

2025

HARVARD-YENCHING
INSTITUTE WORKING
PAPER SERIES

**RESEARCHING CHINA FROM JAPAN:
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM A 2025
SCHOLAR SURVEY**

Asei Ito | University of Tokyo
Jaehwan Lim | Aoyama Gakuin University
Haichun Yu | Hokkaido University
Yuki Mikiya | Keio University

Researching China from Japan:
Preliminary Findings from a 2025 Scholar Survey

Asei Ito* Jaehwan Lim† Haichun Yu‡ Yuki Mikiya§

Abstract

This study examines the challenges faced by Japan-based China scholars, drawing on data from the “Survey on the Experiences of China Scholars in Japan” conducted in March 2025. The findings reveal that 11.3% of respondents reported being directly informed by Chinese authorities that their research was considered politically sensitive. Additionally, 27.1% encountered various research-related difficulties, including restricted access to specific materials and incidents where local contacts were approached by the authorities. Regarding academic dissemination, 21.8% experienced issues such as censorship or the need to obtain prior approval when presenting research or publishing in China. Furthermore, 32% stated that recent detentions and related incidents influenced their choice of research topics. Notably, 43.2% of academic advisors reported considering the sensitivity of research topics when supervising graduate students. These experiences varied significantly across academic disciplines. Overall, this survey offers a valuable snapshot of the diverse and evolving constraints encountered by China scholars based in Japan.

This paper is the English translation of the following discussion paper:

Asei Ito, Jaehwan Lim, Haichun Yu, and Yuki Mikiya. *Nihonban Chugoku Kenkyusya Chosa 2025: Gaiyo to Sokuhou* [日本版中国研究者調査 2025: 概要と速報], Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo, Discussion Paper Series (Japanese version) No. 255, published in May 2025. <https://jwww.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/publications/dp/dpj/pdf/j-255.pdf>

* Associate Professor, Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo

† Professor, School of International Politics, Economics and Communication, Aoyama Gakuin University

‡ Research Faculty, Graduate School of International Media, Communication, and Tourism Studies, Hokkaido University

§ PhD Student, Graduate School of Law, Keio University

Introduction

Recent years have seen scholars both inside and outside the People's Republic of China experience more challenges in conducting research on the country because of heightened academic censorship in China, tightened controls on academic studies and fieldwork, and strengthened legal frameworks in the name of national security. David Shambaugh, a leading scholar of Chinese politics in the United States, observed the persistence of the post-COVID trend of prioritizing national security, stating, "[T]he years when American and foreign scholars could roam the country by train and other means, live in villages, observe factory workers, interview officials, and other research modalities appears to be over" (Shambaugh 2024, 327). In Japan, similar concerns have been widely expressed within the academic community of China studies. In the field of history, for instance, access to primary sources has become increasingly restricted, while in sociology and anthropology, fieldwork has become particularly difficult to conduct. Furthermore, since the 2010s, sporadic incidents have been observed in which scholars affiliated with Japanese universities and research institutions—regardless of nationality—have been detained or gone missing while staying in mainland China, significantly worsening the overall environment for China-related research.

A notable study that addressed the challenges confronted by foreign-based China scholars is Greitens and Truex (2020), hereafter the Greitens and Truex survey. Conducted in 2018, the Greitens and Truex survey focused on scholars of China residing in North America, Western Europe, Australia, and Hong Kong, examining conditions in the broader Western academic sphere. Its findings showed that approximately 9% of respondents reported undergoing interrogation by Chinese authorities, which, despite representing a minority of the overall sample, clearly demonstrates that a nonnegligible number of researchers have experienced some repression or difficulty during their scholarly work.

In Japan, the field of China studies is characterized by considerable depth and breadth, covering not only well-established subjects such as history, thought, and literature but also robustly extending into areas such as economics and politics. Because of Japan's cultural and geographical proximity to China, researchers usually adopt field-based, observational approaches. Amid shifts in the research environment described earlier, the kinds of difficulties Japanese scholars have encountered must be uncovered as the realities of their experiences have only been partially revealed and remain insufficiently understood.

To this end, in March 2025, we conducted the "Survey on the Experiences of China Scholars in Japan," building on the framework of the Greitens and Truex survey while modifying and supplementing the questionnaire to reflect the Japanese context. The current survey focused on China scholars affiliated with Japanese universities and research institutions regardless of nationality. We contacted a total of 574 researchers via an online questionnaire and received 362 valid responses, yielding a 63.1% response rate. For comparison, the Greitens and Truex survey

distributed questionnaires to 1,967 individuals and obtained 562 valid responses for a response rate of 28.6%; of these, 358 (64%) were from US-based scholars. From both the number of responses and the response rate when focusing on a single country, the present survey provides a meaningful and representative picture of the situation in Japan.

This paper presents a preliminary report on the key survey findings. The results showed that 11.3% of respondents were directly told by Chinese authorities that their studies were politically sensitive, while 27.1% encountered some research-related challenge. Particularly, many respondents reported that their local friends or acquaintances were approached by authorities or that they were denied access to specific materials in archives or libraries that hold historical documents. Additionally, 3% of respondents experienced physical threats or temporary detention by Chinese authorities. With regard to academic dissemination, 21.8% of scholars were subjected to some form of censorship or were required to obtain approval from Chinese authorities before presenting their research or publishing their works in China. Meanwhile, 43.2% of graduate student supervisors reported that they considered the political sensitivity of research topics during their advisory work.

The current survey also revealed significant differences in the nature and severity of incidents experienced by the respondents, with notable variations across academic disciplines. However, with respect to the supervision of graduate students, many researchers across a wide range of fields reported considering political sensitivity in their advising. Furthermore, many respondents expressed that the responses of their respective institutions and the Japanese government to recent detentions and related incidents have been inadequate.

Section 1 discusses the background of this study and relevant research. Section 2 then outlines the survey design and implementation. Section 3 presents the main findings, focusing on respondent demographics, the relation between research sensitivity and incident experiences, and the impact on responses and academic advising. Section 4 discusses issues including differences across academic fields and the comparison with the Greitens and Trux survey. Finally, section 5 concludes the paper.

1. Background

A key motivation behind this survey is China's increasing control and oversight of academic researchers in the past decade. Besides cases of missing Chinese scholars based in China, there has been a notable intensification of various forms of control targeting foreign-based China scholars. According to public reports in Japanese media, from 2013 to 2024, multiple individuals engaged in China-related research and affiliated with Japanese universities and research institutions, including Japanese nationals, have either been detained or gone missing while in China.¹

¹ According to Li (2024), and based on the authors' compilation, there have been at least eight publicly known cases of Japan-based China scholars being detained or going missing in mainland China between 2013 and 2024.

Beyond these high-profile long-term detentions is a broader range of incidents. For example, scholars conducting academic visits, archival research, or fieldwork in China have sometimes been approached by authorities or subjected to brief interrogations, lasting, in some cases, half a day. While restrictions on access to historical documents housed in archives (referred to in Chinese as *dang'anguan*, or 档案馆) are also common, such incidents rarely make the news. Although researchers sometimes informally share experiences such as these during academic conferences or private conversations, this information remains fragmentary within the academic community and has seldom been communicated systematically or made publicly visible.

A key precedent for visualizing and systematically documenting these challenges is the study by Greitens and Truex (2020), which serves as a foundational reference for the current survey. Conducted by two North America-based scholars, the Greitens and Truex survey focused on China scholars—both Chinese and non-Chinese nationals—residing in North America, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong. The authors built their sampling list using data gathered from major North American and European academic associations and journals. In May 2018, they emailed the survey to 1,967 individuals, obtaining 562 responses. The response rate for those who answered more than 90% of the questionnaire items was 28.6%.² The Greitens and Truex survey was structured around three main components: (1) respondents' basic demographic and professional information, (2) challenges faced when conducting research, and (3) responses and coping strategies. The questionnaire is available in the online supplementary materials accompanying their study.

The Greitens and Truex survey's primary respondents were North America-based political scientists and historians. Out of these participants, 64% were based in institutions in the United States, followed by 7% each in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong, 6% in Canada, 4% in Australia, and 4% in Germany. By discipline, political science scholars were the largest group at 34%, followed by historians. Because the survey focused on actively including female scholars in the sampling list, 47% of its respondents were women. Another notable feature of the survey is that 55% of its participants were citizens of the People's Republic of China. Regarding institutional affiliation, 93% of institutions were universities. In terms of academic rank, 72% of the respondents were professors, associate professors, and lecturers.

According to the results of the Greitens and Truex survey, 5.1% of respondents experienced difficulties when obtaining visas. Problems accessing specific materials or archives were particularly common, with 21% of researchers encountering such issues; this figure rose to 26% for those conducting archival research. Regarding direct contact with authorities, 9% reported being "invited for tea" by officials—a euphemism for interrogation. When the participants were asked whether they

² Greitens and Truex's (2020) online supplementary materials note that the survey included two follow-up emails sent on May 30 and June 27, 2018, with the survey closing on June 30, 2018. Following this procedure, the current survey also incorporated two follow-up emails to participants.

considered their research to be sensitive, 53% answered “somewhat sensitive,” and 14% responded “very sensitive,” indicating that a majority generally perceived their research as sensitive.

The Greitens and Truex survey was highly instrumental in revealing the main challenges faced by researchers based in North America. Although the authors noted in their conclusion the importance of similar studies in other countries, no comparable surveys appear to have been conducted since. Furthermore, the situation in Japan—the current study’s focus—remained unclear, highlighting the value of conducting a dedicated survey targeting Japan-based China researchers.

However, some aspects make a direct comparison between the Greitens and Truex survey and our survey problematic. Specifically, differences can be observed in (1) the timing of the surveys, (2) the respondents’ characteristics (e.g., nationality and research fields), and (3) response rates.

First, the Greitens and Truex survey was conducted in 2018, while the present study was conducted in 2025. Even focusing solely on Western countries, one would reasonably assume that the research environment has significantly changed during this period. As Truex (2024) pointed out, travel restrictions due to pandemic-related lockdowns and increasing geopolitical tensions—including the U.S.–China rivalry—may have made it more difficult for foreign-based scholars to conduct research on China.

Second, about half of the respondents in the Greitens and Truex survey were citizens of the People’s Republic of China, with political scientists and historians making up a large proportion of respondents. As will be discussed later, these respondent attributes differ from those in our survey.

Third, the two surveys have different response rates; our survey’s response rate was more than double that of the Greitens and Truex survey. If scholars who face research difficulties are more likely to participate, differences in response rates may complicate comparisons of the prevalence of these challenges.

Besides these three points, our survey also modified some response options to better fit the Japanese context. Hence, any comparisons with the Greitens and Truex survey should be considered indicative rather than definitive.

2. Survey design

2-1. Population of interest

Focusing on Japan-based China researchers, this survey aimed to clarify (1) the kinds of research-related difficulties they have faced; (2) whether they have engaged in self-censorship or self-restraint, including adjusting research topics in the context of supervising graduate students; and (3) the measures they have taken in response. This survey was conducted for research purposes only and is not intended to serve any commercial interests or support any political factions either domestically or internationally.

This survey’s target population was defined as “humanities and social science researchers based

in Japan whose research focuses on China.” Their nationality was not restricted, and their fields covered a broad range of humanities and social science disciplines. The historical periods they studied were also unrestricted, covering the ancient times to the modern and contemporary eras. This survey targeted not only researchers affiliated with universities but also those working at think tanks and research institutes within private companies and public organizations, as well as independent researchers. This study also defines “China” as including not only the mainland but also Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.

