



A Methodology for Evaluating Chinese Academic Publications

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Executive Summary: Chinese academic and think tank publications will be increasingly useful in evaluating Chinese strategic perspectives as direct access to mainland scholars declines. This memo offers a methodology for collecting and prioritizing materials by Chinese scholars with observable policy influence. It aims to increase confidence that we are dealing with publications by those who matter, and to ensure that collection takes place in a transparent and consistent manner.

Background

Academic publications, including journal articles, books, and chapters in edited volumes, can be a useful way to better understand the strategic perspectives of Chinese researchers. These materials contain deeper analysis than, say, op-eds or media soundbites. Unlike essays in *Global Times* or English-language social media posts, they reflect discussions between Chinese subject matter experts rather than attempts to shape foreign perceptions.¹

Relying on this literature, we can develop a relatively granular picture of how China's research community interprets key foreign policy and security issues. Analytic objectives that can benefit from this exploitation include identifying schools of thought (including across different bureaucratic or civilian/military lines), describing and explaining shifts in attitudes over time, understanding dominant threat perceptions, and gaining insight

into policy prescriptions that are being discussed prior to CCP approval.¹

The value of these publications will likely grow in the coming years as interactions between scholars in China and the United States decline and personal relationships become difficult to maintain. Worsening Sino-U.S. relations not only reduce our ability to have “frank” conversations with Chinese interlocutors, but also our underlying knowledge of how the academic-policy nexus in China functions: who matters, on what topics, and why? At the same time, we face the opposite problem of information overload—a growing research output from mainland scholars that can be accessed through online databases or procured from online bookstores. Put another way, the “haystack” is growing, while the “needle,” which may have seemed obvious at one time, is no longer as clear-cut.

This memo provides a way to filter this literature to focus on the views of scholars who we assess to be relatively *influential* in the policy process, or who at least may be *informed* on the state of internal government and party thinking within their area of expertise. We wanted to be explicit about why we selected certain authors and dismissed others so that we are using a consistent way of collecting materials over time and so that others can understand and challenge our rationale; using a similar methodology would allow others to achieve the same benefits. We also intend this memo to be a practical guide for future use, and so tried to keep our criteria as few and easy to establish as possible, without becoming overly simplified.

¹ Our focus is on domestic publications written originally in Chinese, though authors sometimes contribute to foreign publications in English.

We organized the memo into two parts. The first deals with university professors, the second with think tank scholars. We decided to make this distinction because we argue that influence works differently in these two communities. University professors tend to be influential based on their status as public intellectuals, their role in training future officials, and the personal relations they maintain with former students and leaders. Our criteria thus look for signs of seniority and access at the individual level, while also considering the contributions of some of China's younger "rising stars." By contrast, the influence of think tank scholars is more a function of their institutions. Unlike universities, government research institutes have formal channels to provide advice to policymakers and are more likely to have access to classified information. We also considered university-based and private think tanks.

We initially developed this methodology for a project on Chinese perspectives on U.S. strategy in Asia, but it can also be a starting point for collecting and prioritizing (or "triaging") the Chinese academic literature on any foreign affairs or security topic.² One caveat is that for some specialized topics, universities and think tanks based farther away from the major eastern cities could be more relevant. A project on Sino-Indian relations, for instance, could benefit from consideration of insights from scholars based in the southwest, while research on North Korea would benefit from views in the northeast.

Part 1: Publications by University Professors

We prioritized materials from scholars at 42 leading civilian universities as defined by the Chinese Ministry of Education. This provides an official view of universities that receive priority funding, though we recognize that there is significant variation in the presence of high-caliber international affairs and regional studies faculties.ⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱ In practice, we found that almost all the relevant articles for our project on Chinese views of U.S. strategy in Asia were by scholars from a small sub-set of these universities, including

In step 1, we looked for full professors. Attaining this rank is a sign that someone has already built a public reputation, has enough political acumen to remain in good standing with the university's party committee, and has possibly trained party or government cadres. In step 2, we cast a wider net to identify junior scholars at these institutions who are "rising stars" from a policy perspective.

We also recognized that a few universities that are not on the list of 42 have special relations with key party organs or government ministries, giving them more the flavor of a think tank (i.e., institutional access to officials within a specific policy system). We judge it more likely that, say, an associate professor at the Central Foreign Affairs University would be able to influence Ministry of Foreign Affairs decisions than a similarly ranked scholar at a major civilian university, all else being equal. Thus, we created a "group B" in step 1 below that doesn't require a full professor rank.

