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*Contemporary China Studies in the Netherlands*<sup>1</sup>

*1. The disappearance of contemporary China in Chinese Studies*<sup>2</sup>

In 1662 after a prolonged siege, Zheng Chenggong (or Koxinga) forced the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to abandon Fort Zeelandia on Taiwan. Since then, the Netherlands has not had any systematic and enduring imperial, colonial or missionary involvement in China, quite unlike many other European powers. As other articles in this volume document, the growth of the study of China in the second half of the nineteenth century was mostly a modest offshoot of colonial involvement in the Dutch East Indies. The interest of early sinologists was largely focussed on aspects of what was then contemporary China that were of practical use in dealing with Chinese subjects in the Dutch Indies: classical Chinese, southern Chinese spoken languages, translation, secret societies, law, religion. Despite these limitations, what made Dutch sinologists of this period stand out from later generations was their awareness that contemporary China ought to be understood as a complex whole. Classical literati culture and the popular and vulgar realities of contemporary daily life were tied together in a series of connections that had to be understood as much through close and personal observation and study as through immersion in the classics. These early sinologists also did not shy away from commenting and writing on many aspects of political, social and economic developments in China.<sup>3</sup>

The end of the Chinese empire came in 1911. China's imperial present suddenly became its traditional past. Sinology did not respond like one would expect by shifting its focus to the momentous political, cultural, social and economic transformations that constituted China's new present. Instead of turning to China's troubled path of modernisation, sinology transformed itself into a fully professionalised and esoteric text-based academic discipline of China's high, literate culture imagined as purely a thing of China's glorious past, unconnected with the messy present of the new contemporary China.

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<sup>1</sup> This article has benefited from many people's cooperation who agreed to share their recollections with me or who commented on earlier versions. I particularly would like to thank Gregor Benton, Leo Douw, Barend ter Haar, Wilt Idema, Barbara Krug, Pál Nyíri, Ben van Rooij, Rint Sybesma and Ot van den Muijzenberg.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this article, the terms "contemporary China", "modern China" and "pre-modern China" are not pinned down on particular historical periods, but are used relative to the contemporary period being described. "Contemporary China", the subject of the article, thus is China *now*, regardless of whether "now" is the seventeenth or twenty-first century. This hopefully serves to highlight my main point, namely that in certain periods China specialists gained, lost and regained a professional interest in what was happening in China at that particular time, and that this had less to do with academic curiosity or priorities than it did to the shifting importance attached to China in Dutch society and politics. This article focusses on the work of social scientists and historians, as scholarship on language and literature is dealt with in other chapters of this work. Also absent in this article is Chinese religion. With the exception of some of the work of historians Kristofer Schipper and Barend ter Haar, religion in contemporary China is hardly dealt with in the Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> A very nice example is Henri Borel, *Het daghet in den oosten* (Amsterdam: L.J. Veen, 1926 [1910]) that comments extensively on the rapidly increasing pace of reform in China after the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 and the inevitability of radical political change.

Barend ter Haar in this volume, and Maurice Freedman and Harriet Zurndorfer in earlier articles, already have documented this remarkable epistemological shift towards the past that is best illustrated by – but by no means limited to – the figure of Jan Jakob Maria de Groot.<sup>4</sup> This shift is made even more remarkable by the fact that, like earlier generations of sinologists, leading figures of philological sinology in the twentieth century, such as Jan Duyvendak, Erik Zürcher and for a brief period Wilt Idema, for at least part of their career wrote and commented extensively on developments in contemporary China,<sup>5</sup> and in fact Anthony Hulsewé, Zürcher and Idema received their first academic appointments as lecturers of modern Chinese or modern China. Moreover, between 1925 and 1940, the Dutch-Chinese Association (Nederlands-Chineesche Vereniging) published the journal *China* with original articles or translations from Chinese into Dutch, French, German and English on all aspects of China – traditional and modern – to which Dutch sinologists also regularly contributed. However, professional sinologists carefully restricted their serious academic work to text-based studies of pre-modern China. Only much later, from the early 1970s onward, did some later generations of sinologists (like Piet van der Loon, Kristofer Schipper, Idema, ter Haar) develop an interest in the vernacular aspects of traditional Chinese society and culture reminiscent of the sinological pioneers from a century earlier. Contemporary modern China, however, to them too continued to remain out of bounds as an object of serious academic inquiry.

## 2. *The irrelevance of contemporary China*

The disappearance of contemporary China within sinology is a remarkable turn of events that continues to colour the size, shape and form of Chinese studies in the Netherlands (and many other continental European countries) even today. Part of this shift may be explained by the fact that the conceptual and methodological toolkit of sinology simply was not up to the challenges of new China's rocky path of modernisation. However, a turn towards the social sciences and modern history might have helped here. Before 1911, there had been many connections between sinology and ethnology (De Groot after all had been professor of ethnology before taking up the chair in Chinese). There is no particular reason to assume that other social sciences could not also have been made to serve the purposes of Chinese studies. This in fact happened in the United States and Japan from the 1920s onward, but was only pioneered in the Netherlands in the 1970s by E.B. (Ward) Vermeer (1944). My own guess here is that the “philological turn” in European sinology was caused more by a combination of disenchantment with the new contemporary reality in China and the country's insignificance on the global scene. After 1911, China turned its back on the glorious traditional high culture and unique political system that had made it so special. All that remained were the poverty and backwardness of the “sick man of Asia” with the addition of a rapid descent into political chaos and, until the ascent of

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<sup>4</sup> Maurice Freedman, “Sinology and the Social Sciences: Some Reflections on the Social Anthropology of China,” *Ethnos* 40/ 1 (1975): 194-211, Harriet T. Zurndorfer, “Sociology, Social Science, and Sinology in the Netherlands before World War II: With Special Reference to the Work of Frederik van Heek,” *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* 84 (1989): 19-32.

<sup>5</sup> The best example is perhaps J.J.L. Duyvendak, *China tegen de westerkim* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn N.V., 1948[1927]). The third edition, published in 1948, contains an extensive new chapter on political developments in China in the fifteen years since the publication of the third edition in 1933.

Japan in the 1930s, irrelevance both as an independent power and a theatre for the global and colonial preoccupations of European powers.<sup>6</sup>

Dutch sinologists, so it appears, could therefore only take China seriously as an extinct civilisation, but not as a country and a nation that was trying to carve out a place in the modern world. Frederik van Heek's (1907-1987) brief involvement with China in the 1930s illustrates this point. Van Heek was trained in Amsterdam in social geography, sociology and ethnology and was, to my knowledge, until the 1970s the only social scientist in the Netherlands to do research in and on contemporary China. In 1935 he published a lengthy Ph.D. thesis with the title *Western Technology and Social Life in China* based on six months of research in China itself. The thesis was essentially about the mismatch between Chinese society and culture and Western modern technology and methods of industrial production. In 1936 he published another book on the miserable living conditions of Chinese sailors stranded in the Netherlands because of the global economic depression in the 1930s.<sup>7</sup>

As Harriet Zurndorfer has shown in an article on Dutch sinology already mentioned earlier, Van Heek chose to work on China out of a personal interest in the Chinese textile industry, the primary competitor of textile manufacturers like his father in the Twente region of the Netherlands. His work on poverty-stricken Chinese in the Netherlands was commissioned by the Amsterdam Committee for Support of Destitute Chinese (Amsterdamsche Comité voor Hulp aan Noodlijdende Chineezers), a group of Chinese-Indonesian students in the Netherlands who had taken pity on their fellow Chinese and felt they needed to know more about them in order to assist them.<sup>8</sup>

Van Heek is mainly remembered among China scholars in the Netherlands for his book on the Dutch Chinese, which remains a unique document based on first-hand sociological field research. However, his work on Western technology in China is largely forgotten. Written in Dutch, it had little or no international impact, while in the Netherlands it failed to spark a tradition of research on contemporary China. In his subsequent career as the founding father of the Leiden school of sociology, van Heek's concern was with social inequality and stratification in the Netherlands. There is, as far as I am aware, no indication of a systematic interaction or dialogue on contemporary China with his sinological colleagues in Leiden University.

Van Heek never made school as a scholar of contemporary China. China, it seems, simply did not merit systematic and prolonged inquiry by social scientists. Van Heek's early work on China remained a curious youthful excursion, and contemporary China ultimately proved equally irrelevant to sociology in the Netherlands and to the philological concerns of van Heek's sinological colleagues in Leiden.

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<sup>6</sup> For the U.S. and Japan, China after 1911 was far more important than for the Europeans. For Japan, China was the first and most important a target of imperial expansion. The U.S. were without a large colonial empire or explicitly colonial ambitions beyond the Philippines, but nevertheless sought to expand their influence in the Pacific. For Americans, China also was a prime focus of missionary activity. Many American China scholars in the pre- and post-Second World War period had either been missionaries themselves or had grown up in China as children of missionaries.

<sup>7</sup> Frederik van Heek, *Westersche techniek en maatschappelijk leven in China* (Western technology and social life in China) (Enschede: M.J. van der Loef, 1935), Frederik van Heek, *Chineesche immigranten in Nederland* (Chinese immigrants the Netherlands) (Amsterdam: 't Koggeschip, 1936).

