

Censorship of Online Research Journals in China: Conditions of Complicity and Resistance in the Global Scholarly Communications Industry

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree of PhD in

Information Studies

2024

Declaration

I, George Cooper, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This research is the first to investigate the involvement of online journal publishers in Chinese censorship practices. Since 2017, publishers have restricted access to research outputs in China at the request of state regulators. Cambridge University Press (CUP) removed over 300 journal articles and Springer Nature suppressed a further 1,000 featuring keywords such as 'Tiananmen', 'Tibet', 'Xinjiang' and 'Hong Kong' via their online platforms. LexisNexis (owned by Elsevier's parent company, RELX) and Taylor & Francis removed a legal information database and 83 academic journals from sales packages sold to Chinese universities. Due to constraints on library budgets and Open Access mandates, journal publishers are increasingly reliant on revenue growth in emerging markets outside the US and Europe. At the same time, the parameters of academic discourse in countries such as China have narrowed, particularly in relation to civil unrest in Hong Kong, the persecution of the Uighur ethnic group in Xinjiang, and the origins of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

This is the first research to draw on work in political theory to establish a theoretical model for the censorship of academic journals. It also explores empirically the conditions and consequences of censorship complicity in this context. The research involves semi-structured interviews with 12 academics that have faced research censorship in China, and 12 publishing professionals with a mixture of direct involvement in censorship concerns and expertise in the Chinese market for research periodicals. This is followed by a corpus analysis study of 450 censored research articles to identify patterns and changes in term-based censorship criteria. The aim of this thesis is to inform industry guidelines via trade bodies like the Committee on Publication Ethics regarding platform amendments, on political grounds, affecting the global scholarly record.

Impact statement

This thesis uncovers the underlying conditions of political coercion and censorship affecting the digital record of published works in China. This is the first research to investigate the involvement of non-Chinese, English-language scholarly publishers—headquartered in the UK, US and Europe—in Chinese censorship. This research impacts publishing practice and scholarship in several ways. The first is by revealing the scale of publisher-enforced research suppression in China, amounting to over 28,000 items of content, which has been brought to public attention through press engagement during this research (Cooper 2022). The thesis also identifies latent consensus within the publishing industry and allied communities that may serve as a foundation for a shared definition of censorship complicity and common standards and guidelines regarding politically motivated platform amendments. Beyond publishing practice, this thesis also advances the scholarship on institutional self-censorship by giving in depth consideration to the experiences and motivations of alleged self-censors—scholarly journal publishers and editors operating in China.

There are three recommended changes to industry practice arising from this research. The first of these is to use a shared notion of censorship (from this thesis' theoretical component and the interviews) as a basis for an industry definition, supported by a standards body, like the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The second recommendation is for communities affected by the censorship of scholarship to form a coalition with librarians and research funders and use mandated conditions on the allocation of Open Access funds to ensure global access to records of publication on publisher platforms. Finally, to enable industry coordination and information sharing on censorship concerns, publishing trade bodies should establish clear rules and procedures for cross-publisher initiatives that do not fall foul of anti-trust and markets and competition laws—an unanticipated yet widespread concern among the publishers interviewed for this research.

There are three further recommendations to advance the study of research censorship in China. The first of these is to embed this study of political (self-)censorship in scholarly publishing within a broader programme of research on commercial censorship, involving the distortion and fragmentation of global scholarly communication through financial access barriers. The second is to use the interview design offered in this thesis, involving a sample censorship request—a ‘vignette’—as a basis for a larger scale survey to allow for statistical generalisability regarding shared notions of and standpoints on research censorship. The third way this thesis may support further research is by outlining a data collection methodology that enables structured term-based corpus analysis of censored journal articles, which could be scaled up using a comparative corpora approach to determine new and emerging censorship criteria.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the dedicated support and contributions of my supervisory team. I've been fortunate to receive guidance from many excellent supervisors, including Nick Canty, Prof. Annemaree Lloyd, and, for the second half of this project, Dr. Anna Sexton and Dr. Andreas Vlachidis, who both provided enormously detailed and thoughtful advice on the empirical components of the research and the many chapter drafts that followed. Special thanks to my primary supervisor, Prof. Samantha Rayner, who has supported me from the beginning in all the ways mentioned and more, through limitless encouragement and an occasional (and essential) dose of realism, without which this project may never have made the transition from notes and data to a thesis-shaped document.

I'd like to thank the interview participants for their candour and trust; the London Arts & Humanities Partnership, for funding three years of the thesis and a host of training and networking opportunities; and my friends and family for their patience and no-doubt sincere interest in my research after six years. My wife, Charlie, deserves special mention, having withstood the full spectrum of PhD-by-proxy highs and lows, coinciding with a baby, a house move, a pandemic, another house move and another baby. Last of all, I'd like to thank my daughter, Flo, for all the welcome distractions (even some of the unwelcome ones)—and my son, Toby, for keeping me roughly on schedule.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1. Research Focus

In recent years, several of the world's leading scholarly publishers have bowed to pressure from Chinese state authorities to remove politically sensitive articles from online scholarly journals. These concerns began in August 2017 with reports that Cambridge University Press (CUP) had removed over 300 articles from the online edition of *China Quarterly* (Adams 2017). In the months that followed, suppressed search returns were identified on Springer Nature's online platform in China, affecting over 1,000 articles in the *Journal of Chinese Political Science* and *International Politics* (Bland 2017b); meanwhile LexisNexis, a subsidiary of Dutch publishing giant, Elsevier, removed two legal information databases to comply with China's media regulations (Reuters 2017). Then, in 2018, Taylor & Francis faced import restrictions preventing the distribution of 83 academic journals in the Chinese market (Taylor & Francis 2018). Since 2018, comparisons between publisher platforms via UK-based and China-based IP addresses have revealed escalating discrepancies along political lines. More than 28,000 items of content have been suppressed on publishing platforms in China (Cooper 2022), including journal articles, book chapters, conference papers and reference works.

Due to growing constraints on university library budgets (Hoeve 2019) and zero-embargo Open Access mandates, like Plan S (Plan S 2023) in Europe, and in the United States, the 2022 White House Office of Science & Technology Policy (OSTP) memorandum (White House Office of Science and Technology Policy 2022), journal publishers are increasingly reliant on emerging markets, like China, to sustain revenue growth from online journal subscriptions, sales deals and Open Access article processing charges (Liao and Zhang 2022). China is the fastest growing research economy, having surpassed the United States as the largest producer of scholarly research articles globally (Zhu and Liu 2020; Lu 2022). Over the same period, the

parameters of academic discourse in China have narrowed, with the introduction of Hong Kong's National Security Law (Lo 2021), tightening constraints for field work in Xinjiang (Greitens and Truex 2020), and pre-vetting of research publications related to the origins of COVID-19 (Cooper 2020).

Against this backdrop, concerns are mounting that global science is splintering in two (Nature 2023) with China and the US pursuing mutually incompatible and increasingly politicised research and development agendas—a trend that has unexplored implications for global scholarly communication. This research interrogates the role of the predominant producers and distributors of the world's leading scholarly journals, which serve Chinese markets while operating overseas. It uncovers the pressures and incentives driving English-language scholarly publishers to remove politically sensitive content from their platforms in China. It seeks to understand the reasons why some publishers acquiesce to these demands, while others resist or otherwise avoid amending their platforms. This research also explores whether external parties—librarians, funders, government agencies—or industry trade bodies can promote collaboration between publishers and their scholarly communities to resist censorship pressures, now and in the future.

1.2. Research Questions

The primary question guiding this doctoral research is as follows:

(PQ) Under what conditions do English-language scholarly publishers enable or constrain censorship practices in the context of online research distribution in China?

This primary question encompasses a sub-set of secondary research questions. The first of these has both a theoretical and empirical basis:

(SQ 1) Under what conditions do platform-based interventions by English-language publishers constitute a form of censorship complicity?

This question is addressed by an attempt to fix the conceptual parameters of censorship complicity in scholarly publishing, while also studying empirically the common conceptions of censorship complicity (tacit or explicit) within the affected publishing and academic communities. The next set of research questions relate to the social and political dynamics of censorship complicity in scholarly publishing:

(SQ2) What are the consequences of platform-based censorship complicity in China for the communities that are affected by it?

(SQ3) What are the constraints that prevent collaborative action within and between affected communities to resist censorship complicity in China?

(SQ4) To what extent is collaborative resistance advantageous for the communities that are affected by censorship complicity in China?

Finally, the last of the secondary research questions suggests a route for a mixed method, qualitative-quantitative approach, allowing for a consideration of both socio-political and statistical qualities of defined censorship criteria:

(SQ5) How have the conditions that enable platform-based censorship in China changed over time?

These questions inform the research design and methodology, which will be summarised here and described in full later in the thesis (p.109).

1.3. Outline of Research Design

This thesis involves three phases of research that aim to answer the research questions given above. The first of these is a conceptual analysis, drawing on the existing philosophical literature on censorship, that aims to offer a definition of censorship complicity in the context of online journal distribution in China. This definition is applied to publicly reported cases of alleged censorship complicity, involving interventions by non-Chinese scholarly publishers to constrain the availability of online scholarly journal articles in China at the request of Chinese research importers and content regulators. This theoretical component answers secondary question 1 (SQ1) regarding the forms of platform-based interventions (by publishers) that constitute censorship complicity.

The second phase of research is an interview-based study, which is the primary method used to answer the primary research question (PQ) regarding the conditions of censorship enablement and constraint. The interviews also address three of the secondary questions regarding the consequences of censorship complicity (SQ2), and the obstacles (SQ3) and opportunities (SQ4) for collaborative action to resist censorship. This study involves a thematic analysis of 24 semi-structured interviews with 12 publishing professionals and 12 China-studies academics with, in most cases, first-hand experience of platform-based censorship of English-language scholarship in China. The semi-structured interviews follow a topic guide relating to three primary concerns: a) definitions of censorship complicity (theoretical); b) impacts of censorship complicity (empirical); and c) ethical considerations in research dissemination (value-based). The interviews involve a range of open questions, closed Likert-rating questions, and a simulated scenario—a vignette—asking participants to consider responses to a censorship request aligning with known positions that publishers have adopted. Transcripts from these interviews are coded and analysed using a combination of inductive and deductive coding and

theme generation, informed by concepts from the existing scholarship on digital censorship, such as Margaret Roberts' theory of 'porous censorship' in China (Roberts 2018).

Finally, to answer SQ5, regarding the changing conditions of censorship, a corpus analysis study supplements and triangulates findings from the primary interview-based approach. By comparing a publisher's online platform using UK-based and China-based IP addresses, 450 journal articles are identified that are unavailable in search returns via China-based IP addresses. Term frequency analysis is used involving a pre-defined set of keywords from research on the censorship of *China Quarterly* in 2017 (Wong and Kwong 2019) to determine whether the same or related terms are present in this more recent set of unavailable content. The results from this phase of research are compared against those from the interview study as a means of generating hypotheses regarding the changing term-based conditions of censorship.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

Having outlined the research focus, questions and design in this introduction, the second chapter of the thesis gives a more detailed account of the key events and wider context including the public allegations of censorship complicity implicating non-Chinese scholarly publishers in China (p.27). Chapter 3 reviews the relevant empirical literature related to the research focus, including studies that address the censorship of scholarly research in China and broader considerations of digital censorship and corporate complicity in Chinese censorship, particularly in the US tech sector (p.75). Chapter 4 describes the research design and methodology in full, including the research paradigm, the rationale for a mixed-methods exploratory design, the data collection and analysis approaches used for the interview and the corpus analysis studies, and the research limitations and ethical considerations (p.109).

Chapter 5 critically reviews and adapts the relevant theoretical literature on censorship to define censorship complicity in the context of online research distribution in China (p.146). Chapter 6 presents original findings from the thematic analysis of interview data gathered (p.183) as the primary phase of data collection and analysis that also partly informs the design and outcomes of the corpus analysis study, given in Chapter 7 (p.262). The central outcomes from the thesis' three phases of research, given in Chapters 5-7, are integrated in Chapter 8 (p.280) and related back to the primary and secondary research questions. Finally, Chapter 9 (p.305) summarising the central contributions to new knowledge and presents a set of recommendations for future research and industry applications arising from the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: Research context

2.1. Introduction

In August 2017, reports emerged that Cambridge University Press (CUP) had complied with requests from China's General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) to remove over 1,000 ebooks and 315 online research articles and book reviews from their China-facing content platforms (Adams 2017). CUP's apparent complicity with China's censorship rules sparked media scrutiny and outrage worldwide. Since then, many more non-Chinese publishers and scholarly information service providers have become publicly implicated in censorship concerns in China. These developments represent a shift in focus in China's censorship efforts from domestic Chinese-language outlets to English-language scholarly books, journals and resource databases intended for a global audience of researchers.

This research context chapter takes these revelations of censorship complicity in the global scholarly communications industry as its primary focus. It will open with a brief timeline of events (p.29) that are central to this PhD study's primary aim: to understand the conditions under which censorship practices affecting online research journals are enabled or constrained. The chapter will then offer a more comprehensive examination of the documents, press reports, academic responses and wider commentary related to five scholarly publishers' reported involvement in online journal censorship: Cambridge University Press (CUP) (p.32), Springer Nature (p.37), Sage Publishing (p.40), Taylor & Francis (p.41), and Brill (p.43).

In the second section of this chapter (p.47), three forms of alleged platform-based censorship complicity are presented relating to the timeline of events described in the preceding section. These forms of alleged censorship complicity are returned to throughout the thesis, for example the theory chapter that aims to define censorship complicity in this context (p.146), as well as elements of the research design, including the interview vignette (p.130). The fourth

section (p.50) examines the changes to China's publication import regulations and research policy framework, which have contributed to the new climate of censorship affecting non-Chinese scholarly publishers. This section also describes China's evolving research assessment framework between 2017 and 2022, and the regulatory and commercial pressures facing international research publishers in the Chinese market. The scope of concerns is expanded further, beyond China's borders, to encompass the commercial constraints of subscription-based and Open Access scholarly publishing in the US, UK and Europe—constraints that are exerting additional pressures on non-Chinese scholarly publishers to tailor their services to the world's largest research economy (Lu, 2022).

The fifth section (p.56) turns to related concerns in book publishing and in academic (p.57) and trade non-fiction markets (p.59) along a timeline coinciding with the core events detailed above. This includes Allen & Unwin's decision to withdraw from publishing Australian academic Clive Hamilton's *Silent Invasion* (Hamilton 2018) due to alleged legal threats from the Chinese Communist Party. The self-censorship of reprinted editions of English-language books intended for resale into China, including Edward Snowden's *Permanent Record* (Snowden 2019), published by Metropolitan Books, is also covered in this section; as are the tightening constraints on academic book publishing and distribution in Hong Kong, in the wake of China's Hong Kong National Security Law.

The fifth section contextualises the censorship pressures facing scholarly publishers inside and outside of China, involving their primary customers and content producers—research libraries and academic authors (p.62)—and their intermediaries: China-based research importers. These pressures include overt political repression and more subtle forms of constraint on Western academics operating in China, as well as the tightening space for scholarly debate on topics of global concern; for example, the alleged outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan and China's post-pandemic response. Finally, this section takes up the theme of

corporate complicity in Chinese censorship (p.67), with a comparative analysis of statements and reporting surrounding the involvement of American tech firms in related concerns, in an effort to draw out commonalities and distinctive elements of censorship complicity in online research distribution. The themes and observations from this chapter inform later stages of thesis, such as the thematic analysis of publisher interviews in chapter 6 (p.183) and the definition of censorship in the context of online research dissemination (p.146).

2.2. Chinese Censorship Complicity in Online Journal Publishing: Timeline of Events

This section of the context chapter will summarise the events that form the central research focus of the thesis. It will begin with a tabulated timeline of events (Table 1), which will then be described in narrative form in the sub-sections that follow, encompassing all public reports of censorship complicity implicating scholarly publishers in China, 2017-2019—namely, Cambridge University Press, LexisNexis, Springer Nature, Sage, Taylor & Francis, and Brill. The section that follows this one will relate situate these events within the wider context of China’s publications import regulations and research policy landscape before turning to related accusations of censorship complicity other sectors.

Date	Event(s)	Publisher(s) involved	Source(s)
17/08/17	Dr. Jonathan Henshaw, an editorial board member of <i>China Quarterly</i> , reveals on Twitter that the journal's publisher, <i>Cambridge University Press</i> , has received a request from China's General Administration of Press and Publications to remove a list of 300 journal articles and book reviews from the publisher's site in China.	Cambridge University Press	(Jonathan Henshaw (@Henshaw_PhD) 2017)
18/08/17	<i>China Quarterly</i> 's editor, Dr. Tim Pringle, and CUP both issue public statements confirming that 315 articles have been removed from the publisher's site in China. CUP releases	Cambridge University Press	(Balding 2017a; 'Cambridge University Press on Twitter', n.d.; Phillips 2017;

a pdf of all affected content. First press reporting in *The Guardian*. Open letters criticising CUP's acquiescence from James Millward (Georgetown University), Greg Distelhorst (University of Toronto) and Jessica Chen Weiss (Cornell University). Prof. Christopher Balding launches a petition to boycott CUP until they reverse course.

Millward 2017b; Greg Distelhorst (@gregdistelhorst) 2017)

21/08/17	Dr. Tim Pringle issues follow-up statement confirming CUP's intention to reverse the <i>China Quarterly</i> censorship. CUP issues statement, confirming that the content has been reinstated. The Association for Asian Studies issues statement confirming that CUP received a separate request to remove 100 articles from <i>Journal of Asian Studies</i> . Reuters reports that LexisNexis has withdrawn two legal and business information databases from China due to related content restrictions.	Cambridge University Press; LexisNexis	(Pringle 2017; Cambridge University Press 2017c; Association for Asian Studies 2017; Reuters 2017)
31/08/17	<i>Financial Times</i> journalists reveal that over 1,000 articles in <i>Journal of Chinese Political Science</i> and <i>International Politics</i> have been suppressed on Springer Nature's platform in China and are missing from keyword searches.	Springer Nature	(Bland 2017b)
01/09/17	A Change.org petition is launched calling for a peer review boycott of academic publications that censor content in China directed at 'five major publishing companies that control over half of international peer reviewed academic work'.	Reed-Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley-Blackwell; Taylor & Francis; Sage	(Makley 2017)
02/09/17	Springer Nature release a statement confirming that they have applied access limitations on content in China to comply with local regulations on behalf of a state-owned importer, China National Publications Import & Export Corporation.	Springer Nature	(Page 2017)
03/08/18	Editors of the Index on Censorship, published by Sage, release a public statement that 115 articles from Index on Censorship magazine have been blocked on a Sage-owned database of academic journals in China	Sage	(Censorship 2018)

03/10/18	Editors of Palgrave's Transcultural Research book series discontinue their publishing contract with the imprint's parent company, Springer Nature, over reports of censorship complicity in China.	Springer Nature	(Redden 2018)
20/12/18	Taylor & Francis confirm in a public statement that Chinese content importers have opted not to include 83 journals in the publisher's Social Sciences and Humanities journals package.	Taylor & Francis	(Taylor & Francis 2018)
05/04/19	China scholar Timothy Grose claims that a review scheduled for publication in Brill's China and Asia journal faced edits and delays due to material critical of China's human rights record in Xinjiang.	Brill	(Timothy Grose [@GroseTimothy] 2019)
18/04/19	China scholars, Jacob Edmond and Lorraine Wong, reveal that several contributions to a special issue of Frontiers of Literary Studies in China had been amended by the journal's editor to abide by China's restrictions on political content.	Brill; Higher Education Press (HEP)	(Edmond 2019)
25/04/19	Brill announces the termination of their distribution agreement with Higher Education Press over accusations of censorship complicity.	Brill; Higher Education Press (HEP)	(Redden 2019a)
19/05/19	Editor of China and Asia, Xiarong Han rejects claims of censorship complicity, claiming that delays and edits to Grose's review reflected a difference in opinion over scholarly conventions for book reviews.	Brill	(Xiaorong 2019)
26/06/19	Brill's Chief Publishing Officer, Jasmin Lange, publicly accepts the perceived censorship of Grose's review and describes changes in publishing policies resulting from the incident.	Brill	(Lange 2019)

Table 1: Timeline of public reports and publisher statements relating to allegations of censorship complicity affecting English-language journals distributed in China

2.2.1. Cambridge University Press

On 17th August 2017, 11.44pm GMT, Dr. Jonathan Henshaw, an early-career historian of modern China and editorial board member of prominent China-studies journal, *China Quarterly*, posted on Twitter¹ a letter from the journal's editor, Dr. Tim Pringle, confirming that the publisher had received a list of 300 articles and book reviews 'to be pulled from the CUP's site in China' (Jonathan Henshaw (@Henshaw_PhD) 2017). The letter claimed that the request had come from China's General Administration of Press and Publications (GAPP), via the Press's China-based publications importer. According to publishing staff at CUP, this was the second request of its kind, the first having involved over 1,000 e-books available via the Press's online platform in China. The affected content mentioned common terms, such as 'Tiananmen, the Cultural Revolution, Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan', and included 'material published last month right back to the 1960s.' (ibid.)

Pringle stated that CUP had claimed to have blocked access to the affected articles to avoid their entire content platform becoming inaccessible in China. CUP also claimed that other publishers had already lost access to the entirety of their published output for failing to comply with China's content regulators, although Pringle added that 'none of the other China studies journal editors I have contacted were aware of similar demands'. (ibid.) Pringle closed his letter promising a public statement and 'a more detailed response and policy approach' (ibid.) in the coming weeks.

With Pringle's revelation of CUP's involvement in censorship circulating widely on Twitter, the *China Quarterly* editor responded the following day, on 18th August 2017, with a full statement expressing 'deep concern and disappointment' over the actions of 'a Chinese import

¹ ¹ Rebranded as 'X' in 2022—referred to as Twitter throughout this thesis, which largely covers events that occurred before Elon Musk bought and rebranded the platform.

agency’ (Pringle 2017)—not accusing CUP directly—for having censored over 300 articles in *China Quarterly*. He added:

this restriction of academic freedom is not an isolated move but an extension of policies that have narrowed the space for public engagement and discussion across Chinese society. (Pringle, 2017)

CUP issued their own statement the same day, confirming the publisher’s compliance with ‘an instruction from a Chinese import agency to block individual articles’ to ‘ensure that other academic and educational materials we publish remain available to researchers and educators’ (Cambridge University Press 2017a). CUP also published a list of 315 articles and book reviews that had been removed from *China Quarterly*’s Chinese website (Cambridge University Press 2017b). CUP reiterated their earlier claim, reported in Pringle’s letter, that competitors had taken alternative routes that resulted in ‘entire collections of content blocked in China until they have enabled the import agencies to block access to individual articles’ (Cambridge University Press 2017a).

