

# China Watchers

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## Abstract

Recent debates have raised concerns about how academia, just like policy-makers, rely on country experts when trying to understand the politics of—particularly authoritarian—regimes. This study argues that one possible source of bias are the experts’ network of affiliations and interactions with each other, and that we should therefore make the social background and networks of country experts more transparent. We implement this by examining experts on contemporary Chinese politics using a nomination process to establish a list of over 2,200 such experts. We find that US-based and -educated male academics still form the core of this community, but that younger cohorts appear to be more diverse in terms of educational background, gender and geographic location. Our findings not just provide the first analysis of the global China Watcher community, but also speaks to current debates about the reliability of aggregated expert assessments.

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# 1 Introduction

Recent debates in this very journal (Bergeron-Boutin, Carey, Helmke, & Rau, 2024; Knutson et al., 2024; Little & Meng, 2023, 2024) have raised attention to the importance of expert assessments in political science research—and the potential of biases in the aggregate of those assessments. This problem is hardly new or unique to academic research. In particular when it comes to closed political settings (such as authoritarian regimes), government officials, foreign companies and the public have traditionally relied on country experts to tell them what is actually going on behind closed doors.

It is thus remarkable how little information most organizations that rely on such expert assessments provide to the users of their indices, and how little recent research there is on experts on specific countries or regimes: Just who, for instance, are the China Hands or Russia Watchers, whose interpretation of obscure party speak, appearances or non-appearances of party leaders, and palace rumours helps us understand some of the most powerful nations in this world are "up to"?

This paper is the first contemporary attempt to describe the community of "China Watchers" as a whole—and not just the group of experts based in the United States or working in academia. This is not a simple task. As David McCourt has noted in the only recent evaluation of the English-speaking China Watcher community, it has ballooned to multiple thousands of members (McCourt, 2022a, 64-65), and has become polarized (McCourt, 2022c). And while the community has become more international, Ash, Shambaugh, and Takagi (2007, 246)'s observation made 15 years ago—that the different national communities remain relatively separated, and that there is a "lack of international interaction among China specialists [in] Australia, Asia, Europe, Japan, and North America"—remains to some degree true, as we will show. In addition, the field has become methodologically fragmented (O'Brien, 2011), and thus research on Chinese politics is no longer published in a few, specialized venues. Or as McCourt (2022a, 73) put it: "American China watchers no longer need a degree from one of a handful of top China or Asian Studies programs to participate, but can transfer many different forms of knowledge into recognized insights." Identifying the members of this fragmented community has thus become far from straightforward.

Previous efforts to establish an authoritative list have focused on scholars whose research appears in important English-language academic journals and conferences (Greitens & Truex, 2020) or have interviewed a sample of experts based in mainly the United States (McCourt, 2022a, 2022c). One of the contributions of this paper is therefore to establish such a list that includes China Watchers outside academic institutions and the English-speaking world through a snowballing nomination method.

This approach identifies experts through a principled process of self- and other-

ascription, allowing the community to define its boundaries and determine the importance of its individual members in a bottom-up process, instead of the researchers imposing it by fiat.

Establishing such a list and analyzing its members is important because there is evidence that it matters who the members of this China Watcher community are. Jacobs and Page (2005) have shown that experts are the second-most influential group affecting US foreign policy. More recently, McCourt (2022c, 3) has argued specifically that the changing composition of the China Watcher community has contributed substantially to the replacement of the United States' long-standing "engagement" approach towards China with the tougher "strategic competition."

While describing this new makeup of the China Watcher community, our paper focuses in particular on the question of whether the composition of the community indicates biases or lack of diversity—something often summarized through terms such as "echo chambers" or "group think." We know that ordinary people and leaders can fall prey to biases, echo chamber effects and group think (Janis, 1972). If similar psychological and social patterns affect expert communities, then this threatens the validity of many seemingly "objective" measures based on aggregated expert opinions, such as transparency and democracy scores (Little & Meng, 2023), but may also lead to disastrous policy mistakes even when the decision-makers themselves do not engage in group think or a march of folly (Tuchman, 1984).

In the past, country or region specialists have made such mistakes and failed to anticipate important changes such as the fall of the Soviet Union (Remington, 1992; Rutland, 1993, 2003), the Arab Spring (Gause, 2011), or the financial crisis that ended the Asian miracle (Jones & Smith, 2001). By examining the professional and educational background of the members of the China expert community, as well as their connections to each other, we provide indirect evidence of how diverse the China Watcher community is, and whether its network and social structure might lend itself to echo chamber biases.

We show, for instance, that this expert community is indeed very diverse in terms of work institution and geographical region, educational background and gender. But it is also still dominated by male academics working in the United States who tend to have attended the same group of (mostly US) universities for their postgraduate and doctoral studies. In particular the most influential China Watchers are disproportionately US- and academia-based. There is also a tendency of experts in the US and in academia to nominate and be nominated by each other, which suggests the potential for echo chamber effects. On the other hand, there are also clear changes happening in the community: Younger cohorts of China Watchers in our database tend to be more diverse with regards to gender and educational background, as well as, to some degree, geographic location.

Because of the increasing difficulty of accessing information, the assessment of Chi-

nese politics by the China Watcher community as a whole is likely to grow in influence over important business and policy decisions, such as whether companies should invest or stay in China, or whether or how to prepare for China invading Taiwan. It is also possible that individual China Watchers themselves may substitute independent on-the-ground information with information gleaned from their peers' assessments. Society thus relies more heavily on a community of experts exactly at a time when it has become vastly more difficult to get an overview of who the members of this community are—and our research helps provide exactly that.

## **2 Methodology**

### **2.1 Diversity and Echo Chambers**

Echo chambers are widely discussed in academic and lay writing and blamed for a variety of problems, in particular the political polarization of society and the spread of misinformation. They are situations in which individuals interact mainly or exclusively with those who hold very similar opinions and are rarely or never exposed to information that contradicts their view, or to put it the Cambridge dictionary's definition: "a situation in which people only hear opinions of one type, or opinions that are similar to their own." This situation may come about by accident (Nguyen (2020, 141), "epistemic bubbles") or due to the active exclusion of alternative sources. Either way, it is often associated with the concept of "homophily" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), the idea that individuals are more likely to form ties with those who are similar to them.

With this in mind, we present two things here: First, the overall diversity of the field based on publicly available background information, and differences between age cohorts. Is the claim that the China Watcher community is becoming more diverse borne out in our data?

Second, we examine whether homophily may reinforce a lack of diversity in subcommunities in our nomination network (Interian, G. Marzo, Mendoza, & Ribeiro, 2022, 8–10). If experts with similar background, i.e. from the same country, working in the same institution, having attended the same universities, predominantly nominate each other, we might worry that any bias due to their similarity is further reinforced because they also tend to be aware of, and therefore are more likely to get their information from, experts with similar background.

