies', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (Summer/Fall 1971), pp. 113–137; James Peck, 'The Roots of Rhetoric: The Professional Ideology of America's China Watchers', *Bulletin of Concern Asian Scholars* (October 1969), pp. 59–69. This polemic is well described by Richard Madsen in 'The Academic China Specialists', in Shambaugh (ed.), *American Studies of Contemporary China*, op cit.

[16]See, for example, Bill Gertz, *The China Threat: How the People's Republic Targets America* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing,2002); *Deceiving the Sky: Inside Communist China's Drive for Global Supremacy* (New York: Encounter Books 2021).

[17]See Aaron L. Friedberg, *Getting China Wrong* (Cambridge: Polity 2022); Orville Schell, 'The Death of Engagement', *The Wire China*, June 7, 2020: https://www.thewirechina.com/2020/06/07/the-birth-life-and-death-of-engagement/.

[18]See, for example, Peter Schweizer, *Red Handed: How American Elites Get Rich Helping China Win* (New York: Harper Collins 2022); Isaac Stone Fish, *America Second: How American Elites Are Making China Stronger* (New York: Knopf 2022).

[19]See, for example, Anne F. Thurston (ed.), *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021); Alastair I. Johnston, 'The Failures of the "Failure of Engagement" with China', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Summer 2019), pp. 99–114.

[20]For a superb study of the evolution of the Soviet Studies field see David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press 2009). Someone should write a similarly careful study of the China field.

become a booming and growth industry in academia, think tanks, consulting firms, financial services, and government.

In addition to these five factors, there is one other factor that also affected American contemporary China studies. Unlike in Europe, in the United States there has been no strong requirement for grounding in historical, cultural, and linguistic Sinology to underpin the work of contemporary China scholars. In American China studies, all one basically needs is fluency in the language (and simplified characters) and training in a discipline. As absurd as it sounds, many contemporary China scholars are so ignorant of Chinese history that they cannot even identify the Chinese dynasties in proper sequence, much less hold a knowledgeable conversation about them. As a result, the study of pre-1949 China has been left entirely to historians, art historians, philosophers, and others in the humanities.

This being the general case, over the past two decades one very positive development is that the '1949 Great Wall' has begun to erode—as historians of modern China (and diplomatic historians) have forged across the '1949 divide' into the 1950s-1980s[21]—while a handful of post-1949 social scientists have tentatively probed backwards into the Republican, Qing, and earlier periods. This is a very positive trend—but the broader ignorance of pre-'49 China and the humanities is a serious detriment in the field. Worse still, the current generation of China specialists have precious little in-depth knowledge of the 1950s-1970s. For many China scholars today, contemporary China began under Deng Xiaoping.

Six Generations of Scholarship

With these qualifying and contextual factors in mind, let me turn to (an admittedly superficial) survey of the evolution of the contemporary China studies field over the past seven decades. Over this period I would identify six 'generations' of scholarship of contemporary China:

Generation 1: The Soviet Era (1950s through the mid-1960s)
Generation 2: The Chaotic Era (late-1960s through the late-1970s)
Generation 3: The Liberal Reform Era (1980s)
Generation 4: The Hard Authoritarian Era (1989–2002)
Generation 5: The Soft Authoritarian Era (2002–2012)
Generation 6: The Neo-Totalitarian Era (2012—present).

Two important caveats are first in order:

First, the concept of these scholarly 'generations' has to do mainly with *events in China*. The beginning and end dates represent 'bookends' to distinct periods in the domestic governance of China—essentially coinciding with successive supreme leaders: early and late Mao (Generations 1 and 2), Deng Xiaoping (Gen 3), Jiang Zemin (Gen 4), Hu Jintao (Gen 5), and Xi Jinping (Gen 6).[22] Thus, I am trying to capture the major trends in scholarship published during each of these periods. While the periods are demarcated by specific events in China, in reality many scholars have been active 'across' two or three generations.

Second, perhaps because I am a political scientist and study Chinese politics, as distinct from Chinese society, economy, culture, demography, or other areas, the following survey is no doubt inevitably skewed in favor of the domestic political domain (but in communist China politics has an outsized influence on other spheres). I also have not generally included scholars of China's foreign relations or security in this survey (of which there are a considerable number). I also apologize to the many fine scholars whose work in these non-political fields escaped my attention.

[21]See, for example, Julian Gewirtz, *Never Turn Back: China and the Forbidden History of the 1980s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2022).
[22]Also see my *China's Leaders: From Mao to Now* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2021, 2023).

The First Generation: The Soviet Era (1950s through mid-1960s)

This period is defined overall as the Soviet era for China: first copying and then adapting the Soviet political and economic model (the PRC never, to this day, has *rejected* the Soviet political, economic, and military models—it only has adapted them). This was, of course, the period of the early Cold War and the Sino-Soviet alliance until 1960 and thereafter the Sino-Soviet Split. Even though the new People's Republic began to chafe under certain aspects of the Soviet economic model and began to develop distinct Maoist alternatives beginning with the Great Leap Forward (1958–60), this entire period can best be described as the 'Soviet era'.