<sup>8</sup> Zurndorfer, "Sociology, Social Science, and Sinology."

### 3. Rediscovering Contemporary China in Amsterdam and Leiden

The shock of the “loss of China” to the Communist Party in 1949 and the Chinese involvement in the Korean War in 1950-1953 exposed modern and contemporary China scholars in the United States to the anti-communist witch-hunts of the McCarthy era. Taiwan, new home to the Guomindang (or Kuomintang, Chinese Nationalist Party), became a major U.S. interest on the East Asian frontline against communism. Although little funding or encouragement was forthcoming during that decade, research on contemporary China at U.S. universities continued. Likewise, in Britain an interest in China was sustained even in the darkest hours of the Cold War, both among the British Left and in business and government. Mao had, after all, allowed Britain to retain Hong Kong, and so contemporary China never completely disappeared from British maps, minds and universities. In the late 1950s and early 1960s with the Sino-Soviet split and the escalating conflict in Vietnam, China quickly became more prominent on American and British diplomatic radar screens. Government and private funding for contemporary China began to be made available, earlier and more plentiful in the U.S.; somewhat later and more miserly in the U.K. Hence, contemporary China scholarship in the U.S. and the U.K. quickly grew and prospered. The emphasis was very solidly on the social sciences: politics, economics, sociology and (more marginally) anthropology. Modern language training was also emphasised, but no longer connected to the philological traditions of sinological scholarship. In just a few years, contemporary China studies were reinvented as an independent field of social science research.<sup>9</sup>

In the Netherlands a similar pattern unfolded, albeit more hesitantly and on a much more modest scale. After 1949, a few scholars sustained their individual interest in specific aspects of contemporary China, such as M.H. van der Valk (1908-1978) at the Law Faculty of Leiden University or the diplomat M.J. Meyer (1912-1991), who both wrote about law in the People’s Republic, the Republican period and late imperial China.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise, the Fifties were devoid of new funding or fresh scholarly talent for contemporary China studies. In 1960, Wim Wertheim from the University of Amsterdam (then still named Municipal University of Amsterdam, Gemeentelijke Universiteit Amsterdam) and Erik Zürcher in Leiden took the lead in establishing the China Study Committee (China Studie Comité). The committee consisted of academics, civil servants, business people and artists with an interest or expertise in China. Its aim was to “further the study of, and disseminate knowledge on, modern China.”<sup>11</sup> In 1963, the committee published a collection of introductory articles on aspects of traditional and modern China.<sup>12</sup> Although it is unclear what other activities this committee

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<sup>9</sup> Sources on the developments in the U.S. and Britain include Richard Baum, *China Watcher: Confessions of a Peking Tom* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010); Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream: A Moral Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Tom Buchanan, *East Wind: China and the British Left, 1925-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); European Association of Chinese Studies, *Chinese Studies in the U.K.* (European Association of Chinese Studies Survey no. 7, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Wilt L. Idema, *Chinese Studies in the Netherlands* (European Association of Chinese Studies Survey no. 6, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> See “The China Study Committee,” *China Information* 1/ 1 (1986): 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Wim Wertheim and Erik Zürcher, eds., *China tussen eergisteren en overmorgen* (China between the day before yesterday and the day after tomorrow) (Den Haag: W. van Hoeve, 1963) The Committee also published *China informatie*, a periodic update on events in China. In 1986, the Documentation

engaged in except for a vague mention of “lectures, conference and advice to students, travellers to China and publishers,” lobbying for contemporary China research and teaching was also part of its mission.

Like in many other countries but lagging a few years behind,<sup>13</sup> in the Netherlands the Cultural Revolution (either 1966-1969 or 1966-1976, depending on which version of official Chinese historiography one prefers) created confusion, controversy, debate and even a modest interest in what was happening in China. Barend ter Haar’s article in this volume already deals with the main events and protagonists of this period; therefore, it will suffice here to merely state the most important effects that the China Study Committee’s efforts and the Cultural Revolution debate had on the subsequent development of contemporary Chinese studies.

The first of these is that, at Leiden University, contemporary China finally became incorporated into sinology, once Zürcher secured generous government funding for the new Documentation Centre for Contemporary China in Leiden. The first four staff members of the Documentation Centre were C. Schepel, Wilt Idema, Ward Vermeer and somewhat later Lloyd Haft. Schepel continues to be known mainly as the Dutch translator of Mao Zedong’s “Little Red Book”, while Idema and Haft ultimately went on to do other, more traditionally sinological work. Ward Vermeer, however, used his training as a sinologist and historian to become an internationally respected and widely published specialist of the economy and society of contemporary China.

We will return to the Documentation Centre, but first mention must be made of the second main outcome of the renewed importance of China in the 1960s and early 1970s. Unlike Leiden University, the University of Amsterdam did *not* manage to establish itself as a centre for the study of contemporary China. As a bastion of the New Left in the Netherlands in the 1970s, Amsterdam would have been a natural counterweight to the more conservative Leiden. Yet this was not for lack of trying on the part of Amsterdam professor Wim Wertheim, a noted Indonesia scholar whose interest in – even fascination with – China gathered pace as the revolution there seemed to intensify. For Wertheim, the Maoist revolutionary experiment served as a vital counterpoint to and way out of the poverty, underdevelopment and exploitation in other Asian countries, chiefly Indonesia and India. Unfortunately, in the 1960s the Amsterdam Faculty of Arts increasingly divested itself of its remaining commitments to non-European cultures, a move that continues to determine the shape and form of the humanities there. Wertheim therefore argued for investment in contemporary China at the wrong place and the wrong time. He only succeeded in securing an appointment for Zürcher for one day a week (between 1963 and 1971), but only to teach Chinese language, despite the fact that the appointment had the title “History of the ‘Far East’ .”

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Centre for Contemporary China in Leiden obtained the rights to this title – and more importantly its list of subscribers – using it as a launch pad for *China Information*, a new scholarly journal in English. Although no longer edited in Leiden, *China Information* continues to thrive as one of the three or four most important international journals in the modern China field.

<sup>13</sup> In France, for instance, the China debate involved many prominent figures of the Left, started earlier and lasted longer; see Jean Chesneaux, “China in the Eyes of the French Intellectuals,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 27 (1987): 11-29. Contemporary Chinese studies in France, most likely as a result of the debate, developed much quicker and more vigorously in the 1970s; see Marianne Bastid, “A Survey of Recent Trends in French Studies on Contemporary China: The State of the Field,” *Pacific Affairs* 53/ 4 (1980-1981): 698-707. For the British left and China, see Buchanan, *East Wind*.

Although Zürcher apparently managed to throw in the occasional lecture or content class, this circumstance severely restricted the development of Chinese studies before it had even begun.<sup>14</sup>

Another factor that may have prohibited Wertheim from securing government or university funding might possibly have been his inclination to make sweeping statements on the state of the Maoist revolution in China based on brief visits to the country, in the finest tradition of Western fellow travelling.<sup>15</sup> Under very difficult conditions that are hardly imaginable now, he tried his level best to do research when in China. The problem, however, was that he was only looking for Maoist socialism and was much less interested in China itself as a culture and society. In his last book on China written in the 1990s, Wertheim in fact confirmed as much when he wrote that “[i]n the course of the 1980s, my interest in China diminished considerably. It became increasingly clear that the tendency, already noticeable in 1979, toward a transition to a market economy and cooperation with foreign capitalist powers, would rapidly continue after 1980... With this, China lost its attraction as a large-scale, unique social and ideological experiment.”<sup>16</sup>

The infamous Loes Schenk affair in 1975 should have been the final nail in the coffin of any flirtations of the New Left with the institutionalisation of China studies in Amsterdam. Loes Schenk-Sandbergen (1941) was a Ph.D. student of Wertheim’s. Her otherwise solid thesis on street sweepers in India included a one hundred page section on China (based on a two week friendship visit) intended to demonstrate how much better off the poor in China were.<sup>17</sup> Leiden’s Erik Zürcher was co-examiner (*co-referent*) and a member of the dissertation committee; he must have had doubts about the quality of the thesis, yet been unwilling to confront Wertheim. At the last minute, he informed the committee that he would be unable to attend the examination committee meeting and thesis defence, asking a then still very young Wilt Idema to go in his stead. After heated debate behind closed doors among the committee members,

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<sup>14</sup> The information on Amsterdam in the 1960s here is from an interview and subsequent correspondence with Otto van den Muijzenberg on 28 June 2012 and 6 July 2012. Van den Muijzenberg was Wertheim’s successor when he retired in 1972. The dates of Zürcher’s appointment in Amsterdam are from *Archief van de Universiteit van Amsterdam; College van Curatoren: aanvulling*, item 1435 Prof. dr. E. Zürcher in de “Moderne geschiedenis van het ‘Verre Oosten’” (Modern history of the ‘Far East’) 1963 – 1971, <http://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/archieven/archiefbank/printversie/279a.nl.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> A collection of essays on these study trips was published as Willem F. Wertheim, *China om de zeven jaar: studiereizen naar het aardse rijk* (China every seven years: study tours to the Earthly Empire) (Berchem, Breda: EPO, 1993) The most notorious fellow traveller in the Netherlands (and France) was film director Joris Ivens, who had been Chairman Mao’s reliable propagandist since the 1930s. For the final word on Ivens, see Michel Korzec, “Joris Ivens”, in *Ik kan alles uitleggen* (I can explain anything) (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1994), pp. 56-81.