## 2.2 Establishing a list of experts

In order to establish a list of experts we use a snowballing nomination process in which China Watchers nominate other individuals that they consider to be part of the China Watcher community. In other words, experts on Chinese national politics are those individuals who are considered to be experts by other experts.

The authors nominated 43 individuals as seed individuals.<sup>1</sup> We contacted these individuals first through regular mail with university letterhead, and followed up with an invitation e-mail and a reminder e-mail from our project account in the case of non-response. This was followed by a final, more personalized reminder sent from our own university e-mail account. The message contained the respondent's unique respondent ID and the link to the short survey of six questions on Qualtrics.<sup>2</sup> The survey asked about their fields of expertise, whether they considered themselves to be experts on contemporary Chinese politics or experts on Chinese political elites, how often they consumed news on Chinese politics, how confident they feel ranking the Top 20 most influential actors in Chinese politics and asked them to indicate 10–20 or more names of other experts on Chinese contemporary politics. A research assistant then searched online for the nominees' contact details and publicly available information on their gender, work place and CV.

We sent out the first letters in June 2019, and are still receiving a handful of new responses every month. We explain in the appendix(Section D) why we are confident that future entries will not change the main conclusions presented here. Specifically, we show that the most recent responses tend to nominate fewer new names and do not differ from those in the previous 2–3 waves in terms of gender and work institution composition. And while the latest waves do contain new experts in particular from less covered regions (South America, Africa and the Middle East), there is still a strong tendency to nominate the same top-nominated experts that were named in earlier waves (Figure 15). In fact, as Figure 1 indicates, there is less than 10% turnover in the most nominated China watchers after wave 4, irrespective of whether we look at the Top 10 or Top 500.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Gender and work place and institution

As of end of February 2024, our database contained 2,200 names, the result of 6,996 instances of an expert nominating another expert. For 2,028 of those nominated, we were

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<sup>1</sup>All but three of these were subsequently nominated by other experts as well.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.chinaexpertsurvey.net/index.php?page=snowball>

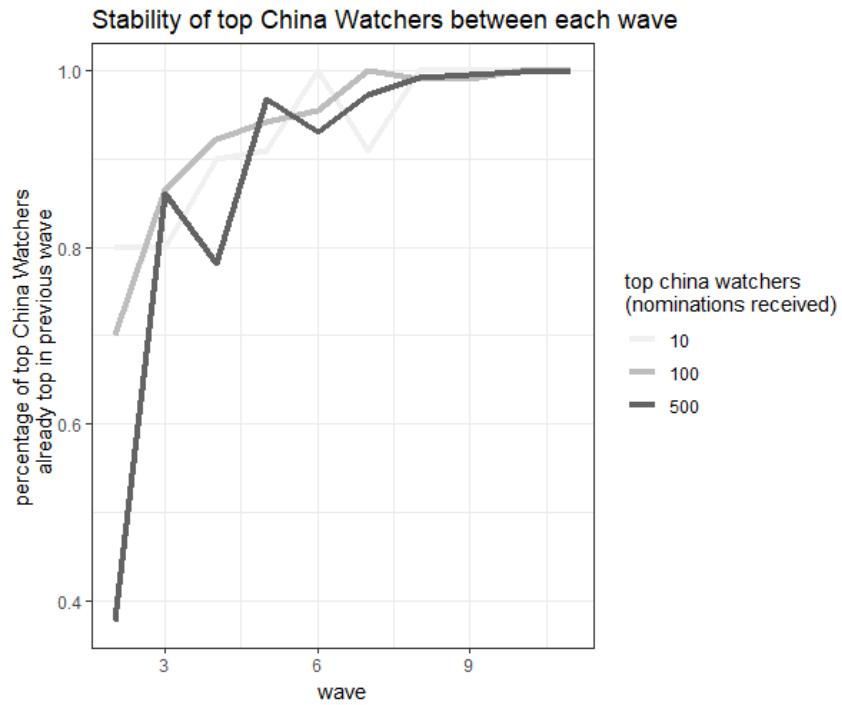


Figure 1: Percentage of top China watchers based on number of nomination received up until given wave that were already among the top China watchers in the previous wave. Different shades of grey indicate different definitions of "top".

able to identify a physical or e-mail address, of which we have tried to contact 1,969 so far.

659 of those contacted reacted to our inquiry, 40 by refusing, the rest by filling out the survey, resulting in a response rate of 28.2%. Women (with a response rate of 33.7%) and individuals working in academia (34.0%) were significantly more likely to fill out our survey. China Watchers located in Taiwan were also more likely to fill out our survey (42.0%), those located in Mainland China less so (16.2%).

Based on publicly available information, there appears to be a distinct gender imbalance in the China Watcher community: Only 552 or 25.6% appear to be women (see Figure 2, left). This is partly a cohort effect (see Section 3.3), but could also be due to bias against considering women as experts. We had tried to counteract this effect by adding a second, "dark horse" nomination question that asks for experts "who are not the first that come to mind, and that are less likely to be mentioned by other respondents." Experts nominated in this question are indeed more likely to be female, but still only make up 32.7%.

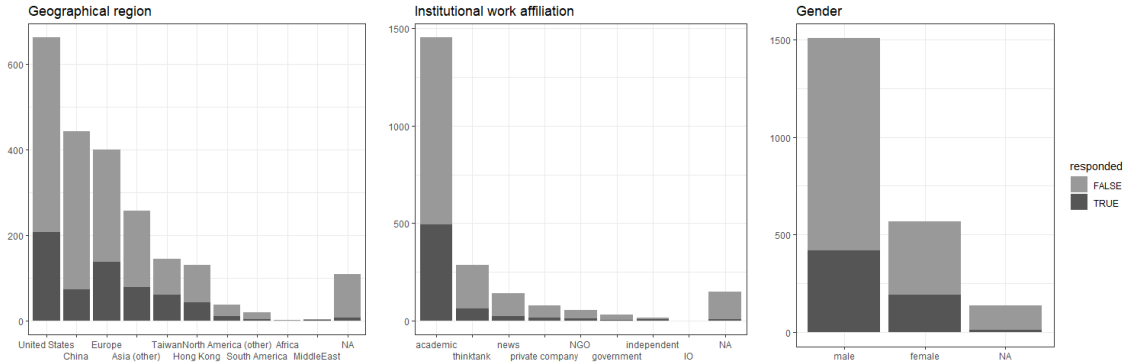


Figure 2: Distribution of gender (right), type of work institution (middle), and geographic region (left) of China Watchers in our data.

Our nominees overwhelmingly work for academic institutions (65.8%), followed by think tanks (12.9%) and news media (6.4%). Individuals that work for NGOs, the government, international organizations, private companies (consulting firms or companies that need China expertise themselves) or are independent bloggers and podcast hosts are relatively rare.