Despite acceding to importers’ demands and actively removing articles from their China-facing platform, CUP stated that they ‘do not, and will not, proactively censor our content and will only consider blocking individual items (when requested to do so) when the wider availability of content is at risk.’ (ibid.) CUP described Chinese censorship as a deep-rooted problem that requires a ‘longer-term approach’ (ibid.). Referring to the Publisher’s Association of China’s recent admission into the International Publisher’s Association (IPA), they emphasised the centrality of the IPA’s freedom-to-publish principles and pledged to ‘take every opportunity to influence this agenda’ (ibid.).

By the time CUP released their public statement, allegations of censorship complicity had already reached reporters writing for the education section of *The Guardian*, who published the first press report of publisher involvement (Phillips 2017). *The Guardian*’s coverage was quickly

followed by reports in the *New York Times* (Johnson 2017), *South China Morning Post* (M. Lau 2017) and *The Wall Street Journal* (Chen 2017), with statements solicited from *China Quarterly* authors, decrying CUP's 'pathetic' and 'extraordinary capitulation to China', having 'sold its soul for millions of govt [sic] dollars' (Phillips 2017). Open letters began to circulate from prominent China scholars, including James Millward (Georgetown University) (Millward 2017b), and (jointly) Greg Distelhorst (University of Toronto) and Jessica Chen Weiss (Cornell University) (Greg Distelhorst (@gregdistelhorst) 2017), calling for CUP to '[j]ust say "no" to China's self-defeating censorship demands' (ibid.), and threatening an authorship and peer-review boycott of CUP's publications unless they reversed their decision. On the same day, Christopher Balding, then an Associate Professor of Political Economics at Peking University,² launched a formal petition to boycott CUP's products and services (Balding 2017a).

On 21st August, *China Quarterly*'s editor, Dr. Tim Pringle, issued a follow-up statement, confirming that CUP 'intends to repost immediately the articles removed from its website' (Pringle 2017), having acted without the consent of *China Quarterly*'s editorial board. CUP followed Pringle's statement by confirming that they had reinstated access to all *China Quarterly* content to 'uphold the principle of academic freedom on which the university's work is founded' (Cambridge University Press 2017c). According to CUP, the decision to block access was 'a temporary measure pending discussion with the academic leadership of the University of Cambridge, and pending a scheduled meeting with the Chinese importer in Beijing' (ibid.). The Association for Asian Studies confirmed simultaneously that they had been notified by CUP of a request to remove from their Chinese site 100 articles from the *Journal of Asian Studies*. Unlike *China Quarterly*, CUP did not comply with this request and retained access to the affected articles (Association for Asian Studies 2017).

² Christopher Balding has since been removed from his post at Peking University and left China, stating that 'the restrictions and how much [the CCP] monitor you have increased significantly over the past couple of years ... China has reached a point where I do not feel safe being a professor and discussing even the economy, business and financial markets' (Reuters 2018)

2.2.2. Fallout from Cambridge University Press' *China Quarterly* Incident

News of CUP's reversal was circulated widely in high-profile media outlets (and to a greater extent than earlier reports of their involvement) such as the *Washington Post* (Denyer 2017), *New York Times* (Buckley 2017), *The Guardian* (Haas 2017), *South China Morning Post* (S. Zheng 2017) and *Times Higher Education* (Else 2017). CUP's reversal also prompted an article from the Chinese Communist Party loyalist newspaper, *The Global Times*, arguing that Western institutions, like CUP, have the freedom to choose whether to engage with China: '[i]f they think China's Internet market is so important that they can't miss out, they need to respect Chinese law and adapt to the Chinese way.' (Shepherd and Potkin 2017)

In press reports and commentary outside of China, the backlash among academic communities to the Press' initial acquiescence to censorship demands was widely credited for the U-turn, with Dr. Pringle claiming that the Press had changed course facing a 'justifiably intense reaction from the global academic community' (Else 2017). Responses from the broader academic and publishing communities were mixed. On the 22nd August, the International Publishers' Association (IPA) issued a statement applauding

the move from Cambridge University Press to restore the censored articles. We ask the Chinese authorities to respect that decision. We urge the authorities not to ban the journal. We stand against censorship. (Flood 2017)

The IPA's statement was supported by the UK's Publisher's Association, emphasising the restrictions facing publishers in the Chinese market (Publishers Association 2017), and the US-headquartered Association of Information Science and Technology (ASIST), celebrating CUP's reversal and condemning all 'censorship and the limitation of access to information in all its forms' (Association for Information Science & Technology 2017). Elsewhere the commentary turned to the Press's apparent willingness to self-censor in the absence of wider scrutiny. Paul Mason, writing in *The Guardian*, described CUP's initial acquiescence as a 'craven submission to

Chinese censorship demands’ (Mason 2017), characterising their subsequent reversal as a necessary act of self-interest in pursuit of an academy ‘devoted to truth’, rather than ‘securing the power of Chinese officials’ (ibid.).

Academic commentators, writing in the aftermath of the *China Quarterly* incident, turned their attention towards the conditions that led to CUP’s initial acquiescence. Jonathan Sullivan commented on the Press’s diminished reputation, following their initial compliance with censorship demands, and the likelihood of further reprisals and demands from the CCP (Sullivan 2017a). He called for a coherent policy, across the publishing industry, to deal with these demands. Christopher Balding argued that China’s domestic research censorship had foreign ramifications, given the prevalence of Chinese-funded research centres, for example at Oxford and Cambridge (Balding 2017b). For Balding, restrictions on research topics and arguments inevitably shape the output of their host institutions. James Farley and Jonathan Sullivan (Farley and Sullivan 2017) also drew parallels with the CCP’s readiness to impose its norms in the West (ibid.), influencing the content of films, of university curricula via Chinese student associations, and circulating propaganda ‘masquerading as news in western broadsheets like the *New York Times* and *Telegraph*’ (ibid.).

Within publishing communities, some commentators suggested that CUP had not engaged in censorship from the outset. Kent Anderson, then President of the Society for Scholarly Publishing, shifted the weight of responsibility from the Press to the Chinese government: to ‘those who seek to censor, not on those who fall victim to governmental or corporate extortion or bullying’ (K. Anderson 2017). Roger van Zwanenberg, founder of Zed Press, and Jessica Lagan, Publisher of Cambridge Archive Editions, writing in a letter to Paul Mason’s opinion piece cited earlier (Mason, 2017), both argued that the outcry against CUP was misguided: ‘[a]ll societies have their own particular sensibilities; many have positions of sacredness. . . all societies limit free speech in varying detail’, wrote Van Zwanenberg,

questioning the efficacy of ‘lecturing other societies with different histories’ (van Zwanenberg and Lagan 2017). Lagan emphasised CUP’s limited role in determining what its customers want and contrasts their actions with pre-publication censorship:

[t]he publishers removed content unwanted by the customer. The censorship is by the customer ... not Cambridge. If the Chinese government had asked CUP not to publish a particular work in order to maintain access to their market that would be unacceptable, but that is not what happened here. (ibid.)

The question of whether tailoring journal collections, such that specific articles are unavailable in a given territory, constitutes censorship—in contrast to other supposedly ‘editorial’ amendments—is returned to in the discussion of publishers’ routes to complying with censorship demands below (p.47) and in this thesis’ theory chapter that aims to define censorship in this context (p.146).

2.2.3. LexisNexis and Springer Nature

Press reports and wider commentary following CUP’s reversal on 21st August coincided with a Reuters report the following day, suggesting that LexisNexis, a subsidiary of the RELX Group (including Elsevier) and provider of legal, regulatory and business information,³ had faced related content restrictions and withdrawn two databases from China: Nexis and LexisNexis Academic (Reuters 2017). Ahead of the 2017 Beijing Book Fair, Reporters Without Borders released a statement urging publishers ‘not to get involved in the Chinese regime’s censorship’ (Reporters Without Borders 2017), while a petition was circulated, via Change.org, on behalf of Asia studies academics, supporting a peer review boycott of all academic publishers that censored their publications in China (Makley 2017).

³ A subsidiary of the RELX group, parent organisation of the Dutch scientific publisher, Elsevier.

Despite these warnings, on 31st October 2017, news broke that Springer Nature had complied with requests from Chinese authorities to prevent access to journal articles on larger scale than CUP's *China Quarterly* incident. Ben Bland, writing for the *Financial Times*, revealed that over 1,000 articles in the *Journal of Chinese Political Science* and *International Politics* had been removed from the publisher's platform and were absent in search returns when accessed in China (Bland 2017b). According to the report, all affected content included politically sensitive keywords, such as *Taiwan*, *Xinjiang* and *Hong Kong*, with some terms (*Cultural Revolution*, *Tiananmen*, *Tibet*) returning no results in affected journals, for example the *Journal of Chinese Political Science*. Springer Nature issued a statement that they had complied with 'local distribution laws' (Page 2017), which are enforced by its partner, the state-owned China National Publications Import & Export Corporation (Bland 2017a), 'to prevent a much greater impact on our customers and authors' (Page 2017).

Following news of Springer Nature's involvement in censorship practices, Kevin Carrico pointed to the relatively minor backlash from academics in the face of the Springer Nature revelations. He called on academics to 'recapture their shock' before the practice was normalized (Carrico 2017). However, Springer Nature's involvement in censorship controversies did compel some prominent trade bodies in scholarly publishing towards tentative stewardship to tackle the issue. In January 2018, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)—a leading advisory body for ethics guidance and standards in scholarly publishing—issued a statement on censorship, reaffirming COPE's 'principles of academic freedom and editorial independence' in the face of 'requests' or 'practices' that 'interfere with and restrict the communication and distribution of scientific research results' (COPE 2018). Then, in March 2018, the Association of University Presses issued a joint statement of guiding principles for its membership (Association of University Presses 2018), made up of the world's leading university-affiliated scholarly publishers, stating that 'any bowdlerization of a curated collection of scholarship (e.g., a journal issue, an

edited volume) [does] damage to the editorial work invested in the construction of that collection' (ibid.).

The AUP's characterisation of publishers, such as Springer Nature, as having 'bowdlerized' their content collections in China faced criticism within the Asia studies community. Michel Hockx, Professor of Chinese Literature at the University of Notre Dame, writing in *Times Higher Education* in May 2018, rejected this notion outright (Hockx 2018), arguing that the AUP's statement's tacit notion of censorship relied on 'outmoded claims about consumption' in scholarly publishing (ibid.). For Hockx, the 'integrity of the journal issue' misrepresents how readers access and how institutions buy academic content, i.e. at the article-level, via content aggregators, bundles and sales deals: '[i]t is only because large publishers offer to sell things in bulk at a cheaper price that the issue of "censorship" has emerged' (ibid.). Hockx's argument offers some implicit (likely unintentional) support for Springer Nature's own characterization of their intervention as 'not Editorial censorship' (Page 2017). This argument is returned to in the theory chapter, which explores notions of editorial censorship in relation to the online scholarly record (p.179).

Disquiet within Asia studies circles culminated with reports that the editors of Palgrave's *Transcultural Research* book series had discontinued their publishing contract with the imprint's parent company, Springer Nature, over successive reports of censorship complicity in China (Redden, 2018). In their statement submitted to the publisher, six past and current editors of the book series rejected Springer Nature's rationale for suppressing content—the argument that less than 1 per-cent of content was restricted to allow access to the majority, itself an object of criticism (Millward 2017a)—instead insisting that such compromises work against the best interests of their scholarly communities:

[t]he Springer argument that 'only 1 percent' of Springer Nature articles offered were affected disregards the fact that once this door of accepting censorship orders is opened,

nothing stands in the way of China (or any other state) expanding its list of banned subjects. (Herren-Oesch et al. 2018)

Stephen Inchcoombe, then Springer Nature's Chief Publishing Officer, responded by claiming that CUP had faced severe repercussions from reinstating access to *China Quarterly's* initially suppressed content, to the extent that

all articles from 'banned' journals (both new articles and those previously accessible) and all books deemed to be 'suspect' by Chinese importers or by the Chinese government's appointed online text mining engines, are now blocked from being accessed in China (Redden 2018)

Responding to this claim, *China Quarterly's* editor, Tim Pringle, revealed that although the journal had faced 'a significant drop in institutional subscriptions in China' (ibid.), the 'CUP/CQ site and tables of content remain available' (ibid.), separate from the underlying content, which was likely unavailable due to the reluctance of import agencies to authorise the purchase of subscriptions to the journal in China. Despite growing calls for boycott and protest over Springer Nature's decision to suppress content in China, the publisher has not publicly changed course.

2.2.4. Sage Publishing

Following Ben Bland's reporting for the *Financial Times*, revealing the involvement of Springer Nature in platform self-censorship in China, several more publishers were contacted for position statements on the issue. The majority stated that they would not self-censor their content platforms in China, opting instead to remove products from the Chinese market at a loss of revenue and institutional access; among them, University of Chicago Press, MIT Press and Oxford University Press (Bland 2017c).

In contrast, Sage Publications, a US-based independent scholarly publisher, suggested a more flexible approach should they encounter any demands to block content: ‘we would engage in consultations with learned societies, editors and others shaped by the specific request in order to decide how to respond.’ (ibid.) They followed this statement by clarifying that as ‘a matter of general principle, SAGE does not block or remove content in response to such a request’ and (writing in December 2017) that they had not received any requests to do so by Chinese authorities (Sullivan 2017b).

However, in August 2018, the editors of the *Index on Censorship*, published by Sage, released a public statement that ‘115 articles from *Index on Censorship* magazine, some of which mention Tiananmen Square, have been blocked on the Sage database of academic journals in China (a paid-to-view platform for academics)’ (Index on Censorship 2018). The editors of the *Index* pledged to make all affected articles freely accessible, worldwide, and to translate the articles into Mandarin (ibid.), although no subsequent statements were released to the public, either by the *Index* editors or Sage, to confirm or to elaborate on the consequences following this proposed course of action. At the time of writing, no further statements or incidents of platform-based censorship have been raised publicly concerning Sage and their business interests in China.

2.2.5. Taylor & Francis

In December 2018, the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) circulated an undated notification among its membership, confirming that the Association’s journal, *Asia Studies Review* (ASR), published by British commercial publisher, Taylor & Francis, was inaccessible in China (Asian Studies Association of Australia 2018). According to the notice, Taylor & Francis had informed ASAA that import agencies in China had decided not to include ASR in the publisher’s Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences subscription package because six articles in the journal were deemed ‘objectionable’ (ibid.). The ASAA informed its members in China that articles

published before September 2018 would still be accessible (if their members' affiliated libraries subscribed to the journal) and that they would 'also be able to read any current article in the journal, including free content, if sent a link to the article.' (ibid.) The ASAA pledged to work with Taylor & Francis to restore full access to ASR in China.

Following the ASAA's notification, on 20th December 2018, Taylor & Francis released a public statement revealing that the access constraints extended beyond ASR, encompassing 83 journals in the publisher's Social Sciences and Humanities journals package, which importers had 'opted not to include' in collections of content distributed to Chinese research libraries (Taylor & Francis 2018). Taylor & Francis resisted the accusations of censorship complicity implied in the ASAA's members' notice, stating that

Taylor & Francis does not participate in censorship in China, or anywhere else. The ability to sell publishing services, or any other services, into China is controlled by import agencies. They have the right to select what they would like to import. (ibid.)

Like Sage, Taylor & Francis suggested a consultative approach, stating that the changes to their content packages were the subject of 'open and transparent' discussions with 'a number of our society publishing partners earlier this year' and they pledged to 'work towards' selling content packages in China, unaltered, in consultation with their publishing partners in future (ibid.).

Despite the scale of affected content, Taylor & Francis' involvement in censorship concerns received comparatively little press attention or academic commentary. A *Reuters* report on 24th December reiterated the facts of the ASAA correspondence and the publisher's statement (Shepherd 2018), followed by a short news item on the Reporters Without Borders (RFS) website, on the 4th January 2019, titled, 'China censors British academic publisher' (Reporters Without Borders 2019) tacitly endorsing the publisher's denial of censorship

complicity. The characterisation implicit in 'Taylor & Francis' statement and subsequent RSF report of the publisher as victim of rather than complicity party in Chinese censorship has faced some scrutiny within academic communities, however. For example, China scholar, Nicholas Loubere, wrote that

it seems that the Chinese censors have fully realised that they do not need to censor anything themselves. Rather, they can just cancel subscriptions and then let the 'Great Paywall' do the work for them. (Loubere (@NDLoubere) 2018)

Loubere openly criticised Taylor & Francis for refusing to share (publicly or in confidence) information on the journal articles or subsequent journals implicated by China's content restrictions, despite publishing the journal on behalf of the ASAA. For Loubere, this position amounts to a 'remarkable assertion of ownership' by the publisher that 'makes it abundantly clear where the power lies' (ibid.). These initial remarks from Loubere laid the foundation for a more fully articulated critique of paywall-based commercial publishing models in China and elsewhere (Loubere and Franceschini 2017; 2018; Loubere 2020; Pia et al. 2020), which will be returned to in the following chapter, as part of a discussion of publisher paywalls as a mechanism of platform-based self-censorship.

2.2.6. Brill

Announcing the publication of the 40th volume of *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR) the journal's co-editors, Jacob Edmond and Lorraine Wong, revealed on 18th April 2019 (via Edmond's personal blog) that three of the volume's essays had previously faced censorship in a separate publication, *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* (FLSC) (Edmond 2019). At that time, FLSC was subject to a publishing partnership between Netherlands-based commercial publisher, Brill, and China-based Higher Education Press (ibid.), affiliated to China's Ministry of Education. The three essays were linked thematically by 'the powerful and contested

role played by the Chinese script in imagining and questioning notions of Chineseness and of the Chinese state' (ibid.). One of the three essays, written by China scholar, Jin Liu, focused on Chinese blog cartoonist Li Xiaoguai's use of invented Chinese script as a form of coded political satire. Shortly before the intended publication date, the editors received proofs for the issue, absent Liu's essay, with the editors' extended introduction 'crudely edited to remove all mention of Liu's article, though one mention of her subject, Li Xiaoguai, had somehow evaded the censor's eye' (ibid.)

The guest editors raised the amendments to the *FLSC* special issue with the journal's US-based lead editor, Xudong Zhang, who allegedly replied that '*FLSC* has its editorial office in Beijing and so must abide by normal Chinese censorship' (ibid.), adding that 'Liu's essay should never have been accepted and that he was now using his editorial prerogative to reject it' (ibid.). Wong and Edmonds subsequently withdrew the issue from *FLSC*, publishing the contributions in *CLEAR* instead, a self-published title affiliated with the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Brill responded the following day (19th April 2019) in a Twitter thread, stating that since 2012 they had formed a publishing partnership with Higher Education Press (HEP), whereby HEP managed editorial processes for *FLSC*, while Brill distributed the journal in print and online to customers outside of China (Brill (@degruyter_brill) 2019). Brill expressed their concern about the allegations in Wong and Edmonds's blog post, stating that their 'cooperation with HEP is under review and Brill will not hesitate to take any necessary action to uphold our publishing ethics.' (ibid.)

Following Wong and Edmonds's revelations, reported in press coverage by Elizabeth Redden for *Inside Higher Education* (Redden 2019a; 2019b), on April 25th 2019, Brill announced that they had terminated their distribution agreement with Higher Education Press, covering four journals published by their Beijing-based partner: *FLSC*, *Frontiers of History in China*, *Frontiers of Law in China* and *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*. In a statement solicited by Redden, Edmonds

celebrated the move ‘as a small win in what is an ongoing battle against censorship creep’ (Redden 2019a), while criticising Brill and their partner for ‘a duplicitous and unethical representation of these journals as operating in accordance with the standards of academic freedom that we expect’ (ibid.). *FLSC*’s editor in chief, Xudong Zhang, a China scholar based in the United States and employed (at that time) at New York University, refused to comment publicly on the incident.

Overlapping with the *FLSC* case, another allegation of pre-publication censorship reached public attention concerning an academic journal distributed—and this time published independently—by Brill, titled *China and Asia: A Journal in Historical Studies*. On 5th April 2019, Timothy Grose, an Assistant Professor at the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, posted on Twitter a book review of anthropologist Tom Cliff’s *Oil and Water: Being Han in Xinjiang* (Cliff 2016), inviting publication of the review in a relevant China-studies outlet. Grose claimed that the review, which had originally been scheduled for publication in Brill’s *China and Asia*, had faced severe edits and delays at the hands of the journal’s editor, Han Xiaorong, Professor of Chinese culture at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Timothy Grose [@GroseTimothy] 2019).

Grose’s review opened with a description of detained Uighurs in ‘concentration re-education centres’ (Redden 2019c), based on his own research and first-hand testimony, having conducted field work in Xinjiang, before praising Cliff’s ethnographic work for ‘much-needed clarity [on] the confounding situation in the region’ (ibid.). Grose’s opening passage was removed from the version of the review returned to him by Xiaorong. Grose claimed that having refused to accept the amendments, Xiaorong delayed the review for several weeks before expressing ‘serious doubts over the possibility of publishing piece’, followed by ‘three more months of silence’ (ibid.). Three days following Grose’s tweet, Jonathan Sullivan at the

University of Nottingham's Asia Research Institute published the book review unredacted in the University's self-published title, *The Asia Dialogue* (ibid.).

China and Asia editor, Han Xiaorong, replied in full to the accusations of censorship in a blog post (Xiaorong 2019). He contradicted Grose's implication that delays were due to a reluctance to publish material critical of China's human rights record in Xinjiang. Instead, Xiaorong claimed that the book review was 'not directly relevant to our journal's central theme, which is China's historical relations with other countries' (ibid), adding that the amendments to Grose's review were due to a difference of opinion over the conventions of scholarly book reviews, which in Xiaorong's view, typically open with 'the book rather than a political message' (ibid.). Xiaorong rejected the accusation of censorship on the grounds that

[i]f censorship was my aim, I would have rejected the review immediately without revisions, because the book under review and the rest of the book review were also critical of China's practices (ibid.)

Xiaorong's response to Grose's accusations and the surrounding controversy involving the journal's publisher, Brill, developed into multi-post dialogue on the Modern Chinese Literature and Culture blog between the parties, prompting an intervention from Brill's Chief Publishing Officer, Jasmin Lange, on 26th June 2019 (Lange 2019). Lange accepted that Han's amendments to the political content of Grose's review could be 'perceived as censorship and a breach of our publication ethics' (ibid.). Lange claimed that the matter was not discussed with Brill before Grose raised the issue publicly on Twitter and she explained that a series of measures had been introduced to address censorship concerns, including the appointment of a *China and Asia* co-editor based outside of Mainland China and Hong Kong; a special issue in on 'the role of Xinjiang in the historical relations between China and Central Asia' (at the request of Grose); revised publishing ethics guidelines regarding editorial bias, with an explicit clause on censorship; and a dedicated email address 'to provide authors with the ability to address any concerns about

editorial decisions directly with Brill' (ibid.). At the time of writing, no further claims of pre- or post-publication censorship have been made publicly against *China and Asia*, or Brill.

