

Reimagining China Studies: Taiwan as a Platform for Engaging with the Sinosphere

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Executive Summary

In Canada, as in many other countries, we need to prepare ourselves more robustly to manage our relationship with China, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in order to address effectively the many global issues on which China has significant influence. Gaining a sophisticated understanding of the Sinosphere and cultivating China competencies among academics and analysts in the public, private and non-profit sectors will help us to do so.

China competencies can be developed in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and in Taiwan. Under current geopolitical conditions, some international Sinosphere specialists are hesitant to pursue China Studies in the PRC, in light of restrictions on research access and security considerations. Adaptability is called for in reimagining China Studies and encouraging continued engagement in the Sinosphere.

Taiwan has much to offer in terms of engaging with the Sinosphere and training the next generation of international China specialists, with teaching programs and research centres providing training to develop language proficiency, serious scholarship in China studies, and policy-relevant competencies. It also offers an opportunity to engage with regional academic and policy networks that offer a fresh, non-Western perspective on the Sinosphere, cross-Strait relations and regional dynamics. We should tap Taiwan's expertise through visits by scholars and analysts, teaching exchanges and focused conferences.

While the decline in cross-Strait engagement has weakened direct academic links between Taiwan and the PRC, Taiwan's pool of expertise remains deep. Compared to shrinking opportunities in the PRC, Taiwan continues to offer a robust environment for alternative approaches to China Studies, especially for understanding geo-politics, geo-economics and security in regional and global contexts.

This research does not suggest that China experts in Taiwan are more objective than China experts elsewhere. It does suggest that astute international observers should use their own judgment to assess the quality of analysis by Taiwan experts and determine if the evidence supports the conclusions drawn.

Canada will benefit from having more people who understand what is going on in China, are proficient in Chinese and understand perspectives on the Sinosphere from both sides of the Taiwan Strait. There are many persuasive reasons to consider Taiwan as a springboard for this endeavour.

This report's appendices —The [Inventory of Selected Academic Resources Relevant to Sinosphere Studies in Taiwan](#) and the [Matrix of Canada-Taiwan University Linkages](#)— provide practical examples highlighted in this research on *Reimagining China Studies: Taiwan as a Platform for Engaging with the Sinosphere*.¹

¹ This report is based on information provided by selected Taiwan academic institutions, from their websites or via in person interviews in spring 2025. Time constraints precluded visiting more institutions. The Inventory of Sinosphere Resources (Appendix I) covers a broader range of institutions than those mentioned in this report. While interlocutors' views may be subjective, I endeavoured to include a mix of different perspectives and observations in this report. Some of the information will inevitably be obsolete or inaccurate. The responsibility for information presented in the report and its interpretation is my own.

Introduction

This paper examines Taiwan as a platform for training future China experts and building bridges of knowledge and collaboration in this field between Canada and Taiwan. It is set against the backdrop of Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy and how China and Taiwan are positioned within that strategy.² This Strategy, launched in 2022, aims to position Canadians for success through engagement with the region, by building knowledge and capacity to engage. While this research is grounded in the interest of reimagining China studies for Canadians under current geopolitical conditions in 2025, much of the information is equally relevant to those from anywhere outside the Sinosphere with an interest in China studies.

I use the term Sinosphere to refer to greater China, with a principal focus on contemporary China (the People's Republic of China or PRC) and Taiwan (officially known as the Republic of China). In this paper, I use the terms China Studies, Sinosphere Studies and China competencies interchangeably.

The research involved meeting with faculty, administrators and students from over a dozen universities in Taiwan to undertake a series of interviews, addressing the question of what Taiwan offers as a place for training future China experts and analysts to work on the Sinosphere.

Ten public universities and research institutions were selected on the basis of having established area studies programs with a strong social science foundation. This was complemented by including two of Taiwan's private universities.

The universities and research institutions were:

- National Taiwan University (NTU), located in Taipei
- National Cheng Chi University (NCCU), located in suburban Taipei

² [Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy](#)

- National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU), located in Taipei
- Academia Sinica (Sinica), located in suburban Taipei
- Tamkang University, located in Tamsui
- National Defence University (NDU), located in suburban Taipei
- National Tsing Hua University (NTHU), located in Hsinchu
- National Chung Hsing University (NCHU), located in Taichung
- Tung Hai University, located in Taichung
- National Cheng Kung University (NCKU), located in Tainan
- National Sun Yat-Sen University (NSYSU), located in Kaohsiung
- National Dong Hwa University (NDHU), located in Hualien

Background and rationale for *Reimagining China Studies: Taiwan as a Platform for Engaging with the Sinosphere*

This research was prompted by the need to reimagine China studies for the next generation of potential Canadian specialists, at a time when Canada-China relations and international perception of China are otherwise discouraging. It was also prompted by curiosity about the value of Taiwan as a platform for learning about the Sinosphere today, and about the extent of Canada-Taiwan academic linkages. To investigate this, in spring 2025, I undertook three months of fieldwork in Taiwan, based at National Taiwan University's Centre for China Studies, whose senior management was instrumental in introducing me to Sinosphere scholars across Taiwan.³ My research focus was principally contemporary subjects such as political science, economics and sociology as well as Mandarin language training.

In 2025, the field of China Studies is experiencing rapid change as a result of geopolitical turbulence and increasing restrictions on international academic engagement with and field research in the PRC. Many international China specialists are thus rethinking how to

³ This research was supported by a Taiwan Fellowship from Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as a grant from the York Centre for Asian Research whose China Insights Fund for the first time included Taiwan within the framework of reimagining China studies.

continue to conduct research and sustain meaningful academic engagement with counterparts in China. Discussions with Canadians, including those at early stages of careers related to the Sinosphere, suggest that some are questioning the relevance of this field and its continued viability. Their perception is that studies and research in China are less accessible and/or riskier than they used to be, and that the employment demand for these skills is shrinking. Some perceive few career prospects at a time when Canada, like other countries, urgently needs people who have a nuanced understanding of the Sinosphere, of cross-Strait relations, and of China and Taiwan's respective positioning in Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Others are reorienting their research to shift away from topics which require fieldwork in the PRC.⁴

In the face of shrinking space for international academic engagement with mainland China, expanding Canada-Taiwan academic collaboration offers a means of sustaining and deepening interest in the Sinosphere (including mastering Mandarin) among students as well as researchers and faculty. In addition, Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy is intended to foster closer people-to-people ties between Canadians and those in the Indo-Pacific region. More specifically, the Indo-Pacific Engagement Initiative aims to support outbound scholarships and fellowships, research in and collaboration with partners in the region, including Taiwan, and can cover subjects related to the Sinosphere.⁵ Hence the value of mapping Taiwan's resources in terms of China Studies.

⁴ "Next Generation China Scholars Conference" at University of Toronto, 15 Feb 2024; Canada China Forum Event "China Careers: Are they Still Worth the Investment?", 17 Sept 2024, at University of Toronto; Martin Regg Cohen, *Canadians are Turning Away from China*, **Toronto Star**, 17 Feb 2024.

https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/canadians-are-turning-away-from-china/article_7ad5487e-cdd5-11ee-8932-dbd1db39b2.html; Bessma Momani et al, *Mapping Out the Global Innovation Landscape*, Waterloo: Waterloo International, University of Waterloo 2025 [Reports | Dr. Bessma Momani | University of Waterloo](#)

⁵ Under Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, the Indo-Pacific Engagement Initiative includes two programs which can foster academic collaboration, including with Taiwan. The *Indo-Pacific Scholarships and Fellowships for Canadians* are designed to foster the development of Canadian expertise on issues related to the Indo-Pacific and create linkages between Canadian researchers and counterparts in the region. The *Regional Connectivity Envelope* is designed to enhance connections between Canadian academic and other organizations, Canadian researchers and think tanks, and those in the Indo-Pacific region. See [Indo-Pacific Engagement Initiative](#)

This research is intended to help address these questions in three ways:

- a) This narrative report synthesizing my findings in Taiwan highlights how Taiwan can help Canadian students, scholars and the next generation of China analysts deepen their understanding of the Sinosphere and develop China competencies, including what is happening within China and Taiwan as well as China's regional and global influence.
- b) An [Inventory of Selected Academic Resources Relevant to Sinosphere Studies in Taiwan](#) (Appendix I) provides an annotated list of select university programs and opportunities in Taiwan of greatest potential interest to Canadian scholars of the Sinosphere. It also includes reference to wider themes, such as Asian Studies, international relations, international business and indigenous studies. The Inventory is divided into two sections: opportunities organized by institution in Taiwan and information on funding and other resources related to Sinosphere Studies in Taiwan. The inventory does not cover think tanks in Taiwan which address issues related to the Sinosphere.
- c) The matrix of [Canada-Taiwan University Linkages](#) (Appendix II) is based on Canadian sources, supplemented with data from interviews in Taiwan and institutional websites. This spreadsheet is searchable by Canadian university.