We consciously avoid scholars at obscure universities and younger professors at major ones who have not yet shown any signs of policy influence. We do not consider publications solely authored by graduate students but do include co-written articles where only one of the authors meets the criteria. Finally, we considered but ultimately decided not to include research productivity (e.g., article or citation counts) as a measure of influence, focusing instead on more discrete signs that a scholar is connected to the policy process (see step 2 below). For reference, however, we include a recent list of high-citation scholars in the appendix.

Peking, Renmin, Tsinghua, and Fudan. Nevertheless, it is worth considering the broader pool because there can be influential or informed scholars outside the "top-4." Examples in our research included Xia Liping (Tongji University) and Fan Gaoyue (Sichuan University), both of whom are retired PLA officers with insight into military thinking. One might also think of a scholar like Zhu Feng (Nanjing). Each of the senior scholars we identified had previously published in top Chinese IR journals, leading us to conclude that we did not need to include prior publications as another indicator of influence for full professors

Step 1 – Senior Scholars at Top Civilian Universities and Professors at Special Party/Government-Affiliated Universities

This step can be performed easily since most Chinese academic publications list the author’s job title and affiliation. The analyst should look for full professors at any of the 42 PRC Ministry of Education-listed “world-class universities” (group A)³ or professors *at any rank* in a small handful of universities linked to party/government offices (group B).

Group A: Full Professors at Key Civilian Universities

- Peking University (北京大学)
- Renmin University of China (中国人民大学)
- Tsinghua University (清华大学)
- Beihang University (北京航空航天大学)
- Beijing Institute of Technology (北京理工大学)
- China Agricultural University (中国农业大学)
- Beijing Normal University (北京师范大学)
- Minzu University of China (中央民族大学)
- Nankai University (南开大学)
- Tianjin University (天津大学)
- Dalian University of Technology (大连理工大学)
- Jilin University (吉林大学)
- Harbin Institute of Technology (哈尔滨工业大学)
- Fudan University (复旦大学)
- Tongji University (同济大学)
- Shanghai Jiaotong University (上海交通大学)
- East China Normal University (华东师范大学)
- Nanjing University (南京大学)
- Southeast University (东南大学)
- Zhejiang University (浙江大学)
- University of Science and Technology of China (中国科学技术大学)
- Xiamen University (厦门大学)
- Shandong University (山东大学)
- Ocean University of China (中国海洋大学)
- Wuhan University (武汉大学)
- Huazhong University of Science and Technology (华中科技大学)
- China South University (中南大学)
- Sun Yat-sen University (中山大学)

- South China University of Technology (华南理工大学)
- Sichuan University (四川大学)
- Chongqing University (重庆大学)
- University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (电子科技大学)
- Xi’an Jiaotong University (西安交通大学)
- Northwestern Polytechnical University (西北工业大学)
- Lanzhou University (兰州大学)
- National University of Defense Technology (国防科技大学)
- Northeastern University (东北大学)
- Zhengzhou University (郑州大学)
- Hunan University (湖南大学)
- Yunnan University (云南大学)
- Northwest A&F University (西北农林科技大学)
- Xinjiang University (新疆大学)

Group B: Professors at Any Rank at Special Party/Government-Affiliated Universities

- 2 PLA institutes directly under the Central Military Commission: National Defense University (国防大学) (NDU), National University of Defense Technology (国防科技大学) (NUDT)
- 1 People’s Armed Police-affiliated university: People’s Armed Police Force Academy (中国人民武警大学)
- 1 Ministry of Foreign Affairs-affiliated university: China Foreign Affairs University (外交学院) (CFAU)
- 1 Ministry of State Security-affiliated university: University of International Relations (国际关系学院) (UIR)
- 1 Ministry of Public Security-affiliated university: People’s Public Security University of China (中国人民公安大学)
- 1 CCP Central Committee-affiliated institution: Central Party School (中央党校)

Step 2 –Influential Junior Scholars at Top Civilian Universities

We also considered more junior scholars at key civilian universities (i.e., those in Group A above)

who may have developed policy influence at a younger career stage. We settled on a few categories based on their clarity and the relative ease, using online searches, of determining whether an author has attained.ⁱⁱⁱ

