



COLD CRISIS

Academic freedom and
interference in China
studies in the UK

August 2025



英透 UK-CHINA
中视 TRANSPARENCY

About UK-China Transparency

UK-China Transparency (UKCT) was founded on the premise that the public deserve more and better information about ties between the UK and China, and that transparency should be a key pillar of our engagement with the country.

The UK and China have a wide-ranging relationship in trade, industry, education, and politics. Connections have grown steadily deeper in the last twenty years, especially since the governments of both countries heralded a ‘golden era’ of relations in 2015. China is now the UK’s fourth largest economic partner.

UKCT aims to fill a vital gap in knowledge about ties between Chinese and British educational and research institutions, companies, NGOs, political groups and government bodies.

We will do so by conducting research on key case studies, curating a unique library of primary sources, running public events and outreach initiatives, championing freedom of information, and providing informational support to those in need of it.

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“COLD CRISIS – ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND INTERFERENCE IN CHINA STUDIES IN THE UK”

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Executive summary

The study of China in the UK is in crisis. The field is subject to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) repression and harassment, undermining academic freedom and the safety of staff and students, especially those of Chinese nationality. For Chinese nationals, surveillance is so entrenched that it appears the situation in China itself has been partially replicated in the UK.

There is strong evidence that CCP influence is a source of systemic distortion for the study of China in the UK, shaping careers and disincentivising certain research and other activity that might be negatively received by the CCP. This distortion is likely to have a downstream effect on the knowledge and advice supplied to government, the press, the public, think-tanks and business.

This report presents evidence that, in some cases, university administrators and management are actively involved in the repression of academic freedom, reinforcing the distortion. This appears to be motivated by financial dependencies on Chinese student fees. The crisis is uneven, however, and some institutions appear largely unaffected or to be offering proper support to China studies practitioners. Of the scholars surveyed, 38% agreed that university administrators’ concern about relations with the Chinese government have made it “more difficult to study or conduct original investigative research on sensitive issues”; but 46% stated that this was not the case.

Much work remains to be done to improve support and protections for scholars. Universities must adapt to new legislation such as the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which strengthens the requirement for universities to protect academic freedom. And they must consider the consequences of the National Security Act 2023, which criminalises cooperation with foreign intelligence agencies and may result in criminal sanctions for those involved in campus surveillance and harassment.

UK-China Transparency (UKCT) conducted the largest ever survey of UK-based China studies academics on these issues. This voluntary anonymous survey was conducted as part of UKCT’s

research into CCP-related activity on campus. The survey itself consisted of 19 questions, and was filled in by 50 respondents, submitting more than 17,000 words of text. These detailed and often thoughtful submissions included testimony of troubling phenomena, including the following:

- Strategic denial by Chinese authorities of visas to scholars involved in sensitive research, disincentivising such research.
- Academics’ family members in China being threatened, warned or harassed by CCP authorities because of their work in the UK.
- Various forms of serious harassment towards academics in the UK, including a campaign of digital harassment against one academic, and a visiting scholar from China telling another, “We’re watching you”.
- China studies students of Chinese nationality confiding in academics that CCP officials ask them to spy on their fellow students.
- Claims that Chinese Student and Scholars Associations (groups present at most UK universities and formally linked to the CCP) are vectors for surveillance and repression. There is growing evidence for this.
- China studies students of all nationalities telling academics that they are not comfortable speaking freely about issues the CCP is sensitive about in class or pursuing their interest in those issues moving forward.
- CCP officials threatening university administrators with reference to an academic’s work and the university’s financial dependence on China.
- University administrators passing on these threats via pressure on academics, sometimes with explicit reference to lucrative ties to China.
- Quasi-demotion by administrators of an academic deemed a threat to relations with the CCP.
- Denial of funding to research because it might upset the CCP.

- Cancellation of a recent sensitive research project following pressure on administrators by the CCP.
- CCP officials being allowed to visit China studies classes and offices being used by China studies academics.
- CCP officials being proactively given sensitive information about China studies academics by university administrators.
- CCP intermediaries such as local Chinese groups harassing students in the UK.

Introduction

Concerns about Chinese Communist Party (CCP) influence and interference in British universities have in the past six years or so become more widespread. The diplomatic dispute between the UK and China over Hong Kong, the outcry against ethnic cleansing in Xinjiang, the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of Chinese technology companies, and other factors have combined to fuel these concerns and shape the broader political, academic and media environment in which these concerns are articulated and debated.

The issues facing universities can be divided into two categories: first, those relating to science and technology; and second, those relating to the humanities. These categories are, of course, interlinked. For example, Chinese nationals and/or those with family in China are involved both in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) and in the humanities. It is these 160,000-odd individuals who are broadly understood to be most at risk of being intimidated or coercively instrumentalised by the CCP.¹ Both categories of activity, moreover, share their home in the institution of the university, and may both be affected by universities’ financial dependencies, albeit in different ways. UK-China Transparency (UKCT) has devoted significant energy to the study of UK-China ties as they relate to both of these categories. The present report focuses on the humanities and on the study of China in particular.

CCP influence over and interference in the study of China abroad has long been a subject of discussion within the field itself. However, there has been little granular primary research on the issue in the UK. In 2021, the British Association for Chinese Studies (BACS) published a report on the impact of Hong Kong’s National Security Law for China studies in the UK, which involved more than 25 interviews.² In 2020, an important paper was

published which analysed proprietary data from 562 responses from scholars in North America, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong, including 37 from the UK.³ The data focused on respondents’ own personal experience of various forms of repression, such as scholars having difficulty obtaining a visa, being denied access to archives in China, or being pressured to cooperate with authorities whilst in China.

As the regime in control of an authoritarian one-party state, the CCP treats academic disciplines such as economics, history, politics and sociology as potential vectors of opposition or criticism which could be a threat to regime stability. The CCP has always imposed severe restrictions (albeit differently severe at different times) on academic freedom and freedom of speech within higher education inside China. During the last twenty years, the surge in the numbers of Chinese nationals engaged in academic study or work abroad has incentivised the widened internationalisation of the CCP’s domestic apparatus for repression. This transnational repression is also motivated by broader strategic and diplomatic considerations, to the extent that disincentivising Chinese nationals from undertaking anti-CCP activity abroad is seen as a way of protecting the CCP’s and China’s international image and preventing the emergence of exile dissident movements.

For scholars who are not Chinese nationals, a comparable but distinct set of pressures has long existed and the reasoning behind them is similar. The CCP has a long record denying visas to scholars perceived as hostile, and harassing scholars conducting field research within China and their associates. The extent to which this system of academic repression as it affects those without Chinese nationality has been affected by the internationalisation of higher education – and, in the UK context, by serious financial dependency

upon Chinese student fees – has until now remained relatively understudied.

In recent years, the CCP’s efforts to shape academic discourse and effect transnational academic repression have been given political impetus by Xi Jinping, during whose early tenure as China’s paramount leader “A Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere”, also known as “Document Number 9”, was circulated.⁴ According to this document, the CCP should class “the ideological situation as a complicated, intense struggle”. The document singled out the promotion of constitutional democracy, of universal values, of civil society, of neoliberalism, of journalism, of “historical nihilism”, including in academia, and of “questioning” the CCP’s socialist credentials as “false ideological trends, positions, and activities” to be crushed. The document called for CCP cadres to “strengthen management of the ideological battlefield”.

This increased paranoia and assertiveness, along with the factors mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, have solicited a delayed response from Western governments, including that of the UK. In 2023, Parliament’s Intelligence and Security

Committee published a report on China. In it, the Committee warned that the CCP posed a “‘whole-of-state’ threat” to the UK, and that attempts to influence and interfere with academia were a part of this. “Academia” made up one of the report’s three case studies. The report stated that “The UK’s academic institutions provide a rich feeding ground for China to achieve both political influence and economic advantage by... controlling the narrative of debate about China within UK universities by exerting influence over institutions, individual UK academics and Chinese students...” The UK has responded in various ways, including with legislation such as the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, and with bureaucratic reorganisation, and the introduction of new teams and workflows within government. These measures are not explored exhaustively here.

In this context, a new survey on academic freedom in China studies in the UK seemed overdue. UKCT’s study commenced in autumn 2024 and sought to probe UK-based China studies academics’ understandings, perceptions, and experiences of the state of academic freedom in their field, and of CCP influence, harassment and repression.

¹ See <https://ukctransparency.org/projects-2/ccp-on-campus/> for this estimated figure.
² <https://bacsuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/BACS-HK-SSL-report-HoffmanS.pdf>.
³ Greitens SC, Truex R, “Repressive Experiences among China Scholars: New Evidence from Survey Data”, *The China Quarterly*, 2020; 242: 349-375, doi:10.1017/S0305741019000365 / URL: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/china-quarterly/article/repressive-experiences-among-china-scholars-new-evidence-from-survey-data/C1CB08324457ED90199C274CDC153127>.

⁴ Context and a translation can be found here: <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>.

Methodology

Collection method

In September 2024, UK-China Transparency directly emailed 469 UK-based China studies scholars, using a list commissioned from a freelance researcher and reviewed by UKCT’s Director, Sam Dunning. The list was compiled using the publicly listed email addresses of scholars at the universities of Aberdeen, Birmingham, Cambridge, Cardiff, Central Lancashire, Chester, Durham, Exeter, Glasgow, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Northampton, Oxford, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Reading, St Andrews, Sheffield, Surrey, Swansea, Wales (Trinity St David), Warwick, Westminster, and York, along with the Birmingham City Institute of Creative Arts, City St George’s (University of London), King’s College London, Queen Mary University of London, the School of Oriental and African Studies, and University College London. The email sent by UKCT invited responses to a survey hosted on Google Forms from academics working at a UK university, or who had worked at a UK university within the past three years, along with advice about how to use a VPN to fill in the survey and guarantees about anonymity and confidentiality. A full text of the email sent to academics can be found in Appendix 1.

