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## EDITORIAL

# Censorship and Self-censorship in Chinese Contexts

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Editorial on the topic of "Censorship and Self-censorship" and introduction of the journal

介紹歐洲漢學學會期刊及本期專題“審查與自我審查”。

**Keywords:** Censorship, Self-censorship, Sinology, Chinese Studies, Editorial

**關鍵詞：** 審查，自我審查，漢學，编者序

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Censorship is a constant and well-established factor in the development of Chinese media and culture (Qiu 2009). The population under Chinese rule have lived with agents of censorship and daily practices of self-censorship in imperial times, under warlords during the Republican era (1912-1949), in the People's Republic, and under KMT rule with martial law in Taiwan (Zhao 1998, Qiu 2009).

The situation in the People's Republic differed from the situation in the former Soviet Union. In much less repressive political conditions inside the People's Republic, nearly twenty years ago, Perry Link (2002) has argued, the "Chinese Communist Party rejected these more mechanical methods in favor of an essentially psychological control system that relies primarily on self-censorship". He illustrates the hidden power of censorship in a fascinating metaphor:

In sum, the Chinese government's censorial authority in recent times has resembled not so much a man-eating tiger or fire-snorting dragon as a giant anaconda coiled in an overhead chandelier. Normally the great snake doesn't move. It doesn't have to. It feels no need to be clear about its prohibitions. Its constant silent message is "You yourself decide," after which, more often than not, everyone in its shadow makes his or her large and small adjustments—all quite "naturally." (Link 2002, see also Hamilton/Ohlberg 2020, ch. 12)

Censorship in this Maoist ideological setting worked because there were internalised perceptions of potential danger and red lines, repeating mechanisms of self-constraint and self-censorship, and discipline through observation and self-observation in the peer groups (Bakken 2006, Svarverud 2010).

Consequently, China state-censorship "is not a cloak-and-dagger business" (Crevel 2017). It has clearly shifted from "classical" totalitarian practices of surveillance, public intimidation, persecution, and brain-washing of dissidents to forms of censorship governance that try to hinder debate on specific issues (Document 9 2013) and that repress manifestations with potential for collective action (King et al. 2013).

Censorship gains power precisely when people respect the red line and do not talk about it. Those who do not want to make the anaconda alert will remain on the rehearsed paths of politically correct perception. Performed self-discipline is

normalised in contemporary Chinese cultural life. This is so true for our colleagues in Chinese academia. During their careers, they have perfected this discipline of anticipation of red lines (Hamrim & Cheek 1986) in an act of self-protection for their “obedient autonomy” (Evasdottir 2004, Cheek 2015).

## Overview of this issue: Censorship inside China

This first issue of the JEACS tries to break the silence and speaks about the anaconda in the overhead chandelier. It discusses the institutions and processes of this “normalisation” by censorship in a *longue durée* and how censorship and self-censorship framed perception and subjectification processes in China.

In 2018, we received an overwhelming response of 56 submissions of abstracts and chose eight presenters for a workshop on “Censorship and Self-censorship in Chinese Studies”. The six articles all stem from discussions held from 8 to 10 March 2019 during a workshop in Prague at the Chiang Ching-kuo International Sinological Center of Charles University (CCK-ISC).

This workshop was made possible through the generosity of Prof. Olga Lomová (Charles University) and her team. Therefore we want to use this opportunity to thank all of them and the Chiang Ching-kuo International Sinological Center for providing accomodation and travel costs for most participants.

After long discussions and exchanges, we are glad to publish six research articles addressing various forms of censorship and their implications. The articles, arranged in chronological order, attempt to show different aspects of (self-)censorship manifestations in various media: historical writings, literature, and films. These contributions show that censorship is and was a political and cultural practice in the Sinophone world. They address the political production of censorship as well as the strategies employed by various actors to deal with censorship regimes.

Limin Bai addresses the political and institutional side of what was published and compiled during the Kangxi era. By analysing the emperor’s tactics for creating a sort of “soft power”, Bai illustrates how this shaped the intellectual milieu of the time.

By analysing the compilation of the *Guwen guan zhi*, Jyrki Kallio reveals how the *Guwen guan zhi* promotes unorthodox ideas in a subdued manner. He argues that the editors of *Guwen guan zhi* were not merely following officially established norms of the literary canon sanctioned by the Qing government just in order to produce one more textbook, more handy for students, thus, likely to become more popular than the complex and more demanding text compilations issued by court-officials. Employing content analysis methods, the author draws attention to the compilers' unexpressed bias towards 'cracking wider the inevitable fault-lines in China's state-enforced orthodoxy'.

Martin Blahota discusses how Jue Qing, one of the most accomplished writers in Manchukuo, used Aesopian language to bypass official censorship in his books. This process had two goals: to camouflage praise for resistance against the Japanese coloniser and, at the same time, to draw the reader's attention to it.

Wendy Larson looks into the literary representation of self-censorship in two short stories of Wang Meng, a former Minister of Culture of the People's Republic of China. In *A Young Man Arrives at the Organization Department* and *Long Live Youth*, Wang shows how censorship and self-censorship are part of daily life.