- a. The article is published in a journal of a major government think tank or ministry-affiliated university. Examples: *Contemporary International Relations* (现代国际关系) (CICIR), *China International Studies* (国际问题研究) (CIIS), *Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies* (当代亚太) (CASS), *Chinese Journal of America Studies* (美国研究) (CASS), *World Economics and Politics* (世界经济与政治) (CASS), *China Military Science* (中国军事科学) (AMS), *NDU Journal* (国防大学学报) (NDU), *Foreign Affairs Review* (外交评论) (CFAU), *Journal of UIR* (国际关系学院学报) (UIR), or *Journal of International Security Studies* (国际安全研究) (UIR).^{iv}
- b. The author has been invited to lecture at the Politburo 政治局集体学习 (Collective Study Sessions) or participated at a 专家学者座谈会 (Expert and Scholar Panel) for the Party leadership.⁴
- c. The author has been published or interviewed in Xinhua (新华社 or *People's Daily* (人民日报)).^{v5}

ⁱⁱⁱ Searching for indicators of influence among junior scholars is the most labor-intensive part of the process, since one needs to look beyond job title and institutional affiliation, but in practice we found that relatively few scholars below the level of full professor had published on our topic.

^{iv} The reason is that publication in these types of journals signifies a relationship with those closer to the policy process, not because of journal ranking. Thus, we did not include prior publications in journals published by top civilian universities or books published by top university presses.

^v We focused on these core newspapers for ease of searching. More relaxed criteria would include other authoritative outlets, such as *China Daily* (English), *PLA Daily* (解放军报), *Enlightenment Daily* (光明日报), or appearances on central media, including CCTV, CGTN, or China Radio International. For a fuller discussion of China's media environment, see footnote.

Part 2: Publications by Think Tank Scholars

In evaluating think tanks, we were less concerned about an individual's seniority than the institution in which they are employed. This information is also typically provided and thus easy to establish. Based on a review of the existing literature, we identified several government-affiliated think tanks that regularly produce research on foreign and security topics for central government, policy, and military consumers.⁶ These are included as "Level 1" in the list below. This should be the focus of the analyst's efforts. Note that each of these organization contain subordinate research centers, which are too numerous to list here. Depending on the project, some of these centers may be more important than others – for instance, understanding Chinese views on the United States would be served particularly well by research from the America centers at CASS, CIIS, and CICIR.^{vi}

Some projects could also benefit from casting a wider net to understand views of scholars affiliated with other types of research institutes. Some prominent university-based think tanks are listed as Level 2 below. These scholars should be included if they are full-time research staff (and not professors, who would be evaluated according to the criteria in part 1). We also sorted through the growing ranks of non-affiliated or "private" think tanks. Judging by references in Xinhua and *People's Daily*, we selected several of these institutes as Level 3.

Influential Think Tanks

Level 1: Major Government Think Tanks

- China Institute of International Studies, (CIIS) (中国国际问题研究院) – MFA
- Chinese Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) (中国现代国际关系研究院) – MSS
- Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) (军事科学院)

^{vi} The list does not include specialized think tanks, such as the National Institute on South China Sea Studies, which is affiliated with the Hainan provincial government.

- China Institute of International Strategic Studies (CIISS) (中国国际战略学会) – CMC (Joint Staff Department)
- China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies (CFISS) (中国国际战略研究基金会) – CMC (Joint Staff Department)
- Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) (中国社科院) – State Council
- Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) (上海社会科学院) – Shanghai Municipal Government
- Shanghai Institutes of International Relations (SIIS) (上海国际问题研究院) – Shanghai Municipal Government

- The Pangoal Institution (盘古智库)
- The Charhar Institute (察哈尔学会)

Conclusion

The methodology discussed in this memo is a starting point for systematizing the collection of Chinese academic materials that can lead to more consistent and refined assessments of Chinese strategic perspectives. It reflects the authors' best attempt to balance signs of influence in the academic and think tank communities with ease of use. Since our judgements on criteria are ultimately subjective, we offer additional thoughts, including criteria we discarded, in the appendices. It is also worth noting two scenarios where a method such as this one might be inefficient or less useful. First is when the researcher already has a solid grasp of key voices on a given issue, which is likeliest for those conducting deep research over a long period of time. In that case, it could make more sense simply to search for books and articles by scholars the analyst already knows to be influential. Second is when the researcher is more interested in describing broad attitudes across Chinese academia rather than focusing on voices of policy influence. This task would benefit more from big data analytics.

