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Lessons for Sweden
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Challenges for China Research and State of the Field in Europe: Lessons for Sweden

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Introduction
The field of China studies in Sweden as well as in Europe has since the 1980s developed from classical Sinology to increasingly focus on contemporary society. This development is due to changes in China as well as changes within academia in Europe. China’s reform and opening up policy, rapid socio-economic changes and growing global role and impact on world economy, have spurred increasing attention among scholars and students within different disciplines. At the same time, the field of Sinology itself and language institutions have also changed and come to address more contemporary issues. Interdisciplinary educational programmes and institutions that focus on contemporary China (or Asia more generally) and sometimes combine language and area studies have been established in many countries. The improved access to data and new opportunities for conducting research in China, including increasing collaboration with Chinese scholars and universities, have helped pave the way for more in-depth research on a range of topics, resulting in a growth of publications and the rise of a new generation of China scholars.

While developments in the field of China research have been impressive since the 1980s, there are many challenges and new issues that need to be addressed. One challenge obviously still is China’s authoritarian political system that has a negative impact on scholarship in the country as well as on scholarship abroad, and where recent developments under President Xi Jinping are cause of grave concern. Another challenge relates to the higher education section in European countries and the organizational and institutional set-up of universities that sometimes prevent new approaches and interdisciplinary research/education. The situation varies between countries and even among universities within one country.

The following brief report aim to address some of the trends, challenges and needs, and argues for a strengthening of research on China in Sweden at a critical juncture in time in order to meet new demands. It provides a brief overview of challenges in China and the state of the field and new developments in Europe with a particular focus on the Nordic countries. It pays attention to some interesting cases of relevance to Sweden while acknowledging underlying differences among countries and obstacles in terms of funding and university organization. The report builds upon the author’s own experiences and insights from some earlier works on China research in Europe (for example Ash, Shambaugh, and Takagi 2007) and other reports, governmental reports on Sweden’s engagement with Asia (for example Framtiden med Asien 1998), and a recent report by two German think tanks, GPPi and MERICS, that outlines China’s growing influence in Europe (Benner et al 2018). The latter report calls for strengthening “high-caliber, independent China expertise” within think tanks and universities as well as collaboration among scholars in Europe in order to meet the challenges of a more assertive China. While China’s more assertive positioning and influence in Europe and globally is one reason for strengthening critical research (see also Godemant and Vasselier 2017), it should be stressed that there are also many other reasons for why it is imperative to study the contemporary Chinese society. China’s development for example challenges many understandings and theories within the humanities and social sciences. Furthermore, understanding
developments in one of the world’s largest countries is of an academic and wider human interest regardless of any pragmatic considerations, at the same time as China and Europe/Sweden face many of the same global challenges and therefore also benefit from collaborative research.

Trends and challenges
Developments with respect to research on and in China are complex, challenging, and sometimes contradictory. China’s economic rise and impact on world economy, in particular its innovative tech companies, growth of FDIs and companies abroad, and the One Belt, One Road Initiative (BRI) that involves huge infrastructural projects, have generated both interest and concern among policymakers, companies and the general public in Europe. At the same time, China’s investments in higher education, R&D, and innovation, have attracted both the attention and admiration of European governments, policymakers and the higher education sector. Many scholars and departments within the technical, natural sciences and medical fields have been particularly attracted to and interested in collaboration with China as it is in the forefront in many fields and Chinese collaborators have significant resources. Many Chinese students within these fields are also studying at European universities. Concomitant with this development we however see an increasing concern among China scholars within the humanities and social sciences. This group is more exposed to and aware of how academic freedom is curtailed within Chinese universities, and how censorship and self-censorship impact research on social, political and economic issues. They are also more likely to themselves experience these restrictions when doing fieldwork and collaborating with Chinese colleagues. This creates a gap in perception and awareness among scholars working with Chinese universities, as well as difficult ethical choices for scholars, universities, funding agencies and governments who are eager to have close connections with Chinese universities and advance scientific knowledge of common interest. It is therefore imperative to strengthen knowledge of the socio-political context within which the higher education sector operates in China, including the natural sciences, technical subjects and medicine and collaboration with these fields.