The email sent by UKCT was also intended to be sent to the British Association for China Studies’ (BACS) mailing list, which contains 1415 email addresses. However, instead, UKCT’s message was shared to the same list by a China studies scholar before UKCT could do so and without UKCT’s prior knowledge.

The forwarded message from UKCT was accompanied by the following message: “You may be interested in the survey below. While some may well have doubts about the origins or motives of the survey, I’m sharing the invitation because I believe it would be helpful to have as many responses as possible from UK China scholars in order to make the findings more genuinely representative of the evidence across the country.”

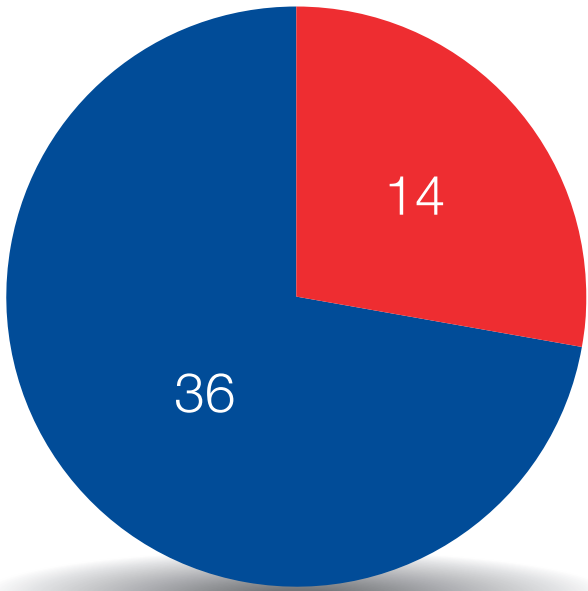
In March 2025, by which time UKCT had received 43 responses, UKCT emailed the BACS mailing list directly. A further 8 responses were subsequently received, including a second response from a scholar who had already responded, meaning there were 51 responses and 50 respondents overall. UKCT was able to interview this scholar and their responses were not counted twice for the purposes of the quantitative analysis (see below) conducted by UKCT. A further response was received in July 2025, too late to be included in the data, however, it informed the contents of this report.

Questions and interviews

The survey was anonymous, meaning that UKCT left it up to respondents whether to share their names or email addresses. Of the 50 respondents, only 14 gave their names and email addresses with UKCT. None gave initial blanket permission for UKCT to share their details in this report. It is apparent that many China studies academics have reservations about publicly sharing their views on academic freedom in the field. One scholar who responded to the survey stated explicitly their hesitancy to complete it, suggesting others might be unwilling to do so because of security concerns. Many responses implied something similar. This is concerning in itself.

The survey consisted of 18 direct questions and one general question asking “Is there anything else you’d like to tell us?” A full list of the questions is contained in Appendix 2. The questions sought to situate the responding scholar in terms of the self-reported sensitivity of their research, to probe perceptions of the visa issue and of issues experienced by scholars conducting sensitive research, pressure and support from university administrators and management, exchanges with Chinese officials and scholars, matters connected to Chinese nationals in the student body including special teaching issues and fear of the authorities, direct threats or warnings and other harassment from CCP cadres and Chinese officials, and awareness of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

Limitations and issues



- Respondents unwilling to share name
- Respondents willing to share name

The major limitation to UKCT’s data gathering was the small number of people (14 of 50) who gave their names, and of these the smaller number of people (4 of 14) with whom UKCT was able to conduct an interview about their responses. In the latter case, this was largely due to the short time that UKCT had in the summer of 2025 to interview respondents, itself a function of human resource constraints at UKCT, a charitable research organisation run on a shoestring budget with (at the time of writing) two staff. Whilst UKCT was able to rely for contextual understanding on far more numerous informal interviews and conversations conducted with academics – including respondents – over the course of the past two years, this paucity of interviews represents a weakness for the survey, albeit one

mitigated by the quality, quantity and length of the responses themselves.

Some respondents took issue with the nature of the questions asked by UKCT, suggesting that questions with a format such as ‘have you been affected by or do you know anyone affected by...’ (for example, questions b and f) would encourage the presentation of rumours as evidence of CCP interference, or otherwise fail to gather proper evidence or fuel speculation. This criticism is partially valid. However, any presumption that UKCT would elide the two categories of response was mistaken: where a question took this format, UKCT classified responses as either ‘I have been affected by...’ or ‘I know someone affected by...’ in its quantitative analysis and quantitative data presentation (see later section).

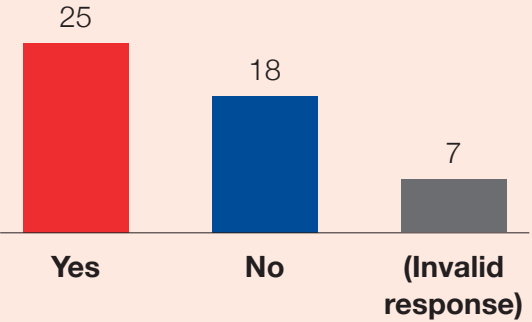
Those studying the repression of scholars and scholarship by the CCP – and indeed the nature of authoritarian totalitarian systems of repression in general – tend to concur that such systems rely for their effectiveness upon the perceived ambiguity and lack of clarity of whatever rules or norms forbid certain forms of speech and action and the uneven and arbitrary way in which these rules and norms are enforced. Only one or a handful of scholars need be made an example of *pour encourager les autres*. Indeed, the resulting self-censorship has been the subject of much handwringing, sometimes rather confused, in the field of China studies.⁵ Several responses to UKCT’s survey explained and/or referenced the importance of this dynamic. The inclusion of ‘...or do you know anyone affected by...’ clauses was a deliberate attempt to gauge how repression is perceived by the friends, colleagues and associates of its direct victims precisely because this is an important aspect of the effectiveness of the system of repression. These perceptions are the motor of fear and self-censorship and UKCT was determined to probe them.

⁵ See, for example, Brown K, China and self-censorship, in Natzler, M, UK Universities and China, *The Higher Education Policy Institute Report* 132, 2020, doi:10.1017/S0305741019000365 / URL: https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/UK-Universities-and-China_HEPI-Report-132_FINAL.pdf.

Findings

Sensitive research

Question a: Do you do produce public research on issues that are deemed highly sensitive by the PRC government/CCP, such as human rights, the politics of ethnicity in Xinjiang or Tibet, political corruption, or CCP/PRC espionage and interference in other countries? If so, please state what the topic is/topics are and whether you use original primary sources or investigative methods to conduct this research.



Response	Count
Yes	25
No	18
(Invalid response)	7

The survey’s first question (question a) asked, “Do you produce public research on issues that are deemed highly sensitive by the PRC government/ CCP, such as human rights, the politics of ethnicity in Xinjiang or Tibet, political corruption, or CCP/ PRC espionage and interference in other countries?” This was an important framing question for the rest of the survey: 7 out of 18 subsequent questions (c, d, e, h, j, l) referred to ‘sensitive’ topics; and knowing whether a respondent considered their work sensitive or not provided important context for their other answers. (Henceforth, references to ‘sensitive research’ should be understood with reference to the survey’s first question.)

Half of respondents said that they did produce such sensitive research, although the set of topics mentioned was highly varied and it was apparent that respondents were involved in research of different levels of sensitivity.

Several respondents pointed out that it is difficult to define precisely which issues are sensitive and what kind of engagement with them will provoke

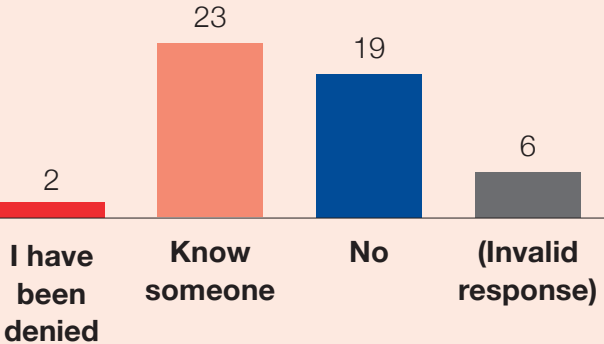
a response, that the standards of sensitivity are ambiguous and change over time and that this is part of the dynamic of repression. As Professor Gregory Lee put it in his response, “The effectiveness of censorship is not making explicit the criteria for its imposition.”

One response to the survey’s final question argued that discussion of Taiwan affairs was perhaps the subject of greater CCP repression than the discussion of affairs in mainland China – this may or may not be true and is a thesis that would merit further research. This observation nonetheless highlights UKCT’s omission of mention of Taiwan in question a. However, several responses referenced Taiwan and the sensitivity of Taiwan affairs is well appreciated, suggesting that this omission unsurprisingly did not stop respondents mentally flagging Taiwan as a sensitive subject.

Another response to this first question included a statement to the effect that the scholar responding had chosen not to conduct sensitive research because they wished to visit China: an immediate concrete example of the kinds of systematic disincentivisation explored further in the next section.

