

The Growth of Contemporary China Studies and *The China Quarterly*

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While China studies in the United Kingdom has waxed and waned, *The China Quarterly*—in part due to its relatively early founding with American financial support in 1960 but also in part due to the excellent editorial skills found in the United Kingdom—has managed to remain the premier contemporary China studies journal in the world.¹ As the English language has become even more the world's *lingua franca* over the past half century, *The China Quarterly* has benefited by expanding from a Britannic-American base to become a truly "international" journal of China studies. As we shall see, the most crucial sign of this is the large number of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau-born ethnic Chinese who have chosen to publish their works in our journal's pages. In this sense, and despite growing (but welcome) competition from other journals, recent changes in the scholastic focus of *The China Quarterly* still reflect the direction of the best research in contemporary China studies.

For comparative purposes, perhaps a simple statistical analysis of an early year (1969) with the most recent one (2002) can give a feel for how

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¹As a supplement to this essay, one can find the views of past *China Quarterly* editors in *The China Quarterly*, no. 143 (September 1995): 669-96. See also Andrew Marble's research note on *The China Quarterly* in this issue.

Table 1

Topic of Articles and Nationality of Authors for Two Selected Years of *The China Quarterly* (in percentages)

Topic/Discipline	1969	2002	Author Location	1969	2002
Political Studies	79%	58%	USA	77%	44%
Economics	4%	25%	UK	14%	11%
Demography/Geography	13%	11%	Australia	9%	7%
Religion	4%	0%	Germany	0%	16%
Literature	0%	3%	Hong Kong	0%	11%
Medicine	0%	3%	France	0%	3%
			R. Korea	0%	3%
			Singapore	0%	3%
			Portugal	0%	2%

the journal has or has not changed. Bearing in mind limitations,² table 1 reveals the major changes in China studies over the last half century.

These trends represented are true, if not in the specifics, at least in the big picture.³ Over the years there has been growth away from political topics, although such foci still dominate in China studies and in *The China Quarterly*. The dominance of politics is related to the nature of China in the 1950s and 1960s when U.S. government agencies and those in other Anglophone countries funded much of the English language research. In addition, there was little economic, geographical, legal, or social anthropological literature to work with for those outside of China. Thus the China watcher from the outside could only gather information from surveys of emigrants or from official documents that were heavily political in nature. Field studies generally were undertaken in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Macau.

²As with most "statistical analyses" there are flaws. In this instance, I made a single disciplinary link for each article. Therefore, articles became associated with what was the dominant topic, although most contained flavors of more than one focus. As an example, a 1969 article about Buddhism during the Cultural Revolution was listed as "Religion" whereas a 2002 article about organization of the *Falungong* (法輪功) was categorized as "Political Studies."

³As another limitation of this mini-survey, note that the 2002 Special Issue was devoted to Sino-European relations from a European perspective. This one volume goes a long way to explaining the growth of numbers of authors from continental Europe in 2002.

Table 2
Number of Ethnic Chinese Publishing in *The China Quarterly*
(by place of residence)

Place of Residence	1969	2002
Hong Kong	0	5
USA	2	3
Singapore	0	1
Taiwan	0	1
Australia	0	1
Germany	0	1
UK	0	1

Today this trend has changed drastically given the wide variety of data now available from the People's Republic. Likewise, the chances to do fieldwork in inland China allow for all sorts of field surveys. The greatest surge seems to have come in economic studies, although environmental-scientific and socio-cultural studies have also increased (see below). It is worthy of note that art and literature studies have generally tried to find outlets outside of the mainstream China studies journals—this despite efforts by some of the editors to encourage publications in these areas since at least the 1980s.

While the number of contributions has increased from the non-English speaking world, most notably from Western countries (such as France and Germany), table 2 also reflects another major transformation. Although issues of *The China Quarterly* have grown in size since the 1960s when they were often just over a hundred pages a year to roughly 1,250 pages today, it is still clear that the proportionate number of ethnic Chinese publishing in the journal has increased. Moreover, many of these authors are resident in Taiwan and Hong Kong, although very few reside in inland China or tiny Macau. Not shown on table 2 is that the number of authors with Chinese names romanized in *pinyin* (拼音, i.e., scholars born in inland China) has skyrocketed in the last decade. Ironically, there is much more writing by Chinese scholars today in English at a time when Chinese language journal quality is also improving.

Also not apparent from these tables is the changes in the quality and

specific focus of the work being produced. The need of academics to establish themselves in disciplines has been increasing as the pressure of research assessment for promotion, departmental ranking, and job security increases in many countries. For better or for worse, these assessments are discipline-based. Sadly this means that academics often publish top quality articles on China in discipline-based journals where their interested readership is much smaller than in a journal like *The China Quarterly*.