Almost a third of our nominees work in the United States (30.0%), followed by 20.0% in Mainland China, 18.0% in Europe, 5.9% in Hong Kong, 6.6% in Taiwan, and 11.6% in other Asian countries. And, like Ash et al. (2007, 243), we find that in "Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, the field of China Studies is still virtually non-existent"—our database contains less than 1% from each of those regions.

Our findings are thus decidedly mixed with regards to diversity: Despite the fact that we did not simply gather a list of authors of academic journal articles, participants of academic conferences on China, or scholars working at China Studies departments of big US universities, we still ended up with a China Watcher community that is distinctly male, academic, and based in the United States.

### **3.2 Educational Background and Age**

Ash et al. (2007, 243)'s observation that "university and research institutes are [...] no longer the only repository of expertise about China" may well be true—but universities and colleges still dominate the field. Figure 3 shows the educational background of about a quarter of the experts for which we were able to find this kind of information. Here again we observe some diversity, but also a concentration on specific universities. About a third of the China Watchers attended the Top 10 most commonly attended universities for their graduate and PhD studies (in grey), which are dominated by US-based universities. This dominance is more pronounced for higher degrees: For instance, around 38% of experts hold an undergraduate degree from a institution that only appears once in the dataset, while less than 25% hold a PhD degree from such an institution.

### **3.3 Cohort Analysis**

There seems to be a general consensus that the community of China Watchers and their outputs have changed dramatically over the last four decades (McCourt (2022a, 2022c); O'Brien (2011)). While we do not know the list we could have gotten had we implemented this study before the opening of China or during the 1980s and 1990s, we can examine different cohorts in our database to approximate the changes over the years.

Educational background information from public CVs lets us estimate the age of about half of our China Watchers (see Figure 8 in the appendix). We then divided the experts into 10-year age brackets, except for the very young and very old, where we only have few observations.

There are not too many differences in terms of institutions of work, and geographic location for the youngest cohorts are difficult to interpret because many are probably still in a non-permanent position. But there is a tendency for older China Watchers to be based in the United States as opposed to Mainland China and Europe (Figure 9 in the appendix), and there is a slight increase in individuals working for think tanks after their 50s at the expense of other, non-academic forms of employment. The changes with regards to gender composition, however, are very clear (figure 4): The youngest cohorts are much closer to gender parity than those of their older peers, a phenomenon common in many countries



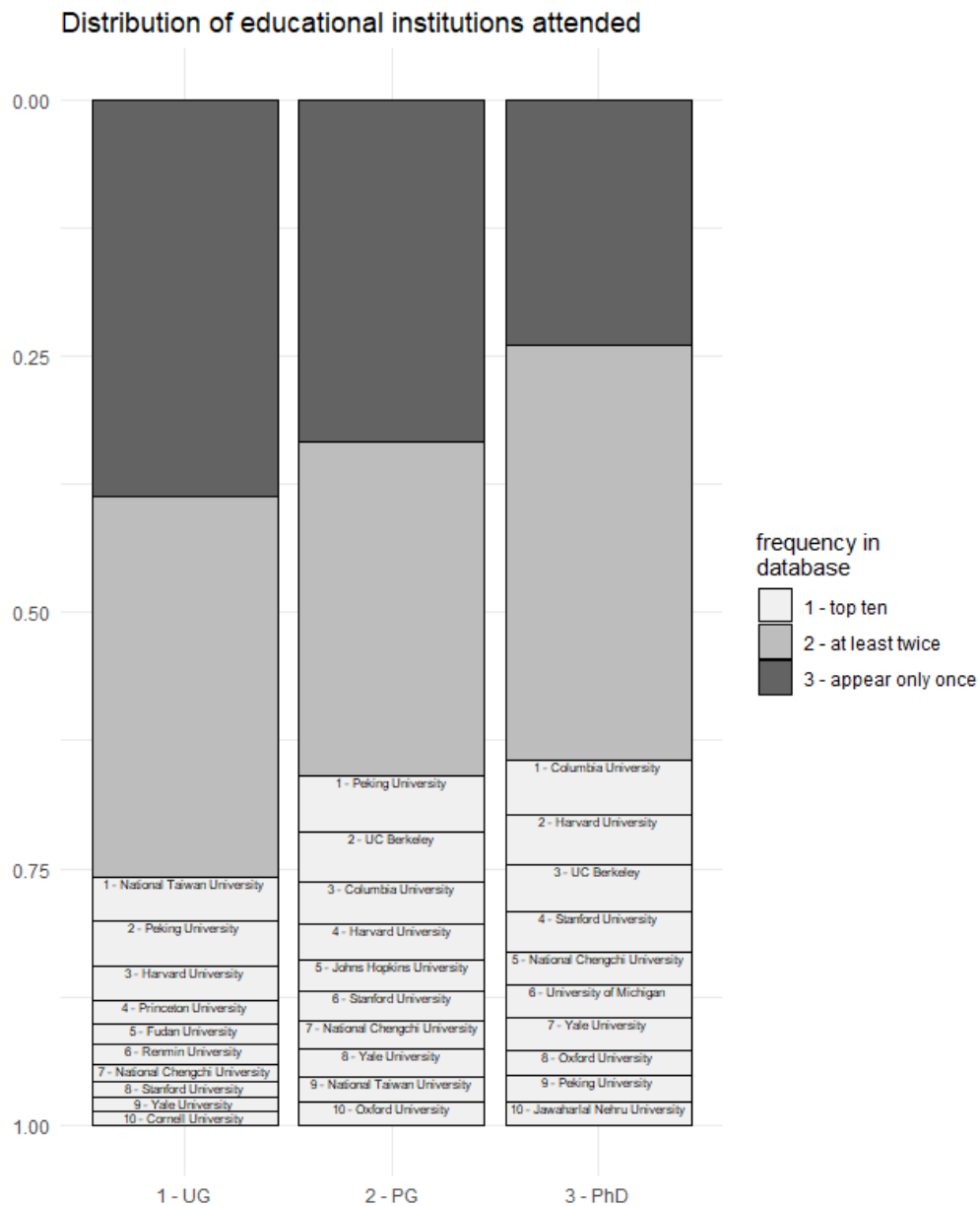


Figure 3: Educational background of China Watchers in our database: Top 10 universities (white) and distribution among institutions mentioned once (dark grey) or 2-12 times in the dataset (light grey). Length of bar section proportional to the number of China Watchers attending the specific institution(s).

and fields (Powell, 2018).