Since coming to power in 2012/2013, Xi Jinping has emerged as the strongest political leader since Mao Zedong. During his term in office he has cracked down on civil society and the media, declaring the Internet an ideological battleground, while also strengthening ideological control in universities and curtailing academic freedom (Perry 2015; Zhao 2016; Benner et al 2018). Xi Jinping has now entered his second period in office (2018-2022), and, as a result of constitutional changes passed by the National People’s Congress in March 2018, has possibilities to stay on in power beyond that time period. The tightening control of institutions of higher education and worsening situation for academic freedom is thus likely to continue and will also have an impact on scholarship abroad, resulting in increasing difficulties within some fields to engage in collaborative projects and undertake fieldwork and surveys. Another trend is China’s more assertive interference in foreign academic scholarship, including setting up Confucius institutes and establishing think tanks (Benner et al 2018). The most notorious cases to date have been the pressure put on foreign publishing houses, such as Cambridge University Press and Springer, to self-censor in order to have a presence in China (Eise 2017). At the same time there have also been reports, particularly from Australia, of Chinese students being vocal in objecting to critical discussions of China’s development in classes at universities and at other public events (Benney 2017). Given China’s attempt to influence academic
scholarship and ability to push research in certain directions through funding it is crucial that scholars in Sweden and elsewhere continue to engage in critical research on important topics, and that research and education on China is strengthened at Swedish universities. There is also a need for more collaboration and discussions on academic freedom in China by European universities, professional associations, and individual scholars across disciplines.

State of the field in Europe
In a 2007 overview of research within the fields of Chinese politics, economy, and foreign and security policies in Europe, the authors draw attention to new promising developments and different foci of research while also pointing out its uneven development across European countries (Ash, Cabestan and Möller in Ash, Shambaugh and Takagi 2007). The book remains to date the only comprehensive survey of the field of contemporary China research in Europe. However, as the authors already then pointed out, it did not cover all subjects and also left out many countries (for example southern Europe, East and Central Europe as well as the Baltic states). There have been several developments during the past ten years, including establishment of new institutions, emerging fields and topics, as well as a growing number of researchers and Chinese scholars and students at European universities. It is not possible within the framework of this brief overview to cover all countries and institutions or do all of these developments justice, but some developments and new institutions and focus areas will be pointed out as they illustrate some major trends and lessons for Sweden.

1) Institutional developments and national trends
It is probably fair to say that countries such as Germany, France and the UK that already in 2007 had a high concentration of academic institutes focusing on contemporary China, as well as many individual scholars at other institutions, remain the leading research nations on China in Europe. However, we have also seen impressive developments in other countries such as for example Finland, which has developed a special focus on Chinese law (https://blogs.helsinki.fi/chinalawcenter/). Other countries such as Austria, Italy and Switzerland that were quite neglected in the 2007 study has developed particularly strongly in certain fields e.g. law (the University of Turin and the University of Vienna), politics (University of Vienna), media and film (State University of Milan and the China Media Observatory at Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland, http://www.chinamediaobs.org/), and labour issues (Venice University).

In the following the report will focus on research and education on contemporary Chinese society and will thus not address more traditional fields of Sinology such as language, history, literature and cultural studies. However, it needs to be stressed that it is central to be firmly grounded in knowledge of Chinese history, culture and language in order to understand contemporary socio-economic and political developments (see e.g. Barmé 2008).

In France, education and research on contemporary Chinese society remains clustered in Paris and Lyons. The two major research institutes are the Centre for International Studies and Research (CERI) of the French National Foundation for Political Sciences and the Research Centre on Modern and Contemporary China of the Higher School in Social Sciences (EHESS). Although mainly publishing in French, a range of French scholars also publish in English on politics, law, and civil society. One interesting and important French institution is the Centre for Research
on Contemporary China (CEFC) established in Hong Kong in 1991 (http://www.cefc.com.hk/centre/about/). It is one of 27 research institutes abroad funded by the French Foreign Ministry and a unique feature among European countries. It also has branches in Taipei and Peking and has in total some six researchers, organises events as well as provides scholarships for Ph.D. candidates. It publishes China Perspectives (also in English since 1995) that has developed to become an important journal in the field of contemporary China studies.

