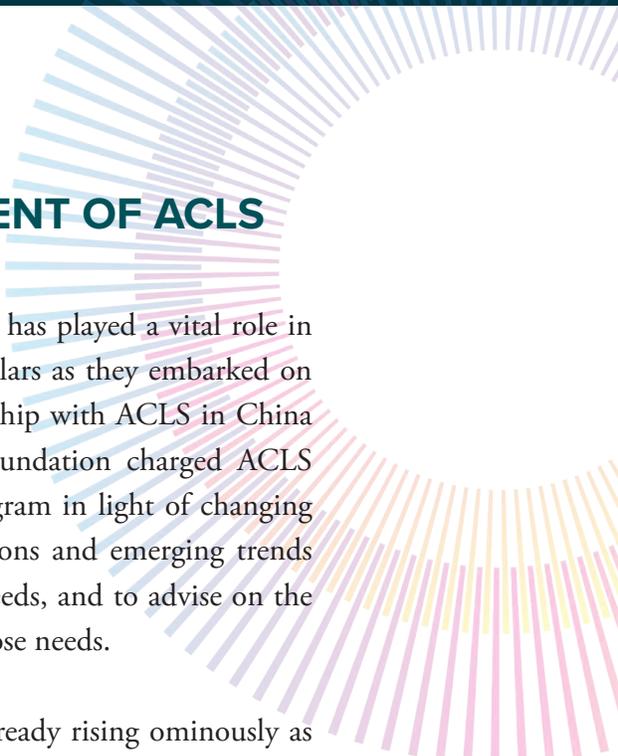


AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES

# China Studies in North America

A report on survey  
research by the  
Luce/ACLS  
Advisory Group  
2021





## FOREWORD FROM THE PRESIDENT OF ACLS

The Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies for nine years has played a vital role in nurturing the field by providing research support to scholars as they embarked on academic careers. In 2020, on the strength of its partnership with ACLS in China studies as well as other initiatives, the Henry Luce Foundation charged ACLS with reassessing the fundamental goals of the China program in light of changing conditions in the academy: to survey the current directions and emerging trends in the field of China studies, identify its most pressing needs, and to advise on the redesign of program components that would best meet those needs.

Geopolitical tensions between China and the US were already rising ominously as the pandemic spread, disrupting longstanding practices of teaching and research. The pandemic revealed underlying contradictions in the structure of the field: the production of more new PhDs than there are academic positions available; an overconcentration of teaching, training, and research in the best-resourced institutions of higher education; and fundamental inequities in access to knowledge, both degree programs and scholarly resources. The careers of new PhDs are ever more precarious.

Looking back, great progress has been made by China studies since the 1980s, particularly thanks to the dramatic increase in numbers of women and scholars of Chinese origin. Today the field literally does not look the same as it did fifty years ago. The horizon of topics of study and methods has broadened, and cooperation with scholars in China has been raised to a higher and more productive level.

To review the field's condition and current trends, and the career prospects for those just entering it, in 2020 ACLS organized the China Studies Advisory Group, to be active for the academic year 2020-21. The group's mandate was to identify issues, conduct research, draw implications, and make recommendations. The report summarizes the Group's findings and reflections. We hope it will focus attention on the specific challenges involved in the production of new knowledge on China and on the obstacles faced by the emerging generation of PhDs. The culmination of the first year of ACLS's reexamination of China studies, the report is a solid springboard to our contribution to transforming the field through a redesign of components in the Luce/ACLS program.

ACLS looks forward to fruitful cooperation with the cohorts of scholars we have identified and nurtured with the support of the Henry Luce Foundation as we continue our work in 2021-22.

All of us at ACLS are profoundly grateful to the members of the Advisory Group for their insight and inspiration. Considering the number of meetings and the complexity of issues addressed, I must also commend their stamina.

The Advisory Group:

Keisha Brown, Tennessee State University

Dorothy Ko, Barnard College

Yingyi Ma, Syracuse University

Michael Szonyi, Harvard University

Wang Feng, University of California, Irvine

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I should also like to express my appreciation to members of the ACLS staff who worked with the Advisory Group and the survey project:

Emily Carroll

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May 31st, 2021

# A Study of the Current Conditions and Prospects of China Studies in the United States and Canada

(Advisory Group, Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies)

## INTRODUCTION

As part of an effort to gain deeper understanding of the changing landscape surrounding teaching, training, and research on China at higher education institutions in North America, the Advisory Group for the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies was tasked to conduct a survey-based study in early 2021.

The study circulated two online questionnaires to China scholars with advanced degrees and expertise: one to faculty who have supervised PhD dissertations at institutions of higher education in North America (identified as “trainers”) and the second to PhDs who had applied to the [Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies Early Career Fellowships Program](#) over its eight competitions 2012-13 to 2019-20 (identified as “applicants”). The study was designed to explore the following issues:

1. How the field of China studies has changed in recent years
2. The current state of training China studies PhDs
3. The perceived prospects and challenges

In total, 403 responses (211 “trainers” and 192 “applicants”) were received from approximately 1,300 surveys distributed, a 30+% response rate, which is considered high for an online survey. Among the “applicants” who answered the survey, 60 out of 77, or 78%, received a Luce/ACLS Fellowship. The response rate for unsuccessful applicants was much lower, at 23%. The respondents correspond well to the lists of potential respondents in the field in terms of gender and academic rank (see Appendix for methodology used in the survey).

Respondents from both groups were asked to assess recent changes and future challenges in China studies. “Trainers” were asked for their recent experiences in advising graduate students and “applicants” about their experiences with job applications. “Applicants” who received fellowships were also asked how they utilized their fellowship periods and what benefits they gained for their careers.

This report summarizes the findings from these surveys. It also draws on information in a summer 2020 report that analyzed the ACLS database of applications to the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies between 2012-13 and 2018-19. Given constraints on time and resources, the surveys were designed to take only 15 minutes on average to complete.

Following a summary with main takeaways, and a note on implications, this report has five parts:

- I. Recent Changes in Higher Education in China Studies
- II. Training China Studies PhDs
- III. Anticipating Future Demand and Challenges
- IV. Addressing Diversity in China Studies
- V. Future Research

## SUMMARY AND MAIN TAKE-AWAYS

The survey was distributed to a sample of scholars in the China studies field at different career stages: faculty supervising PhD dissertations and applicants to the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies Early Career Fellowship competitions. The competitions are interdisciplinary, open-call, peer-reviewed, and cross-institutional. The Luce/ACLS program attracts an applicant pool populated mainly by emerging scholars from the United States and Canada; it engages senior scholars as peer reviewers and recommendation-letter writers.

Of the 1,300 surveys sent out, approximately 400 responses were received. The decision to survey these groups was guided by the long experience of the trainers and the familiarity of the applicants with the conditions of work and life faced by emerging scholars.

The results analyzed in this report offer a reliable and timely snapshot of recent developments in China studies in North America. They convey the perceptions and assessments of China scholars regarding the field's most promising prospects and greatest challenges in the coming years.

Overall, interest in China studies is strong, evidenced by reports of increased course offerings over the past five years. At the same time, respondents noted high barriers to entry (the degree of difficulty in learning the language and culture of China) and obstacles to success in early career steps (political and geopolitical pressures affecting research, along with the difficulties of conducting research in China and of collaborating with scholars there). The data points to widespread frustration with obtaining visas, censorship, and pressures to engage in self-censorship.

Perhaps the most surprising observation to emerge from the study was the anticipation of strong demand for China scholars both within the academy and outside of the academy in journalism, non-governmental organizations, policy institutes, and government agencies.

Another noteworthy finding was the increasing proportion of scholars of Chinese origin<sup>1</sup> pursuing PhDs and embarking on careers as recent PhDs.