The visa issue and exchange with China

Question b: Are you or do you know a China studies academic who has been denied a visa to visit China? Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate, giving an indication of how widespread this is, if possible.



Response	Count
I have been denied	2
Know someone	23
No	19
(Invalid response)	6

Question c: Based on your knowledge and experience, does a history of researching, teaching or speaking publicly on highly sensitive issues make it difficult for China studies practitioners to get a visa to visit China? Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate.



Response	Count
Yes	29
Don't know	6
No	6
(Invalid response)	9

There was a consensus that studying sensitive topics could make it difficult for scholars to visit China. Question b asked, “Are you or do you know a China studies academic who has been denied a visa to visit China?” 2 respondents (4%) said that they had been denied a visa, and 46% said they knew someone who had been, whereas 38% answered ‘no’. Establishing how common visa denial is was one of many questions about repression in (and, indeed, on the way into) China in the 2020 *China Quarterly* study of academic repression in China studies, which remains a stronger source of evidence for in-China repression than the present survey. That study found that, of 562 respondents, roughly 1% said they had been denied a visa, whereas nearly 5% reported difficulty obtaining a visa.⁶ As in that study, in the present survey, it is likely that many of those who said they knew someone denied a visa were thinking of the same person. This form of repression is uncommon but important because of its chilling effect.

Question c probed this dynamic, asking, “Based on your knowledge and experience, does a history of researching, teaching or speaking publicly on highly sensitive issues make it difficult for China studies

practitioners to get a visa to visit China?” 58% of respondents agreed that such activity added to visa difficulties, versus 12% who stated that this was not the case. Scholars also reported experiences and perspectives such as the following:

- Their own deliberate self-censorship in order to continue to be able to visit China. In two cases, a distinction was drawn between self-censorship in research and self-censorship in public statements, for example on social media, the implication being that different levels and kinds of publicity generated different kind of exclusion risks.
- The argument that visa denial is more of a fear for young scholars without an established reputation.
- Repeated reference to the chilling effect of the arbitrary detention of Canadian citizens Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, which went on for nearly three years starting in 2018.
- Repeated references to scholars working on Xinjiang being denied visas, and reference to the sanctions imposed by China on three academics and a well-known German China research centre in 2021, which were widely reported.⁷
- Repeated reference to not feeling safe or comfortable visiting China today and therefore not having applied for visas recently.
- The argument that researchers who can visit China are under constant surveillance and all self-censor as a result – or they would lose their access.
- The argument that there are three categories of China studies scholar: those who are openly critical and banned from visiting China; those who self-censor and still have access; and those complicit in the CCP’s repression, with whose public statements the CCP does not take issue.
- Restrictions on accessing online materials outside of China have compounded the importance of the visa issue.

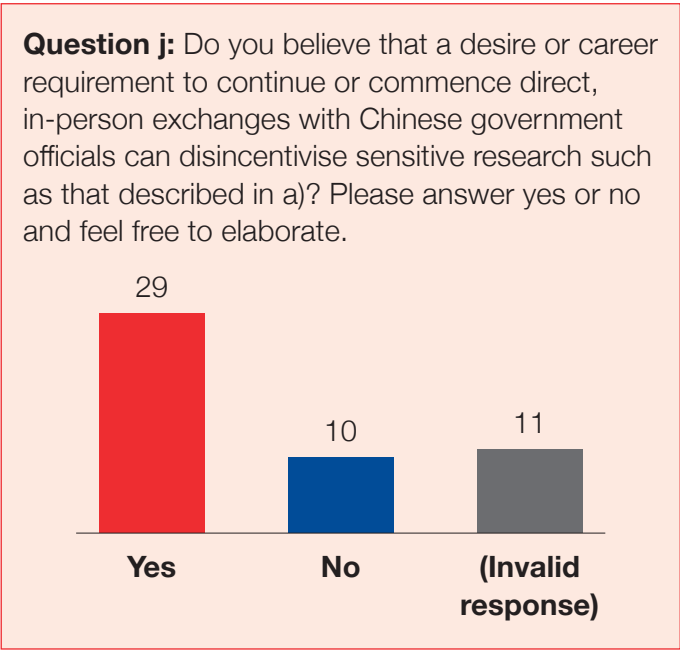
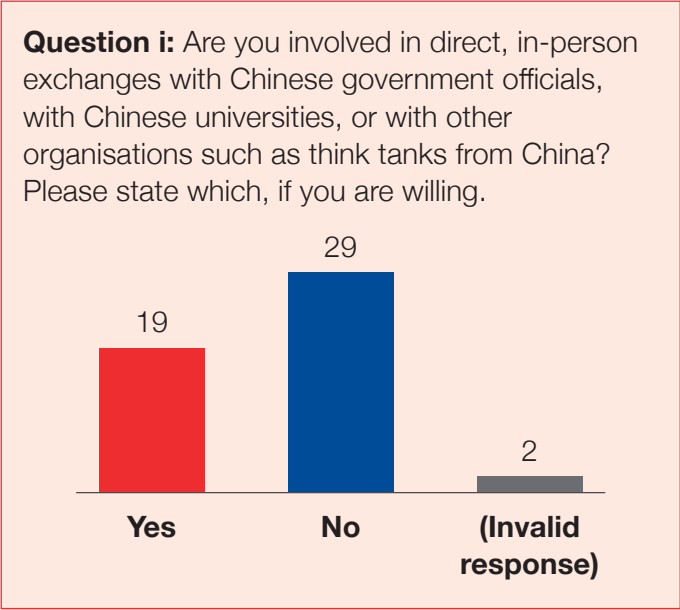
⁶ Greitens SC, Truex R. *op. cit.*
⁷ <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/2021/05/china-revoke-sanctions-on-international-scholars-and-respect-free-and-open-scholarly-inquiry/>.

The findings of this part of UKCT’s survey will not be viewed as novel or surprising within the field. They testify to the continuing difficulties and fears about access to China experienced by many scholars and suggest that the weaponisation of access by the Chinese authorities has had and continues to have a cumulative, multi-generational shaping effect on the UK’s China expertise.

This dynamic is longstanding yet remains changeable and ambiguous. Moreover, it is embattled and a source of division within the field. One respondent’s views on visa denial stood out: this scholar suggested that “China is eager to have potential critics visit”. In interview, this scholar clarified that there is a distinction between those conducting academic research that implies a criticism and those who promote such research publicly and aggressively, popularising and politicising it. It is a matter of record that scholars who have uncovered facts that cast the CCP in a very poor light do in some cases retain access to China, including sometimes high-level access.

The respondent in question also stated that “total disengagement with China has very negative consequences in the quality of our research. A Scholar of French studies would never think of disengaging from French academia or cease visiting France. You can’t honestly present yourself as a scholar of French Studies if you don’t engage with French people. The same goes for China.” This imparts an important truth. It echoes arguments made publicly by scholars who suggest that those without access to China are fundamentally less informed or knowledgeable.⁸ However, by blocking access to China to scholars viewed as hostile, the CCP seeks to undermine their credentials, disincentivise criticism by others, and thereby shape the discourse about China and its regime. Scholars who make assertive, public, blanket statements about the inferior knowledge or credentials of those who cannot visit China *without properly referencing this dynamic* certainly cause division within the field and arguably support the CCP’s distortive agenda. In the context of the weaponised denial of access by the CCP and the fears many scholars have about visiting, those in positions of considerable influence who make such blanket statements publicly would do well to reference the visa denial issue.

⁸ See, for example, <https://mailchi.mp/kcl/news-from-the-lau-china-institute-sept-6736647?e=1aa50c21ec>.



Questions i and j related to exchanges with China. In response to question i, 38% of respondents said they were involved in “direct, in-person exchanges with Chinese government officials, with Chinese universities, or with other organisations such as think tanks from China”; 58% were not, although a number of these described past exchanges, remote exchanges, informal links, or direct, in-person exchanges in the past; 4% gave an invalid response. Question j asked, “Do you believe that a desire or career requirement to continue or commence direct, in-person exchanges with Chinese government officials can disincentivise sensitive research [...]?”

58% of respondents thought so; whereas 20% thought not. 22% gave an invalid response.