2-2. Questionnaire and the list of survey participants

The questionnaire was created by first translating the Greitens and Truex survey into Japanese and, based on this, controlling the overall number of questions by removing certain items while adding others tailored to the Japanese context. Deleted items included the country of the affiliated research institution, university student enrollment numbers, year of PhD completion, questions about colleagues’ research, and inquiries on promotion reviews at the affiliated institution. Meanwhile, newly added questions reflected the extended historical scope of China studies in Japan, the impact of recent incidents such as scholar detentions on research activities, and whether the respondents supervised graduate students and how this affected topic selection.³ Additionally, for the retained questions, response options and wording were modified as necessary.

The list of survey participants was initially compiled using public information registered in J-Global⁴ and Researchmap.⁵ This foundational list was then supplemented using public data from academic societies, research institutions, academic journals, and individual inquiries, resulting in a final list of 624 individuals. The list creation process did not use internal membership lists of any academic organizations (e.g., societies or research institutions).

2-3. Survey implementation

Survey participation was made entirely voluntary as the survey contained items that could impose psychological burdens on respondents. The survey cover page (front page) clearly stated that respondents were free to decline participation or withdraw at any time. Additionally, the questionnaire design allowed respondents to skip any question they preferred not to answer, and this option was also explicitly stated on the front page. Because of this survey design, the total number of valid responses varied slightly depending on the question. To transparently reflect this, the number of nonresponses for each item is reported alongside the valid response counts below.

³ An example of education-related research was Newland (2024), a survey targeting scholars teaching Chinese politics or East Asian politics at U.S. universities, reporting various issues that arose in the classroom, such as class participants’ concerns about surveillance.

⁴ J-Global: <https://jglobal.jst.go.jp/>

⁵ Researchmap: <https://researchmap.jp/>

The questionnaire was distributed using unique links for each participant to prevent duplicate responses. To avoid excessive collection of personally identifiable information, the respondents' IP addresses and location data were not recorded. Before this survey was administered, the research plan and questionnaire were submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo, and were approved on February 21, 2025.

The survey commenced on March 11, 2025. Of the 624 invitations sent, 50 were undeliverable, resulting in 574 successfully delivered questionnaires.⁶ Therefore, the response rate and related figures below used 574 as the denominator. After two reminder emails, the survey was closed on March 31, 2025.

After the survey ended, the number of valid responses, defined as those with a completion rate of 90% or higher with answers to key questions, was 362. This corresponds to an effective response rate of 63.1%, which is substantially higher than the 28.6% reported in the Greitens and Truex survey.⁷ While these results considerably reflect the experiences of Japan-based Chinese studies researchers, the sample may not represent the entire population.⁸

3. Results

3-1. Respondent attributes

Table 1 presents the respondents' basic attributes, showing a roughly even split between humanities and social sciences. Specifically, history, a key field in Japanese China studies, accounted for 22.1%, literature 16.9%, and thought/philosophy 8.6%, totaling 47.6%. Thus, about half of the respondents were from the humanities, commonly referred to as "literature, history, and philosophy" (文史哲, *bunshitetsu*). Meanwhile, political science and law accounted for 21.5%; economics, business administration, and public policy 19.9%; and sociology and anthropology 5.6%, for a total of 47.0% in the social sciences. Other fields included area studies and linguistics.

Regarding institutional affiliation, 86.1% of the respondents were university researchers, while 8.0% were associated with research institutes or think tanks. Although details were omitted here, 58% of the university respondents held professorial positions, making them the survey's main contributors.

The gender composition of the respondents was 26.2% female, 72.1% male, and 0.6%

⁶ Invitations were not delivered for two main reasons. The first is that some email addresses collected from publicly available information were outdated and no longer valid, and the second is that some emails were blocked by filtering mechanisms or similar functions.

⁷ If the 50 undeliverable emails were included, the response rate would be 58.0% (362/624).

⁸ Future research will address potential biases in the survey results. Among these biases, a particularly important point is that researchers who have experienced difficulties during their research process or censorship of their findings may be more likely to respond to the survey. In such cases, the reported proportion of scholars facing challenges could be subject to an upward bias relative to the true population average.

nonbinary.

Table 1 Respondents' Basic Attributes

| Total sample size | N = 362 | |
|--|----------------|-------|
| Academic Discipline | Sample size | Ratio |
| History | 80 | 22.1% |
| Political Science and Law | 78 | 21.5% |
| Economics, Business, and Public Policy | 72 | 19.9% |
| Literature | 61 | 16.9% |
| Thought and Philosophy | 31 | 8.6% |
| Sociology and Anthropology | 20 | 5.5% |
| Others | 18 | 5.0% |
| Unknown | 2 | 0.6% |
| Affiliated Institution | Sample size | Ratio |
| University | 312 | 86.2% |
| Research Institute / Think Tank | 29 | 8.0% |
| Independent (No affiliation) | 9 | 2.5% |
| Other | 5 | 1.4% |
| Non-Profit Organization | 3 | 0.8% |
| Private Company (excluding think tank divisions) | 1 | 0.3% |
| Unknown | 3 | 0.8% |

As shown in Figure 1, when asked about their primary research regions (multiple answers allowed), 93.6% of the respondents indicated mainland China as their main (or one of their main) research targets. Similarly, 29% selected Taiwan. Regarding research periods (multiple responses allowed), approximately half of the respondents conducted research on the period after the founding of the People's Republic of China (post-1949) (Figure 2). Meanwhile, 14.4% of researchers focused on the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period or earlier, indicating that the respondent pool covered a wide range of history including ancient and medieval times. With regard to research materials and data collection methods (multiple answers allowed), most researchers used published sources, while 42.5% conducted qualitative interviews (Figure 3).

Compared with Greitens and Truex's respondents, the ones in the present study showed several distinctive characteristics. First, they were from a more diverse range of disciplines, including literature, philosophy/thought, and economics. In the Greitens and Truex survey, participants were

predominantly from political science (34%) and history (32%), accounting for about two-thirds of the sample. Although political science (21.5%) and history (22.1%) were also the largest fields in the current survey, other disciplines were relatively more represented. Particularly, our survey included higher proportions of respondents from the literature, philosophy/thought, and economics/business/public policy fields, which were less common in the Greitens and Truex survey. Specifically, literature and philosophy/thought accounted for 25.5% of the respondents in our survey but were underrepresented in the Greitens and Truex sample. Second, regarding institutional affiliation, 86.2% of respondents in this study were university researchers, a slightly lower percentage than the 93% reported in the Greitens and Truex survey. The current sample also included a relatively higher number of scholars affiliated with think tanks and research institutes in Japan. Third, regarding gender composition, the present survey had a lower proportion of female respondents (26.2%, with 72.1% male and 0.6% nonbinary) compared with 47% in the Greitens and Truex survey.

Figure 1. Main Research Regions (Multiple Responses Allowed)

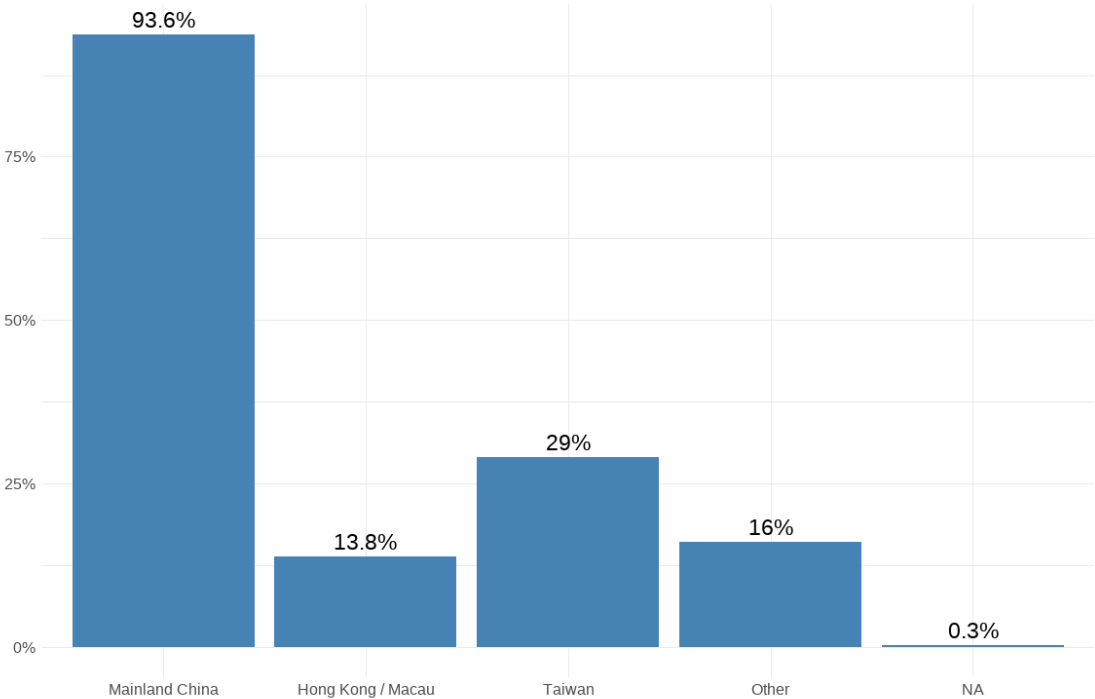


Figure 2. Main Research Periods (Multiple Responses Allowed)