In Germany, the GIGA Institute for Asian Affairs in Hamburg (https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/giga-institute-of-asian-studies), established already in 1956, remains an important centre for research on China and also houses the open access journal Journal of Current Chinese Affairs that developed from the German language monthly journal China Aktuell. Likewise, the East Asian Institute of the University of Duisburg has developed a strong profile on Chinese politics in particular. In recent years the University of Cologne has developed a strong focus in the field of Chinese law and society with the recruitment of Björn Ahl and Susanne Brandstätter. Freie Universität Berlin also has a strong focus on contemporary Chinese law and politics as well as environmental issues (including scholars such as Klaus Mühlhahn, Katja Levy, Elena Meyer, Genia Kostka https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/einrichtungen/fachbereiche/fb/gesch-kultur/orient/sin/index.html). Many other universities such as for example University of Tübingen are also particularly strong in the fields of Chinese politics and economics. Furthermore, many more traditional institutions of Sinology address new aspects and flows of ideas and cultural exchanges, including has developed more transregional approaches to the study of China (and Asia). Special mention should be made of the University of Heidelberg, its cluster of excellence Asia and Europe in a Global Context (http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/) and Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) https://www.cats.uni-heidelberg.de/ and the Global and Transregional Studies Plattform at the University of Göttingen (https://www.gts-goettingen.de/).

One of the newly established research institutes in Germany is the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), which was established in 2013 as a Stiftung Mercator initiative. It today employs some 35 people and has rapidly become one of the largest international think tanks providing more policy-oriented research on a range of issues related to contemporary Chinese society and China’s global role. What is interesting is that it not only addresses foreign policy issues and general political topics but also social issues and new and hot topics such as digital developments and the environment. It collaborates with universities in Germany and elsewhere as well as has a fellowship programme that brings German and international scholars to Berlin. What is interesting from a Swedish perspective is that MERICS is funded by a private foundation. Many other German foundations such as Robert Bosch Stiftung, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, and Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung have also over the years engaged in support of research and conferences on China as well as developed different collaborative projects. Sweden in contrast lacks this kind of private foundations and initiatives to support either research in universities or independent research institutions on China.

The UK has a long tradition of Sinology with renowned institutions such as the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Oxford University and Cambridge University. In a 2016 report on the state of the field of China studies in the UK it was mentioned that as many as 35 research institutes offered some kind of courses related to China (BACS 2016). In 2002, the Contemporary China Studies
Program was established at Oxford with a grant from the Leverhulme Trust, which runs seminars and workshops and host postdoctoral fellows and visitors. In 2008, the Oxford China Centre was created as a hub to further collaboration among scholars at the university and host different activities (http://www.chinacentre.ox.ac.uk). Its new building (2014) has a library that houses parts of the Bodleian Libraries’ Chinese book collection. Other leading centres for research on China includes University of Leeds, University of Sheffield and University of Nottingham. The latter has a China Policy Institute that publishes policy briefs and blogs about contemporary China. The China Institute established at King’s College London in 2008 was re-named the Lau China Institute after receiving a major donation from Dr Lau Ming-Wai, a King’s College London alumnus in Hong Kong. It today conducts extensive research and also has a large number of affiliates at other departments within the university. In 2017, the University of Manchester got a donation from Dr Lee Kai Hung, a Hong Kong businessman, philanthropist and honorary graduate of the university, that enabled the establishment of the Manchester China Institute (https://www.mci.manchester.ac.uk/). At the University of Glasgow, the Scottish Centre for China Research, brings together scholars from different universities who are engaged in research on contemporary China (https://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/socialpolitical/research/sccr/).

Other institutions in the UK include Chatham House (https://www.chathamhouse.org/about/structure/asia-pacific-programme/about), Great Britain China Centre (http://www.gbcc.org.uk/about-us), and China Dialogue (https://www.chinadialogue.net/), that provide valuable and updated information on contemporary China and organise different events.

From a Swedish perspective it is interesting to see the important role played by private donations, especially from alumni and wealthy businessmen, supporting research and chairs (for example at least two on China at Cambridge University), although this dependency may create problems when the funding come from people with vested interests or backing from China. Another striking feature is the large number of Ph.D. students enrolled in programmes on China and the high percentage of Chinese students among them.

In the Netherlands, the Sinologische Institut at Leiden University and the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) are two of the leading institutes with a focus on contemporary China, although the latter more in the form of guest researchers. Leiden has attracted a number of international scholars and has in recent years also built up expertise in the field of studies on digital developments (Florian Schneider, Rogier Creemers and Daniella Stockmann until she moved to a position in Berlin). At Delft University of Technology, Professor Peter Ho is a leading scholar on land issues in China.