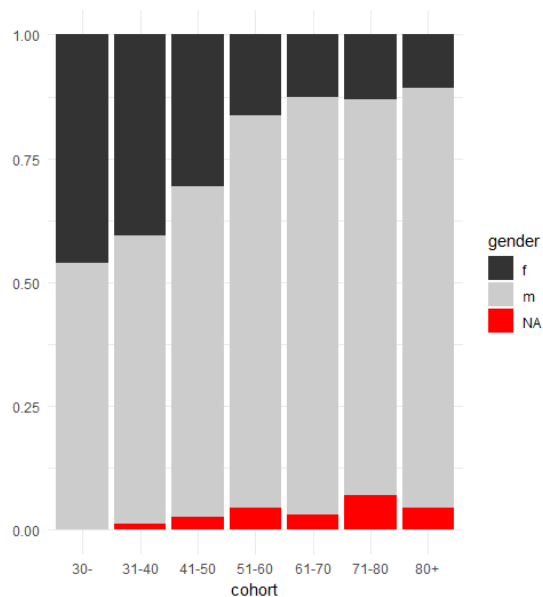


Figure 4: Gender distribution of different China Watcher cohorts.

There is also increasing diversity in the educational background in younger cohorts. We measure this using a GINI coefficient of how many individuals in each cohort attended the most commonly attended institution for their undergraduate, graduate, and PhD degree. Figure 5 confirms that there is less diversity in the higher levels of education (the GINI for the undergraduate institution is lower than that for the postgraduate and PhD institution). The GINI coefficient also increases in the age of the cohorts—China Watchers in their 60s, 70s and 80s are much more likely to have attended the same university for their PhD or MA than their younger colleagues.

### 3.4 Homophily

In addition to lack of diversity, we might also be worried about smaller echo chambers within the network. If experts with similar background mainly communicate with or nominate each other, then this could lead to an echo chamber effect within a network cluster. Figure 6 certainly points to this possibility.

The Force Atlas 2 algorithm as implemented in Gephi places connected actors closer to each other, with groups of actors nominating each other thus appearing as clusters. The clusters here appear to be mostly based on geographical region. Clusters based on type

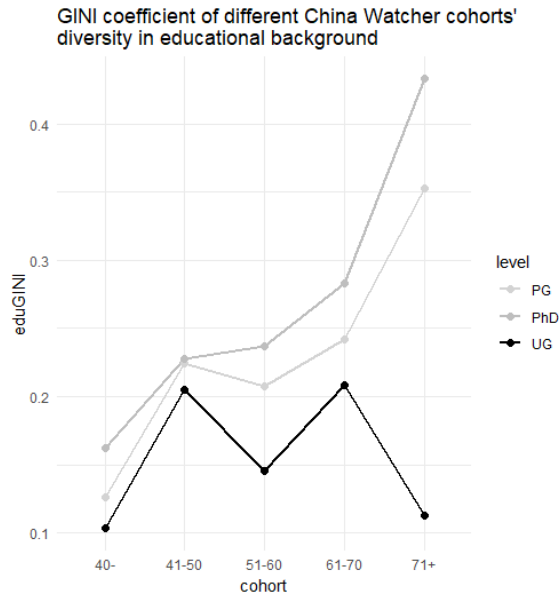


Figure 5: Diversity in the educational background (undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD degree institution) of China Watcher cohorts. Diversity is measured using the GINI coefficient: If all members of the cohort attended the same institution, the coefficient is 1, if everyone went to a different institution, the coefficient is 0.

of institutions also do exist, but are less distinct (for a better visualization of this, see in Figure 16 in the appendix).

The centrality of the United States and academia is even more striking in Figure 7, where we collapse the nodes by geographical region (left) and type of institution (right), respectively. Figures 10 and 11 in the appendix show the corresponding adjacency matrix, with the cells indicating the percentage of nominations going from a geographical region or type of institution in the row to that in the column. Experts from most larger regions tend to nominate within that region, but the second most common region nominated is almost always the United States. When it comes to type of institution, however, experts in academia are always the most common type to be named.

### 3.5 The most influential China Watchers

Even if a field is relatively diverse, its very influential core community could be a lot more homogeneous. Our nomination approach allows us to identify such particularly influential individuals, which we define as having received 10 or more nominations (120 individuals).

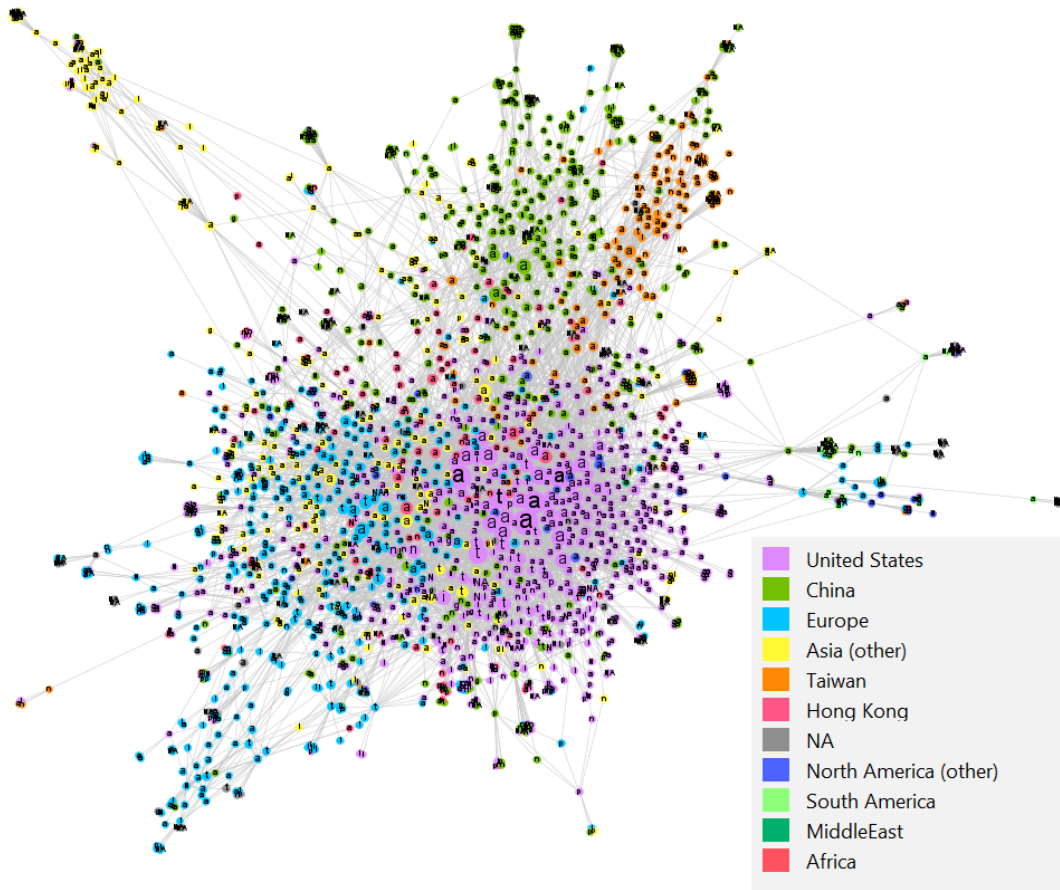


Figure 6: The nomination network of the China Watchers in our database, with size of node proportional to indegree, i.e. number of nominations, color according to geographical region of work institution, with letters indicating the type of institution (a = academic, g = government, i = independent, n = news, N = NGO, p = private company, t = thinktank).