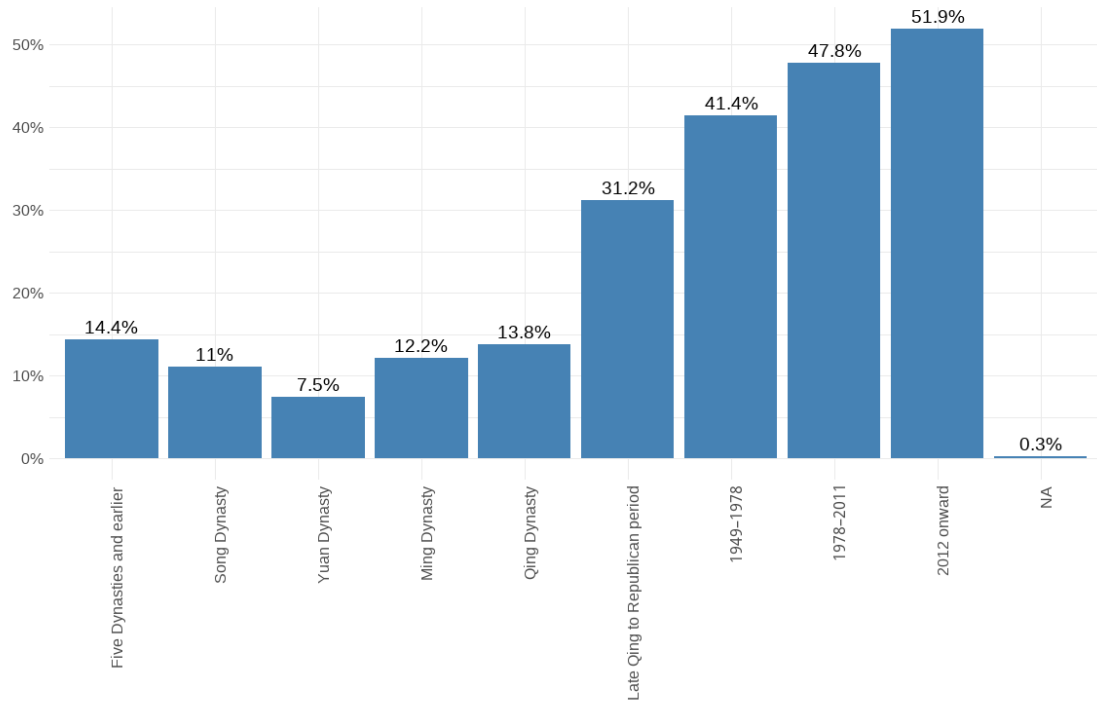
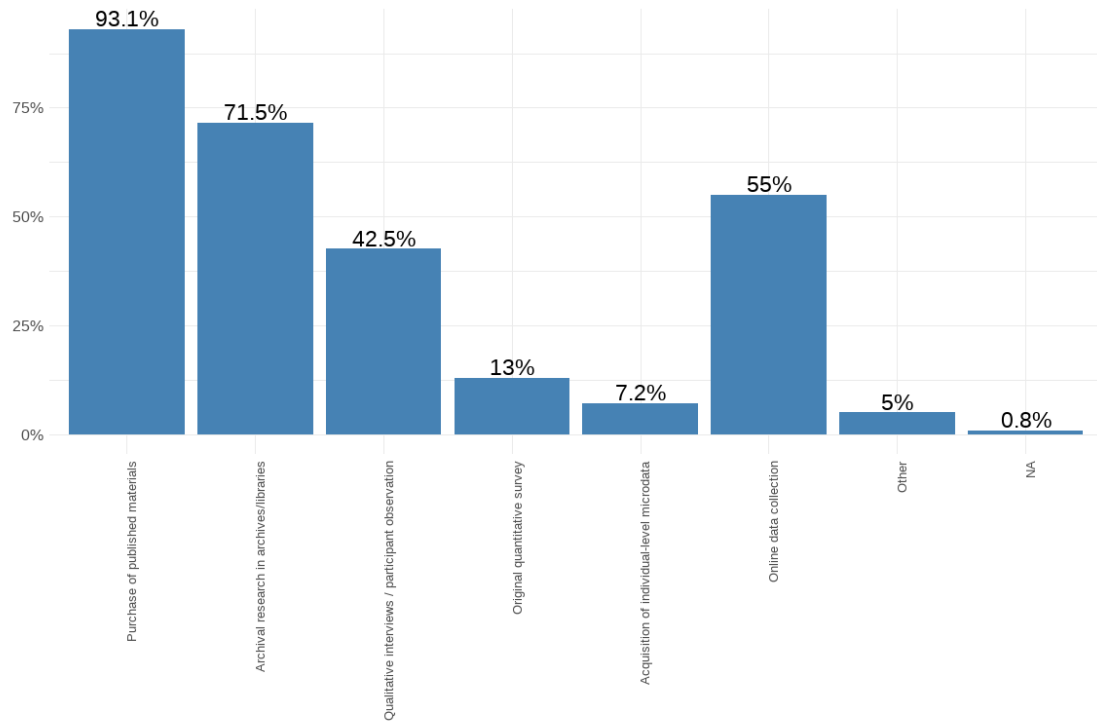


Figure 3. Research Material and Data Collection Methods (Multiple Responses Allowed)



3-2. Research sensitivity and experience of incidents

Below are the responses to the key questions in our survey. Each question and its corresponding response options are presented inside a box, followed by a report of the results.

Question: How politically sensitive do you consider your research to be?

Response options (*single choice*):

- ☐ Very sensitive
- ☐ Somewhat sensitive
- ☐ Not so sensitive
- ☐ Not sensitive at all

First, the respondents were asked about their subjective perceptions of the political sensitivity of their studies (Figure 4). On average, 16.9% considered their research to be “very sensitive,” while 38.4% responded with “somewhat sensitive.” In total, 55.3% of the respondents recognized their research as politically sensitive to some degree.

Such subjective perceptions significantly varied across research fields (Figure 5). The highest proportion of “very sensitive” responses was observed in political science and law, with half of respondents in these fields perceiving their research as such, followed by sociology and anthropology at 15% and history at 12.5%. Conversely, no respondents from the literature field reported their studies as “very sensitive,” and a low proportion was also observed in philosophy as well as economics, business, and public policy. In the fields of history and sociology/anthropology, approximately half of the respondents answered “somewhat sensitive,” and a similarly high percentage of respondents in economics, business, and public policy (40.3%) selected “somewhat sensitive.”

Figure 4. Scholars' Perceptions of Their Studies' Political Sensitivity

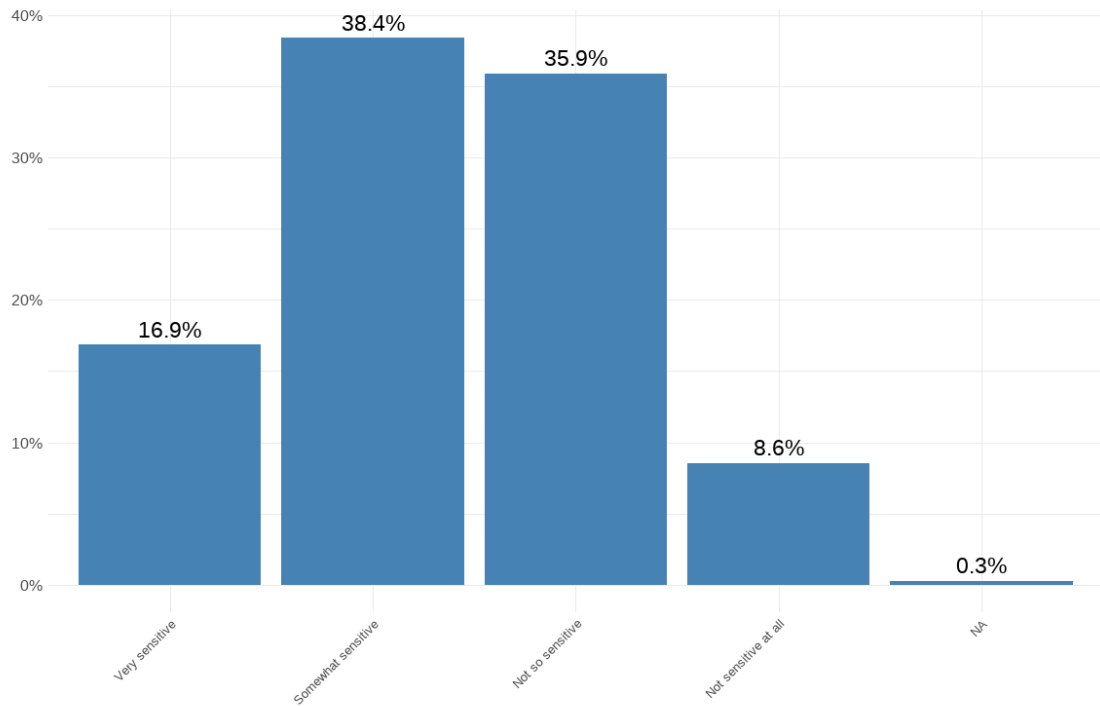
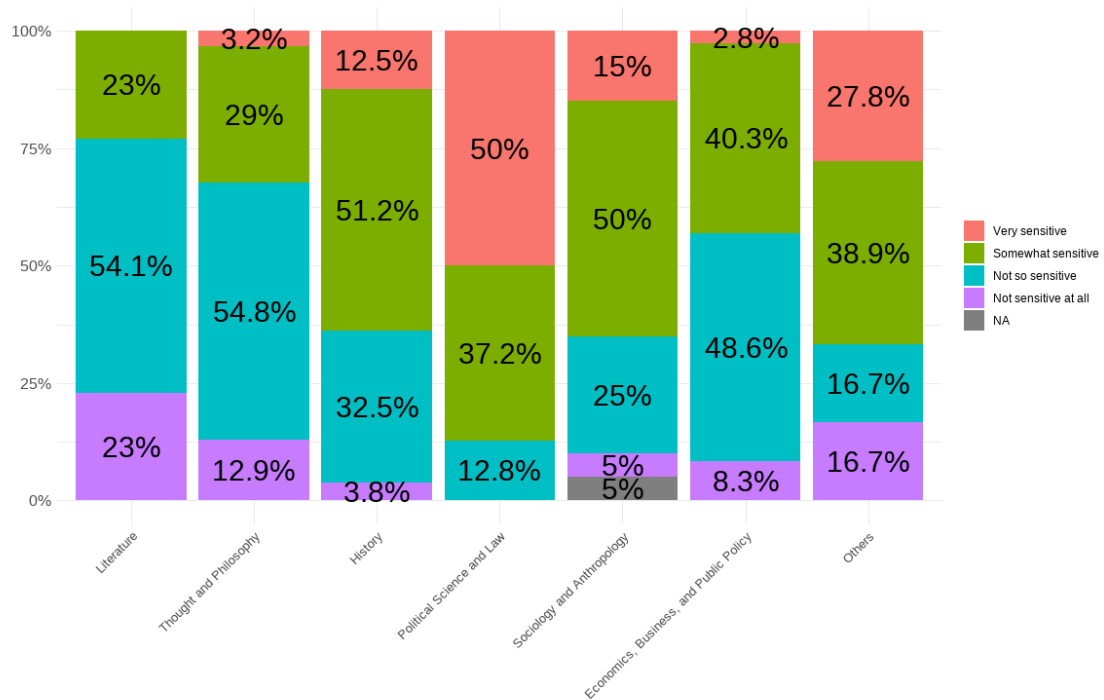


Figure 5. Scholars' Perceived Political Sensitivity of their Studies (by Academic Discipline)



Question: Have you ever been directly told by officials of the Chinese government or the Chinese Communist Party that your research is politically sensitive?

Response options (*single choice*):

☐ Yes

☐ No

Next, the respondents were asked whether Chinese authorities directly told them that their research was politically sensitive. On average, 11.3% reported having such an experience (Figure 6). The proportions of those with the same experience were highest in political science and law at 20.5%, followed by sociology and anthropology at 15%, history at 10%, and economics, business, and public policy at 8.3% (Figure 7). The proportions were relatively low in the literature, philosophy, and intellectual history fields, ranging from 3.2% to 3.3%.