2.3. Three forms of alleged platform-based censorship complicity

The first section of this research context chapter described the events that form the primary research concern of this PhD thesis, involving reported cases of publisher self-censorship in China affecting English-language online scholarly journals. In each case, the implicated publisher faced claims of self-censorship, or of otherwise facilitating Chinese censorship practices. In turn, some of the implicated publishers, such as Cambridge University Press (CUP) and Springer Nature, responded publicly with claims that amendments to journal access in China were introduced to comply with China's regulatory framework regarding the distribution and import of overseas publications. Before moving on from the central events that form the primary scope of this PhD research, a summary of three different ways that publishers are reported to have responded to censorship concerns in China will be given.

1. Removing journal articles from the China-facing platform of online journals

This describes the initial approach taken by CUP to remove individual journal articles from the China-facing online platform of *China Quarterly*. These changes were made at request of CUP's China-based publications importer, acting under the instruction of China's General Administration of Press and Publications (GAPP). In exploring the implications of this route in later discussions it will be assumed that this route amounts to the removal of entire journal articles and associated metadata from online journal issues, including titles, abstracts, author details and references. CUP publicly admitted to removing journal articles from *China Quarterly*'s online journal platform, before reinstating the affected articles and making them free to access globally, following backlash.

Based on IP-based comparisons between journal platforms, accessed via a UK-based and a China-based IP address, at least one academic publisher appears to have taken the same route. For reasons detailed in the research design chapter (p.109), this publisher has been anonymised. The articles that are inaccessible in China via this second publisher's platform form the basis of a corpus analysis study, also detailed in the research design and methodology chapter (p.135) and the interview analysis chapter (p.262). The affected article titles are listed in the online journal listings of journal issues; however, when accessed via a China-based IP address, the journal pages are empty, beyond a 'Page not found' message, rendering the article full-text, abstract, and associated metadata (author details, references, funding information) and supplementary material (images, multimedia, datasets) inaccessible via China-based web servers.

2. Amending the search function of publishers' China-facing journal platforms

This is the approach that Springer Nature allegedly took to comply with demands from the China National Publications Import & Export Corporation. This allegation is based on Ben Bland's reporting for the *Financial Times* in 2017 (Bland 2017b). Working with a China-based collaborator, Bland reported discrepancies in search returns via Springer Nature's online platform, such that terms such as *Cultural Revolution*, *Tiananmen* and *Tibet* returned no results in *Journal of Chinese Political Science* and *International Politics* when accessed in mainland China. It has not been verified via Bland's reporting or from subsequent press statements or commentary whether the underlying content remained accessible, or if the discrepancies affected only the publisher's search function. For the purposes of this thesis, as in other discussions of the case (Hockx 2018), it will be assumed that at the time of Bland's reporting, the discrepancies affected search returns via Springer Nature's platform only, not the underlying content.

3. Removing journals from sales packages sold to China-based institutions

This is the approach taken by Taylor & Francis, as reported in a press release from the publisher in 2018 (Taylor & Francis 2018). Taylor & Francis claimed that they refused to take

route 1 (to remove individual journal articles from journal issues) leaving Chinese research importers with the option ‘not to include’ 83 journals that contain inadmissible content (ibid.). It is not clear how these changes to sales packages were made without publisher involvement, but for the purposes of this thesis, it will be assumed that some mechanism has been introduced whereby China-based importers can remove journals from content packages independently. This is consistent with testimony from interviews, reported in the interview analysis chapter (p.183), concerning ‘modular content packages’, which are formed, sold and distributed in ways that allow for journal-level customisation.

The three approaches detailed above are not exhaustive but owing to ambiguity around the routes to compliance taken by other English-language scholarly publishers that publish content that is inadmissible in China, these approaches inform the thesis design and discussion. The route taken by Sage Publications, for example, is not clear and has not been the subject of conclusive investigative reporting, beyond a statement from editors of the *Index on Censorship*, reporting that over 100 articles are inaccessible via an unnamed research database in mainland China (Index on Censorship 2018). This thesis will remain neutral on the Sage Publications allegations, which have not been independently verified, and focus solely on the routes to compliance that have.

Finally, in terms of Brill’s alleged involvement in Chinese censorship concerns, while this is broadly consistent with route 1, involving the removal of individual journal articles, the alleged censorship occurred pre-publication, bypassing the publisher’s online platform. Therefore, these alleged journal amendments constitute a form of pre-publication censorship on the part of the implicated journal’s editorial team. This form of censorship is relevant to the thesis and the wider contextual considerations, including other instances of pre-publication editorial censorship, which will follow. However, the Brill case is strictly beyond the primary focus, which deals with the alleged involvement of English-language scholarly publishers in *post-publication* self-censorship

practices, involving amendments to online journals and their associated online publication platforms. This distinction, between pre-publication editorial censorship and post-publication platform-based self-censorship, will be detailed further in the theory chapter (p.146).

2.4. Recent changes to China's publications import regulations and research policy framework

Unlike the first part of this context chapter, which aimed to describe the primary scope of the thesis, this section and the others that follow will explore (non-exhaustively) a cluster of topics that offer some wider contextual explanations for China-based censorship complicity in scholarly publishing. This discussion will cover some common themes with respect to censorship and self-censorship in trade publishing, in higher education, and the technology and gaming industries. It will begin with China's regulatory framework concerning the import and distribution of publications in mainland China and recent changes to China's research policies and assessment criteria, which are relevant to Chinese censorship practices.

Constraints within mainland China and surrounding territories, including Macau, Taiwan and Hong Kong, on the publication and distribution of published material, in print and online, are longstanding and documented extensively—and historical precedents to the events concerning English-language scholarly publishers will be described in detail, in the literature review (p.75). Publishers and distributors of English-language publications intended for the Chinese market have faced restrictions ranging from definitions of China's territorial borders, descriptions of political upheaval in China's recent history, such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square student protests, or Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976. Since 2012, when Xi Jinping assumed office as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and president of the People's Republic of China (PRC), publishers inside and outside of mainland China, trading in the region, have faced growing pressure to amend or redact passages of printed books

and periodicals (Song 2022), to alter illustrations of China's territorial boundaries (ibid.), and to limit or to prohibit the publication and dissemination of titles associated with Chinese writers, artists, academics and public intellectuals that have fallen out of favour with China's ruling party (ibid.).

Despite these persistent and growing constraints in the Chinese market, until relatively recently, there have been very few reports of overt pre- or post-publication censorship pressures facing online English-language scholarly publications imported into China. Historically, publishers of periodicals in printed form have tended to avoid selling copies of titles that touch on politically sensitive subjects in the Chinese market (Anderson 2017). While access to periodicals in their online form have expanded considerably, industry commentators have speculated that publishers have sidestepped China's constraints on published material due to a) a longstanding reticence among non-Chinese publishers to import printed periodicals that contain politically sensitive material in the Chinese market, and b) the high cost barriers to accessing online scholarly publications, either via traditional journal subscriptions or pay-per-view article access (Johnson 2017).

In 2017, China's policy towards online English-language scholarly periodicals became more overtly hostile, however, with publishers facing requests from China's official publications and media regulator, the General Administration of Press and Publications (GAPP)⁴, to prevent access in China to published journal articles, mediated through China's authorised publications importers, such as the China National Publications Import and Export Group (CNPIEC). Commentators point to several relevant developments, such as a 2010 Chinese Communist Party (CCP) white paper, introducing an official policy of 'internet sovereignty', whereby '[w]ithin Chinese territory the Internet is under the jurisdiction of Chinese sovereignty' (Chinese

⁴ *Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó Xīnwén Chūbǎn Zǒngshǔ*—中华人民共和国新闻出版总署, sometimes translated as 'National Press and Publications Administration' or abbreviated as NPPA.

Communist Party 2010), encompassing the internet-based activities of non-Chinese organisations and individuals operating in China (Xi and Albert 2017). Added to this, in February 2016, Xi Jinping signalled a move towards regulatory stringency and political alignment across all China-based media platforms (E. Wong 2016), print and online, as well as new regulations aimed at constraining the publication and distribution of online content in China by non-Chinese publishers and platforms (ibid.).

Adding to these wider constraints, in the aftermath of self-censorship allegations concerning non-Chinese scholarly publishers, new regulations concerning the import and distribution of publications in mainland China have entered the public domain (Cooper 2022). A policy announcement, issued by the GAPP in 2019, titled the ‘Measures for the Recording of Major Subject Selections of Books, Periodicals, Audiovisual Products, and Electronic Publications’, offers some tentative explanations for the increased scrutiny of English-language online scholarly journals distributed in China (NPPA 2019). This regulation is concerned with the import and dissemination of publications involving ‘major selected topics’, defined as any published material concerning China’s national security and social stability; the construction of China’s national defence and army; internal documents relating to the Chinese state and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); speeches, writing, articles on the work and life of current and former part and state leaders; major events in the history of the CCP and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), with special reference to the attempts to ‘reflect and evaluate’ the Cultural Revolution; internal decision-making processes within the CCP or Chinese military, including the establishment of the CCP, government institutions, and the selection of ‘leading cadres’; important figures or events concerning the Kuomintang⁵ and other high-level ‘United Front targets’; significant events and the selection of major leaders in the Soviet union, Eastern Europe and ‘other socialist periods’; topics related to China’s diplomatic work; maps of China’s borders;

⁵ Referred to elsewhere as the Guomindang, the Nationalist Party of China or the Chinese Nationalist Party, which left mainland China for Taiwan after 1949.

and discussion of ‘special administrative regions’, such as Hong Kong and Macao, and Taiwan’s economy, politics, history, culture, and ‘important social affairs’ (NPPA 2019).

Under this policy, publishers and distributors of published material in China are obliged to register all relevant works for written approval from the GAPP, with the threat of annual inspections and ‘administrative sanctions’ for individuals associated with non-compliant organisations (ibid.). The events outlined above, concerning demands placed on non-Chinese publishers by China-based importers, acting under the instruction of the GAPP, suggest that this policy has been in force before its official publication; particularly given alignment between the keywords and topics associated with content removed, for example, from *China Quarterly*’s online platform in China (Wong and Kwong 2019), and the scope of ‘major selected topics’ described above.

Alongside greater regulatory stringency in China concerning English-language scholarship, these developments have coincided with China’s rise as a pre-eminent research economy. The volume of published research articles from China indexed in Scopus has surpassed that of the United States, with China becoming the world’s largest producer of scholarship in academic journals (Lu 2022). While China’s research culture has been mired by an overreliance on citations metrics as a quality proxy (Shu, Liu, and Larivière 2022) and a surge in paper mills and related research and publications ethics concerns (Else and Van Noorden 2021), by its own measure, the quality of China’s research output has also surpassed that of the United States, with Chinese research accounting for the highest quantity of citations in Clarivate’s Web of Science in 2018-2020 (Brainard and Normile 2022).

China’s rise as a research superpower represents one of several motivations for non-Chinese, English-language academic publishers to more actively grow their market share in the region. These growth activities include strategic partnerships with Chinese universities and central funders and societies in the region, such as the Chinese Academy of Sciences (and Social

Sciences), and more actively commissioning content from highly cited authors in China, drawing on newly appointed Chinese Editors and Editorial Board members to build awareness of non-Chinese, English-language scholarly publications.

Although China's publications output has grown exponentially, since 2019, official research policy in China has pivoted away from an incentive structure based around maximising research output in so-called 'high-impact' (highly cited) overseas publications towards a 'representative works' model (Tao 2020). This model is aimed at incentivising greater engagement among Chinese researchers with domestic journals, while also limiting the quantity of output required for China's annual research assessment exercises to disincentivise rapid publication of poorly-conducted studies in overseas and/or predatory outlets. Researchers are limited to 5 articles for assessment, stretching to 20 for teams of researchers at National Laboratories, a third of which must be published in domestic journals (*ibid.*), and with outputs being cross-referenced against an 'Early Warning' list of journals (domestic and overseas), with potential for journals to become blacklisted if they fail to meet quality criteria. Since the policy was introduced, there have been wider discussions within China's publishing and research communities about the parameters of the new criteria, which are not publicly known in full, particularly in terms of the value of high-impact overseas publications as a component of university hiring and promotions, with researchers reporting persistent pressures to publish in non-Chinese venues with high Journal Impact Factors (Lem 2022). Meanwhile, China's Association for Science and Technology (CAST) has funnelled greater resources into the development of domestic journals (Feng 2022) and even the purchase of overseas journals and journal publishers, such as the purchase of French scientific publisher EDP Sciences by China's Science Press Ltd.—an affiliate publisher of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (EDP Sciences 2019).

The ramifications and extent of China's research assessment reforms have been the subject of extensive commentary, as have efforts to crack down on widespread plagiarism and papermills. For some, China's policy developments mark a shift away from a reliance on international university rankings towards a system that places greater emphasis on domestic publishing and journal ranking criteria (Liang 2022; Sharma 2020). Other commentators point to strong incentives for Chinese researchers to engage in misconduct to achieve publishing targets at elite institutions (Mallapaty 2024), despite the introduction of strict punitive measures prevent these practices—plagiarism in particular—including 'naming and shaming' individual researchers who may face public funding bans if they are accused of research misconduct (Packer 2024; W. Zheng 2024). Opinions are divided over the impact of these developments on publishing behaviours. Some point to evidence that suggests that co-authored studies between Chinese and overseas collaborators have declined (Owens 2023), perhaps also reflecting efforts in the US and Europe to restrict research partnerships with Chinese institutions due to national security concerns (Nature 2023). Indeed the growth in output from China over this period may suggest that China's research economy can thrive independently from Western liberal democracies (Wagner 2024). Nevertheless, many incentives persist for Chinese scholars to publish in highly ranked international publications to secure institutional recognition, promotions and even per-article payments tied to publication in top-tier international journals (Wang 2024; Lin 2022).

Questions have also been raised about the authenticity of the stated motivations of the Chinese government to improve the quality of China's research output and address an overreliance on high-citation, non-Chinese outlets on such grounds. In 2020, a more detailed set of criteria for admissible international outlets in the humanities and social sciences was released by China's Ministry of Education, raising fresh concerns about assessment criteria for scholarly journals under the 'representative works' model. Under this revised policy, researchers at China-based research institutions must 'adhere to the correct political direction' in all published outputs and avoid all attempts to 'deliberately dwarf and vilify China in pursuit of international

publication, and damage national sovereignty, security and development interests’ (Ministry of Education 2020). This new policy development, coupled with qualitative assessment criteria for non-Chinese scholarly journals, creates a strong incentive for non-Chinese publishers to tailor their journals and content collections in ways favourable to China’s new regulatory environment.

Due to growing constraints on university library budgets (Hoeve 2019) and zero-embargo Open Access mandates, like Plan S (Coalition S 2018) in Europe, and in the United States, the 2022 White House Office of Science & Technology Policy (OSTP) memorandum on federally funded research (OSTP 2022), journal publishers are increasingly reliant on emerging markets, like China, to support revenue growth and to attract high quality (and highly cited) scholarship (Hyland 2023). Taken together, global publication policy trends have caused significant and intensifying economic, regulatory and political pressures on non-Chinese, English-language scholarly to secure and retain access to the Chinese market for scholarly research.

2.5. Related allegations of censorship complicity in or about China

The newly reported constraints facing publishers of online scholarly journals in China represent a subset of far broader censorship concerns facing non-Chinese publishers operating in the Chinese market. This section describes a handful of related cases that illustrate common dynamics with respect to censorship pressures resulting in allegations of complicity aimed at non-Chinese publishers. This discussion includes related cases of censorship complicity in scholarly publishing and trade non-fiction publishing. It is important to highlight that this discussion of censorship complicity sidesteps the far wider discussions surrounding so-called ‘cancel culture’ in Western trade publishing (and other media and creative industries), except for one case, which is relevant to the central topic(s) of this thesis involving Clive Hamilton’s *Silent*

Invasion (Hamilton 2018). Finally, this section will briefly discuss relevant trends and examples of self-censorship in Chinese higher education and research; for example, in Hong Kong, following the introduction of Hong Kong's National Security Law, having coincided with reported cases of censorship compliance in Western publishing.

2.5.1. Allegations of censorship complicity in Western scholarly publishing

Many accusations of censorship complicity levied at Western academic publishers operating in China (aside from claims already discussed) relate to China's official position regarding territorial boundaries and jurisdictions. For example, a 2019 report, published in *Times Higher Education*, detailed at least nine journal articles published in English-language scholarly journals featuring the so-called 'nine-dashed-line' extending China's territory southwards, encompassing Taiwan and other island clusters or territories claimed by 'Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam, including Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands' (Ross 2019). China's territorial claims over the South China Sea islands were dismissed at a 2016 ruling by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Hayton 2018), which has been a source of geopolitical tension between China and neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia. The articles were written by Chinese authors, with five including co-authors based in Australia, Germany, Scotland, Singapore and the US (Ross 2019). Five journals were named as part of the investigation: *Cells*, published by MDPI; *Diversity and Distributions*, *Molecular Ecology* and *New Phytologist*, published by Wiley; and *PLOS One*, published by Public Library of Science (PLOS). Only PLOS responded to the accusations, stating that its current policy requires authors to 'follow international treaties and conventions' regarding territorial claims, while remaining 'neutral on any jurisdictional claims made'—a policy 'not unusual in scientific publishing' (ibid.).

Similarly, Springer Nature faced accusations of implicitly accepting China's territorial claims regarding Taiwan by amending Taiwanese authors' affiliations in journal article listings and

metadata. In 2020, a Taiwanese contributor to Springer Nature journal *Eye and Vision* reportedly received a request from the journal's editorial team to add the word 'China' after 'Taiwan' to prevent her article being retracted due to the 'journal's editorial policies' (Radio Free Asia 2020). Springer Nature replied to the accusation, stating that the publisher did not pressure authors to make this change, but rather the 'policy stemmed instead from *Eye and Vision*, which it publishes in partnership with Wenzhou Medical University in China, and operates under a separate set of editorial guidelines' (ibid.). This development was accompanied by reports of a publisher's note, appearing under every article in *Nature*, among other Springer Nature journals, repeating PLOS' claim above, that 'Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations' (Salzberg 2023). This note prompted speculation that the publisher was again bowing pressure from the Chinese government (ibid.)—a claim that Springer Nature refutes:

there are many territorial disputes all around the world and we do not believe that it is our place as a publisher to adjudicate these disputes. We add the disclaimer to try to explain this position to our readers, some of whom do, from time to time, petition us to revise the works of our authors to conform to one or another political position on a given territorial claim. (ibid.)

The issue of geopolitical and territorial disputes in scholarly publications has been analysed by publishing research ethics specialists at Cambridge University Press in an article for the *International Journal of Human Rights*, alongside other forms of 'soft-repression' arising from political pressures that compromise the integrity of the scholarly record (Wright et al. 2022). These trends include increased requests from authors for anonymous or pseudonymous publication; a rise in ghost authorship; compromised, destroyed or unavailable data; unethical consent gathering procedures, or an absence of proper consent; and what the authors term 'undeclarable conflicts of interest', whereby authors (in China, but also other territories, including

the United States) are required to seek university or funder approval before submitting an article for publication—as reported in the case of research on COVID-19 (Cooper 2020)—among political constraints affecting editors and reviewers in specific geographies, requiring ‘acknowledgement of a counter-narrative, which in itself may pose a risk to the editor or reviewer’ (Wright et al. 2022). The authors propose different strategies for handling politically-motivated research and publications ethics concerns while recognising that this is a fast-moving area of publishing policy, with limited industry-wide guidance or support—particularly in the case of competing territorial claims.

The authors highlight problems with the position of neutrality, referenced above, of PLOS, Springer Nature, and others, in the absence of any publisher guidance on what neutrality entails. In practice, journal editors and reviewers are expected to enforce their own judgments on territorial claims with minimal publisher intervention. In many cases, no publisher intervention on grounds of neutrality and editorial independence amounts to tacit acceptance of a particular claim, as in the cases outlined above, undermining claims of supposed neutrality (Wright et al. 2022). Related concerns will be discussed later in this thesis in relation to access-based censorship practices, whereby publishers sidestep accusations of self-censorship by removing products from the Chinese market as a supposedly neutral position (p.179)—as will notions of ‘integrity’ in relation to the digital scholarly record in the theory chapter (p.173).

2.5.2. Allegations of censorship complicity in Western trade publishing

Scholarly publishers are not alone in facing claims of self-censorship during the timeline outlined above (p.29). In the weeks following reports of Springer Nature’s involvement, in November 2017, Australian academic and public intellectual, Prof. Clive Hamilton, revealed that the trade publisher, Allen & Unwin, had decided to delay the publication of Hamilton’s forthcoming book on Chinese influence in Australian academia and politics, titled *Silent Invasion* (Hamilton 2018), citing fears of a potential ‘vexatious’ defamation suit against the publisher and the author from

the Chinese Communist Party and their proxies (Richard 2017). The publisher had requested to delay publication until the introduction of new legislation in Australia, aimed at preventing cover lobbying, infiltration or donations to political parties on behalf of foreign governments (ibid.). According to a statement from Allen & Unwin, Prof. Hamilton ‘was unwilling to delay publication and requested the return of his rights, as he is entitled to do’ (ibid.).

In response, Prof. Hamilton released details of confidential emails exchanges with Allen & Unwin to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Financial Times*, claiming that the publisher had taken ‘a big step along the path to western self-censorship of commentary on modern China’ (Bland and Smyth 2017). In February 2018, Prof. Hamilton revealed that three further publishers had declined to publish *Silent Invasion* due to fears of legal ‘retaliation’ from the Chinese government. The same month, Australian trade publisher, Hardie Grant, published the book ‘after it had been “rewritten to minimise the legal risk”’ (BBC News 2018a). Two years following publication, in September 2020, China’s *Global Times* announced a country-wide travel ban preventing Prof. Hamilton from entering China (Global Times 2020), alongside Alex Joske of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute thinktank (Lau and Ross 2020), describing the work of both individuals as ‘anti-China’ and a ‘connivance of denigration under the guise of scholarly work’ (Global Times 2020).

In addition to accusations of pre-publication self-censorship, trade presses have also faced pressure to introduce post-publication amendments to titles intended for the Chinese market. On 12th November 2019, Edward Snowden, former United States National Security Agency contractor and whistleblower, revealed in a Twitter thread (Snowden (@Snowden) 2019) that sections from the Chinese translation of his forthcoming memoir, *Permanent Record* (Snowden 2019), had been amended or removed, violating the terms of his publishing agreement with Macmillan Publishers. Snowdon posted the removed passages in Mandarin and called on Chinese readers to translate them to help ‘compile a correct and unabridged version of

#PermanentRecord to publish freely online in Chinese’ (ibid.). Passages removed from the Chinese edition included Snowden’s reflections on the 2011 Arab spring, ‘calling for an end to oppression, censorship, and precarity’ (Kuo 2019a); the nature of authoritarian states and authoritarianism; discussion of Chinese internet censorship; Hong Kong’s ‘nominal autonomy’ (ibid.); and the ‘extent of China’s surveillance capabilities’ (ibid.).