Why does this matter and what gaps does this research fill?

The extent of Taiwan's expertise, teaching and research resources related to the Sinosphere is not as widely known in Canada as it should be. Raising awareness in Canada of these resources and encouraging Canadians to consider Taiwan as a destination for study and research provides an avenue for exploring the Sinosphere and mastering China competencies.

The inventory of Sinosphere resources can inform those interested in deepening their knowledge of the Sinosphere, including Mandarin, as well as research and teaching relevant to China, Taiwan and Asia. It includes degree programs in Chinese and English as

well as context for teaching exchanges and visiting scholars. It can help provide practical information about opportunities in Taiwan to develop China competencies.

The matrix takes stock of existing linkages between universities in Canada and Taiwan. Interviews in Taiwan suggest there may be room to make them more active as well as to identify potential new partnerships.

Why Taiwan and why now?

The PRC and Hong Kong no longer offer the convenient training grounds they once did for those seeking to sharpen their China competencies. In contrast, Taiwan has gained in prominence as a vital alternative hub for China Studies. It provides a rich environment for serious research and language training, bolstered by strong academic institutions, access to extensive data, and deep regional expertise—without the political pressure noted in the PRC.

Interviews with over a hundred university interlocutors confirmed Taiwan’s strength in research, language instruction and policy engagement. Its position within the Sinosphere provides a critical vantage point for understanding the evolution of Chinese society and politics. Familiarity with Taiwan’s current realities and cross-Strait dynamics can be very valuable for enhancing China competencies and a deep understanding of the Sinosphere.

For those pondering the impact of the changing landscape of China Studies, Professor Wang Hsin-Hsien of National Cheng Chi University analyzes this succinctly in his work on “China Studies without China”, with a particular focus on the positioning of China Studies in Taiwan in light of global changes.⁶ Those interviewed view Taiwan as an increasingly

⁶ Wang Hsin-Hsien’s article on “China Studies without China”: 王信賢 (國立政治大學東亞研究所特聘教授兼國際關係研究中心副主任)。2024-06-09, “沒有中國的中國研究]: 全球變局下, 台灣中國研究的重構與新定位. 台灣的中國研究不僅是學術研究, 也是攸關台灣命運的政策研究。” Link to podcast by Wang Hsin-Hsien: 什麼是「沒有中國」的中國研究? | 端聞 Podcast <https://theinitium.com/audio/20250115-initium-audio-taiwan-china-studies-restructuring>"

pivotal vantage point for China Studies, particularly as regional and global conditions shift, emphasizing Taiwan's strategic role in fostering interdisciplinary and policy-relevant research.

Key advantages include:

- Instruction in Mandarin, providing full immersion for those seeking proficiency.
- Cultural affinity with mainland China, rooted in shared history and customs, religious beliefs and folk traditions.
- A more open intellectual environment, including publication and media freedom, enabling unfettered academic and public discourse.
- Ability to interpret mainland Chinese sources within ideological and historical context.
- Regional academic and policy networks, offering diverse non-Western perspectives.
- Increasing international recognition of Taiwan's expertise on China, especially as direct access to mainland scholars declines.
- Access to research funding, including fellowships and scholarships.
- Shared academic paradigm of social sciences with the West in terms of problematique, subject matter of interest, methodology and theoretical perspective.
- Easy logistics for travel between Taiwan and the PRC, since there are many flights to between Taiwan and cities across China - and no jet lag.

Taiwan has a long history of China-watching and its knowledge assets remain very strong. The revival of interest in the Taiwan tradition of China Studies harks back to an earlier era, prior to the PRC's opening to the outside world starting in the late 1970s: for the first 30 years after the PRC's establishment in 1949, Taiwan served as a critical observation post,

offering eyes and ears on China.⁷ Today, significant resources are available in Taiwan in terms of funding and talent to collect data. An international scholar underscored the value of learning from Taiwan experts' monitoring of the Chinese economy and thinking about economic resilience, e.g., in anticipating the impact of a potential blockade.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, international interest in Taiwan's academic resources—including archives, surveys and public opinion data—has grown. Taiwan also offers valuable insights in terms of understanding local perceptions of China, given that the PRC poses a significant strategic challenge to Taiwan. The views of Taiwan's China specialists are necessarily coloured by the state of cross-Strait relations, and the possibility of potential bias is an ever-present factor. The section below on cross-Strait academic engagement reviews the extent to which China scholars in Taiwan remain directly engaged in or with the PRC.

As one historian who was interviewed put it, “The Chinese Communist Party justifies its legitimacy by taking control of the narrative of Chinese history, posing an existential threat to Taiwan. Historians [outside the PRC] can make a contribution by re-establishing the historical record . . . We need to articulate effectively how history can transform identity.”

Taiwan's push toward bilingual education⁸ and the growing catalogue of English-language courses at Taiwan universities also make it more accessible to international students and researchers who are not proficient in Mandarin.⁹

⁷ [A Review of China Studies in Taiwan: History, Development and Main Contributions - Guan-yi Leu, Mu-min Chen, 2025](#)

⁸ Information can be found here on the Taiwan Ministry of Education's program for internationalization of higher education and Sustained Progress and Rise of Universities in Taiwan (SPROUT), which includes attention to international competitiveness. <https://english.moe.gov.tw/cp-48-17299-E6CF9-1.html> (Date: 2024-12-30); <https://sprout.moe.edu.tw/en-us/main.aspx>

⁹ Thoughtful analysis of these issues can be found in the paper "Internationalization of Higher Education in Taiwan," by Ping-yin Kuan, Harry Harding, Syaru Shirley Lin, and Li-yun Wang, Siwei Huang and Caroline Fried, commissioned by the Talent Circulation Alliance, Nov 2020.

In terms of developing China competencies, interlocutors in Taiwan suggested several ways in which Canadians could benefit from using Taiwan as a platform for deepening their knowledge of the Sinosphere. One observed that Westerners typically see China through a Western lens, hence the value of coming to the region to understand how China is perceived regionally. Another pointed out that Canadians need to better understand Taiwan as a nexus of US-China rivalry, underlining the perception gap among Canadians related to Taiwan, cross-Strait relations, and Taiwan's perspectives on the Indo-Pacific. Yet another suggested that Canada could learn from Taiwan's experience in managing a large unfriendly neighbour. And one proposed collaboration among scholars in Taiwan and in Canada with a shared vision on how to reimagine China studies.

Freedom of expression and publication

For those interested in the exchange of intellectual ideas in the public sphere, unfettered by political constraints, Taiwan offers considerable scope for thought leadership, translation and publication. Taiwan serves as a major hub within the Sinosphere for freedom of expression and publication in Chinese, a role previously shared with Hong Kong. A scholar described Taiwan as the “last bastion” for publishing freely in Chinese, as this is no longer enjoyed in Hong Kong and Singapore is cautious about what can be published.

For example, the Harvard Yenping project on modern Chinese history, published by National Taiwan University Press, is widely read and influential in the Chinese-speaking world: it involves collaboration on Chinese history by Taiwan scholars and historians of China outside the PRC.¹⁰

¹⁰ Through the National Taiwan University Press, the Harvard Yenping Institute and the College of Liberal Arts of National Taiwan University publish a series of scholarly monographs in Chinese which make original contributions to social sciences and humanities. Submissions are encouraged from all Chinese-speaking regions and beyond. More information is available here: [NTU Press website](#).

At the same time, there is some concern about the PRC's impact on public opinion in Taiwan society, which have prompted warnings to academic and business circles about PRC influence and infiltration. As a result, a senior academic warned that heightened fears of China's influence may stifle balanced discussion: "The China threat is pervasive and real in Taiwan, but its exaggeration has prompted [excessive] fear about any contact with the PRC. This threat is part of our democracy. It is natural for some scholars to take this position, as long as it does not prevent the expression of alternate views."