Figure 6. Scholars’ Experience of Being Directly Told by Chinese Authorities
That their Research Is Politically Sensitive

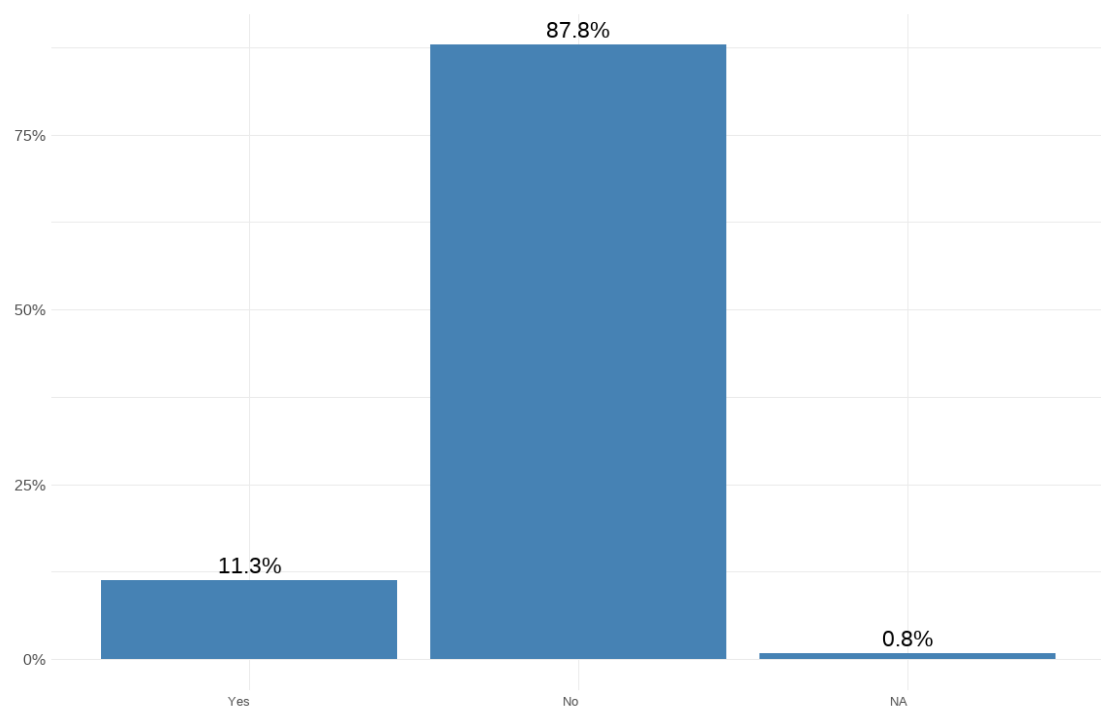


Figure 7. Scholars' Experience of Being Directly Told by Chinese Authorities that their Research Is Politically Sensitive (by Academic Discipline)



Question: In the past 10 years, have you experienced any of the following during your research activities related to China?

Response options (Multiple answers allowed, but if you select the last option, you cannot select any others.)

- ☐ Difficulty obtaining a visa or having a visa application denied
- ☐ Being questioned (or “invited for tea”) by Chinese authorities and having to talk about your research
- ☐ Experiencing physical threats or temporary detention
- ☐ Being harassed online, via email, or by phone related to your research
- ☐ Having notebooks, materials, or computers confiscated (even temporarily) and inspected by Chinese authorities
- ☐ Chinese friends or acquaintances being contacted by authorities in connection with your research
- ☐ Being denied entry to archives, libraries, or research facilities
- ☐ Being denied access to specific materials in archives, libraries, or research facilities
- ☐ Being refused the provision of survey results by Chinese research institutions
- ☐ Undergoing a state statistical law review required for foreigners conducting surveys, but being

- denied permission without proper explanation or reason
- ☐ Having interviewees cancel or withdraw their participation at the last minute
- ☐ Your Chinese interviewees' identities being misunderstood or misrepresented by authorities
- ☐ Being pressured or encouraged to cooperate with Chinese authorities in some way
- ☐ No particular experience

Next, the respondents were asked about any incidents they encountered while conducting their research, and 70.7% reported no experience, while 27.1% reported experiencing at least one incident (Figure 8). When these experiences were classified by discipline, the highest proportions of respondents reporting such incidents were from sociology and anthropology (40%) followed by political science and law (39.7%), other fields (33.3%), history (31.2%), and economics, business, and public policy (27.8%) (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Experience of Difficulties during Research Activities
(Any Selected Indicates “Experienced”)

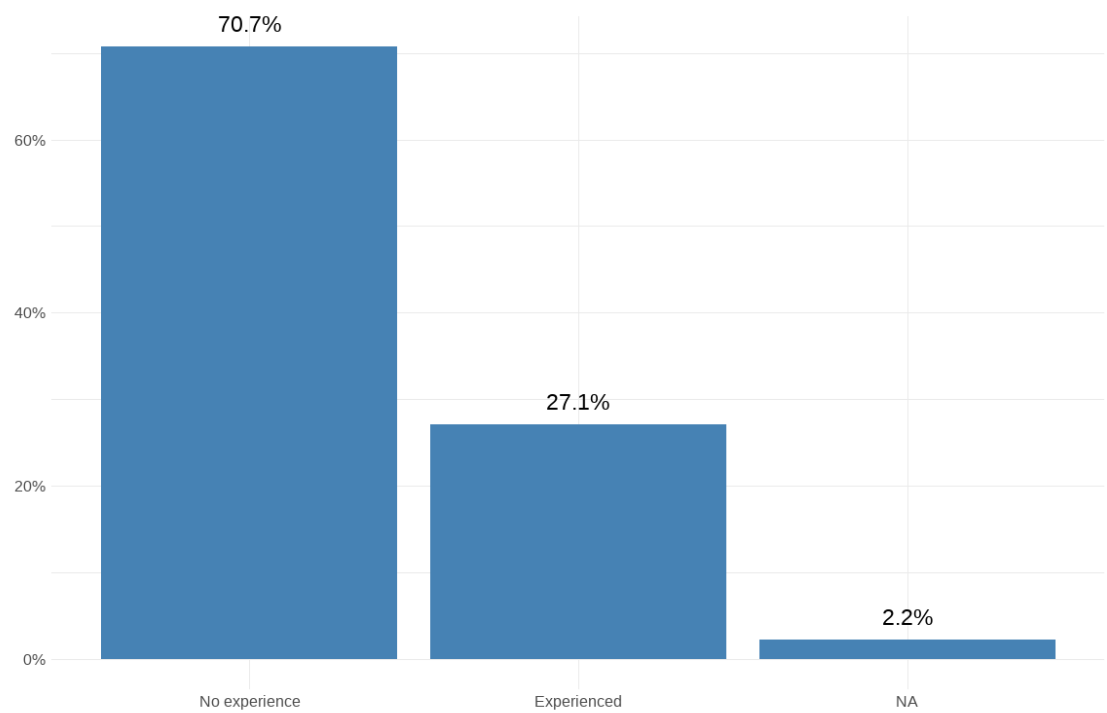
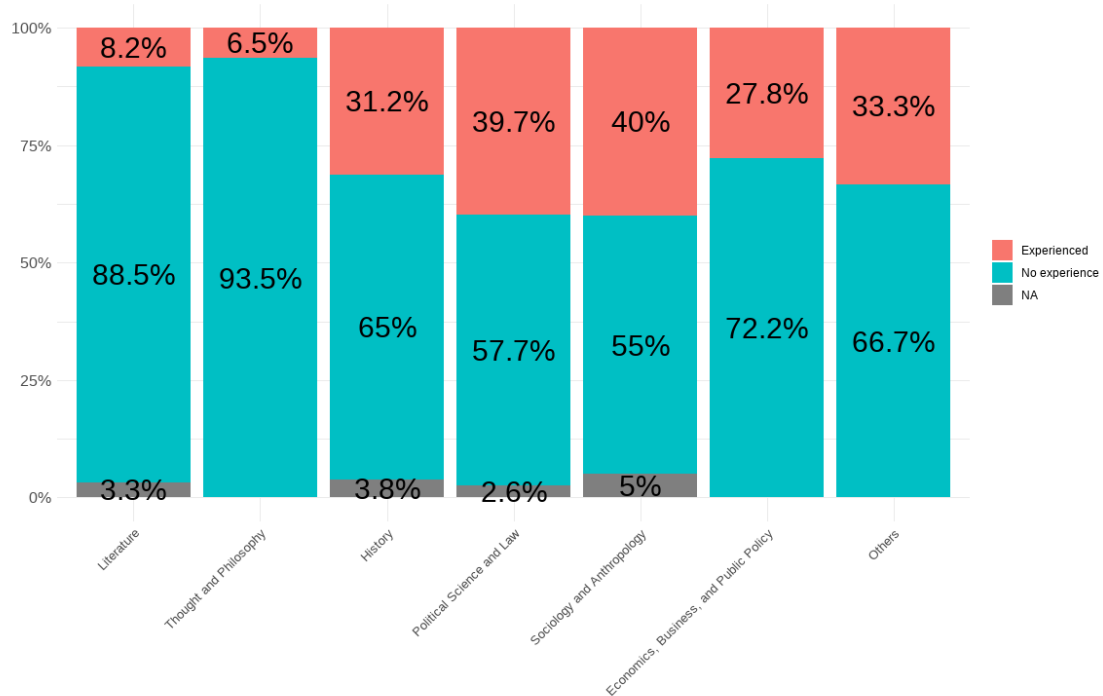
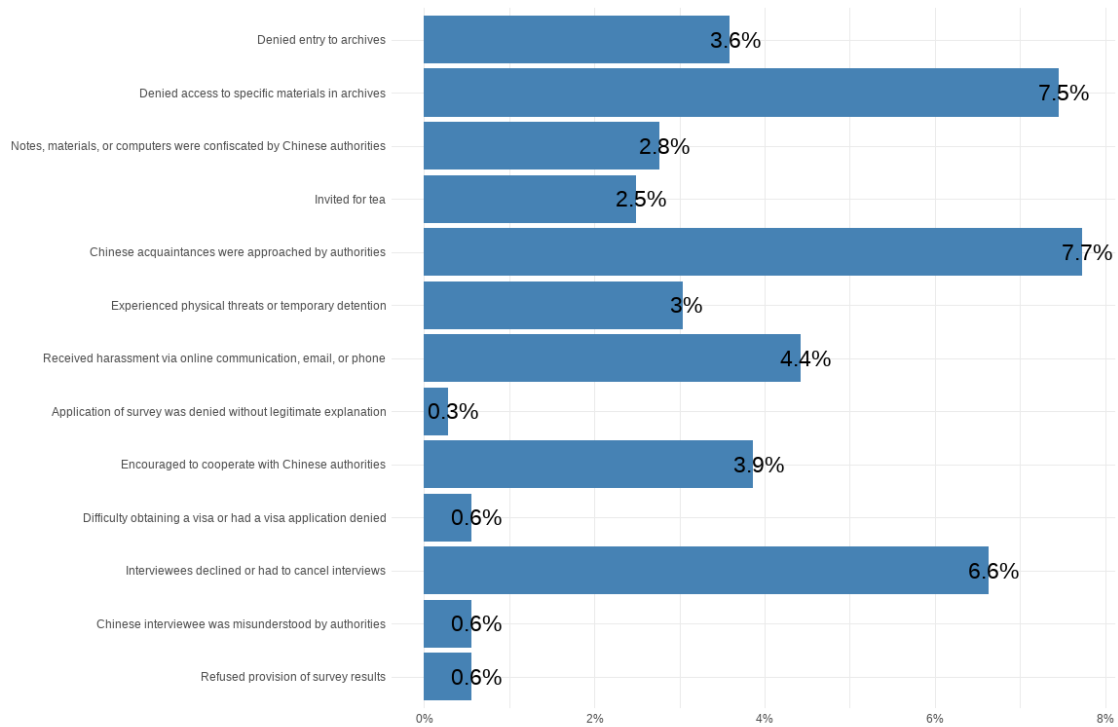


Figure 9. Experience of Difficulties during Research Activities
(by Academic Discipline)