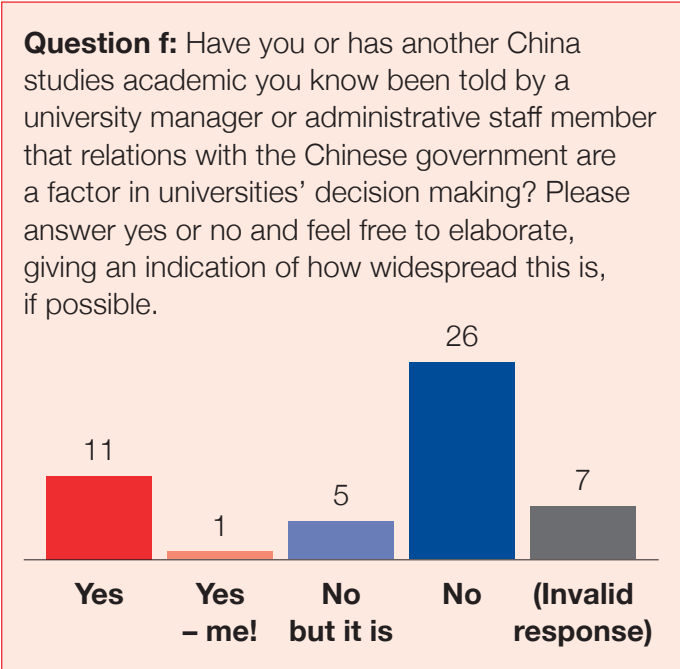
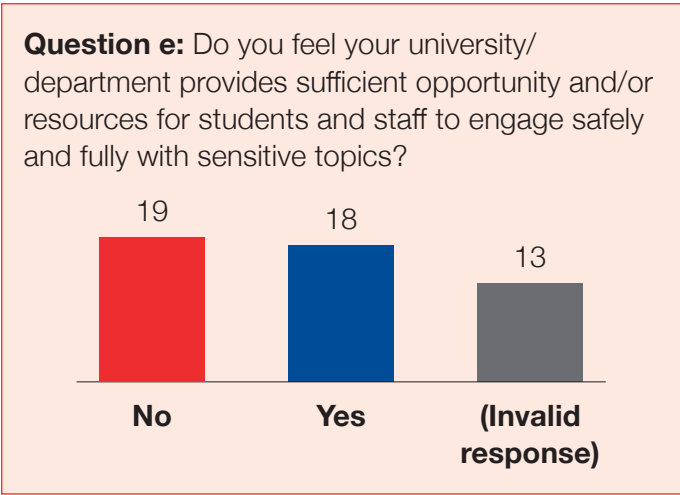
The responses to these questions did not shed much light on whether *requirements or pressures to conduct exchanges are common* in the field. Instead, responses focused on describing various forms of exchange, on espousing its worth in general, and on situating exchange as a form of access to China comparable and closely related to the visa issue. Some respondents took these two questions as an opportunity to repeat accounts of colleagues who censored themselves in order to maintain access to China, for example. One respondent said that their exchanges had stopped during COVID-19 and not recommenced. A number of responses highlighted the obvious benefits to exchange, whilst acknowledging the risks and ethical quandaries (in terms of potentially endangering Chinese academics in China) involved. One scholar argued that it was natural, given the CCP’s repressive system, that some foreign scholars are not involved in exchange because their work is deemed too sensitive, whereas other scholars are; and that this variety is healthy, given that in some cases Chinese partners need to be protected, whilst in others the risk is lower and the research can best be done properly within China.

The two questions on exchange were perhaps the least well-designed of all the questions in UKCT’s survey. Several respondents took issue with questions i and j, and specifically the fact that they did not differentiate exchanges with academics, which are normal, and those with officials, which are more unusual. On the other hand, one respondent pointed out that exchange with Chinese officials is typical for those in executive roles within universities. It is possible that the situation of China studies might present special barriers to practitioners in this field entering executive positions. Further research into the various forms of exchange, the pressures to conduct it, the decline or revival of exchange in the post-COVID era, its advantages, pitfalls, etc. would be welcome.

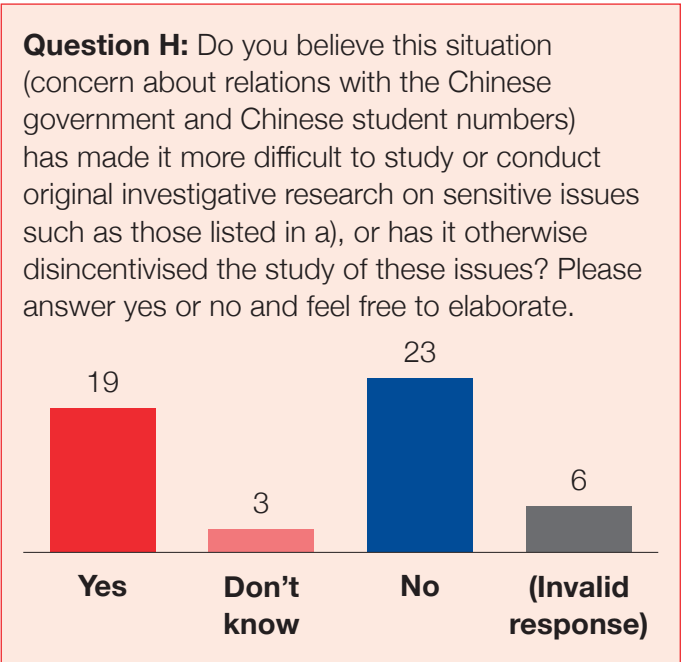
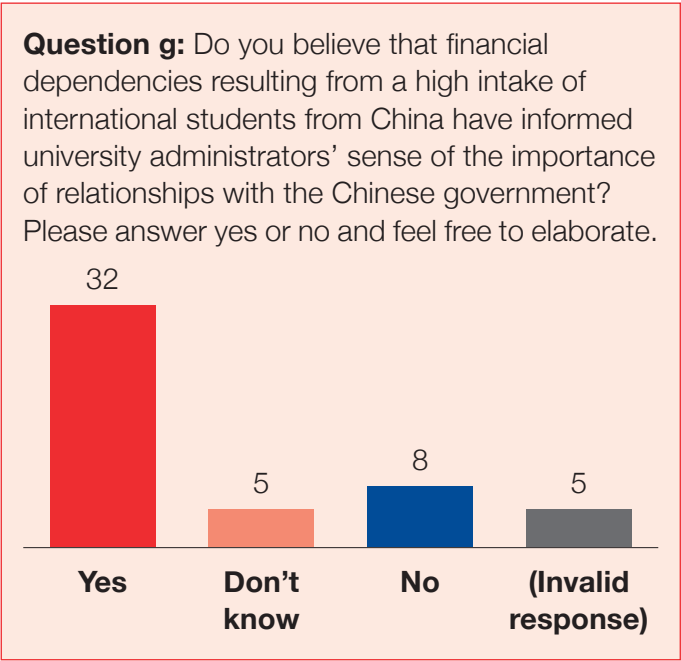
Higher education institutions, complicity in repression, funding and support

Whereas the visa issue and the question of exchange relate mostly to repression in China, later questions

dealt with conditions in the UK specifically. In response to question d, 28% said that they thought a history of engaging with sensitive topics makes it “more difficult for a China studies practitioner to obtain promotions, invitations to important events, or grant funding”; versus 34% who felt that this was not the case. A large proportion (38%) of respondents said they did not know or otherwise demurred in their response to this question – more than demurred in response to most other questions. This may well be related to testimony respondents gave as to the opacity of funding processes, HR decisions and so on in general (see below).



Question e then asked whether respondents felt their “university/department provides sufficient opportunity and/or resources for students and staff to engage safely and fully with sensitive topics”. 38% stated that



their university/department was not offering sufficient opportunity; 36% stated that it was. A relatively high proportion, 26%, demurred, giving what UKCT classed as an invalid response. Three further questions (f and g) sought to probe perceptions of financial dependencies on Chinese student fees, the incentives of university administrators/management, and whether there was any discernible effect on China studies. 64% of respondents thought that “financial dependencies resulting from a high intake of international students from China have informed university administrators’ sense of the importance of relationships with the Chinese government” (question g), versus 16% who felt that this was not the case.

Question f asked, “Have you or has another China studies academic you know been told by a university manager or administrative staff member that relations with the Chinese government are a factor in universities’ decision making?” 22% of scholars responded in the affirmative, with 10% stating that they knew Chinese government relations were a factor though this had not been spelt out to them or someone they knew. 52% of respondents answered in the negative without this caveat. Crucially, however, there was not a clear consensus that universities’ concern for relationships with the Chinese government translated into influence on academic freedom vis a vis sensitive subjects: 38% agreed that university administrators’ concern about relations with the Chinese government have made it “more difficult to study or conduct original investigative research on sensitive issues” (question h); but 46% stated that this was not the case.

Taken together, these responses suggest that most China studies scholars sense that university administrators are conscious of financial dependencies tied to relations with the Chinese government, and a significant minority of scholars have been told as much, whilst more than a third think that these dependencies have made conditions worse for sensitive research – the same proportion as feel their university is not doing enough to support engagement with sensitive topics. A plurality of scholars stated that universities have not been influenced in this way.

This data is concerning but must be related to the qualitative content of scholars’ responses. Respondents used questions c to h as an opportunity to share specific issues or perspectives. One highlighted the problems that ethics reviews pose for China studies practitioners, suggesting such reviews make conducting sensitive research more onerous. This sentiment was echoed by other scholars in their response to other questions, with one suggesting ethics review processes were not suited to fieldwork in China. Another argued that the opacity of grant funding regimes makes it difficult to know whether China-related sensitivity has fed into decisions. Another described evidence that they been denied grant funding because their application contained language critical of the CCP, and that funding bodies did not have a good enough understanding of problems specific to the field of China studies.

Some of these issues fade into general concerns about opaque funding and troublesome risk assessments – albeit these dynamics may be especially damaging in the field of China studies. In other cases, there was clearer testimony of CCP-related repression carried out by UK university staff. One respondent referenced faculty opposition to a sensitive event. One scholar gave an account (not a first-hand account) of a recent incident at a university other than their own, which saw a research project cancelled and its funding returned because of Chinese government pressure on university management.

One scholar, ‘X’ stated that they had been pressured to remove teaching elements that could offend nationalist Chinese students. X had also been asked by funders whether planned research would offend the Chinese government. X was aware that international student recruitment teams were kept informed about X’s funding applications and had received threats from the Chinese government in relation to X’s sensitive research.