Cross-Strait academic engagement

Academic exchange across the Taiwan Strait has declined due to political tensions and travel restrictions. Taiwan has been affected by this more than the PRC. Data on the PRC is harder to obtain, and fewer scholars and students travel in either direction, resulting in less exposure on both sides. Factors which diminish interest on the Taiwan side include the perception of political and security risk, challenges of fieldwork, and economic stagnation, with fewer job prospects for young Taiwanese who pursue China Studies or careers involving the PRC. "While the PRC used to be seen in Taiwan as an opportunity, it is now seen largely as a threat."

Some Taiwan scholars still visit mainland China for conferences or to conduct research, and vice versa, though sensitive topics are avoided. Interactions between historians and economists has been more resilient than those between political scientists and sociologists whose research touches on issues considered sensitive in both locales.

Even if they do not visit regularly, many Taiwan scholars continue to be in contact and exchange academic information and research data with PRC counterparts. A political scientist noted two self-selecting groups: those who choose to continue visiting the PRC and those who don't. They estimated that half of their colleagues still travel to the PRC

regularly. This academic travelled to the PRC four times between 2022 and 2025 and continued to be able to access required data.

A professor of economics spoke of travelling to China regularly for conferences and having no security concerns or apprehension about potential detention. Another academic remarked: “Most Taiwan scholars [with an academic interest in China] continue to go to the PRC. They just don’t talk about it.” They see the value of continued interaction with mainland scholars to maintain dialogue, avoid a visible public profile both at home in Taiwan and in the PRC, and do not engage with media on either side of the Taiwan Strait.

A senior scholar identified Taiwan academics teaching in the PRC as a significant resource for China-watchers based in Taiwan: Hundreds of Taiwanese academics teach in the PRC and can share observations when they return to Taiwan, though more cautiously than previously. Retired faculty and third-country meetings also sustain academic contact, as does sharing data and triangulating information among themselves and with international experts on China.

Some research centres continue to engage academically with leading PRC universities. In one case, following decades of collaboration, a delegation from the PRC partner university came to Taiwan for a milestone annual conference in 2024. This reportedly involved quiet Taiwan government funding, which can be discreetly supportive of such cross-Strait interaction in the absence of government-to-government relations.

The head of a China Studies centre mentioned that it periodically hosts events to which PRC scholars are invited, noting that their participation requires vetting on both sides. PRC visitors are expected to have an informal interaction with Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council to explain Taiwan’s perspective to them.

Taiwanese scholars of Communist ideology are especially valued for interpreting internal developments within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), military sentiment and policy debates in Beijing. Analysis shared by Taiwan-based experts may be particularly valuable to those outside the Sinosphere, given the constraints on those in the PRC discussing internal CCP developments with foreigners, including diplomats or foreign media.

How sensitive Taiwan scholars are to constraints on visiting the PRC depends on several factors, including the nature of their research, their political views on the PRC, and political affiliation in Taiwan. Reluctance to visit the PRC may be a function of how close scholars are to the current Taiwanese administration, including those undertaking government-funded research projects.

Overall, the consensus among most of those interviewed was that expertise in Taiwan remains valuable for international China scholars because there are still routine interactions between academics in the PRC and Taiwan as well as student exchanges and deep business ties.

Taiwan's strengths in China Studies

Academia Sinica, as Taiwan's premier research institution, has several clusters of expertise on China and extensive data and archives, both on historic data and on surveys since the 1980s. The mission of its Institute of Political Science at Academia Sinica (IPSAS) is to seek breakthroughs in China studies where local scholars enjoy comparative international advantage. It hosts research groups on China and comparative politico-economic transition and cross-Strait relations.¹¹ The China study group at its Institute of Sociology (IOS) distinguished itself in terms of labour rights and society in China as well as strong connections to protest movements in Taiwan (such as the Sunflower Movement) and Hong Kong. It remains a good place to conduct social science research on Hong Kong and the

¹¹ For example, IPSAS research fellow Dr Wen-Hsuan Tsai has published prolifically, including in leading journals of China Studies such as the *China Quarterly* and the *China Journal*. He now serves on the editorial board of both publications. [WEN-HSUAN TSAI / Research Fellow - IPSAS](#)

Chinese diaspora. It also conducts public opinion surveys in the PRC through innovative online and telephone polling methods, involving a Canadian survey company. The Institute of Modern History (IMH) hosts China research groups on women and gender history, urban history and state and society. Its core strength is Republican history and diplomatic history. It offers a platform for reimagining China studies in terms of how historical scholarship can present Taiwan's interpretation of Chinese history and project Taiwan's narrative globally. International scholars have shown increasing interest in archives on Ming and Qing history held by the Institute of History and Philology.

National Taiwan University (NTU)'s Centre for China Studies offers a research platform whose areas of concentration encompass Chinese foreign policy, international relations, legal issues, peace and security. Its flagship program on The World and China addresses themes such as Taiwan and the US-China Tech War, the Rules-Based International Order, and Maritime Security. Its China research methodology emphasizes observing and measuring developments in the PRC, including via indirect methods, such as satellite imagery. It offers a good database for quantitative, qualitative and alternative methodologies. There is a strong research team on regional maritime security, on issues such as marine environment, submarine cables, security of trade routes and maritime supply chains. Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council has commissioned the Centre to undertake projects on countering a potential PRC-directed blockade or quarantine, and how to respond legally. The Centre is also running a large research project on China and Trump 2.0.¹²

NTU's Mainland China Studies Program, established around 2000, offers an interdisciplinary certificate (similar to a minor) involving faculty from the departments of economics, politics, sociology, law, and history. Most enrolled students take one year to complete the courses for this certificate, in conjunction with degree requirements for their

¹² The Centre has strong bipartisan connections in Taiwan and works with the University of Oxford China Centre, RAND and the Mercator Institute for China Studie - MERICS.

major. The introductory course on Mainland China often attracts foreign students. Recruiting local students for the certificate is challenging for several reasons. Few see career relevance unless they are targeting employment as a legislative assistant or in cross-Strait affairs. Since geopolitical shifts starting in 2018, students in Taiwan are less informed about the PRC, and they have to work harder to earn the certificate than earlier cohorts.

National Cheng Chi University (NCCU)'s Graduate Institute of East Asia Studies (GIEAS) offers both master's and doctoral degrees, with a primary focus on mainland China and surrounding regions, including political, economic and social development, aiming to develop experts in cross-Strait issues and China Studies capable of professional analysis. GIEAS courses are taught in Chinese but there are cross-listed courses in other departments which are taught in English.

Interpreting PRC government and CCP documents to understand their domestic political and organizational relevance poses a major challenge for China scholars outside the PRC. In the absence of the ability to undertake fieldwork and discuss such documentary sources with mainland counterparts, academics and thinktanks in Taiwan spend significant time and resources analyzing and considering various interpretations. Against this backdrop, GIEAS provides a foundation in document-based political analysis of CCP ideology. This is increasingly relevant since Chinese President Xi Jinping has deepened emphasis on CCP history and ideology.

National Tsing Hua University (NTHU)'s Centre for Contemporary China Studies was founded in 2003 by NDHU and Sinica's IOS, in recognition of the need to train a new generation of China scholars based on a social science approach combining sociology and political science. Faculty are from NDHU and Academia Sinica. While originally its master's of sociology in Contemporary China Studies was based on solid training for fieldwork in China, the program's design is now being reassessed. Since the pandemic, faculty are

reportedly reluctant to travel to the mainland so the annual faculty-led field trip is now Taiwan-based to cover topics such as the China factor in Taiwan and cross-Strait marriage. While most students enrolled in this program are from Taiwan, there have been some PRC students and occasionally an international student with sufficient Mandarin fluency. International graduate students or postdocs could be affiliated with this Centre by seeking a supervisor and participating in talks and networking events at NDHU and IOS.