2) European networks and associations
One of the oldest associations devoted to Chinese studies is the European Association for Chinese Studies (EACS) established in 1975 with around 1200 members (http://chinesestudies.eu/). It arranges a bi-annual conference that however still is quite heavily dominated by more traditional Sinology, such as linguistics, literature, pre-modern history, archaeology and art, although having an increasing number of panels devoted to contemporary issues on politics, economics, media and other social issues. It runs a website that provides valuable information about upcoming conferences and events in Europe, as well as distributes a newsletter and at times also organises summer schools. Another network is the International Conference on
Agriculture and Rural Development in China (ICARD) that grew from a European network (ECARDC) and took the new name in 2017 to underline its international dimension (http://www.icardc.org/about/). In 2006, motivated by a research project on law implementation in China, and with funding from SSAAPS (discussed below), the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies arranged a network meeting with scholars in Europe, China and the US working on law from an interdisciplinary perspective. The network resulted in the establishment of the European China Law Studies Association (ECLS) that today has some 300 members from around the world (http://www.ecls.eu/). Since 2007 it has arranged annual conferences in different cities (including Hamburg, Bologna and Turin, Vienna, Copenhagen, Oxford, Helsinki, Hong Kong, Cologne, and Rome).

In 1997, the European Alliance for Asian Studies was established by GIGA, IIAS, and NIAS (https://asiascholars.eu/). Today the alliance has a total of 12 members (including the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies at Lund University). Its aims to “build high-quality border-transcending research, teaching and public services, including scholarly networks within Europe and beyond. It also encourages linkage between academic and non-academic actors, aiming to develop a model of how Asian studies in European academia could respond to political, economic and heuristic shifts and contexts.” Its website highlights member institutions’ events, courses, and research projects.

At the EU level, the EU-China Academic Network (ECAN) was established in 1997 with the goal to bring together specialists on contemporary China working in EU Member States. It aimed to foster a community among EU specialists on contemporary China in universities and research institutions, share research findings on China’s current and future development and seek ways of stimulating collaborative research, and to promote links between academic experts and European policymakers (Ash 2007). The network was after a break restarted in 2007 (ending in 2013) and administered by a consortium consisting of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the Asia Research Centre (CBS), the Institute for East Asian Studies, University of Duisburg-Essen and the Centre Asie, Institut Francais des Relations Internationales-IFRI. It among other things commissioned policy briefs and organised conferences.

At the national and regional level there exist a range of associations such as the British Association for Chinese Studies and the Nordic Association for China Studies (https://nacsorg.wordpress.com/) that organise conferences and other events.

3) European funding and collaboration
It is difficult to get a good overview of how many EU grants, including Horizon 2020, ERC grants, and Hera projects, have been awarded for research on China. However, it is quite interesting that several ERC grants recently have been awarded for research on different aspects of the Chinese digital society. In 2011, David Miller at LSE got a grant that aimed to studied social media in different parts of the world and also involved two China scholars addressing social media in rural respectively urban China. In 2014, Daniella Stockmann, then at Leiden University and today at the Hertie School in Berlin, received a ERC starting grant focusing on the Chinese Internet, and in 2015 Christian Göbel, Vienna University, received a ERC grant looking into e-governance and protest. In 2017, two scholars at Stockholm University also received a ERC grant to study social media in China.

Other major recent joint European projects for example include a project on new forms of political representation involving scholars from Germany and France (
(https://representativeclaims.wordpress.com/about/), and a project with scholars from Germany, France, the UK and the Netherlands working on immigrants in China (https://immigrantchina.net/about/). These projects rely on different national and university research funding.

Given the fact that the research environment at many European universities and in many countries is quite small, networking and collaboration, in particular in order to help create an environment for Ph.D. students, is often seen as crucial. Special Ph.D. workshops have become a feature in the work of many national and regional associations and institutions, for example the British Postgraduate Network for Chinese Studies, the Nordic Association of China Studies and the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Nordic Council. The Made in China journal (discussed below) organised its first summer school devoted to labour issues in 2017, and is in 2018 organising its second summer school in Italy.