Similarly, another respondent was effectively threatened by administrators, who told them that their activities should bear in mind financial dependencies relating to international student fees. Another respondent referenced reports about Professor Michelle Shipworth, a scholar at UCL who was barred from teaching her course because of complaints from nationalist Chinese students.⁹ One respondent stated that one colleague endured a quasi-demotion at the hands of administrators after complaining about Chinese police harassment of the family of a second colleague who had given a sensitive lecture.

Another suspected that middle managers were the source of pressure on academics, not executive leaders. Multiple respondents testified to the implicit nature of pressure from administrators. Multiple respondents testified as to mistaken or inflated assumptions about the severity of ramifications for a university of sensitive research – as if university management, by overestimating the risk, were not just transmitting but amplifying repressive forces originating in the CCP. In a response to questions

that merits consideration here, one scholar stated that there is a tendency to blame the CCP for academic freedom problems in China studies but that, in fact, whereas the impetus for repression comes from the Chinese state, it was actors on campus who effected repression. One scholar argued that, overall, the CCP has achieved what amounts to control over academic outputs in many cases.

It is important to relate these responses, which paint a very dark picture, to other parts of the testimony received. Several scholars were keen to emphasise that academic freedom was also comparably or even more limited for scholars studying other sensitive geopolitical topics such as those relating to Palestine. Four respondents pointed out that specialising in sensitive research or work critical of the CCP could in fact create opportunities for scholars in the West: and one scholar stated that in their career, focusing on a sensitive issue had led to opportunities. Relatedly, one scholar suggested that there was a risk in the current political climate that “a strongly anti-Chinese stance” could create “a stifling effect on those who wish to discuss nuance.”

Two scholars suggested that university administrators had become more conscientious and aware of CCP repression in recent years – a sentiment echoed by another in their response to a separate question – and one suggested that institutions which had long hosted a scholar conducting sensitive research had improved over time. One compared CCP influence to that of pharmaceutical and weapons companies and many raised the broader financial crisis in the higher education sector, with one going so far as to suggest that “all obstacles faced by China researchers in the UK are those faced by all academics in the UK. Too much bureaucracy, not enough research funding”. The first part of this statement represented something of an outlier in the context of UKCT’s survey. However, references to general funding and bureaucracy issues were widespread.

Taken together, the answers to questions d to h comprise strong evidence that universities’ financial dependencies are a vector for CCP influence and that this is affecting China studies in the UK, although not all institutions are affected and there is diversity

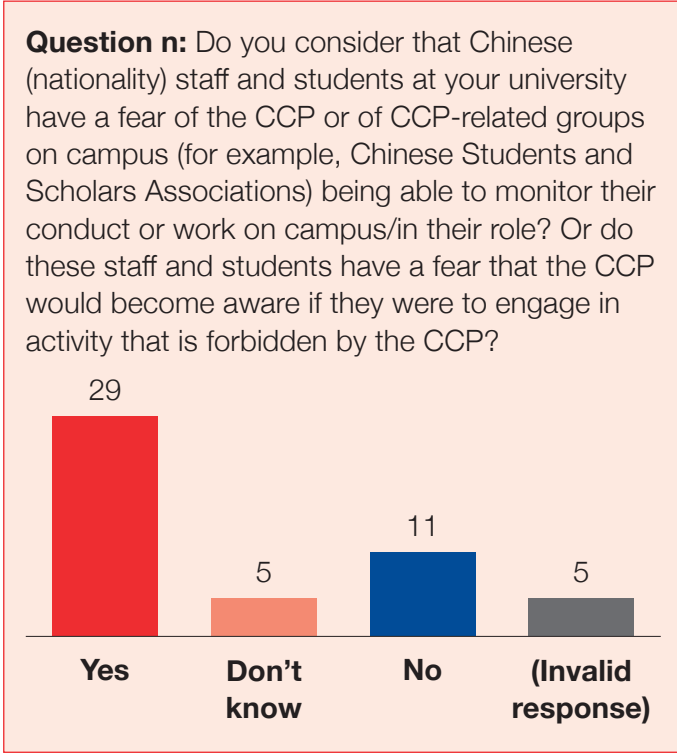
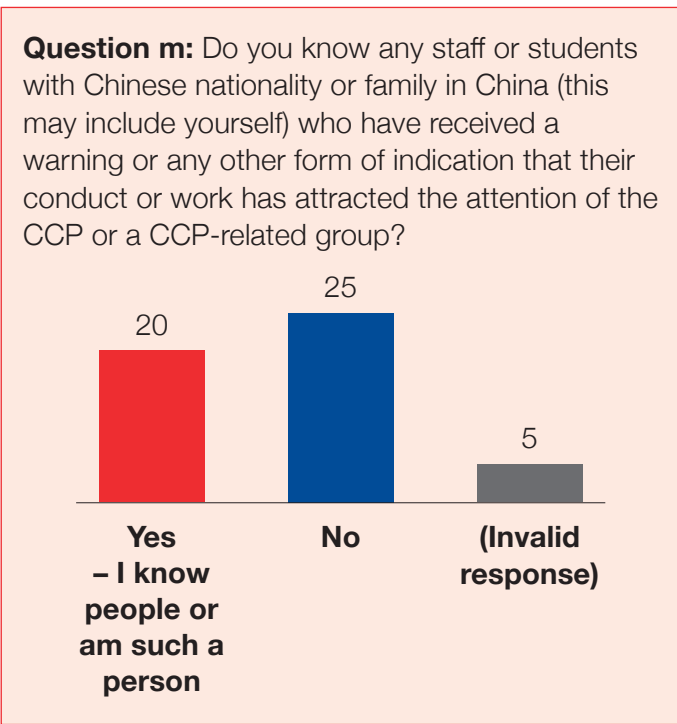
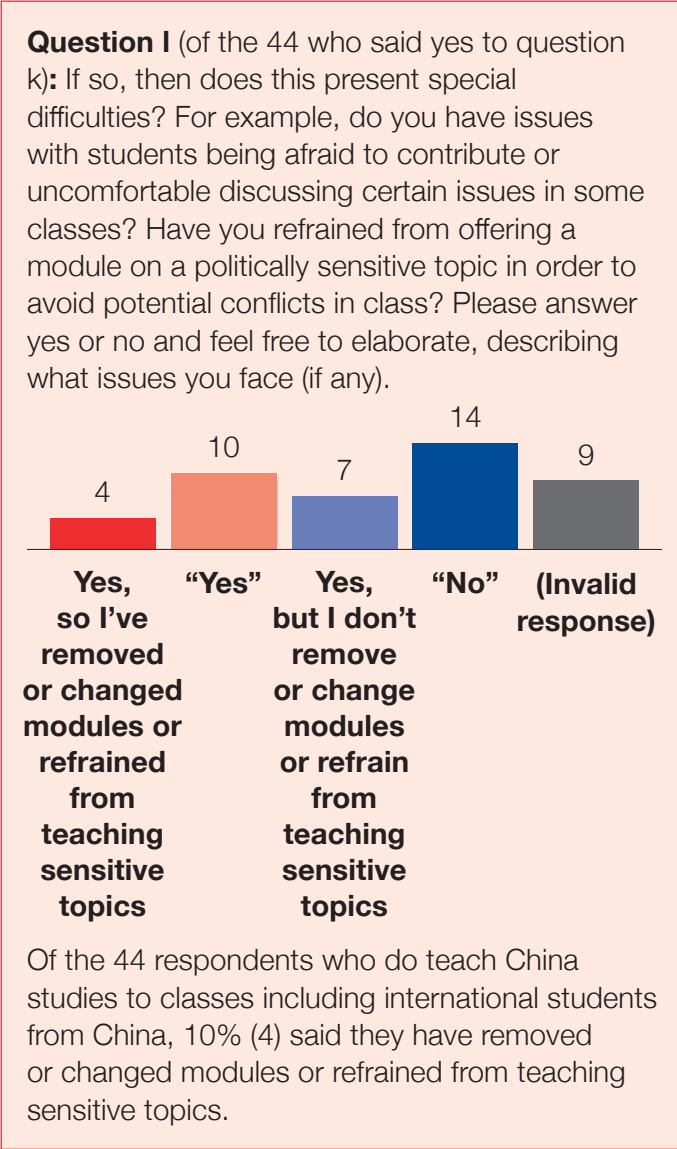
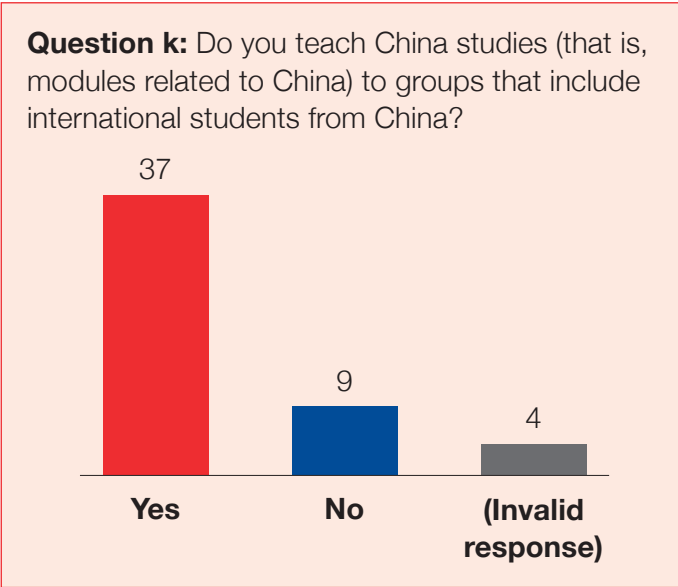
⁹ This incident was widely reported in UK media: <https://news.sky.com/story/ucl-professor-warns-academic-freedom-at-risk-as-module-removed-after-student-complaints-13091493>.

of experience across the field. As one scholar put it, “Sensitive topics are welcomed by some institutions but not others.”