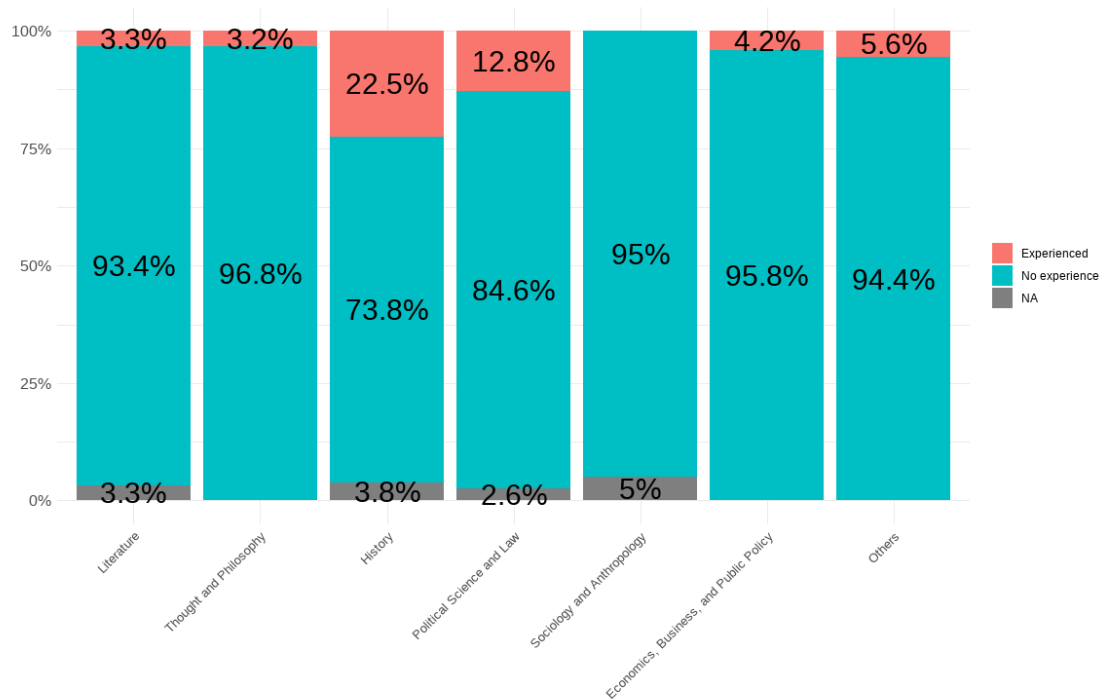
Regarding specific incidents, 7.7% of the respondents reported that their Chinese friends or acquaintances were contacted by authorities in connection with their studies; 7.5% reported that they were denied access to specific materials in archives, libraries, or archival institutions; and 6.6% experienced interviewees withdrawing or canceling interviews at the last minute (Figure 10). Additionally, 3.9% reported being pressured or compelled to cooperate with Chinese authorities; 3.0% suffered from physical threats or temporary detention; 2.8% had their notes, materials, or computers confiscated (even temporarily) and examined by Chinese authorities; and 2.5% were interrogated (or “invited for tea”) by Chinese authorities and asked about their research. Despite these relatively low percentages, given the total number of respondents, the data reveal that a nonnegligible number of researchers have faced serious situations.

Figure 10. Experiences of Difficulties during Research Activities
(Multiple Responses Allowed)



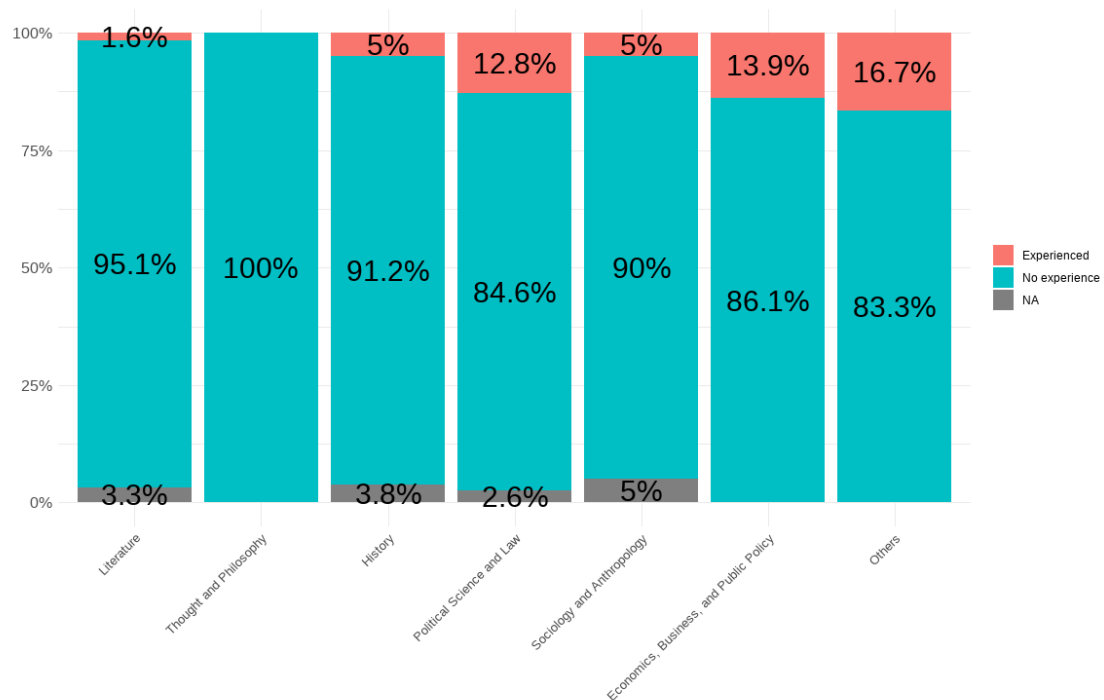
We also examined differences among disciplines regarding specific incidents. First, focusing on two options on difficulties in collecting research materials—namely, “being denied entry to archives, libraries, or archival institutions” and “being denied access to specific materials in archives, libraries, or archival institutions”—we analyzed responses by field (Figure 11). As expected, 22.5% of respondents in the history field reported experiencing such challenges, followed by 12.8% of political science and law researchers.

Figure 11. Experience of Difficulties in Data Collection



Similarly, we aggregated respondents who selected one or more of the following options regarding direct threats: “Being interrogated by Chinese authorities (or “invited for tea”) and questioned about their research,” “Experiencing physical intimidation or temporary detention,” and “Being pressured or coerced in some form to cooperate with Chinese authorities” (Figure 12). The results showed that the highest percentage was from respondents from the “other” category (16.7%), followed by those in economics, business, and public policy (13.9%) and those in political science and law (12.8%).

Figure 12. Experience of Interrogation, Detention, or Requests for Cooperation



3-3. Censorship and its impact on education

Question: In the past 10 years, have you experienced any of the following?

Response options (*Multiple answers allowed; however, selecting the last option excludes all others*):

- ☐ Your publications (books, articles, reports) in China were censored.
- ☐ Your invited talks, guest lectures, or other presentations in China were canceled.
- ☐ You were instructed by Chinese authorities on the content of your lectures, classes, or other presentations in China, or required to obtain their approval.
- ☐ No particular experience.

With regard to the scholars' experience of censorship or receiving instructions on research presentations or publications in China in the past 10 years, on average, 21.8% reported experiencing some form of such interference (Figure 13). Specifically, publication censorship was the most common, with 14.4% of respondents reporting such experience (Figure 14). Additionally, 10.5% indicated that they needed to follow instructions or obtain approval for lectures, talks, or other presentations. Although less common, 1.9% of respondents reported having their presentations canceled.

Regarding the proportion of researchers who experienced any of the three abovementioned types of interference by field, political science and law (29.5%), "other" fields (27.8%), and history

(26.2%) showed higher rates. Unlike the incidents encountered while conducting research, censorship-related experiences were reported by 18% of respondents from the literature field and 9.7% from the thought and philosophy field (Figure 15).

Figure 13. Experience of Censorship or Similar Incidents
(Any Selected Indicates “Experienced”)

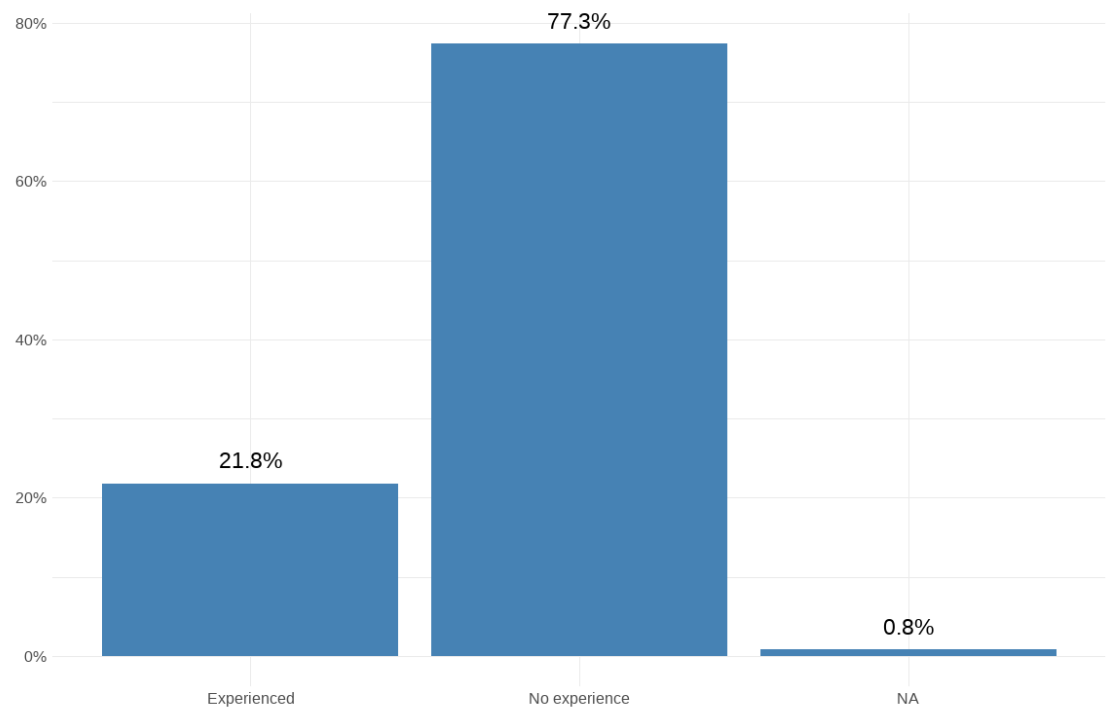


Figure 14. Breakdown of Experiences of Censorship or Similar Incidents
(Multiple Responses Allowed)

