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Authoritarianism and marketisation in higher education: implications of China's rise for cosmopolitan academic citizenship

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ABSTRACT

Academic citizenship has long been recognised as a core aspect of belonging to institutions of scholarship and teaching. According to the normative conception adopted here, academic citizenship encompasses engagement with and service to society. It is an inherently cosmopolitan and liberal-democratic idea, because its point is the promotion of the free exchange of academic ideas in the service of society, regardless of national borders. Yet, while a cosmopolitan conception of academic citizenship is broadly speaking compatible with the laws and politics of liberal democracies bound to safeguard academic freedom, it is in tension with authoritarian political-legal orders, such as that of the People's Republic of China, which has in certain contexts transformed citizenship into an instrument of repression and population control. The paper is divided into three parts. We begin by developing a cosmopolitan conception of academic citizenship that allows us to analyse and assess the connection between membership of the academic community and academic freedom. We juxtapose the cosmopolitan conception of academic citizenship with marketised and authoritarian conceptions of academic citizenship (1). We then discuss the ways in which the Chinese government's authoritarian advance impacts academic freedom abroad, arguing that a prevalent, reductionist, marketised conception of academic citizenship renders academic institutions particularly vulnerable (2). Finally, we critically assess state and non-state actor responses to these challenges (3). We argue that a cosmopolitan understanding of academic citizenship requires a fundamental rethinking of the existing mechanisms and initiatives to protect and promote academic freedom in China and beyond.

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Introduction

Academic citizenship has long been recognised as a core aspect of belonging to institutions of scholarship and teaching. According to the normative conception adopted here,¹ academic citizenship encompasses engagement with and service to society. It is

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an inherently cosmopolitan and liberal-democratic idea, because its point is the promotion of the free exchange of academic ideas in the service of society, regardless of national borders. Yet, while a cosmopolitan conception of academic citizenship is broadly speaking compatible with the laws and politics of liberal democracies bound to safeguard academic freedom, it is in tension with authoritarian political-legal orders, such as that of the People's Republic of China ('China'), which has in certain contexts transformed citizenship into an instrument of repression and population control.²

Against this background, this paper aims to understand the theoretical and practical implications of China's rise and 'authoritarian revival'³ for academic citizenship and academic freedom. We therefore differentiate three competing conceptions of what constitutes a 'good' academic, corresponding to different styles and systems of academic governance, namely, conceptions of academic citizenship based on marketisation, authoritarianism, and cosmopolitanism. We also highlight how internationalisation enables the expansion of authoritarian conceptions of academic citizenship, in particular in the context of higher education systems that are increasingly based on a marketised conception of academic citizenship, such as the United Kingdom (UK). By doing so, we not only shed light on the ways in which higher education has become an important avenue for the development and promotion of authoritarian practices within and outside China, we also reflect upon the challenges generated by an increasingly marketised higher education landscape.

The paper is divided into three parts. We begin by developing a liberal democratic, cosmopolitan conception of academic citizenship that allows us to analyse and assess the connection between membership of the academic community and academic freedom. We juxtapose the cosmopolitan conception of academic citizenship with marketised and authoritarian conceptions of academic citizenship (1). We then discuss the ways in which the Chinese government's authoritarian advance impacts academic freedom abroad, arguing that a prevalent, reductionist, marketised conception of academic citizenship renders academic institutions in countries like the UK particularly vulnerable (2). Finally, we critically assess state and non-state actor responses to these challenges (3). We argue that a cosmopolitan understanding of academic citizenship requires a fundamental rethinking of the existing mechanisms and initiatives to protect and promote academic freedom in China and beyond.

(1) Three conceptions of academic citizenship

It is important to recognise that very different and in some sense competing conceptions of academic citizenship are available and at times used in public, as well as academic discourse. We can usefully differentiate between a marketised service conception, a liberal democratic cosmopolitan conception, and an autocratic conception of what it means to be a (good) scholar and part of an academic institution.

The view that appears to dominate the fields of higher education studies and related managerial and political discussions is marketised; it relies on the notion that higher education and research is an economic sector that can and should primarily be assessed in the terms of a market economy.⁴ In the words of Stefan Collini, '*[U]niversities are now forced to regard each other as competitors in the same market, where their flourishing will be dependent on the accuracy with which they pitch their products to appeal to their*

particular niche of consumers.⁵ This outlook dictates not only a discourse of performance and output excellence which, in the UK, is reflected, for example, in the so-called research and teaching excellence frameworks, which aim at assessing individual universities (and indirectly, individual academics) on a basis of criteria that assume, virtually without argument, a market-like competition between the entities assessed and translate the assessment into allocation of public funding, as well as public rankings.⁶ Importantly for the topic under discussion, the scholar-participant of such an imaginary academic marketplace shows ‘citizenship’ by offering up time and energy that could otherwise be deployed for – as it were – personally gainful activities such as research and (up to a point) teaching, resulting in ranking advantages, to the institutional community of which they are part. On this account, being a good academic citizen means doing work that keeps one’s institution going without being assessed as valuable in accordance with the excellence criteria that dominate academic careers. It means ‘service’ as an aspect of separately assessable academic work.