Several cases of post-publication censorship have also come to light involving China-based printers, which Western publishers use to print titles at low cost and intended for global distribution. China-based printers producing titles for Octopus Books, an imprint of Hachette, and Quarto Books, based in London, both allegedly removed or amended references to *Taiwan*, *Hong Kong*, *Tibet* and contemporary artist and political activist Ai Weiwei from several non-fiction books to comply with printing regulations in China (Telling 2022). The news followed revelations, also from the *Financial Times*, of a memo from US printing company RR Donnelly & Sons, claiming that ‘Chinese printers were unable to produce books mentioning human rights abuses in Xinjiang and suggestions that Covid-19 originated in China’ (ibid.). Another recent case, in late-2022, involved Hong Kong-based 1010 Printing refusing to work on a memoir of a Jewish woman who immigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States, titled *The Queen of Cleveland*, published by Hasidic Archives (Elia-Shalev 2022). China’s General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) rejected the printer’s request to print the book in China because the content was ‘anti-communist’ (ibid.). This case is useful for the present research, as it illustrates the application of China’s regulation concerning ‘major selected topics’, discussed earlier (p.50), whereby publishers, printers and distributors are required to seek direct approval from the GAPP to distribute titles that contain political content, broadly construed. The application of the GAPP’s criteria will be investigated further as part of the corpus analysis study of censored journal articles, later in this thesis (p.262).

2.5.3. Allegations of censorship complicity in Western higher education and research

Beyond the publishing industry, the United Kingdom's higher education sector has faced related allegations of censorship complicity in the years coinciding with this research. For example, in July 2020, during the first few months of widespread online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, UK universities were accused of complying with China's internet restrictions in ways that risked promoting self-censorship in higher education (Coughlan 2020). The focus of this reporting was a pilot project, managed by JISC in the UK, involving King's College London, Queen Mary University of London, York University and Southampton University, and the Chinese internet firm Alibaba, allowing secure access to approved course material in a virtual learning environment, whilst preventing wider access to filtered or blocked websites in China (ibid.). A spokesperson for Universities UK denied the claim that this technical solution amounted to censorship, stating that it would allow students in China 'to have better access to UK courses "while complying with local regulations"' (ibid.): a rationalisation aligning with Cambridge University Press, Springer Nature and Taylor & Francis' statements regarding access constraints in the Chinese market discussed earlier (p.29).

Another source of allegations of Chinese political influence in UK higher education concerns sources of funding, with Cambridge University coming under increased scrutiny (in the wake of the *China Quarterly* incident). In July 2020, reports emerged that Jesus College had accepted a £155,000 donation from Chinese tech firm, Huawei, alongside a £200,000 donation from China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) (Dunning 2020). Both donations were aimed at supporting the formation of Jesus College's China Centre and UK-China Global Issues Dialogue Centre. Shortly afterwards, the College released a white paper, titled 'Multilateral Solutions for the Global Governance of the Information and Communications Technology Industry', including a foreword from Cambridge University's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Stephen Toope, encouraging greater involvement of China and Chinese companies in

shaping global digital governance (Jesus College 2020). The scholarly event that resulted in the white paper was funded by Huawei and involved participants from the company (Williams 2021).

Critics have accused Prof. Toope of actively ‘advancing a disconcertingly uncritical view of the Chinese regime’ (ibid.) in the months following the Huawei and NDRC donations. They point to Prof. Toope’s subsequent engagement with China and Chinese institutions, including his public endorsement of Peking University as a ‘formidable institution, which seeks an open world’ (Moore 2020) in the months following the abduction of three Peking students on political grounds and the suppression of Peking’s Marxist club for having raised concerns about student disappearances (UnHerd 2021). Jesus College’s China Centre reportedly received an additional £3.7 million endowment for a professorship, held by Professor Peter Nolan, and sponsored by the China-based Chong Hua Foundation (Williams 2021). Prof. Nolan allegedly ‘cautioned Jesus College students against discussing politically sensitive topics, such as human rights concerns in Xinjiang and Hong Kong’ (ibid.).

The concerns raised in relation to Cambridge University form part of a wider set of reports and allegations at other UK-based institutions, including the formation of joint research centres and undergraduate programmes with Chinese institutions and the rise of Confucius Institutes on university campuses outside of mainland China (Index on Censorship 2021). Confucius Institutes aim to promote cultural and knowledge exchange related to China within non-Chinese higher education institutions. In 2019, a UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee report raised concerns about Chinese political interference over ‘the research agenda or curricula of UK universities’ through Confucius Institutes and other joint ventures, alongside limits on ‘the activities of researchers on university campuses’ (Foreign Affairs Committee 2019), finding that the ‘need for universities to attract more funding and grow internationally can come into conflicts with principles of academic freedom’ (ibid.). The report

names the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) as one such ‘instrument of ... interference’ (ibid. p.6) in the UK higher education sector on behalf of the Chinese Government.

The concerns outlined above are not confined to the United Kingdom, with related governmental reviews of Chinese political influence in Australia (Karp 2019), New Zealand (Steff 2024) and the United States (US Department of State 2023). Human Rights Watch released a report in 2021 revealing a climate of fear in Australian universities, including surveillance, harassment, intimidation and censorship of pro-democracy students or faculty originating from China (McNeill 2021). In some cases, Australian universities have been accused of bowing to pressures to remain neutral on human rights issues concerning China. In August 2020, an adjunct lecturer at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Elaine Pearson, accused UNSW of self-censorship, having removed quotes attributed to Pearson from the University’s official Twitter account regarding human rights infringements in Hong Kong on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party (Smee 2020).

Since 2019, prominent China scholar Prof. Anne Marie Brady has reported a campaign of intimidation and harassment, including two office break-ins at her affiliated institution, Canterbury University, a home burglary, and threatening phone calls and letters following her work on Chinese political influence in New Zealand (Roy 2019). In July 2021, following a series of tweets criticising the Chinese Communist Party’s 100th anniversary celebrations, Prof. Brady’s Twitter account was temporarily suspended (ibid.). Twitter refused to comment on the source of the account block, prompting speculation that it had resulted from ‘a concerted campaign of complaints by Communist Party agents’ (Perry 2021), targeting Prof. Brady. As in the case concerning Elaine Pearson, above, Prof. Brady has also made censorship allegations against her host institution, the University of Canterbury. The University launched an investigation into a report by Prof. Brady’s on the links between universities and tech companies in New Zealand and the Chinese Communist Party, which was submitted to the Justice Select Committee of the

New Zealand parliament in July 2020 (Radio Free Asia 2020). The decision of the University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ian Wright, to investigate complaints raised by universities and individuals linked to the report prompted widespread condemnation and an open letter, signed by 150 international scholars, who describe the investigation as an extension of an ongoing campaign of intimidation and harassment aimed at censoring Prof. Brady (*ibid.*) on behalf of the Chinese government.

Beyond censorship concerns in Western and Chinese higher education, Hong Kong has also seen a dramatic rise in reported infringements in academic freedom due to Chinese governmental influence and legislation. In March 2019, Hong Kong's citizens erupted in protest over a bill introduced by the newly appointed pro-CCP government, led by Chief Executive Carrie Lam, which would allow extradition to mainland China for alleged infringements under China's legal system (US China Economic and Security Review Commission 2019). This bill was interpreted by pro-democracy groups in Hong Kong as a tool to suppress dissent by the Chinese government and to erode the fragile autonomy of the city state, having become a special administrative region of China in 1997 after 156 years of British rule. In the months that followed the introduction of the bill, the protests morphed into wider calls for political autonomy and the restoration of democratic self-governance following the invocation of emergency powers, violent clashes with the police, and the deaths of a prominent pro-democracy protester, Chow Tsz-lok (Kuo 2019b), and a government-contracted cleaner, Luo Changqing (Choi 2019).

To draw an end to a period of escalating civil unrest and to prevent the dismantling of Hong Kong's CCP-appointed government, in June 2020, China's Standing Committee of the National People's Congress introduced the Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL) (China Daily 2020), bypassing Hong Kong's Legislative Council. The NSL criminalises perceived acts of secession, subversion, terrorism or collusion with foreign forces in ways that damage China's

interests, with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Following its introduction, a CCP-led security office was established in Hong Kong under mainland Chinese jurisdiction, with Chief Executive Carrie Lam given full authority over judicial appointments to enforce the NSL. Of particular concern for China's critics is the absence of territorial scope for crimes that fall under the NSL's expansive categories of misdemeanour, such that individuals that may be extradited and tried under the Hong Kong NSL regardless of nationality or location (Fu and Hor 2022).

Human rights groups, including Amnesty International and the United Nations human rights office, have openly criticised the NSL as 'dangerously vague and broad' (Amnesty International 2020), allowing for 'discriminatory or arbitrary interpretation and enforcement which could undermine human rights protection' (United Nations 2020). Since the law was introduced, there have been widespread arrests and crackdowns on peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong, and 58 civil society groups, including unions, churches, media organisations and political parties, have been disbanded (Hong Kong Free Press 2022). The NSL has also had immediate and lasting effects on academic freedom in Hong Kong (Baehr 2022), with academics reporting widespread campus surveillance, disciplinary action against students and faculty, and an environment of heightened censorship and self-censorship since it was introduced (ibid.).

Finally, Hong Kong's domestic publishing industry has faced significant pressure to conform to the political sensitivities of the CCP. The impacts have been most visible at Hong Kong's 2021 and 2022 Book Fairs (Associated Press 2021; 2022), with publishers of political books being prevented from participating, while others have admitted to tailoring their displays so that they can participate and to avoid legal consequences. In some cases, this has led to independent Hong Kong-based publishers making pre-publication amendments to historical non-fiction titles, which discuss political revolutions, or advocate for Hong Kong's independence. In September 2022, five children's book publishers, Lorie Lai, Melody Yeung,

Sidney Ng, Samuel Chan and Marco Fong, were found guilty of ‘conspiracy to print, publish, distribute, display and/or reproduce seditious publications’ (Wu and Zhu 2020) and were sentenced to 19 months’ imprisonment under the NSL. Their imprisonment was described by the International Publishers’ Association’s Kristenn Einarsson as ‘clearly intended to scare other author and publishers into self-censorship’ and ‘an absurd example of unrelenting repression’, by Amnesty International (P. Anderson 2022).

The implications of the Hong Kong’s NSL will feature throughout this thesis, along with the other concerns raised above for academics in China, in Hong Kong, and globally, related to the so-called ‘long arm’ of Chinese political influence and censorship. These themes were present in the interview discussions, for example, and are returned to in chapter 6 (p.185). The scholarly topics, contemporary and historical, that have faced publicly reported censorship concerns in China and Hong Kong are also discussed in the corpus analysis study (p. 262), which aims to explore the expanding political constraints for English-language scholarship in China and surrounding territories.

2.5.4. Allegations of Chinese censorship complicity in other sectors: sports, video games, film and technology

The final section of this chapter looks at sectors outside of publishing and academia where related political and commercial dynamics have encouraged alleged cases of censorship complicity; for example, non-Chinese media and technology firms, which have allegedly amended their products or services to suit political sensitivities in China. This section will begin with a brief discussion of high-profile allegations of censorship and self-censorship in sports and video gaming sectors. It will then present a more detailed comparison between events concerning tech firms, such as Microsoft, Apple and Google, all of whom have faced accusations of institutional self-censorship to maintain market access in China. The stated justifications for complying with Chinese content regulations offer some revealing comparisons between the

alleged involvement of non-Chinese digital scholarly publishers, such as Springer Nature. This discussion will inform the theory chapter, which deals with notions of censorship, self-censorship, and institutional complicity in this context (p.146).

On 15th February 2006, US Congressman Christopher Smith chaired a congressional hearing on the 'Operations of U.S. Internet Companies in China' (C-Span 2006). A committee formed of government officials, internet company executives, and human rights advocates heard a series of accusations against Google, Yahoo, Microsoft and Cisco Communications, all for their role in 'aiding and abetting the Chinese regime' by facilitating 'surveillance and invasion of privacy' and monitoring, filtering and blocking access to sensitive content via their internet services (ibid.). Yahoo was accused of identifying Chinese dissidents based on online forum records and search terms; Cisco, of providing the Chinese government the technology to create 'PoliceNet', an Internet filtering and monitoring tool; Google, of having limited search returns to politically sensitive terms; Microsoft, of shutting down the MSN blog of Chinese dissident, Xiao Jin, worldwide, at the request of the Chinese government (ibid.).

Both Yahoo, Google and Cisco released statements to the effect that they 'must adhere to local laws in all countries that [they] operate' (ibid.). Cisco added elsewhere that 'our customers determine the specific uses for the capabilities of [our] products' (Cohen 2013, p.287). Like Springer Nature and CUP, the initial line of argument is the same. Large multinational organisations must comply with the local regulatory frameworks under which they operate; therefore, the weight of responsibility sits with the customer. Note that again, if this line of argument is followed with the example of Google—that they restricted returns on their search engine to sensitive topics because of the preference of their customer—the customer is far removed from the end-user. Who the customer is, if not the end-user,⁶ is unclear.

⁶ This is especially unclear in Google's case, as their business model relies on advertising, therefore strengthening the transactional link between service provider and end-user. The end-user pays for the service they receive by forfeiting data that will be used by 3rd parties to market products. Compare with a journal article, which in China will have been

What is unique in Google's case, however, is that on 22 March 2010, it not only reversed its decision to limit search results in China⁷—it actively and publicly admitted it had complied with state censorship:

earlier today we stopped censoring our search services—Google Search, Google News, and Google Images—on Google.cn....We want as many people in the world as possible to have access to our services, including users in mainland China, yet the Chinese government has been crystal clear throughout our discussions that self-censorship is a non-negotiable legal requirement. (Google 2010)

Google claimed in their statement that the Chinese government unequivocally asked the company to censor their own search engine. The term censorship is used in the Google statement even though the search keywords would otherwise return unredacted information, published freely, that is available elsewhere. Google's statement qualified this as self-censorship.

While Google has remained inaccessible in China for users accessing the site without using a Virtual Private Network (VPN), or another means to circumvent China's internet censorship controls, reports have surfaced since suggesting that Google has continued to explore ways to re-enter the Chinese market. On 8th August 2018, reporters at *The Intercept* revealed, through confidential interviews and leaked documents from Google employees and software engineers, that the US tech firm was working on an Android app, known within the company as 'Project Dragonfly' (Gallagher 2018a). The app, also known in Mandarin as 'Maotai' and 'Longfei', has reportedly been programmed to identify and suppress sensitive search results, using user data harvested from a Chinese-language news and internet search website, 265.com, which Google acquired in 2008 (Gallagher 2018a). Leaked documents also suggested that Google's recent partnership with Chinese tech giant Tencent might have involved information

purchased in a bulk collection by at least two intermediaries (import agent, librarian) on behalf of their end-user (an individual at a higher-education institution), who may or may not want to read the article.

⁷ By redirecting users of their Google.cn service to their uncensored Hong Kong equivalent, Google.hk.

sharing between the two partners to improve efforts to blacklist websites and ‘sensitive queries’ in China (ibid.).

According to *The Intercept*’s reporting, only a small proportion—around ‘a few hundred’—of Google’s 88,000 employees were informed of Project Dragonfly, limited to a small number of software engineers and product managers, alongside more senior colleagues in policy, user experience, and the company’s legal department—all under conditions of strict confidentiality (ibid.). Following the first reports, hundreds of Google employees signed a letter protesting against the company’s move to develop a censored Chinese-language search app, provoking resignations among Google’s research staff (Campbell 2018), with one ex-employee, Jack Poulson, submitting a letter to the US Senate Commerce Committee, alleging that Google’s Dragonfly app would ‘aid Beijing’s efforts to censor and monitor its citizens online’ (BBC News 2018b). At a US Senate Judiciary subcommittee hearing, on 16th July 2019, Google executive Karen Bhatia confirmed that Google had ‘terminated Project Dragonfly’ (BBC News 2019) facing a joint campaign of protest and advocacy from Google employees and Amnesty International (Google Employees Against Dragonfly 2019), alongside widespread press reports and criticism of their planned re-entry into the Chinese market.

The experience of Google in China will be returned to in the literature review (p.92) as it offers a revealing parallel with other forms of platform-based and search-based censorship and suppression. Before then, it is worth briefly summarising the escalating cases of censorship complicity in other sectors. On 6th October 2019, Daryl Morey, General Manager of US basketball team the Houston Rockets, deleted a tweet in support of Hong Kong’s pro-democracy protesters and issued a formal apology (Choudhury 2019) after a Chinese Consulate-General spokesperson in Houston insisted that Morey ‘correct the error’ (ibid.). The Chinese Basketball Association threatened to ‘suspend communication and cooperation with the Houston Rockets club’ (ibid.). This incident prompted a Chinese-language statement from the

US National Basketball Association that the NBA was ‘extremely disappointed by the inappropriate remarks made by Houston Rockets General Manager Daryl Morey’ (ibid.), alongside criticism of the NBA’s ties to China (Pramuk 2019) and the necessary compromises to secure \$500M in revenue from sponsorship and advertising in the region (McNicol 2017).

Overlapping with this incident, computer games giant, Activision Blizzard, faced a series of related accusations as censorship concerns migrated from basketball to e-sports. On 8th August 2019, reports emerged that Blizzard had suspended Hong Kong-based Chung Ng Wai, known online as ‘Blitzchung’, from the popular digital card game Hearthstone (Beauchamp 2019). During a post-match interview at the 2019 Hearthstone Grandmasters tournament, Chung repeated a popular protest slogan, ‘Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our time’ (ibid.). Two days later, Blizzard announced that Chung would forfeit all prize money and face a year’s suspension from the game, as well as refusing to work with the ‘casters’ who conducted the interview (Blizzard Entertainment 2019). Parallels were drawn with the incidents involving the NBA the same month, with Blizzard accused of acting as an agent of Chinese censorship (Beauchamp 2019), while several high-ranking players of Hearthstone threatened to boycott the game and other Blizzard products until Chung and the casters were reinstated (ibid.).

In the weeks following, Riot Games, creator of another popular digital card game, League of Legends, issued a public statement emphasising the game’s players’ ‘responsibility to keep personal views on sensitive issues (political, religious or otherwise) separate’ (Chalk 2019); whereas Tim Sweeney, CEO of Epic Games, creator of the online role-playing game, Fortnite, announced that ‘Epic supports the rights of Fortnite players and creators to speak about politics and human rights.’ (Clark 2019) In August 2020, Activision Blizzard again encountered censorship concerns after removing a one-second clip of the Tiananmen Square protests from a teaser trailer for *Call of Duty Black Ops: Cold War*, intended for circulation in China (Perez 2020). Journalists have pointed to the undeclared links between non-Chinese computer games

companies and China-based tech firms, such as Tencent, as well as an escalating trend of ‘localising’ computer games content for the Chinese market to ensure that restricted China-based servers can run online games and the content ‘complies with the publishing rules of the country’ (Holmes 2021).

Accusations of Chinese censorship complicity have even implicated some of America’s cherished film and TV franchises, with the news that Disney’s live-action adaptation of *Mulan* featured ‘special thanks’ to the ‘public security bureau’ and ‘publicity department of CPC Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomy Region Committee, for permission to shoot film sequences in China’s Xinjiang region’ (BBC News 2020). The two government departments referenced are credited elsewhere for detaining Uighur Muslim minorities in Xinjiang’s ‘re-education camps’, alongside producing state propaganda in the region (ibid.). These revelations led to widespread boycotts of *Mulan*’s international release, with the film’s lead actress, Liu Yifei, coming out in support of Hong Kong’s pro-democracy movements in 2021 (De Souza 2020). Disney has also faced accusations of self-censorship for removing ‘sensitive’ material from the Disney+ streaming platform, including an episode of *The Simpson*, titled ‘One Angry Lisa’, offering a satirical take on China’s efforts to control perceptions of its policies towards Uighur populations in Xinjiang (Lang 2023).

The cases summarised above, of Western corporations facing pressure to acquiesce to Chinese censorship demands, are not exhaustive. Rather, the cases concerning the NBA, Activision Blizzard and Disney have been summarised here, alongside earlier cases concerning US tech firms’ entry and exit from China, because they each display conditions of compliance that will be returned to throughout this research to establish commonalities or discontinuities with respect to platform-based self-censorship in scholarly publishing.

2.6. Conclusion

Writing in the *Washington Post* in the weeks following the NBA and Activision Blizzard incidents, two prominent political scientists and experts in Chinese censorship, Jennifer Pan and Margaret Roberts, identified three factors that help to explain the increasing tendency for Western commercial entities to engage in self-censorship (Pan and Roberts 2019).⁸ The first, they argued, is that companies tend to acquiesce to censorship demands when their competitors follow suit. In particular, referring back to Google's apparent determination to re-enter the Chinese market with a censored search platform, US tech firms are more likely to acquiesce to censorship pressures because they are facing tighter competition from domestic platforms in China, which are already compliant with China's internet regulations, such as Baidu, Weibo, WeChat and Douyin (ibid.). This finding underpins the authors' second argument: that companies facing little domestic competition in China can afford to resist censorship pressures because users based in China will continue to use their services via unauthorised means (ibid.). The authors suggest that the NBA has greater leverage to resist Chinese pressures, which it has failed to exercise, given that Chinese fans of US basketball will likely circumvent censorship controls to continue watching NBA coverage, regardless of any public stance on political issues in Hong Kong. The third argument that the authors advance is that public revelations of censorship complicity can hamper company profits, due to backlash in markets outside of China, citing user boycotts following Activision Blizzard's suspension of Blitzchung, alongside increased costs and inefficiencies involved in screening user-generated content and managing public relations related to topics that are considered sensitive or impermissible in the Chinese market. The authors point to companies like GitHub, who have exercised their leverage over the Chinese market, as a site that was temporarily blocked in China in 2013 then reinstated because

⁸ The article summarises findings from research conducted by Pan (Pan 2017) and Roberts (Roberts 2018) that will be returned to in this thesis' literature review.

Chinese programmers heavily relied on the platform's software development hub, with no equivalent China-based service (*ibid.*).

As a shorthand, these three arguments outlined above are summarised as follows:

- A) Chinese competition promotes overseas censorship compliance.
- B) Market dominance allows for overseas censorship resistance.
- C) Censorship compliance hampers overall profitability.

These three arguments, related to the conditions and impacts of censorship compliance for companies headquartered outside of China, help to offer some explanatory frameworks for the events concerning non-Chinese scholarly publishers, summarised above (p.29). The research design that follows (p.109) aims to explore whether the same dynamics are present in this form of censorship complicity, or if different dynamics have emerged in scholarly publishing contexts. As this research context chapter has demonstrated, the events concerning non-Chinese scholarly publishers in China relate to a wider set of coercive censorship pressures in related industries, shifting regulatory and policy frameworks affecting content dissemination and research, and also a growing structural dependency on the Chinese market in the global scholarly communications industry. Alongside the three conditions of censorship complicity outlined above, this thesis will explore whether key findings from the empirical literature concerning the mechanisms and dynamics of censorship complicity in China from other sectors apply in the case of scholarly communication. This is the subject of the chapter that follows, which aims to review the relevant empirical literature on censorship in China, both to identify core applicable findings and approaches to the present study, but also to more clearly outline the empirical and methodological gap that this thesis aims to fill.