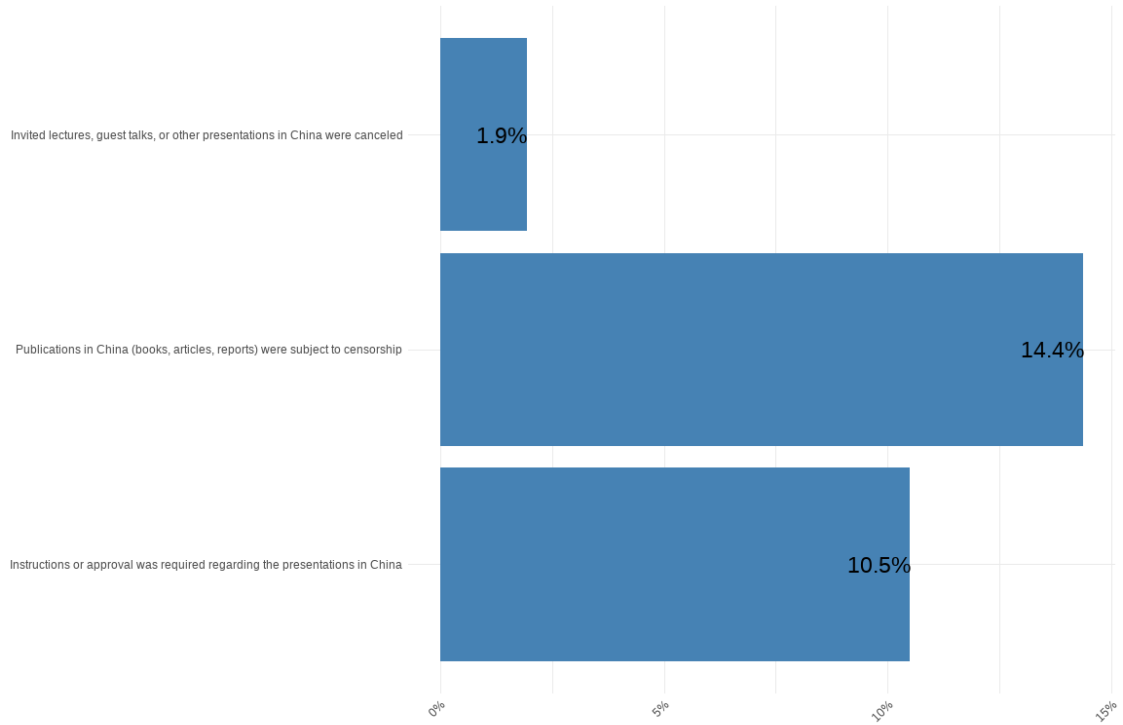
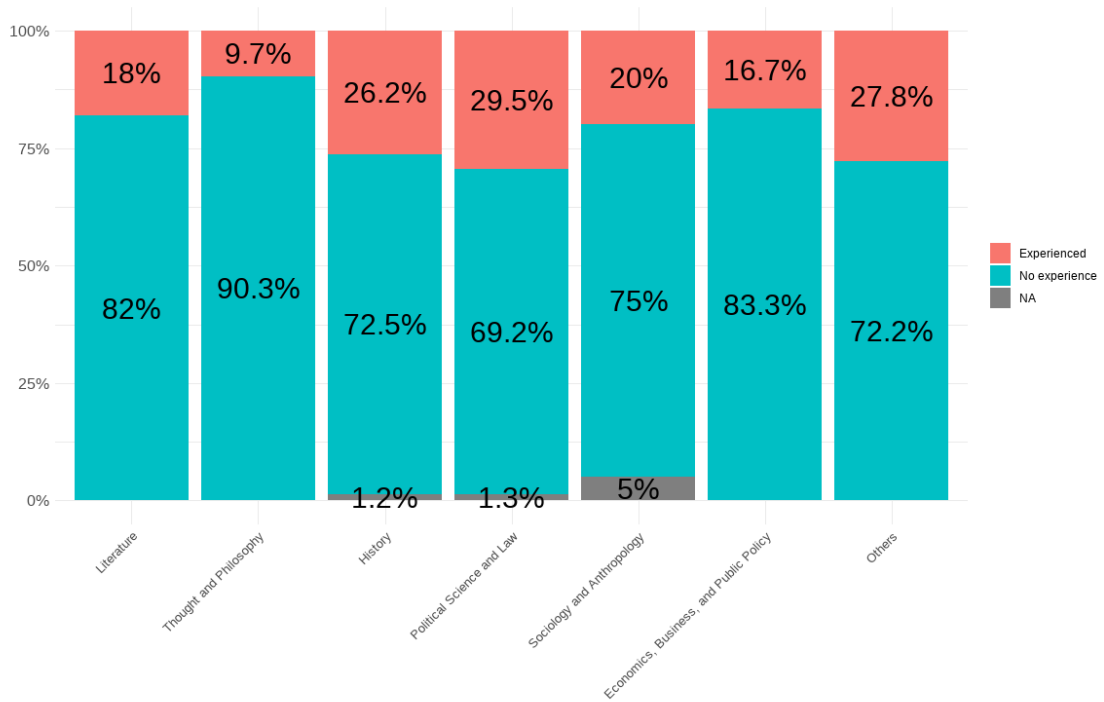


Figure 15. Experience of Censorship or Similar Incidents (by Academic Discipline)



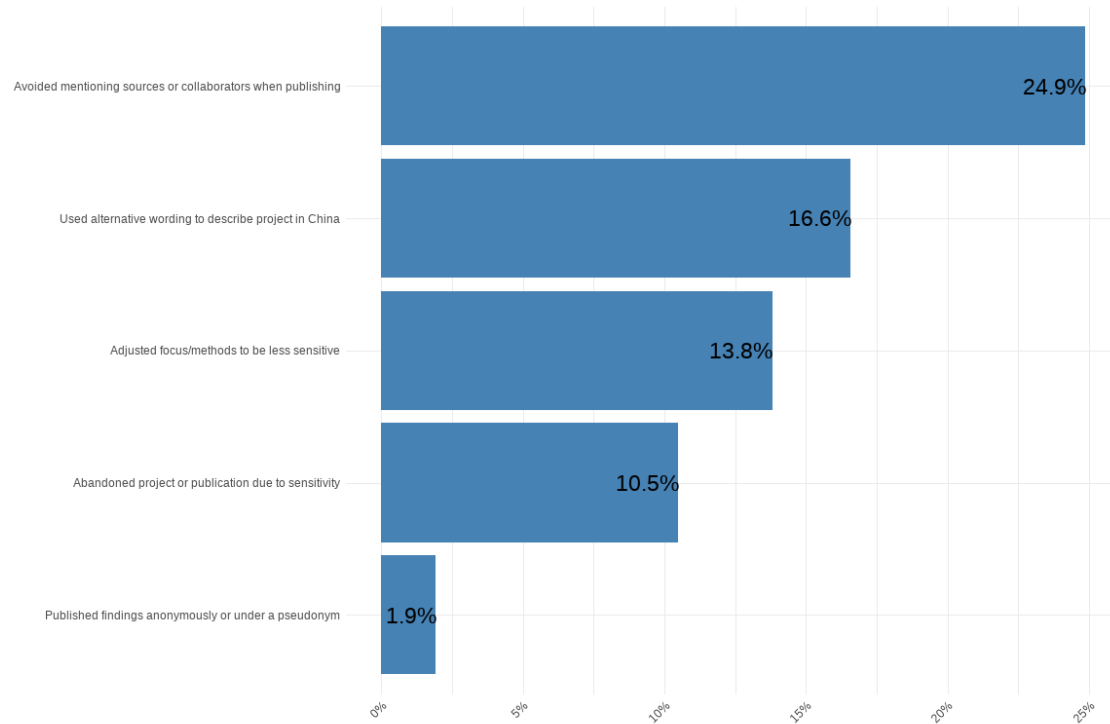
Question: During the course of conducting research-related to China, have you ever done any of the following? Please check all that apply.

Response options (*multiple selections allowed; if the last option is selected, no other options can be chosen*):

- ☐ Abandoned a project or publication due to it being too sensitive
- ☐ Changed the focus, analytical methods, or research approach of the project to something less sensitive
- ☐ Used different wording to describe the research project while staying in China
- ☐ Published project results anonymously or under a pseudonym
- ☐ Deliberately refrained from mentioning informants or collaborators when presenting research findings
- ☐ None of the above

With respect to the measures the respondents have taken during the research process and when presenting their findings (Figure 16), the results showed that 13.8% reported changing “the focus, analytical methods, or research approach of their project to something less sensitive” during the research process. Additionally, 16.6% indicated using “different wording to describe the research project while staying in China.” Regarding the presentation of research results, 10.5% reported abandoning a project or publication “due to it being too sensitive.” Furthermore, 24.9% stated that they “deliberately refrained from mentioning informants or collaborators when presenting research findings,” while 1.9% reported that they “published project results anonymously or under a pseudonym.”

Figure 16. Responses in the Course of Research



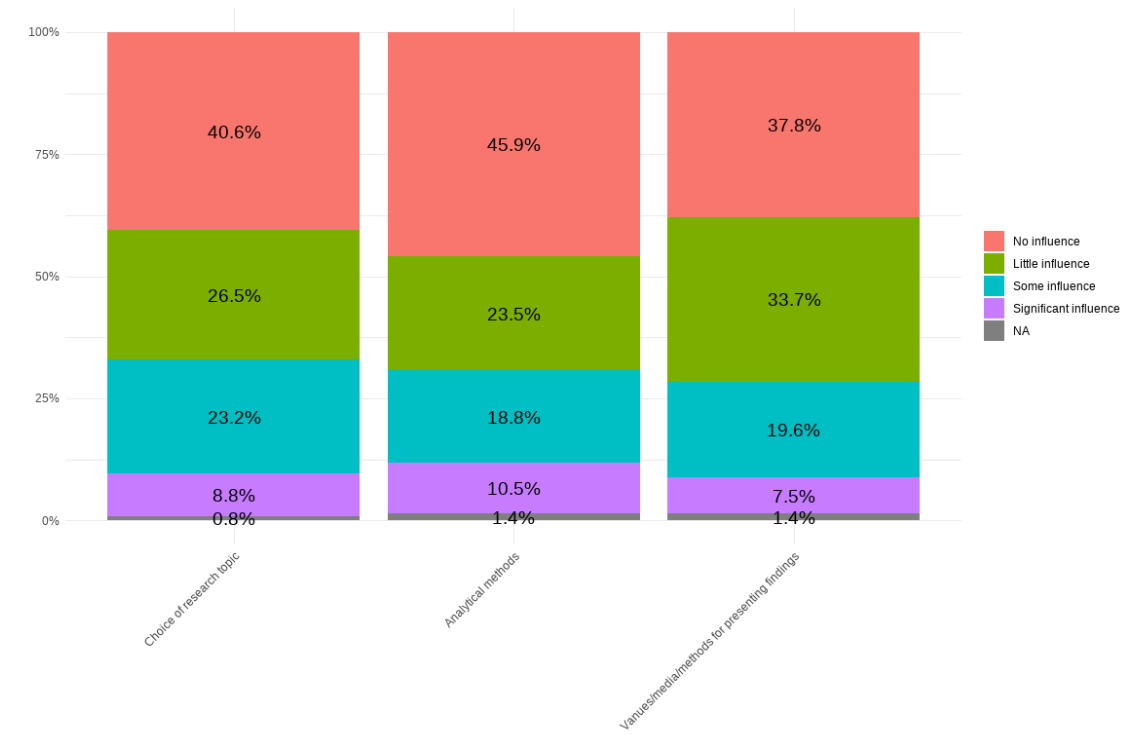
Question: There have been intermittent cases of researchers engaged in Chinese studies in Japan (including those with Chinese and Japanese nationality) being detained or going missing in mainland China. Do you think these series of incidents have influenced your own research project in terms of your choice of research topic, analytical methods, or the venues/media/methods used for presenting your findings?

Response options (*Select one option per row*):

| | Significant influence | Some influence | Little influence | No influence |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Choice of research topic | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Analytical methods | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Venues/media/methods for presenting findings | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Regarding the impact of intermittent incidents of detained or missing researchers in mainland China on the respondents’ selection of research themes, analytical methods, and mediums or methods of disseminating research findings (Figure 17), responses indicating “no influence” or “little influence” accounted for more than 65% of the total, but those reporting “significant influence” or “some influence” also accounted for approximately 27.1%–32.0%, respectively.