Universities claiming to include (and perhaps in fact including) ‘academic citizenship’ in their promotion criteria spell out what can be taken as useful illustrations of the marketised conception of academic citizenship. At the University of York’s human resources webpage, for example, academic citizenship generally is defined as ‘*activities additional to normal research and teaching.*’ It ‘*encompasses a broad range of externally and internally focused contributions and is defined as engagement with those elements of university life that enable the smooth and collegial operation of the institution ... includ[ing] such areas as attendance at and informed contribution to committees and staff meetings; attention to deadlines (whether for marking or for research applications or for consultations); where included in role, assiduous performance of duties as personal supervisor to students and mentor to junior staff; involvement in positive promotion of the University through public engagement activities and/or open days; effective representation of colleagues, for example as trade union representative; willingness to volunteer for one-off duties.*’⁷ The University goes on to specify what this means internally and externally, as well as at different ranks of academic employment, and states that ‘*[t]hese activities must show demonstrable benefit to the University. Claims must be supported by reliable evidence at every level which demonstrates effectiveness, scale, quality, impact and importance of achievements. Appropriate quantitative indicators will be valuable.*’ Transnational ‘citizenship’ activities would include e.g. ‘*building international partnerships, promoting inter-cultural understanding and advancing the University’s internationalisation strategy.*’

In a similar way, promotion guidelines at Queen Mary University of London specify that citizenship constitutes an ‘*area of contribution*’ that covers ‘*activities which enable the University to achieve the 2030 Strategy, support others to achieve their goals, and develop the University community.*’ These activities may include ‘*mentoring within your School/Institute or Faculty*’, ‘*servicing on School/Institute, Faculty or University committees*’ (...) or ‘*contributing to School, Faculty or University strategic activity.*’⁸

In autocracies such as the PRC, official conceptions of the duties of those employed by all studying at universities is very much dominated by a general idea of loyalty owed by all citizens (*gongmin*) or indeed – in the phrase preferred in Chinese Communist Party (CCP) traditional discourse – by the People to the Party State. Article 59 of the Civil Servant Law of the PRC provides that ‘*A civil servant shall comply with disciplines and law, and shall not have any of the following acts: (1) Spreading words that damages the*

*authority of the Constitution, and the reputation of the Communist Party of China and the state, and organizing or participating in such activities as assembling, parading and demonstration aiming at opposing the Constitution, the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and the state.*⁹ For university teachers (and their students), this general duty of loyalty translates into strong expectations of taking the correct political view, accepting censorship, engaging in reporting on other members of one's academic community (including student on teacher and teacher and student reporting), and accepting disciplinary measures when any of these duties are breached.¹⁰

The Chinese understanding of academic citizenship has to be situated against the background of the overall conception of public intellectuals, whose rise and fall has historically been shaped by the evolving relationship between state and society.¹¹ In the darkest eras of the PRC history such as during the Cultural Revolution, intellectuals were repressed as a class, while during the opening-up and reforms era they were called to contribute to China's fast modernisation.¹² Whatever the changes in the Party priorities and policies, the space made available to intellectuals has nevertheless always been conditional and limited to the extent that intellectuals were not challenging the one-party rule,¹³ even though the Chinese intellectual environment remains diverse and includes liberals, neo-Maoists, neo-conservatives, neo-Confucians, and many others.¹⁴

Universities touted as 'top' within internal rankings in China have historically always played a key role in the formation of the Party political elites. In recent years, Tsinghua University, for example, has put in place a 'cultivation/transfer' system by which 'the school, in a purposeful, calculating, and organized manner, selects and trains talented students and then places them in political posts after graduation'.¹⁵ Whereas Pan has argued that the very close relationship between academia and official circles has acted as 'double-edged sword' in facilitating the university's autonomy as it enables/reinforce the risk for political influence,¹⁶ autocratic conception of political governance does not so much shape as diminish university autonomy: so far as universities are able to make decisions unaffected by party state control, this is as a result of toleration, not as a result of any explicit recognition of a principle of university autonomy.

While the Jiang and Hu era provided some limited space to engage with the dominant Party discourse, intellectuals have been allowed significantly less space since Xi Jinping came into power in late 2012. The tone was set when the now famous Document No 9 was released in 2013. In this Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere, the CCP pointed to the external and internal threats to China's 'mainstream ideology'.¹⁷ This only signalled the beginning of a broader movement of total ideological control and repression driven by a re-emphasis on party leadership of China's politics and society. For example, the Mao-era phrase 'the Party leads everything,' written into the Party's Charter.¹⁸ This change has had consequences for all critical voices in China's society as exemplified by the crackdown on human rights lawyers (including some legal academics) – the so-called 709 crackdown –¹⁹ initiated in 2015.