<sup>16</sup> “In de loop van de jaren tachtig verminderde mijn belangstelling voor China aanzienlijk. Het werd steeds duidelijker dat de tendentie die al in 1979 kon worden opgemerkt, de overgang naar een markteconomie en naar samenwerking met buitenlandse kapitalistische machten, zich na 1980 in snel tempo zou doorzetten... Hiermee verloor China voor mij zijn aantrekkingskracht als een grootscheeps uniek experiment op maatschappelijk en ideologisch gebied”, Wertheim, *China om de zeven jaar*, p. 300.

<sup>17</sup> Loes Schenk-Sandbergen, “Vuil werk, schone toekomst?: Het leven van straatvegers en vuilruimers—een onderzoek in Bulsar (India), en verkenningen in Peking, Shanghai, Tientsin en Tangshan (China)” (Dirty work, clean future? The life of street sweepers and garbage cleaners: a study in Bulsar (India) and explorations in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Tangshan), PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 1975.

Schenk-Sandbergen was in the end awarded her doctorate. Already before the examination, *Vrij Nederland* (Free Netherlands) columnist Renate Rubinstein, under the pseudonym Tamar, had written a scathing attack on Schenk-Sandbergen, creating a highly public debate and controversy that left a serious stain on Wertheim's academic reputation.<sup>18</sup>

Yet a few years later, Schenk's doctorate would indirectly have a happy outcome, at least for China studies in Amsterdam. In 1978, the South and Southeast Asia Department of the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology (Antropologisch-Sociologisch Centrum; A.S.C.) had to fill the vacancy left by the departure of Southeast Asianist Guus van Liebenstein. The choice was between consolidating departmental strength in Southeast Asian studies (which was what most of the academic staff argued for), or the appointment of a China specialist on the argument that the department could no longer ignore China's revolution. The latter position was taken by Schenk-Sandbergen and the majority of the student representatives on the departmental management committee. In a testimony to student power that is almost unimaginable nowadays, the students and Schenk-Sandbergen won.<sup>19</sup> An open international search yielded the appointment of a modern China historian, British-trained Gregor Benton (1944). Benton was a sinologist with a Cambridge degree in Oriental Studies. Although Cambridge at the time was hardly a hotbed of modern China studies, Benton's main research was on the history of Chinese communism. As a young undergraduate student at the time, I obviously was not privy to the background and details of his appointment, but Benton must have had enough credibility as a leftist to pass muster in Amsterdam, especially with the students, despite the fact that he had very little sympathy for the Maoist dictatorship and its Western supporters. His personal and academic interests in contemporary China revolved around Trotskyism, political protest, dissidence and the possibilities of democratic change. This must have been as much of a disappointment to the supporters of Maoism as it was welcomed by the many other academic staff and students whose leftist leanings did not include support for communist dictatorship.<sup>20</sup>

Benton stayed in Amsterdam until 1988, after which he returned to Leeds before moving on to Cardiff in 1999, where he continued his career as a prolific author of books on Trotskyism, the Chinese Communist Revolution and – an interest he developed while in Amsterdam initially to create fieldwork opportunities for students – the overseas Chinese. He retired in 2009.<sup>21</sup> In the ten years he spent in Amsterdam, Benton made a serious attempt at establishing modern China studies, encouraging

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<sup>18</sup> Wilt Idema, personal communication, 21 March 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Otto van den Muijzenberg, 28 June 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Gregor Benton, personal communication, 29 June 2012.

<sup>21</sup> During his period in Amsterdam, Benton's main publications included the following: Gregor Benton, *Wild Lilies: Poisonous Weeds: Dissident Voices from People's China* (London: Pluto Press, 1982); Wang Fanxi and Gregor Benton, *Chinese Revolutionary, Memoirs, 1919-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Gregor Benton, "The South Anhui Incident," *Journal of Asian Studies* 45/ 4 (1986): 681-720; Gregor Benton and Hans Vermeulen (eds.), *De Chinezen* (The Chinese) (Muidersberg: Dick Coutinho, 1987). Perhaps even more important for China studies in the Netherlands were the many working papers that he published either alone or with one of his colleagues or students, usually in the working papers series of the Anthropological-Sociological Centre of the University of Amsterdam. They set an example, introduced new scholarship and helped us think about publishing in English as an achievable goal.

students to write their MA theses on China or the overseas Chinese in the Netherlands.<sup>22</sup> He also emphasised the need to learn modern Chinese – and for a while even offered an introductory course himself – encouraging students such as myself to spend a year in China as an exchange student.

Slowly a modest “Amsterdam school” of modern Chinese studies emerged, increasingly also in cooperation with the VU University Amsterdam (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), and especially after the creation of the joint Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam (CASA) in 1987. However, apart from Margaret Sleeboom (1961), who in the end wrote a two-book (!) Ph.D. thesis under the supervision of Peter van der Veer,<sup>23</sup> and the present author Frank Pieke (1957) who went to the University of California at Berkeley,<sup>24</sup> no other anthropology students have come through as China specialists in Amsterdam. Like Sleeboom, Jeroen de Kloet (1967) received his Ph.D. under the supervision of Peter van der Veer in 2001. His background was in mass communication and media studies, in which field he continued his career at the University of Amsterdam.<sup>25</sup> CASA was somewhat more successful in recruiting Chinese Ph.D. students through the relationship of the University of Amsterdam with Xiamen University: Wang Hongshan, Li Minghuan, Song Ping and Wu Xiao’an (Xiao An Wu).<sup>26</sup> Of the Ph.D.’s with an Amsterdam pedigree, the Chinese returned to China (Li and Song to Xiamen, Wang and Wu to Peking University), while I went to Leiden in 1986. In 2004 Margaret Sleeboom was made a university lecturer at the Anthropology Department of the University of Amsterdam, but soon (in 2006) moved

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<sup>22</sup> After van Heek’s book in 1936, research on the Chinese in the Netherlands only occasionally had been done by enterprising MA students of anthropology, and a sustained tradition of research was never established. Benton energetically went out to change this state of affairs. In particular, he put a great deal of effort into the MA thesis of Henk Wubben (1942) on the history of the Chinese before the Second World War, which was published as Henk Wubben, *“Chineez en ander Aziatisch ongedierte”: lotgevallen van Chinese immigranten in Nederland, 1911-1940* (“Chinese and other Asian vermin”: the vicissitudes of Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands, 1911-1940) (Zutphen: De Walburg Press, 1986). The title, taken from a Dutch police document from the 1930s (hence the quotation marks and outdated spelling of “Chinezen” (Chinese) as “Chineez en”), was intended to foreground the racism of the Dutch authorities at the time. The subtlety of Wubben’s rhetorical strategy was wasted on many of the leaders of the Dutch Chinese community, who, despite repeated explanations, vehemently protested with the understandable argument that the title was disrespectful to the Chinese and risked merely confirming racist attitudes among the book’s readers.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Sleeboom received her Ph.D. in 2001. The two volumes of her thesis were published as Margaret Sleeboom, *Academic Nations in China and Japan: Framed in Concepts of Nature, Culture and the Universal* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004) and Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner, *The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS): Shaping the Reforms, Academia and China (1977-2003)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> My 1992 thesis was published as Frank N. Pieke, *The Ordinary and the Extraordinary: An Anthropological Study of Chinese Reform and the 1989 People’s Movement in Beijing* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> The revised thesis was published as Jeroen De Kloet, *China with a Cut: Globalisation, Urban Youth and Popular Music* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Wang Hongsheng, “From Revolutionary Vanguards to Pioneer Entrepreneurs: A Study of Rural Elite in a Chinese Village,” Ph.D. diss., University of Amsterdam, 1995; Li Minghuan, “We Need Two Worlds’: Chinese Immigrant Associations in a Western Society,” Ph.D. diss., University of Amsterdam, 1998; Song Ping, “Transnational Social Practice from Below: The Experiences of a Chinese Lineage,” Ph.D. diss., University of Amsterdam, 2002; Xiao An Wu, “Chinese Family Business Networks in the Making of a Malay State: Kedah and the Region c. 1882-1941,” Ph.D. diss., University of Amsterdam, 1999). In 2009, Paul Tjon-sie-fat received his Ph.D. from the University of Amsterdam: Paul Tjon Sie Fat, “Chinese Migrants in Surinam: The Inevitability of Ethnic Performing” (2009).

to the University of Sussex. After her Amsterdam doctorate, she shifted focus from academic nationalism to the social, political and economic consequences of the application of the new genetic technologies in China, India and Japan, an interest that she has continued to pursue since her move to Britain.