## THE MAIN RESULTS OF THIS STUDY

### *Profile of Applicants to the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies*

- China is now a major source of talent for North American humanities and social sciences. On the list of the 10 universities from which the greatest number of applicants to the Luce/ACLS program received their undergraduate degrees, six are in the People's Republic of China and one is in Taiwan. Close to half of the applicants to the Luce/ACLS program received their BA degrees in China.
- The field of China studies is still dominated by a small number of very well-resourced institutions. The applicants to the Luce/ACLS program (and the fellowship recipients) come overwhelmingly from institutions ranked in the [top 100 universities](#) and [top 50 liberal arts colleges](#) in the US. About 60% of total applicants and 50% of those awarded hold degrees from these institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term "scholar of Chinese origin" will be defined as a person born and educated in China at least to the baccalaureate degree, with "China" defined as the PRC, including Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Macau, and Taiwan.

- The applicant pool to the Luce/ACLS program contains more humanists than social scientists. The most frequently reported discipline by applicants is history, followed by literature.

### *Prospects for Embarking on a Career with a China Studies Degree*

- The training of a China scholar is a costly undertaking and the first steps in the career are precarious. Many university faculty members supervise a large number of graduate students, which burdens both the student and the supervisor. Most graduate students take more than six years to earn the PhD. After receiving their degrees, they find that tenure-track positions, the traditional goal after the completion of graduate training, are fewer than the number of new PhDs seeking employment.
- Institutional support for China research and education is perceived by all respondents to have declined in recent years; external funding, in particular, has been reduced.
- Interest in China studies remains strong. Despite recent political tension and a reported decline in the number of students learning the Chinese language on campuses, both undergraduate and graduate course offerings on China increased in number over the past five years.
- The importance of the Luce/ACLS Early Career Fellowships to academic careers is confirmed by statistics as well as by the testimony of survey responses, with 82% of “applicants” citing this. More awardees than unsuccessful applicants received academic positions.

Demand for scholars with China expertise, according to reports by survey respondents, has been robust in recent years and is expected to increase in the near future, with an average demand rank above the mean (2.5 out of 5). (See Fig. 7) In comparison with the demand at research universities and liberal arts colleges, an even greater increase in demand is anticipated in non-educational settings, such as government agencies, policy institutes, and businesses.

An alarmingly high share of faculty and their students have already encountered political barriers in carrying out China-related research and writing.

### *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Field of China Studies*

- The field of China studies shows two successes in terms of diversity: the strong representation of women and scholars of Chinese origin. The shares of other under-represented minority groups are low, reflecting systemic barriers facing these minorities in higher education generally.
- To enhance diversity, inclusion, and equity in the China studies field, comprehensive measures are suggested by survey respondents, such as building the pipeline early and moving beyond the circle of well-resourced institutions.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Andrzej W. Tymowski, Director Emeritus of International Programs, ACLS

### HOW THIS REPORT CAME TO BE

The research report on China Studies in North American Higher Education Institutions was developed by the 2020-21 Advisory Group of the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies in partial fulfillment of its mandate to collect information on the current status of the field of China studies, identify its needs, and suggest new directions. Two research studies were completed:

1. An analysis by Wang Feng (with Langou Lian) of the ACLS database of eight annual fellowship competitions
2. An analysis of data from two surveys by Wang Feng and Yingyi Ma (with Langou Lian)

This section summarizes the second half of the Advisory Group's mandate: year-long discussions on the implications of the research. The discussions constitute an important supplement to the survey-based research studies, because they go beyond topics examined in the report. These include issues such as expanding the reach of China studies outside the circle of research universities, incorporating curriculum development as a component of fellowship competitions, reaching new audiences within and beyond the academy, continuing the decolonization of the field, and coping with pressures for prioritizing national security in China studies (securitization).

These reflections are intended to be used by Luce/ACLS advisers in 2021-22 to continue the rethinking and redesign of the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies.

The summary of the Advisory Group's discussions was prepared by Andrzej W. Tymowski, in view of the lack of time to produce a collectively authored document. He is alone responsible for the presentation of the Advisory Group's reflections as well as for any infelicities of style.

### SUMMARY REFLECTIONS ON THE FINDINGS

#### *Sources of Talent*

The noteworthy inflow of women and scholars of Chinese origin into the field since the 1980s has enriched scholarship with fresh perspectives, topics, and analytic paradigms. The significant proportion of scholars educated in Chinese universities at the level of Bachelor and Masters degrees (noted in the study of the ACLS fellowship database), reveals China to be a remarkably rich source of talent for the field in North America. However, the inflow of women and scholars of Chinese origin contrasts sharply with a much lower representation of these groups in the leadership of China studies at the major North American universities that still dominate the field. There is a dearth of Black, Brown, and other minority scholars at all ranks and levels of study.

### *Career Prospects*

Support for early career scholars has been the fundamental focus of the Luce/ACLS fellowships in China Studies, because the early post-PhD stage is critical for priming the pipeline for future expertise. Covid made certain blockages worse (a greater supply of PhDs than positions available caused obvious problems). However, the pandemic also brought to light other constrictions, such as inequities of access to resources and the continued dominance of the field by well-resourced universities. Compounding these problems is the decline in financial support at many universities and colleges, especially from sources external to the institution. Survey responses pointed to a decline in funding for scholars as well as for China-related programs. Against this darkening horizon, it is heartening to note the decisive, positive contribution of steady support for fellowships from the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies.

### *Glints of Light*

The demand for expertise in China studies, as noted in the research report, is perceived to be robust in higher education. It is also anticipated to increase in government agencies, non-profit research institutions, and journalism.

### *Curriculum Development*

Teaching, training, and research in China studies, in the view of the Advisory Group, based on its reading of survey responses, should be extended across the landscape of China studies in the United States and Canada. This would widen the scope of the Luce/ACLS program, which in the past focused exclusively on research leading to major scholarly products. Based on this recommendation to make the program more inclusive, the 2021-22 Luce/ACLS fellowship program broadened access and diversified the objectives of awards. Eligibility for support in 2021-22 is flexible, so that scholars at a greater number of institutions may apply, including those with heavy teaching responsibilities. Applications ask for the curricular implications of the research proposed as a criterion of selection. A summer retreat for Fellows and mentors will provide an opportunity to discuss syllabi prepared by Fellows and offer mentoring for career advancement.

### *Decolonization and Its Undertow*

There has been undeniable progress in the decolonization of the field of China studies in the United States and Canada, especially in recent decades, regarding the intellectual content of research and writing. Two factors have been salient in structuring the field in the English-speaking world from inception: traditional divisions of knowledge (from classical learning to Sinology) and contemporary political changes (from empire to nation-state to peasant revolution). The former has given China studies its interdisciplinary character: Scholars are trained in the integrated study of literature, history, philosophy, and religion—unified by an intensive language-based pedagogy and text-based inquiry. This intellectual commitment finds institutional expression in the composition of departments of East Asian Languages and Cultures in R1 universities, the linchpin of the Area Studies model that arose in the Cold War era.

Equally important to the shaping of the field have been the tumultuous political changes in China and the visceral responses they elicited in the English-speaking world. The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, for example, prompted reflections on "Who lost China?" in the U.S. and generations of scholarship on peasant rebellions. The democracy movement and call for civil society in China after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 coincided with the shift to the "state-and-society" as a key analytic paradigm, and so on. As a result, the field of China studies has always been inter-disciplinary, dynamic, and "relevant" in the sense of being entangled with shifting perceptions of and policy towards China in Euro-America.

Although salient categories such as "society," "gender," and "nature" have enabled fresh approaches to the study of China, they are primarily western concepts. Examples of a Chinese category or theoretical concept that has been accepted into the international discourse dominated by English-speaking scholars are rare. Redressing this imbalance is one of the most pressing tasks in the near future. The borders around the field, and particularly the place and status of the study of the Chinese diaspora and the impact of China on the rest of the world, are under debate.

In coming years, tensions between the forms of knowledge developed in Europe and North America and the forms of knowledge current in East Asia and the global south will increasingly come to the fore. These are distinct from political and geopolitical conflicts, though not entirely unrelated. How (and whether) these tensions are resolved, will be a major point on the agenda of decolonization. It will be influenced by the presence of women in the field, along with China-born-and-educated scholars, and by the potential inclusion of communities of inquiry from East Asia and the global south.