Figure 17. Impact of Detentions and Related Incidents on Respondents’ Research



Question: There have been intermittent cases in which researchers engaged in China studies in Japan—including both Chinese and Japanese nationals—have been detained or gone missing in mainland China. In your view, have the following institutions responded adequately to this issue?

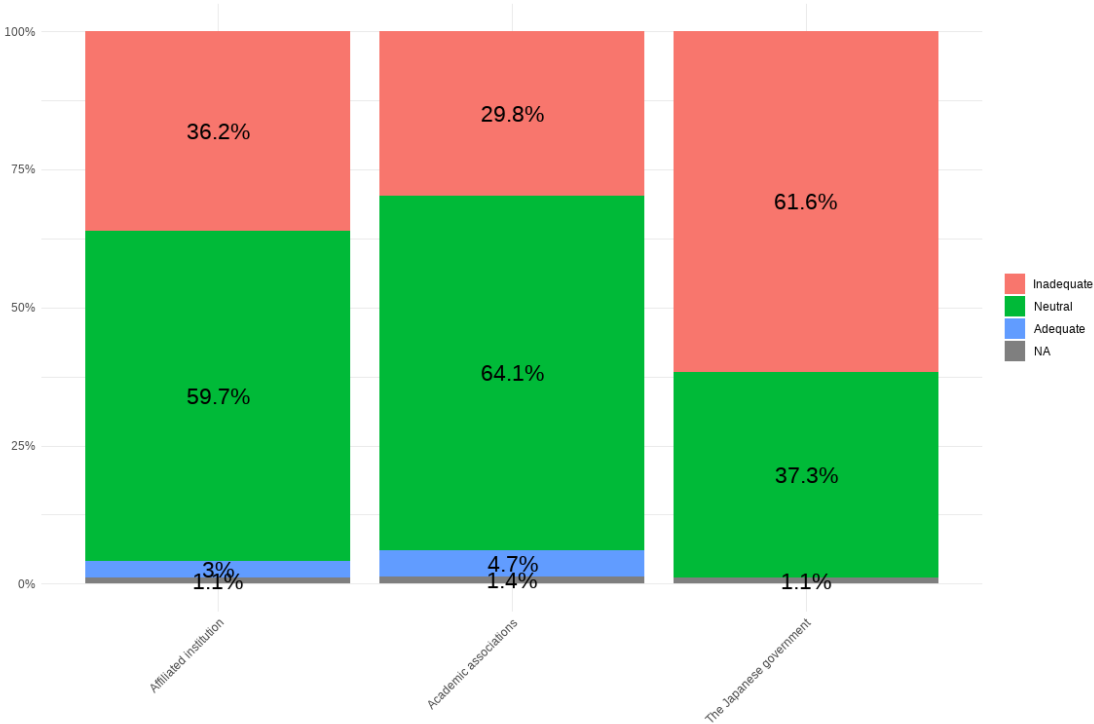
Response options (*Select one option per row*):

| | Adequate | Neutral | Inadequate |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Your affiliated institution (e.g., university, company) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Academic associations and societies | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The Japanese government | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

This survey also examined the adequacy of responses by affiliated institutions, academic organizations, and the Japanese government to these ongoing incidents (Figure 18). For affiliated institutions and academic organizations, a large proportion of respondents had neutral answers (“neither agree nor disagree”), accounting for 59.7% and 64.1%, respectively. Focusing on those who perceived such responses as “inadequate,” the proportion was notably high for the Japanese government (61.6%).

Figure 18. Evaluation of Various Institutions’ Responses to Detentions and Related Incidents



Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

“Self-censorship is a problem in the field of China studies in Japan.”

Response options (*Single choice*):

☐ Strongly agree

- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

With regard to respondents' opinions on the view that self-censorship—refraining from conducting or publishing research on certain topics—is a problem within Japan's field of China studies (Figure 19), 40.9% had neutral answers (“neither agree nor disagree”), while 10.5% selected “strongly agree” and 33.7% “somewhat agree,” indicating that approximately half of the respondents considered self-censorship an issue. Classified by discipline, the combined percentages of “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” were notably high in sociology and anthropology. Specifically, the percentage of respondents who selected “strongly agree” exceeded 10% in political science and law, sociology and anthropology, history, and economics, business administration, and public policy (Figure 20).

Figure 19. Scholars' Opinions on Whether Self-Censorship Is a Problem in China Studies in Japan

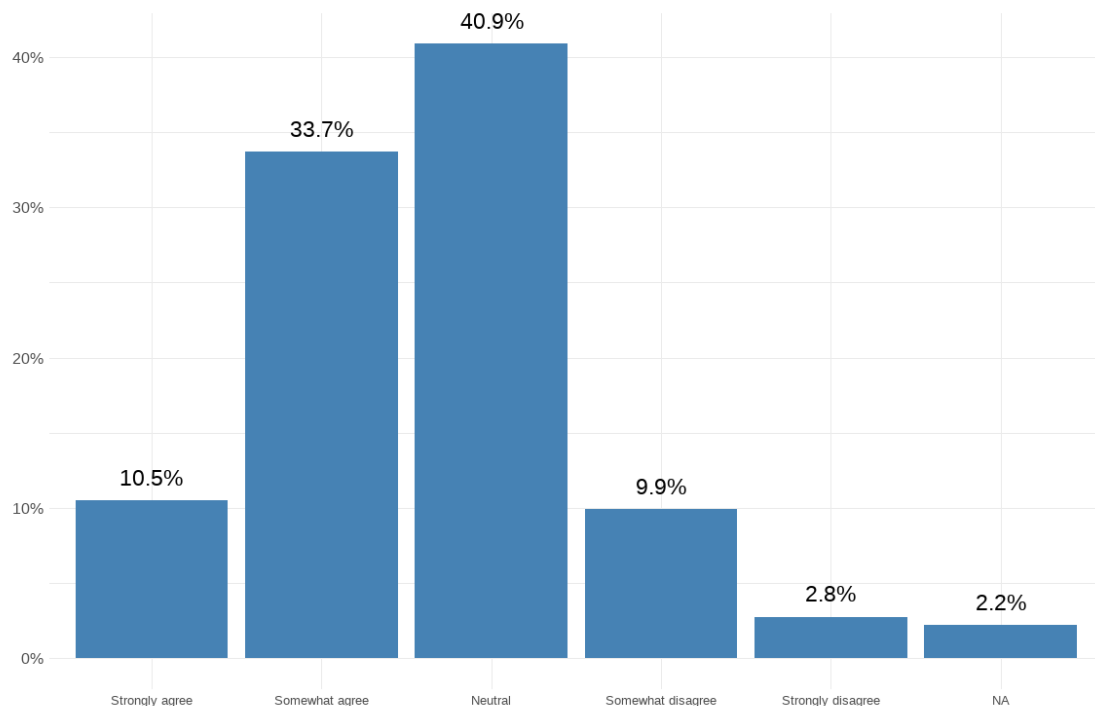
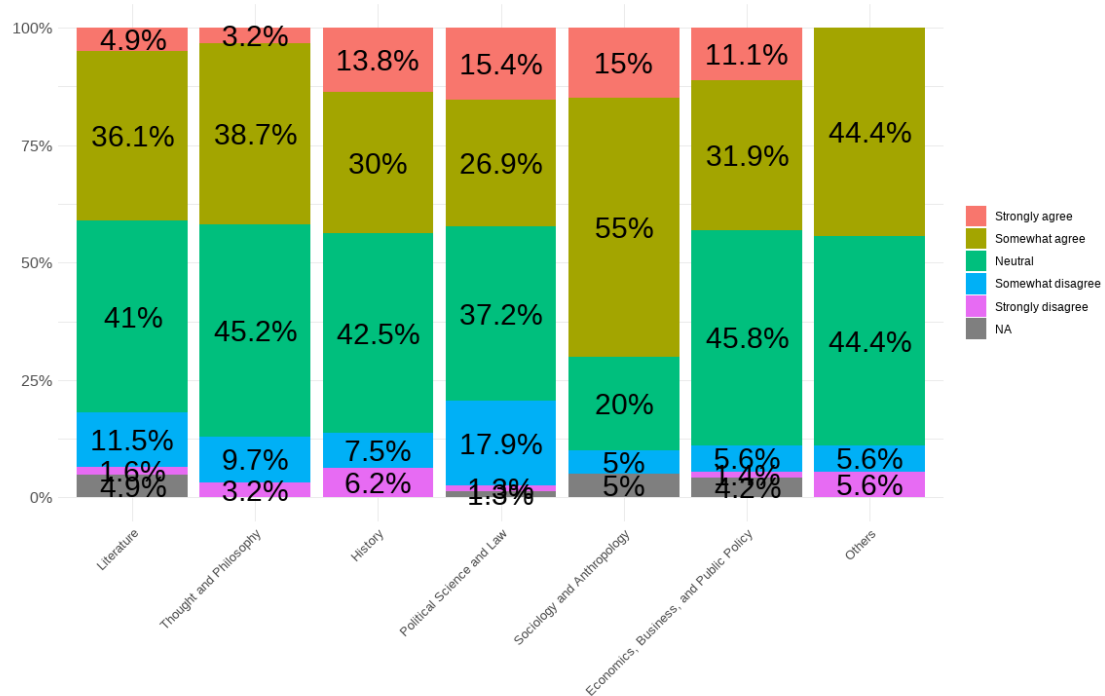


Figure 20. Scholars' Opinions on Whether Self-Censorship Is a Problem in China Studies in Japan
(by Academic Field)



Question: In supervising graduate students, have you ever recommended that they select their research topics with political sensitivity in mind, or suggested that they reconsider proposed topics due to potential sensitivities?

Response options (Single choice):

☐ Yes

☐ No

Finally, this survey inquired about the impact of recent events on graduate education (Figure 21). The respondents were asked beforehand whether they supervised graduate students, and this item was presented only to those who did. The results showed that 43.2% of supervisors provided guidance that considered the sensitivity of research topics. Classified by discipline, percentages were particularly high in sociology and anthropology (58.3%) and political science and law (55.6%), followed by economics, business, and public policy (51.4%) (Figure 22). Notably, similar experiences were reported by 38.9% of supervisors in philosophy and thought, 34.7% in history, and 24.1% in literature.