The 1950s saw American scholarship focus on the new party-state, its institutions, its leaders, and its ideology. American China specialists tried to establish what was really 'new' and 'communist', what was Soviet-inspired, and what remained uniquely 'Chinese' about the new PRC. The 'institutional mapping' of the new party-state was an important first step to understanding the new regime and nation. What scholars found was, in fact, a near-complete *cloning* of the USSR in 'Communist China' (a.k.a. 'Red China'). This *did not* reflect ideological prejudice on the part of Western scholars—it was an empirical fact! With few exceptions, prior to the onset of the Cultural Revolution, the PRC *was* an organizational replica of the Soviet Union: party, government, military, security services, economy, social organizations, educational systems—*everything* was drawn from the Soviet model, with some relatively minor adaptations to suit Chinese local conditions and Maoist inclinations. Examples of this generation of scholars include A. Doak Barnett, John Lewis, Richard (Dixie) Walker, Harold C. Hinton, Franz Schurmann, Ezra Vogel, John King Fairbank, Jerome Cohen, Lucian Pye, and others.

The unending series of economic, social, and political *campaigns* (运动) unleashed by the Maoist regime during the decade also attracted the attention of numerous scholars, as many wrote their doctoral dissertations and first books on one or another of these campaigns (many were the result of research done at the Universities Services Center in Hong Kong). The USC was established in 1963 with the impetus of a few leading American scholars and seed funding from the Ford and Carnegie Foundations. Until the early 1980s it operated from a somewhat dingy two-story art deco bungalow at 155 Argyle Street in Kowloon—until it relocated to the campus of Chinese University of Hong Kong Library in Shatin in 1988. A few blocks from the USC was the Union Research Institute (URI), which maintained extensive 'clipping files' of PRC provincial and local newspapers (the URI lasted until 1985, when was closed and its collection relocated to Hong Kong Baptist University).

The USC in those years was a truly unique place for China-watching. Its particular virtues were opportunities to interview refugees (of which there was an outpouring in the wake of the Great Leap Forward famine, 1960–62) and mining of various media materials from the mainland (particularly the provincial press). The USC was *the center*—physically, intellectually, and socially—for this first and second generations of contemporary China scholars. It was born out of circumstance: the 'inside' of China had to be studied from the 'outside'.[23]

After 'mapping' the institutions of the new communist regime in China, American scholars began to focus on other dimensions. With the emerging cleavages in the post-Eighth Party Congress CCP leadership, particularly in the wake of the 1959 Lushan Plenum, the dynamics of intra-elite politics gained increased salience. The ensuing Great Leap Forward attracted a lot of attention, especially by economists.

Another prominent trend during this period was to select one large municipality or province, and to assess the impact of each of the aforementioned factors on such a discrete locality—from which broader generalizations about 'Communist China' could be offered. Many of the American doctoral students and scholars in residence at the USC wrote their dissertations and first books about specific localities—Ezra Vogel on Guangzhou, Lynn White on Shanghai, Kenneth Lieberthal on Tianjin, Dorothy Solinger on Yunnan, and others.

[23]The Institute of International Relations at National Cheng-chi University on Taiwan was the other significant 'CHICOM (Chinese Communist) watching' center at the time, but access to its collection of materials (which included some ferreted out of the mainland by covert Nationalist intelligence raids) was often restricted.

First generation scholars were thus forced to use a relatively limited number of sources and employ research techniques developed for the analysis of the Soviet Union: scrutinizing the central media, monitoring leadership appearances and statements, interviewing refugees and the odd defector. A variant of 'Kremlinology' emerged: 'Pekingology'. As in the study of the Soviet Union, this 'methodology' focused on senior party, state, and military leaders—looking for any possible differences of opinion among them (which became known as 'tendency analysis'). Photographs of leaders were carefully evaluated (who was standing next to whom, who was missing, etc.),[24] and publications such as the *People's Daily* were similarly scrutinized for indications of policy 'tendencies' and divisions. How many times was a certain term used in an article, where were articles placed on the page, were they published by pseudonymous authors, and other such lacunae were dissected and analyzed. Occasionally an (alleged) government document or juicy source of information would emerge, but normally scholars were limited to a narrow range of available materials.

Using these sources and research techniques had a number of analytical implications: an elite (rather than society) centered focus, a seemingly centralized and commandist system where leaders, discipline, and ideology were dominant, with little variation across the country. These research foci continued through the mid-1960s, until the Cultural Revolution erupted in 1966.

The Second Generation: The Chaotic Era (Late-1960s through the Late-1970s)

The cataclysmic 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution' produced a major shift in the research agendas of China specialists and inaugurated a second discernible phase of scholarship. Ironically, as the Cultural Revolution swept across the country, elite politics became an even more emphasized area of study,[25] but instead of the previous perception of a relatively homogeneous and unified elite, just the opposite image took hold—with the intense factionalism, wholesale purges, and outpouring of information and accusations (often false) contained in Red Guard tabloids. The Red Guards themselves also became an object of study (by Hong Yung Lee, Ron Monteperto, Andrew Walder, and others). Of course, Maoist ideology was also a central focus of this generation of political scientists.[26]

While many focused on the elite (or what was left of it), a second major emphasis of this period of research was quite naturally the mass turmoil of the Cultural Revolution movement itself. Researchers wrestled with what the chaotic movement indicated about the (changed) nature of Chinese society. What was it doing to the nuclear Chinese family, as spouses and family members were split apart (some denouncing each other)—many were imprisoned, sent to labor camps, May 7 cadre schools or 'down to the countryside', schools and universities shuttered, and daily life disrupted. Thus, scholarly attention began to shift from the top of the system to the bottom of society as the Cultural Revolution unfolded.