### *The Call for Expertise on China*

China is much in the news, with many voices speaking without deep knowledge of Chinese society, language, culture, or history. Moreover, hostile anti-Asian rhetoric abounds in the press and in the streets, as well as in the halls of power. Many well-informed individuals and policy-oriented, non-profit organizations labor mightily to counteract bias with solid, verifiable information. The Advisory Group noted that the field of China studies should speak to new publics and policy-making communities. This is an area that needs to be explored, but surely an important step will be to encourage scholars to write and speak in ways accessible beyond their carefully circumscribed specializations.

In addition to outreach, the field should attend to diversification of knowledge exchange within the academy. Introduction of China-related topics more widely in undergraduate teaching will stimulate interest in students before they make decisions about entering graduate school. Scholarship should remain the central focus in order to ground the sharing of knowledge within and outside the academy.

The image of the teacher-scholar is often praised in higher education institutions, but seldom promoted effectively. Redesigned fellowships could emphasize and enable the two-way relation between teaching and research, sending a clear signal to both individuals and institutions that research should directly inform communication within the academy as well as to interested communities outside.

## *Securitization*

The term as used in the present context refers to the distortion of academic priorities by national security concerns. Exclusive concentration on research that supports national security interests leads ineluctably to the neglect of other research. While there are good reasons to promote studies useful to the national interest, the Advisory Group expressed a genuine concern that this might create pressure for intellectual conformity and simplification, reducing the understanding of other cultures and societies to generalizations for policy purposes. Practically, securitization results in the shift of funds from humanities to disciplines in the social sciences and STEM disciplines, perceived as more relevant to policy.

Arguments against such politically motivated, reductionist pressures may be at least of two kinds. Taking an instrumental approach, it can be argued that even if the US-China relation is deteriorating, it is all the more important to know China better, in all its cultural, historical, and sociological scope, based on knowledge that is objective and not partisan. More importantly, it also needs to be argued that the basic values of scholarship – freedom, engagement, collegiality, and objectivity – should never be jeopardized. Both types of arguments proceed from the conviction that securitization, especially in its extreme form, is dangerous, because it reduces opportunities for collaboration across international communities of inquiry and flattens our perspectives on other societies.

While defending the freedom of scholarship, the China studies community should also urgently promote practices to combat anti-Chinese and anti-Asian stereotypes by fostering respectful, collegial, cross-cultural relations among all who study China, whatever their ethnic or national origins, and whatever the location of current employment. In the atmosphere of growing xenophobia in word and deed, it is crucial to encourage a culture of respect for Asian-American and Pacific Islander colleagues, with whom scholars in North America are engaged in the common enterprise of studying Asia, which is fully a part of the academy in the United States and Canada.

## **A NOTE ON THE LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF SURVEY-BASED RESEARCH**

The Group was well aware of the limits of the survey as a form of research. It is worth emphasizing to readers of the Report that a survey asks respondents for their perceptions and observations based on experience rather than for statistical quantities. (For example, the survey question: “Did the number of courses related to China studies at your institution increase over the last five years?” is not the same as “How many courses related to China Studies were listed in the catalog per year over the last five years?”) Answers to the latter questions would be sought more effectively in registrar records rather than in a survey.

The strengths of survey research lie with the unique ability to convey a valuable picture of the reactions of relevant populations to trends, along with their expectations of the future. The reliability of survey responses depends in part on the degree to which respondents are well chosen – intensely active in the field being examined and concerned about its prospects – as is the case with the respondents to the Advisory Group’s survey questionnaires.

The N in these surveys (the number of individuals queried and the number of responses) was significant. Moreover, the questionnaires sought relevant demographic data, perceptions, and observations of a critical cohort of China studies – scholars just entering the field who, by applying to a competitive fellowship

program, demonstrated sufficient experience and determination in pursuit of career to offer insightful replies. Their mentors, who were also queried, are commensurately well experienced and involved in assuring the future of the field. In sum, responses from these two cohorts—applicants and trainers – constitute a unique source for descriptions of broad patterns, trends, and new directions.

Another advantage of survey research is that it can reveal questions and areas of investigation for further research. For example, information from questionnaire responses can be supplemented by in-depth interviews (as suggested at the end of the Survey Report) in order to probe the dynamics driving patterns and trends.

## I. Recent Changes in Higher Education in China Studies

There is evidence of a continuing demand for China studies. Whereas the number of students learning the Chinese language on college campuses seems to have declined somewhat, this is not the case for China studies among higher education institutions, as assessed by respondents of both surveys. The general interest in China, judged by the growing number of both undergraduate and graduate course offerings, has increased in recent years. In addition, whereas the perceived demand for China scholars in academic settings (teaching and research in higher education institutions) remains unchanged, there is also a perceived increase in the demand for China expertise by government agencies, policy institutes, NGOs, and corporations. Yet, despite the sustained interest and perceived increased need for China expertise, survey respondents sense a decline in the funding support for China-related teaching and research among higher education institutions.

### *Interest in China Studies Remains Robust*

China studies among higher education institutions have been undergoing some notable changes in recent years. Respondents were asked to offer their assessment of three kinds of needs related to China studies: student demand for language study; demand for undergraduate level courses related to China; and demand for graduate courses.<sup>2</sup>

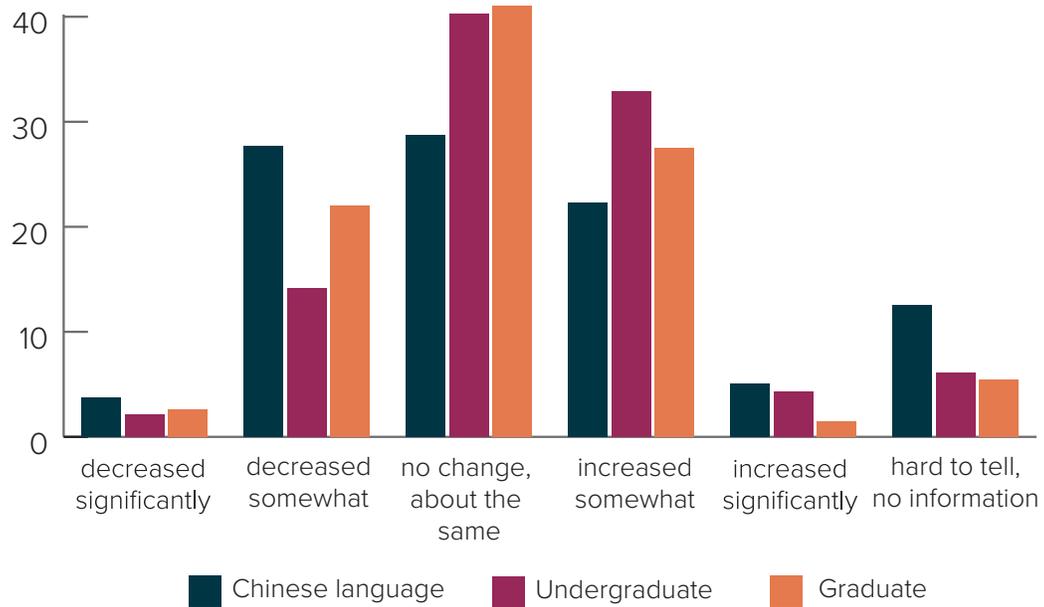
In the five years preceding the survey, as reported by nearly 300 faculty members across 49 universities and colleges, student interest in China-related subjects remained strong. Whereas there was a modest decline in the number of students taking Chinese language courses, the number of both undergraduate and graduate level course offerings increased more than decreased. Among those responding to the survey question, over a third (36%) noticed the student demand “declined somewhat” or “declined significantly,” versus 31% responding “increased somewhat” or “increased significantly.” (Figure 1).

In contrast to this reported small decline in the number of students studying Chinese language, course offerings related to China showed an encouraging upward swing (Figure 1). Although some respondents note that course offerings in China-related subjects “decreased somewhat” (15%) and “decreased significantly” (2.3%), overall, the shares reporting “increased somewhat” (35%) and “increased significantly” (4.6%) far exceeded those reporting declines. The share of respondents reporting “no change” was 43% (excluding those who did not provide an answer).