CHAPTER 3: Review of Empirical Literature on Digital Censorship and Censorship Complicity in China

3.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the central sources from the body of empirical studies on digital censorship in China that have been conducted over the last twenty years. The basis of the review is a series of structured literature searches via the Scopus index, the largest index of published scholarly articles and books in the humanities and social sciences, alongside citation networks linked to the most relevant studies from the main literature search. The initial search of literature involved broad terms linked to censorship in China. This produced a body of scholarly literature of over 450 items. This literature included empirical studies on all aspects of censorship in China; for example, the censorship of digital communication and social media platforms, e.g. WeChat (Ruan et al. 2021; Ruan, Knockel, and Crete-Nishihata 2020; Ruan et al. 2016; Hobbs and Roberts 2018; Crete-Nishihata et al. 2017; Ng 2015), Weibo (King, Pan, and Roberts 2017; Crete-Nishihata et al. 2020; 2017; Yaqiu Wang 2016a; 2016b) and TOM-Skype (Crandall et al. 2013); China's overarching political strategy in relation to censorship (Dimitrov 2017; Lorentzen 2014); institutions and mechanisms of Chinese media propaganda (Brady 2008; Shambaugh 2007); Chinese overseas influence (DiResta et al. 2020); and corporate complicity in Chinese censorship, both within China and overseas (Ruan et al. 2021; Pan and Roberts 2019; Dimitrov 2017; Pan 2017; Tan and Tan 2012; Stockmann 2012; Dann and Haddow 2008).

To identify central literature for a more extensive review, all abstracts were read and rated by relevance according to whether the studies were conducted after the year 2000 and the extent to which the studies related to one of three core themes:

1. censorship of scholarly resources in China;
2. digital censorship in China;
3. corporate complicity in Chinese censorship.

The date range was limited to 2000 because of the focus on digital forms of censorship and as a shorthand to exclude pre-2000 studies that focus predominantly on press and mass media censorship. The three central themes were selected, along with the date-based and geographical exclusion criteria (excluding studies in territories outside of China), to allow for a more comprehensive and comprehensible review of a subset of the vast literature on censorship, both in general, and in China during different time periods or via different mediums or mechanisms.

The form of censorship under discussion (involving platform-based interventions on the part of scholarly publishers to address political concerns) has, to-date, only occurred (publicly) in China. Therefore, this review concentrates on digital censorship and censorship complicity in China to allow for an in-depth consideration of this form of censorship in this socio-cultural and geographical context. Other chapters of this thesis will include a broader consideration of censorship in other times and contexts, however; for example, the theory chapter, which aims to define censorship of the online scholarly record (p.146) in broader terms, beyond a China-specific context.

3.2. Censorship of scholarly resources in China

The first section of this review covers a narrow subset of literature that addresses the central concerns of this thesis, outlined in the context chapter (p.27), concerning the censorship of online scholarly resources in China since 2017. At the time of writing, only one empirical study has been published that addresses non-Chinese academic publishers' complicity with Chinese censorship demands. This study offers a preliminary analysis of the keywords of articles removed

from *China Quarterly*'s online platform at the request of state authorities, versus those that remained unaffected (Wong and Kwong 2019). The findings support early analyses within the affected academic communities that China's General Administration of Press and Publications (GAPP) did not screen *China Quarterly*'s articles in detail (Ruwitch 2017). All articles with the terms 'Falun Gong' in their title were removed, while several that discuss this topic in the full-text were spared (Wong and Kwong 2019, 289), as were articles on openly contentious subjects such as Taiwan's 'de-facto independence' (ibid. 291). However, further analysis suggests that the keyword-filtering is subject to human adjustments. Almost all articles that contain 'Tiananmen' in their title or abstract were removed, except for an article that refers to celebrations held in Tiananmen Square in the 1950s (ibid. 290). Similarly, 'Tibet' triggered a blanket removal, except for a handful of articles on 'neutral' topics such as the state of Tibetan studies, or military manoeuvres in Tibet before the formation of the People's Republic of China (ibid. 290).

Beyond Wong and Kwong's 2019 article, there are other empirical studies on the censorship of scholarship in China that relate to the present research. The first is a large-scale survey of repressive experiences among Asia-studies scholars, involving the participation of over 500 individuals across all career levels in the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Germany and Hong Kong (Greitens and Truex 2019). 68% identified self-censorship as a concern for the field (ibid. 351), although in open ended responses, many dismissed accusations of careerism or cowardice and stressed 'the ethical imperative to avoid self-censorship in the core tasks of academic work versus what they perceived to be a more discretionary choice about adopting publicly critical stances.' (ibid.) (The qualitative component of the present research will explore the extent to which these concerns influence scholars' attitudes towards publishers that have complied with censorship demands (p.239).)

The second study that relates to the core objectives of the present research is by Glenn Tiffert, exploring the creeping redaction of digitised historical source material in China. Tiffert

investigates the case of two academic law journals, *Political-Legal Research* and *Law Studies*, published in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the 1950s (Tiffert 2019). Access to these digitised sources is administered via online databases that are maintained within mainland China. Tiffert reports that more than 40% of pages of content have been removed from issues of these journals. Tiffert uses the statistical test of χ^2 (chi-squared) feature selection⁹ to analyse the disproportionate occurrence of characters that are present in the censored material. The features that correlate strongly with censored material include political keywords and phrases, such as 'rightist element,' 'rule of law,' and 'campaign to eliminate counterrevolutionaries,' along with a list of prominent political figures from 1950s who were 'flagrantly persecuted [by the Chinese Communist Party] as a personification of heterodoxy and an example to others' (ibid., 557). This study is significant because it is the first to associate the centralised administration of access to the digitized scholarly record in China with issues of political censorship. It also offers a methodological framework for analysing large bodies of text data to identify key terms or phrases that have triggered censorship requests, which will partly inform the corpus analysis study outlined in the research design chapter (p.135).

Beyond these early empirical studies into aspects of the censorship of scholarship in China that intersect with the present research focus, it is also worth highlighting efforts by scholars to document the events that this research aims to understand. Chief among those scholars is Nicholas Loubere, who offered some early analysis of many of the events detailed in the research context chapter (p.29), including the involvement of CUP, Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis and Brill (excluding Sage) in censorship concerns. Loubere ties these events into a wider critique of mainstream academic publishing, described as 'the convergence of China's increasingly assertive information control regime and the commercial academic publishers' thirst

⁹ The chi-squared test is a statistical method commonly used in classification tasks and machine learning to determine the dependence between a feature and a target variable,

for ever more profits’ and as examples of a new form of ‘commercial censorship’ (Loubere 2020, 239). This thesis engages with Loubere’s analysis at several points, primarily in relation to the emphasis on commercial academic publishing—returned to in the interviews (p.183), which expand the scope of this analysis to encompass the dynamics driving censorship compliance among non-commercial publishers—and the theory chapter (p.146), which defines censorship in this context and explores whether and to what extent paywall-based constraints on access amount to censorship complicity.

Beyond the studies scoped above, the literature on censorship (and censorship complicity) in China does not engage directly with the events that form this thesis’ research focus, given the relatively recent emergence of political interventions in the dissemination of English-language journals via scholarly journal publishers’ online publishing platforms. The rest of the far more expansive literature on Chinese censorship that falls within this review’s scope, outlined above, deals with broader or more specialised topics in relation to China’s digital censorship regime, which are discussed in the following section. Before then, it is worthwhile scoping part of the scholarly literature on Chinese publishing and higher education that intersects with some of the core concerns of this thesis.

Much of the scholarship on Chinese scholarly publishing deals with the historical development of China’s domestic journals market, the predominance of Mandarin-language titles, processes of industrialization, internationalization, digitization, and efforts to improve journal quality and reputation (Wu and Dong Fa 2014; Yuandi Wang et al. 2018; Xu et al. 2019). More recently, scholarly attention has turned to some of the political dynamics that have shaped China’s publishing environment, including substantial increases in government research funding (Hyland 2023); state involvement and investment in domestic scholarly journals (Cyranski 2019); the ‘byzantine processes required to gain a certificate to publish new journals’ (Hyland 2023, 398) leading to market fragmentation (Wang et al. 2018); and mounting concerns about the

government's stated willingness and ability to counteract widespread research misconduct (Xiao et al. 2022; Else and Van Noorden 2021; Tang 2019).

Parallel to the study of China's domestic journal publishing industry, in recent years, scholars have also sought to contextualise these trends within Xi Jinping's 'dynamic authoritarianism' (Pringle and Woodman 2022), leading to tensions between China's research and development goals and geopolitical or ideological commitments, of which journals censorship represents a subset of related forms of political repression affecting Chinese higher education (Pringle and Woodman 2022; Woodman and Pringle 2022; Frangville 2024; Mulvey and Lee 2024). Meanwhile, others have sought to investigate the structures of power and state patronage of scholarly journals in China, including the gatekeeping role played by journal editors (Li and Lee 2014), as well as the broader and 'brokered' dependency dynamics at play between Chinese academia and 'anglophone-hegemonic academic publishing' (Lin 2022). While these latter studies do not deal with the topic of censorship extensively, Lin does introduce a way of understanding how scholarly communication is mediated between Chinese scholars, publishers and their intermediaries—the Ministry of Education, university librarians, publication importers. As the thesis will demonstrate, censorship occurs at precisely these brokerage points, where commercial, academic and political interests are mediated by non-state actors playing a gatekeeping function between Chinese academia and global scholarly communities.

Finally, beyond the study of censorship affecting published scholarship in China, there are sources that explore related concerns in international science and scholarship—its history, methods and motivations—largely on religious grounds in Early Modern Europe; or due to overt political repression in soviet Russia; or concerns related to so-called 'dual-use' research whereby findings in fields such as nuclear physics or virology are suppressed in anticipation of misuse by bad actors (Evans and Selgelid 2015). Indeed, one recent study suggests that censorship of scholarship is more often driven by prosocial motives and enforced bottom-up by

scientists and scholars to protect themselves or colleagues from harmful criticism, or to avoid contributing to harmful public debates surrounding vulnerable social groups, rather than top-down authoritarian oppression (Clark et. al. 2023). Nevertheless, this study draws on survey data from participants in US, UK, Canada and New Zealand, limiting the applicability and scope of its theoretical contribution to the study of censorship affecting global scholarly communication and scholarly journal publishing in China, which is this thesis' primary concern. Moving away from the narrow literature that deals with censorship in this context, the scope of this review will now be expanded to explore related forms of digital censorship.

3.3. Digital censorship in China

This second section of the literature review covers digital censorship in China, which is the more expansive of the three topics of empirical literature reviewed in this chapter—the other two being censorship of scholarly resources in China, discussed in the preceding section, and corporate censorship complicity in China, discussed in the section that follows this one. Given the breadth of the literature on digital censorship, this section will be structured around three sub-topics, all relating to internet-based censorship in China: (3.3.1.) mechanisms of digital censorship in China; (3.3.2.) strategies of digital censorship in China; (3.3.3.) and impacts of digital censorship in China. For the purposes of this discussion, 'digital censorship' also encompasses social media censorship, which is one of the more prevalent forms of censorship that this literature investigates.

3.3.1. Mechanisms of digital censorship in China

Much of the empirical research into digital censorship in China deals primarily with the underlying mechanisms and censorship criteria of the so-called 'Great Firewall of China' (hereafter 'GFW'), which refers to China's system of website filtering and blocking. According to

the literature on the GFW, this system involves five routes to control the availability of websites in China: ACL control¹⁰, URL and DNS blocking¹¹, BGP hijacking¹², and keywords blocking.¹³ (Zhong, Wang, and Huang 2017) In most cases, responsibility for screening and deleting online content (or otherwise blocking access to websites that host impermissible content) falls on third-party, private-sector intermediaries—internet service and content providers (ISPs and ICPs)—who are legally required to screen and delete information that might ‘threaten the security of nation’ or ‘the unity of ethnic groups and the stability of the society, and those spreading rumour, pornography, and violence.’ (ibid., 975) The consensus among various authors (Bamman, O’Connor, and Smith 2012; Crandall et al. 2007; MacKinnon 2011; ‘China | OpenNet Initiative’ 2012; Z.-J. Zhong, Wang, and Huang 2017), is that the GFW encompasses a combination of centralised censorship using a ‘a porous network of Internet routers’ (Bamman, O’Connor, and Smith 2012) to filter ‘the worst of blacklisted keywords’ (ibid.), alongside a more thorough system of censorship administration delegated to ‘domestic companies to police their own content under penalty of fines, shutdown and criminal liability.’ (ibid.)

While investigating these underlying mechanisms and systems of internet control, many empirical studies deal with the GFW’s implications for network filtering, search filtering, online chat platforms and blogs and social media censorship by identifying keywords or key terms that are typically associated with censorship. Bamman et. al. (2012) summarises these studies across multiple dimensions. The first deals with network filtering, whereby a directory of ‘black listed keywords’ is used to ‘sever the connection between the user of a Web site they are trying to

¹⁰ Access Control Lists. Censors may restrict the flow of traffic through a digital environment by using ACLs, which are rules that limit access from human users or machine/system processes to files, directories and internet networks (McCarthy 2023).

¹¹ Domain Name System, a system that turns internet domain names into IP addresses, which browsers use to load internet pages (Fortinet, n.d.). Censors may target DNSs with software that prevent users from accessing websites that are otherwise available, also known as internet filtering or blocking, which can involve targeting entire websites, hosting providers, or internet technologies (Electronic Frontier Foundation 2024).

¹² Border Gateway Protocol, the internet’s inter-domain routing protocol, which routes internet traffic via Autonomous Systems (AS) that advertise a set of IP prefixes and allows routes to destinations to connect to IP addresses. BGP hijacking involves malicious ASs that use IP prefixes to disrupt internet traffic and connectivity (Cho et al. 2019).

¹³ As above (e.g. DNS blocking) using keyword-based criteria.

access', encompassing the work of Crandall et. al. (2007) and citizen science projects, such as the Herdict Project (Herdict 2024), utilising 'a global network of users to report unreachable URLs (Bamman, O'Connor, and Smith 2012). This project highlights a common methodological strategy in empirical studies on China's censorship mechanisms, involving reverse engineering the censorship criteria used for search filtering via 'Google, Yahoo, Microsoft and Baidu (ibid.), chat censorship (via TOM-Skype) (Villeneuve 2008) and blog censorship (MacKinnon 2009). Some researchers have designed tools that allow for the discovery of filtered websites in China and reverse engineering of censorship criteria using automated search-based discovery of blocked URLs (Darer, Farnan, and Wright 2017) and web crawling (Darer, Farnan, and Wright 2018). In most cases, these studies highlight 'extreme variation' in the content that's censored 'with the most common forms of censorship being keyword filtering (not allowing some articles to be posted due to sensitive keywords) and deletion after posting' (Bamman, O'Connor, and Smith 2012).

3.3.2. Strategies of digital censorship in China

Beyond an analysis of keyword-based criteria for censorship, other authors go further and aim to reverse engineer not only the technical mechanisms but also the overarching strategy of China's censorship regime. This discussion will begin with Margaret Roberts' recent work on internet censorship in China, given the extent of Roberts' empirical and theoretical contribution in this area. In the volume *Censored: Distraction Inside China's Great Firewall*, Roberts (2018) addresses the mechanisms and strategic intent of China's digital censorship regime, substantially revising earlier studies that focus on traditional forms of mass-media censorship and propaganda (Brady 2008). Roberts also offers a definition of political censorship in the context of Chinese internet censorship, which will be discussed further in theory chapter (p.171).

Roberts' central thesis is that China's censorship system is 'porous': that the CCP uses low-level distraction and diversion to avoid public accountability, rather than more overt

measures to purge or penalize access to politically sensitive information (Roberts 2018). There are three censorship tactics involved: *fear*, *friction* and *flooding*. Fear is used sparingly by the Chinese state to suppress high-profile activists and dissidents, through ‘threats of punishment, such as losing a job, prison, or worse’ (Roberts 2018, 4). More often, *friction* is used to control public access to information by ‘increasing the costs, either in time or money, of access or spread of information’ (ibid. 6). *Flooding* involves ‘information coordinated as distraction, propaganda, or confusion’ (ibid.)—another common tactic of distraction and diversion—whereby online spaces and social media platforms are inundated (by government actors and proxies) with misinformation to dilute and distract from authentic expressions of dissent online.

According to Roberts, internet censorship is effective when it does not cause significant disruption to people’s daily lives beyond low-level inconvenience. Under such circumstances, internet users are less likely to notice that information has been censored and low-level friction or flooding can be explained away by official sources. The overarching aim of China’s censorship regime is a separation between an educated and politically informed elite, who face more overt fear tactics, from a less politically engaged majority, who are more susceptible to friction and flooding as a means of distraction and diversion. Roberts describes this separation as part of wider efforts to prevent ‘coordination of the core and the periphery, known to be an essential component in successful collective action’ (Roberts 2018, 8). China’s censorship strategy is not infallible, however. As Roberts describes, China’s internet-literate public—including those who are not politically engaged—will invest more time to overcome efforts to suppress information, through friction or flooding, during localised crises or political disruption, referring to the 2015 Tianjin explosion, or the 2014 Hong Kong protests, which led to blocks on popular social media platforms, like Instagram. These events serve to educate politically disengaged members of the public about China’s information constraints, when the need to circumvent is pressing and widespread and the efforts to suppress information become more overt.

Roberts' work in this area is informed by three separate studies, conducted between 2013 and 2017, in collaboration with Gary King and Jennifer Pan (King, Pan, and Roberts 2013; 2014; 2017). These studies all concern social media censorship in China aimed at identifying the underlying mechanisms and strategies involved in this form of censorship, separate from other forms, such as website-based censorship, whereby entire sites are filtered, blocked or shut down in China. King, Pan and Roberts' first study (King, Pan, and Roberts 2013) looks at China's vast network of domestic social media and microblogging platforms, involving a dataset of 3,674,698 posts across 1,382 Chinese-language services. Of this dataset, 127,283 posts were randomly selected for further analysis (ibid, 9), involving automated categorisation of each post's content using a predetermined list of topics, then logging the time and location of posting and revisiting the post over consistent intervals to see if the post was subsequently removed and replaced with a content notice (ibid.). The authors report that, on average, approximately 13% of all social media posts were censored in this way with a 'surprisingly low correlation between our *ex ante* measure of political sensitivity and censorship' (ibid. 11). Rather than political sensitivity determining likelihood for censorship, the authors note a strong correlation between instances of censorship and what they term 'collective action potential' (ibid. 14). This term describes the co-occurrence and relevance of posts to political events such as protests or crowd formations in public spaces regardless of anti- or pro-government sentiment, as well as posts related to events or individuals who 'have organized or incited collective action' (ibid. 13) in the past. Censorship therefore correlates strongly to posts that occur in high volumes in relation to a specific event or topic that could serve to galvanise collective action (ibid.).

The authors note that most content removals occur within 24 hours of posting, in ways that imply a 'large ...and highly professional' (ibid. 10) network of government agents, combining close reading and automated methods, such as keyword searching or filtering, as 'an auxiliary part of this effort' (ibid. 7). They distinguish this form of post-publication censorship from others, such as website filtering and blocking, using DNS poisoning and IP filtering

affecting entire websites—the GFW, discussed above under 3.3.1.—and pre-publication filtering and blocking social media posts, based on predetermined keywords.

In 2014, the authors published a follow up study (King, Pan, and Roberts 2014) that aims to understand more fully China’s pre-publication and post-publication censorship mechanisms and criteria. This study began by a) creating social media accounts; b) submitting posts on randomly assigned topics; c) tracking post-publication censorship of those posts; d) creating a bespoke social media site, with its own URL and rented server space in China with contracted Chinese firms to acquire the same software used by other social media sites; then, finally, e) ‘with direct access to their software, documentation, and even customer service help desk support—reverse-engineer[ing] how it all works.’ (ibid. 891) As in their earlier study, the authors report that pre-publication censorship involved prior review of social media posts using automated keyword filters, followed by selective post-publication review of posts by employees of Chinese internet regulators. (ibid.) In both studies, the authors note that criticism of the ‘state, its leaders, and their policies are routinely published, whereas posts with collective action potential are much more likely to be censored—regardless of whether they are for or against the state.’ (King, Pan, and Roberts 2014, 891.) Moreover, the authors hypothesise that the availability of criticism of the Chinese state and its officials may, in fact, be used by the state to ‘determine which officials are not doing their job of mollifying the people and need to be replaced.’ (ibid.)

Roberts, King and Pan’s findings on the mechanisms of social media censorship in China are supported, broadly, by earlier empirical studies, exploring China’s overarching censorship mechanisms and strategy. These include studies of internet-based press censorship in China (within the date range of this review), reporting that while an increase in the availability of information via the Internet may have constrained media freedoms in China (Lorentzen 2014), the Chinese Communist Party stands to gain from critical press reporting that deals with local issues, allowing the central organs of the CCP to hold local officials to account. Despite these

advantages, critical investigative reporting ‘of malfeasance at higher levels of government’ (ibid. 402) is tightly constrained in China. Indeed, as Lorentzen writes, ‘journalists are rarely punished for reporting on a topic that is later closed off’ (ibid. 403), reiterating the dynamics discussed above in relation to social media censorship and the potential for collective action. In fact, under some conditions, ‘a regime optimally permits investigative reporting on lower-level officialdom, adjusting how much reporting is allowed depending on the level of underlying social tensions’ (ibid., 402).

Building on this work, Tai and Fu (2020) devised a study of post-publication censorship via China’s most frequently used social media platform, WeChat. Like earlier studies, the methodology involved creating WeChat accounts for the purposes of the study, following public WeChat accounts, then systematically tracking posts and post-publication amendments due to censorship across 2,280 pairs of posts. (ibid.) King, Pan and Roberts (2014) concluded that the primary driver of censorship was the collective action potential of online discussion. Tai and Fu arrive at three conditions of censorship that do not contradict this earlier work but, instead, offer a more nuanced analysis of this central concern. For Tai and Fu, the conditions are censorship tied to ‘collective action potential’ are a) *specificity*, i.e. mention of specific ‘names of individuals, organizations, countries, and policies’ (ibid. 857); b) *focal points*, i.e. mentioning high-profile events or policy proposals that ‘serve as natural focal points for coordination’ (ibid. 859); and c) *conflict*, i.e. the use of specific focal points that may be perceived, by China’s censors, as being ‘likely to persuade social media readers to think toward undesirable directions, for example... issues that may lead to social instability’ (ibid.). Overall, the authors describe the censor’s central motivation for amending or removing social media posts as ‘killing the focal point’—even when the messages express pro-regime sentiment—if that focal point may serve as a basis for coordinated conflict or social instability (ibid.).