4) Communication and publications
The oldest China focused journal in Europe, the China Quarterly was established in 1960. It remains one of the most authoritative journals in the field, and it was of great concern to scholars when the news broke in 2017 that Cambridge University Press had given in to Chinese demands to delete a range of articles on more sensitive topics for the Chinese audience. The press eventually gave in to the pressure and critique and after some astute work by the current editor. However, it clearly showed how market concerns may lead even established publishers to give in to censorship. In Germany, the Journal of Current Chinese Affairs has become an important journal, whereas another European based journal is China Information. Three journals address different legal issues: the China-EU Law Journal published by the China-EU law school since 2013, the China Law and Society Review established in 2016 (Brill), and the Chinese Journal of International Law established in 2010 (Oxford University Press). A recent journal that although not exclusively addressing China has a strong China focus through one of its editors, Florian Schneider, is Asiascape: Digital Asia (Brill) established in 2014. As the name indicates it focuses exclusively on articles exploring different aspects of the digital in the realms of social, cultural, and political developments.

One of the interesting new additions in the field of journals devoted to contemporary China is the Made in China journal, an open access journal that was initiated by several postdoctoral scholars based at the China in the World Center at Australia National University in 2016 (http://www.chinoiresie.info/made-in-china-quarterly/). They include Ivan Franceschini who graduated from Venice University and is a Marie Curie postdoctoral fellow currently based at ANU and Venice, and Nicholas Loubere, who got his Ph.D. from Leeds University and in 2016 was a postdoctoral fellow at ANU, but since January 2017 is employed at the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University. The journal has within a short period of time become an essential source for those interested in in-depth information about developments in the field of labour, rights and civil society, and the journal today receive some 10,000 downloads for each issue.

5) Emerging topics and trends
Developments in China have an influence on emerging research fields at European universities. One of the strongest such trend is in the field of Internet studies that has developed as digital technologies now permeate how Chinese people work, communicate and play, as well as how the state rule and conduct ideological work.
Among the first groups of researchers in Europe were Jens Damm and Gudrun Wacker in Germany and Johan Lagerkvist in Sweden. In recent years more individual scholars and groups of scholars have begun to study different aspects of the Chinese digital society. They for example include a group of seven scholars that all originally were based at the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies (https://www.ace.lu.se/research/research-clusters-and-research-projects/digital-china ). Other larger projects include Daniella Stockmann and her collaborators in the ERC funded project Authoritarianism 2.0 (initially based at Leiden University), Florian Schneider and Rogier Creemers (Leiden University), and Christian Göbel and his team at Vienna University. Other topics that have received increasing attention are issues related to the environment with scholars establishing projects in different universities (recent larger projects include one on low carbon innovation in the UK https://steps-centre.org/project/low-carbon-china/ and a project on pollution and climate change at Oslo University http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/projects/airborne-pollution-china/ ). Many other topics also receive scholarly attention, including gender, migration, civil society developments and minority studies. The One Belt, One Road Initiative have also received increasing research interest with Oxford University establishing the first research centre on the topic (https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/one-belt-one-road ). In Sweden, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has initiated a project on the One Belt, One Road Initiative (https://www.sipri.org/news/2017/new-sipri-research-21st-century-maritime-silk-road ), and a new research network, Stockholm Belt and Road Observatory, is just about to start.

6) Nordic universities, collaboration and trends
The establishment of the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) in 1968 with funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers is an example of early Nordic collaboration in the field of Asian studies (http://nias.ku.dk/what-nias ). The institute has played an important role over the years, hosting several generations of Nordic scholars, running visiting scholars programme and a library (until it was integrated with Copenhagen University), arranging conferences and hosting master students and Ph.D. students. NIAS is also home to NIAS Press that has published the works of many Nordic scholars. Since 2005 NIAS is a part of University of Copenhagen (institutionally placed at the Department of Political Science). NIAS has in recent years seen cuts in its Nordic funding, and today only has few permanent researchers with only one working on China. It remains partly funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers, in addition to receiving funding from the University of Copenhagen and 23 Nordic member universities through what is called NIAS Nordic Council (NNC). It is currently facing further cuts and an out-phasing from the Nordic Council of Ministers, something that would seriously threaten the institution and Nordic collaboration. One important feature is NIAS LINC, the library and information centre, which provides valuable data bases, journals and newspapers, including in Chinese (for example CNKI) to member universities. No Nordic or Swedish university would probably be able to shoulder this costs on its own, and member universities have in the last two years been vocal in their support of NIAS and the services it provides. The NIAS NNC also holds annual conferences and Ph.D. workshops on Asia that are hosted by the different member institutions. They are international in scope and provide a good platform for the scattered Nordic community of China (and Asia) scholars.

