

## **China Workshop “Chinese Research and Academic Discourses in Contemporary China Studies”**

Iserlohn Network, Schwerte, July 16–17, 2022

### **Report by RYANNE FLOCK, GRETE SCHÖNEBECK, and MATTHIAS HACKLER**

The “Iserlohn Network” is a loose circle of young social scientists working on China. After two years of spending our academic life primarily online, the network’s China workshop finally took place again at Haus Villigst in Schwerte. Over the course of one and a half days, young scholars presented their work under the motto “Chinese Research and Academic Discourses in Contemporary China Studies”. As in previous years, the workshop reflected the broad range of social sciences research on China conducted in Germany but also welcomed more classical sinological work and international participants.

The first panel focused on inter- and intranational relations and political discourses. Against the backdrop of the prevailing *anglophone* theories, Felix Brender (London School of Economics) examined under which conditions Chinese academic voices find recognition in the field of International Relations. Through an ontological security framework, Hassan Al-Said (University of Cologne) analyzed how Saudi Arabian authorities use different narratives to diminish the impact of the Uyghur crisis on their national identity. Vivien Markert (Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen) discussed the changing image of Islam in Chinese academic discourses and the understanding of successful sinicisation of Islam in recent years. The first panel’s case studies convincingly highlighted the two trends of China’s discursive isolation on the one hand and its growing entanglements within global contexts on the other.

While the first panel was looking at the state as the dominant actor, the second panel dealt with the reciprocity between the individual and society’s “superstructure”, asking about (political) ideology and identity. Jian Long (Goethe University Frankfurt) discussed nationalist narratives on collaboration and resistance during the second Sino–Japanese war and their re-evaluations at the time through the diaries of Zhou Fohai. Marius Meinhof (University Bielefeld) presented his research on “*Luohou* (lagging-behind) and the impetus of self-improvement” in today’s China. Afterwards, Ng Chin Fung (Goethe University Frankfurt) explained how and why the contents and aesthetics of Hong Kong cantopop are deeply rooted in sinophone and Cantonese local cultural history. The three presentations emphasized the examined actors’ agency and, at the same time, showed the difficulties to find one’s way in China’s overarching discourse environment.

Finally, panel 3 addressed contemporary cultural trends and social activism. Based on her field work in art communities in Guangzhou, Liu Ruoxi (Cambridge University) elaborated on self-employed artists in Guangzhou. She questioned the idea of resistance and instead found various forms of alternative-seeking practices in everyday life and in art, such as decentralized socially engaged art production and

the support for cooperation among independent artists. Dai Yifan (Goethe University Frankfurt) addressed fashion politics and contemporary *Hanfu*-trends, which she placed, among other things, in a broader context of identity politics in a multi-ethnic society and emancipation from international comparisons. Last but not least, Monika Arnoštová (University of Duisburg-Essen) presented her study on overtime work and its impact on leisure time for white-collar workers in Beijing. Interestingly, one of her findings implied that their cultural life is not necessarily negatively influenced by overtime work. Looking at different social groups, the panelists demonstrated how China's younger generation is dealing with the increasing social and economic pressure to claim their own way.

As in previous years, the workshop's didactic focus was on collegial feedback and constructive criticism to further develop one's research. The participants presented completed dissertations, works-in-progress or first steps into a new field of research. In the evening session on Saturday, Josie-Marie Perkuhn (University of Trier) introduced her BMBF-funded project "Taiwan as Pioneer" and started a lively debate on the institutional standing of Taiwan Studies within Sinology. All in all, the participants' enthusiastic discussions on this and other China-related topics (e.g. post-pandemic field research options) continued in and outside the conference room, carrying on the workshop's legacy as an important event for China-related research and academic networking in Germany.

The China workshop was organized by Ryanne Flock (Julius-Maximilians-University Wuerzburg), Grete Schönebeck (Goethe University Frankfurt) and Matthias Hackler (European Parliament) and supported by the Evangelische Akademie Villigst (Institut für Kirche und Gesellschaft). The next workshop is planned for summer 2023.

**Ryanne Flock, PhD**

Research Associate (Postdoc), Julius-Maximilians-University  
Wuerzburg

Ryanne.flock@uni-wuerzburg.de

**Grete Schönebeck, MA**

Research Associate, Goethe University Frankfurt

schoenebeck@em.uni-frankfurt.de

**Matthias Hackler, PhD**

Assistant to MEP at the European Parliament

mhackler@hotmail.de