Higher education has certainly not been immune to the tightening of ideological control.²⁰ It has had both institutional and individual implications. At institutional level, a number of Chinese universities have revised their Charter and re-emphasised the university's loyalty to the Communist Party (e.g. Peking University) while some others have simply taken away references to the principle of academic independence

and freedom of thought (e.g. Fudan University).²¹ At individual level, a number of academics have become the target of state repression, as was the case for Tsinghua Law School Professor Xu Zhangrun who was suspended and stripped of his pension rights. This particular case made the headlines not least in view of the fact Tsinghua is one of those Chinese higher education institutions that is deeply anchored in the dynamics of globalisation of higher education in both research and education.²² Beyond the cases that made the headlines, it is clear that repression in academia has an impact on scholars who are not directly affected by state repression: *'most China scholars believe their research to be sensitive; a majority adapt their conduct to protect themselves and others; and most express concern about potential self-censorship'*.²³

This emphasis on ideological conformity and *'illiberal innovation'* is not without consequences at a time when China attempts to transform into a technological and scientific powerhouse²⁴ and puts a great emphasis on the attraction of international talents (i.e. Chinese students overseas) to drive innovation and build up knowledge and knowhow.²⁵ As the think tanks GPPi and SAR have pointed out, Peking University would see its overall score of 83.5 downgraded to 68.2 if the QS World University Ranking were to integrate academic freedom as one of its criteria.²⁶ From the perspective of students and researchers, it remains still difficult to assess to what extent the emphasis on ideological conformity will impact China's ability to retain or attract talents. As Pan put it, though, *'[F]orcing Chinese academia into an ideological straitjacket is unlikely to help'*.²⁷

The marketised and the autocratic conceptions of academic citizenship are evidently widely different, and yet, they are in some sense congenial, because they encourage political quietism amongst scholars and discourage scholars from thinking of themselves as having a general responsibility towards the public that may require them to challenge power structures. In a report published by the European University Association, it was made clear that both marketisation and authoritarianism *'point to a context that narrows the playing field for universities'* and *'pushes them to be more explicit about their values, and to counter these trends by broadening and opening up'*.²⁸ These two conceptions should indeed be contrasted with wider interpretations of citizenship within liberal democracies as well as the idea of transnational citizenship informed by the values of liberal democracy, or in other words, cosmopolitan citizenship as we propose to understand it. Once we seek to relate the status of academics within institutions to these broader ideas, we can see that academic citizenship can be interpreted in quite different ways.

Liberal-democratic citizenship has been the subject of a very long-standing, rich and varied discussion with important roots in those strands of the enlightenment tradition that emphasise the importance of citizens willing not only to show solidarity and social awareness by, for example, contributing to associations of citizens working for the public good, but also to stand up to public power, confronting and challenging the state in the context of abuses and rights violations. It is very broadly speaking this notion that inspires the Tocquevillian interpretation of *'civil society'* in the United States of America, for example. Of course, scholars and public intellectuals have always played an important role in these accounts of citizenship, of the citizen who is protected by and – within the limits of what she can do – responsible for the defence of civil and political liberties. References made to *'scientific advancement'* and *'scientific*

progress' in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the International Covenant for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights imply the potential of science to serve the promotion of peace and human rights.²⁹ This ideal also finds manifestation in China's own intellectual history. In late Qing and Republican era for instance, academic institutions such as Peking University and Tsinghua embraced ideals of the scholar as a free and responsible individual in the service of the University as embodiment of 'Great Learning' in the wake of Europe's 19th century revival of these ideas.³⁰

While somewhat inevitably, accounts of citizenship originating in historical eras that see the nation-state as primary repository of liberal democratic values tend to tie citizenship to notions of national belonging, globalisation and transnationalisation increasingly compel us to reflect on the meaning of citizenship beyond national borders. At the same time, the values underpinning liberal democracy are conceived as challenges to the power of national governments to define and control the lives of their subjects; the very idea of civil and political rights, as well as human rights more widely, is after all inherently transnational. In this vein, Habermas argues that cosmopolitan citizenship transcends national borders with the development of a post-national identity anchored in human rights.³¹ Unsurprisingly, therefore, cosmopolitanism – *'the idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, are (or can and should be) citizens in a single community'* – has been a long-standing tradition within enlightenment discourse and well beyond (again, we can also find it, for example, in Mencian philosophy).³² The importance of national citizenship notwithstanding, authors such as Tan, for example, have defended cosmopolitan citizenship as an idea *'used aspirationally to denote a moral perspective or point of view an individual should adopt when considering her moral obligations and duties of justice to others. It is an ideal of how the morally engaged person should view the world, that beneath our local and parochial ties like state citizenship and nationality, our obligations of justice to all persons in the world are fundamentally the same'*.³³

Once we allow ourselves to relate academia and academics to normatively ambitious, rights-based ideas of citizenship, we can swiftly move on to engage with the moral and ethical responsibilities of scholars. Thus, for example, Ronald Dworkin has identified as one of citizens' central responsibilities *'the responsibility not to profess what one believes to be false,'* adding that *'this duty is protected, in liberal societies, by a right of conscience that forbids forcing people to religious or moral or political declaration against their will'*.³⁴ He has argued that *'Some social roles and professions incorporate heightened versions of this personal responsibility'* and that *'those who teach and study in universities have ... a paradigmatic duty to discover and teach what they find important and true, and this duty is not, even to the degree that medical responsibility may be, subject to any qualification about the best interests of those to whom they speak. It is an undiluted responsibility to the truth'*.³⁵ George-Jackson has argued for a *'cosmopolitan University'*.³⁶ While from our perspective, there is every reason to promote the idea of liberal democratic academic citizenship as a cosmopolitan idea, it is very important to note, with Dworkin, that individual responsibilities to truth arising out of this citizenship are bounded and in a certain sense conditioned by the protection of civil rights in one's own legal system. In that sense, cosmopolitan academic citizenship imposes responsibility on those who can be truthful in the expectation that their rights will be respected.