Beijing's revolutionary diplomacy across the developing world also attracted a small cohort of scholars who studied China's foreign policy, as Mao sought to export revolution to so-called 'national liberation movements' abroad. The Sino-Soviet rift was also carefully scrutinized, and together with Mao's 'intermediate zone' diplomacy, the sub-field of Chinese foreign policy began to grow. Another feature of this period concerned the People's Liberation Army as an institution—but more as a domestic political actor following its intervention in 1967 than as a military per se. These three research foci characterized the second period of China scholarship and lasted roughly until the end of the decade of the 1970s.

Representative American scholars of this period include Richard Baum, Michel Oksenberg, Kenneth Lieberthal, David M. Lampton, Lowell Dittmer, Allen S. Whiting, Thomas W. Robinson,

[24]See Roderick MacFarquhar, 'On Photographs', *The China Quarterly*, No. 46 (June 1971), pp. 289–307.
[25]See, for example, Robert Scalapino (ed.), *Elites in the Peoples Republic of China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1972); John Lewis, *Leadership in Communist China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1963).
[26]See the classic work by Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1968); Chalmers Johnson (ed.), *Ideology and Politics in Contemporary China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1973).

Dorothy Solinger, Merle Goldman, Lynn T. White, Marc Blecher, Martin King Whyte, Andrew Nathan, Susan Shirk, Richard Solomon, Chalmers Johnson, Orville Schell, Tang Tsou, Robert Scalapino, Robert Dernberger, Dwight Perkins, Tom Bernstein, Ed Friedman, and others.

It was also during the 1960s that the field of contemporary China studies began to be *institutionalized* as a result of a series of substantial seed grants by the Ford Foundation to major universities in the United States (American, California-Berkeley, Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, George Washington, Harvard, Michigan, Stanford, Yale, and Washington).[27] Most of Ford's U.S. grants ranged between $500,000 and $1.25 million. Ford was thus instrumental in catalyzing and institutionally anchoring the field. From 1959, when the foundation initiated its 'Research and Training on China Initiative', to 1970 when it wound down, Ford invested a total of $27.2 million into establishing centers for Chinese Studies inside the U.S. and $2.8 million outside the United States.[28] In the U.S., Ford's institutional grants went directly to the university concerned, while support for graduate training, research, and publications was channeled through the Ford-initiated Joint Committee on Contemporary China (JCCC).[29] The U.S. Government also contributed (largely through the creation of the National Defense Education Act), a few other foundations (notably Rockefeller and Carnegie), and the universities themselves all contributed further funding. Together, the sources combined to invest approximately $70 million into Chinese studies during the decade of the 1960s.[30]

The Third Generation: The Liberal Reform Era (1980s)

The third discernible phase occupied the decade of the 1980s up to the events of 1989. Of course, scholars from the second generation continued to be active into (and beyond) the third generation, and those who entered the field prior to 1989 continued well beyond.

During this period, however, it was not so much *changes in China* that affected scholarship, as much as it was the *opportunities* offered—for the first time for Americans—to physically conduct research *in China*. It is true that, to some extent, the research agenda of American social scientists and humanists reflected the Deng Xiaoping government's new policies of 'reform and opening'—but, just as much or more, scholarly research reflected subjects that were simply *researchable* for the first time. Due to a ban on field research placed on American academics by the Chinese government until normalization of diplomatic relations was achieved in 1979, many subjects had simply been inaccessible due to unavailable empirical data. Australian, British, Canadian, European, and Japanese researchers all had a head-start on the Americans, although the research landscape they encountered in China during the 1970s had not really changed all that much. They could be students in Chinese universities—mainly studying the Chinese language—but not much real research was possible.

Fortuitously, Deng Xiaoping's reforms coincided with the normalization of Sino-American relations, and Americans arrived to witness a new changing research landscape.[31] Yet, looking back on the subject matter of much of the scholarship during the 1980s, it was at least as notable for data and sources that were accessed and exploited as it was characterized by issues related to Deng's reform agenda. The opportunity to conduct *interviews* and do 'participant-observation' *in situ* illustrates the point. Anthropologists and sociologists led the way. A whole variety of social sectors all of a sudden

[27] John M. H. Lindbeck, *Understanding China: An Assessment of American Scholarly Resources*, op cit. A complete itemized listing of all Ford grants, the institutional recipients, the amounts, and the specific programs are listed in Lindbeck, op cit, Appendix V.

[28] Ford also funded a number of non-American institutions: the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS) and its Contemporary China Institute (CCI) in London; the Asian Studies Center at Oxford University, the Center for Chinese Studies in New Delhi, India; Kyoto University; Academic Sinica in Taiwan; the Australian National University; the Institute for Asian Studies in Hamburg, University of Bochum University of Munich, and the Free University in Berlin, Germany. Source: Lindbeck, ibid, pp. 153–156. Specific amounts of grants are given.

[29] The JCCC received $1 million in 1965 alone. Ibid, p. 150.

[30] Ibid, p. 107.

[31] I was one of them—first going for language studies in 1980 (Nankai) and 1982 (Fudan), then during 1983–85 as the first foreign student permitted to study in a department of international relations (Beida).

became available for observation and random interviewing: petty entrepreneurs (个体户), industrial workers, peasants, migrants, youth, elderly, intellectuals, students, etc. Studies were done on each of these and other groups. For economists, the newly available statistical compilations (统计年鉴) offered a boon of previously unavailable information, which afforded time series analyses of different sectors and locales.