At the graduate level there were also shifts in both directions. The number of respondents reporting that students/courses “increased somewhat” (29%) and “increased significantly” (1.6%) slightly outnumbered those reporting “decreased somewhat” (23%) and “decreased significantly” (2.7%).

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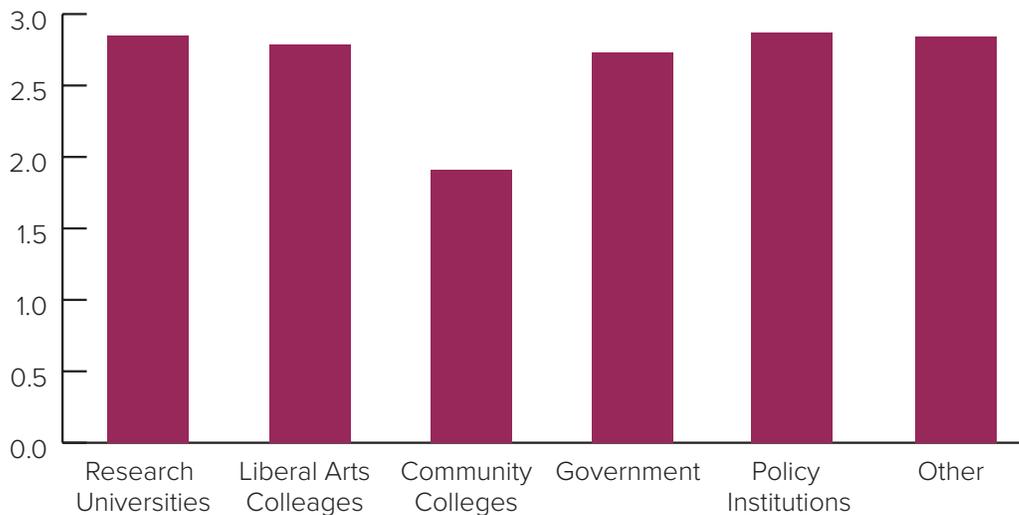
<sup>2</sup> For Chinese language study, the survey asked about “the number of students studying Chinese language” over the last five years at the respondent’s institution. For undergraduate and graduate level course education, the survey asked about “the number of undergraduate/graduate courses related to China” offered at the respondent’s institution in the past five years.



*Figure 1. Survey Responses: “In the last five years, would you say the number of undergraduate/graduate courses related to China offered in your institution...”*

### *More Demand for China Scholars in Non-Academic Positions*

Respondents, who were mostly scholars based in higher education institutions, were asked their perception of demand for China scholars in various educational settings, particularly teaching positions at research universities, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges. They were also asked about their perceptions of demand for China scholars in other settings: government agencies, policy research institutions, and others (such as cultural institutions).<sup>3</sup> Respondents were asked to rank these choices from 1, “not strong,” to 5, “very strong.” (Figure 2)



*Figure 2. Survey Responses: Demand for China Scholars in Different Industries Over the Past Five Years*

In the five years preceding the survey, perceived demand for China scholars in educational institutions remained robust, with mean scores for each category being over 2.5 (the average). The lone exception is the demand in community colleges because few if any offer China-related curricula (Figure 2).

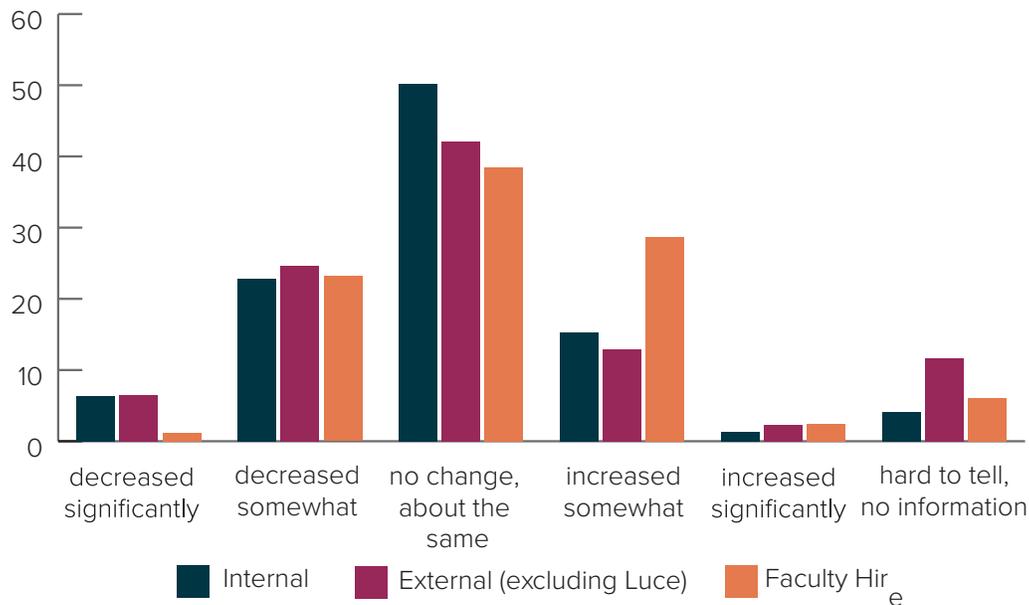
Notably, survey respondents also reported strong demand for China scholars in non-educational settings. The mean of scores reported for demand in government organizations, NGOs, corporations, policy institutions, and other institutions was as high as that for demand in research universities and liberal arts colleges.

<sup>3</sup> The questions asked was: “What do you think the demand for China scholars was in the past five years in each of the following professions?”

### *Funding for China Studies is in Decline*

Institutional support for China studies reveals a mixed picture. On the one hand, a core element of support – faculty hires – shows a slight increase. More respondents reported increases in faculty hires at their institutions (31%) than decreases (24%), with slightly over a third reporting no change (Figure 3).

On the other hand, in terms of internal and external funding to individuals for teaching and research,<sup>4</sup> support for China-related work in recent years was reported to be declining. A much larger share of respondents (29.2% vs.16.5%) noted that internal institutional funding decreased somewhat or significantly. The contrast was even larger for external funding (excluding support from the Henry Luce Foundation), with 31% reporting decreases versus 15% reporting increases (Figure 3).



*Figure 3. Survey Responses: Changes in Resources for China-Related Teaching and Research*

<sup>4</sup> In reference to funding for teaching and research, the survey asked about “funding for China-related teaching and research” at the respondent’s institution over the past five years.

## II. Training China Studies PhDs

Training a China scholar takes years of investment, both by the individual and the institution, and can span several stages of secondary and postsecondary education. The survey of “trainers” asked faculty members for information on the number of graduate students they advised (including those who completed studies and those who did not) over the last five years, as well as the number they were advising at the time of the survey. “Trainers” were also asked for information on the average number of years needed for a young scholar to complete a degree, as well as job placement information for recent graduates. These respondents generally were highly experienced scholars with a mean of 24 years of teaching.

### *Faculty Advising Load and Time to Degree*

On average, faculty in China studies advise a large number of graduate students. Of the 168 “trainers” who indicated they were faculty members who had advised students in the five years preceding the survey, the average number of graduate students advised was rather high, at 6.6. The average number of students advised varied by the discipline of the respondent: four advisees in sociology (18 respondents), 6.8 in history (45 respondents), 7.9 in literature (33 respondents), to 9.6 in political science (16 respondents).<sup>5</sup> At the time of the survey, of the 143 “trainers” still advising graduate students, the mean number was four, with those in history (37 respondents) advising 4.8; in literature (31 respondents) advising 4.3; and in anthropology (15 respondents), advising 4.6.

It takes a substantial number of study years to become a China studies scholar. On average, it requires more than six years to complete training in a graduate program in the humanities and social sciences. The average time to a Ph.D. reported by faculty advisers for recent graduates is 6.48 years. The duration to degree also varies by discipline: it ranges from 6.2 years in political science to 6.7 years in literature, 6.8 years in history, and seven years in anthropology.