(2) The transnational impacts of authoritarian conceptions of academic citizenship

The authoritarian conception of academic citizenship described in Part I of this paper has had a growing impact on academic freedom within but also outside China. It is here argued that academic internationalisation or the overall dynamic of globalisation of higher education do facilitate the expansion of authoritarian conceptions of academic citizenship. Internationalisation is being driven by a number of factors that include technological advance, growing labour mobility, as well as the increased privatisation of higher education.³⁷ What emerges with the internationalisation agenda of universities is a tension between a commitment to research and teaching that should be free from any external interference (being from the university itself or any other entity) and the growing interdependence with higher education institutions that are anchored in a very different political-legal environment that is not protective of the same values:³⁸ The risk in that context is a '*rise of epistemological illiberalism*',³⁹ or of a tendency, prevalent especially amongst university administrators, to frame international exchange and collaboration in terms analogous to commercial relations between centrally managed economic enterprises, which suggest it might be almost improper to enquire into the internal governance structure and political environment of one's academic partner abroad. One of the authors, indeed, on one occasion found herself repeatedly reminded by her university's public relations office to '*keep our corporate interests*' and '*our projects and partners in China*' in mind when giving an interview to a major UK media outlet interested in her views on the topic of this essay. In such settings, internationalisation comes at the cost of compromises with some of the key values of a cosmopolitan idea of academic citizenship, including academic freedom.

The risk of transnational expansion of authoritarian conception of academic citizenship is particularly acute in the context of academic internationalisation involving China. This risk is only reinforced by the fact there is still very much of a lack of understanding of the ways in which China's higher-education framework operates at both national and international levels.⁴⁰ In recent years, China has very much transformed its higher education internationalisation from being strictly '*inward-oriented*' to becoming increasingly '*outward-oriented*'.⁴¹ The great emphasis put on internationalisation is to be read against the background of Beijing's attempt to transform itself into a major scientific powerhouse.⁴² In light of China's Education Modernisation 2035 Plan published by the State Council in 2019, international cooperation and exchange is to play a key role in the modernisation of China's Higher Education.⁴³ It is here important to keep in mind that the modernisation of the education system is driven by the evolving needs of the Party and the state.⁴⁴ Internationalisation shall now no longer simply be aimed at importing knowledge and ideas but has to become an important vehicle to defend and promote the Party State's interests and ideology abroad. In that sense, internationalisation contributes to the transnational expansion of China's authoritarian conception of academic citizenship.

In the following paragraphs, we will highlight how the increasing reliance on China as a sponsor of research cooperation and a market for higher education; the establishment of Confucius Institutes; as well as the use of legal and practical tools to silence critical academic voices abroad support the transnational expansion of China's authoritarian conception of academic citizenship.

First, it is important to highlight the impact that financial dependency vis-à-vis China can have on academic citizenship. China has, in fact, emerged as an important sponsor of research cooperation and market for higher education. On the one hand, China has increasingly been identified as an important partner in the areas of research, innovation, and technological advance. For instance, in Horizon 2020 projects, the largest scale EU funding scheme, cooperation with China is particularly encouraged in areas ranging from food, agriculture, energy, nanotechnology, space and polar research.⁴⁵ China has also increasingly emerged as an important market for higher education. While there are now more than 20 international branch campuses established in China,⁴⁶ universities in the US, UK, and Australia have become increasingly reliant on incomes generated by the higher tuition fees paid by Chinese students. In the UK, China is the largest source of international students with as many as 39,130 Chinese students studying in the UK during academic year 2019-20.⁴⁷

In terms of the rising importance of China in the area of academic research, a number of elements can be mentioned. First, the whole academic publishing industry has been very much impacted by China's rise. In a number of instances, China has increased the pressure on respected publishing houses not to publish research outputs deemed to be too sensitive from the perspective of the Party State. The most well-known case is the one of the respected *China Quarterly* – a journal edited by the School of Oriental Studies and published by Cambridge University Press – which involved the censorship of more than 300 articles and reviews at the request of the Party State. This development was described by the editor of the journal, Tim Pringle, as being '*unprecedented*' but also as '*the natural outcome of a much stronger shade of authoritarian government that excludes voices from outside the party-led system*'.⁴⁸ The ability of the Party State to influence the content of academic journals is now only reinforced by the fact a number of peer-reviewed journals are now being hosted or sponsored by Chinese universities.