Of equal importance, especially for political scientists and economists, was the chance to interview officials and bureaucrats at a variety of levels in the governmental system concerning the policymaking and policy implementation processes. Such interviews were random and not systematic or widespread, and they depended on 'connections' of the interviewers (for example, senior U.S. scholars A. Doak Barnett, Michel Oksenberg, Kenneth Lieberthal, and David M. Lampton all gained very high-level access). Broad 'large N' surveys would come later. The opportunity to interview party and state officials and cadres in Beijing and below afforded the 'remapping' of institutions first studied from afar during the 1950s, as well as providing a much more refined and empirical sense of decision-making and the policy process. By interviewing at several tiers of the system, scholars were also able to piece together and track the implementation of policies. As a result, the influential Oksenberg/Lieberthal/Lampton 'fragmented authoritarianism' paradigm emerged during this period.

With respect to Chinese foreign policy, researchers were also able to interview university and 'think tank' experts—thus stimulating a series of studies of Chinese perceptions of foreign countries and international affairs (of which my PhD dissertation on China's America specialists was one[32]). Also, during this period China's statistical system was rebuilt post-Cultural Revolution and there were actual data for economists, demographers, and others to work with. A number of 内部 (internal) materials also began to find their way into foreign hands and out of the country.

Thus, the third period of scholarship was primarily characterized by a finer feel for the policy process, a series of studies of specific social sectors, as well as the new reforms being unveiled by the Deng Xiaoping-Zhao Ziyang-Hu Yaobang leadership. To some extent, these emphases continued into the 1990s, but the momentous events in the spring of 1989 served to shift the research agenda once again.

Illustrative scholars of this generation included Harry Harding, Tom Gold, David Zweig, Elizabeth Perry, Stanley Rosen, Steven Goldstein, Nicholas Lardy, Deborah Davis, Elizabeth Perry, Andrew Walder, Jean Oi, Richard Madsen, Barry Naughton, Scott Roselle, Alice L. Miller, Orville Schell, Susan Shirk, Vivienne Shue, Joe Fewsmith, Anne Thurston, Brantly Womack, and others.

The Fourth Generation: The Soft Authoritarian Era

This generation of scholarship coincides with the decade of the 1990s and is associated with Jiang Zemin's rule. It is during this time that the 'authoritarian resilience' paradigm became popular in the field.[33] During this period many of the younger scholars who had 'incubated' and received their doctoral training while conducting fieldwork in China during the 1980s began to emerge in the profession. This cohort included Kevin O'Brien, Pierre Landry, Melanie Manion, Dru Gladney, Avery Goldstein, Elizabeth Economy, Scot Tanner, Bruce Dickson, Steve Jackson, Susan Whiting, Robert Ross, Penelope Prime, John Garver, Ed Steinfeld, myself, and others. It was also during this period that students from China enrolled in American doctoral programs and began to enter the field — individuals such as Minxin Pei, Yasheng Huang, Li Cheng, Bian Yanjie, Tang Wenfang, Shi Tianjin, Dali Yang, Suisheng Zhao, and others.

[32]My dissertation was subsequently revised and published as *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1991).

[33]See Andrew Nathan, 'China's Changing of the Guard: Authoritarian Resilience', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (January 2003), pp. 6–17.

While this generation of scholars and scholarship emerged throughout the 1980s, the period began with a sharp disjuncture at the end of the decade that analytically demarcated many analyses of China: the 'June 4th massacre'. Whereas the decade of the 1980s was generally very optimistic about China's 'reform and opening', the dramatic and traumatic events of May-June 1989 brought about a certain (but understandable) disillusionment among many scholars—which contributed to a distinctly more critical set of perspectives of China's political, social, and economic evolution.

Numerous scholars attempted to understand the causes and consequences of the demonstrations and their forcible suppression on 4 June 1989. Coincidentally, these events came at the same time that Jürgen Habermas' study of civil society was translated from German into English and published in America. This coincidence stimulated many scholars to view the demonstrations through the prism of a growing civil society in a rapidly reforming and liberalizing China. As the communist states of Central Europe toppled like dominoes during the summer and autumn of 1989, followed by the Soviet Union in 1991, there was an understandable trend in the field to frame the PRC's evolution within an 'end of history' perspective. Scholars asked: where on the inevitable arc of communist atrophy and decline was the CCP/PRC—or could it 'save' itself through proactive 'adaptation'?[34]

The tragic events of 4 June 1989 also stimulated a new interest in the study of the Chinese military (People's Liberation Army). Neglected as an object of study since the late Cultural Revolution period, the PLA received substantially increased attention during the 1990s—both as an internal actor and, following the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crises, as an external actor. PLA studies became, for the first time, a bona fide sub-field of contemporary China studies (although most of those involved were not in academia). The events of June 4th also resulted in a changed Chinese leadership, which provided new impetus to the study of elite politics.

Events in China during the mid-late 1990s stimulated another noticeable shift in research: on the one hand, a new focus on domestic political economy and 'state capacity' (Vivienne Shue's work was illustrative), combined with a growing emphasis on China's diversifying external relations on the other.

In retrospect, the Jiang Zemin era (1989–2002) was in many ways a 'hard authoritarian' period (especially from 1989–1996), but after the effects of Tiananmen dissipated it was also a remarkably open one—and this was reflected in the broad range of research topics undertaken during this period. After 1996 China was remarkably open for research. Municipal and provincial archives were mined, 'large N' social surveys expanded,[35] *in situ* fieldwork of all kinds flowered, interviews of officials at many levels were permitted—all kinds of opportunities, previously restricted, were now possible. Some collaborative research between American and Chinese scholars (based in mainland China) was also permitted (albeit limited) during this period. The Luce Foundation's US-China Cooperative Research Program funded 49 joint research projects from the late-1980s into the 1990s.[36]

The net result of the third and fourth generations of research was a more nuanced and highly variegated image of China. The extraordinary diversity, complexity, and heterogeneity of contemporary China became increasingly evident—precisely *the opposite* perspective of first and second generation scholars who tended to see considerable uniformity across the land.