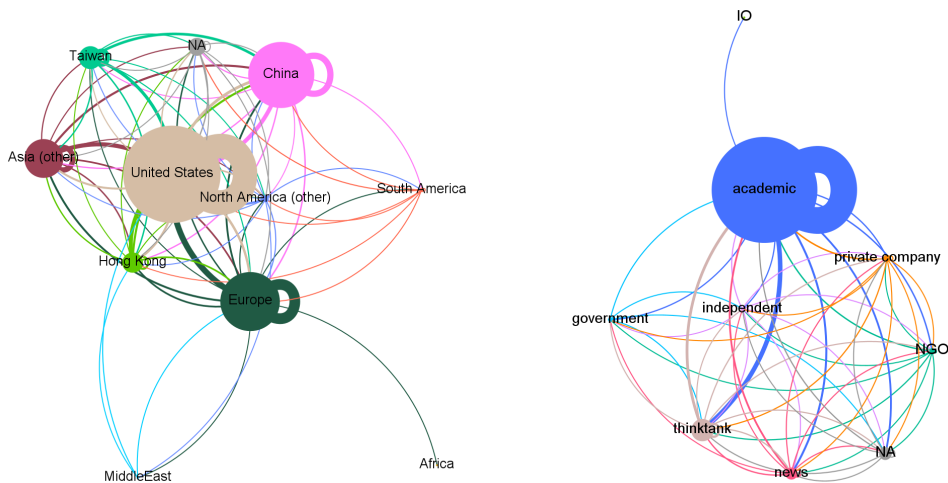


Figure 7: Network of experts in geographical region (left) or type of institution (right) nominating each other. Size of nodes is proportional to number of experts, width of arcs proportional to number of nominations, color of arcs corresponds to sending node, arcs follow clockwise direction.

Unsurprisingly, those individuals tend to be older on average (60 instead of 56 years old), and even more likely to be working for a university (78%) and live in the US (60%). However, they are not more likely to be male, and their educational background is, if anything, a bit more diverse: The GINI coefficient for all three levels of education is lower among the top 120 individuals than in the whole community.

## 4 Conclusion

An analysis of publicly available data of more than 2,200 experts on Chinese politics worldwide, gathered through a bottom-up nomination process, has shown that this China Watcher community is globally connected and diverse, but also still dominated by male US-based academics. This may be problematic, as we also document a fair level of homophily, meaning that experts are more likely to note other experts who are similar to them, which suggests they may not be exposed to the full breadth of information available in the community. We do, however, find evidence for changes in the composition of the community: Younger cohorts in our database tend to be more diverse with regards to gender, educational background, and geography.

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# Appendix

## A Additional figures

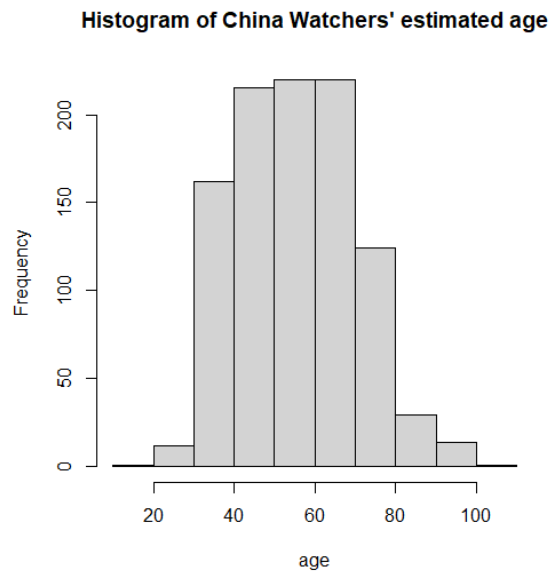


Figure 8: Estimated age in our sample, assuming an age of 23 at graduation and/or 31 when receiving the PhD (based on averages for non-missing observations in sample).

## B Ethical considerations

The questions asked in our survey mostly pertain to the respondents' expertise, and one could argue that we are therefore not dealing with human subjects in that classical sense. We nevertheless submitted our study to the relevant ethics committees of our universities and received approval. (The project number for the ethics review approval at National Taiwan University : 202005HS042)

The respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary, how the data they provided would be used and that they could find additional information on our website. They were not provided with any incentives except the promise of a personalised report.



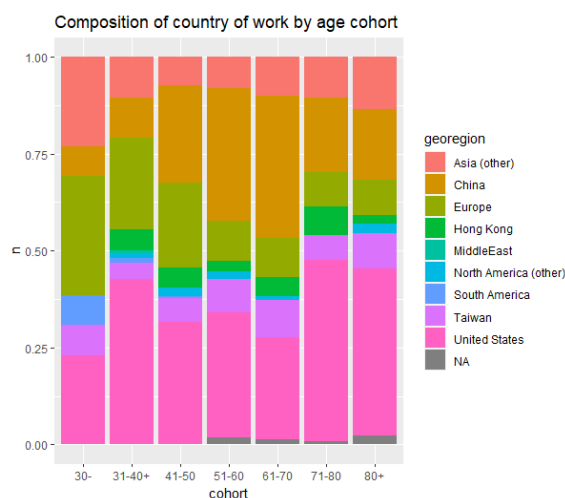


Figure 9: Workplace of different China Watcher cohorts.

Finally, we gave each respondent a unique ID, which they would enter when answering our survey hosted by Qualtrics. The document linking the unique ID to the respondents' names and addresses was stored separately.

## C Data sharing

As most respondents have a professional presence online, it would be relatively easy to identify at least some of them using a combination of variables available in the dataset: there may only be one academic based in Hong Kong that has attended the specific combination of undergraduate, graduate and PhD institutions, for instance. And even the individuals that do not have such a unique background could be identified with reasonable certainty by a member of the community if they also had access to the nomination network. In order to protect the privacy of our respondents, we therefore will only publicly share aggregated data for this study.