Second, China has now established a very wide network of Confucius Institutes (CIs) across colleges and universities worldwide with the aim to promote Chinese culture and language. They are central in China's own engagement with globalisation: they contribute to China's attempt to present itself more as a '*model for*' rather than a '*target of*' globalisation.⁴⁹ They are central in China's strategy to shape its own international image and enhance its soft power abroad.⁵⁰ The use of cultural and education means to enhance China's soft power has nevertheless largely proven to be a failure: '*many countries regard CIs as a propaganda tool and a threat to academic freedom and the local community*'.⁵¹ The financial dependency generated by the establishment of CIs has indeed the potential to serve the Party State's authoritarian conception of academic citizenship. While in some instances CIs have been used to advance propaganda on issues such as the history of Tibet,⁵² it has also been reported they have enabled discriminatory practices against Falun Gong Members.⁵³ More generally, a number of topics simply remain '*off limits*' and support a tendency towards self-censorship within CIs.⁵⁴

CIs are nevertheless only one most visible and frequently criticised part of a far more complex structure of collaborative and exchange programs, often funded by external sources which may include government agencies, built up between Chinese and non-Chinese academic institutions, and that can lead to dependencies or an appearance of dependence from autocratic governors. Against the background of deficient transparency

rules and weak scrutiny over foreign donations, China has now emerged as a very important source of foreign donation for universities in Europe and the United States. In the UK, a widely noted example has been the creation of academic chairs with funding that can be traced to Chinese Party State sources, such as for example in the case of the chair professor heading up the Jesus College China Centre.⁵⁵ In the US, China has emerged as the main source of foreign donations for universities with more than a billion dollars in gifts since 2014.⁵⁶ Universities have also become increasingly reliant on Chinese funding schemes, including in sensitive fields such as advanced policing.⁵⁷ It is important to note that donations and benefactions to universities are not necessarily by themselves evidence of nefarious influence; however, the very fact that universities have set up guidelines governing acceptance of such gifts well illustrates that they may come (or appear to come) ‘with strings attached.’ In that sense, the contract linking the Free University Berlin and Hanban (the Chinese government agency responsible for the establishment of CIs) came under fire as it submitted the establishment of a professorship to Chinese laws and regulations.⁵⁸

Third, the Party State has also used a variety of legal and practical tools to silence criticisms abroad and has targeted foreign and Chinese scholars in that process. In a report produced in 2019, the UK Foreign Affairs Committee referred to the ‘*alarming evidence about the extent of Chinese influence on the campuses of UK universities*’.⁵⁹ China’s influence can take different forms from attempts to shape the content of the curriculum, limit the organisation of events, and discredit critical voices against the Party State. Regarding the latter, it is to be noted China’s so-called ‘*wolf-warrior*’ diplomats⁶⁰ have become increasingly assertive in the way they defend China’s interests abroad by targeting individual critical voices. The example of French academic Antoine Bondaz, an outspoken China expert based at the Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS), is particularly telling. He was called a ‘*little rascal*’ and a ‘*crazy hyena*’ by the Chinese Ambassador to France, Lu Shaye. In an open letter ‘*A Democratic Discussion on Freedom of Speech*’, the Chinese Embassy justified this rhetoric by arguing the time of ‘*lamb diplomacy*’ was over and that this was the way in which ‘*the villains*’ were to be treated.⁶¹

The most blatant illustration of China’s authoritarian long arm into foreign academia nevertheless took place in March 2021 when the Chinese government announced the imposition of ‘*sanctions*,’ including travel bans, a prohibition on Chinese citizens and entities from ‘*having dealings*’ with them, and asset freezes, on a number of scholars and their families in the EU and the UK.⁶² The Party State was keen to portray these sanctions as a ‘*tit for tat*’ measure taken in response to the adoption of ‘*Magnitsky*’-style sanctions (i.e. global sanctions for human rights violations) against individuals linked to the massive human rights violations and suspected international crimes on the part of the Chinese government.⁶³ These measures, for which the government provided no legal basis, were nevertheless primarily imposed in retaliation for the targets’ work on and with China, including research on international crimes and human rights violations in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). In an editorial aimed to justify China’s sanction list against EU entities and individuals, the China-sponsored Global Times referred to MERICS, a research institute targeted by the sanctions, as ‘*a self-claimed independent institute that has actually been colluding with anti-China forces over the years since it was established in 2013*’.⁶⁴ It is to be noted that, in the aftermath of this event, China has further developed its toolkit to respond to foreign sanctions with the

adoption of the 2021 Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law.⁶⁵ This new law is more than a defensive tool to ‘counter unjust foreign sanctions’ but constitutes ‘a blocking statute, retaliatory regime and proactive sanctions legislation rolled into one’.⁶⁶

These sanctions should nevertheless not overshadow the fact that Chinese scholars themselves remain the premier target of the transnational expansion of China’s authoritarian conception of academic citizenship. The ‘intertwined relationship’ between academia and officialdom described by Pan (above) is also an important factor shaping exchange, collaboration, and cooperation activities of Chinese universities with partners abroad: since the beginning of the reform and opening era, and especially since the 1990s, Chinese universities have promoted international exchange as part of a wider agenda of ‘connecting to the international level’ (*yu guoji jiegui*). At transnational level, the re-emphasis on academics’ duty of political loyalty translates into severe restrictions, for example, on travelling or lecturing abroad, censorship when abroad, requirements to seek permission to meet foreign scholars visiting China, and a general duty imposed on foreign scholars and students to ‘tell China’s story well’ when abroad.⁶⁷ The adoption of the 2020 National Security Law by the National People’s Congress – which includes broadly defined crimes of ‘secession’, ‘subversion’, and ‘collusion’ has put an even greater pressure on Hong Kong-based scholars as it applies both in Hong Kong but also extraterritorially.⁶⁸ In a joint letter to the UN Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteurs on the right to education, the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, all expressed their concerns regarding ‘the disciplining of educators for their social activism and for exploring political issues in class’.⁶⁹