Another example of Nordic collaboration is the Nordic Centre at Fudan University, Shanghai. It is a collaboration between 25 member institutions in
Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden (http://www.nordiccentre.net/). Although having multiple focuses, for example being a platform for Chinese students and scholars who study the Nordic countries, it has played an important role for Nordic students and scholars studying China. The Nordic Centre thus provides funding for conferences and also serves as a host institution for Nordic scholars.

In Denmark, China research is concentrated in Copenhagen, Aarhus and Aalborg. In 2008, University of Copenhagen launched a new research initiative entitled Asian Dynamics (ADI), with the aim to position the university more strategically in the field of Asian studies and with an explicit acknowledgment that a narrow disciplinary focus does not suffice in order to capture the complex changes in Asian countries (Køpenhavn Universitet 2008). In the proposal it was stated that the aims were to create “a platform for developing new competencies at the University of Copenhagen based on research on social, economic, political, cultural, and religious complexities in Asia and their rich historical, philosophical, and intellectual underpinnings.” The ambitious initiative was launched jointly by the humanities and social science faculties and included annual investments of 6,5 million DK for positions, conferences and new cross-faculty courses. Although Copenhagen at the time already had quite a large group of scholars focusing on Asia in various departments (around 43 positions), the new initiative meant recruitment of professors in different disciplines (anthropology, political science, economy) with a focus on Asia. Currently ten associate and full professors are employed with partial or full funding from ADI, one with an explicit focus on China and at least another also addressing China. Copenhagen has recently seen some cuts in funding in the humanities that also has affected Asian studies. However, it has quite a lot of Ph.D. students and postdoctoral scholars working on Asia at different departments (https://asiandynamics.ku.dk/english/research/postdocphd/). In 2013, The Fudan-European Centre for China Studies was established in partnership with the University of Copenhagen and based at NIAS. The Centre is a strategic initiative of Fudan University to advance China studies in Europe and the first such centre to be established in Europe. It is headed by a scholar from Fudan University and hosts guest scholars, organise seminars and other events (https://www.fudancentre.eu/our-mission/).

Another ambitious Danish initiative is the China-Danish Center established in 2010 (http://sdc.university/about/about-sdc/). It is a partnership between eight Danish universities, the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences (UCAS) with the aim to increase collaboration and student and research mobility between China and Denmark. It has several affiliated masters programmes and employs many Ph.D. students in the fields of life sciences, food and health, social sciences (welfare and innovation management), nanoscience, sustainable energy, water and environment.

In Norway, the major centre for research on China is the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University Oslo, although there are researchers at other institutions such as for example the Fridtjof Nansen Institute (on environment in China). In Finland, the major centres include the Centre for East Asian Studies at the University of Turku, and the Department of World Culture at the University of Helsinki, which also houses the Finish China Law Centre. In addition, the Finnish University Network for Asian Studies, organises courses and events and involve scholars at different universities in the country (http://www.asianet.fi/about-us/).
China studies in Sweden

Sinology in Sweden dates back to eminent scholars such as Bernhard Karlgren and a bit later Göran Malmqvist. Their influence is still felt and much work on China continues to take place at language departments, first mainly at Stockholm University, Lund University and Gothenburg University, and later also Uppsala University. Today research on China is in addition mainly concentrated to the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University, the Stockholm China Economic Research Institute, the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), with individual scholars at other departments and universities.

The second generation of China scholars who took up positions, or were promoted as, professors in the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s, mostly focused on history and literature. They include Torbjörn Lodén (Stockholm) working mainly on literature and history of ideas, Lars Ragvald working on literature but shifting his interest to work on a dictionary (Lund), Roger Greatrex working on Song history (Lund), and Michael Schoenhals working mainly on the Cultural Revolution and more generally on pre-reform PRC history (originally in Stockholm and then in Lund). The former three have now retired. In the 1990s, there emerged a new group of scholars and Ph.D. students who addressed diverse topics, but as they took their degrees at language departments at Stockholm and Lund still mainly addressed literature, language, culture, and history. (Uppsala only began offering a Ph.D. programme in 2017 and their first candidate also focuses on literature.) Of those who have received their Ph.D. since the 1990s, two are today professors at Uppsala University working on literature (Lena Rydholm) and minorities and minority languages (Joakim Enwall), two are lecturers at Gothenburg University working mainly on poetry and intellectual history (Martin Svensson Ekström) and missionary history and religion (Fredrik Fällman), one is professor at Lund University working on topics such as human rights, media, Internet, cultural heritage, and documentary film (Marina Svensson), and one is professor at Stockholm University working on China’s global role, Internet, and civil society developments (Johan Lagerkvist). Today there are very few Ph.D. candidates in any of the language departments. In Lund there is currently only one Ph.D. student enrolled, in Stockholm there are two, and in Uppsala only one.