The diversity of research subjects and findings was natural and mostly for the good—although it also resulted in a more negative side-effect in my view: an increasing inability to aggregate and generalize. Scholars began to 'know more and more about less and less' and it became increasingly difficult to generalize about 'China' writ large. Whatever generalities one could posit about one part

[34]David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (Washington, DC and Berkeley, CA: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and University of California Press 2008).

[35]In 2004 Andrew Walder noted that 'Important sample surveys have been completed in the past ten years on political participation and political attitudes, rural household incomes, health and nutrition, mate choice and marriage patterns, social stratification and mobility, and other subjects'. Walder, 'The Transformation of Contemporary China Studies', op cit, pp. 314–340.

[36]Andrew Mertha, 'A Half Century of Engagement: The Study of China and the Role of the China Scholarly Community', op cit, p. 100.

of China invariably would not stand up to scrutiny in another part of the country. Scholars knew the 'trees' of their fieldwork sites and subjects—but seemed incapable of generalizing about the 'forest' of China more generally.

As a result, scholars began to lose one major audience for their work: *everyone else* (outside the Academy). They lost their previous roles as public intellectuals, and increasingly lost their value to journalists and others in society.

This tendency was reinforced by another significant development characterizing this generation: the increased pressure of disciplinary demands on young scholars. No longer able to 'hide in the shadows' of area studies journals and conferences, the tenure ladder increasingly dictated theoretical and methodological rigor. For better or for worse, it was during this generation that China really began to be 'mainstreamed' in the social science disciplines. Critics argue that the testing of theories and use of statistical methods have become *ends in themselves*—rather than *explaining* what was actually *occurring* in Chinese behavior.

As a result, oddly and counter-intuitively, just at a time when China was becoming more open and influential on the world stage, the micro focus of most research projects taken together with disciplinary demands had the ironic twin effects that contemporary China scholars became more and more isolated from broader society. The field was becoming like an insular sect.[37]

Recognizing these problems and the aging of the first-to-third generations of China scholars, as noted briefly above, in 2005 the National Committee on US-China Relations initiated its 'Public Intellectuals Program' (PIP). An underlying objective is to increase Americans' understanding of China by strengthening links among U.S. academics, policymakers, opinion leaders, and the public.

The Fifth Generation: The Soft Authoritarian Era (2002–2012)

No single event really characterizes the onset of the fifth generation—although it roughly coincides with the tenure of Hu Jintao as China's leader (2002–2012). In reviewing the scholarship of this period, the one overarching trend was the focus on the various social maladies and general malaise which characterized the period and Hu's and Wen Jiabao's rule (at the end of which some Chinese labeled it the 'ten lost years').

The research foci of this decade paralleled the increasingly apparent problems in Chinese society: widening income gaps and social inequalities, the worsening environment, deepening corruption, increases in crime and social disorder, ethnic uprisings in Tibet and Xinjiang, more pronounced dissent, declining provision of public goods, public health crises (like SARS), natural disasters (like the Wenquan earthquake), land seizures and forced relocations, rising nationalism, and so on. Yet many American scholars focused on more general social, political economy, and political-legal topics such as property rights, labor rights and contestation, 'rule of law' issues, poverty reduction, the emerging private sector of the economy, foreign direct investment and foreign business operations, and China's foreign relations. Illustrative scholars who emerged on the scene during this decade include Jessica Chen Weiss, Scott Kennedy, Mary Gallagher, Andrew Mertha, Victor Shih, Joshua Eisenman, Jessica Teets, Carl Minzner, Kellee Tsai, and others.

In general, there was a distinct focus on topics outside of Beijing and across the country. As such, scholars also began to focus on a growing set of studies describing China as 'fragile', 'decayed', and the party-state as 'predatory', systemically corrupt, and incapable of tackling the daunting menu of socio-economic problems that were gelling like a perfect storm.[38]

What was also notable about this fifth generation of scholarship was a preponderance of research projects that were theoretical and generic in character. Scholars of this generation consciously began framing their research questions and projects in comparative and generalizable terms, drawing on

[37]Richard Madsen makes this point, and uses the term 'sect', in 'The Academic China Specialists', in Shambaugh (ed.), *The American Study of Contemporary China*, op cit.
[38]Minxin Pei's work is illustrative and impressive.

socio-political-economic studies of *other* countries and applying these findings to China. In other words, this is the period when scholarship truly 'broke away' from the study of *sui generis* China and began to view China more through comparative and disciplinary lenses.

Much of this scholarship was theoretically informed and conceptually impressive. Yet, it treated China as a kind of 'laboratory' in which to 'test' hypotheses, methodologies, insights, and findings generated elsewhere. It was very much an 'outside-in' approach.

To be sure, these studies illuminated phenomena in China by casting them in a more comparative light, thus 'generalizing' broader theories. On the other hand, though, it must be said that the theoretical and methodological rigor (which were mandated by American social science doctoral programs and tenure criteria) often overshadowed the phenomena being studied. Moreover, despite utilizing comparative approaches from other societies to illuminate China, there were precious few findings from China that were applied more generally—thus again illustrating the fact that contemporary China studies has been a 'importing' but not an 'exporting' field.