National Cheng Kung University (NCKU) hosts a Centre for Cross-Strait Relations and Chinese Societies Governance, which is connected with Taiwan research centres at several PRC universities. The Centre involves faculty from law, business, economics and the liberal arts. Their research interests span cross-Strait, state-industrial relations and legal work, analysis of the impact of the PRC's anti-secession law on Taiwan and the national security law in Hong Kong, and cross-Strait linguistic comparisons of dialects and idioms. One of the Centre's areas of research addresses reinvestment strategies for Taiwan business-people looking to move investments out of the PRC; some Taiwan businesses have been operating in the PRC for 30 years and now find it difficult to cash out, facing administrative, legal, tax or other hurdles, sometimes imposed retroactively.

NCKU is located in Tainan, in southern Taiwan, which reflects a relatively strong sense of local (Taiwanese) identity politically, yet culturally and in daily life, Tainan preserves its Chinese heritage and religious beliefs and retains more "Chineseness" than cities in northern Taiwan. Therefore, in addition to general cross-Strait relations and China studies themes, NCKU's Cross-Strait Centre emphasizes research on social, religious and agricultural exchanges across the Strait as well as questions about how, at the grassroots level, Taiwan's people view political identity and cultural/ethnic heritage as separate matters.

Tamkang University's Institute of China Studies includes a focus on China's Belt and Road Initiative. Tamkang's Department of Diplomacy and International Relations offers a

master's degree with an option to concentrate on China. Its history department offers a master's program focused on the history of Taiwan and relationships between China and other countries. Tamkang's interest in Southeast Asia relates to Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, which is seen as contrasting with China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Challenges of China Studies in Taiwan

Despite these strengths, China Studies in Taiwan faces significant hurdles, including the sharp drop in cross-Strait engagement, both economic and academic. While some Taiwan scholars continue to attend conferences in the PRC, many no longer do so and fieldwork there has virtually ceased. This has led to a greater reliance on alternative approaches, especially quantitative research and the use of alternative methodologies. Some scholars have shifted their research focus, for example from domestic issues in China to the PRC's role in international relations.

While Taiwan's business presence in China remains a source of informal insight, the number of Taiwanese business people in the PRC has diminished dramatically: from a million a decade ago to fewer than 200,000 today (300,000 including family members). This is due to economic stagnation, stricter security laws, and deliberate PRC policy to reduce the profitability of foreign and Taiwan businesses in the country, especially in high technology. Taiwan business people in the PRC are now more guarded in sharing information, so the knowledge of the PRC that they share with academics is not as robust as previously.

According to an academic estimate, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 100,000 PRC professionals and businesspeople visited Taiwan annually. In 2024, this number was estimated at about 1000. Student exchanges have also dropped sharply, especially in degree programs, and PRC students mainly come to Taiwan for short-term exchanges.

As a political scientist pointed out, the current Taiwan leadership is less supportive of engagement with the PRC and more influenced by US geopolitical positioning, which paints China as a threat. Research funding reflects this shift: since 2016, funding for China Studies has declined, while support for Southeast Asian Studies has increased. Some warn that bias may affect Taiwan-based analysis of the PRC, so observers must remain vigilant to avoid letting ideology colour conclusions.

One source underlined that there may be a disjuncture between empirical evidence and judgments, thereby requiring careful assessment to identify subjective analysis or foregone conclusions. Another observed a similarity between Sinologists in Taiwan and abroad: those who work on China's domestic affairs "tend not to hold unreasonably anti-China views," while those who work on China's engagement with democratic countries may be "less friendly to China."

Another challenge is the apparent decline in interest in China Studies among young people in Taiwan. Many appear to perceive the PRC as increasingly foreign, with fewer job prospects arising from China Studies. A professor commented on a change in youth attitudes, with the PRC now regarded as "another country" rather than directly related to Taiwan. They noted that 30 years ago, their master's program in China studies attracted 400 applicants. In 2024, there were 80 applicants, while the size of the cohort has remained constant at 20 students.

The younger generation often views China primarily via a social science lens, comparing it to other authoritarian regimes, rather than seeking to understand internal politics in the PRC. As a result, the field has become increasingly coloured by national security considerations.

A leading expert asserted that "there is no way to do [social science] field work in China, which is de rigueur for qualitative studies." The lack of on-the-ground fieldwork has pushed

some scholars towards methods like data mining, artificial intelligence and satellite imagery. Undertaking China Studies without fieldwork in China is necessarily imperfect, and there is still a gap, however creative the methodology for data collection. Yet even under restrictions, visits to select destinations in the PRC—such as “red tourism” sites [promoted for their relevance to CCP history]—can still provide valuable insights, for example, into economic stagnation and post-pandemic realities.

China-watchers in Taiwan are aware that how the Taiwan media portrays cross-Strait relations often does not correspond to academic perceptions (this is not unique to Taiwan).

Some political scientists now see China Studies in Taiwan as increasingly intertwined with domestic politics, especially on issues such as fake news, sharp power and societal vulnerabilities. While significant resources in Taiwan are being invested in assessing the impact of the PRC on Taiwan, some China scholars in Taiwan argue that this is not the same as genuine China Studies.

Taiwan as a place for language and literature studies

Taiwan offers a strong environment for mastering Mandarin Chinese. Of its 23 million people, about six to eight million speak only Mandarin, and most native speakers of Taiwanese are also fluent in Mandarin. Mandarin remains the official language of government and education, while instruction at the elementary level in “mother tongues” like Taiwanese or indigenous languages is limited. Mandarin is dominant in northern Taiwan, while Taiwanese predominates in southern Taiwan. At the university level, courses on Taiwanese or indigenous languages and on Taiwanese literature assume fluency in Mandarin.

NTNU hosts the only department of Taiwanese literature and culture, while the Language and Literature Department at National Sun Yat Sen University (NSYSU) teaches Taiwanese

language and linguistics. Taiwan’s bilingual education policy—promoting English as a medium of instruction at the senior secondary and university level—sometimes conflicts with efforts to protect local languages (“anything but Mandarin”, i.e., Taiwanese and indigenous languages).

NSYSU’s Center for Transcultural Co-Becoming and Global Sinology (跨文化共生國際漢學研究中心) serves as a hub for “bringing meaning to the world from Chinese written and spoken languages”, or raising awareness of the culture and philosophy of Chinese in spoken and written forms.¹³ It hosts events, reading groups, webinars and podcasts involving leading Sinologists. The Centre invites big names in the field to offer workshops for one or two weeks, such as University of Alberta’s Professor Christopher Lupke, translator of Ye Shitao’s *A History of Taiwan Literature*. The Centre’s co-director, Professor Mark McConaghy, a Canadian, notes that the Centre brings contemporary relevance to classical Chinese philosophy and ethics (as exemplified by Confucius and Mencius), by addressing issues such as global crises, transitional justice, the role of the family, gender, environment and indigenous people. Professor McConaghy observes that in providing a platform for Chinese literature scholars in Taiwan, some of whom may feel increasingly out of place today, the Centre enables them to speak to contemporary issues through the lens of Sinology.

Interestingly, the Centre’s title frames Sinology as 漢學 *hanxue* (study of Han language or people) rather than 中國文化 (culture of China), which is harder to fund in Taiwan. The National Central Library’s Centre for China Studies also uses *hanxue* in its name 漢學研究中心 *hanxue yanjiu zhongxin* (research centre on Han language, culture or people), although its focus is not limited to Chinese language or literature. This Centre hosts the Taiwan Fellowship Office, which runs Taiwan’s flagship international fellowship program for

¹³ <https://syscfh-la.nsysu.edu.tw/>

social science and humanities research focusing on Taiwan, cross-Strait relations, the Asia Pacific region and Sinology.¹⁴

Taiwan as a place to pursue Taiwan Studies

Several institutes at Academia Sinica are sources of expertise in Taiwan Studies. It has a dedicated Institute of Taiwan History (separate from IMH), which includes the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan. IPSAS research themes encompass Taiwan politics and comparative democracy, shifting identity and reorientation of external policy. IOS research areas include Taiwan and indigenous research as well as interactions and comparisons between Taiwan and neighbouring societies. One of Academia Sinica's marquee events is the World Congress of Taiwan Studies, held every three years, alternating between Taiwan and an international venue; it was hosted in May 2025 by Academia Sinica. Centres of expertise in Taiwan Studies can also be found in various universities, all requiring proficiency in Mandarin.