### *Recent Placement of Students*

Upon completing their degrees, most recently trained students with an expertise in China studies embarked on academic careers. Yet those who began careers in a tenure track academic position constitute a minority. Of the 295 recent graduates reported in the survey by “trainers,” nearly three quarters (73%) began academic careers but only a minority of the total (38%) began careers in tenure track academic positions (Figure 4). An almost equal share, over a third of those who completed a degree, began with more precarious positions, in non-tenure track or contingent positions.

It is notable that a substantial share of graduate students with China studies expertise, more than a quarter of recent graduates did not go into the academy. About 9% went to government agencies, 5% to non-profit organizations, and 4% into corporate industries.

In contrast, recipients of the Luce/ACLS Fellowships were more likely to be placed in tenure track academic

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<sup>5</sup> There were disciplines with more extreme numbers, which are not included here due to the very small number of respondents representing them.

positions. But even among them, the share was only 57%, a marginal majority. Awardees’ second most likely employment type was post-doctoral fellowships.

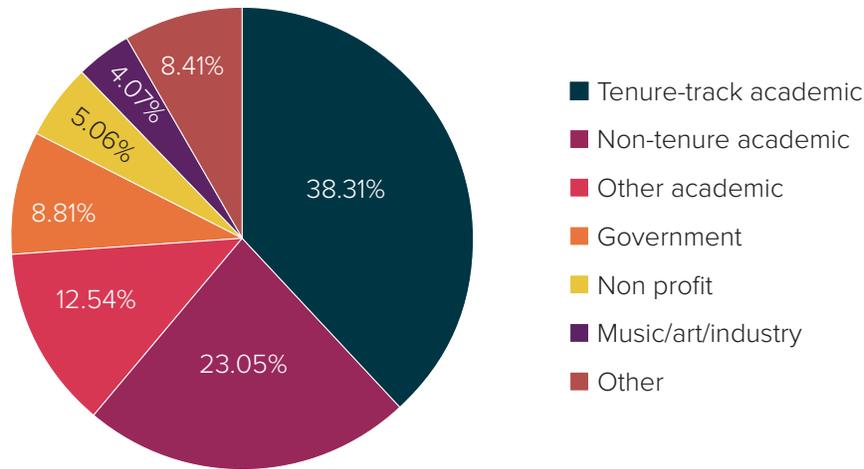


Figure 4. Survey Responses: Job Placements of Young Scholars Trained in China Studies (by %)

### *Institutional, Disciplinary, and National Origins of Scholars*

Among the “applicants” responding to the survey, both successful and unsuccessful applicants for the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies Early Career Fellowships overwhelmingly came from institutions ranked in the top 100 universities and top 50 liberal arts colleges in the US. About 60% of fellowship applicants and about 50% of those awarded were from these institutions.

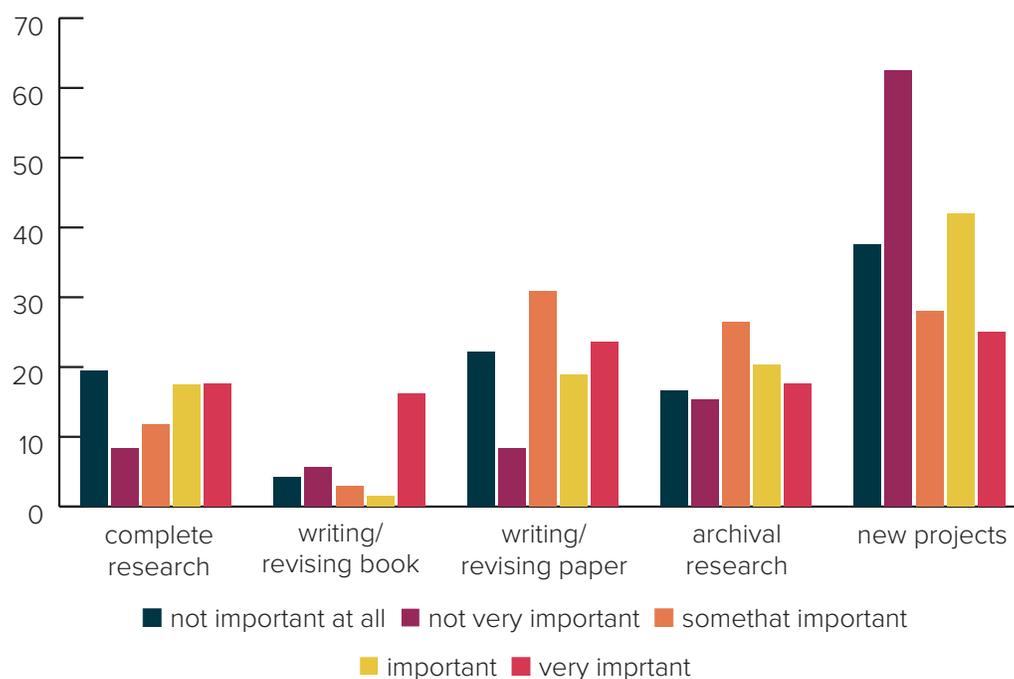
History was the largest discipline among applicants for the Luce/ACLS Fellowship, followed by literature. History was also among the most likely to be awarded, followed by sociology, with literature being the least likely awarded. Compared to 37% of all applicants indicating their discipline as history, 55% of those awarded were in history. On the other hand, more than 10% of all applicants indicated their discipline as literature, while less than 4% of awardees for the program were in literature.

As noted earlier, China has become a major source of talent supply. Among the top 15 institutions at which “applicants” received their undergraduate education, nine were in the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) and one was in Taiwan. More award recipients received undergraduate education at Peking University than at Harvard University.

Yet, compared with the overall number of applications, those with an undergraduate degree from China receive fewer fellowships from the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies. These applications account for 43.8% of all those received over the eight years of the program. Among “applicants” with a Chinese undergraduate degree, 12.6% were awarded the fellowship, compared with 16.6% of those with undergraduate degrees from North American institutions.

### *Use of Early Career Fellowships from the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies*

The Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies Early Career Fellowships support a diverse range of disciplines that are central to the field. Recipients also confirm the critical importance of the support: 82% of “applicants” reported the fellowship was very important for their own career and 95% regarded the fellowship important or very important in general. Of the 72 fellowship recipients who responded to the survey as “applicants,” most used their fellowships to write and revise books (60%), followed by conducting archival research to complete a project or simply “completing research.” Such reported use corresponds well to the program’s initial intended goals. The awards were least used to write articles. (Figure 5)



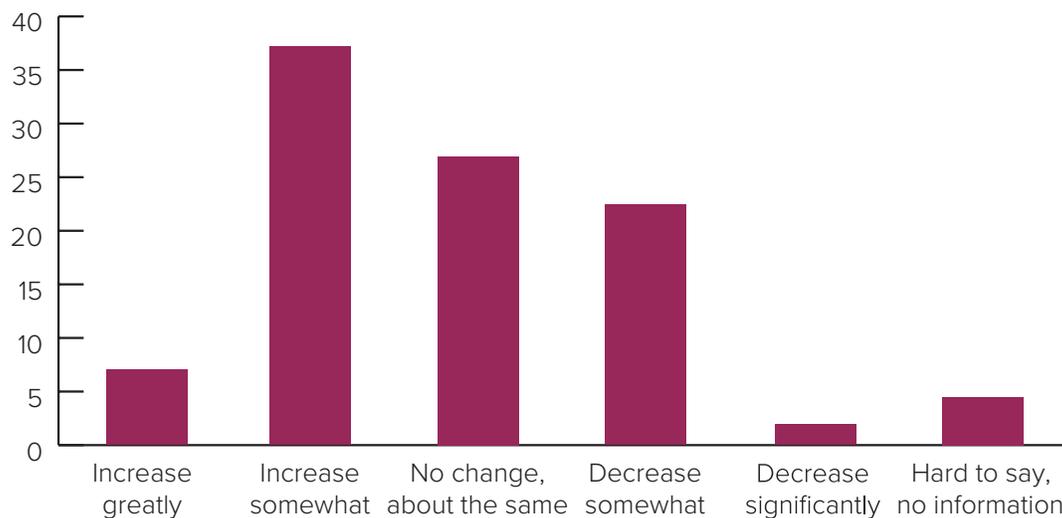
*Figure 5. Survey Responses: “Applicants” Ranked on the Importance of Fellowship Use (by %)*

### III. Anticipating Future Demand and Challenges

The scholarly and political contexts of China studies are changing. Survey respondents foresee in general a continued demand for China scholars in the near future, even an increased demand. This optimism came despite their reports of discouraging experiences and their concerns about the worsening political contexts. An alarmingly large share of scholars and their students have already encountered political difficulties in conducting China-related research, ranging from problems with getting visas to China or, more commonly, with censorship.