The Sixth Generation: The Neo-Totalitarian Era (2012-Present)

Scholarship on China over the past decade has reflected Xi Jinping's rule: his personal dictatorial dominance in all domains; restrengthening the CCP; widespread repression against multiple sectors of society; the surveillance state and total information control; a renewed emphasis on Marxist ideology; prickly nationalism, 'wolf warrior' public diplomacy, China's search for soft power; an assertive foreign policy and strained relations with many countries; intensified military modernization; the political emasculation of Hong Kong and increased intimidation of Taiwan; the 'Zero COVID' policy; and so on.[39]

Over the last decade scholars have written about all of these topics. This newest generation of scholars includes Yuen Yuen Ang, Maria Repnikova, Julian Gewirtz, Sheena Greitens, Rory Truex, Margaret Roberts, Jude Blanchette, Oriana Skylar Mastro, Jennifer Pan, Wang Yuhua, Lily Tsai, Xu Yiqing, Junyan Jiang, Dimitar Gueorguiev, Martin Dimitrov, David Bulman, Kyle Jaros, Dan Chen, Wendy Leutert, Daniel Mattingly, Suzanne Scoggins, Christian Sorace, Denise Ho, Aynne Kokas, Rachel Stern, and others. The productive output and broad range of research topics by these young scholars relatively early in their careers is quite impressive and bodes well for the future of the field.

While this cohort works on an extremely diverse range of topics, in general this has been a period during which there has been an overall 'paradigm shift' from the 'hard authoritarianism' of Jiang Zemin and the 'soft authoritarianism' of Hu Jintao back to 'neo-totalitarianism' under Xi Jinping.[40]

What is interesting is that this shift in scholarship has occurred by-and-large from studying China from afar and largely based on documentary research and secondary journalistic sources, rather than in-country, in-person, and from primary sources. This has been the case because beginning in 2019 Xi Jinping and the COVID lockdowns combined to largely shut the country down for foreign research. Even the relatively few foreign journalists remaining in-country had an extremely hard time doing their reporting.

Now that the strict COVID controls have been relaxed and foreigners are again allowed into China, it will be interesting to see if the controls on foreign research will remain in place or be relaxed. Early indications are that the research environment remains very fraught, with strict 'national security' laws and regulations affecting many areas of scholarship and research (see the discussion below). The years when American and foreign scholars could roam the country by train and other means, live in villages, observe factory workers, interview officials, and other research modalities appears to be over.

The result is that, ironically, the field of contemporary China studies may be *coming full circle* (to explain this article's sub-title) during the sixth generation and returning to a research environment

[39]See, for example, Susan Shirk, *Overreach: How China Derailed Its Peaceful Rise* (New York: Oxford University Press 2022).
[40]For these conceptual distinctions see my *China's Future* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2016).

not unlike the first and second generations confronted: peering into China from the outside.[41] This may require the dusting off of research tools used in the 1950s through 1970s—including understanding all of the features and methods of the modern totalitarian state.

The good news here is that there are so many digital sources that can be accessed via the internet and through databases, which previous generation researchers could only have dreamed of. The bad news is that the Chinese authorities have been selectively but systematically 'curating' (censoring, deleting, altering) originally published content. For example, when he was doing research on the 1957 Anti-Rightist Movement, Hoover Institution historian Glenn Tiffert discovered that the digitally available version of *Fazhi Bao* (*Legal Daily*) had been considerably altered, with whole articles deleted and others selectively censored.[42] Other scholars have found similar instances of retroactive deletion and censorship.

More bad news came abruptly on 1 April 2023 when the Chinese authorities terminated international subscriptions and access to the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI, 中国知网), a widely-used and invaluable scholarly resource that provided full text material for thousands of journals, Chinese doctoral dissertations, conference proceedings, statistical compendia, and newspapers.[43] CNKI was an extraordinarily valuable resource, and its terminated access has dealt a severe blow to China researchers worldwide. It may also portend further electronic restrictions to come in the future.[44] This is one more example of the severely tightened research environment in China for foreign scholars and researchers under the Xi Jinping regime, but in this case it extends *beyond* China's borders.

These digital controls come on top of a more lengthy trend (beginning in 2009) of progressive tightening and restriction of access to historical archives, libraries, interview opportunities, and field research. Foreign scholars and researchers (and Americans in particular) are no longer as welcome as they once were, and opportunities to be placed in a Chinese university or other institutions that can sponsor research (because scholars cannot simply conduct research without institutional sponsorship) have considerably contracted.

One consequence of this tightened access to source materials and data inside of China is that researchers need to make better use of materials already *outside* of China. Fortunately, over the past several decades a number of universities have acquired and amassed considerable collections of 'hard copy' publications (books and journals). In the United States, two collections are of particular note: the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies Library (in the H.C. Fung Library) at Harvard University,[45] and the China Documentation Center (in the Gelman Library) at George Washington University.[46] Scholars from around the world regularly visit and use these two specialized collections.[47] Other U.S. universities that have considerable primary language holdings on contemporary China include the University of Michigan, University of Washington, Columbia University, and University of California-Berkeley. With the Universities Service Center at the Chinese University of

[41]'Great Academic Walls: Studying China Is Getting Much Harder', *The Economist*, April 8, 2023.

[42]See Glenn D. Tiffert, 'Peering Down the Memory Hole: Censorship, Digitization, and the Fragility of Our Knowledge Base', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 124, No. 2 (April 2019), pp. 550–568.

[43]See Han Bochen, 'A Portal to China is Closing, and Researchers Are Nervous', *South China Morning Post*, March 25, 2023.