It was only in the late 1990s that the first Ph.D. students working on China were recruited within other disciplines and departments than the language departments. Three Ph.D. students defended their thesis in the field of political science (one in Lund and two in Uppsala), one received his degree in peace and conflict studies (Gothenburg), and one got his Ph.D. in law (Lund). It is difficult to know how many Ph.D. candidates working on contemporary China are enrolled in or recently have graduated in different departments. To the best of my knowledge, and the figure might be slightly higher, in the last ten years one student graduated from global studies (peace and conflict theory) at Gothenburg University, one graduated from the department of political science at Stockholm University, one graduated from the department of political science at Uppsala University, two from the department of sociology at Lund University, one from the department of political science at Linnaeus University, one from the department of anthropology at Stockholm University, and one from the department of economics at Gothenburg University,
whereas three are currently enrolled in the department of sociology, respectively at the school of social policy at Lund University.

Currently Lund University probably has the highest number of researchers working on China in Sweden: four (plus one postdoctoral fellow) at the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, two at the sociology department, one at the School of Economics, and two at the language department.

It is interesting to note that Sweden has seen a quite strong trend of recruiting German scholars working on China, which shows both the strength of China research in Germany (and possibly a lack of positions there) as well as the lack of Ph.D. students in Sweden and few possibilities for young researchers in Sweden to focus on China. At the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies at Lund University, for example, since 2006 four out of eight postdoctoral fellows recruited to work on China have come from Germany (one with a Ph.D. from Leiden although a background in undergraduate studies in Germany), whereas the other four came from respectively China (two), Denmark, and the US. A professor with a focus on Chinese economy at Lund University was also recruited from Germany, whereas one professor and one lecturer at the Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies at Stockholm University came from Germany. Looking at other international recruitments, to the best of my knowledge and excluding Chinese language teachers, one lecturer has been recruited from Norway (Lund University), one lecturer from the UK (Lund), and another lecturer from Italy (Gothenburg University), in addition to an American anthropologist and professor working on China but not recruited for her area expertise (Gothenburg University). Three of the four Ph.D. students recruited to language departments are also internationally recruited, whereas three currently working in other departments at Lund University also are internationally recruited. While the international recruitment in the field of China studies is very positive it may also very well reflect the fact that few Swedish students are encouraged to work on China at the undergraduate and master level or are encouraged or able to do a Ph.D. on China.

There have been some attempts to establish larger research environments in the form of centres or networks over the years. Already in 1983 the Centre for East Asian and Pacific Studies (CEPAS) was established at Stockholm and at its height had several scholars working on the region, including at least one on China. The Centre published working papers and organising many events but was eventually closed. In 2010, the social science faculty at Stockholm University established a network, the Forum for Asian Studies, which works to strengthen research on Asia at the university, organises seminars and conferences as well as give minor grants and travel grants, although none work on China (https://www.asianstudies.su.se/about-us ). In Stockholm there is also the Stockholm China Economic Research Institute (SCERI) at the Stockholm School of Economics, which having been initiated in 2006 took its current name in 2013. It receives funding from Ericsson but has only one permanent staff working on China. The institute organises conferences and host guest scholars.

The largest existing centre that both conducts teaching and research is the Centre for East and South-East Asia Studies established in 1996 at Lund University with special government funding. It builds on previous work on the region at the university. The organizational set-up of the Centre at first prevented any permanent staff apart from the director and administrative staff. The Centre could therefore at first only recruit postdoctoral fellows but in 2012 its directives changed and permanent positions became possible. The Centre has a masters programme in Asian studies but a Ph.D. programme was not allowed as the Centre organisational was
placed outside of the faculties (only faculties can run Ph.D. programmes at Lund University). This has prevented the Centre from more actively advancing China (and East and South-East Asian) studies at Lund University. By 2019, the Centre, like all other interdisciplinary centres at Lund University, will have been organizationally moved to a faculty. This move, although not based on more thorough discussions and considerations, will enable the Centre to finally develop its own Ph.D. programme. The Centre currently has three permanent positions on China, whereas one researcher and one postdoctoral scholar also currently work on contemporary China.