NTNU offers a degree program in Taiwanese language and culture. NDHU has a department of Taiwan and regional studies, which includes regional literature and history, community development, human geography and digital humanities technology. It offers intensive summer courses focused on eastern Taiwan and field investigations, combining a strong Taiwanese identity with a global perspective. NYCU's College of Hakka Studies offers a master's and PhD in Hakka Society and Culture. NCHU offers an English-taught international PhD program in Taiwan and Transcultural Studies, involving a transnational approach to literature, visual culture and performance.

There is some rivalry between China Studies and Taiwan Studies: the latter is popular domestically as a topic in sociology, economics and political science. This rivalry has an impact on research funding.

¹⁴ For details on the China Studies Centre at Taiwan's National Central Library, see [Center for Chinese Studies Organization and Mission](#). For details on the Taiwan Fellowship, see [Introduction](#)

Taiwan as a place to study International Relations

Taiwan's global profile has grown due to several factors, such as deft handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, developments in Hong Kong, China's geopolitical moves such as support for Russia in the war in Ukraine, and shifts in U.S. leadership. Taiwan has effectively used these factors to project itself onto the global stage. Taiwan's aid to eastern and central Europe to support those displaced from Ukraine was cited as an example of Taiwan's well-calibrated diplomacy.

Taiwan international relations (IR) scholarship spans IR theory and area studies, examining China as an emerging power and rival to the U.S., and analysis of Chinese economics, politics and security as factors defining China's international behaviour. The Ministry of Education requires consistency between English-taught and Chinese-taught IR programs, and their core design must meet the requirements of the annual entrance exam for the diplomatic service, e.g., a full-year course on the history of diplomatic relations.

NCCU is the premier training ground for Taiwan's diplomats, offering a full suite of undergraduate, master's and doctoral programs in international relations, international security, power politics, global governance and Taiwan's diplomatic history. Students are encouraged to study the relevant language as part of their area studies specialization on Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia or South Asia.

NTU's Political Science Department launched an English-taught undergraduate IR program in 2024; the composition of its first enrolment was just under half from Southeast Asia, a third from Europe, and others from Korea and Japan. The program curriculum is the same as for the program taught in Chinese, with some additional elective courses such as geopolitics, Asian democracies and supply chains.

NCHU's Graduate Institute of International Relations is small but influential, combining quantitative and qualitative research, recognizing the value of attracting international students by focusing on China's rise and Indo-Pacific area studies, in light of sensitivity of studying in the PRC. Topics include strategic studies and geopolitics, cross-Strait relations, China's global and regional integration in Asia.

NSYSU's International Master's Program in Asia Pacific Affairs (IMAPA) is an English-taught program focusing on Taiwan, China and Asia, attracting students from both Taiwan and abroad. One of the factors reflected in the program is that teaching international relations theory in English requires Taiwanese students to think about international issues in a different way than if they were learning in Chinese.

National Defence University (NDU)'s Graduate Institute of International Security offers theoretical training and research on broad-based international security issues, while its Graduate Institute of Strategic Studies offers practical policy analysis and strategic planning. NDU's International master's in strategic and international studies is open to civilians and offers training in professional strategic literacy, global perspectives and national security capability. NDU holds an annual international two-week course on the military strength of the People's Liberation Army and security from Taiwan's perspective. Funded by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it attracts both foreign military and civilian government officers.

NDU's International and National Defence Affairs College regularly hosts visiting scholars. International applicants to NDU who are civilians must first be approved by the relevant Taipei Economic and Cultural Office abroad, then by the Ministry of Defence. There has been growing international interest (including from Canada) in engagement with NDU on topics such as the Taiwan Sea, People's Liberation Army exercises, defence posture and future scenarios. An NDU scholar noted that it is frequently involved in exchanges with Japan and the Republic of Korea (including trilateral exchanges); however, exchanges with

Southeast Asia are less frequent, due to Southeast Asian concerns about the PRC's reaction.

Connecting with East Asian and Asia Pacific research and policy networks

Taiwan universities maintain strong regional research networks focused on Asia or Asia Pacific, with growing interest in Southeast Asia amid declining engagement with the PRC. Taiwan scholars are well connected with counterparts elsewhere in Asia, offering opportunities for international scholars to gain a regional perspective on issues such as economics and trade, supply chains, security and conflict. According to a Taiwan think tank leader, Taiwan's shifting security environment and changes in regional power relations add value to networks connecting Taiwan with international partners and to dialogues among scholars and think tanks in Taiwan and abroad.

Southeast Asia is now seen in Taiwan as valuable for research, recruitment and people-to-people ties. According to an academic who travels regularly to Southeast Asia, scholars can serve as informal bridges in the absence of diplomatic relations. Academic engagement can help the Taiwanese understand Southeast Asian perspectives in terms of small and middle-power diplomacy. Such engagement can be useful, for instance, for Taiwan's outreach to ASEAN for support in joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Transpacific Agreement (CPTPP).

An international scholar teaching at a Taiwanese university cited Taiwan's strong regional networks as a useful platform for building personal networks on cross-Strait engagement and with Southeast Asia.

Several institutes at Academia Sinica have regional research clusters. IMH has a research group on East Asia Regional Studies, IPSAS has a research group on Political Changes in Asia & Global Democratic Development and the IOS research group on neighbouring societies includes study groups on China's impact, Hong Kong and comparison of Taiwan

with Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. Reorientation to the Indo-Pacific has resulted in remapping narratives, such as Southeast Asian trade routes and indigenous matters, i.e., diverging from narratives with a mainland China focus.

NTU's East Asian Studies (EAS) program offers an interdisciplinary approach bridging political science, economics, sociology and social work, at both undergraduate and graduate level. Although it is in principle an English-taught program, some courses are taught in Mandarin, hence Mandarin proficiency is required. At the master's level, the thesis requirement can be completed in English. The EAS program accommodates exchange students or students on a gap year who can take courses in English or Chinese or both. Many of the international students in EAS are from Japan or Korea, with a few from the U.S. and Europe.

NTU's Global Asia Research Centre (GARC) is a comparative transnational research centre focused on global Asia, especially democratization and gender equality. With faculty members from sociology, political science, economics, anthropology, geography and demography, issues of interest to GARC include rural/urban comparisons, democratization, gender and identity. GARC hosts workshops, guest speakers and an annual invited professorship for a week-long mini course. In 2024, it was awarded to Professor Joe Wong, Vice President of University of Toronto.

With government support to promote Taiwan's visibility and international status by attracting young people to understand Taiwan as the heart of Asia, NCCU developed two programs focused on Asian studies: the International Master's in Asian Studies (IMAS) and International Doctorate in Asian Studies (IDAS). Enrolment in IMAS was described as half from North America, and about a quarter each from Europe and from the rest of the world. There are few local students in these programs.

NCHU's Research Centres for Humanities and Social Sciences include centres on China, India, Japan and Korea, with the latter two focusing on China-Japan and China-Korea. NCHU is also home to an International Master's Program in Asia and China Studies (IMPACS); its enrollment in 2024–25 was 48% from Asia, 38% Europe and 14% Americas, including Mexico and Haiti. IMPACS students can take courses offered by the Graduate Institute of International Politics (GIIP) in Chinese or English. IMPACS welcomes international faculty on sabbatical willing to teach a course or half course.

NSYSU's Institute for China and Asia Pacific Studies (ICAPS) blends economics, law and politics, with a focus on Taiwan security and Southeast Asia. While both NSYSU's Graduate Research Institute of Political Science (GRIPS) and ICAPS share an interest in cross-Strait relations, GRIPS provides a more academic approach while ICAPS is more regional and policy-oriented. They offer many joint courses, such as statistics, methodology and theory.

NTNU's Department of East Asian Studies is the only such department in Taiwan, offering the full suite of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. Its approach is multidisciplinary, boasting expertise in Sinology, cross-Strait relations, political science, international relations, finance and economics of East Asia, history, literature and cultural studies. It actively encourages international exchanges both inbound and outbound, e.g., with Japan and Korea, and attracts a high percentage of foreign students. With graduate courses offered in Chinese and English, the greatest strength of this program is international relations and international security, including maritime dispute settlement studies. EAS scholars at NTNU use the theory and practice of international relations to analyze politics and developments in East Asia, including relations among Taiwan, China, Japan and Korea.