#### *Continued Demand in a Shifting Field*

The supply of next-generation scholars is likely to grow, because of the reported anticipated increase in graduate student enrollment. Respondents to the surveys held generally optimistic views about the demand for China scholars in the coming years, while also noting a possible shift. Survey respondents were asked to assess the demand for graduate students in China studies in their disciplines over the next five years. As shown in Figure 6, a much larger share of “trainers” (44%) expected a continued increase in graduate students in China studies, versus those expecting a decrease (24%).



*Figure 6. Survey Responses: Demand for Graduate Students in China Studies Over the Next Five Years (by %)*

This optimistic view is also reflected in respondents’ assessment of the demand for China scholars. Demand for these scholars in teaching institutions is likely to remain robust, as in the recent past. To gauge respondents’ anticipation of the future demand for China scholars, we compared their ranked assessment of the future with their reports of the recent past. As shown in Figure 7, anticipated demand in teaching institutions remains comparable to the recent past, with an average demand rank above the mean (2.5 out of 5). In contrast with the recent past, anticipated demand for teaching in community colleges is higher than in the past, though still

below the mean.

Training in China studies is also expected to play an increasingly important role in non-academic arenas, as can be judged by the expectation expressed by survey respondents that the demand for China expertise will increase in government and policy institutes (Figure 7). Such an assessment may also reflect the uncertain job market in the academic world. Although faculty recruitment in general increased recently, both internal and external funding decreased significantly.

There is an expectation that demand for China studies is likely to increase in the next five years in policy research institutions, government agencies, and especially in other types of non-teaching, non-research, and non-government institutions such as arts organizations and corporate businesses (Figure 7).

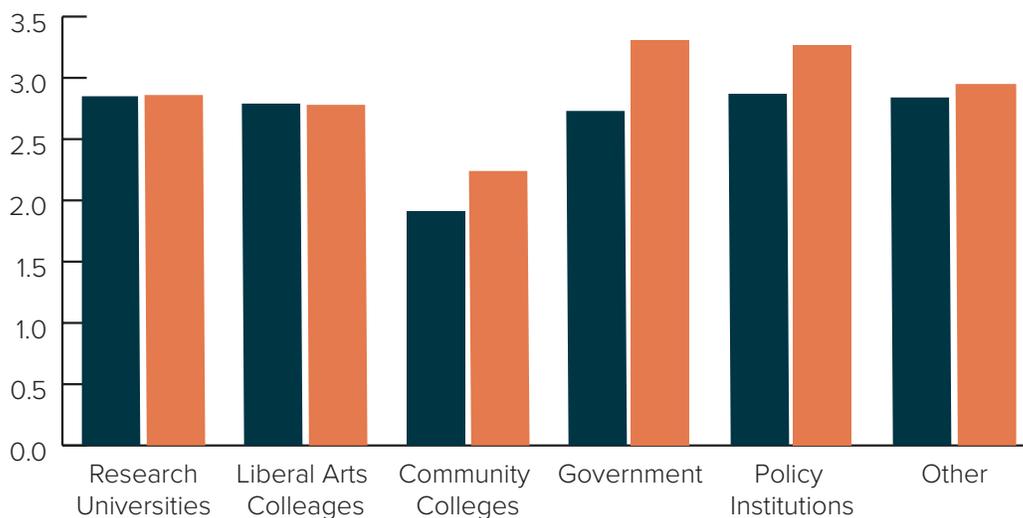


Figure 7. Survey Responses: Demand for China Scholars Over the Last Five Years and During the Next Five Years

### *A More Precarious Field*

Research on China has become more politicized and riskier. In both surveys we asked respondents about their and their students' recent experiences in conducting China-related research, from getting a visa to collaboration with colleagues in China, to censorship.<sup>6</sup>

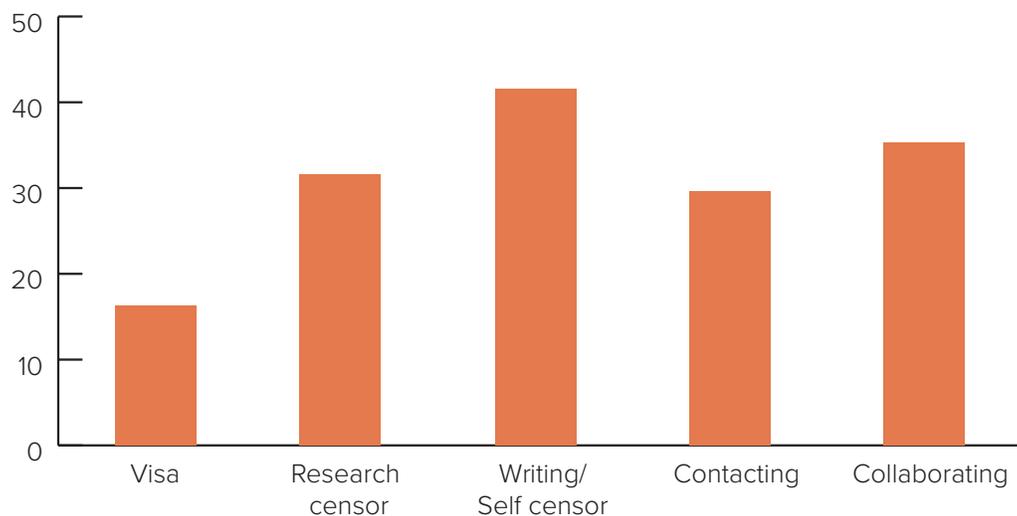
A significant share of survey respondents (16%) encountered a problem in getting a visa to China (Figure 8). Contacting and collaborating with scholars in China was also deemed challenging, with 30% and 35% respectively of respondents indicating such difficulties. The most chilling were reports of censorship (32% of respondents) and especially of self-censorship in writing (42% of respondents).

Those with baccalaureate degrees from China, who account for close to half of all young scholars who applied for Luce/ACLS Fellowships, reported a higher rate of self-censorship while they were writing, though they

<sup>6</sup> Respondents were asked to indicate if they encountered "any of the following due to changes in the conditions for China studies in the last five years"

report being censored while conducting research at the same frequency as those who have not been educated in China. Moreover, those with baccalaureate degrees from China also reported that they experienced barriers in collaboration at a much higher rate than those without baccalaureate degrees from China. Compared with young scholars holding a post-doctoral position, those with more secure employment (in tenure track positions) reported a lower level of self-censorship.

Censorship and experiencing obstacles to collaboration also vary by academic discipline. About 30% of “applicants” in history or literature encountered censorship while researching in China, compared with 55% of those in sociology. “Applicants” in urban planning and the arts also encountered a very high level of censorship. “Applicants” in literature, urban planning, and the arts/visual studies fields also experienced a high incidence of obstacles to collaborating with scholars in China.