Viewed as a system, however, the evidence from this survey suggests that CCP influence over universities is distorting China studies in the UK. This distortion is not limited to the longstanding visa issue and to access to China; instead, there is distortion taking place because of financial dependencies in UK higher education institutions, with repression involving UK higher education administrators as intermediaries in some cases. This is deeply concerning. The possibility regulatory jeopardy created by such conduct is discussed in the concluding section of this paper.

Students and staff of Chinese nationality involved in China studies

Questions k, l, m and n interrogated another aspect of internationalisation: the participation of large number of Chinese nationals as China studies students in the UK. Question k was the framing question, revealing that 74% of respondents “teach China studies (that is, modules related to China) to groups that include international students from China”, whereas only 18% of respondents do not. (8% gave an invalid response to this question). Question l asked, “If so, then does this present special difficulties? For example, do you have issues with students being afraid to contribute or uncomfortable discussing certain issues in some classes? Have you refrained from offering a



module on a politically sensitive topic in order to avoid potential conflicts in class?” To this, of the 37 respondents who said they do teach Chinese students, 4 (10.8%) said that they encountered special difficulties related to international students and that they had responded by altering modules or refraining from teaching sensitive topics. 10 (27%) answered simply ‘yes’ or words to that effect. 9 (24.3%) said that they had encountered special issues but not changed teaching content; and 13 (35.1%) said that they had not encountered special issues. Question m asked whether respondents knew anyone with Chinese nationality or family in China who had been received a warning from the CCP or some indication of attention from the CCP or a related group. 40% knew such a person, 50% did not. Question n asked respondents whether they thought Chinese nationality staff or students fear the CCP or related groups on campus in the UK being able to conduct surveillance on them in some way. 58% thought so, 10% responded that they didn’t know, and 22% thought not.

The detail of the responses adds further nuance to these findings. There was widespread reference to concern for Chinese students’ safety, and to

adaptions such as the imposition of Chatham House rules for classes or bans on recordings. One response to a later question argued that the issues were more severe for students from Hong Kong. There were two references to difficulties connected to the recording of classes. One respondent stated that their Chinese students had confided in him that they had been asked to spy on campus events by Chinese police. Another scholar stated that they were told by Chinese students that surveillance is omnipresent and students are interviewed by officials when they return to China. Another stated that they had heard of officials visiting classes, without offering real detail. Another scholar in response to a different question did offer substantial detail about a visit to an in-use faculty building by Chinese officials (further reference to this can be found below, in the section on the responses to question o and p.)

Three respondents singled out Chinese Student and Scholar Associations (CSSAs, a group of student societies within UK university student unions with formal links to the CCP)¹⁰ as surveillance vectors – recent research involving interviews of CSSA officers substantiates this claim.¹¹ As one of these three put it, “Chinese Students and Scholars Associations are probably the primary source of student spies on campus, with observable and constant connections with local consulates.”

Others attested to Chinese students asking to stay behind after class or arranging separate meetings with tutors to discuss sensitive questions, being less muted in class when they were the only Chinese student in the room, or becoming more muted when an unknown fellow Chinese national joined a group or discussion. One scholar referenced Chinese students dropping classes that they realise contain sensitive content. All of this reflects what one scholar summed up the situation as follows: “students from China are afraid of openly discussing sensitive topics due to their (healthy) fear of potential student spies in their classrooms. However, they are much more free when they come to my office time or are in a relatively small tutorial group with people they can trust.” This also

¹⁰ <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/studying-abroad-to-serve-china-research-on-the-systematic-threats-of-cssas-in-the-uk/>.
¹¹ See above (footnote 9) for some evidence, and, for the interviews, the following blog: <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/china-institute/2025/02/13/why-become-a-student-cadre-overseas/>.

points to the diversity in the student body, which was referenced in many responses: a distinction can be drawn between nationalist students, who may intimidate their fellows into silence and carry the threat of surveillance, informing or disruption, and dissident students who fear being reported and adapt their contributions in light of the company they find themselves in. One respondent suggested that students who are not Chinese nationals are disturbed by this atmosphere. In response to a later question this respondent stated that younger scholars are avoiding sensitive subjects. One respondent referenced a shift whereby, since COVID-19, students of the latter variety were becoming more numerous and outspoken. This may be connected to the ‘White Paper protests’ against China’s COVID-19 restrictions in 2022. Another respondent suggested that female students especially are increasingly inclined to be frustrated at the CCP’s repressive measures. Another highlighted the special sensitivities of Hong Kong students, especially during the democracy protests in that city in 2019.

Taken together, this data further substantiates the longstanding claim, which has received more mainstream attention recently,¹² that Chinese nationality students, including those involved in China studies, are subject to systematic surveillance and transnational repression in the UK. Their academic freedom is severely limited as a result. UKCT’s survey sheds new light on how the presence of Chinese nationality students may be affecting China studies teaching more broadly, including the education received by students of all nationalities – and the UK’s next generation of China experts. A minority of respondents stated that they are altering their teaching content because of special difficulties presented by Chinese nationality students. Moreover, there was reference to ways in which the presence of Chinese nationals enriches the experiences of other China studies students. Nonetheless, in a minority of cases, sensitive issues are being skirted in order to avoid the special difficulties teaching such students presents. This is a concerning phenomenon that must be carefully monitored, whilst more must be done to protect the academic freedom of Chinese nationality university members. There are also new regulatory and law enforcement problems related to the involvement of some Chinese students in

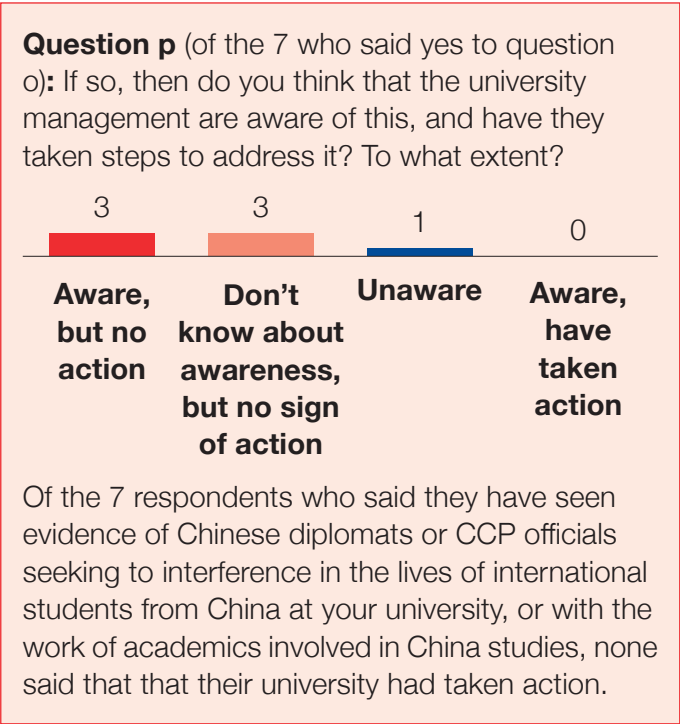
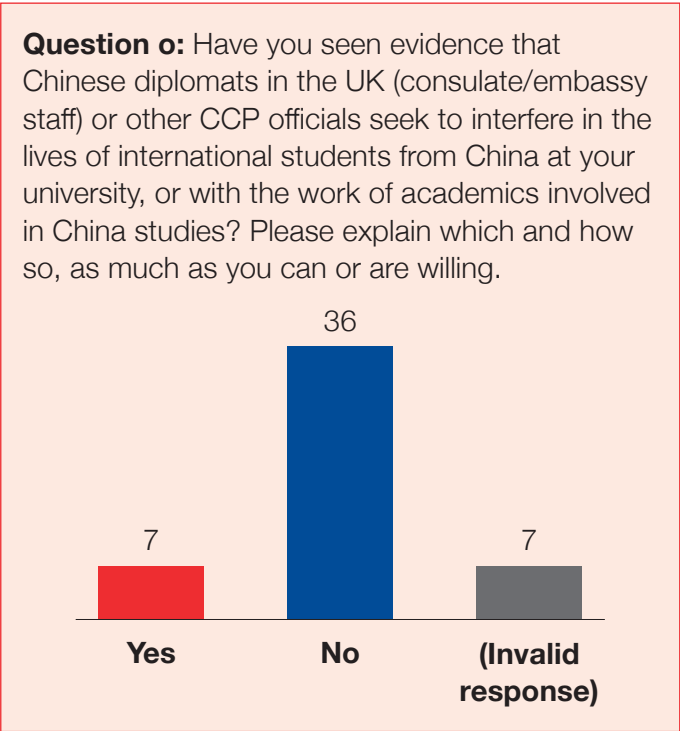
surveillance and repression, but these are addressed in the conclusion of this report.

No questions in the survey addressed issues relating to UK-based China studies staff of Chinese nationality alone, and this was a weakness of the survey. More research is required to understanding what systematic effect the presence of such staff might have on China studies in the UK, and what Chinese staff are facing. Several responses referenced the difficulties faced by such staff, and by staff with family in China, who face similar repression to Chinese nationality students. A couple of respondents implied in response to question l that they were changing their teaching content in the presence of Chinese nationality students because of fears about their own safety.