NDHU's Asia Pacific Regional Studies Doctoral Program caters to international students, and encompasses economics, sociology, culture and environment in East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia and Pacific countries such as the U.S., Australia and New Zealand. Many

of its students are from Southeast Asia and some intend to stay in Taiwan after graduation. Some are already lecturers in countries such as Vietnam or the Philippines and need to complete a doctorate for professional advancement. The cohort includes students from places such as the UK, the Netherlands, U.S. and Mexico—some of whom did their master's degree in Taiwan or were already in Taiwan for other reasons.

Mandarin proficiency as a critical entry point to the Sinosphere

Taiwan's primary assets as a platform for China Studies include its Chinese language environment and proximity to the PRC in terms of geography, culture and society. The significant impact that China has on Taiwan in all sectors provides additional opportunities for those learning Mandarin in Taiwan to absorb not just linguistic competency, but to understand current events, language-based socio-cultural expectations, assumptions and perspectives which may never be translated.

Mastering Mandarin is an entry-level barrier for Sinosphere Studies, and Taiwan offers an ideal environment for linguistic and cultural immersion. The Mandarin learning centres at major Taiwan universities increasingly attract international learners who might previously have gone to the PRC, and some offer customized programs for those seeking linguistic competency for professional purposes. Some are prepared to use teaching materials in simplified characters [used in the PRC] or to help students transition from simplified characters to complex characters.¹⁵

A senior scholar in Taiwan warns that the decreasing willingness of young people abroad to master foreign languages poses a challenge in acquiring China competencies, since they may see artificial intelligence translation as a substitute. This has resulted in a decrease in the perceived value of learning Chinese as a skill set for employability.

¹⁵ Taiwan uses traditional complex characters 繁體字, whereas the PRC uses simplified Chinese characters 簡體字.

However, this is shortsighted, given that rigorous linguistic training provides a solid foundation for understanding perspectives on the Sinosphere which are often lost in translation when relying on communication in English or translation software. In addition, the absence of Chinese fluency may have an impact on research methodology and nuances in data collection. According to this source, the changes in the Taiwan education ecosystem require moving beyond linguistics: despite the growing availability of courses in English, recognizing the cultural and sociological content that is inherent in mastering Mandarin underlines Taiwan's continuing relevance as a crucial centre for China Studies.

Taiwan as a platform for Mandarin training

Several universities offer full-time Mandarin-language training year-round, summer programs for a month or six weeks and customized programs which can involve intensive language training or be combined with cultural activities. The three universities best recognized for their Mandarin training programs are NTNU, NTU and NCCU, along with independent centres like the Taipei Language Institute.

NTNU is recognized as Taiwan's oldest and most prestigious language education institution, having decades of experience in both teaching Mandarin to international students and curriculum development. In 2024, enrollment in long-term and short-term courses totalled close to 10,000. NTNU's Mandarin Training Centre has developed standardized Mandarin proficiency tests and trained evaluators on behalf of the Taiwan Ministry of Education. Many Mandarin training centres at other universities in Taiwan use material developed by NTNU, which include manuals highlighting Taiwan culture and literature. In addition to offering four quarters of instruction per year, NTNU's Mandarin Training Centre also offers three-week express courses in spring, summer, fall and winter as well as online courses. It has developed customized training programs for over 50 universities, including the University of Alberta and the University of British Columbia (using UBC textbooks) and for Global Affairs Canada. NTNU's cost for Mandarin training compares favourably to costs at NTU and NCCU.

NTU's International Chinese Language Program is very intensive, requiring dedication and delivering results, e.g., for Chinese majors, graduate students or government purposes. Its summer program runs for nine weeks between June and August. There is also a regular Mandarin training course at NTU during the academic year, with most students studying for nine months, involving three hours of daily language instruction plus electives; NTU also offers online Mandarin courses and customized Mandarin training programs, e.g., for the U.S. State Department.

NCCU's Mandarin Training Centre teaches four quarters per year as well as offering Mandarin courses for exchange students according to NCCU's semesters and month-long summer courses. There is scope for students at this centre to use language material on politics, economics and international relations, and to audit NCCU courses. Exchange students and degree-seeking students can take Mandarin courses for credit; these classes usually have 15 to 20 students each, totalling 300 to 400 students per semester.

Some universities, including NSYSU, offer free Mandarin training for academic credit to exchange students. Students enrolled in full-time Mandarin language programs involve a mix of students from Europe, North America or Oceania, typically doing a gap year or having recently graduated from university, as well as many from Asia who may be mastering Mandarin prior to enrolling in degree programs.

The NCKU Chinese Language Centre's rigorous curriculum offers ten hours per week of compulsory language training plus five hours per week of electives. A Canadian who studied intermediate Mandarin at NCKU for a year was impressed with the program, in particular its teaching style (in a small group with the same teacher for consistency), language electives such as pronunciation, grammar and hot topics like climate change or natural disasters as well as cultural electives such as songs, calligraphy and Taiwanese language. She also cited this program's rigorous testing such as frequent quizzes every other day, testing on each unit, mid-terms, finals and weekly oral reports by each student

supported by PowerPoint slides, working upwards from three minutes. This enables steady progress of one level per semester (NCKU's Chinese Language Centre offers nine levels, three each at beginner, intermediate and advanced level). The centre describes its comparative advantages as lower cost of living than Taipei, slower pace of life and better weather than northern Taiwan—hence students regularly transfer from Taipei to Tainan for their second semester.

Taiwan qua Taiwan

Taiwan is an attractive place in its own right for learning about the Sinosphere. According to one expert, political developments in Taiwan as a liberal democracy merit attention, as do its adoption of social and political reforms, globalization, leading-edge technology, and its advocacy of progressive economics.

A question worthy of attention among scholars of the Sinosphere is: What does it mean to be Taiwanese? It is important to be alert to the fact that identity is perceived differently at different times and in different parts of Taiwan, due to socio-cultural, linguistic (dialect), economic and political factors.

NCCU's public opinion surveys of Taiwan over the past 30 years document shifting views regarding identity of Taiwan's citizens and maintaining the status quo in terms of cross-strait relations.¹⁶ 2008 marked a shift from the majority identifying as Taiwanese, as compared to the previous majority choosing dual identity. For example, a recent survey indicates 64% identify as Taiwanese, 30% identify as dual Taiwanese and Chinese, and 3% identify as Chinese only.

However, one observer pointed out that while NCCU's annual surveys of public perception of China are useful in terms of showing changes over time, they don't necessarily accurately reflect reality. There is now sensitivity to stating that one is both Chinese and

¹⁶ [Election Study Center, NCCU-Taiwanese / Chinese Identity](#)

Taiwanese, and a perception of decreasing freedom of speech, as evidenced, for example, by recent deportations from Taiwan of mainland Chinese bloggers.

Southern and central Taiwan—Taichung, Tainan and Kaohsiung—offer contrasting perspectives to those in Taipei and elsewhere in northern Taiwan, especially on Taiwan politics, Taiwan identity and cross-Strait relations. The further south one goes, the greater support there is for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and its political views, and perception of the PRC as fundamentally undemocratic and as a threat.

In considering Taiwan as a platform for learning about the Sinosphere, it is worth noting that Taiwan's powerhouse universities are located in northern Taiwan. Southern Taiwan has traditionally felt neglected in terms of infrastructure development and investment. This is gradually being addressed through national policies and programs, and the fact that the current Minister of Education is the former NSYSU president provides a strong southern voice in the current DPP administration. The establishment of NSYSU's three new colleges of banking and finance, medicine and semi-conductors, are all intended to signal government commitment to strengthening southern Taiwan's economy and attracting high-value industries there.

At the risk of oversimplification, a second contextual factor for exploring the Sinosphere in Taiwan is recognizing that academics in Taiwan who are aligned with Kuo Min Tang (KMT) views tend to be more willing to engage with PRC academics and to visit the mainland. Academics in Taiwan who are aligned with DPP view tend to be more anti-PRC and less willing to engage with counterparts in the PRC. Exploring the Sinosphere in Taiwan requires an understanding that the current DPP administration is seen by some in Taiwan as taking a provocative stance on the PRC, and there is hope in some quarters for a return to the status quo ante which reigned during the KMT administration.

Scope for increasing the number of Canadians at Taiwan universities?