After the departure of Benton in 1988, the continuation of China studies in Amsterdam became precarious. China remained a concern only of anthropology, where Leiden-trained sinological historian Leo Douw was hired on a part-time basis in 1989 – the other half of Douw’s appointment still being with the Department of History of the VU University Amsterdam – to replace Benton and, as already said in the previous paragraph, Margaret Sleeboom in 2004. Together with the author of this piece on behalf of Leiden, in 1995 Douw secured major funding from the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS) for a project on the home areas (*qiaoxiang*) of overseas Chinese immigrants, funding that supported postdoctoral scholars, conferences and research, thus raising Amsterdam’s China studies profile during otherwise lean years. However, further appointments in China studies, either in anthropology or other disciplines, were very slow to materialise. When push came to shove, South and particularly Southeast Asia (Indonesia) were always given priority. Other disciplines, until recently at least, had even less inclination or incentive to venture into the China field, an area far removed from their core interests and a seemingly high-risk adventure. The university’s central administration too apparently was disinclined to develop a serious and sustained strategy for the development of China studies. In retrospect, Wertheim’s inability to match Leiden’s early initiative in contemporary China studies continued to hamstring the university. The Benton appointment turned out to be a single spark that failed to start a prairie fire after a brief period of student empowerment. For decades, “China” remained Leiden’s territory, a perception that only very recently has started to shift.

Moreover, Amsterdam’s advantage of kick-starting modern and contemporary China studies through the importation of British expertise did not last long. In Leiden, the Documentation Centre for Contemporary China essentially only had one serious expert in the field, namely Vermeer, who built up a formidable reputation both in the Netherlands and abroad as an expert on Chinese development, agriculture and food, land use and economy. He also continued to develop a second specialisation in Chinese economic history, especially of the Qing and Republican periods. He published prodigiously and carried out numerous assignments and consultancy projects, becoming one of Europe’s leading all-round specialists on modern China.<sup>27</sup> Although Kurt Radtke (1945) had joined him at the Documentation Centre and quickly developed into an equally excellent scholar, his work on Sino-Japanese relations gradually shifted more towards Japan.<sup>28</sup> In the end he was appointed to a chair in the Japanese Studies Department in Leiden.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> His main publications on contemporary China in the 1970s and 1980s include E. B. Vermeer, *Water Conservancy and Irrigation in China: Social, Economic and Agrotechnical Aspects* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1977) and E. B. Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China: The Central Shaanxi since 1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>28</sup> Kurt W. Radtke, *China’s Relations with Japan: The Role of Liao Chengzhi* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). Kurt W. Radtke and Tony Saich, eds. *China’s Modernisation: Westernisation and acculturation* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993) was published to mark the retirement of Erik Zürcher.

<sup>29</sup> Lloyd L. Haft, who was also employed at the Documentation Centre, worked on modern and contemporary literature, with an emphasis on poetry. The study of Chinese literature, including modern and contemporary literature, in the Netherlands since the 1960s is the subject of the chapter by Mark

Clearly, just one person is not enough. Moreover, Vermeer was trained as a sinologist and historian, not as a social scientist. He was less inclined to engage in issues and debates in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, or politics and international relations. It was therefore fortuitous that – quite unintentionally – Leiden copied the Amsterdam experience when Anthony (Tony) Saich (1953), a British-trained political expert with a focus on modern China, was hired in 1982 as the teaching replacement for Vermeer. This was followed by a research project (with Stefan Landsberger) on science and technology in China for the Dutch Ministry of Education and Science. Shortly afterwards Saich was made a university lecturer and ultimately was appointed to a personal chair of the politics and administration of contemporary China. Saich held an MSc in Economics from SOAS (the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London) and had worked as a lecturer at Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic before coming to Leiden. In 1986 he received his Ph.D. from Leiden on a thesis based on the Ministry of Education project on Chinese science and technology.<sup>30</sup> In the 1990s, Saich's career seriously took off when senior scholars in the United States (Roderick MacFarquhar at Harvard, David Apter at Yale and Richard Baum at UCLA) took note of his work, inviting him over as visiting scholar<sup>31</sup> and (in the case of Apter) involving him in a research project of his own.<sup>32</sup> On the back of his contacts and reputation in the U.S., between 1994 and 1997 Saich was appointed Representative of the Ford Foundation in Beijing. He left Leiden permanently in 1999 to take up a chair at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

The presence of Vermeer and Saich together completely changed the face of contemporary China studies in Leiden, especially because further appointments were rapidly added at the Documentation Centre for Contemporary China: Woei-Lien Chong (1957)<sup>33</sup> and Stefan Landsberger (1955) as documentalists and myself, Frank Pieke (1957), as a researcher and later a lecturer. Vermeer continued his work on the economy and development of China rooted in the sinological tradition. Saich added expertise on the politics and international relations of China in the British tradition of contemporary China studies. The visiting professorships of Jonathan Unger and Anita Chan (in 1986, en route between Kansas and the Australian National University) and Richard Baum (in 1990, from UCLA) added to Leiden's shift towards Anglo-Saxon scholarship instead of the European sinological tradition. By the 1990s, Leiden had become the leading centre for contemporary China studies in continental Europe, making Ph.D. study on an aspect of contemporary China a regular feature.<sup>34</sup>

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Leenhouts in this volume, and is not discussed in this chapter, whose focus is on social science research on China.

<sup>30</sup> The thesis was published a few years later as Tony Saich, *China's Science Policy in the 80's* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

<sup>31</sup> One of the results of a stay at Harvard was Tony Saich, ed., *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party* (Armonk/London: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> The collaboration between Apter and Saich led to the publication of an important study on the Yan'an period: David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> Woei-lien Chong developed a strong interest in comparative philosophy and wrote her dissertation on the work of Li Zehou: "Kant and Marx in Post-Mao China: The Intellectual Path of Li Zehou," Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Theses from this period include Geor Hintzen, "Imagining Political Science: The Formative Influence of Political Culture in the Establishment of the PRC's Political Science (1980-89)," Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 1998; Peter P.S. Ho, "Rangeland Policy, Pastoralism and Poverty in China's

In addition to their activities in Leiden, in the late 1980s and early 1990s Saich, Landsberger and I also worked on projects at the Amsterdam-based International Institute of Social History (IISH). Saich carried out a project on the IISH's archive on Henk Sneevliet alias Maring, Comintern representative with the Chinese Communist Party in the early 1920s, thus developing a second field of expertise in Chinese Communist Party history.<sup>35</sup> I created an archive of documents on the 1989 Protest Movement in Beijing that I witnessed firsthand while doing research for my doctorate.<sup>36</sup> Landsberger worked on his expanding collection of propaganda posters that eventually was put online, making China studies in Leiden instantly recognisable to students all over the world.<sup>37</sup>

Yet not all was well in Leiden. Vermeer and Saich could not get along. Zürcher's (head of the China Studies Department until 1990) strained relationship with Vermeer and friendship with Saich added further fuel to the flames of competition and animosity between the two men. In the 1990s Saich spent long periods of time away from Leiden, either in the U.S. or in Beijing as head of the Ford Foundation. His departure, it was felt, would only be a matter of time, although in the end I beat him to it by leaving for Oxford in 1995. Landsberger replaced me as university lecturer of the Society of Modern China, while Saich's prolonged absences created room to hire a new lecturer of Chinese politics. International searches had, by this time, become more common in the Netherlands and Tak Wing Ngo (1962), a recent Ph.D. from SOAS and former anti-corruption officer at the Independent Commission Against Corruption in Hong Kong, was appointed in 1995. At Leiden, Ngo developed into a well-known scholar of the politics of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, editing numerous books and succeeding Woei Lien Chong as editor of *China Information* in 2002. In 2008, he was made Extraordinary Chair Professor of Asian History at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. In 2010, Ngo left Leiden and took up an appointment as Professor of Political Science at the University of Macau, but retained the professorship in Rotterdam.

Despite Ngo's appointment, the final departure of Saich in 1999 for Harvard left a real gap. His professorship had been a personal one and thus automatically lapsed when he

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Northwest: Ningxia Province in the Twentieth Century," Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 1999; Edward Xin Gu, "The Structural Transformation of the Intellectual Public Sphere in Communist China (1979-1989)," Ph.D. diss., Leiden University: 1999; Stefan R. Landsberger, "Visualizing the Future: Chinese Propaganda Posters from the 'Four Modernizations' Era, 1978-1988," (Ph.D. diss., University of Leiden, 1994); Jacob Eyferth, "Eating Rice from Bamboo Roots: The History of a Papermaking Community in West China, 1839-1998," Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 2000; Hein Mallee, "The Expanded Family: Rural Labour Circulation in Reform China," Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 1997; Flemming Christiansen, "The De-Rustication of the Chinese Peasant? Peasant Household Reactions to the Rural Reforms in China since 1978," Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 1990); Wu Yongping, "In Search of an Explanation of SME-led Growth: State Survival, Bureaucratic Politics and Private Enterprise in the Making of the Taiwanese Economy (1950-1985)," Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Tony Saich, *The Origins of the First United Front in China: The Role of Sneevliet (alias Maring)* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> Frank N. Pieke, Fons Lamboo, Hudi Tashin and Agnes Ee Hong Khoo, eds., *Inventory of the Collection Chinese People's Movement, Spring 1989 at the International Institute of Social History. Volume I: Documents; Volume II: Audiovisual Materials, Objects and Newspapers; Volume III: Further Documents* (Amsterdam: Stichting Beheer ISG, 1990-1995).