This trend of "publish in your discipline journals" and "identify with your discipline or perish" is affecting area studies in many countries; the articles appearing in *The China Quarterly* are thus naturally becoming more discipline-centered and methodologically focused. The journal increasingly has tried to insure discipline excellence—but I think the other driving factors have been sufficient to lead to this change.⁴ While the positivist approach—which argues that social studies should be looking for universal principles rather than studying the unique in isolation—has negative impacts upon much area studies work and funding, there also have been some benefits from increased discipline rigor. In my six years as editor, I saw a growing number of submissions that tried to test discipline-based theory within a Chinese context. Sometimes, articles were turned away if they required a sophisticated understanding of technical expertise—such as quantified techniques or knowledge of scientific nomenclature—that might be better received in a discipline journal. Active debates that engage research on China for comparison with other countries were, however, welcome. *The China Quarterly* can afford to look for methodological rigor because our number of submissions is high. The large volume of quality methodological input has made editorship a pleasure—but also a time-consuming task requiring considerable help from other scholars for which I am thankful.⁵

⁴The journal and the field owe a particular debt to the unsung heroes who have pointed out the wide range of disciplinary skills found on *The China Quarterly* editorial board and assured auditors that they should award more points for articles published in the *CQ* in their various national research selectivity ratings.

⁵Allow me to thank here all those who aided me by refereeing papers that were beyond my methodological expertise.

At the same time, the journal has tried to improve its Sinological skills.⁶ The days when articles could be based solely upon Western language secondary sources essentially ended in the 1970s. Use of primary sources or field experience has become an essential element for acceptance of most submissions. At the same time, there is an increasing volume of English language translations of primary sources—many of these accessible on the web. While this has taken away some of the Sinological "magic" from non-Chinese writers, this change has sped up many researchers' ability to absorb large quantities of information and has enabled some writers to produce good quality general articles solely from English language materials.

For well over a decade, *The China Quarterly* has tried to broaden its readership to appeal to journalists, governments, and the business community as well as the general public. The appeal to government is not new, as the U.S. government was directly involved in the creation of the journal in the first place. However, contact with journalists began almost from the start and the business community has been interested in the journal since the beginning of the reform period around 1980.

Special Issues are now an annual event and mean that anyone can find state-of-the-art information on a topic within one volume. Some of these issues, such as the one marking the fiftieth anniversary of the People's Republic and the volume on Sino-European relations, have striven to present a very broad picture for the non-expert as well as the expert.

So what themes have dominated the pages of *The China Quarterly* during my days as editor since mid-1996? There is not space to write about this in detail but one can organize the writing of the last six years around certain themes (albeit with much overlap).

One way or another, reform was the largest concern of *China Quarterly* authors in this period. Many articles focused on economic aspects of reform including reforms of banking, housing and property, industry,

⁶As one small sign of this dedication to helping the specialist, *The China Quarterly* began to incorporate a Chinese-language glossary under my editorship.

overseas investments, the private sector, the tax system, and rural welfare. Organizational reform has been just as key a topic as education, the legal system, the *hukou* (戶口) or registration system, think tanks, and social organizations targeted by experts. In more purely political terms, authors have written about both reform—of elections, leadership change, and statistical reporting—and the emergence of new elite groups.

In contrast, over the last few years proportionately less has been written about foreign policy—traditionally an important subject in *The China Quarterly*, although U.S.-China relations and Europe-China relations have been major topics of research as has been China's WTO entry. Perhaps the relative reduction in international relations papers can be explained by the ability of China specialists to work more on internal issues rather than by a decrease of interest in China's foreign policy. There continues to be much debate, however, in various aspects of the military: weapon development, organization of the People's Liberation Army, and defense industries.

Another major theme revolves around human rights. Articles have addressed various aspects of this topic including dissent, intellectuals, land rights, control of the media, migrant issues, religion, women, and workers' rights.

A growing area of interest might best be called economic geography. Themes have included urban competition for market share, regional inequality, central-provincial fiscal relations, coastal development, the environment, health, and the ability of China to feed itself.

Another relatively large theme has been articles relating to identity and place. Here we find articles on such varying places as Harbin (哈爾濱), Taiwan (台灣), Hainan (海南), and Shanxi (山西) as well as migrants in Beijing (北京) and Overseas Chinese (華僑, *Huaqiao*). Ethnic issues concerning minority and Han (漢)-Chinese relations as well as regional boundaries and ethnic identity have also appeared

Hong Kong and Macau both became Special Administrative Regions (特別行政區) during my period as editor. These transitions—including their political, economic, and educational ramifications—were the object of research in *The China Quarterly*. Likewise, Taiwan was of interest both as a democracy dealing with sensitive issues in new ways and as a place

with a discontinuous history.

Not just pre-1945 Taiwan but the Republican period on the mainland have both been investigated for the value that history can teach us about the present situation. Some authors used study of literature to represent the feelings of those earlier periods.

Finally, *The China Quarterly* had the sad obligation to mark the end of the lives of many who had shaped China studies in the West during the journal's early years. A. Doak Barnett, Bill Brugger, Keith Buchanan, Jürgen Domes, Jacques Guillerma, Helmut Martin, Michel Oksenberg, Benjamin Schwartz, George Taylor, Tang Tsou, and Gordon White have all passed away since 1996. I am sure we missed others—especially those scholars who provided key work inside China. Their contribution to China studies helped formulate the field we find today.