In 2001, the Swedish School of Advanced Asia Pacific Studies (SSAAPS) was set up and jointly funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond and STINT with the intention to further Asian Studies at Swedish universities. It involved scholarships for Ph.D. students, travel grants, funding for workshops and conferences, and later also postdoctoral fellowships. Of the nine Ph.D. positions (partly funded by SSAAPS) two focused on China and of the six postdoctoral fellowships four went to scholars focusing on China (Geschwind 2008). In terms of research funding the Swedish Research Council has on a number of occasions announced special funding for collaborative research with China, in 2013 together with FAS and Formas that also included social sciences (although no project in that area got funding in the end), and later also in collaboration with Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC). STINT has also on several occasions, most recently in 2018, provided funding for research collaboration in the natural sciences with Chinese universities.

Apart from universities, a range of other institutions including SIPRI, the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP), and the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) also conduct research on various aspects of China’s foreign policy and defence issues. In addition, Stockholm China Forum is a transnational platform for European, Chinese, and American policymakers and academics to discuss various strategic policy issues. It is funded by the Swedish Foreign Ministry and the German Marshall Fund of the US (http://www.gmfus.org/forum/stockholm-china-forum).

**Conclusion: Needs and challenges for China research in Sweden**

It is instructive to note that quite a lot of the research on China in Sweden remains concentrated in language departments, including the only specific Ph.D. programmes, in contrast to developments in many other countries in Europe. There exists no China centres or other forms of cross-faculty institutions in Sweden trying to promote closer collaboration among China scholars across the disciplines similar to the Asian Dynamics Initiative at the University of Copenhagen. Although the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies at Lund University is interdisciplinary in character it has until 2019 been outside of the faculties. Scholars working on China at other departments, although growing, are quite few and scattered which prevent the establishing of larger research projects and environments. Furthermore, language departments by and large are not as well equipped or interested in addressing social and political issues (with some exceptions in terms of recent Ph.D. and recruitments). It is disappointing to note that 20 years after a major government report on the Future with Asia, very few Ph.D. theses focusing on China have been produced in Sweden. Swedish universities have not really fulfilled the expectation that China studies would become more embedded within the disciplines that was envisioned by the SSAAPS initiative.

One of the reasons behind the low number of Ph.D. students working on China is the lack of senior scholars with expertise within the disciplines. In contrast with
Denmark (Asian Dynamics Initiative) and most European countries, disciplines and universities in Sweden are quite adverse to make recruitment with an area focus, such as setting up chairs on Chinese politics or other similarly specialised chairs. The only such recruitment was a Gad Rausing Professor of International Economics with a special focus on China established with an external grant in 2004 at the School of Economics at Lund University. Initiatives such as the Asia Dynamics and the Sino-Danish Centre, for example, would be difficult to imagine in Sweden at the moment. Another more general problem is of course the low number of Ph.D. students across disciplines and universities in Sweden with the exception of some fields within the natural sciences and medicine. With the move to the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies to the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology in 2019 it will be possible to develop a Ph.D. programme in area studies but it is not likely that it will be a large environment due to the general funding situation. The reluctance of Swedish universities to make targeted investments in China studies is one strong impediment to strengthening research on contemporary Chinese society. Sweden also differs from the UK, where donations from alumni have been instrumental for some recent initiatives and establishment of China centres, and from Germany, were many more funding agencies are active. In France, there has on the other hand been a strong government involvement as exemplified with the establishment of CEFC.

It is also noteworthy that since SSAAPS, the major funding agencies such as the Swedish Research Council, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, and STINT, have been more willing and interested in providing special funds for collaboration with China in the field of natural sciences rather than supporting research within the social sciences. This being said however, several individual research projects on China have been awarded in the general competition for research grants.

There does not at the moment seem to be any visions or forthcoming initiatives either at the government level, at individual universities or among the major research foundations, which would be much needed in order for Sweden to provide high quality research on China. There is a growing need for research on contemporary Chinese society at Swedish universities and Sweden is unfortunately today lagging behind many other countries in Europe in this respect.

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