One response referenced Chinese nationality China studies staff being detained upon their return to China, and a couple described how such staff do not conduct sensitive research if they wish to return to China. Another referenced gentle pressure to avoid certain topics from Chinese academics in China. Many described their desire to protect Chinese collaborators, and several put this forward as one of the motives for self-censorship. On the other hand, one scholar stated that they felt a duty to conduct research Chinese colleagues in China could not conduct – precisely because they could not conduct it. Three responses, all to different questions, referenced Confucius Institute staff seconded from Chinese universities as a source of fear or intimidation: in one case, for the respondent themselves; in another case, for a colleague; and in the final case, for Chinese nationality students and staff generally.

Direct interference and harassment

Question o and p focused on direct interference by CCP officials in the UK. Question o asked, “Have you seen evidence that Chinese diplomats in the UK (consulate/embassy staff) or other CCP officials seek to interfere in the lives of international students from China at your university, or with the work of academics involved in China studies?” 14% of respondents answered that they had; 72% said they had not. In response to question p, of the 7 respondents who answered that they had, 3 stated that their university was aware but had taken no action, 3 said they did not know if the university was



aware but had seen no signs of action, and 1 said that the university was unaware. Not one said that the university was aware and had taken action.

This data should be handled with caution, because not all of those who had referred to what some might class as such direct interference in their answers to other questions answered yes to question o; and not all of those who answered yes to question o provided details of interference that could rightly be understood as direct and conducted by Chinese diplomats or

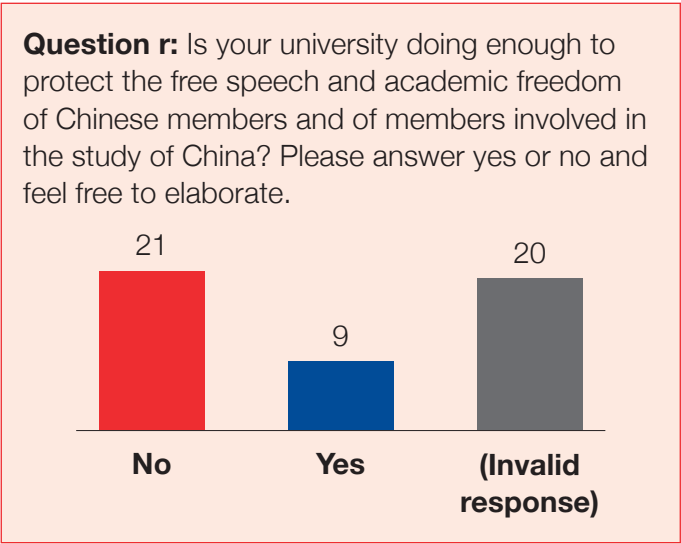
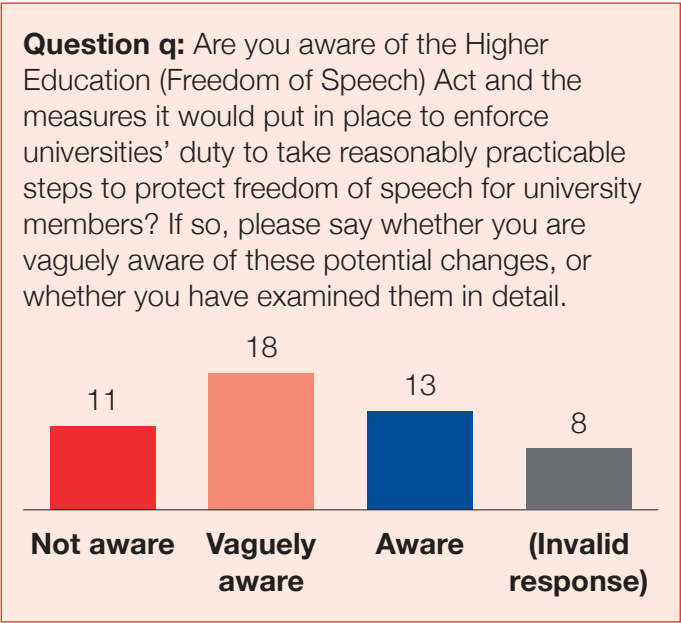
other CCP officials. This probably points the slightly non-specific nature of the term ‘interference’.

Examples of direct interference and harassment of individuals without Chinese nationality that were included in responses to other questions and are not mentioned above include one respondent who stated that their work on sensitive issues had led to a severe campaign of digital harassment. This person did not appear to know who the perpetrator was. Another scholar, Y, involved in sensitive research, described two incidents in detail to UKCT. One incident was ambiguous and involved an attempt by a roommate who was a Chinese national to enter Y’s room without permission when Y was absent. The second incident was a case of continued and definite harassment during which a visiting scholar from China whispered into Y’s ear, “We’re watching you”, at one event, and at another event began to shout and make a scene of interrogating Y about Y’s personal history. Y stepped down from teaching because they believed that such occurrences might continue.

Answers to questions o and p that described indirect interference, via intermediaries, again referenced CSSAs (in two cases). Two responses highlighted the role of groups of local ethnic Chinese businesspeople based near a UK university in the harassment of students in one case, and in the application of pressure upon universities in another – it was not clear that the two testimonies related to the same group of businesspeople. Another scholar stated that their Chinese nationality students had received messages from the Chinese embassy in London but did not feel compelled to respond; in one case, the student simply deleted the messages.

Nonetheless, some answers to questions o and p yielded further information about various forms of direct interference. One response highlighted a further instance of pressure to silence staff involved in sensitive research applied to university management by Chinese diplomats in the UK. Another scholar provided an account of staff at a Chinese consulate being given free rein to explore, unsupervised, a China studies faculty building that was in use by academics. This scholar, who conducts sensitive research, was told by a university staff member that this staff member was subsequently instructed to pass personal information on the scholar to a senior Chinese official. This information included a list compiled for internal purposes of the scholar’s “associates and research activities”.

¹² See for example, this report by Amnesty: https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_1182967_smxx.pdf.



Protecting academic freedom

Question q asked, “Are you aware of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act and the measures it would put in place to enforce universities’ duty to take reasonably practicable steps to protect freedom of speech for university members?” 22% of respondents said they were not aware; 36% said they were vaguely aware; 26% said they were aware; 16% gave an invalid response. Question r asked, “Is your university doing enough to protect the free speech and academic freedom of Chinese members

and of members involved in the study of China?” 42% said that their university was not; 18% said that it was; 40% gave an invalid response that could not be easily categorised.

This was the highest percentage of invalid responses of any question in the survey. Rather similar in content and in its high percentage of invalid responses was question e, asking “Do you feel your university/department provides sufficient opportunity and/or resources for students and staff to engage safely and fully with sensitive topics?” In that case, 26% gave an invalid response; 36% answered ‘yes’ or words to that effect; and 38% answered ‘no’ or words to that effect. Whilst the questions are different, it is not easy to offer a full explanation of the differences in the responses here, although the lack of focus and proportion of ‘don’t know’ answers amongst the invalid responses suggests a degree of survey fatigue. In addition, several responses classed as invalid wondered what exactly universities could do: it is not easy to imagine how universities could protect Chinese nationality members from the CCP, for example. A lack of ideas as to how to improve protections may explain the large proportion of ‘don’t know’ answers to question r, especially considering it followed question q, to which several scholars responded that they doubted the Act would achieve anything. The theory that question r solicited many invalid responses because respondents were not sure what they would suggest to ameliorate the situation is lent credence by the fact that several respondents took question r, although it did not ask for recommendations, as an opportunity to offer them.

Recommendations included greater education for Chinese nationals about rules forbidding informing; the provision of information for Chinese nationals on who to talk to if they experience or fear interference from the CCP; visa guarantees for students from China (though it was acknowledged this was not really viable); improved job security for China studies academics; and acknowledgement from universities that proactive measures are required to improve the situation.

Conclusion

Regulation and law enforcement

Several newly passed or activated pieces of legislation have altered the regulatory and legal environment in which universities must treat these issues. These are discussed briefly here.

➤ The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023: the act creates an enforceable requirement for English universities to take reasonably practicable steps to protect freedom of speech. Guidance (effective from 1st of August 2025) as to what this means recently published by the Office for Students (OfS), which has power to enforce the rules, effectively recommends the closure of Confucius Institutes and the termination of China Scholarship Council scheme arrangements.¹³ UKCT has submitted extensive information to the OfS about these schemes. Separate messaging from the OfS suggests it is “thinking about... [...] the co-ordination of responses to external threats” to academic freedom.¹⁴ UKCT notes that the CCP obviously constitutes such a threat. More specifically, the OfS’s guidance suggests that many of the concerning incidents and anecdotes related by respondents to UKCT’s survey would, were they to take place again or continue, expose universities to serious legal jeopardy or aggressive regulatory sanction. The OfS is also now administering a new condition of registration (of higher education institutions) relating to harassment, representing a step-up in the requirements made of universities to prevent and educate about harassment. Harassment emanating from or exploiting the system of CCP repression is not just in scope of this, but is in fact an important part of the harassment picture nationwide, considering the huge number of people (more than 150,000 students and staff with Chinese nationality) who are potentially vulnerable, especially at moments of tension in

Chinese politics, during which large numbers of people may be drawn into sensitive activity (this was seen in 2019 and 2022).¹⁵

