

Cold War History Studies in China in the 21st Century

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In the second decade of the 21st century, according to Mark Kramer, the editor of *Journal of Cold War Studies*, China is emerging as the most vibrant center of Cold War studies in the world.[1] From an international perspective, with the continuous rise of China, more and more doctoral students and younger scholars in the West are becoming interested in researching and studying China's Cold War experiences when they are entering the field; from the domestic perspective, China now has the largest cohort of Cold War scholars in the world. Chinese Cold War scholars have received more funding and have traveled more frequently to international archives and conferences than a decade ago. Several new centers for Cold War history studies have been established since 2010.

The [Center for Cold War International History Studies, East China Normal University \(ECNU\)](#) in Shanghai was established in 2001 and has expanded greatly in the last ten years. Led by Shen Zhihua, it now has a team of over 20 scholars and enrolls about 10 doctoral students annually. From a geographical perspective, its research covers China, the U.S., the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Asia and Africa in the Cold War. It has secured many research grants from the National Social Science Fund, the Ministry of Education and the



Shanghai Municipal Government and has published important findings in Chinese and international venues. It is the most prominent institution for Cold War studies in China and has achieved an international reputation. In August 2011, ECNU and the [Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars](#) inaugurated the ECNU-Wilson Center Cold War Studies Initiative (housed at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington D.C.), which has since offered Chinese Cold War scholars and doctoral students new opportunities to conduct research in the United States. Since 2010, with the support from the ECNU Cold War Center, several centers for Cold War history studies have been established in Sun Yat-sen University (Guangzhou), Jinan University (Guangzhou), South China Normal University (Guangzhou), Northeast Normal University (Changchun), and Xinjiang Normal University (Urumqi). Additionally, there are numerous well-known Cold War scholars in Beijing University, Zhejiang University, Capital Normal University, Wuhan University, and Shanghai Normal University.[2]

The study of Cold War history in China has evolved and improved significantly in the 21st century, particularly during the last ten years. Chinese perspectives on the Cold War are now even being incorporated into mainstream international scholarship and debated amongst non-Chinese scholars. In early 2004, a Chinese scholar made the argument that "the study of Cold War history has become a new point of growth in academics in China." [3] This means that the field is competitive vis-à-vis other academic disciplines.



In addition to much easier access to archival documents, without any doubt the progress in China's Cold War studies in the past decade has much to do with the efforts of Chinese scholars. But funding and support from the Chinese government and non-governmental organizations have contributed to the development as well. In 2011, the Academic Degrees Committee of China's State Council and the Ministry of Education jointly issued a notice on new "Degrees Awarded and Personnel Training Discipline Catalogue 2011," in which the largest change pertains to the category of history. The discipline of "history" has been expanded from one first-class discipline into three first-class disciplines: archaeology, Chinese history, and world history. The promotion of world history to the status of a first-class discipline demonstrates the Chinese government's growing emphasis on the study of international history and has since been accompanied by enormous financial investments in teaching and research in this field. In China, universities and academic organizations have since expanded their enrollment for both researchers and students focusing on world history. The study of Cold War history, in particular, is certainly one of the greatest beneficiaries of the expansion in this area.

In China, the National Social Science Fund (NSSF) supports the highest-level state-funded research projects. Cold War history research projects have appeared annually and in greater numbers in the NSSF award lists. [4] With the stable and continuous economic growth, the China Scholarship Council, provincial governments, and universities and research institutes have gradually enhanced the level of financial aid to scholars including graduate students for overseas research and study



opportunities. Cold War scholars have had more opportunities to travel to foreign archives to do research and attend international conferences.

In the mid-1980s, mainly relying on the series *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Chinese scholars studied and published on U.S. policy toward China in the first decade after the end of World War II. This has been regarded as the beginning of Cold War history studies in China. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the end of the Cold War and the declassification of archival documents from the former socialist bloc countries, topics such as the Korean War, the Vietnam War, China's policies toward the United States, Sino-Soviet relations, and Soviet foreign policy started to receive academic attention in China.[5] In the 21st century, with relative more research support for international outreach, new research methodologies and documentations, Chinese scholars have made great stride in the following new areas of studies: economic cold war; U.S. covert operations, U.S. psychological warfare strategy and nuclear strategies; Cold War sciences and overseas educational projects of the United States; and China's policies toward its neighbors during the Cold War.

[1] Mark Kramer, "Trends in the Study of the Cold War over the Past Quarter-Century," lecture at Jinan University, Guangzhou, China on 21 December 2015.

[2] For more on the ECNU Cold War center, see Yafeng Xia, "The Study of Cold War International History in China—A Review of the Last Twenty



Years," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 10, No.1 (Winter 2008), pp. 83-85.

[3] Xu Siyan, "The Cold War History Studies: A New Academic Growing Point," *Zhonghua dushubao* (China Reading Weekly), 10 November 2004.

[4] In 2012 and 2015, among all world history related awarded research projects, Cold War history projects consist of 15%.

[5] See Xia, "The Study of Cold War International History in China," pp. 97-110.

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