Kenny N.N. Ng investigates film censorship in Cold War Taiwan and colonial Hong Kong. Looking into the shifting practices of censorship in the 1970s and 80s, he examines film's ambiguous expressions of China and Chineseness as it constantly negotiates the factors of colonialism, Chinese nationalism, and Cold War transnational politics.

Xi Tian highlights such strategies for coping with the censorship and publishing environment in her article on a very recent online genre, "boys' love". By analysing how they cope with the uncertainty of what will be censored due to vague definitions, this article shows that the effect of censorship is more than deletion. It creates new visibilities in the public domain, from journalism to literary activities to performing arts (Yang 2015). Censorship does something with culture, it creates new visible cultural responses and artefacts.

These research articles are followed by the Spotlight section. Spotlight targets focal and controversial topics through investigations from well-argued subjective view-points and revisits historical actors of European sinology and their major works.

In relation to the topics addressed in the special issue, this first Spotlight seeks to document and reflect upon recent developments on censorship. David Bandurski illuminates the People's Republic's growing control of the print media. For journalists, the anaconda has already moved from the chandelier just next to their hands on the computer keyboard – functioning self-censorship now becomes a balancing act and permanent threat to one's own (professional) existence. This may be either caused by too much ingratiation, by manipulation or sarcastic overtones or by effusive transpicuous appraisal.

In the second Spotlight piece of our current issue, Nicholas Loubere documents incidents of self-censorship by Western publishers in recent years. He examines these “incidents” and the responses of the publishers upon being discovered—arguing that the convergence of China's increasingly assertive information control regime and the commercial academic publishers' thirst for ever more profits has resulted in a new form of institutionalised commercial censorship outside Chinese frontiers.

The third Spotlight article on Marcel Granet by Rémi Mathieu inaugurates our inquiry into the founding fathers and innovators of modern European Sinology. By looking into their innovative efforts within their situated pasts, this section reflects upon what can be said and analysed in our field. A self-proclaimed sociologist, Marcel Granet successfully challenged the existing boundaries of the institutionalised field of Sinology. Consequently, he opened up new sources for research and introduced new methodological approaches into European Sinology. He made possible the relocation of what is essential to a field such as Sinology.

The Spotlight section is followed by two review sections discussing translations and research monographs. Their common aim is to call attention to books published in languages other than English to increase the visibility of important work based on less frequently quoted European languages.

The last section of the JEACS is devoted to dissertation abstracts. It provides information on recently defended PhD theses to inform our scholarly community on new research carried out in Europe by early career scholars.

At the end, we turn to ourselves: Recent developments display a clear intensification and rising presence of censorship activities not only within China (Document 9, 2013) but also visibly in all major kinds of foreign relations or among China's activities abroad. Having left the sinological armchair in our Institutes for a role of exchange with a globalised China, our former positionality as "researchers at a distance" has become more embedded and entangled. On the one hand, China comes to us, with the open or "hidden hand" (Hamilton/Ohlberg 2020) lobbying for its interests (Brady 2017; Hamilton 2018; Izambard 2019; Weber 2020). Confucius Institutes have often become part of the universities with their sometimes contested agendas (Sahlins 2015). On the other hand, we connect with people from China: for colleagues coming from China or married to Chinese partners, China is part of their daily life, from which they cannot distance themselves at all (Kjellgren 2006). With the opening-up of a self-isolated China and its integration into the world, the Chinese regime of "censorship and self-censorship" is no longer observable from a distance. Censorship and self-censorship is already part of our academic life (Carrico 2018; Greitens/Truex 2018). It reshapes social and organisational structures, and forms and hinders academic careers and cooperation opportunities not only there, but also here (Hansen 2006; Klotzbücher 2014). China is not only an object of research, but also an expanding field of political power: we are still used to our comfortable professional role as observers from the distant armchair, even though we are realising that our environment has long since transformed us into a "vulnerable observer" (Behar, 1996; Klotzbücher 2019). Joseph Esherick (2014) has documented in detail the challenge faced when intending to publish for readers in China. Vulnerability became manifest even within our own association, EACS. The printed conference programme of our association became an object of censorship during our biannual conference in Braga in 2014 (Greatrex 2014). Self-censorship, taboos, bans on speech, all create explicit or implicit boundaries and disconnect issues and research communities. A continuous discourse, including rising black zones and red lines in our field of Chinese Studies, will be necessary to identify

threats, concealed conflicts, and even new perspectives naturally arising from a situation we have just begun to realise as a common concern..

This is the reason why the question of self-censorship within Chinese Studies was also part of the call for papers in 2018. What does it say about us and our reflectivity that not one essay was submitted on censorship and self-censorship in *our* field? How can we become more innovative if we are not aware of our position and what is missing or covered up in our academic hierarchies? That is why we are launching the special issue on this topic today: we invite submissions on censorship and self-censorship in our field as an ongoing “special collection” that could grow out of this issue.

EACS has spent years discussing this journal and we are now glad finally to launch the first issue. Thank you to all supporters and contributors on this long road. EACS provided financial support for the funding of translation and the setup of our journal infrastructure. We are looking forward to constructive and fruitful cooperation in the Editorial Board and to the ambitious suggestions of our readers!

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