<sup>37</sup> Available at <http://www.iisg.nl/landsberger/>.

left. Saich's leaving also came at a time when many other personnel changes were happening almost all at once. At the same time as Saich, Wilt Idema (1944), Professor of Chinese Language and Literature, likewise left Leiden for Harvard. He was quickly succeeded by his former student Maghiel van Crevel (1963). The following year Barend ter Haar (1958) was appointed as the successor to Kristofer Schipper, who had replaced Zürcher when the latter retired in 1993. Both had extensive international experience before returning to Leiden (van Crevel in Sydney and ter Haar in Heidelberg) and realised that a Chinese studies programme without a senior modern China figure would no longer be taken seriously on the international stage. They strongly supported the university's plan to fund a new, regular chair in Modern China Studies, to which Axel Schneider (1962) was appointed in 2001. Schneider specialised in Chinese Republican history rather than a social science approach to contemporary China.

The first decade of the twenty-first century was a trying time for Chinese studies at Leiden University. In 2004, budget cuts required a broad reorganisation of what was then still the Faculty of Arts.<sup>38</sup> Contemporary China studies lost the lectureship of Chinese law (whose postholder Hubert van Straten [1940-2007] agreed to take early retirement) as well as Vermeer's senior lectureship. The abolishment of Vermeer's position put an unhappy end to the Leiden career of the university's most distinguished and longest-serving contemporary China scholar. Fortunately, a few years later and shortly before his formal retirement, Vermeer had the opportunity to take up an appointment as professor at Turku University in Finland, enabling him to end his career on a high. These relatively lean times at Leiden University were also illustrated by the sudden drop in the number of completed Ph.D. theses on contemporary issues since 2001: I have been able to identify only one.<sup>39</sup>

But the 2000s were not only a period of retrenchment. In 2004, Stefan Landsberger was made part-time professor of the Culture of Contemporary China at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Amsterdam, retaining his lectureship in Leiden for the remainder of his time. In 2008, Tak Wing Ngo was offered a very similar appointment at the School of History, Culture and Communication at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. His part-time appointment in Rotterdam freed up funds in Leiden to hire Florian Schneider, a specialist of Chinese media studies who had graduated from the University of Sheffield. A few years earlier, in 2006, Axel Schneider and Chris Goto-Jones of the Japanese studies programme had created a lectureship in the International Relations of East Asia shared between the Chinese and Japanese teaching programmes to which Lindsay Black was appointed, another Sheffield graduate and specialist of Japanese-Chinese relations. In 2006, Axel Schneider and Rikki Kersten (the then Professor of Modern Japanese Studies), having obtained a major research grant from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, also secured a university grant to set up the Modern East Asia Research Centre (MEARC). MEARC's mission was to strengthen research on modern East Asia and to serve as an antidote to the reputation of Leiden as a bulwark against

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<sup>38</sup> In 2008, the Faculty of Arts merged with several other faculties of the university into the new Faculty of Humanities.

<sup>39</sup> Els van Dongen, "'Goodbye Radicalism!': Conceptions of Conservatism among Chinese Intellectuals during the Early 1990s" (2009). During these years, however, several dissertations in the field of contemporary literature and culture were completed under the supervision of Maghiel van Crevel.

research and teaching on pre-modern China. Although university funding has since run out, MEARC continues to host external research grants and organise and publicise academic conferences and dissemination activities.

Axel Schneider left Leiden in 2009 to take up a new chair of modern China studies in Göttingen. After his departure, the China studies programme at Leiden embarked on an ambitious expansion of its contemporary China establishment. Not only was Schneider's post continued (to which the author of this article was appointed in 2010), but a completely new professorship in Chinese economy and development was created at the same time as well. The intention behind this new post was in particular to heighten the visibility and impact of Leiden China studies within business and government in the Netherlands, and to reignite an indispensable field of research on contemporary China that Leiden had managed to develop a long tradition in, only to lose it with the budget cuts in 2004. The appointee to the post, Peter Ho (1968), had been a long-time student of Vermeer's. After his Leiden Ph.D. in 1999, he held appointments in development studies first at Wageningen and subsequently, as one of the youngest professors in the Netherlands, at the University of Groningen. In addition to his own research, Ho also very actively engages in non-academic arenas where there is demand for specialist knowledge on China through publications, lectures, media appearances and the organisation of networking events, including the Dutch Academic China Meeting (*Academisch China Overleg*, or ACO) of which he is the founder. He specialises in Chinese development, agriculture and pastoralism, the environment, land and land use, governance and property rights, and non-governmental organisations.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, Ho's time at Leiden University was not a happy one. Just before this article went to press in March 2013, Ho left Leiden University and took up appointments at Delft University and the Ford Foundation's representative office in Beijing. A search for a university lecturer of Chinese economy is expected to start in the coming months.

#### *4 Proliferation and spread of contemporary China studies*

In the previous section I have deliberately limited myself to developments within Chinese studies at Leiden University and anthropology at Amsterdam University. These were the two academic settings where contemporary China was rediscovered in the 1970s and that developed a sustained research and teaching programme on contemporary China. But China, and especially contemporary China, was of course much too important to remain the territory of just two places for very long. In this section, I will discuss specialised research on contemporary China by individual researchers or research groups. In the next section I will turn to a connected but separate development, namely the inclusion of an aspect of China by non-specialist researchers, a process that I refer to as the mainstreaming of China studies.

I have already briefly mentioned the larger debate on Maoism and the Cultural Revolution in the early 1970s. The fascination with China did not end there and a steady stream of journalistic accounts, travelogues, photo books, memoirs and novels on contemporary China has been coming out in print, either directly written in Dutch or (more commonly) in translation from English, Chinese or other foreign languages.

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<sup>40</sup> His Ph.D. thesis was published as Peter P.S. Ho, *Institutions in Transition: Land Ownership, Property Rights, and Social Conflict in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

The best of these are based on long-term immersion in China and make important contributions to our understanding of contemporary Chinese society, politics and culture; the worst are fantasy, superficial, or simply plain wrong.<sup>41</sup>

A special mention will have to be made at this point of Michel (Michal) Korzec (1945), whose involvement in the debates and research on contemporary China is not easy to pin down in a few sentences, but could be said to pioneer the mainstreaming of contemporary China in the social sciences in the Netherlands. Korzec grew up in the Netherlands as a slight latecomer to the iconoclastic generation of the 1960s. He developed an interest in China originally mainly because many of his generation upheld China as an example of successful socialism. As the son of Polish refugees who had personally felt the iron fist of state socialism, Korzec had good cause to be sceptical, and he made it one of his many missions to uncover the truth about actual socialism being practised in China. His was not a brief flirtation. He made a serious attempt at learning the language and in the mid-1980s spent several years in China as a newspaper correspondent. As a university lecturer first at Delft University and since 1986 at the Political Science Department in Leiden, he has also embarked on and published academic research on social inequality and labour relations in contemporary China.<sup>42</sup>

However, academic research and publication were not his true passion. Korzec was first and foremost a polemicist, a master of the carefully crafted insult, who – as he himself put it – took a “devilish pleasure” in exposing the mendacity, pomposity and ideological rigidity of received opinion.<sup>43</sup> As his writings were by no means limited to China, but included among many topics feminism, Dutch society and politics, Eastern Europe, and the philosophy of science, in the course of time he managed to antagonise an impressive number of people in the Netherlands. Characteristically, a collection of Korzec’s essays that turned out to be his last Dutch publication before he left the Netherlands for Poland in 1997 was entitled *I Can Explain Anything*.<sup>44</sup> Even Bart Tromp, long-time friend within the Dutch Labour Party and then academic high-priest of the moderate Left, started his review of the book as follows: “Michel Korzec is a

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<sup>41</sup> Excellent and important books on contemporary China written by long-term Dutch newspaper correspondents include Willem van Kemenade, *China, Hongkong, Taiwan BV: superstaat op zoek naar een nieuw systeem* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1996; also published in English as *China: Hong Kong, Taiwan, Inc.: The Dynamics of a New Empire* [New York: Knopf, 1997] ); Floris-Jan van Luyn, *Een stad van boeren: de grote trek in China* (Amsterdam and Rotterdam: Prometheus and NRC Handelsblad, 2004; also published in English as *A Floating City of Peasants: The Great Migration in Contemporary China* [New York: The New Press, 2008]); Garrie van Pinxteren, *China: centrum van de wereld (China: centre of the world)* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> He received his Ph.D. at the University of Amsterdam in 1988. Part of his thesis was published as Michel Korzec, *Labour and the Failure of Reform in China* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> For Chinese studies in the Netherlands, the low came with Korzec’s article in the Dutch edition of *Playboy* (the place of publication in itself of course intended to offend) that pseudonymously featured and gratuitously insulted several senior figures from Chinese studies in Leiden; Michel Korzec, “Vieze woorden” (Dirty words), *Playboy (Dutch edition)*, February 1987 (1987): 31 and 91-97.