## D Development of dataset over time and waves

Snowball samples are often thought to be simple convenience samples, but as Gile and Handcock (2010) show, principled snowball samples can approach random samples if one is willing to make certain assumptions and let the sampling process run for enough waves. This is of course particularly true in a case where the snowball process is not intended to



Figure 10: Fraction of nominations by experts in source region going to experts in target region

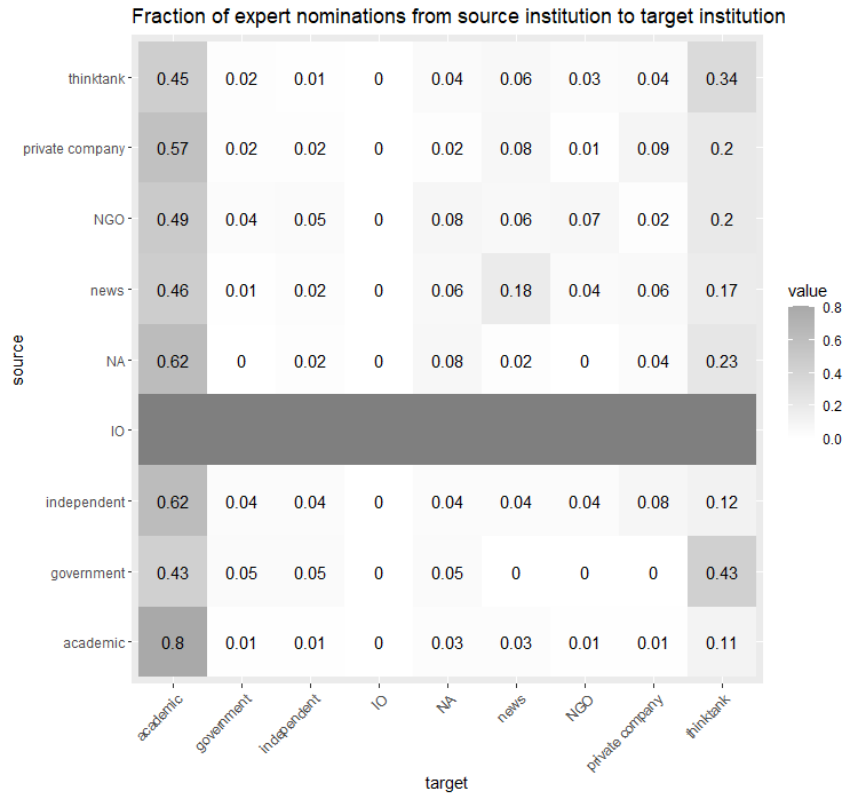


Figure 11: Fraction of nominations by experts in source institutions going to experts in target institutions

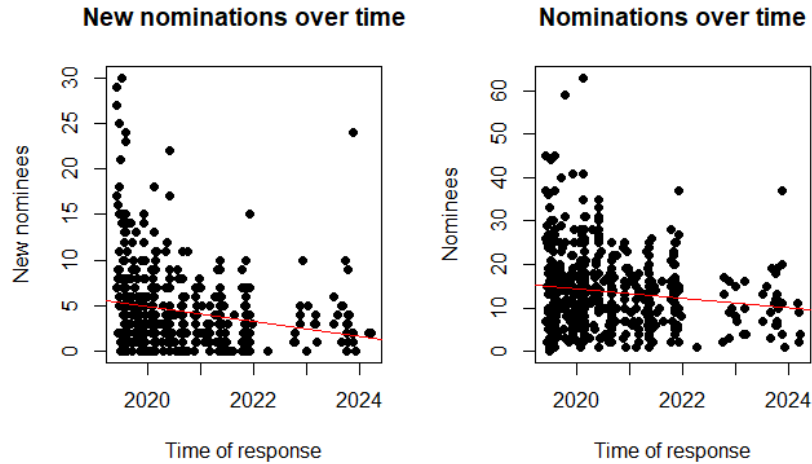


Figure 12: Number of experts nominated (right) and number of new experts nominated (left) by each respondent over time.

produce a sample, but the whole universe of cases - which is what we do here. Figures 12-15 indicate that we have explored a large part of the potential network. We receive fewer new names over time, while the number of people nominated by each respondents only declined slightly (figure 12).

Examining the composition of the different waves in which the experts were nominated (figure 13) and the characteristics of the experts they in turn nominate (figure 14), we find that they move away from the characteristics of the PIs who nominated the first wave of respondents, as predicted by Gile and Handcock (2010). We see fewer experts based in Taiwan and Hong Kong (location of the PIs who nominated most of the initial China experts) almost immediately, and fewer from the United States (where the PIs got their PhD) after the 4th wave, with other regions, such as Europe and other parts of Asia, increasing in prominence. The snowball process also penetrates traditionally under-covered regions (Ash et al., 2007) such as Africa, South America and the Middle East. The same occurs for work place diversity: While academic institutions remain dominant, later waves also contain more individuals working for think tanks, NGOs, and private companies.

## E Comparison with alternative approaches

There are a variety of other approaches that we could have chosen to establish a list of experts, but most of these produce lists of China Watchers with specific backgrounds: For

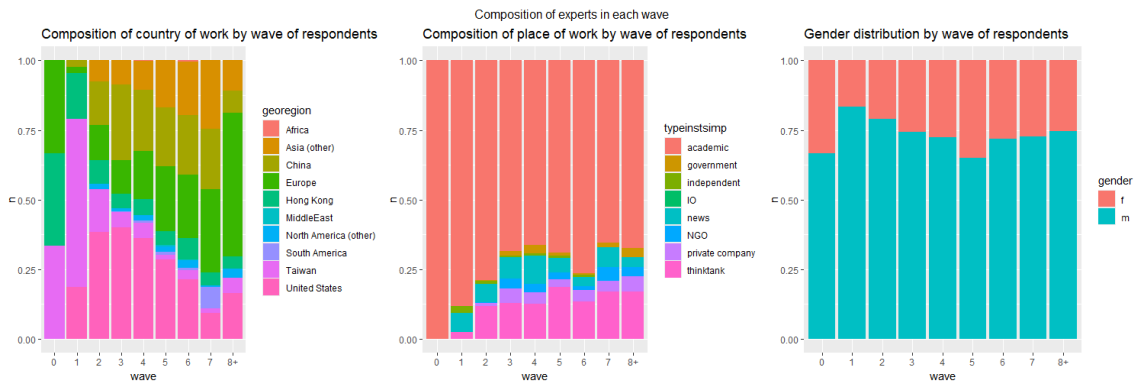


Figure 13: Composition of different waves by respondents country of work (left), institution (middle) and gender (right). Missing values removed for clarity. Waves 9-11 were collapsed into wave 8 because they contained less than 25 individuals each.

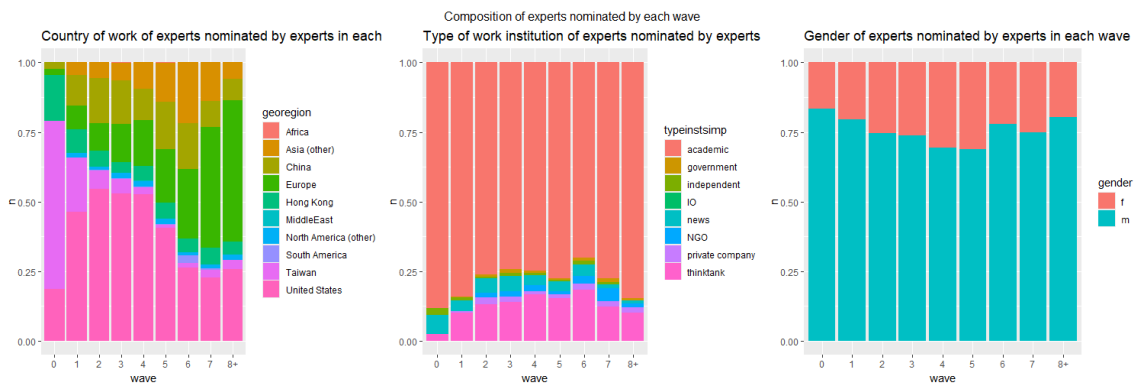


Figure 14: Composition of experts nominated by each wave by nominees' country of work (left), institution (middle) and gender (right). Missing values removed for clarity. Waves 9-11 were collapsed into wave 8 because they contained less than 70 individuals each.