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Level 2: University-Based Think Tanks

- Tsinghua-Carnegie Global Policy Center (清华卡内基全球政策中心) – Tsinghua
- National Strategy Institute (清华大学国家战略研究院) – Tsinghua
- National School of Development (NSD) (北京大学国家发展研究院) – Peking
- Center for Institute for International Strategic Studies (北京大学国际战略研究院) – Peking
- National Academy of Development of Strategy (NADS) (中国人民大学国家发展与战略研究院) – Renmin
- Institute of International Law, Wuhan University (武汉大学国际法研究所)
- Center for American Studies, Fudan University (复旦大学美国研究所)
- Institute of International Studies (IIS), Fudan University (复旦大学国际问题研究院)
- Institute for Strategic Studies, National Defense University (国防大学战略研究所)
- China Reform Forum (改革开放论坛) – Central Party School

Level 3: Non-Affiliated Think Tanks

- Center for China and Globalization (CCG) (全球化智库)
- China Center for International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE) (中国国际经济交流中心)
- China Society of Economic Reform (CSER) (中国经济体制改革研究会)

ENDNOTES:

¹ Recent research that has leveraged this literature includes Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), Gilbert Rozman, *Chinese Strategic Thought Toward Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), and David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972-1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

² For instance, Chinese academics are rewarded for publishing in SSCI journals. Michael C. Desch, *Cult of the Irrelevant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

³ Joel Wuthnow, "Just Another Paper Tiger? Chinese Perspectives on the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy," *INSS Strategic Forum* 305 (2020).

⁴ http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A22/A22_ztzt/ztzt_tjsylpt/sylpt_is_gx/201712/t20171206_320667.html. This includes 36 universities in "class-A" and 6 universities in "class-B."

⁵ Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China* (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2010), 34-5; Brian Hart, "The CCP's Shifting Priorities: An Analysis of Politburo Group Study Sessions," *China Brief*, July 2, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-ccps-shifting-priorities-an-analysis-of-politburo-group-study-sessions/>.

⁶ For discussion of China's media environment, see Heidi Holz with Anthony Miller, *China's Playbook for Shaping the Global Media Environment* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2020); Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga et al., *Deciphering Chinese Deterrence Signaling in the New Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2021); and Paul H.B. Godwin and Alice L. Miller, *China's Forbearance Has Limits: Chinese Threat and Retaliation Signaling and Its Implications for a Sino-American Military Confrontation*, *INSS China Strategic Perspectives* 6 (2013).

⁷ Pascal Abb, "China's Foreign Policy Think Tanks: Institutional Evolution and Changing Roles," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24:93 (2015), 531-553; Jakobson and Knox, *China's New Foreign Policy Actors*, 38; Bonnie S. Glaser, "Chinese Foreign Policy Research Institutes and the Practice of Influence," in Gilbert Rozman (ed.), *China's Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 87-214; Bonnie S. Glaser and Phillip C. Saunders, "Chinese Civilian Foreign Policy Research Institutes: Evolving Roles and Increasing Influence," *China Quarterly* 171 (2002), 597-616; Bates Gill and James Mulvenon, "Chinese Military-Related Think Tanks and Research Institutions," *China Quarterly* 171 (2002), 617-624.

Appendices

List of Chinese Scholars with High Citations

In 2020, a local university in China called 长安大学 released a ranking of political science and IR scholars in China. This list is certainly not authoritative, as the Ministry of Education has [publicly disapproved](#) this list, citing that the list only considers the number of citations a scholar has. Nevertheless, this list is useful to track who are the most prolific IR scholars in China. Many scholars who would make our list (passing Part 1 step 1 and/or 2) are named on this list, but so are many others who have no political influence at all (the list has a high false positive rate). The bold-faced scholars are studying a tier-one subject 一级学科. This has no bearing on our assessment of influence.