3.3.3. Impacts of digital censorship in China

As well as analysing the mechanisms by which internet and social media censorship occurs, or the implied strategy of China's censorship regime, there is another set of empirical literature in this field that aims to make sense of the effects and impacts of censorship for people who encounter it in China. This body of literature will not be surveyed exhaustively, as the primary focus of the present study is the conditions of censorship, rather than censorship's effects. Nevertheless, several important findings and approaches are worth highlighting from recent studies in this area. The first is a study on the effects of publicly available information about and justifications for censorship and Chinese internet-users' tendency towards online self-censorship (Z.-J. Zhong, Wang, and Huang 2017). Pointing to earlier studies that suggest that many Chinese people are unaware or unconcerned by online censorship (Damm 2007; Liu 2011), the authors set out to test the hypothesis that, when faced with public information that censorship is, in fact, occurring in relation to certain topics, Chinese people will tend towards self-censorship. Further, the authors hypothesise that this tendency will be increased when internet users encounter public justifications for China's internet regulations (Zhong, Wang, and Huang 2017, 977).

Zhong et. al. (2017) asked participants to access information on China's Baidu search engine about the number of people who attended the anti-Chinese Communist Party Occupy Central protest in Hong Kong and the pro-regime Anti-Occupy Central counter-protests in 2014. (Information about the number of anti-regime protesters is suppressed on Baidu.) Then, participants were asked to use the search engine to find 'the third sentence that Jing Chai said in her documentary film *Under the Dome*' (ibid. 980)—a documentary about environmental pollution in China, which is available on YouTube outside of China but blocked via Chinese websites, including Baidu (ibid.). Participants would therefore be required to circumvent the so-called Great Firewall of China (GFW) to complete the two tasks.

Three sets of participants were given three different routes. The first experienced ‘soft censorship’, whereby no routes were provided to circumvent, and the participant group encountered content warnings and missing or unavailable information, as would any regular internet user in China. The second group were given a VPN service to circumvent the access blocks, allowing for ‘compared censorship’ (ibid. 984), whereby the reality of censorship was known to them, as was the details of the information that had been suppressed. The third group experienced ‘hard censorship’ (ibid. 986). While the participants were watching the documentary film using the same VPN as group 2, the ‘experimenter pretended to receive a phone call from the Internet Supervision Department of the university and told the subjects that the flow to overseas websites were detected and not permitted in the campus’ (ibid. 981). The authors also showed one set of participants some articles about common justifications for censorship, for example, avoiding individual harm or offence, or protecting social stability. Participants were then asked to rate their willingness to discuss ten sensitive issues, including the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, after which they were asked to sign a petition to make Google Scholar available in China, contrary to China’s censorship controls, with either their own name or a pseudonym.

The authors found that, in all cases, perceived censorship ‘significantly decreases the willingness to talk about sensitive issues and the likelihood of signing petitions with true names’ (ibid. x), regardless of the form that the censorship takes. However, the participant group that was primed with common justifications for censorship reported more willingness to talk about Tiananmen Square and showed lower levels of self-censorship (ibid. 974). This study’s findings are significant for the present research, which will explore the relationship between perceived external censorship pressures affecting scholarly publications and self-censorship practices among editors and authors of scholarly publications. These topics will be returned to in the interview design (p.119) and discussion (p.280).

Aside from a tendency towards self-censorship as a consequence of overt forms of external censorship, one recent empirical study suggested that Chinese internet censorship can, in certain circumstances, have the opposite effect and prompt Chinese citizens to find routes to circumvent information access controls (Hobbs and Roberts 2018). In this study, the authors track the individual information access behaviours of Chinese social media users before and after a nation-wide block of Instagram in 2014 (ibid.). The authors find that this access block prompted a large proportion of Instagram's China-based users to download Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to connect to internet servers outside of China, which are not subject to China's information controls. Doing so allowed these internet users to access censored search engines and social media platforms, including Google, Twitter and Facebook. (ibid.) Moreover, the authors find that, paradoxically, China's political censorship in this context served to politicise many of Instagram's users who were either unaware of or ambivalent towards China's information controls before the website block (ibid.). Despite 'initially being apolitical, these new users began browsing blocked political pages on Wikipedia, following Chinese political activists on Twitter, and discussing highly politicized topics such as opposition protests in Hong Kong.' (ibid. 621)

In a second study, Margaret Roberts and Jennifer Pan (2020) explored the effect of the Chinese government's shutdown of Wikipedia's Chinese-language site on 19th May 2015. The authors describe this as 'coarse censorship' (ibid. 1), i.e. censorship affecting an entire site, not targeted towards individual posts or users, and they explore the impacts of this form of censorship in terms of Chinese internet users' information seeking behaviours. Pan and Roberts describe and investigate two forms of information seeking behaviours via the website: a) proactive information consumption, i.e. actively searching for pages and information on the site and b) incidental information consumption, i.e. stumbling across site pages and information (ibid.). Pan and Roberts find that 'users from mainland China were much more likely to consume information on Wikipedia about politics and history incidentally rather than proactively' (ibid. 1).

Combined with the earlier study reported above, these findings suggest that, although ‘coarse censorship’ may prompt greater efforts to circumvent censorship under certain circumstances, the effects of site-wide access blocks can still be politically significant insofar as they limit opportunities for incidental information consumption related to topics of political concern in China.

3.4. Corporate complicity in Chinese censorship

The opening section of this chapter and the context chapter (p.27) discussed the narrow body of literature on the involvement of non-Chinese scholarly publishers in Chinese censorship practices. Beyond these events, there have been many related cases involving non-Chinese organisations in other sectors. This final section of the literature review discusses the scholarly literature that deals with these related cases of censorship complicity, particularly those involving the US tech firm, Google, and its fraught entry into the Chinese market for its search platform and allied services.

Although the literature on corporate censorship complicity is extensive, this section focusses predominantly on studies involving Google and other tech firms because of the parallels with the cases concerning Cambridge University Press and Springer Nature. These parallels include the nature of the company’s public statements and strategies for handling the reputational and business risks associated with enforcing, on behalf of China’s media and internet regulators, constraints on users of each company’s products and services (see context chapter, p.29). The studies discussed here also offer methodological approaches and conceptual tools for the research design that follows (p.109).

3.4.1. Google in China

In the context chapter (p.56), parallels were drawn between the cases of publisher involvement in Chinese censorship practices and Google's entry into the Chinese market in 2006 with a self-censored search platform. Google withdrew from China, in 2010, following alleged attempts on behalf of the Chinese government to hack into Google's user data and reveal the personal information of political activists using the company's email service, Gmail (Sheehan 2018).

Business ethics scholars were quick to describe this case as an example of an apparent tension between a) Google's corporate ethos, 'Don't be evil', b) their business practices, via Google.cn (Google's China-based search platform), and c) international standards set by the UN on business practices of non-domestic firms that serve to compromise or conflict with international human rights, such as the right of free speech and the free exchange of information (Tan and Tan 2012; O'Rourke, Harris, and Ogilvy 2007).

This discussion begins with O'Rourke et. al.'s 2007 case study, analysing Google's business development and communication strategy, having announced their entry into the Chinese with a censored search platform, Google.cn, the year before (O'Rourke, Harris, and Ogilvy 2007). The authors point to concerns (at the time) among non-governmental organisations, such as Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders, that Google's willingness to compromise their stated ethics with respect to a censored search platform may signal a change in stance with respect to user data to support investigations by the Chinese state into journalists and political activists—two central requirements placed on internet service providers in China, known informally as 'the Pledge' (Hamilton, Knouse, and Hill 2009). Other tech firms, such as Microsoft and Yahoo!, had at that time already entered the Chinese market and complied with these regulations leading to the imprisonment of China-based users (O'Rourke, Harris, and Ogilvy 2007, 18). The authors also point to an apparent contradiction with respect to Google's codes of practice outside of China, where, for example, in the United

States, the tech firm refused to comply with a US governmental request to supply user data to aid the government's investigation of online child pornography (ibid. 13). O' Rourke et. al. note that Google's stock price fell in response to the company's stance regarding to the US government's investigation; however, trading on Wall Street posted a 3.6% gain immediately following Google's announcement of the firm's entry into China with Google.cn (ibid. 12). With these developments in mind, the authors ask, 'does the pursuit of profit in the developing world trump the need for ethics and values in business operations?' (Ibid.)

Other early studies, responding to Google's entry into China proper, take up this discussion of the firm's fraught ethical position and the question of whether censorship compliance renders Google and other tech firms complicit in human rights violations in the region. Dann and Haddow (2008) argue that, while compliance with China's censorship rules may be a condition of access to the market, these requirements ought not to supersede corporations' wider obligations under the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (ibid. 222). Under this framework, corporations are, on the one hand, obliged to respect 'the public interest, development objectives, social, economic and other cultural policies including transparency, accountability and prohibition of corruption, and the authority of the countries in which the enterprises operate' (ibid. 223). However, under the UDHR, corporations are also obliged to 'refrain from any activity which supports, solicits, or encourages States or any other entities to abuse human rights... [and further,] to ensure that the goods and services they provide will not be used to abuse human rights.' (ibid. x) The authors conclude that when the domestic legal frameworks of a country in which a non-domestic corporation entity is operating entail an abuse of human rights—such as China's internet regulations constraining free exchange of information on political grounds—'corporations may not take advantage by abetting the State in this abuse.' (ibid.)

Not all scholars of human rights and international business ethics agree with Dann and Hodder's assessment of this case. Brenkert (2009), instead, frames Google's decision to suppress search returns in China as a plausible moral compromise, whereby the company 'maintained its integrity to the extent that it has done what it thinks best, all things considered, inasmuch as this maximally maintains its core mission.' (Brenkert 2009, 462) Brenkert questions whether the UN's obligations regarding suspected human rights violations apply to corporate entities, who are not parties to these treaties, unlike government entities (*ibid.*). Moreover, Brenkert argues, the relevant human rights legislation could only apply to entities capable of violating those rights directly, i.e. 'organizations that are capable of arresting people or bestowing on them a nationality.' (*ibid.* 455) Therefore, to violate or otherwise compromise the human rights of Chinese nationals, Google would have to work in consort with a network of actors to wholly prevent access to information on certain topics, not just to suppress that information. Or, minimally, Google would 'have to have authority or effective power over those rights holders' (*ibid.* 458) through other means. This argument does not, however, rule out the possibility that Google is to some degree complicit in the Chinese government's systematic violations of Chinese citizens' human rights, if not themselves wholly responsible for those violations, or obligated under the UN's human rights framework.

Notwithstanding concerns of Google's potential complicity with human rights violations in China, Brenkert offers an ethical framework for Google's actions, whereby their corporate mantra, 'Don't be evil', operates as a regulatory ideal that permits exceptions when other company values are in conflict and must be reconciled—for example, the firm's corporate mission to provide (some level of) access to information worldwide. Under this framing, Google's moral compromise may be justified as an effort to maximise information access as an ethical good insofar as Google is a) transparent about the nature of this compromise and b) actively mitigates potential harms to users of Google's services (*ibid.* 470). These mitigations could (and indeed, did) include flagging suppressed content that is subject to censorship

controls; refusing to share private or sensitive personal data with the Chinese government; and monitoring and evaluating their position in the Chinese market, which could, ultimately, result in withdrawal if new evidence emerged of human rights violations in China (ibid.). Despite this attempt to frame Google's compliance with censorship as a moral compromise, in later work, Brenkert describes this as a 'legalistic and consequentialist' (Brenkert 2010, 125) position: one that maximises information access while 'significantly and knowingly' (ibid. 126) furthering political censorship in China on behalf of the Chinese state. In so doing, Brenkert argues, Google are 'complicit in the violation of the right of freedom of expression' (Brenkert, 2010, 126), regardless of the applicability of human rights law to corporate entities operating internationally.

Brenkert's position finds support in other contemporary analyses of the Google case (Nolan 2009; Hamilton, Knouse, and Hill 2009). Although Google may have avoided violating obligations under human rights or sanctions law, such as the American Export Law, which acts to 'prohibit sales of any products that would aid the totalitarian governments' (Hamilton, Knouse, and Hill 2009, 149), the company has nevertheless violated 'generally held ethical principles' (ibid. 150) that underpin this legislation. Therefore, they may still face reputational penalties outside of China because of their violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of human rights law. Rather than speculating on the legal ramifications of Google's self-censored search engine in China, however, Hamilton, et. al. (2009) instead offers a heuristic for corporate managers to resolve what the authors term 'cross-cultural ethical conflicts' (ibid.), whereby 'the firm's way of doing business differs from the practice in the host country' (ibid. 143). These questions are reproduced here in full:

1. What is the Questionable Practice (QP) in this situation?
2. Does the QP violate any laws that are enforced?
3. Is the QP simply a cultural difference or is it also a potential ethics problem?

4. Does the QP violate the firm's core values or code of conduct, or an industry wide or international code to which the firm subscribes, or a firmly established hypernorm?
5. Does the firm have leverage (something of value to offer) in the host country that allows the firm to follow its own practices rather than the QP?
6. Will market practices in the host country improve if the firm follows its own practices rather than the QP in the host country marketplace?' (ibid. 146)

Working through these questions in relation to the Google case, Hamilton et. al. conclude that the firm adopted at its 'Questionable Practice' in the absence of clear-cut legal constraints or industry codes of practice to the contrary, despite the obvious ethical conflict and potential reputational penalties. As they describe,

[w]hen there is no formal enforcement agency and condemnation by non-government organizations (NGO) or unfavorable public opinion is unlikely, voluntary adherence to industry wide principles or international ethics codes will be inconsistent. Individual managers may feel at some peril to their careers for insisting their firm follow such codes. (Hamilton, Knouse, and Hill 2009, 144)

Hamilton et. al. therefore establishes both a practical decision-making heuristic and theoretical frame, or set of conditions, for censorship compliance, which are relevant to the cases that are explored in this thesis, involving platform-based self-censorship in scholarly publishing. As such, the conditions outlined above—the absence of legal constraints, formal enforcement and wider condemnation outside of the affected fields of practice—form tentative hypotheses that will be explored further in the interview design (p.119) and analysis (p.183). As will be described later, the research design will aim to understand the extent to which formal obstacles exist in scholarly publishing to dissuade corporate managers from resolving ethical conflicts in

favour of a compromised position that is in tension with values of freedom of information and expression, as in the Google case.

Despite the absence of formal obstacles in the Google case, however, as both Nolan (2009) and Hamilton et. al. (2009) describe, Google did make attempts to form a set of obligations under a broader corporate social responsibility framework. This framework was later formalised as part of the Global Network Initiative (GNI) in 2008, including Yahoo!, Microsoft, human rights groups, academics and ‘socially responsible investors’ (Nolan 2009, 24). As Nolan describes, when it was founded, the GNI was tasked with developing ‘a set of principles and systematic approach to guide companies in resisting and limiting efforts by governments that seek to enlist companies in acts of censorship and surveillance that violate free expression and individual privacy’ (ibid.), with a focus on human rights concerns that could arise through member organisations’ business ventures in foreign markets, such as China. Over time, the scope of the GNI’s has expanded, now with over 80 members from across the information and communication technology (ICT) sector, civil society organizations, academics, and investors from Africa, Europe, Latin America, North America, and the Middle East (Global Network Initiative 2024b), all of whom are jointly responsible for implementing the GNI principles (Global Network Initiative 2024c). The GNI has adapted and expanded stated obligations under the UN Declaration on Human Rights (UNDHR) to ensure that member organisations’ business dealings do not interfere with customers’ and suppliers’ rights to freedom of expression and privacy (ibid.).

While the GNI is not a legal or governmental body and therefore has limited enforcement powers, all members are required (as a condition of membership) to ‘act in a manner consistent’ with the stated guidelines (ibid.). Each member organisation is subject to a periodic company assessment every two or three years by other GNI members, reporting on the extent to which each company’s business practices are consistent with the GNI principles and

implementation guidelines (Global Network Initiative 2024a). Underpinning the GNI's transparency requirement, known as the GNI 'Accountability, Policy & Learning Framework', is a presumption that, as Nolan (2009) writes, ethical codes of practice will 'be adopted more quickly by those companies that rely heavily on the value of their brand to sell their products' (ibid. 25).

In the wake of what was described as 'a highly sophisticated and targeted attack on our corporate infrastructure originating from China', in January 2010, Google announced a 'new approach to China', which would be consistent with the GNI's principles. This began by discussing with 'the Chinese government the basis on which [Google] could operate an unfiltered search engine within the law, if at all' (Google 2010a). On 22nd March 2010, Google announced that they had, instead, abandoned their filtered service via Googl.cn, with users redirected to Google.com.hk, offering 'uncensored search in simplified Chinese, specifically designed for users in mainland China and delivered via our servers in Hong Kong.' (Google 2010b) Thus, Google effectively exited the Chinese market for search services in 2010, with its .cn service becoming subject to China's own state-mandated internet filtering apparatus.

Google's effort to comply with stated principles under the GNI while maintaining market access in China and operating within the bounds of China's internet regulations was ultimately unsuccessful. This tension between business interests and corporate social responsibility frameworks is consistent with Nolan's (2009) stated condition of non-compliance with censorship, i.e. that companies will prioritise compliance with industry codes of practice if the value of their brand outside of the foreign market is contingent on the perceived consistency of their business practices with their stated company values and principles. This condition of non-compliance with censorship demands will be explored further in this thesis in relation to scholarly publishers' unwillingness to commit to industry-level transparency frameworks and self-regulation, equivalent to the GNI, beyond the Association of University Presses statement

of guiding principles (Association of University Presses 2018). The AUP has no reporting or enforcement framework and its principles only apply its members, rather than the wider scholarly publishing industry and commercial publishers in particular. To date, no other industry body in scholarly publishing has adopted a set of principles or reporting requirements to prevent infringements of platform users' rights to freedom of expression, information or of privacy in a manner consistent with ICT providers under the GNI framework.

Since Google's exit from China, described above, the relevant business ethics literature has, with some exceptions (Spinello 2014), moved on from an analysis of potential human rights violations as a result of the firm's initial compliance with censorship demands towards more nuanced considerations of multi-stakeholder obligations, institutional dialectics and the role of governmental agencies to uphold multinational corporate social responsibility principles (Tan and Tan 2012; Baker and Tang 2015). For Tan & Tan (2012), Google's commitment to corporate social responsibility is complicated by the fact that the company 'made its ethical mandate highly visible in Western markets which then made it far more challenging to reconcile its actions' (ibid.) Nonetheless, unlike its competitors, Google was comparatively transparent about the moral compromise it reached in the Chinese market, through several unprompted public statements and a mechanism whereby suppressed search returns were flagged as such to China-based users (ibid.). When the company 'realized the business environment was too challenging to navigate, it politicized the question, turning to vocal support from the U.S. State Department' (ibid.) Therefore, the authors argue, Google found itself caught in a tangle of 'highly sensitive, multistakeholder interactions' with little possibility of a 'universally favourable' (ibid.) resolution.

Baker and Tang's (2015) analysis of Google's exit from China is broadly consistent with Tan and Tan's (2012), although they situate their public statements within a theoretical lens of 'discursive institutional work' (Baker and Tang 2015, 2982) through which Google's evolving

public positions and discourse regarding censorship complicity constitute ‘an adaptation to the institutional environment rather than an institutional change’ (ibid. 2981). Baker and Tang identify three phases of dialectical tensions present in Google’s public discourse: a) business versus ethics; b) global standards versus local compliance and c) corporate control versus state control (ibid.), rephrased as:

[a,] the company’s role in maximizing profits and its ethical obligations; [b,] its need to establish global codes of conduct and the pressure of adhering to local standards; and [c,] the choice between maintaining control over its products or relinquishing some degree of control to the local government. (ibid. 2993)

These three dialectical shifts allowed Google to reframe their initial compliance as a) bad for business, collapsing the distinction between commercial expediency and business ethics; b) a global problem, not limited to Google, expanding the company’s ethical obligations to broader industry and governmental actors; and c) an unavoidable compromise with the Chinese state, which, paradoxically, allowed Google to assume an activist mantle through the company’s efforts to inform China-based users about the extent of content suppression via the company’s search platform (ibid.). The implications of Baker and Tang’s thesis have been expanded upon here in full, as they offer a means of decoding the public discourses of Cambridge University Press, Springer Nature and Taylor & Francis, all of whom released public statements (p.29) that bear many of the hallmarks of Google’s three dialectics.

3.4.2. Related studies on corporate censorship complicity in China

Beyond the business ethics literature dealing with Google’s entry into (and exit from) China, there is a wider body of literature on the topic of corporate complicity and Chinese censorship, involving both domestic and non-Chinese corporations. This sub-section focusses on three studies that illustrate some of the broader concerns that are relevant to global scholarly

communication. Jennifer Pan (2017) has studied the extent to which China's social media censorship can be exported to other authoritarian regimes. Using website data from Alexa to analyse social media platform traffic and ownership details, Pan concludes that 'China's success in social media censorship is inexorably tied to the dominance of domestic companies such as QQ, Weibo, and YouKu' (ibid. 168). The dominance of these companies allows them to offer fine-tuned content moderation that is compliant with China's internet regulations by suppressing, removing or blocking access to individual posts, comments and profiles, rather than relying on site-wide blocks and filtering—unlike competitors, for example Google or Facebook, which operate outside of China's regulatory jurisdiction (ibid.). This blanket approach to internet censorship, imposed by Chinese internet service providers on websites and internet services originating outside of China, is comparatively ineffective, as internet users can circumvent China's Great Firewall and access unfiltered websites using a Virtual Private Network (VPN). Therefore, the dominance of domestic competitors is an essential component of digital information control within China's territorial borders (ibid.).

Pan's dynamics of domestic dominance and corporate censorship offer an explanatory framework for China's pivot towards scholarly information control through an expansion of domestic publishing outlets and a new incentive structure for China-based researchers to publish in them, as discussed in the context chapter (p.50). Rather than representing 'a useless overreach' fraught with unintended consequences, as suggested elsewhere (T. Phillips 2017), Pan's thesis can be adapted to the present research, involving strategic alignment between China's social media censorship and content moderation practices delegated to dominant domestic corporate entities; the censorship of scholarship also involves a combination of state coercion via the General Administration of Press and Publications, domestic publications importers and multinational scholarly publishers, like Cambridge University Press and Springer Nature. This is a strategy common to both domains, of controlling the rules of access to China's information

economy and the imposition of censorship, at source, by service providers that are better equipped (technologically and linguistically) to enforce China's content rules.

Jaw-Nian (2017) builds on this body of literature with a study on China's state coercion of private media outlets in Taiwan to develop a theoretical framework to 'systematise the mechanisms through which the Chinese government extends its authoritarian influence ... extraterritorially' (ibid. 28). This theoretical framework integrates two concepts from the wider literature on China's modes of influence overseas and foreign direct investment: the 'commercialisation of censorship' (Kurlantzick and Link 2009) and the 'China factor' (J. Wu 2016). These concepts refer to processes by which the Chinese state a) outsources censorship to 'private media companies by threatening them with economic repercussions' (Jaw-Nian 2017, 27) and b) 'exerts political influence on other countries by absorbing them into [China's] sphere of economic influence' (ibid. 28). Building on these foundations, Jaw-Nian proposes three levels of censorship outsourcing:

International: creating an 'asymmetric economic structure at the international level, making the target country economically dependent on China' (ibid. 28)

Sectoral: using financial and business advantages and threats of withdrawing those advantages to 'co-opt media capitalists at the sectoral level to become Beijing's local collaborators in the target country' (ibid.)