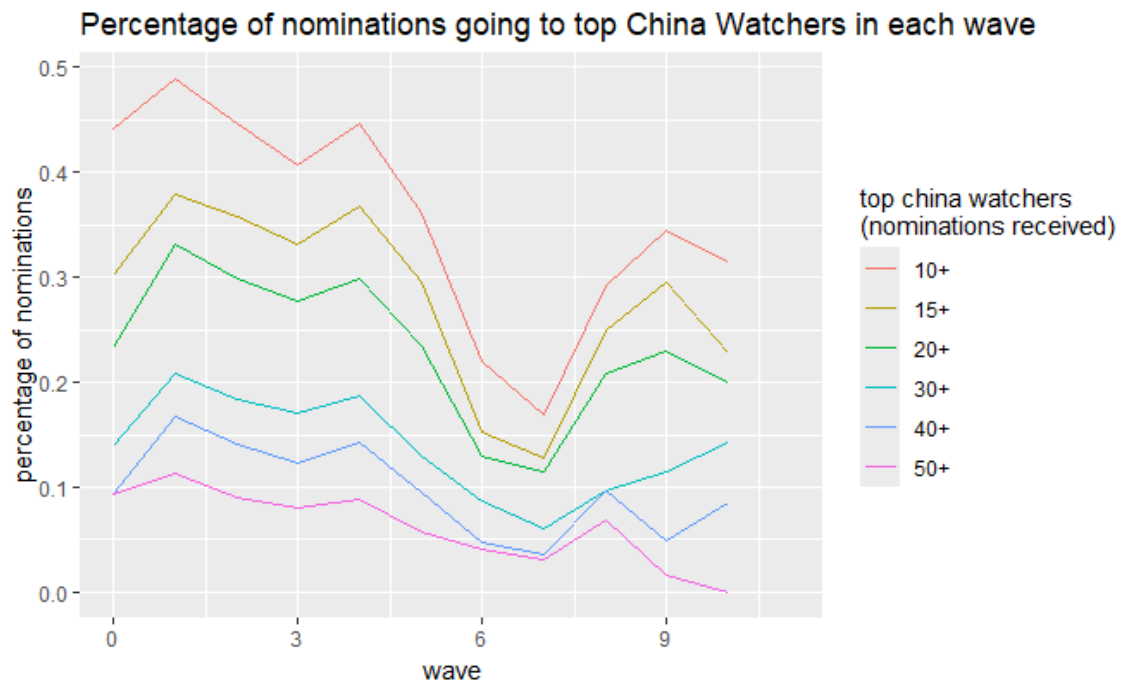


Figure 15: Percentage of nominations going to top China Watchers by wave.

instance, drawing up a list of contributors to important area journals (such as the *China Quarterly*, the *China Journal*, etc) likely results in a list of mostly academic experts. Lists of signatories to open letters regarding China policies result in experts with specific policy views. Lists of authors of China-related articles in top newspapers mainly provide us with journalists and China Watchers who write Op-Eds.

Still, such alternative sampling methods help evaluate whether the snowball sample has captured the most important and central China Watchers and whether it has difficulties reaching China Watchers with a specific background. The following sections with present comparisons with different alternative lists.

## **E.1 McCourt**

The most interesting comparison is that with the list of individuals interviewed and mentioned in the output of David McCourt's research project on China Watchers McCourt (2022a, 2022b, 2022c). Like our project, McCourt's set out to cover the broad China Watcher community, but only those based in the United States (and some in the UK and Australia). He has interviewed 150 individuals and mentions another 81 in his publications. Some of 231 individuals also have made enough public statements that he is able to assign them to four different camps that indicate how they would like the United States to interact with the P.R. of China, namely "Engagement", "Competitive Coexistence", "Strategic Competition", and "New Cold War." The list also contains some information about the type of institution the respondent works in.

125 of the 231 individuals in McCourt's research appear in our snowball sample. Of the subset of 150 individuals interviewed, 95 are in our list. Included in his sample are some that McCourt thinks are rather marginal to the China Watcher community: Of those 20 individuals, only one also appears in our sample. Thus there is considerable overlap: Between 59 and 65% of McCourt's China Watchers are part of our list. But there are discrepancies: Those included in our sample are more likely to be affiliated with universities and less likely to work for the government, pointing to a possible bias towards academic China Watchers. Among the different policy positions groups, only the "New Cold Warriors" have a majority of their members not included in our sample. This chimes with McCourt's observation that this camp tends to be made up of individuals closer to the military and intelligence services, often lacking the classical "China studies" training. "Traditional" members of the China Watcher communities may thus not consider them to be proper "China experts", and rarely nominate them. And as many of them do not work in academia, they are also less likely to answer the survey and nominate their like-minded peers.

## E.2 Female representation

Only 26% of the China Watchers on our list are women. This strikes us as relatively low. This is partly a cohort effect: The female experts in our list are on average more than 8 years younger than the men. But it is also possible that survey respondents are less likely to think of women as possessing expertise on China. The NGO NüVoices publishes a crowdsourced list of female and non-binary China experts to make female and non-binary China experts more visible.<sup>3</sup> The list also contains a "Category" variable similar to our "type of institution" variable, and the current location of the expert. When we downloaded it in August 2023, it contained 612 unique names, only 30.5% of which are on our list. The determinants of who makes it into our sample is similar as in the case of McCourt's list: Academics are overrepresented, while individuals working for NGOs and or in private companies or consultancies are less likely to appear. In terms of location, the picture is less clear: While US-based female experts on this list are more likely to appear in our sample, those based in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China (i.e. the locations of two of the Pis who selected the initial round of experts to contact) are less likely. It is therefore unclear if this differences is due some residual bias of the initial seeds or due to NüVoice maybe focusing on non-US-based female scholars.

The small overlap of less than a third could be a reason for concern, but may also simply be due to the nature of NüVoice's list. After all, it is exactly designed to raise the profile of individuals that may not be named by those familiar with the community. NüVoice's China expert list is also somewhat broader, extending beyond experts on contemporary Chinese politics. It contains also, for example, experts on Chinese contemporary art.