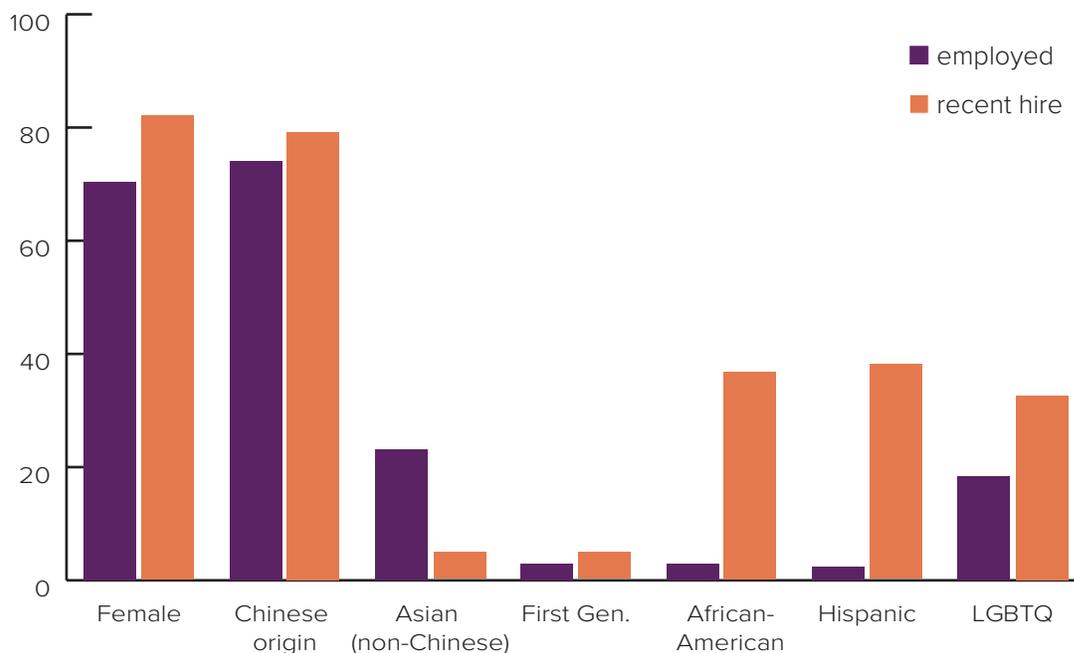
*Figure 8. Survey Responses: Obstacles to Research in China Studies (by % encountered)*

## IV. Addressing Diversity in China Studies

To explore the question of diversity among China scholars, the surveys also posed a number of questions for “trainers” about recently employed graduates and recent hires in their institutions.<sup>7</sup> Faculty respondents were asked if any of their recent advisees who found employment could be identified in any of the categories shown in Figure 9.

These diversity profiles show a mixed picture. On the one hand, it is encouraging to see the high representation of women and scholars from China: female scholars are well represented, as are scholars who were born and educated in the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan. Such representations are noted by over 70% of the respondents. Looking at these numbers, one can say that the field of China studies in recent years has a high degree of diversity. Female scholars and scholars born and educated in China constitute important sources of China expertise in North America.

At the same time, as in the higher education profession in general, the shares of other groups, such as first-generation in college/university, African American, and Hispanic students are all very small, under 5%. The discrepancies between the reported graduates and recent hires, as in the cases of first-generation and LGBTQ categories, may suggest more concerted efforts are needed for success in the hiring of under-represented minorities and groups. Without a fuller survey, however, such an observation or conclusion could only be preliminary.



*Figure 9. Survey Responses: Diversity Profiles of Scholars in China Studies and Recent Hires (by %)*

<sup>7</sup> The survey asked “trainers” if their institutions hired “any faculty to teach courses related to China” from a selection of minority groups.

In addition to the two questions about recent graduates who were employed and recent hires at respondents' institutions, this survey had one open-ended question that asked respondents for advice on advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in China studies. The following is a summary of insights from answers given by both "trainers" and "applicants." Not all comments are directly related to China studies in higher education institutions, but taken together, they constitute a broad roadmap with valuable suggestions for advancing DEI in China studies. The comments express the views of individual respondents and do not necessarily correlate with the overall research findings of the survey.

***Build the Pipeline Early:*** Make the study. . . and culture available to under-represented groups and under-funded schools as early as possible. This is especially needed because language training by Confucius Institutes has been withdrawn in a number of schools. It is also worth promoting China studies in middle and high schools, especially those serving communities of color. This implies encouragement of training programs in Chinese history, culture, and society for high school teachers to produce a large pool of diverse undergraduate students interested in studying China in graduate school.

***Move Beyond Elite Institutions:*** Provide more funding to people from schools outside the circle of major research institutions (Carnegie rating: R-1). Compared to faculty at R-1 institutions, teachers at smaller, less well-resourced schools often shoulder heavy teaching loads, have poor access to databases, and have fewer opportunities for funding and leave time to enable research. However, it is precisely these faculty who work with a large number of students enrolled in less well-resourced and less selective institutions in the US. Therefore, if we truly want to change pervasive lack of knowledge and (mis)understandings about China among Americans, we cannot ignore the importance of providing access to courses in China studies to students who are less likely to be accepted by prestigious universities and who rarely can afford to study abroad. These students could benefit from learning from their own professors who have done field or archival work in China and who could share their experiences and stories.

***Diversify Topics of Study:*** Promote scholarship that is explicitly focused on contemporary ethno-racial and labor issues in China and for Chinese populations outside China. The China studies field is disproportionately focused on historic and literary scholarship. Sponsor talks and initiatives on anti-blackness and "Han chauvinism" (Sinocentric racism) in China studies; on disability studies, feminist activism, and rise of anti-Asian ("Yellow Peril") racism in US. It is also critical to support the study of Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as ethnic minorities oppressed by the People's Republic of China regime (e.g., in Tibet and Xinjiang). By supporting scholarly work concerning these oppressed societies and people, the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies will be seen as making a strong statement about academic freedom.

***Diversify Career Pathways:*** Support the development of emerging scholars who may not be finding full employment in tenure track posts and provide opportunities for non-academic work, because I believe that academic jobs in China studies are dwindling. Many cash-strapped universities are concentrating on expanding and strengthening STEM and other fields that are seen as financially viable to the detriment of the humanities and interpretive social sciences. In addition, Master's study could be supported as an end in itself, commensurate with a number of career pathways, and/or as a mentoring program with an eye towards doctoral education.

***Create Mentoring and Networking Opportunities:*** One good example is the [Hurst Institute](#), directed by the American Society of Legal Historians. This three-week summer program which brings together early

career scholars and gives them intensive experience working together. The institute is led by a senior person in the field, and other senior people visit throughout the program period. This results in a strong sense of community among the young scholars, who are also able to form connections with senior people other than their committee members.

***Combat Anti-China Bias:*** Be on guard for anti-China bias, even within Asian studies programs. Embrace an anti-racism platform that accounts for both anti-China/Asia racism, as well as anti-Black and other biases. The current international political environment has made Chinese scholars' academic lives precarious, especially due to increasing political tensions between the PRC and the US. Institutional efforts should be made to enhance the open platform of interchange and to ensure that scholars from China can still act in the international arena without being concerned about suppression or suspicion from either side.

***Improve Application Procedures:*** Allow recommendation letters from Interfolio or other dossier services, which will save much time especially for those from less well-resourced institutions who have heavy teaching loads. Removing individualized letters and other such hurdles is not a lowering of standards; it makes fellowships more accessible. Ask a question, as the American Association of University Women fellowship application does, about what challenges an applicant has faced that the fellowship can help address. Such a question would provide applicants an opportunity to note how racism and discrimination, or language barriers or cultural adjustments, have undermined their career progress. Special awards, perhaps smaller than the year-long fellowships but that would address these obstacles, could also help.

## V. Future Research

The ACLS surveys of China studies scholars in North America, together with the database kept by ACLS of applications over the lifespan of the program, provide the richest data source, to our knowledge, for describing the composition of scholars in the field and the career trajectories of early-career scholars. Analyses of these data sources have already helped to illuminate institutional origins, disciplinary distributions, and sociodemographic profiles. Responses from the surveys have also offered a timely assessment of scholars' career prospects, as well as the most challenging barriers encountered.

Significant and important questions remain, which we would like to sketch as potential paths that future research might take. We envision three elements that would enrich and expand our study of the field beyond what has been already accomplished.

**1) Provide in-depth analysis of survey data:** The data we collected should be analyzed by institutional types and rankings. This could be done by coding the institutional types and rankings of the nearly 400 survey respondents (“applicants” as well as “trainers”). With such coding and further analysis, it will be possible to gain a better sense of the varying needs and constraints faced by early career China scholars in institutions of different types. Such an analysis will also add context to the professional trajectories of these emerging scholars, and the role the fellowship plays in their career development. Such analysis will be especially important for understanding the trends and future needs in non-R-1 research universities and teaching-intensive institutions. Separating respondents by institutional rankings will also allow a better sense of what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean in China studies, and the consequences for future program design.