Corporate: exerting pressure on local media capitalists to help 'implement and routinize external-oriented self-censorship at the corporate level in the target country' (ibid. 29)

While the study deals primarily with traditional news media outlets in Taiwan, some elements of Jaw-Nian's framework suggest a level of alignment with the dynamics of outsourced (self-)censorship of non-Chinese scholarly publishers; for example, the use of economic incentives and penalties to co-opt executive-level actors in multinational companies in ways that

further China's political interests. The present research will delve further into the dynamics of economic influence and internal and external drivers to comply with research censorship at the corporate level, in chapters 6 (p.183) and 8 (p.280), to test and expand upon this theoretical framework.

Taking a broader view of corporate censorship complicity outside of China, Zhong and Watters (2020) investigate the content moderation practices of Facebook, Twitter, Google, Reddit and Imgur in New Zealand, United States, Russia, Japan and South Korea. Although this study does not meet the more narrow inclusion criteria of this section, concentrating on censorship complicity in China, it is mentioned here as it uses a comparable methodology to the corpus analysis component described in chapter 4 (p.135), as well as pointing to some features of content moderation and suppression common to the Chinese context. The authors use structured VPN comparisons of each platform, routing access through servers registered in each of the nations investigated, with a pre-determined list of known blacklisted keywords (covering pornography, domestic and cyber security, terrorism, natural disasters, emergencies, biological warfare, among other topics) to explore the different ways that content moderation policies are enacted by multinational social media firms (*ibid.*).

The authors find that, rather than concentrating solely on public posts, which pose the greatest risks, 'social networks widely interfere with private and personal communications in the absence of any legal or regulatory requirements to refrain from doing so' (*ibid.* 705), which is at odds with a non-consequentialist approach to freedom of expression and privacy. Rather than engaging in opaque and expansive content moderation and suppression practices, the authors recommend that social media firms instead use 'auto-Internet warnings' to flag potentially harmful posts, rather than immediate suppression, 'which could be a mechanism that is more consistent with situational crime-prevention theory.' (*ibid.* 708) Rather than relying on content suppression as a last resort, it appears, based on the authors findings, that social media firms

instead apply moderation policies indiscriminately and with little consideration to users' rights to privacy within closed-access, peer-to-peer communications. (ibid.)

Returning to the involvement of Chinese firms, Ruan et. al. (2021b) study the domestic social media platform, WeChat, in administering China's information controls before, during and after China's 19th National Communist Party Congress (NCPC19). The authors track the occurrence of 531 NCPC19-related keywords, which have been blocked in user posts on WeChat. While the findings do not lead to wholly novel conclusions, they offer further empirical support for the outcomes of related studies described above that a) censorship is delegated by the Chinese state to private companies and their intermediaries and b) that targets of censorship include 'neutral and potentially positive references to government policies and ideology' (ibid. 1), as in the earlier discussion of 'focal points' (Tai and Fu 2020), and c), therefore, that the 'intermingling of the state and private companies can lead to outcomes that may not align with government strategies' (ibid. 23). It is worth noting, however, that c) does not necessarily follow from b); as in the discussion of 'focal points' and Margaret Roberts' work on 'porous censorship' (Roberts, 2018), the strategy of the Chinese state may also include the suppression of pro-government sentiment to maintain social order and cohesion. Moreover, some level of government criticism may be permitted tactically as a means of tracking the performance of local officials, as discussed earlier (Lorentzen 2014).

Aside from more established theoretical claims, the Ruan et. al. (2020) study is significant because it supports the claim, found elsewhere (Roberts 2018), that China's censorship controls are more stringent and far-reaching during significant anniversaries and events in the political calendar, such as the CCP's five-yearly Party Congresses. The events concerning Cambridge University Press and Springer Nature also coincided with the CCP's 19th Party Congress in 2017 (Ming 2017); likewise, the surge in content suppression via a publisher's platform, tracked in this

thesis' corpus analysis study (p.262), coincided with the CCP's 20th Party Congress (16th-22nd October 2022), reaching a peak of over 28,000 items of content in December 2022.

To conclude this section, two recent studies (Sun and Zhao 2022; O'Connell 2022) have focused exclusively on the notion of 'delegated censorship' in the Chinese context. The first of these is a desk-based case study that investigates the events surrounding the Chinese government's threat to exclude the National Basketball Association from China (O'Connell 2022), described earlier in the context chapter (p.67). O'Connell argues that when it comes to markets for televised or internet streamed sports events, China's is 'so large that alternative markets effectively do not exist, and its authoritarian structure mitigates the extent to which business is able to exert influence on politics to resist sanctioning' (ibid. 1115), drawing parallels with the events surrounding scholarly publishers are this thesis' research focus. O'Connell concludes that global firms, like the NBA—and by extension, international scholarly publishers, like Springer Nature and others—are 'likely to comply with the standards of the largest markets but may ignore smaller markets if they perceive compliance costs to be too high relative to potential profit.' (ibid.) Both of O'Connell's central arguments will be explored and tested further in relation to the interviews with scholarly publishing industry professionals in chapter 6 (p.190).

The final study in this section (Sun and Zhao 2022) follows a familiar methodology to King et. al. (2014), which both involve creating political content and tracking the patterns of censorship that follow. In Sun and Zhao's study, the authors created an online political publication for the purposes of the study, called *Global China*. They then used A/B testing¹⁴ to analyse article-level censorship combined with qualitative interviews with Chinese officials to understand China's system of censorship outsourcing (ibid.). As in King et. al. (2014), the authors find that although censorship is administered by private firms in China, those firms are

¹⁴ A randomized form of experiment that typically involves comparing interactions with two variants, e.g. in this case, two forms of the same article with minor tweaks 'or one word or picture or by changing the publication timing' (Sun and Zhao 2022, 197) to determine censorship criteria.

scrutinised according to article timing, quantity targets and publication stage, which are all relevant criteria for censorship (ibid.). The downside of this system of censorship delegation is that criteria are applied with significant variation and flexibility throughout China's internet. However, this system presents advantages for the Chinese government in terms of a cost-effective means of ensuring 'regime stability and legitimacy' (ibid. 191), while recognising the state's 'technical and bureaucratic limits.' (ibid.)

As in the previous study (O'Connell 2022), the overlap with established methodologies and findings related to mechanisms of (delegated) censorship in China suggests a degree of saturation in the literature. Several studies investigate top-down censorship controls using structured comparisons of censored and uncensored online political content or social media posts, often in tandem with interviews with state officials. This established approach also suggests a methodological gap in terms of in-depth qualitative research that aims to understand the conditions of censorship compliance by private-sector firms, taking industry professionals working for companies unaffiliated with the Chinese state and acting (in some cases) as administrators of China's information controls as one of two central participant groups. This is one of the methodological gaps that the present thesis aims to fill, while contributing to the wider literature on global corporate social responsibility in publishing (Phillips 2019) and related sectors with a focus on censorship concerns affecting non-Chinese scholarly publishers operating in China.

Conclusion

This literature view summarised the body of empirical research that has been conducted on three core topics: 1. Censorship of scholarly resources in China; 2. Digital censorship in China; and 3. Corporate complicity in Chinese censorship. Given the breadth of topics 2. and 3., these were broken down further into sub-sections dealing with the mechanisms, strategies and impacts of

digital censorship in China; Google in China; and related studies of corporate censorship complicity in China, including the outsourcing of China's censorship controls to other non-Chinese tech firms, social media platforms, internet service providers and sports associations.

Several points of intersection with the present research were identified, in some cases offering routes of inquiry to answer the research questions given earlier the thesis (p.22), particularly in the literature dealing with corporate censorship complicity. For example, some of the studies suggest conditions of censorship compliance that could apply in the context of global scholarly communication, including the absence of legal constraints, formal enforcement of guidelines or wider condemnation to prevent these practices (as in the discussion of Hamilton, Knouse, and Hill 2009). Some studies suggested conditions of non-compliance, when the value of a business' brand outside of China is contingent on perceived alignment with stated organisational values and principles (see discussion of Nolan 2009). Others analysed China's forms of state coercion, using a combination of asymmetric economic dependency, financial and business advantages and political pressure to co-opt domestic and overseas content platform providers (Jaw-Nian 2017); likewise China's censorship strategy, aimed at enforcing more effectively (at source) regulatory constraints at the level of individual items of content (Pan 2017), as opposed to more overt and crude forms of information control (Roberts 2018) via China's so-called Great Firewall.

Finally, this literature review has identified gaps that the present research aims to address. Beyond some initial analyses of the common terms associated with censored research articles (Wong and Kwong 2019)—or of the surrounding events and their implications for a critique of mainstream academic publishing (Loubere 2020), or related forms of archival censorship in China (Tiffert 2017)—there are no in-depth empirical studies into the involvement of non-Chinese scholarly publishers in platform-based censorship complicity. Moreover, in the wider literature on corporate censorship complicity, there is an absence of studies that use qualitative

methods to explore the conditions and dynamics of censorship complicity from the perspective of individuals associated with the corporations in question. Therefore, these topic-based and empirical gaps inform the research design, which is described in full in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER FOUR: Research Design, Methods and Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This research aims to address the primary question, introduced above (p.22), regarding the conditions that enable or constrain censorship (and censorship complicity) in the context of online scholarly journal platforms in China. It aims to understand empirically the impact of Western publishers' compliance with censorship demands, how they came about, and the conditions under which those demands might be resisted. This is the focus of the primary research. As secondary concerns, the research aims to define censorship in this under-theorised context and to understand the consequences of censorship complicity in scholarly publishing; the barriers to collective action to resist censorship; whether collective action is advantageous for the communities affected; and to explore, qualitatively and quantitatively, the keyword and term-based censorship criteria affecting English-language scholarly literature in China.

To achieve these aims, this thesis follows an exploratory-sequential mixed methods design. There are two methods of empirical enquiry. The first and primary approach is a qualitative interview-based study involving 12 academics and 12 scholarly publishing professionals who have, in most cases, first-hand experience relevant to the research focus, involving the censorship of online journal platforms in China. The second approach supplements the interview study by using quantitative corpus analysis tools on a corpus of 450 censored journal articles to determine likely term-based conditions of censorship and changes to those conditions over time.

This chapter opens with a summary of the primary and secondary research questions and their underlying motivations (p.110). The section that follows describes the research design

(p.112), including the research paradigm and theoretical framework (p.114), ethical considerations (p.115) and a positionality statement (p.117). Then the main research methods are described—the semi-structured interviews (p.119) and a corpus analysis study (p.135)—including rationale, sample size, selection criteria, methods of analysis and limitations. The conclusion (p.144) relates the research design, methods and methodology to the thesis’ overarching objectives and the empirical and methodological gaps identified in the literature review.

4.2. Research questions

This section of the chapter begins by outlining the primary and secondary research questions, which inform the research design and methods that follow.

4.2.1. Primary research question

As introduced earlier (p.22), the primary research question that this thesis aims to answer is as follows:

PQ: Under what conditions are censorship practices enabled or constrained in the context of online research distribution in China?

The specific censorship practices that are the focus of this research are detailed in the research context chapter (p.29), namely, a) efforts by non-Chinese scholarly publishers to remove journal articles from their online platforms in China to comply with state regulations concerning politically sensitive content and b) efforts by publishers to amend the search function of their online platforms in China such that politically sensitive material is suppressed or otherwise unavailable (see p.48). In addition, this research explores the conditions that lead to other boundary cases of censorship complicity, such as removing journals or otherwise altering content packages sold to Chinese universities in ways that prevent politically sensitive material from being readily accessed by China-based readers. Other related forms of platform-based content

suppression are also considered, which were not publicly known or anticipated at the outset of this research project, such as ‘local loading’, described further in the interview analysis chapter (p.198).

PQ presupposes a theory of censorship and censorship complicity, or self-censorship, that encompasses the two forms of censorship complicity described above (removing articles from journals and suppressing search returns) and distinguishes these more overt forms from boundary cases, such as refusing to sell access to journals that contain sensitive material in the Chinese market. This theory is given in chapter 5 (p.146), which defines platform-based censorship in the context of the online scholarly record. The rest of the methods and methodology sections of this chapter explain how PQ is answered by addressing methodological and theoretical gaps in the existing literature on digital censorship in China.

4.2.2. Secondary research questions

To answer the PQ, five secondary questions have been determined, which inform the empirical research design and the theoretical contribution. These are:

SQ1: Under what conditions do disruptions in the functioning of the online scholarly record constitute (self-)censorship?

SQ2: What are the consequences of platform-based censorship complicity in China for the communities that are affected by it?

SQ3: What are the constraints that prevent collaborative action within and between affected communities to resist censorship complicity in China?

SQ4: To what extent is collaborative resistance advantageous for the communities that are affected by censorship complicity in China?

SQ5: How have the conditions that enable platform-based censorship in China changed over time?

The section that follows relates these questions to the overarching research design and methodological choices that aim to answer these questions using appropriate research methods.

4.3. Research design

As stated above, this research follows a mixed-methods, ‘exploratory sequential’ design (Clark and Creswell 2008, 123), which places greater emphasis on the qualitative component. It involves the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches to address the primary and secondary questions and aims. An exploratory mixed methods design is used for several reasons. The first is that the specific research focus has not been studied empirically before. There is no prevailing research methodology or body of evidence related to the study of the censorship of scholarly research platforms operating in China. Two methods are used, one primary and one secondary, that allow the researcher to establish some early empirical findings and hypotheses that may, themselves, inform later empirical enquiry using other methods and methodologies. The research is primarily qualitative because it concerns primarily socio-economic dynamics to do with the interactions between politics, commercial incentives, organisational and academic cultures and the dissemination of scholarly research. The empirical design, outlined here, aims to answer the primary research question (PQ) and the five secondary questions, SQ1-SQ5.

The qualitative component of this research involves semi-structured interviews with academics who have experience of research censorship in China (involving the alleged censorship complicity of a non-Chinese scholarly publisher) and with publishing professionals that have, for the most part, direct experience of the research focus or, minimally, experience of research distribution in China (see appendix p.366). As above, it addresses PQ and all five of the secondary research questions. The quantitative component involves a corpus analysis of 450

journal articles that are unavailable via a publisher's online platform in China due to suspected censorship concerns. This corpus has been generated using structured comparisons between search results on a non-Chinese publisher's platform using UK-based and China-based IP addresses. This corpus of scholarly articles has not been previously analysed and the content has been suppressed via the publisher's China-based platform during a timescale following on from the censorship of *China Quarterly* (published by Cambridge University Press), which has been subject to some initial analysis to determine the term-based criteria that correspond with censorship (as in Wong and Kwong 2019). Therefore, this corpus analysis study aims answer SQ5 (regarding the changing criteria of censorship) by supplementing discussions in the interviews and offering some early hypotheses regarding the evolving term-based criteria of censorship and the ways that these criteria have changed over time (since the initial *China Quarterly* case).

The theoretical contribution in chapter 5 (p.146) informs the interview design and SQ1, regarding definitions of censorship, is addressed at length in this chapter (p.146.) Participants' conceptual understanding of censorship is returned to in the interview analysis to identify minimally acceptable components of a common definition of censorship that could be adopted by an industry body (p.198). The analysis of the journal text data took place following the interviews and was partly informed by those interviews. The design is therefore sequential, as opposed to concurrent, in the sense that it 'use[s] the results from qualitative interviews to inform the development and administration of a new [methodological] instrument and then interpret the two sets of results together' (Clark and Creswell 2008, 123).

The research is mixed methods because the primary and secondary questions can be answered qualitatively and quantitatively, and the limitations of either approach may be mitigated by triangulating qualitative and quantitative data to answer the research questions (Creswell and Clark 2007, 5). The qualitative component explores the social and institutional dynamics that

give rise to censorship complicity in the global scholarly communications industry, while also offering perspectives on academics' and publishers' ethical and theoretical understanding of censorship complicity. This is the primary component of the research. The three empirical studies that deal with related issues of content removal from publishers' platforms (Wong and Kwong 2019), digital archives (Tiffert 2017), and academic self-censorship in China Area Studies (Greitens and Truex 2019) employ a largely quantitative framework. There is a gap in the literature in terms of an in-depth qualitative inquiry that critically examines the underlying assumptions, ideological frameworks (Kvale 2007, 38), personal meaning and lived consequences (Gorman et al. 2005, 125) regarding censorship complicity in this context (as outlined in the literature review).

Aside from some of the methodological motivations given above, regarding SQ5 and the keyword-based conditions of censorship complicity, the quantitative component also aims to address issues of truth and reliability in participants' own accounts (ibid. 126) of the conditions and prevalence of censorship in scholarly publishing. Studies of self-censorship are vulnerable to forms of bias or non-response error (Robinson and Tannenbergs 2019) whereby only those participants that refuse to self-censor decide to participate in the research—or, of those participants that *do* self-censor, that they also self-censor their own accounts of self-censorship. Therefore, aside from generating early hypotheses and findings regarding term-based censorship criteria, the corpus analysis of censored journal articles also functions as a form of 'verification data' (Gorman et al. 2005, 126) and allows for productive comparisons between participants' accounts of the prevalence of censorship in scholarly publishing and observable (and measurable) occurrences of suspected journal censorship.

4.3.1. Research paradigm and theoretical framework

The research paradigm and theoretical framework for the thesis is dialectical pragmatism (Greene and Hall 2010; Greene 2007; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009). Dialectical pragmatism is

grounded in an epistemology that defines knowledge as an outcome of practical interactions with social reality and, as a research paradigm, it admits ‘more than one methodology and type of method, into the same inquiry space and engages them in respectful dialogue one with the other throughout the inquiry’ (Greene and Hall 2010, 124). The assumption underlying Clark & Creswell’s (2008) sequential qualitative-quantitative design is that the findings from an exploratory qualitative inquiry may be validated or generalizable by the introduction of a quantitative component. This study is dialectical pragmatist in the sense that it does not aim primarily at generalizable conclusions or an integrated *correspondence* between qualitative and quantitative findings. Rather, the design places equal value on results that are *dissonant or divergent* (Mathison 1988), generating new knowledge through a ‘meaningful engagement with difference’ (Green and Hall 2010, 124), and allowing for the identification of ‘empirical puzzles’ (ibid. 125) that require further analysis.

The qualitative component of the research concerns two separate communities: academic publishers and Asia Studies scholars. The research compares two perspectives on an issue of mutual concern to identify conceptual patterns and differences tied to group characteristics and the wider social dynamics that enable or constrain censorship practices. By triangulating sources of knowledge and exploring discontinuity, the research aims to pinpoint the underlying social, epistemological and ideological tensions between the participant groups, which may impede collaborative forms of resistance. Moreover, with the introduction of a quantitative component, the research analyses discontinuities regarding different philosophical approaches to the study of censorship: i.e. between an approach that is concerned with interviewees’ socially mediated reality and one that concerns the quantifiable occurrences of suspected censorship criteria in the scholarly literature.

4.3.2. Ethical considerations

There are five main ethical issues that have been considered in relation to this research:

1. It is not possible to maintain total confidentiality, given the limited pool of potential participants (academics or publishing professionals) that have direct knowledge or experience of platform-based censorship in China. This risk was explained clearly to participants in the information sheet (p376). and consent forms (p.384). It was a requirement for participants in this research to fully consider these risks and provide written consent to participate.
2. Alongside my role as a PhD candidate at University College London, I am an employee of the academic publisher, Taylor & Francis, who part-funded the research from 2018-19. Taylor & Francis is one of the publishers that has faced public censorship concerns in China as outlined in the research context chapter (p.41). My employment status and previous source of funding was declared in all participant information sheets and all outputs resulting from this research, including (and not limited to) the thesis, conference presentations, journal articles, book chapters, or reports. This was so that the publishing industry participants could make an informed judgment about their willingness to speak to an employee of a rival publisher about censorship concerns, despite the assurances given in the information sheets and consent forms about participant confidentiality.
3. Some of the intended participants for the semi-structured interviews are current or previous colleagues or belong to my wider professional network. All participants were given the contact details of my supervisor, who they were encouraged to contact to withdraw their data from the project at any time, if they felt uncomfortable about raising issues about the research with me directly.
4. This research involved generating a full-text dataset of 450 journal articles, which are unavailable in China due to suspected censorship requests. The implicated publisher allows the use of copyrighted journal articles in non-commercial research under the same terms as UCL's subscription licensing arrangements. This data was only used for the purposes of analysing keyword frequency and term extraction, following the methods

outlined below (p.135). Research outputs will not include text excerpts from this dataset beyond the keywords and their frequency.

5. Related to 2. and 4., the implicated publisher's platform that is the focus of the corpus analysis component of this research is managed by a competitor of Taylor & Francis, my employer. Public revelations about the nature and extent of suspected self-censorship could be reputationally damaging for the implicated publisher and my employer could stand to gain commercially from the diminished reputation of its competitors. Therefore, to avoid ethical concerns arising from an apparent conflict of interest, I have not named the implicated publisher in this thesis.

I received UCL Ethics Committee approval for the project (ID 14673/001) on 29th June 2019. In April 2021 and April 2022 the UCL Ethics Committee approved two amendments to the ethics application to address a) changes in the source of funding, from a Taylor & Francis tuition fee award to an AHRC studentship through the London Arts & Humanities Partnership (beginning October 2020); b) changes in the qualitative design, due restrictions on personal contact due to the COVID-19 pandemic, from an in-person focus group and survey to online interviews; c) to approve the use of a third-party transcription service, McGowan Transcription Services, which is one of UCL's approved suppliers. All interview participants were asked to consent in writing to the use of a transcription service, with the option to opt-out of third-party transcription. All participants consented to the use of this service.

4.3.3. Positionality statement

I am a male, white British, English-speaking researcher and publishing professional living and working in the United Kingdom. As already indicated, I am both a PhD candidate and a publishing professional actively working within the field of practice that forms the focus of this thesis: scholarly journal publishing (as a subfield of the broader practice of scholarly communication). My interest in this topic stems from a set of professional and personal

concerns about the implications of journal censorship in China enabled by international scholarly journal publishers—and their employees—working in countries with different sociopolitical and ideological traditions with respect to academic freedom and the freedom to publish.

I bring to this research certain presuppositions about censorship and the role of scholarly publishers with respect to academic freedom. I believe that efforts on behalf of the Chinese government to coerce publishers into suppressing politically sensitive scholarly outputs amounts to censorship. I also believe that scholarly publishers share a responsibility to minimize censorship in global markets and, where possible, governmental censorship pressures ought to be actively resisted. Beyond the empirical and methodological gaps identified earlier, this position with respect to the research focus also informs the research questions and mode of inquiry. Although I intend to challenge my presuppositions, including my own efforts to balance professional values against more pragmatic or consequentialist concerns about the availability of global scholarship in China (and elsewhere), I feel it is important to state openly my own perspective on this research topic at the outset: that the growing tendency of publishers to (self-)censor scholarly publications to suit political interests ought to be challenged within the global scholarly communications industry—individually, or as a collective.