➤ The National Security Act 2023: this act creates a new general foreign interference offence which can take several forms, some relevant to the kind of harassment discussed in this report. For example, it is now an offence for anyone to interfere “for or on behalf of a foreign power” in the exercise in the United Kingdom by another person of a Convention right, so long as the qualifying conduct also involves coercion or misrepresentation. In addition, there are other new offences relating to cooperation with a “foreign intelligence service”. For example, it is now an offence to intentionally assist such a service in carrying out UK-related activities. The exact ramifications and meaning of the act are subject to continuing legal discussion within the state, however, it is quite possible that on-campus harassment may be affected. Universities would do well to consider whether they now have an even more serious responsibility to inform members who are Chinese nationals of these changes. The act also creates a requirement for groups conducting political influence work on behalf of foreign powers to register such work. The government has published extensive guidance as to what this might mean for activities on campus.¹⁶

Next steps

It is hoped that the present report will prompt serious debate within the field of China studies, within university administrations, and within government. It is increasingly important that the UK foster a healthy and diverse China studies system. It is beyond doubt that the CCP is intent on and capable of interfering in that system, with deleterious effects for academic freedom, for the safety of staff and students, and

¹³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-24-guidance-related-to-freedom-of-speech/>.
¹⁴ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/update-on-freedom-of-speech-act/>.
¹⁵ <https://ukctransparency.org/projects-2/ccp-on-campus/>.
¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-influence-registration-scheme-guidance-for-academia-and-research>.

for the wider public interest. This survey presents strong evidence that CCP-linked repression has had and may continue to have a distortive effect on our China studies system, disincentivising sensitive yet critical research. New regulations and laws may go some way to improve the situation. However, top-down enforcement, whilst it may be necessary, will not be sufficient to address the problem. Collective awareness, the fostering of a healthy and frank culture of academic freedom, and grassroots

collaborative action are necessary also. It will be valuable for China studies practitioners to continue to build bridges with those facing similar issues in the study of other countries with authoritarian regimes, as embodied in the model code of conduct put together by a diverse group of scholars in 2022.¹⁷

UK-China Transparency will continue to study these questions and is open to collaboration from other parties with a sincere interest in exploring them.

¹⁷ Heathershaw, J., et al. (2022), “Model code of conduct: protection of academic freedom and the academic community in the context of the internationalisation of the UK HE sector”, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 26 (10), 1858–1865. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2022.2148977> URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642987.2022.2148977>.

Appendix 1 – survey email

Dear colleague,

UK-China Transparency is conducting an anonymous survey of academics involved in China studies in the UK. We would be most grateful if you would take part.

The aim of this exercise is to gather data on the state of academic freedom in the field. There are 19 questions. You can respond with as much or as little detail as you like to as many of the questions as you like. In order to take part in the survey, please fill in your answers using this Google form. It does not collect email addresses and does not require you to sign in to Google.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf840GEc_6tHZbWoD0fvSTSm9rNBkO3O3l3UL1VhT1CHlzDig/viewform?usp=sf_link

Please do not take part in this survey if you are not an academic working at a UK university, or who has worked at a UK university in the past three years.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the survey or your participation, please email **survey@ukctransparency.org**. We are also interested in conducting video, phone and in-person interviews. Again, if you are interested in taking part in such an interview, please email **survey@ukctransparency.org**.

If you are concerned about communicating digitally, you can send us a letter at 101 Sotheby Road, N5 2UT. We will treat any correspondence with the utmost confidentiality.

How will you protect my anonymity?

Our survey does not automatically collect email addresses and you do not need to sign in to Google to respond, meaning that you can fill it out without sharing your personal details with us. We would greatly appreciate it, however, if you choose voluntarily to share your email address and name with us, as this will allow us to communicate with you about your response and will reduce the risk of fake responses and unverifiable claims.

Whether or not you choose to share your name and email address, we will not publish your information without your consent, and will guard it carefully; nor will we quote your response or reveal any identifying details of it without your consent. We are only publishing details of individuals’ responses with their express consent, so if you are happy for your response to be used please either describe how within the Google form, or email **survey@ukctransparency.org** to discuss the issue with us.

We take privacy seriously and, naturally, comply with GDPR. All of our systems are protected by two- or three-factor authentication, and accessed using a Virtual Private Network (VPN). Completed survey answers will be transferred into a secure digital vault once the project is complete.

What will you do with the responses?

We will not directly quote from responses without your explicit and specific consent. Nor will we report, in a paraphrased form, any details of your response unless we have your explicit and specific consent to do so.

We will not treat merely filling out the survey or corresponding with us as a form of consent. We will seek explicit and specific consent for any details of your response that we might intend to publish.

Our overall purpose in conducting the survey is to use the results to produce a report on the survey and what it says about the state of academic freedom and personal safety in China studies in the UK. After the

report has been completed and published we will transfer the data collected through the survey process into a secure vault.

Who are we?

UK-China Transparency is a registered charity that conducts research on ties between the UK and China. We are regulated by the Charities Commission (our charity number is 1201902). See <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5203553/contact-information>.

You can find details about our work to date, funding, mission, personnel, etc, on our website – www.ukctransparency.org.

Why are we conducting a survey?

During the course of our work, we have investigated cases in which UK-based academics and students have faced severe consequences because of their speech or work regarding China. The topic of ‘CCP interference’, direct or indirect, in academic China studies in the UK has been raised in Parliament and in the media, however, there is little solid data about the phenomenon. That is what we would like to gather.

Additional privacy tips

Typically, Google itself will store the IP address of the device you use to fill in the survey. UK-China Transparency is not able to access this data. However, if you would like to protect your IP address from Google for the purposes of completing this survey, we suggest you complete the survey on a secure device other than your personal device, or download and use a VPN. Various kinds of free and easy-to-use VPN software are available online.

If you have any other questions, please email us at survey@ukctransparency.org.

Best wishes,

UK-China Transparency

Appendix 2 – survey questions

UK-China Transparency is conducting an anonymous survey of academics involved in China studies in the UK. We would be most grateful if you would take part. The aim of this exercise is to gather data on the state of academic freedom in the field. There are 19 questions, and you can respond with as much or as little detail as you like.

If you are willing, please provide your name and email address.

-
- a) Do you do produce public research on issues that are deemed highly sensitive by the PRC government/CCP, such as human rights, the politics of ethnicity in Xinjiang or Tibet, political corruption, or CCP/PRC espionage and interference in other countries?
If so, please state what the topic is/topics are and whether you use original primary sources or investigative methods to conduct this research.

b) Are you or do you know a China studies academic who has been denied a visa to visit China?
Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate, giving an indication of how widespread this is, if possible.

c) Based on your knowledge and experience, does a history of researching, teaching or speaking publicly on highly sensitive issues make it difficult for China studies practitioners to get a visa to visit China?
Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate.

d) Based on your knowledge and experience, does a history of researching, teaching or speaking publicly on sensitive issues such as those listed in a) make it more difficult for a China studies practitioner to obtain promotions, invitations to important events, or grant funding?
Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate.

e) Do you feel your university/department provides sufficient opportunity and/or resources for students and staff to engage safely and fully with sensitive topics?

f) Have you or has another China studies academic you know been told by a university manager or administrative staff member that relations with the Chinese government are a factor in universities’ decision making?
Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate, giving an indication of how widespread this is, if possible.

g) Do you believe that financial dependencies resulting from a high intake of international students from China have informed university administrators’ sense of the importance of relationships with the Chinese government?
Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate.

h) Do you believe this situation (concern about relations with the Chinese government and Chinese student numbers) has made it more difficult to study or conduct original investigative research on sensitive issues such as those listed in a), or has it otherwise disincentivised the study of these issues?
Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate.

i) Are you involved in direct, in-person exchanges with Chinese government officials, with Chinese universities, or with other organisations such as think tanks from China?
Please state which, if you are willing.
- 25

j) Do you believe that a desire or career requirement to continue or commence direct, in-person exchanges with Chinese government officials can disincentivise sensitive research such as that described in a)? Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate.

k) Do you teach China studies (that is, modules related to China) to groups that include international students from China?

l) If so, then does this present special difficulties? For example, do you have issues with students being afraid to contribute or uncomfortable discussing certain issues in some classes? Have you refrained from offering a module on a politically sensitive topic in order to avoid potential conflicts in class? Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate, describing what issues you face (if any).

m) Do you know any staff or students with Chinese nationality or family in China (this may include yourself) who have received a warning or any other form of indication that their conduct or work has attracted the attention of the CCP or a CCP-related group?

n) Do you consider that Chinese (nationality) staff and students at your university have a fear of the CCP or of CCP-related groups on campus (for example, Chinese Students and Scholars Associations) being able to monitor their conduct or work on campus/in their role? Or do these staff and students have a fear that the CCP would become aware if they were to engage in activity that is forbidden by the CCP?

o) Have you seen evidence that Chinese diplomats in the UK (consulate/embassy staff) or other CCP officials seek to interfere in the lives of international students from China at your university, or with the work of academics involved in China studies? Please explain which and how so, as much as you can or are willing.

p) If so, then do you think that the university management are aware of this, and have they taken steps to address it? To what extent?

q) Are you aware of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act and the measures it would put in place to enforce universities' duty to take reasonably practicable steps to protect freedom of speech for university members? If so, please say whether you are vaguely aware of these potential changes, or whether you have examined them in detail.

r) Is your university doing enough to protect the free speech and academic freedom of Chinese members and of members involved in the study of China? Please answer yes or no and feel free to elaborate.

s) Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

英透 UK-CHINA
中视 TRANSPARENCY