**2) Collect new data via interviews:** While the survey data offers a general portrait of the field, additional data should be collected by means of in-depth interviews in order to gain a fuller, more nuanced appreciation of issues facing early career scholars and senior scholars (“trainers”). Information gathered from interviews – with approximately 30 scholars selected from the survey respondents representing different career stages, disciplines, institutions, and sociodemographic backgrounds – will be extremely valuable in explicating questions contained in the surveys, such as the perceived barriers in the field, censorship, and pressures for self-censorship. Interviews will also provide the opportunity to gather other important information on the future of the China studies field and to address issues related to concerns about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**3) Analyze application materials:** To draw a landscape of themes and topics in the field and to anticipate future changes in terms of both research subjects and approaches, it will be useful to carry out new research utilizing the data available in the fellowships database of the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies. One promising approach would be content analysis of the fellowship application abstracts and essays. Such analyses, utilizing existing computer software designed for such data but with coding schemes for the needs of this project, can be uniquely valuable as well. They can identify the changing intellectual content of the annual cohorts of application projects in relation to the smaller subset of projects that received fellowships. This will offer unique insights into the China studies field in terms of topics proposed by scholars who received Luce/ACLS Fellowships.

## Appendix: Methodology of the Survey Study

This study of the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies included two surveys, carried out simultaneously in late January and early February 2021. Survey respondents were advanced-degree holders with academic specialties in China studies based in higher education institutions in North America.

One sample, the “trainers,” consisted of China studies faculty members affiliated with PhD-granting institutions in North America. The initial distribution list was made up of institutions designated as origins of applicants to the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies Early Career Fellowship. That list was expanded to include institutions not located in the higher education “hubs” of the East and West coasts of the United States (whether or not their faculty received fellowships or grants), directors of other PhD-granting institutions with a China studies program, and members of the Public Intellectuals Program of the National Committee on US-China Relations who are not on the other lists. Together, the institutions on the sampling list are responsible for training most China studies scholars in the United States, including nearly 90% of all applicants to the Luce/ACLS program for the eight years between 2012 and 2020. Questionnaires were distributed to roughly 700 faculty members from approximately 60 higher education institutions. Of the potential respondents in this study sample, 211 completed the survey, a response rate of 30%.

For the “trainers” sample, in addition to a few questions about the respondent’s background (discipline, year in service), we asked questions on:

1. Recent graduates (number, placement, diversity)
2. Changes in graduate enrollment in China studies
3. Changes in undergraduate education in China studies
4. Institutional support in China studies
5. Demand for China scholars in different professions in the past five years and in the coming five years
6. Ranking importance of Luce/ACLS Fellowship in different areas
7. Any recent experiences of work affected by political environment in the People’s Republic of China

The second sample, the “applicants,” includes all applicants to the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies Early Career Fellowship since its inception in 2012, 500 in total. We received 192 responses from this second sample, with a response rate of 38.4%. These response rates, 30% for “trainers” and 38% for “applicants,” are both considered high for online surveys, which typically range between 3% and 30%. Comparisons of the characteristics (gender, rank) between the returned responses and the sample lists show broad consistency. With a combined 400 respondents, the survey is arguably the most comprehensive survey of China studies scholars ever conducted. These responses provide a valuable snapshot of the field of China studies in North America.

For the “applicants” sample, in addition to background questions used to match with the information already collected from their program applications, the group was asked questions concerning:

1. Changes in undergraduate training in the last five years (language, China-related courses)
2. Changes in graduate training in China studies in respondents’ institutions in the last five years
3. Changes in institutional support in the last five years
4. Assessment of demand for China scholars in different professions, comparing the past five years with the next five years.

These questions are identical to those used with the “trainers” sample, thus allowing us to have a large sample for assessing changes in the field.

For the “applicants” sample, we also asked questions on the importance of the Luce/ACLS Program in China Studies support in different areas and any recent experiences of work affected by political environment in the People’s Republic of China.

The disciplinary distribution of survey respondents shows the wide range of disciplines in which young scholars have relied on the Luce/ACLS program for support (see Figure A1). Humanities fields remain the major areas, with “history” (29%) and “literature” (12%) forming the two largest categories. Three humanities-related social sciences (political science/International Relations, sociology, and anthropology) make up another 30% of the respondents.

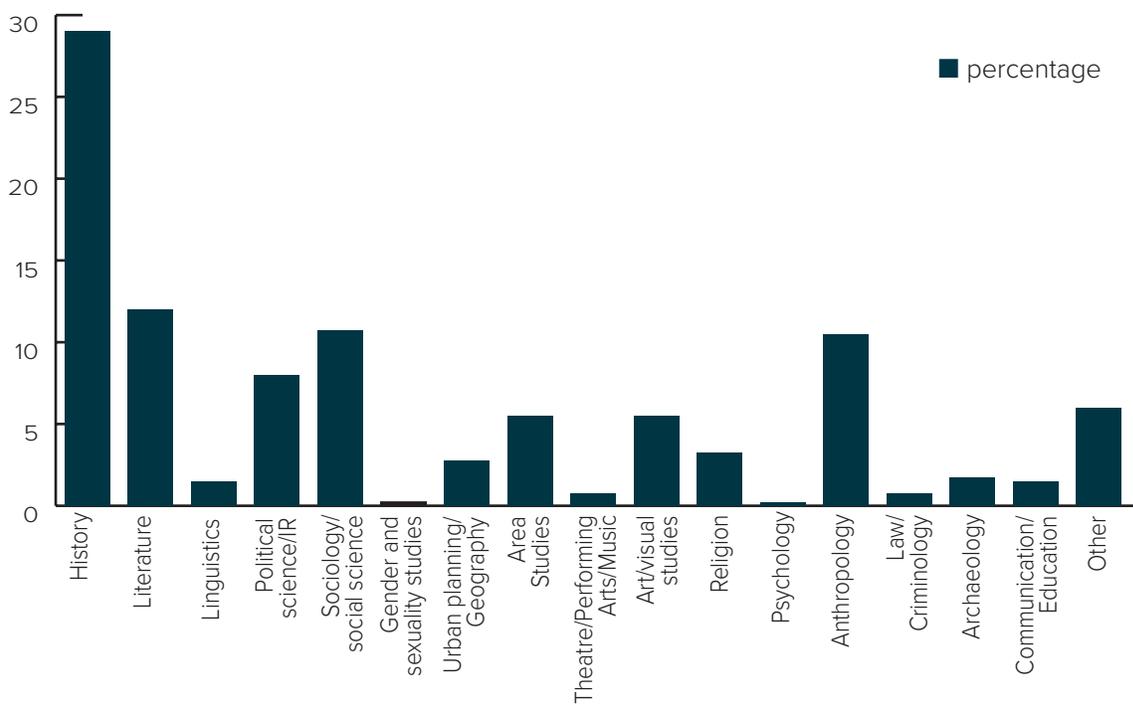


Figure A1. Disciplinary distribution of survey respondents (%)

All survey questions, except for the final one, were designed for numerical responses with pre-coded answer categories. The final question, for both samples, was open-ended asking respondents to provide suggestions on improving DEI in China studies.

Schedule of the surveys:

- Survey question drafting: Thanksgiving holiday 2020
- Advisory Group discussion and input: December 11, 2020, and January 8, 2021
- Questionnaire drafting: December 26-31, 2020
- Questionnaire polishing (introductions, wording): January 3-10, 2021
- Preparation of questionnaires into online survey format, cleaning respondent lists: January 10-14, 2021
- Pre-testing: January 14-19, 2021
- Survey launch: January 20, 2021.
- First follow-up reminder sent: January 28, 2021
- Data assembled and delivered for analysis—completion of data collection phase: February 9, 2021
- Survey team completed draft: May 31, 2021

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