## E.3 Public Intellectuals

An alternative way to operationalize the definition of China Watchers is to focus on them explaining Chinese politics to the public. In other words, we would collect lists of individuals who write Op-Eds on China, or are interviewed as China experts by journalists. As one possible sampling strategy in that vein, we collected all authors of China-related articles in "Foreign Affairs", and all guests of the two CSIS podcasts "Pekingology" and "China Power". Unfortunately, this collection is only a list of names without any information on the location or institutions the experts are working in.

Of the 80 individuals who have appeared in the "Pekingology" podcast, 69 (86.3%) appear in our sample. This is reassuring, as we were particularly interested in experts on Chinese elite politics and somewhat primed the respondents to think about the definition of contemporary Chinese national politics in that way by asking them about their confidence

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<sup>3</sup><https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1319IH7kVahhXwWFsMtBdrMs11gWYGOKqNI6rfUM84k4/edit#gid=0>



in ranking the top 20 Chinese political actors. The overlap with the 212 guests of the "China Power" podcast is smaller - 108 (50.9%) - which is likely due to the latter's broader focus and tendency for inviting non-academics. The overlap with the 130 Foreign affairs writers is even smaller - 52 or 40% - probably for a similar reason.

The individuals appearing in any of these outlets tend to be much more central in our nomination network than those who don't - and they overwhelmingly work in academia or think tanks and are based in the United States (with some podcast participants located in China and Europe). A cursory examination of those that do not appear in our sample seems to indicate that they are more likely to work in other types of institutions, but any statistical conclusion will have to wait for a manual collection of the relevant data.

## **E.4 Academics**

Another alternative way of selecting China Watchers is to focus on their production of (scientific) knowledge by collecting authors of scientific articles on China and Chinese politics from academic journals. We've used Web of Science to download the names of all authors who published articles in the China Journal and the China Quarterly, as well as those who published on China in the American Political Science Review and the American Journal of Political Science since 1960. Unfortunately, Web of Science provides the full name of the authors for some time periods, but only the initials and the family name for other periods. The resulting list of 4973 names thus could contain duplicates (when the same author is listed with full name and abbreviated) or lump together separate individuals with the same family name and initial.

The overlap between those two lists ranges between 7.8% (perfect match) and 27.7% (match on initial and family name) and is thus not very high. The overlap for different journals is not fundamentally different: APSR 3.8-26.8%, AJPS 17.5-35%, China Quarterly 8.1-29.4%, and China Journal 12.734.4%. The reason for the relatively small overlap is probably that neither of these journals just publish articles on Chinese politics: China Quarterly and China Journal cover many other China-related issues. China-related articles in APSR and AJPS, on the other hand, may be co-authored by individuals with methodological skills, but very limited China expertise.

## **E.5 Discussion**

Given the length of our list of China Watchers, it may seem worrisome that we capture only 30% or less of some of the alternative lists. But as mentioned earlier, each of the alternative lists operationalizes a slightly different conceptualization of the term "China Watcher": McCourt focuses on the United States policy establishment, NüVoice tries to

	McCourt (231)	NüVoice (612)	Foreign Aff. (130)	Pekingology (80)	China Power (212)	Academic (4973)
McCourt (231)	116/231	4/21	4/18	0/8	3/29	2/29
NüVoice (612)	4/21	187/612	0/8	1/12	5/23	30/81
Foreign Aff. (130)	4/18	0/8	78/130	0/4	1/16	1/18
Pekingology (80)	0/8	1/12	0/4	11/80	0/7	2/28
China Power (212)	3/29	5/23	1/16	0/7	104/212	2/17
Academic (4973)	2/29	30/81	1/18	2/28	2/17	4584/4973

Table 1: Overlap between different samples in row and column. The number after the forward slash indicates the number of experts contained in the both lists. The number before the forward slash indicates how many of those overlapping experts are not contained in our list. Reading example: McCourt’s list of 231 experts and the 4973 authors publishing in academic journals contain 29 identical names, 2 of which do not appear in our list.

foreground female experts on China more broadly, Foreign Affairs and the Pekingology and China Power podcasts feature mainly well-established experts who want to engage in a dialogue with the wider public, and the academic journals are outlets for experts for whom publishing in such outlets is important, i.e. who work in academia. All of these lists may thus contain individuals that match the approach’s definition, but may be rather marginal to the overall community. We would be more worried if we observed a large overlap between two of the other lists that is missing from our list.

Table 1 shows that these names are relatively rare, while the overlap between the different alternative lists is actually also quite small.<sup>4</sup> The largest overlap is between the rather long NüVoices and academic journals lists with 81 names, 30 of which are not in our list. But we miss 5 or less China watchers in any other combination of two lists. In other words: Different approaches to capture the China Watcher community tend to result in quite different lists and therefore should be seen as complements instead of substitutes. But only a handful of the experts that appear on more than one list are left out of our own sample.

<sup>4</sup>It should be noted that the latter is probably an underestimation, as the overlap among alternative lists is calculated using exact match without manual verification.

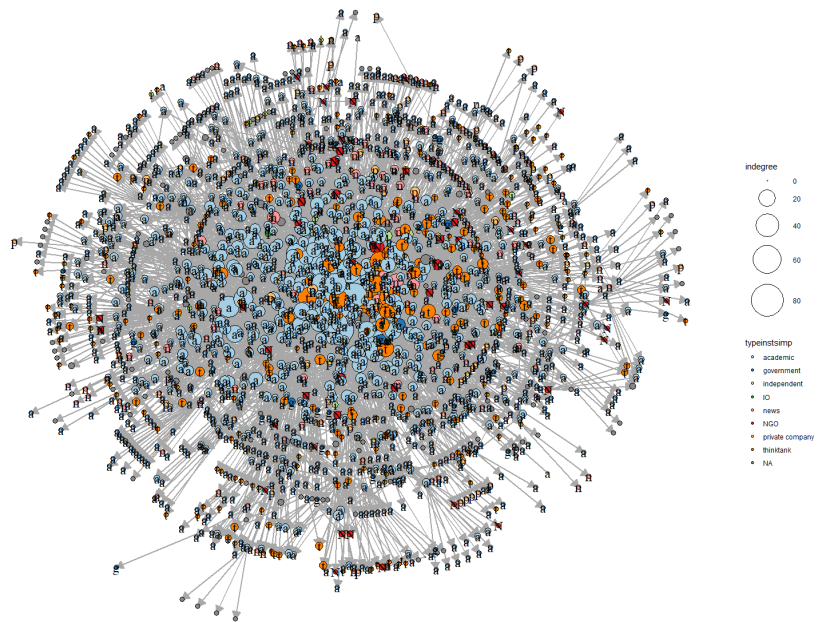


Figure 16: The nomination network of the China Watchers in our database, with size of node proportional to indegree, i.e. number of nominations, and color according to type of work institution.