Arguably, the attempt to control academic discourse about China well beyond China’s borders is supported by the fact that in a general situation of democratic decline affecting many, including some European countries, attacks against academic freedom have also been taking place in Europe as part of a process that has been coined by the literature as ‘rule of law backsliding,’ ‘autocratic legalism,’ ‘democratic retrogression,’ ‘authoritarian practices [within democracies],’ et cetera.⁷⁰ In Hungary, for example, the populist government under Orban, who has explicitly described China’s ‘illiberal democracy’ as a model, has waged a number of attacks against academic freedom, in general, but also in a more targeted way against the Budapest-based, US-accredited Central European University (CEU).⁷¹ The same government that has ousted (parts of) a university devoted to the promotion of a global ‘open society’ (with significant funding from the Open Society Foundations) has welcomed the idea of Fudan University establishing a campus in Budapest, a plan that has attracted wide criticisms in Hungary.⁷²

(3) Assessing state and non-state actors’ responses to the challenges of transnational academic exchange

So far, we have argued, first, that a cosmopolitan conception of academic citizenship, underpinned by the notion of an academic responsibility to the truth and by liberal democratic values, is necessary to uphold academic freedom, even though academia in many countries including the UK is shaped by a deficient, reductionist, marketised conception of academic citizenship. Second, the preceding analysis has shown that the Chinese Party State, embracing an autocratic conception of academic citizenship, has

in certain ways been able to exploit the marketisation of academia in countries like the UK to extend autocratic control to Chinese and non-Chinese academics beyond its borders.

In this section, we selectively assess state and nonstate actors' responses to attempts to control through the critical lens of cosmopolitan academic citizenship, understood as a concept that can help us both to conceptualise the potential risks of transnational academic exchange and to give us criteria for evaluating counter-measures taken to manage these risks. The point of considering such counter-measures through the lens of cosmopolitan academic citizenship is that they can potentially help us foster critical awareness both of threats to academic freedom, and the powerful agendas and discourses that drive critiques of engagement with autocratic countries: such as for instance the militaristic national security agenda promoted by many governments and the managerial 'quality control' agenda promoted by some university administrations.

As an example for (proposed) countermeasures taken by governments and legislators in liberal democracy with the stated aim of countering autocratic influence in universities and research of responses by state actors, we may consider the United Kingdom. First, we observe that members of political parties and of parliamentary select committees have spent considerable energy on directly discussing their concerns about authoritarian influence on UK academia and proposing solutions to this problem. For example, the House of Commons select committee on foreign affairs, chaired by Tugendhat MP (of the then ruling Conservative Party), produced a report titled '*A cautious embrace: defending democracy in an age of autocracies*'.⁷³ Noting that '*the UK, along with Australia, Canada and the US, is the most popular overseas destinations for Chinese students*' and that '*in its 2019 International Education Strategy White Paper, the Government ... mentions China over 20 times in the context of boosting education export to the Chinese market, with no mention of security or interference*,' the select committee report detailed issues of concern, including the financial influence of which autocracies on universities in the UK. It recommended '*that the Government and universities develop together a strategy to address the challenges posed by autocracies to UK universities. As a starting point, the Government should examine mounting evidence of foreign [sic] influence in UK universities to fully understand the extent of the problem*.' Although the report as such noted a need to '*examine the extent to which market incentives may serve to undermine academic freedom in the UK*,' its chair, Tugendhat, in comment pieces such as a 2021 article in the *Daily Mail*, rhetorically asked the question, '*Why have Britain's universities been prostrating themselves so enthusiastically to the Chinese state that denies freedom of thought?*' And answered, '*The ugly truth is that some of our universities, a fundamental part of the UK's innovation-based economy, have been motivated by a mixture of naivety and greed*'.⁷⁴

Second, according to news media reports in February 2021, the foreign office was preparing '*enforcement notices*' warning academics that through their collaborative relationships with China, they might be breaching export laws and potentially even be criminally liable.⁷⁵

Third, proposed legislation would impose duties on universities and student unions to protect freedom of speech as well as mandate the institution of government offices to monitor, regulate and, in the event of complaints upheld by the office, sanction universities for perceived failures to defend the principles of liberal democracy, in particular freedom of speech and academic freedom. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech)

Bill as amended in January 2022 would, if enacted, impose a duty on Higher Education institutions to disclose overseas gifts and contracts affecting freedom of speech.⁷⁶ The bill as it currently stands nevertheless does not consider universities or other research institutions as bearers of the right to academic freedom; it only considers them as bearers of duties towards individual academics.⁷⁷

Reviewing the rhetoric, as well as proposed measures on the part of UK state actors, it is evident that these actors have internalised a marketised conception of academic activity, and by extension academic citizenship, that essentially views it as an economic process resulting in the production of ‘*research*’ understood as an output whose value is assessed in extraneous terms, for example, as economic value. In accordance with this logic, in the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, academic freedom is analogised with freedom of speech and defined in narrow terms as an individuated process of using specific ‘*expertise*.’ This definition, reflecting earlier UK legislation,⁷⁸ fails to acknowledge the institutional dimensions of academic freedom, including academic self-governance recognised as central, for example, by the 2021 Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research.⁷⁹ The protective purpose of the proposed measures, such as export control and legislation to monitor and sanction universities for penalising individual academics, also maintains a focus on the individual academic producer of ‘*research*.’