There have long been calls for more Canadians to study abroad. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) has emphasized the importance of international experience for the next generation of Canadians, and for greater government investment in outward mobility by young Canadians. In its 2018 Policy Brief advocating *The Case for Young Canadians Studying Abroad*, the CBIE observed that “the 3.1% global education participation rate of undergraduate Canadian students is paltry relative to other developed countries.” In comparison, more than 30% of German students go abroad during their studies.¹⁷

In a 2017 report, the Centre for International Policy Studies published the report of its Study Group on Global Education, *Global Education for Canadians: Equipping Young Canadians to Succeed at Home and Abroad*. The report called for a major increase in the number of Canadians studying abroad, to better equip them to face the challenges of an increasingly complex and competitive world. It also noted that other countries, such as the U.S., European countries and Australia, are actively pursuing strategies to increase the number of post-secondary students studying abroad, resulting in a dramatic rise in outbound student mobility. “Not only do we send a smaller proportion of our students abroad than do most of our peer countries, but this gap has been growing. Moreover, the relatively few Canadian students who engage in international learning overwhelmingly travel to only a few places—the United States, Western Europe and Australia—and study in their native language. We are not preparing young Canadians to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world.”¹⁸

While some progress was made with the adoption of Canada’s International Education Strategy 2019–2024 by Global Affairs Canada, its major emphasis related to inbound

¹⁷ Canadian Bureau for International Education, [Nurturing Global Leaders – Boosting Canada’s Competitiveness: The case for young Canadians studying abroad](#) pp 2-3. [CBIE-FINA-brief-2018-EN.pdf](#)

¹⁸ Centre for International Policy Studies, [Global Education for Canadians: Equipping Young Canadians to Succeed at Home and Abroad](#), P.8

international students to Canada. In its 2023 consultation brief to Global Affairs Canada for the next iteration of the International Education Strategy (IES) 2024–2029, CBIE stated, “CBIE believes the next IES should provide a stronger focus on increasing the number of outbound students and better realizing their potential for-Canada benefit, [including] via a scaling up of the current outbound mobility pilot to a full-fledged long-term outbound mobility program.”¹⁹ At the time of writing, Global Affairs Canada had not announced a renewal of its International Education Strategy.

The fact that Canadian students tend to be passive regarding opportunities for studying abroad was readily apparent in discussions at Taiwan universities, where representatives commented how few Canadian students, if any, they have—perhaps the occasional exchange student but very few enrolled in degree programs. In contrast, students from places such as the U.S., the UK, Germany and France are much better represented in Taiwan, not to mention the large number of Asian students in Taiwan. Why does this matter?

Studying abroad as a young adult can be a transformational experience, and exposure to Taiwan is an excellent way to open the eyes of young people to the dynamics at play in the Sinosphere . . . and would possibly encourage them to master China competencies and apply them to a career in the public, private or non-profit sectors.

Without exception, Taiwan universities report more outbound exchange students than inbound exchange students from Canada. This is despite the fact that Taiwan’s lower cost of living, including tuition, and its safe and welcoming environment make it an attractive destination for Canadians looking to study abroad.

¹⁹ <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CBIE-Consultation-Brief-on-Canadas-International-Education-Strategy-2024-2029-July-2023.pdf>

The availability of funding from Taiwan to support international students should facilitate this, yet to date, Canadian applicants are scarce.²⁰ Significant financial support from Taiwan is available on a competitive basis to foreigners in the form of scholarships, fellowships and grants from government ministries, the National Science and Technology Council and from universities. Additional funding is available for teaching and research assistantships and attending international conferences.

Several Taiwan interlocutors mentioned scope for exchange students to find enough courses in English for a year, taking English-taught courses in different departments (e.g., within social sciences). If exchanges students are sufficiently fluent in Chinese, they can take a range of courses in Chinese or mix and match courses in English and Chinese.

For international students seeking a more open and less rigid academic environment, private universities can offer a more welcoming space than public universities. For instance, Tamkang offers a focus on globalization, information technology networking (artificial intelligence is a required course) and future studies related to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

Taiwan offers some innovative graduate degree programs which can capitalize on a background in China Studies or Asian Studies by helping position graduates professionally for future employment. For example, NCCU's master's program in Global Communications and Innovative Technology is sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, which is generous with scholarships in its quest for content creators, new media and projecting soft power. It offers significant Taiwan content and courses of potential interest to exchange students (e.g., in communications), such as "Between Tradition and Modernity: Geopolitics of China and Taiwan." Some of its instructors are international, including from Canada. About 40% of its students are international, many from South and Southeast Asia. It also attracts

²⁰ See Appendix I: Inventory of Selected Academic Resources Relevant to Sinosphere Studies in Taiwan, which includes potential sources of funding.

students from Europe with a background in China Studies, who now see limited employment prospects for China Studies unless it is combined with professional training e.g., in communications and media studies. In their view, “China has destroyed the future for Sinologists.”

NTHU recently established the Taipei School of Economics (TSE), funded by a private endowment, whose enrollment is largely international and whose courses are entirely in English. Founded in 2020, its marquee offering is an interdisciplinary master’s of political economy; it also offers a doctoral program. To reach its goal of having half of its faculty international, TSE is flexible in terms of delivery modes for international faculty, e.g., in person for six to eight weeks, with the rest of the term being offered online. TSE’s teaching staff include many cross-appointed from a range of prestigious Taiwan universities as well as a significant number of international faculty, including from Canada. Thanks to a generous endowment, it pays its foreign faculty higher salaries than other Taiwan universities and offers scholarships for students: funding from the TSE or Taiwan government sources support many TSE students. The TSE Dean, Professor Huang Chao-chi, welcomes Canadians as degree-seeking students, exchange students or for short-term visits, e.g. sitting in on classes for two weeks. Currently about two-thirds of students are from Asia and about 5 to 10% are local; the donor would like to increase this to 30%.

Canada-Taiwan university exchanges and dual degrees

Appendix II provides a matrix of Canada-Taiwan academic exchanges and is based on information compiled from selected Canadian university websites, supplemented by information provided by selected Taiwan universities, from their websites or via in-person interviews in spring 2025. While some of the information will inevitably be obsolete or inaccurate, the matrix is intended to provide a general indication of the types of exchanges which exist between major public universities in Canada and Taiwan.

Although the matrix indicates what agreements exist on paper, it does not show how active these exchanges are. There is an imbalance in exchange students, with more inbound students to Canada than outbound to Taiwan. Taiwan students are often keen to participate in exchanges as Taiwan tuition is low compared to universities in places like the United Kingdom and North America, so being exempt from foreign tuition is a comparative bargain for exchange students. In addition, a Taiwan scholar of international politics observed that Canada may serve as an attractive alternative to pursue academic exchanges and collaboration, in contrast to the U.S., which is increasingly perceived as centre of contention and struggle.

NTU and NCCU were described as particularly well-suited to hosting international students pursuing degrees in China Studies and for partnerships with foreign universities, while other universities in Taiwan offer practical policy-oriented research on China.

NTU's politics department has hosted students from the University of Toronto and University of British Columbia for one-year exchanges as well as some Canadian students with a Hong Kong background, and a doctoral student from McMaster University on a Taiwan Fellowship. Among the non-resident fellows at NTU's Centre for China Studies is Professor Pascale Massot of the University of Ottawa, and the Centre plans to host a master's student from the University of Toronto as an intern.

To foster international collaboration, Academia Sinica has established the Taiwan Graduate International Exchange Program (TGIX).²¹ It allows co-supervision of graduate students resulting in a joint degree between Academia Sinica and a participating foreign university. This has been used, for example, to support a University of Toronto graduate student at IMH for a year of field research. However, if they are not seeking a joint degree, international graduate students in social science and humanities don't require TIGX to do conduct field work based at Academia Sinica.

²¹ For information on Academia Sinica's Taiwan Graduate International Exchange Program (TGIX), see [TIGP-X Pilot Program | General Guidance](#)

Students from Taiwan may hesitate to go to Canada on exchange due to the high cost of living and Canadian tuition for foreign students, if this is not covered by mobility or exchange agreements. Some Taiwan students prefer exchange programs in Europe because tuition and the cost of living may be lower than in Canada or the U.S., especially in eastern or central Europe. For students anxious about recent U.S. policy towards international students, countries like Poland or Czechia may be popular choices.