<sup>44</sup> Michel Korzec, *Ik kan alles uitleggen (I can explain anything)* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1994). Unfortunately, translation into English loses the deliberate ambiguity of the book’s title, where *alles* can mean “everything” or “anything” and could thus be read as either an apology or a claim to omniscience. Knowing Korzec, the latter must have been his intention, hence my choice for “anything” as the translation.

great man, don't let there be any mistake about that ... But Korzec always has something to bitch about."<sup>45</sup>

Nonetheless, Korzec's work on China was important because it took place outside the established centres for China studies and because he, like his ideological opposite number Wim Wertheim, explicitly put China in a comparative framework. In the 1980s, Korzec was just an individual who developed China expertise pretty much on his own. In the 1990s, however, the first stirrings could be detected of a more structural engagement with specialist research on contemporary China elsewhere in Dutch academe. Again, Leiden University and Amsterdam University were among the more important institutional environments where this happened, but other universities and institutions gradually developed their own China expertise as well.

Foremost among these universities is perhaps Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR). EUR's core strength is in economics, business studies and law, making its developing China programme clearly distinct from that of other universities. Like many other universities in the Netherlands and abroad, in the late 1980s the EUR enthusiastically created links with Chinese universities and researchers, initially in Rotterdam's sister city, Shanghai, and later elsewhere as well. In 1998, the university took the next step and established a China centre (the *Erasmus University China Center*) to coordinate and encourage China-related activities.

In addition to this virtual centre, the university invested in dedicated posts and specialist centres for teaching and research on contemporary China. At the School of Management in 1999, Barbara Krug (1950), a German economist and China specialist, was appointed Professor of Economics of Governance. Since her appointment, Krug has been the key member of the China Business Centre of the Erasmus Institute of Management and supervisor of nine Ph.D.'s on aspects of Chinese business and economy.<sup>46</sup> In addition to Krug, Mark Greeven was hired after receiving his Ph.D. under Krug's supervision in 2009, adding his expertise on enterprise innovation. Greeven was the EUR coordinator of the Master of Science in Chinese Economy and Business, a degree jointly taught with the Leiden Chinese studies programme since 2009. In 2011, Greeven left EUR for an appointment at

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<sup>45</sup> "Michel Korzec is een groot man, men vergisse zich niet ... Maar Korzec heeft altijd wat te zeiken." Bart Tromp, "Over idealisten van gisteren die de hufters zijn van vandaag (On yesterday's idealists who have become today's bastards)," *De Volkskrant*, 28 January 1995.

<sup>46</sup> Ph.D.'s completed under Krug's supervision include Yongping Chen, "Labour Flexibility in China's Companies: An Empirical Study," Ph.D. diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2001; Jeroen Kuilman, "The Re-Emergence of Foreign Banks in Shanghai: An Ecological Analysis," Ph.D. diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2005; Ze Zhu, "Essays on China's Tax System," Ph.D. diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2007; Yamei Hu, "Essays on the Governance of Agricultural Products: Cooperatives and Contract Farming," Ph.D. diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2007; Xueyuan Zhang, "Strategizing of Foreign Firms in China: An Institution-based Perspective," Ph.D. diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2007; Mark Greeven, "Innovation in an Uncertain Institutional Environment: Private Software Entrepreneurs in Hangzhou, China," Ph.D. diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2009; Johannes Meuer, "Configurations of Inter-Firm Relations in Management Innovation: A Study in China's Biopharmaceutical Industry," Ph.D. diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2011; Nathan Betancourt, "Typical Atypicality: Formal and Informal Institutional Conformity, Deviance, and Dynamics," Ph.D. diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2012).

Zhejiang University in China. His replacement is Zhang Ying, a recent Ph.D. graduate in business studies from the Eindhoven University of Technology.<sup>47</sup>

The Rotterdam China Law Centre is the third centre at EUR specifically dedicated to contemporary China. The centre was established in 2010 in the EUR School of Law. Its main member and director is Li Yuwen, Professor of Chinese Law at EUR since 2011. She received her Ph.D. in Law from Utrecht University<sup>48</sup> and was a lecturer and researcher of Chinese law at Leiden University and Utrecht University. The centre's main activities are fostering relationships with the legal profession and academic institutions in China, including work with the Chinese Scholarship Council to recruit and fund Chinese students for Ph.D. research at EUR.

Sinologist Leo Douw has been at the VU University Amsterdam since 1975. After receiving his Ph.D. from Leiden University in 1991,<sup>49</sup> the title of his lectureship was changed from general history to specifically non-Western history. At the same time, Peter Post, a Japan historian, was appointed at the VU University Amsterdam. Both Post and Douw were actively involved in the IIAS *Qiaoxiang* Ties Programme in Amsterdam. However, the VU University did not follow up on the short fillip that the project provided, and Chinese studies continued its marginal existence. Change came only late in the first decade of this century, when first Peter Peverelli (1956) and then Pál Nyíri (1972) joined the university. Peter Peverelli holds a double Ph.D. in Sinology from Leiden (1986) and Business Administration from Rotterdam (2000)<sup>50</sup> and is a long-time consultant specialising in Chinese business. At the Economics and Business Studies Faculty, he established the VU University China Research Centre (Vrije Universiteit China Research Centre; VCRC). Pál Nyíri was appointed Professor of Global History from an Anthropological Perspective at the departments of Social Anthropology and History in 2009. Recruited from Macquarie University in Australia, he held earlier academic appointments in his native Hungary and at the University of Oxford. His research is on Chinese international migration and more recently tourism and other aspects of the globalisation of Chinese culture and society.<sup>51</sup> With these two appointments, alongside the presence of Leo Douw in the History Faculty, the VU University Amsterdam now seems to be in a position to make its mark on contemporary China studies in the Netherlands.

Roughly during the same period, contemporary China studies at the University of Amsterdam picked up pace as well. Although the post of Margaret Sleeboom in anthropology was discontinued after she left for Britain, other parts of the university

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<sup>47</sup> Zhang, Ying, "Entrepreneurship Development in China: A Multilevel Approach." PhD diss. Eindhoven University of Technology, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Li Yuwen, "Transfer of Technology for Deep Sea-Bed Mining: The 1982 law and beyond," PhD Diss., Utrecht University, 1994.

<sup>49</sup> Leo Douw, "The representation of China's rural backwardness 1932-1937: a tentative analysis of intellectual choice in China, based on the lives, and the writings on rural society, of selected liberal, marxist, and nationalist intellectuals," PhD diss., Leiden University, 1991.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Peverelli, "The History of Modern Chinese Grammar Studies," Ph.D. diss., University of Leiden, 1986; Peter Peverelli, "Cognitive Space: A Social Cognitive Approach to Sino-western Cooperation," Ph.D. diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> Nyíri has authored or co-authored at least six books in the past thirteen years, including Pál Nyíri, *Chinese in Eastern Europe and Russia: A Middleman Minority in a Transnational Era* (London: Routledge, 2007); Frank N. Pieke, Pál Nyíri, Mette Thunø and Antonella Ceccagno, *Transnational Chinese: Fujianese Migrants in Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

have now taken up the baton. With a gift from the Dr. Olfert Dapper and China Foundation, Stefan Landsberger was appointed part-time Professor of the Culture of Contemporary China at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Amsterdam. Jeroen de Kloet (1967) is a home-grown China specialist in the Department of Media Studies. De Kloet's research is on popular music, in particular Chinese rock and pop music, and more recently he has expanded his scope to include contemporary art, new media and cinema. At the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis he founded the Transasia Cultural Studies Group. De Kloet was appointed Professor of Globalisation Studies in 2012. Benjamin van Rooij (1973) studied both law and Chinese studies at Leiden University.<sup>52</sup> In 2010, he moved from Leiden's Van Vollenhoven Institute for Law, Governance and Development (see below) to the University of Amsterdam Law Faculty as Professor of Chinese Law and Regulation and head of the newly established Netherlands China Law Centre. Just before this article went to press, van Rooij accepted an appointment at the University of California, Irvine that is scheduled to start after the summer of 2013. Van Rooij's research focusses on processes of lawmaking and implementation of law, with particular emphasis on compliance and enforcement. The topics of his research include land management and land use planning, pollution regulation, labour law, tax collection, and food safety.

It is unlikely that the considerable number of new professorial appointments at the VU University Amsterdam and the University of Amsterdam were part of a deliberate strategy on the part of their central administrations. Each appointment rather seems to have been caused by the confluence of accidental circumstances, or perhaps the dawning realisation to individual departments that China has become too much of a global power to be merely covered tangentially in generalist research. However, with a good number of scholars in place now, time may have come to take a longer-term view. An exciting possibility discussed already for some time is more formal collaboration between China specialists at the two Amsterdam universities. If this were to happen, contemporary China studies in the nation's capital would be able to reach critical mass, potentially rivalling Leiden's establishment of contemporary China scholars.