[44]Pola Lem, 'Could China Be on the Verge of Breaking Up Database Publishing?' *Inside Higher Education*, May 4, 2022.

[45]See: https://fairbank.fas.harvard.edu/h-c-fung-library/. The Fairbank Library contains over 30,000 volumes, about half of which are in Chinese. Among its many (and unique) strengths, the collection contains a large number of materials on the Chinese Communist Party and a considerable number of internal (内部) materials. Librarian Nancy Hearst deserves the credit and gratitude of the entire field for her painstaking and diligent efforts to build the Fairbank collection over time.

[46]See: https://library.gwu.edu/cdc. The CDC collection is entirely composed of Chinese language materials. It contains approximately 10,000 books, and over 100 complete runs of hard copy periodicals (as well as a number of electronic databases). The collection is truly unique in its holdings of materials on the Chinese military (PLA), Chinese Communist Party, Chinese government, China's foreign relations, internal security, and Chinese law. Most of the materials in these categories are not to be found in other collections outside of China (and even inside of China).

[47]In order to make its collection more accessible to the international scholarly community, the China Documentation Center at GWU is now (2023) beginning a two-year project of the systematic digitization of its more unique holdings. The digitized materials will be uploaded on the CDC's website in a rolling fashion following digitization.

Hong Kong now likely an endangered species (due to Hong Kong's National Security Law), researchers need to take better advantage of printed and electronic materials already *outside* of China.

As noted above, opportunities for research inside of China have sharply contracted and are now subject to real dangers. Since the 20th Party Congress in 2022, when Xi Jinping used the terms 'national security' or 'security' no fewer than 68 times in his speech to the conclave, the Xi regime has been 'securitizing' everything in China. Security is now paramount in all policy spheres, and this very much applies to the academic sphere. On 26 April 2023 the regime suddenly unveiled an updated and expanded version of the 2014 Counter-Espionage Law. The new law dramatically expands the range of foreign activities in China that the authorities can investigate and prosecute. The foreign business community is directly affected, but so are foreign scholars.[48] The new law includes instructions to Chinese security personnel for 'search and seizure' of baggage, electronic devices (computers and cell phones), and other personal belongings, as well as physical raids on residences and offices. The extremely broad and elastic definitions of 'national security' can apply to any kind of information normally collected by researchers.

The new draconian environment under Xi certainly also has significant implications for selection of research topics by foreign scholars and students. There is so much that is now *not researchable* inside of China—either through *in situ* fieldwork, in archives, in libraries, in personal interviews, and via electronic sources. China has significantly closed up under Xi, reversing the opening up of previous decades.[49] The PRC government apparently does not want foreign scholars snooping around and conducting research. Xi Jinping's broadside against what he terms 'historical nihilism' (历史虚无主义) is a further restriction, as foreign research projects (if they are to be approved by the authorities) must now conform to the new ideological homogeneity of 'Xi Jinping Thought in the New Era'. This affects a wide range of fields, but certainly research on the history of the Chinese Communist Party (党史) and national history (国史).

This new research environment also has real implications for how professors should advise their graduate students in selecting their research topics and devising their research plans. Doing field research on many subjects inside of China now definitely carries a distinct risk to one's physical security and the real possibility of arrest and detention. It is not professionally ethical for professors to *not* offer stern warnings and even to *stop students* from following their own risky inclinations. One thing is now perfectly clear: one should *not* go to China to engage in *any kind* of research without a formal letter of invitation from a Chinese university or research institution, which enables a foreigner to apply for a professional research visa. Only with such a formal letter of invitation (邀请信) and (F) visa should one go to China to conduct research; individuals who enter the country on a tourist (L) visa and attempt to undertake *any* form of research—including simple conversations—are truly risking interrogation, arrest, detention, exit bans, or expulsion. The research environment in China has fundamentally changed and much for the worse. It is thus incumbent on *all* researchers (regardless of field) to familiarize themselves with this new and risky environment, and not take such risks.

One consequence of this new draconian environment is that while the study of 'domestic China' is now increasingly fraught—the opportunities to study China's foreign relations and multiple activities abroad have really opened up in recent years. One does not need to go to China to research China's foreign relations.

[48]Chinese text of the law can be found at: http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202304/a386e8ffa3d94047ab2f0d89b1ea73c4.shtml. English text can be found at: https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/counter-espionage-law-2023/. Also see Nadya Yeh, 'Should You be Frightened by China's Revision to the Anti-Espionage Law?' The China Project, May 2, 2023: https://thechinaproject.com/2023/05/02/should-you-be-frightened-by-chinas-revision-to-the-anti-espionage-law/?utm_source=The+China+Project&utm_campaign=17343ee09a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_05_05_03_31&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_03c0779d50-17343ee09a-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D.

[49]See Karin Fischer, 'Slamming the Door on Scholarship', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 21, 2023: https://www.chronicle.com/article/slamming-the-door-on-scholarship; Lingling Wei, Yoko Kubota, and Dan Strumpf, 'China Locks Information on the Country Inside a Black Box', *Wall Street Journal*, April 30, 2023.

Facing the Future: Will Supply Meet Demand?

The irony of the negative trends and contracting opportunities for research in China is that there remains very strong demand for knowledge and interpretation of China in the United States and other countries. This can be seen in a number of ways.

Major print, broadcast, and social media around the world have an insatiable appetite for China news. This is *not* necessarily because average citizens have a thirst for China knowledge (it is still not a significant concern of average citizens). It is more because China is now so embedded in and tied to the economies of other nations, while the PRC's own power and global influence has grown appreciably (even if its reputation has not). Governments and a wide variety of corporate and civil society actors now have strong demand for informed and granular knowledge of what is going on inside of China and what PRC actors are doing in foreign societies.