International English language proficiency requirements in Canada may discourage some Taiwan students from choosing Canada: European universities may not require the Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS); instead, the less rigorous Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is sufficient: it is also cheaper and therefore more popular.

Some observers commented that Taiwan universities tend to be more interested in dual degrees while Canadian universities indicate that students are more interested in short-term programs or summer courses or internships. Undergraduate dual degrees may serve as a feeder system to funnel students from Taiwan into foreign universities to complete their bachelor's degree, then continue with graduate studies abroad. Not all dual degrees are reciprocal. Examples of dual degree programs established between Canadian and Taiwan universities, include the NSYSU business school with business schools at the University of Victoria and the University of Lethbridge. However, the uptake has been limited, with more outbound NSYSU students than incoming Canadians to NSYSU.

Resources and funding to support Canada-Taiwan academic exchanges and collaboration

A detailed inventory of selected academic resources relevant to Sinosphere Studies in Taiwan is found in Appendix I. A short synopsis is provided here for reference.

There are several Taiwan scholarships, fellowship and internship programs for which Canadians are eligible. These include Taiwan Fellowships for faculty and researchers, Taiwan Scholarships for students, the Taiwan International Internship Program (TIIP), which offers internships of up to three months, funded by Taiwan's National Science and Technology Council, and the Taiwan Experience Education Program (TEEP), which offers internships of up to six months, funded by Ministry of Education. TEEP functions as a clearing house, matching those offering and seeking internships. As examples, NSYSU has a TEEP arrangement involving business consulting, while over 20 NCHU professors host TEEP interns, including related to civil society in Taiwan.

Based on information provided by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Offices in Toronto and Ottawa, the Canadian Trade Office in Taipei, and sources in Taiwan, uptake by Canadians of scholarships, fellowships and other academic opportunities which Taiwan offers has been modest.

Funding from Canadian sources for study and research abroad include federal and provincial academic grants, some of which may accommodate studies and research abroad, and funding from home institutions (such as university resources for student and faculty mobility).

At the federal government level, Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy announced in November 2022 includes Indo-Pacific Scholarships and Fellowships for Canadians (IPSFC). Its objective is to enhance the study and research capacity of Canadians in areas related to the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Taiwan is included as one of the eligible destinations. Research and studies related to the Sinosphere are also eligible, provided they are linked to the priority themes identified in the Indo-Pacific Strategy. It is anticipated that scholarships and fellowships will be awarded by designated Canadian post-secondary academic institutions to Canadian graduate students and researchers to study or undertake research

in the Indo-Pacific Region, up to March 2028. Specific details of how these will be awarded to individuals had not been announced by Global Affairs Canada at the time of writing in summer 2025.²²

Some independent programs can support Canada-Taiwan academic exchanges. These include Mitacs and an international consortium, University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP).

Mitacs is a national not-for-profit organization funded by the Government of Canada and Canadian provincial governments. It provides a channel of potential funding which can support Taiwan-Canada academic and research collaboration related to scientific research and innovation. It supports two-way mobility and the cultivation of talent by creating opportunities for international research collaborations for Canadian and Taiwanese students and postdoctoral fellows.²³

UMAP promotes cooperation and exchanges for students and staff in higher education.²⁴ It involves both short- and long-term programs at institutions in its 25 member countries, which include Canada and Taiwan. There are about 40 member institutions in Canada and about 80 in Taiwan.²⁵ As an example, Tung Hai University in Taichung and the University of Regina have a bilateral exchange program under the UMAP's auspices. The governments of Canada and Taiwan both support UMAP by providing scholarships for inbound and

²² For details on the Indo-Pacific Scholarships and Fellowships and Canadians, see <https://www.mitacs.ca/programs-resources/programs/cific> Scholarships and Fellowships for Canadians – Call for proposals

²³ For information on Mitacs, see Appendix I and <https://www.mitacs.ca/programs-resources/programs/>

²⁴ More information on UMAP can be found in Appendix I and here: [Homepage - UMAP](#)

²⁵ Canadian institutions which are part of the UMAP network include Royal Roads University, Kwantlen Polytechnic, University of the Fraser Valley, Yukon University, Lethbridge University, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, University of Regina, Brock University, Humber Polytechnic, Laurentian University, Memorial University, and the Community Colleges of Nova Scotia and of New Brunswick. The UMAP national secretariat in Canada is the BC Council for Higher Education.

outbound participants from Canada and Taiwan, funded by Global Affairs Canada and the Taiwan Ministry of Education.²⁶

Conclusion

Despite diminished access to the PRC, there remains strong demand for China expertise, especially for understanding geo-politics, geo-economics and security in both regional and global contexts. This is as true for Canada as for other countries. Developing China competencies and a nuanced understanding of the Sinosphere can help us to better navigate the polarized media landscape and the many global issues on which China has significant influence, from global trade and supply chains to technology and artificial intelligence, security and development cooperation.

As noted in the introduction, some international Sinosphere scholars and those at an early stage of pursuing China competencies are discouraged by the reduced access and apparent risk in pursuing studies or field research in the PRC. China's global behaviour, ambitions and tactics have had a negative impact—especially in democratic countries—on perceptions of China, but this has not lessened the need for a deep understanding of the PRC, its leadership and why it behaves the way it does. This is especially apparent in the search for solutions to global issues such as climate change and global health.

Taiwan's resources for training the next generation of international China specialists span teaching programs and research centres for language proficiency, serious scholarship on China Studies and policy-relevant competencies. Taiwan continues to offer a robust environment for alternative approaches to China Studies, observing and measuring developments in China, and assessing what this means for those in the Sinosphere and beyond. The pool of China expertise in Taiwan remains deep, despite direct academic links having been curtailed by the drop in cross-Strait engagement. We should tap this expertise

²⁶ <https://umap.org/scholarships/>

through visits by scholars and analysts, two-way teaching and research exchanges, and targeted conferences.

Engaging with regional academic and policy networks that embrace Asian perspectives on China, Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific provides a counterpoint to like-minded policy networks with which North American or Five Eyes experts are more likely to be connected. This makes Taiwan particularly valuable for those eager to sharpen their China competencies but disheartened by waning access to mainland China.

As one expert noted with respect to academic research on China in the current geopolitical context, “Taiwan is as close to China as it is possible to be, without actually being in China, without direct access to Chinese interlocutors.”

In Taiwan as elsewhere, there has been a polarization of views on China, with domestic political factors in Taiwan directly affecting the rhetoric for and against cross-Strait academic engagement. Similar polarization is evident in the Canadian media landscape, affecting public opinion and influencing policy decisions in ways which are not necessarily based on clear evidence or which carefully assess national interests in relation to the PRC’s bilateral, regional and global impact.

This research does not suggest that China experts in Taiwan are more objective than China experts elsewhere or untainted by the existential threat that the PRC poses to Taiwan. However, they bring valuable cultural background and recent experience that those outside the Sinosphere often lack.

It does suggest that astute international observers, seasoned China watchers and budding Sinosphere students alike, should use their own judgment to assess the quality of analysis by Taiwan experts and the possibility of potential bias, and determine if the evidence supports the conclusions drawn.

I agree with the senior scholar who noted that one of the advantages of pursuing China studies in Taiwan is the profusion of different perspectives on China, thanks to Taiwan's more liberal and pluralistic environment. "A healthy public debate is needed to let people decide for themselves, based on empirical evidence. However, there is some worry that Taiwan is moving too fast towards one extreme. Understanding where China stands today is important—we should not let the spectre of demonization of China prevent understanding of what is actually going on in China."

Canada will benefit from having more people who understand what is actually going on in China, are proficient in Chinese and understand the perspectives of the Sinosphere on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. China competencies can be developed in the PRC and in Taiwan; for those hesitant to pursue China Studies in the PRC, there are many persuasive reasons to consider Taiwan as a springboard for this endeavour.

For those considering Taiwan as a place to pursue China studies and research, the inventory of resources and the matrix of Canada-Taiwan university linkages found in the Appendices provide practical examples highlighted in this research on *Reimagining China Studies: Taiwan as a Platform for Engaging with the Sinosphere*.

Appendix I: [Inventory of Selected Academic Resources Relevant to Sinosphere Studies in Taiwan](#)

Appendix II: [Matrix of Canada-Taiwan University Linkages](#)

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