Despite these promising developments in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and elsewhere in the Netherlands, for the time being at least Leiden University continues to be the main institutional setting for contemporary China studies. Apart from the continuing strength in contemporary China studies within the China studies programme of the Humanities Faculty already discussed at length, Leiden's Van Vollenhoven Institute at the Law Faculty and the Department of Political Science have long had an interest in specialist knowledge on contemporary China. In the Department of Political Science, Michel Korzec was a lecturer until his departure in 1997. After a fallow period of ten years without a China specialist, in 2007 the department appointed Daniela Stockmann (1978), a specialist of political communication and public opinion in China with a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Michigan.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Van Rooij received his Ph.D. in Law in 2006. His thesis was published as Benjamin van Rooij, *Regulating Land and Pollution in China: Lawmaking, Compliance, and Enforcement; Theory and Cases* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2006).

<sup>53</sup> Daniela Stockmann, "Propaganda for Sale: The Impact of Newspaper Commercialization on News Content and Public Opinion in China," Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2007). The revised thesis has been published as Daniela Stockmann, *Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Stockmann's lectureship is in political psychology and research methodology and thus not specifically dedicated to China studies, testimony to the continuing insertion of specialist China research into the mainstream of political science in the U.S. and, one hopes, increasingly in Europe as well.

In 1995, the Van Vollenhoven Institute for Law, Governance and Development (VVI) received a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Education for what became the Leiden-Beijing Legal Transformation Project. Initiated by Tony Saich, then still Professor of Modern China Studies at Leiden, the project started as a programme of legal education and training for Chinese scholars and practitioners. Chinese partners in the project were the Institute of Law at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Law School of Renmin University of China. The VVI argued that, for such a programme to succeed, research on recent developments in Chinese law was also required, and received funding from the Ministry for this as well. Project researchers at the VVI were Chen Jianfu (now at LaTrobe University), Li Yuwen (who moved on to Utrecht and subsequently Rotterdam), and for a brief period Benjamin van Rooij as research assistant. At a later stage of the project, the VVI decided on a long-term commitment to research and teaching of Chinese law, funding a Ph.D. position to which van Rooij was appointed. After van Rooij's graduation, his position was continued as a full lectureship in Chinese law in 2007. As a lecturer, van Rooij taught Chinese law both at the VVI and the China studies programme in Leiden until his departure for Amsterdam in 2010.

An important contribution to China studies in the Netherlands, including contemporary China studies, continues to be made by the Leiden- and Amsterdam-based International Institute of Asian Studies. Although the institute sits somewhat uneasily within the overall framework of the Dutch academic world, it has since its founding in 1993 attracted an immense wealth of Asian studies expertise and innovation to the Netherlands with its postdoctoral fellowships, visiting professorships (including the Taiwan-sponsored European Chair in Chinese Studies) and as host to short-term visitors. The IIAS postdoctoral fellowship scheme has not only brought many people to the Netherlands that otherwise would never have been able to come, but also regularly awards fellowships to recent Dutch Ph.D. graduates, giving them time to revise their theses, develop new projects and in general give them a head-start in the job market. The IIAS has also regularly engaged in the funding and organisation of conferences, seminars and research projects on contemporary China.

In addition to the main centres of contemporary China studies, the two Amsterdam universities, Rotterdam and Leiden, a few other places in the Netherlands have employed or are currently still employing China specialists. At the Netherlands Institute of International Relations (or Clingendael Institute) – a government think tank and provider of short-term courses mainly aimed at diplomats – Ingrid d'Hooghe, a sinologist, and Frans-Paul van der Putten, a historian, both serve as specialists in China's international relations. Between 2006 and 2009, Willem van Kemenade – the longest-serving China correspondent in the Netherlands – was a senior fellow at the institute. His tenure contributed greatly to the volume, visibility and quality of modern China research and teaching at the institute. At Utrecht University, an interest in Chinese law continues to exist after the departure of Li Yuwen for Rotterdam in 2010, although a new appointment dedicated to China has yet to be made. At both Wageningen Agricultural University (2000-2005) and the University of Groningen

(2005-2010), Peter Ho served respectively as a lecturer and Professor of Development Studies before taking up the Chair in Chinese Economy and Development in Leiden in 2010. Tilburg University also has an interest in contemporary China. Members of academic staff at Tilburg who work on China include Jeroen Kuilman, Henk van Gemert and G.M. Duisters, all at the School of Economics and Management. Finally, Nyenrode University, the oldest and most prestigious business school in the Netherlands, has a Europe China Institute with economist Haico Ebbers as its principal China specialist.

### *5. Contemporary China studies in the mainstream*

The proliferation of contemporary China studies in departments and universities beyond China studies in Leiden and anthropology in Amsterdam follows logically from China's rapidly growing importance on the world stage. The spread of China specialist expertise is, however, only half the story. It has been complemented by (and sometimes was simply an adjunct of) a much broader process of the academic *mainstreaming* of contemporary China. This does not mean simply that China is "hot" and the flavour of the day. Mainstreaming indicates the increasing normality of China as an aspect or even chief focus of academic research and teaching: it has become increasingly difficult to speak with authority about global processes or general disciplinary questions without including considerations that pertain to China. This not only includes the humanities and social sciences, but also the biological and medical sciences, and even some aspects of engineering and the natural sciences. This process started with generalists or specialists of other areas who, first perhaps out of simple curiosity, developed projects either specifically on China or with a China component, often in collaboration with China specialists, researchers in China, or Chinese graduate students to provide the necessary China-specific knowledge, access to data or local research opportunities, or simply Chinese language skills. However, as China gains in stature, it becomes more than just an adjunct to projects about issues, concepts or hypotheses that have little to do with China itself (and therefore in many cases do not fit Chinese realities, leading to often very peculiar or even dangerously distorted perceptions of the country). Chinese realities have increasingly become generative of specific concepts and ideas to be tested not only in China, but also elsewhere. China specialists themselves also increasingly direct their research and publications to disciplinary or comparative rather than China-specific questions. This is in particular true for certain types of research on matters relating to the environment, agriculture, development, health and disease, business and entrepreneurship that are still rooted in a fundamental perception of China as a developing country (thus increasingly positioning China as a paradigmatic case of development), but a similar trend can be detected in other fields as well.

Mainstreaming China (both by China specialists and generalists) started in the U.S., where it has gained considerable momentum, although its pace and impact vary considerably across disciplines, even within the social sciences and humanities.<sup>54</sup> In

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<sup>54</sup> On what he calls the "rise of disciplinary China scholarship", see Andrew G. Walder, "The Transformation of Contemporary China Studies, 1977-2002," in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David Szanton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 314-340. Ten years ago, I myself also pointed to the impact that mainstreaming will have on the study of China; Frank N. Pieke, "Introduction", in *The People's Republic of China*, ed. Frank N. Pieke. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 1-10.

the Netherlands, a Dutch scholar without a specifically China background who in a sense pioneered a disciplinary and explicitly comparative approach is Geert Hofstede. As a professor of management studies at Maastricht University, Hofstede has always been far removed from the mainstream of Chinese studies in the Netherlands. In the 1980s he developed a formidable international reputation for his work on cultural difference and business practices.<sup>55</sup> His work included many cultures, but his observations on Asian and especially Chinese culture drew perhaps the most attention. China at the time had just begun to embark on reform and opening up, creating a strong demand (or even desire) for bite-sized generalisations about contemporary China that could readily be applied when doing business in the People's Republic. Hofstede's model of cultural difference provided just that. His work may now come across as outdated (particularly perhaps to an anthropologist), but his is the first instance of research that included China as simply just another culture, comparable to any other culture and comprehensible in terms of a general set of concepts and ideas.

Mainstreaming of China research, particularly by generalists, makes China less directly recognisable than does the work of specialists. Description of this kind of research therefore does not lend itself to the highly individualised and anecdotal approaches used in the previous sections of this article. However, some indications of the type of mainstream research that is carried out can be gleaned from the project database of the Dutch Research Council (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek, or NWO, in English formally called Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research). The NWO and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie van Wetenschappen, or KNAW) have encouraged collaboration between Dutch and Chinese scholars through funding schemes for academic visits, collaborative workshops or conferences, and full project funding. For the period 2000-2011, a total of 147 grants involved China. Of these, only 23 (16%) were in the social sciences and 40 (27%) in the humanities. Even more tellingly, only 4 (3%) in the social sciences and 12 (8%) in the humanities were awarded to a China specialist!

However, the NWO database may give a slightly distorted picture. It includes not only major research grants, but also conference and network grants. Moreover, many of the "generalist" projects have only a very modest China component. Data on current Ph.D. projects on China in the Netherlands collected in 2011 by the IIAS, the International Institute for Asian Studies, give a better picture; nevertheless, Ph.D. students, particularly those from China itself, arguably are also a major vehicle for the insertion of China into the mainstream of a discipline and thus a very good indicator of trends and the future shape of academic research.