政治学排行榜上榜学者单位分布表（2020版）

序号	机构	上榜人数	学者名单
1	中国社会科学院	27	李培林、于建嵘、李春玲、王伟光、王逸舟、郑慧、周穗明、李炜、房宁、唐钧、李慎明、辛向阳、徐友渔、白钢、徐崇温、杨团、周弘、李周、朱伦、李静杰、田丰、洋龙、裴元伦、汝信、张宛丽、杨伯江、谭深
2	中国人民大学	17	时殷弘、王义桅、杨光斌、秦宣、杨立雄、仝志辉、马得勇、金灿荣、李景治、周新城、陶文昭、吴清军、宋月萍、张鸣、张小劲、宋时歌、黄嘉树
3	北京大学	17	俞可平、王丽萍、韩水法、吴国盛、陈功、王立新、郭建宁、郇庆治、谢庆奎、徐湘林、王缉思、李安山、宁骚、袁明、赵光武、卢晖临、曹长盛
4	华中师范大学	16	徐勇、唐鸣、聂运麟、吴理财、项继权、袁方成、陈荣卓、徐增阳、刘义强、邓大才、孙晶、刘金海、黄辉祥、刘筱红、徐育苗、李会滨
5	复旦大学	13	林尚立、倪世雄、苏长和、唐世平、陈志敏、陈周旺、熊易寒、刘欣、俞正梁、郭苏建、曹沛霖、潘富恩、朱明权
6	南开大学	12	朱光磊、吴志成、刘丰、张分田、杨龙、孙晓春、程同顺、陈晏清、季乃礼、张仁德、季任钧、刘珺珺
7	清华大学	11	任剑涛、赵可金、蓝志勇、孙立平、王绍光、阎学通、朱旭峰、孟天广、谈火生、胡联合、张富良
8	浙江大学	10	周俊、张国清、赵鼎新、万斌、高力克、郎友兴、张小玲、赵光勇、杜洁、张黎莉
9	山东大学	10	葛荃、刘京希、王韶兴、宋全成、曲相霏、刘玉安、胡瑾、奚广庆、欧山、李继俊
10	南京大学	10	顾肃、肖唐镖、张乾友、张凤阳、李永刚、朱锋、周沛、杨妍、高传胜、邓燕华
11	中共中央党校	8	韩庆祥、吴忠民、李君如、祝灵君、李海青、刘建飞、赵磊、李慧英

Criteria We Considered but Rejected

This appendix details the criteria the authors chose not to accept after initial empirical exploration. These criteria either overlap too much with the existing ones or fails to capture enough scholars for our purpose to be empirically useful.

In Part 1 Step 1, we did not accept the following:

- A full professor at a defense-related technological and engineering university such as 国防七子

In Part 1 Step 2, we did not accept the following:

- A fellow 院士 at the Chinese Academy of Sciences 中国科学院 or a 学部委员 Member of CASS 中国社会科学院
- Scholars who have received the special allowance from the State Council 享受国务院特殊津贴
- Scholars who made an appearance on any of the CCTV or CGTN channels.
-

Additional Criteria for Identifying Academic Influence (use as needed)

If an author does not meet the sufficient criteria in step 1 or 2, proceed to identify the following characteristics.¹ Include any author who meets at least two from any of the following categories. Note that if someone has won more than one title/grant, that it considered sufficient to make our list.

- National level grant winner:
 - 国家社会科学基金重大项目 (or “重大项目”)
 - 省/直辖市级 合作项目 (e.g. 北京市 XX 项目)
- Social title 社会兼职
 - A 特聘 专家/科学家 at a national-level organization (e.g. 中国政协参政议政人才库)
 - A committee member 理事/standing committee member 常务理事 at a national-level organization or agency (anything that has a 中国 in its name, such as 中国 XX 研究会, 中国 XX 交流中心, 中国 XX 论坛, 中国 XX 学会)
- A committee member 委员 with the 中国科学技术协会 China Association for Science and Technology

Search Examples: Signs of Influence

Example 1: Professor Tang Shiping and “Reference News” (example of appearance in authoritative outlet)

¹ Other signs of policy relevance would include consulting for the Central National Security Commission (中央国家安全委员会), participating in sessions called by the Central Committee Foreign Affairs Office, or receiving written comments (批示) from a senior leader. However, we did not include them due to limited information in public sources.



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2015年10月19日 — 复旦大学国际关系学教授唐世平认为，国际体系正在向在无政府状态下战争不再是各国必须选择的层次上进化。他认为，作为人类社会的一部分， ...

http://www.mof.gov.cn/ksqy/ksqy.htm

Example 2: Professor Tan Huosheng and “Major Program” (example of a junior professor with a national grant)



“谈火生” “重大项目”



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作者：周洁玲 · 2017 — 通讯作者：谈火生，法学博士，清华大学政治学系，副教授，博士生导师 ... 基金项目：国家社会科学基金重大项目“西方国别政治思想史”(13 & ZD149)，项目负责人： ...

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