While there is very strong demand for such knowledge in governments and corporate boardrooms, it must be said that the *academic* China studies profession are not meeting this demand. It is being met either by China researchers in think tanks, journalists, or by in-house researchers in government and the corporate world. The vast majority of academic China specialists still struggle to make their knowledge accessible to those in government, business, and NGOs. In order to 'make themselves relevant' academic China specialists simply *must* leave their scholarly jargon, theories, paradigms, and methodologies behind—and learn to communicate in clear, concise, understandable, and 'bottom line' ways to 'consumers' in the non-academic world. Thus, part of the problem are modes of communication. Another problem is that the expertise of China scholars has become too granular and specific, with the concomitant inability to generalize. For these reasons, despite the very well-intended Public Intellectuals Program undertaken by the National Committee on US-China Relations (described above), in my understanding, the most recent generations of China specialists are still not meeting the 'demand' of non-academic 'consumers'. In my opinion, this is a direct result of the predominant influence of the academic disciplines in the training and promotion of China scholars, which has become pronounced during the fifth and sixth generations outlined in this article.

The reservoir of knowledge about China inside the Academy is *substantial*, but generally speaking it is not of much use to those outside of the Academy. Consequently, academics generally continue to only converse with other academics—and, even then, given the specializations of empirical research and theoretical communities, most tend to only communicate with colleagues in their narrow sub-fields of expertise. The Ivory Tower is thus more isolated than ever when it comes to China studies, and Richard Madsen's earlier description of the field as a 'sect' still seems an appropriate, if unfortunate, characterization.[50]

Put another way, the professional demand for China knowledge has grown substantially and the supply of China specialists has also expanded concomitantly—but their research is overly specific and theoretical, and China specialists have difficulty in communicating to non-academic professions (much less the public).

The good news, though, is twofold. First, the *depth* (i.e. the granularity) of China knowledge is very substantial. If a non-academic entity is looking for information and expertise on a specific subject, after a little searching such a specialist can usually be found. Second, the *pool* of academic China specialists (in tenure track positions) has expanded considerably over the past two decades. All major state and private universities now have a number of contemporary China faculty on staff, while many secondary universities and colleges also now have China faculty and offer courses. One is hard-pressed to find an institution of higher education in the United States that has no China studies or faculty. Major Centers of Chinese Studies exist on most major campuses, while there are 18 specially-designated National Resource Centers for East Asia at US universities (China is always consumed under East Asia in these NRCs).[51] These designated centers receive direct funding from the

[50]See Madsen, 'The Academic China Specialists', in Shambaugh (ed.), *The American Study of Contemporary China*, op cit.
[51]See U.S. Department of Education, IFLE Grantee Institutions: https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1T4OgU-X5xucBUxVXmdG-DGqOs0hkhdk&ll=52.86249649956193%2C–147.1238571989058&z=2.

Department of Education. There are many more university applicants than there are selected institutional recipients, the criteria for selection is stringent, and the competition is stiff.

Student enrollments in courses on contemporary China at the undergraduate and M.A. levels remains robust, with strongest demand for courses on Chinese politics, economy, and foreign relations.[52] Demand for Chinese language courses at the university level also remains strong, while Chinese is also now widely offered at the secondary level across America.

Looking to the future, it remains unclear what short- medium- and long-term impact the deterioration of US-China relations and the increasing view of China as an adversary will have on the contemporary China studies field. As of early 2023, the most recent Pew polls found fully 83% of the American public have 'negative and unfavorable' views of China, while 40% view China as an 'enemy', 52% see China as a 'competitor', and just 6% describe China as a 'partner'.[53]

During Cold War 1.0 vs. the former Soviet Union, adversarial relations had a strong and positive 'demand effect' on Soviet and Slavic studies in the United States, as it became axiomatic to 'know your enemy'.[54] The demand did much to stimulate the training of generations of American Sovietologists. One would hypothesize that the same would be the case today as US-China relations harden and China is perceived by most to be a long-term competitor and adversary of the United States. Even without the increasing adversarial nature of US-China relations, the considerable depth of interdependence between the two countries (something that was completely absent in the US-Soviet era) would also suggest strong demand for China knowledge in the United States.

The discipline of political science would seem to benefit the most (comparative politics, international relations, and security studies). There will also be (and already is) strong demand for those deeply knowledgeable about China's military and security.[55] The study of China's economy will also be significant—however, American economics departments are deeply hostile to 'area studies' expertise.[56] Other social sciences and the humanities also stand to benefit, but on a lesser scale.

For all of these reasons, the prospects for further development of the contemporary China studies field seems very positive. No doubt China will also continue to fascinate and surprise us—which will provide productive fodder for future generations of American China scholars.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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[52]At George Washington's Elliott School of International Affairs, I teach 50 undergraduate students and 60 graduate students every academic year (enrollments are capped at these numbers, but demand is stronger).

[53]Laura Silver et al, 'Americans Are Critical of China's Global Role—Most See Little Ability for the US and China to Cooperate', Pew Research Center, April 12, 2023: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/04/12/americans-are-critical-of-chinas-global-role-as-well-as-its-relationship-with-russia/.

[54]See David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts*, op cit.

[55]Unfortunately, China military studies have unfortunately never found a 'legitimate' place in US political science departments.

[56]As a result, many economists specializing on China find institutional homes in business schools or the private sector.