According to the IIAS database of 248 current or recently completed Ph.D.'s on Asia, 53 (16%) were on China, making China the largest field of study just ahead of Indonesia (50, or 15%), India (35, or 11%) and Vietnam (24, or 7%). Most remarkable is the data on the distribution of China Ph.D.'s across Dutch universities. Of the 53 students nationally, 20 students were enrolled at the Agricultural University in Wageningen and 22 at Leiden University. At the Erasmus University Rotterdam (with 3 students) and the University of Amsterdam (with 2), the number of Ph.D. students

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<sup>55</sup> Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International differences in work-related values* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980).

clearly has not – or, in the case of Amsterdam, perhaps has not yet – kept pace with the relative weight of China-related specialist research by the academic staff. Equally important is the distribution of China research according to discipline. Each of the 53 Ph.D. projects was assigned to up to three fields. According to this breakdown, 26 were in the humanities, 21 in the pure social sciences (economics, sociology, political science, anthropology, psychology), while an applied social science (law, business, agriculture, development, environment, planning, policy, education and so on) was given 80 times.<sup>56</sup> The disciplinary breakdown and distribution across the universities, moreover, are strongly connected. Of all China Ph.D.'s, Leiden students were concentrated in the humanities and to a lesser extent the social sciences fields (history, arts, religion, law, policy, communication, sociology, politics, economics, education, anthropology, linguistics). Wageningen students, by contrast, focussed more on applied subjects, particularly those related to agriculture, the environment, development and economics.<sup>57</sup>

The picture of China-related research in the Netherlands and its future thus seems reasonably clear. A focus has emerged in Wageningen in fields that see China as the world's largest and most successful developing country. Such research plays to traditional Dutch strengths in agricultural sciences, the environment, planning and development. Other applied fields, such as business or law, are spread more evenly across Dutch universities. Their interest in China is predicated on the perception of China as one of the world's most important economies and the opportunities for careers, business, trade and investment that this entails. Another equally clear and traditional strength is in the humanities concentrated in Leiden. This is based in large part either on Leiden's long-standing area studies or Oriental studies tradition, and on the perception of China as a "natural other", a welcome antidote to the traditional Eurocentric nature of the traditional humanities.

In this picture of a predominance of humanities and applied social science subjects, the fundamental social sciences (economics, sociology, political science, anthropology) are relatively underrepresented, although of course by no means absent. This is the particular area where the large comprehensive universities in the Netherlands – first and foremost the University of Amsterdam and VU University Amsterdam, but possibly also Utrecht University, Radboud University Nijmegen and University of Groningen – should be able to find room to expand into (contemporary) China research.

## *6. Remnants of the past and challenges for the future*

Contemporary China has gone in and out of fashion several times in the Netherlands. Whenever the demand for knowledge about China now was on the rise, the Dutch academic establishment has responded, first in the second half of the nineteenth century, then in the 1960s, followed by the 1980s, and most recently in the first

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<sup>56</sup> Although significant, we should perhaps not read too much into the preponderance of applied subjects as many Ph.D.'s might have been listed under both a pure science discipline and an applied science discipline.

<sup>57</sup> Data are from Meredith Holmgren, "The Asian Studies PhD Landscape in the Netherlands: Summary of Findings" (Leiden: International Institute for Asian Studies, 2012). In addition, I received some more detailed information directly from the report's author (Meredith Holmgren, personal communication, 29 June and 2 July 2012).

decade of this century. However, it is surprising how slow, modest and almost lacklustre each response has been. This is only partially a matter of scale: attitudes also play an important role. Unlike in the U.S., Australia, or the larger European countries, to the Netherlands China has never been terribly important.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the study of China was classed with the “small arts” (kleine letteren), fields such as Indology, Egyptology, or Celtic Studies, where student numbers were not enough to warrant the existing faculty under the terms of regulations by which the Dutch universities were financed by the Ministry of Education. This only strengthened the impression of many (especially outside Leiden) that China studies, like Egyptology or Assyriology, were primarily interested in the past, if not the distant past.<sup>58</sup> Although the situation has obviously got a great deal better, the Netherlands never generated either the tradition or the reputation in contemporary China studies that it has in pre-modern China studies. Contemporary China specialists remain isolated individuals with a passion for China who developed Chinese expertise and language skills largely on their own. Of course certain institutions and teacher-student relationships have helped, but it has all remained very incidental. For its real growth and branching out into new areas of expertise, contemporary China studies repeatedly had to dip into the much deeper pools of foreign (British, German, or American trained) scholars. Conversely, because of the very small number of people involved, promising new developments or emerging traditions could easily be cut short with the departure of just one scholar. After the allocation of national funding for the Documentation Centre in Leiden in the 1960s and 1970s, growth and development of contemporary China studies outside Leiden has never again been a matter of planning or strategy, neither on the part of the national government nor on the part of individual universities. The only exception is the proliferation, however modest, of Chinese business or law centres where immediate material gain is assumed, and even then such centres are often mainly a matter of individual initiative rather than a more structural commitment. At Leiden University, contemporary China studies have maintained their full strength for as long as the additional funding for the “small arts” has continued to be available.

Yet the picture is not as bleak as the above paragraph might lead one to believe. Leiden has been able to sustain and even slowly expand a permanent establishment of contemporary China expertise. Amsterdam seems finally to have reached a critical mass of contemporary China scholars. The mainstreaming of China research in Wageningen has attained a scale that remains largely unnoticed among China scholars, but internationally might actually be the most visible part of China studies in the country. Yet for all other universities (with the partial exception of Rotterdam), China as a subject remains a rarity and a luxury that prudent university administrators do not indulge in, an attitude that no longer is in tune with the times.

If we in the Netherlands wish to develop contemporary China studies further, we not only will have to navigate the cliffs of administrative inertia, but also to address the issue of a lack of community, communication, cooperation and division of labour.

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<sup>58</sup> Following a report authored by the well-known indologist and philosopher Frist Staal 1930-2011, entitled “Baby Krishna” (1991), the Ministry of Education and Culture made special funds available for the consolidation of the “small arts.” Part of these funds was used to found the International Institute for Asian Studies, another part was distributed among the various universities. Leiden University was the major beneficiary of this arrangement in view of the large size of its Oriental studies programme.

Contemporary China studies in the Netherlands is a field with very little coherence, let alone joined-up thinking or longer-term strategy. The Dutch Academic China Meeting provides one platform, but is aimed at the engagement with non-academics rather than fostering a dialogue between China scholars. Again, this partly is a matter of scale: there are simply too few of us to sustain a viable academic dialogue, cooperation and specialisation. However, just as important is the fact that most of us think of our work as primarily targeted at the Anglo-Saxon academic world. This attitude also informs our relationships with colleagues elsewhere in Europe, with whom we mostly interact through the English-language academic establishment.

Although it seems unlikely to happen, one possibility to ameliorate the situation might be a regional approach to foster a community of contemporary China scholars in, for instance, the Netherlands, Belgium and parts of Germany who are only a few hours' travel from each other. Another (and possibly complementary) longer-term strategy would be to further encourage research and teaching on China based within the disciplines, either by China specialists or generalists. This is, as we have seen, a trend that is already well underway. Dedicated China centres or programmes require a considerable critical mass of students and staff to be viable. They are expensive and highly visible, and thus easy targets for future budget cuts. It is thus less risky to simply appoint a China specialist within a disciplinary department or channel a mainstream academic researcher into specialising in China: if need be, that individual can always fall back on teaching courses unrelated to China.

Even more importantly, the discipline-based specialist also has other, scholarly advantages. They tend to be better at addressing, if not actively asking, different kinds of questions. Area specialists such as China specialists, especially those working closely together with other area specialists, are driven by curiosity regarding their country or region, and naturally tend to focus on documenting detail, historical depth, and connections between issues that only become apparent when viewing a problem from several different disciplinary angles. This is a great good that ought to be preserved and nurtured, but there is also a distinct disadvantage to this approach. Area specialists find it very hard to relate to non-region specific questions, especially those raised in public debate. This is why China specialists in the Netherlands and elsewhere have only played a modest role in the big debates about China. What does the Cultural Revolution mean for the toiling masses exploited by world capitalism and merciless landlords? Will there be a China threat? Is China an alternative model of development? China experts often find these questions awkward, beside the point, naïve, or sometimes even threatening. They are not about China, but about something else that China might (or might not of course) have a bearing on. If you are surrounded by other area specialists, you might be able to dodge these questions altogether. On the other hand, when you are discipline-based, it is more difficult to hide from your colleagues and students, who most likely are not interested in, say, the arcane details of Communist Party organisation and cadre training, but who would like to know whether that helps to understand why the party is still in power or if its rule can still be called socialist. From there, the step to public debates or political engagement is a much smaller one.

That said, there are some disadvantages to the strategy of appointing more China researchers based in the disciplines. The obvious risk is the even greater erosion of any coherence and multi-disciplinarity that China-focussed research may have,

creating an even more pressing need for investment in an infrastructure that ties together China scholars scattered across the various departments within a university or perhaps even nationally. This is, of course, the model that is well established in many American universities and that also has spread within the U.K. It is certainly not without problems of its own, but might nevertheless be the best way forward in the Netherlands (and elsewhere in continental Europe) if we want to develop a self-sustaining and ever-growing knowledge community on China that can be a partner of, rather than a mere adjunct to, Anglo-Saxon scholarship.