This leads on the one hand to a securitised conception of the problems and challenges posed by international academic collaboration and exchange: remarkably, what seems to be problematic from a national security perspective is (at times) not other countries’ legal-political governance, but the mere fact that they are foreign – thus, some of the language cited above suggests that the problem to be addressed is *foreign* influence, as though, incredibly, influence exercised by any foreign actor upon the nation’s academic institutions were inherently suspect. This is hard to credit especially in light the fact that UK academic institutions have very high ratios of international staff and students, an aspect often touted as contributing to and reflecting their international ‘*excellence*.’

On the other hand, the proposed academic freedom bill appears to focus entirely on risks to the rights of academic staff, students, and visitors stemming from academic institutions. Although the above-mentioned Select Committee report had correctly identified market incentives as a potential source of risks for academic freedom, the drafters of the Academic Freedom Bill appear blithely forgetful of this issue, a further analysis of which would inevitably invite comment on the fact that public funding for UK universities has been hollowed out under a doctrine of academia as consisting of competitive ‘*providers*’ of commercial services, as discussed in the first section of this essay. To compound the limitations of this analysis, some of the rhetoric critical of universities even goes further and accuses them (collectively) of ‘*greed*’ – a personalised ethical assessment suggesting that academic fundraising is a moral weakness, even though one might characterise it as also a need resulting from the reforms of academia instituted three decades earlier by the government.

In sum, although it is clear that state actors in the UK have become aware of threats to academic freedom and integrity arising from activities of collaboration and exchange, some of the (proposed) responses to address this and related issues are flawed by relevant state actors’ problematic and incoherent conception of the values they invoke. Most problematically, state actors tend to treat such threats as justification for interference with universities’ decision-making processes. While these processes are themselves

undermined by marketised and managerial conceptions of university governance, replacing control by university management with control by government offices will not help to improve institutional protections for academic freedom in the UK's own system of academic governance. Additionally, a securitised perspective on 'foreign' influence on academic actors mistakenly treats foreignness *per se* as a reason for suspicion, a move that seems untenable in the context of an academic environment such as that of the UK, in which even to distinguish between domestic and foreign academic actors could pose challenges. Lastly, it is important to refrain from facile accusations of individual moral failure such as 'naivety' or 'greed'. In a university environment severely challenged by funding cuts on the basis of free-market ideology, not to mention anti-intellectual political discourse, it is hardly surprising that universities turn to external funding sources.

In light of this analysis, it is all the more important also to pay attention to initiatives and countermeasures on the part of nonstate actors, in particular, individual academics, advocacy groups, and universities and other research institutions. Here, we selectively address examples of what universities have done and may be able to do, initiatives on the part of (advocacy and/or service) NGOs, and individual scholars.

Universities themselves have to some extent sought to address some of the issues discussed in section 2 of this essay. For example, many universities have developed rules governing the acceptance of donations. Thus, Cambridge University, which has on occasion been criticised over the acceptance of donations from China, states on its website that '*the Vice-Chancellor will seek the advice of the Executive Committee of the Council for all benefactions over £1 m, or that are likely to give rise to significant public interest,*' and that amongst the considerations taken into account are the questions whether '*the purposes of the benefaction [are] compatible with the purpose of the University as defined in its Statutes*' and whether '*there [is] published evidence that the proposed benefaction arises in whole or in part from activity that ... violated international conventions that bear on human rights, limited freedom of inquiry, [or] suppressed or falsified academic research,*' or that '*that acceptance of the proposed benefaction or compliance with any of its terms will damage the University's reputation, including deterring other benefactors,*' *inter alia*.⁸⁰

Prima facie, these considerations at least reflect concern with the values underpinning cosmopolitan academic citizenship. But crucially, they are merely part of '*ethical guidelines*' regarding which members of the University involved in fundraising are '*encouraged to consult the Development Office at an early stage in their discussions with a potential benefactor.*' It is, to say the least, difficult to assess the degree to which such guidelines affect the practice of accepting benefactions. In its draft model code of conduct, the AFIWG (Academic Freedom and Internationalisation Working Group), of which one of the co-authors is a member, calls for more stringent rules that would, for example, enhance the principles governing donations to universities by adding a principle of transparency about such donations, allowing concerned academic citizens to scrutinise and, where appropriate, criticise.⁸¹ It also calls for an early stage involvement of academic colleagues with relevant expertise – in the case of China, for example, as AFIWG member Chris Hughes has observed in media comments about his own institution (LSE), the impression can arise that academic management purposely avoids involving knowledgeable academic colleagues who could advise on the ethical risks associated with setting up a particular programme or accepting a donation.⁸²

A few non-governmental organisations have long been dedicated to helping individual scholars affected by government persecution. These include most prominently the U.S.-based NGO Scholars at Risk (SAR) and the Europe-based CARA Network. Whereas the CARA network is primarily dedicated to facilitating the reception and hosting of scholars compelled to leave their home institutions (for political reasons) and does not engage in advocacy, SAR has, especially in recent years, increasingly engaged in efforts to raise awareness of the problem of authoritarian influencing in the academic field. For example, in 2019, it commissioned an important report on academic freedom in China, which also dealt with the transnational repression.⁸³ However, important both these initiatives are, their focus by and large remains on the highly vulnerable individuals they are dedicated to helping. From the perspective of a conception of cosmopolitan academic citizenship, they might be regarded as organisations primarily calling on the academic ‘*citizenry*’ of liberal democracies to take its responsibility for fellow academic citizens in distress seriously.