Figure 21. Experience of Supervising Graduate Students with Consideration of Research Sensitivity
(Respondents Who Supervised Graduate Students Only)

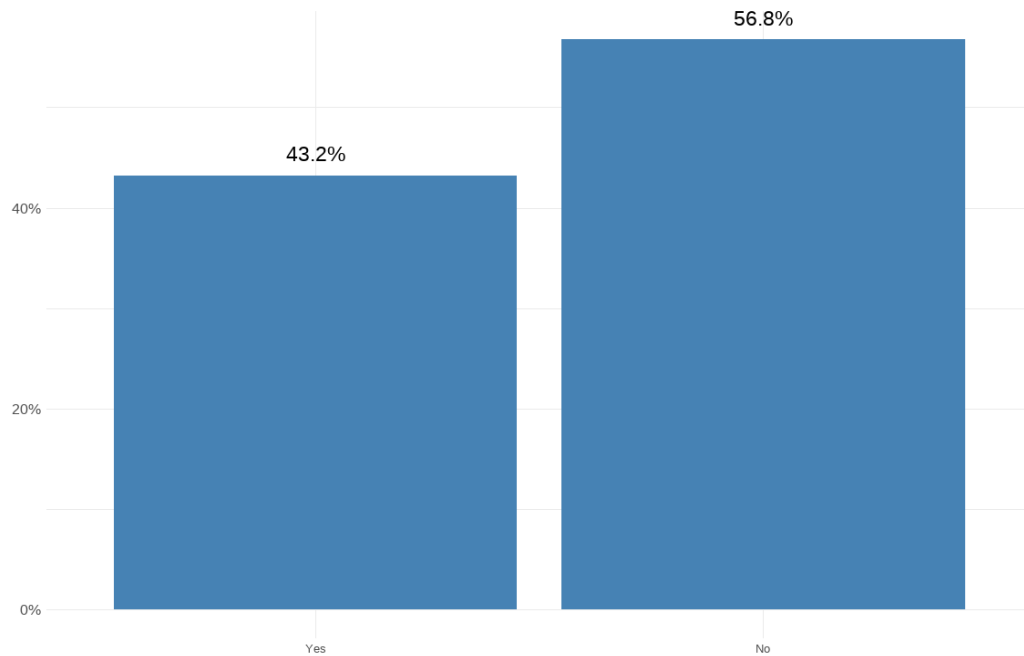
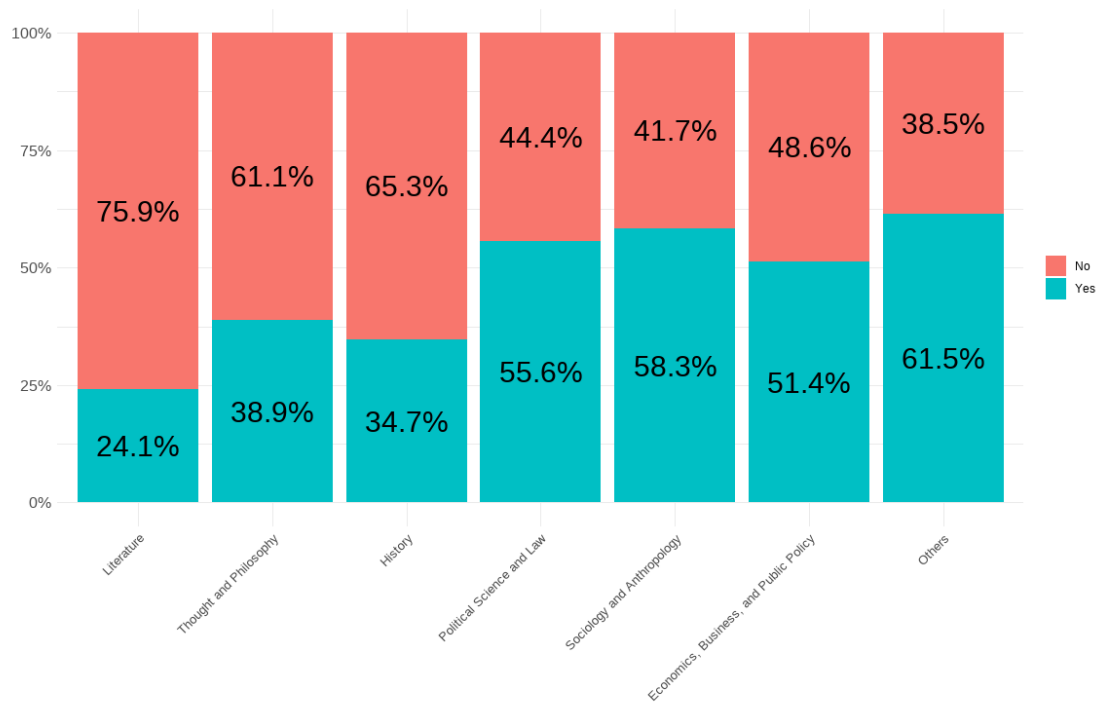


Figure 22. Experience of Supervising Graduate Students with Consideration of Research Sensitivity
(by Academic field; Respondents Who Supervised Graduate Students Only)



4. Discussion

4-1. Characteristics by academic discipline

Examining the average trends across six major academic disciplines, this survey found that researchers in political science and law, as well as sociology and anthropology, had more direct experiences of various incidents and forms of suppression. Specifically, being directly cited by Chinese authorities for conducting politically sensitive research was reported by 20.5% of researchers in political science and law and 15% in sociology and anthropology (Figure 7)—two fields that showed the highest rates of difficulties during the research process (Figure 9). Furthermore, the most severe situations regarding censorship during research presentations and graduate student supervision were observed in these disciplines.

In the case of history, the high incidence of challenges during the research process is notable (Figure 9), with 22.5% of respondents reporting being denied access to archives or materials (Figure 11). Equally significant is censorship, with 26.2% of historians reporting such experiences. While the sensitivity of historical research has been identified in various ways, this survey showed that one in five researchers faced difficulties in collecting materials, and one in four encountered challenges in presenting their findings.⁹

In contrast, a relatively small number of literature and thought/philosophy scholars reported being directly identified or experiencing any incidents. Their perceptions of political sensitivity were also comparatively low. Worth noting, however, is that a significant proportion of researchers in these fields have considered the political sensitivity of their works when supervising graduate students (Figure 22). Specifically, 38.9% of respondents in thought/philosophy and 24.1% in literature reported having to incorporate political sensitivity considerations in their graduate supervision.

In economics, business, and public policy, many items showed generally intermediate response levels between the humanities and other social sciences (political science/law and sociology/anthropology). Regarding respondents' perceptions of research sensitivity, the proportion of those who considered their work "somewhat sensitive" was relatively high, while 8.3%—a nonnegligible figure—reported being directly told by Chinese authorities that their studies were sensitive (Figure 7). Particularly notable is the respondents' experience of concrete incidents involving direct threats—such as interrogation, detention, or requests for cooperation—with the highest level reported by economics, business administration, and public policy researchers (13.9%) (Figure 12).

Recent years have seen the expansion of a political "gray zone" in economic research, and in

⁹ See Kawashima (2016).

the open-ended items, some respondents expressed concern regarding the influence of the “Optimistic View of the Chinese Economy” (中國經濟光明論), a policy referenced at the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Economic Work Conference in December 2023 that calls on experts and analysts to adopt a positive outlook on China’s economic future.

Overall, despite clear differences in the degree of incidents, censorship, and educational impacts among the six major academic disciplines, no field seems completely free from repression or challenges.

4-2. Comparison with the Greitens and Truex survey

According to the Greitens and Truex survey, the main difficulties faced by Western-based researchers were denial of access to specific materials (approximately 16%^{1 0}), denial of access to archives (14.7%), interview cancellations (approximately 12%^{1 1}), and instances where Chinese friends were contacted by authorities (12%), in that order. In the current survey, meanwhile, the response rates were higher than other incident options within this survey (7.5%, 6.6%, and 7.7%, respectively) but generally lower than the levels reported in the Greitens and Truex survey. Regarding more direct pressure—“being urged or pressured to cooperate with Chinese authorities” (3.9% in our survey, 5.7% in the Greitens and Truex survey) and “experiencing physical threats or temporary detention” (3% in our survey, 2.5% in the Greitens and Truex survey)—response rates were roughly comparable between the two surveys.

However, despite some results being lower in our survey compared with the Greitens and Truex survey, this does not simply indicate fewer difficulties faced by researchers based in Japan than by those based in Western countries. As already discussed in Section 1, the two surveys have significant differences in terms of (1) timing (2018 vs. 2025), (2) respondent characteristics (differences in nationality, research fields, etc.), and (3) response rates (28.6% vs. 63.1%).^{1 2} These issues are expected to be addressed by future research.

At this preliminary stage, despite differences in levels for individual items, the overall trends of the two surveys are similar, and fundamentally, both point to the same conclusion—that is, a substantial number of researchers have faced various political challenges while conducting their studies on China.

^{1 0} This figure was based on values inferred from Figure 1 on page 354 of Greitens and Truex (2020). While the main text (p. 355) states the figure as 21%, this represents the combined percentage for denial of access to archives and denial of access to specific materials.

^{1 1} Value inferred from Figure 1 on page 354 of Greitens and Truex (2020).

^{1 2} As previously discussed, the Greitens and Truex survey had a relatively low response rate (28.6%), calculated based on respondents who completed more than 90% of the questionnaire. If scholars who experienced incidents were more likely to participate, the reported figures may reflect an upward bias relative to the actual population average.

5. Conclusion

This survey reflects the difficulties faced by Japan-based researchers of China. The main findings are as follows:

- 11.3% of respondents reported being directly told by Chinese authorities that their research was sensitive
- 27.1% experienced some form of difficulty while conducting their research
- 21.8% reported that their research publications were subjected to some form of censorship in China
- 32% believed that the intermittent incidents of researchers being detained or going missing in mainland China have influenced their choices of research themes
- 43.2% of respondents who supervised graduate students reported considering the sensitivity of their research topics or encouraging them to reassess their themes during supervision

These experiences considerably vary by academic discipline. Overall, higher incidences of direct intervention from and various difficulties involving Chinese authorities were reported by scholars in political science, law, sociology, and anthropology. In contrast, relatively fewer cases were reported by literature and philosophy researchers; nevertheless, experiences of censorship during publication and research dissemination in these fields were nonnegligible. Moreover, while no respondents from the literature or philosophy fields subjectively classified their studies as “highly sensitive,” a certain number still reported being subjected to authority scrutiny or censorship. Notably, history researchers reported a particularly high incidence of censorship directed at research outputs.

The diversity of experiences does not allow for a straightforward summary, and at this stage, it is also challenging to draw definitive conclusions about how to interpret the results, especially whether some items are higher or lower compared with the Greitens and Truex survey. Therefore, we refrained from such interpretations in this preliminary report. Furthermore, free-text responses highlighted specific incidents and noted that these issues extend beyond the past decade, which was the main focus of this survey. Despite the relatively high response rate of this survey, it cannot be said to fully represent the entirety of the experiences of Japan-based China researchers. Instead, this survey should be considered a snapshot of a particular aspect of the issue. Future studies may perform more comprehensive analyses and in-depth discussions of the results.

We express our deep gratitude to everyone involved in this survey, including those who did not respond but nonetheless took the time to consider their participation. We hope that the current findings will serve as valuable foundational information for both the Japanese and international research communities.

References

- Greitens, S. C., & Truex, R. (2020). Repressive experiences among China scholars: New evidence from survey data. *The China Quarterly*, 242, 349-375.
- Kawashima, S. (2016, October 25). *The bitter reality of Republican China studies* [民国史研究の苦渋]. *Science Portal China*. Retrieved from https://warp.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/13982669/spc.jst.go.jp/experiences/kawashima/kawashima_1604.html
- Li, H. (2024, November 12). *China's emphasis on "national security" at the expense of its national interests* [中国の国益を損なう「国家安全」重視路線]. *Chugokugaku.com*. Retrieved from <https://sinology-initiative.com/politics/2001/2/>
- Newland, S. A. (2024). Teaching Chinese politics in the "new cold war": A survey of faculty. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 57(1), 122-129.
- Shambaugh, D. (2024). The evolution of American contemporary China studies: coming full circle? *Journal of Contemporary China*, 33(146), 314-331.
- Truex, R. (2024). Researching China in hard times. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 57(1), 146-148.