In addition to institutionalised, university level efforts to address the problem of transnational academic repression and potential institutional complicity, some initiatives by individual scholars have shown support for individuals and/or institutions affected by transnational academic repression, including sanctions imposed by the Chinese government. In response to recent sanctions, several associations of research institutions issued statements condemning them (for example), and an initiative eventually bringing together over 1300 individual members of the academic and research community signed an open letter declaring solidarity and signalling defiance.⁸⁴

Statements and responses of this kind can be interpreted as important acts of cosmopolitan academic citizenship, understood as ‘*those acts when, regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due*’.⁸⁵ Viewed in this way, such statements may play an important role in raising academics’ civic consciousness with regard to their role and the freedoms which underpin this role, but are liable to be neglected or denied to many academic colleagues. The limitation, however, is obvious: individual members of the research and academic community coming together in this way can only exercise the power to speak collectively; they are not acting as institutional decision-makers, and they lack the power to protect their fellow academic citizens from the measures they denounce.

In sum, while we can observe an array of initiatives and responses to the challenges of transnational academic exchange and collaboration from within the academic communities themselves, thus far, such responses are severely limited. Universities, as the most obvious institutions that ought to be capable of devising systematic mechanisms to address and manage the ethical risks identified in this essay do not appear to be committed to effective responses. Individual academics lack the power to influence University decisions, as do the few and – within their field of primary activity – important non-governmental organisations set up to help scholars at risk.

In line with the analysis of the present article, a crucial missing step towards ameliorating the ability of UK universities (and universities in similar positions) to increase resilience vis-à-vis autocratic control from China would be to abandon the unsatisfactory marketised conception of academic citizenship and restore a liberal democratic conception, which would require significant changes to how universities in the UK are structured, government, and funded. This, in turn, would enable better governed universities

to come up with the kinds of rules and mechanisms now proposed by advocacy groups, requiring transparency, proper due diligence, and universities' ultimate accountability towards the academic citizens, conceived along cosmopolitan and liberal democratic lines.

Conclusions

This paper has argued that an analysis of the impact of China's influence on academia in liberal democracies should consider how autocratic influence affects the citizens of an increasingly interconnected and interdependent global academic community, and how different conceptions of academic citizenship play out in this context. We have distinguished a cosmopolitan, liberal-democratic conception of academic citizenship from an authoritarian and a marketised conception, and argued that while the authoritarian conception is prevalent in China, the academic institutions of countries such as the UK have come to be increasingly dominated by the marketised conception. Both the authoritarian and the marketised conceptions fail, albeit in different ways, to account for the values underpinning academic citizenship. A discussion of how academic institutions and systems interact in the context of collaboration and exchange, et cetera, however, shows that the idea of the marketised university now so prevalent in liberal democracies is especially vulnerable to autocratic pressure from countries such as China. Based on this analysis, this paper has highlighted the different ways in which the transnational expansion of China's authoritarian conception of academic citizenship increasingly influences academic institutions and individuals outside China's territory. In view of the Party State commitment to transform the country into a scientific powerhouse combined with the ever decreasing public funding awarded to universities in Europe and the United States, the different dynamics highlighted in this paper can only be reinforced in the near future.

Against this background, we have argued that it is all the more important to support a cosmopolitan and liberal democratic conception of academic citizenship, which not only makes sense of academic freedom in its individual and institutional dimensions: that is to say, it understands that the academic citizen is constituted within their institution, wider institutional environment, legal political system, and within an interconnected, interacting global academic community. She is situated within multiple power structures and must therefore be seen as an individual whose rights must be protected from power holders including the government and employers, but whose academic freedom can only be truly realised if she has an opportunity to participate meaningfully in academic governance, as an aspect of institutional academic freedom that must be protected against the state.

This paper has, lastly, examined various responses and countermeasures to authoritarian pressure on universities and individual academics, arguing that the marketised conception of the university and academic citizenship is unsustainable if we want to provide robust and long-term protections against the transnational expansion of authoritarian conceptions of academic citizenship and the academic repression it entails. The way forward is nevertheless not an easy one. The challenge relates to the enduring need to create bridges with China by fostering opportunities for dialogue between individual scholars who evolve (*nolens volens*) in different institutional and legal-political

environments. Yet, those committed to dialogue and joint intellectual inquiry, which are both inherent to cosmopolitan academic citizenship, will be directly confronted with the challenge of accommodating, while also questioning, the conditions of knowledge creation shaped by the academic governance contexts within which it takes place.

In fine, the confrontation between cosmopolitan, liberal-democratic and authoritarian conceptions of academic citizenship will likely continue to give rise to situations that will require us to develop an ethics of complicity.⁸⁶ The easy ‘solution’ (to be resisted) is the one of a binary conception in which the other is conceived as the enemy. A more nuanced and, we argue, more appropriate approach requires, from the perspective of a cosmopolitan conception of academic citizenship, critical engagement and self-reflexivity.

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