4.4. Methods

Having given an account of the research design and methodology, this section turns to the empirical methods that have been used in this research, starting with the semi-structured interviews, followed by the corpus analysis study. Each of these sub-sections will be broken down by the rationale, sample size, selection criteria, tools of analysis and method-specific considerations, such as the interview topic guide for the semi-structured interviews.

4.4.1. Semi-structured interviews

The primary (qualitative) method used in this exploratory-sequential research is semi-structured interviewing. The interviews aim to address the primary research question, regarding the conditions of censorship enablement and constraint(s), as well as the five secondary research questions, regarding the definition(s) of platform-based self-censorship; the consequences of this form of censorship; the conditions, advantages and disadvantages of collaborative forms of resistance; and the ways that the conditions of platform-based self-censorship have changed over time. This section describes the ways that the interviews address these questions, along with an expanded rationale and description of the parameters for this qualitative component of the research.

4.4.1.a Rationale

The primary aim of the semi-structured interviews is to obtain empirical knowledge of a subject's typical experiences and understanding (Kvale 2007, 38) of censorship complicity. The interviews cover three core topics: a) the impact of compliance with censorship demands, b) participants' understanding of censorship, i.e. its definition(s), ontology and mechanisms, and c) ethical standpoints related to the dissemination of scholarly content in China. The responses of questions related to these three key areas are analysed in terms of overlapping and divergent perspectives within and between participant groups. This analysis includes the underlying ideological, economic and social conditions that enable censorship complicity and the potential (or not) of collaborative forms of resistance.

As detailed in the research design (p.112), this is an exploratory sequential study. Semi-structured interviewing is used as the primary qualitative method, over surveys or observation, as it allows focused inquiry into participants' personal beliefs, assumptions and conceptual understanding (ibid.). Moreover, this method is flexible, allowing for diversions, follow-up questions and prompts to capture responses on topics that would not otherwise be captured by a

structured question guide, and to gain a deeper understanding of participants' underlying motivations (Gorman et al. 2005, 125). The structured aspect of semi-structured interviewing based around a topic guide (see below and p.367) is suited to this project, because the knowledge gap that this research aims to fill relates to a specific set of censorship practices in the context of research distribution in China. Theoretical considerations are explored in a simulated scenario known as a 'vignette' (see Given 2008) to allow for direct comparisons between participant groups regarding their conceptual understanding of censorship complicity. Therefore, the interviews are partly open and exploratory (or inductive), and, as recommended by Kvale (2007, 38), partly structured (deductive) to understand the implication of existing theories of censorship and to prompt further routes for quantitative inquiry—i.e. by uncovering sensitive research topics that are subject to increasing (self-)censorship.

4.4.1.b Data collection, sample size and selection criteria

Interviews were conducted with 12 Asia Studies academics and 12 publishing professionals. All interviews were approximately one hour in length and were audio recorded and transcribed. They were held between October 2019 and January 2022. The first four interviews were held in person. From March 2020, following the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, all subsequent interviews were held online via Microsoft Teams. The structure and format of the interviews remained the same throughout, including the topic guide and vignette described below, which was read out to participants in the final 15 minutes of the interview. All interviewees were invited to approve transcripts that were produced following the audio recorded interviews, which were emailed to participants as an encrypted Word file once transcribed. Participants were asked to check that they were happy that the transcript was accurate and to approve the categorisation of their demographic characteristics given in the segmentation criteria (below). Some minor changes were requested by participants to remove information that could lead to them being personally identified or to address minor inaccuracies in demographic characterisation.

This study does not aim to produce findings that may be generalised statistically; rather, it aims to generate themes that reflect common experiences and understandings, or significant points of difference, across the study participants. This participant size has therefore been selected with the intention of reaching a point of saturation, after which ‘further interviews yield little new knowledge’ (Kvale 2007, 44). In this study, saturation was determined by the repetition of reported experiences and conceptualisations within and across participant groups, typically according to common demographic characteristics. Within the sample size of 12 publishers and 12 academics, saturation was reached to the extent that the final two interviews (one publisher and one academic) did not yield new knowledge in the form of divergent or anomalous perspectives on the questions given in the topic guide that were likely to lead to the generation of new themes in the analysis. Therefore, no further interviews were held past the intended sample of 12 participants from each group.

To generate themes that represent common experiences and understandings in relation to the research questions—and to explore points of tension across participant groups—principles of stratification were followed when selecting interviewees (Gorman et al. 2005, 128) whereby potential interviewees were selected based on observable demographic characteristics (detailed below). This approach supports rich qualitative data across a range of participant characteristics. Segmentation is also used so that findings may be followed up quantitatively in subsequent research, beyond this thesis; for example, research that aims at statistical generalizations, which ‘require that certain criteria—regarding size and representativeness of the sample of subjects—are taken into account already by selection of interviewees’ (Kvale 2007, 42).

Both groups were segmented along four characteristics: career level, involvement (in censorship concerns), gender and geographical location. For the academic group, career level was determined by length of time (years) since completion of a PhD, ranging from early career (0-10

years) (2 participants), mid-career (10-25 years) (8 participants), and established/late-career (25+ years) (2 participants); the publisher group followed the same criteria, early-career (1), mid-career (5) and established/late-career (6), applied to length of time (years) in paid employment in scholarly publishing (see Figures 1 and 2 below).

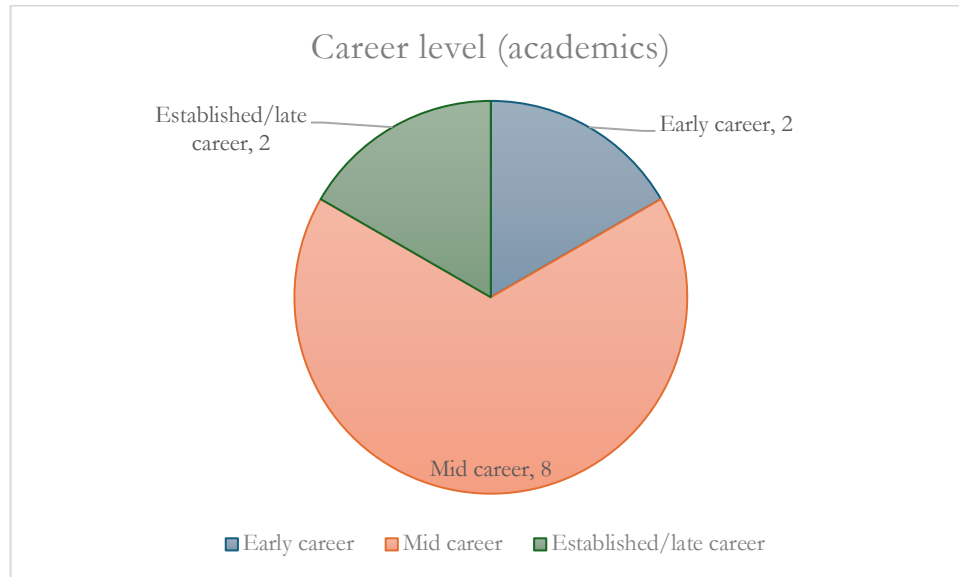


Figure 1: Career levels of academics participating in semi-structured interviews

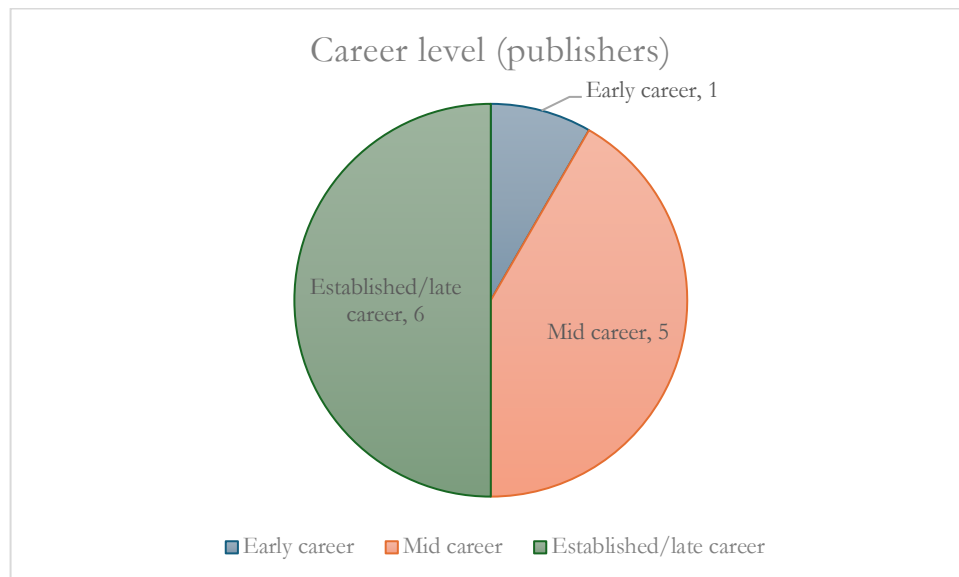


Figure 2: Career levels of publishing professionals participating in semi-structured interviews

Level of involvement in censorship concerns also encompassed three categories: direct, indirect and not involved (Figures 3 and 4 below). For the academic group, direct involvement (11) describes a publicly recorded instance of the author's work or editor's journal having faced content restrictions in China, which involved accusations of publisher compliance. For one of the participants, level of involvement was indirect (1) because they had not faced publicly recorded constraints on their work, although the author had published in journals and subject areas known to have faced content restrictions in China. For the publishers, direct involvement (4) applied to participants who were known to have played a role in responding to censorship concerns at organisations that had been accused of censorship complicity. Indirect involvement (5) applied to participants who occupied a role at one of the implicated organisations during the timescale described in chapter 1 (p.29) but they were not publicly known or did not admit to being personally involved in the organisation's response to censorship concerns. The publisher group also included participants (3) who had not worked for implicated organisations during the timescale, but had knowledge of global content sales and distribution, publishing ethics and regulatory and technical constraints on content platforms in China, which merited inclusion in the study.

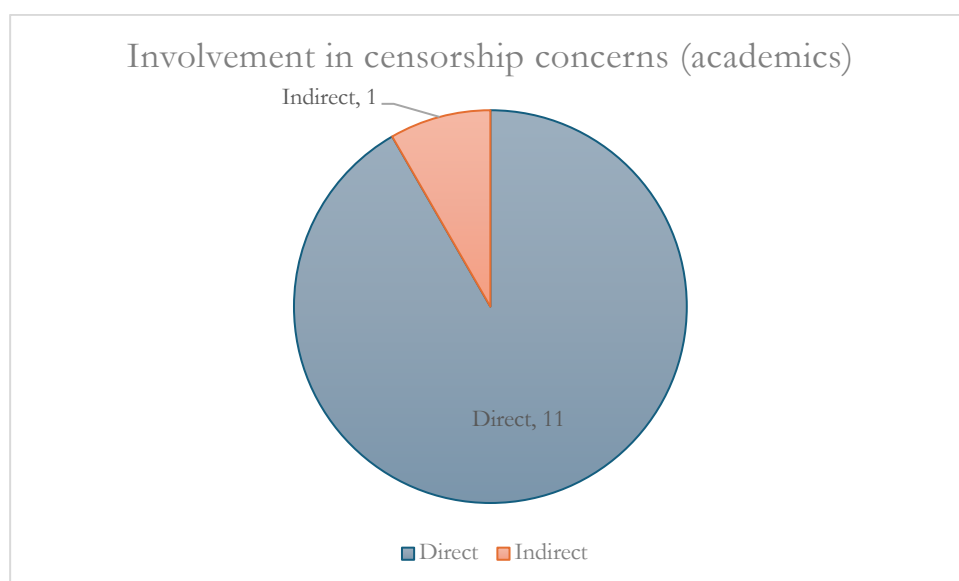


Figure 3: Level of involvement in censorship concerns of academics participating in semi-structured interviews

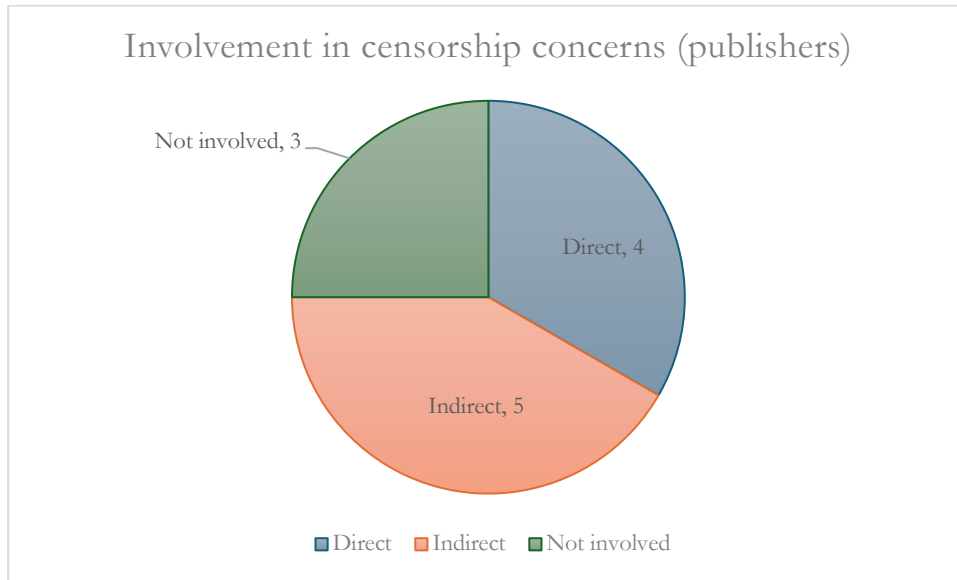


Figure 4: Level of involvement in censorship concerns of publishing professionals participating in semi-structured interviews

The academic group was composed of Asia studies scholars based in the United Kingdom (6), United States (2), Australia (2), Israel (1) and Czech Republic (1) (Figure 5). Two of the participants identified as Chinese, while occupying academic posts outside of China (see further details below on participant selection criteria and limitations). The publisher group included scholarly publishing professionals based in the United Kingdom (8), Netherlands (2), United States (1) and Canada (1) (Figure 6). Both participant groups involved an equal split of participants who identified as female (6 group/12 total) or male (6 group/12 total) (Figure 7).

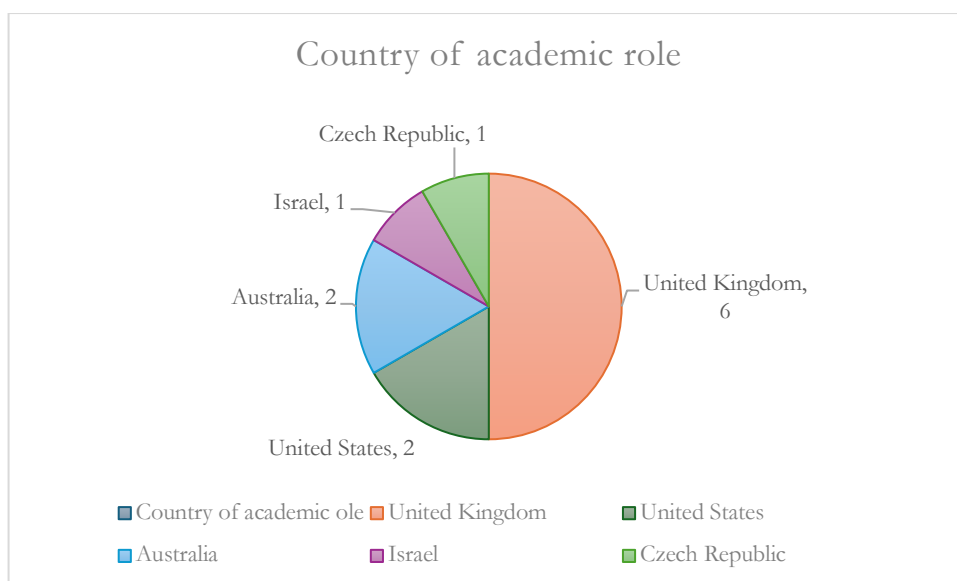


Figure 5: Country of academic institutional affiliation (university) of academics participating in semi-structured interviews

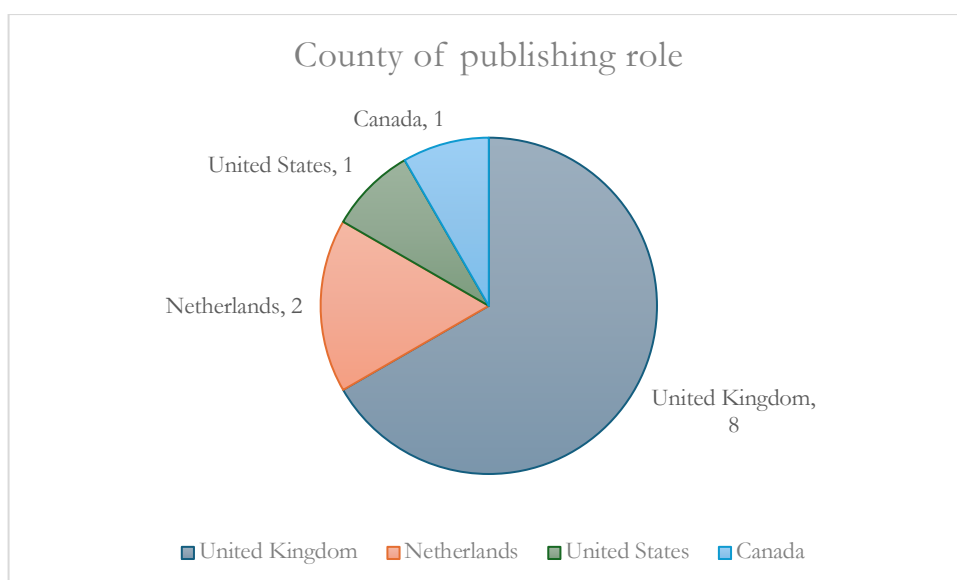


Figure 6: Country of employing publishing organization of publishing professionals participating in semi-structured interviews

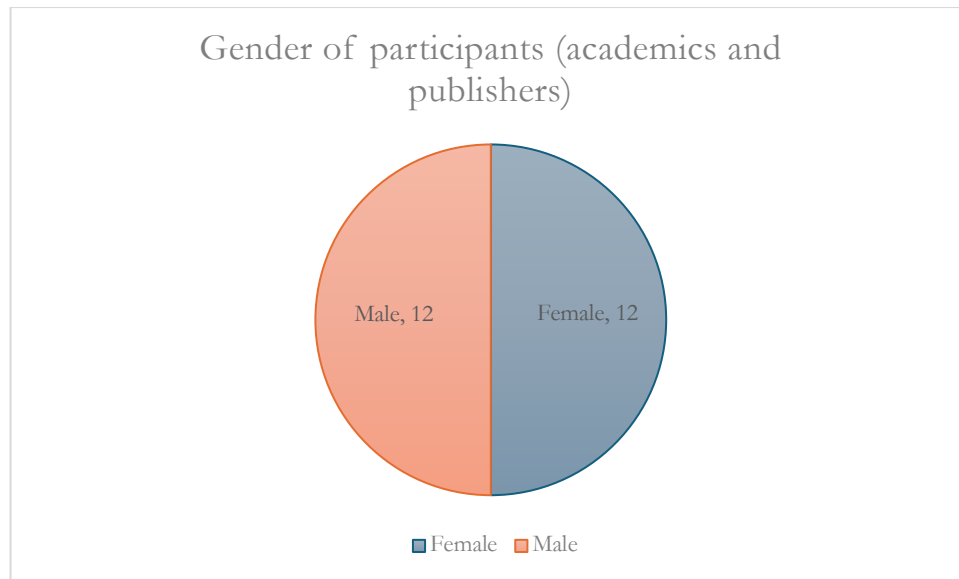


Figure 7: Gender of participants in semi-structured interviews (6 male and 6 female in each group, academics and publishes, totalling 12 male and 12 female overall)

In addition to the general segmentation criteria, some group-specific characteristics were recorded and determined participant selection. The academic group included a combination of journal authors (7), editors (4) and an editorial board member (1) (Figure 8). These variables were introduced to explore alternative perspectives on the research questions with academics who have had their own authored works removed from circulation in China and journal editors and board members who have been more deeply involved with discussions and decision making (internally, within editorial teams, or externally with their publishers), which may have resulted in forms of compliance with or resistance towards censorship demands.

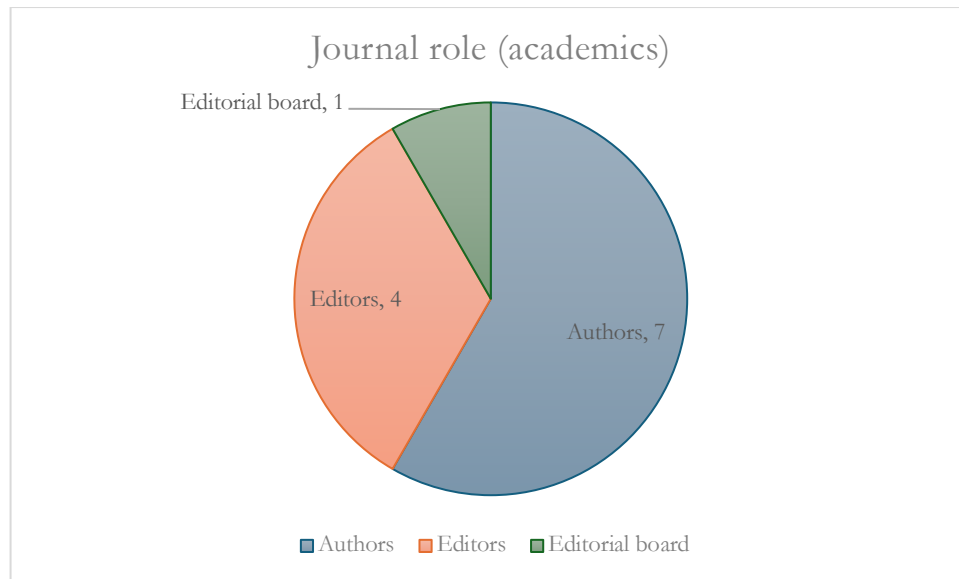


Figure 8: Journal role of academics participating in semi-structured interviews

The publisher group was further segmented by the type of organization that employed each of the participants and their level of seniority within that organization. The organizational types included commercial (5), independent not-for-profit (2), university press (2), academic society (2) and non-affiliated consultancy (1) (Figure 9). These segmentation criteria were included to explore differences and commonalities across different organisational sizes, funding models, commercial imperatives and stated values. In terms of seniority, the group included organisational directors (6), managers (3), executives (2) (i.e. non-hiring managers with no direct reports), and a consultant (1) (Figure 10). Publishing organisations, across the organizational types above (excluding non-affiliated consultancy), are hierarchical, and this study aims to explore how an individual's position within an organizational hierarchy will shape experiences, understandings, and responses to censorship concerns. Finally, the publisher group was also segmented by role function, encompassing organizational/managing directors (5), divisional directors (1), editorial staff (3), sales staff (2) and a publishing ethics specialist (1) (Figure 11). As with hierarchy, these variables are significant because this thesis aims to explore the interactions between different publishing roles and functions and the social dynamics of censorship complicity within and across different organizational structures.

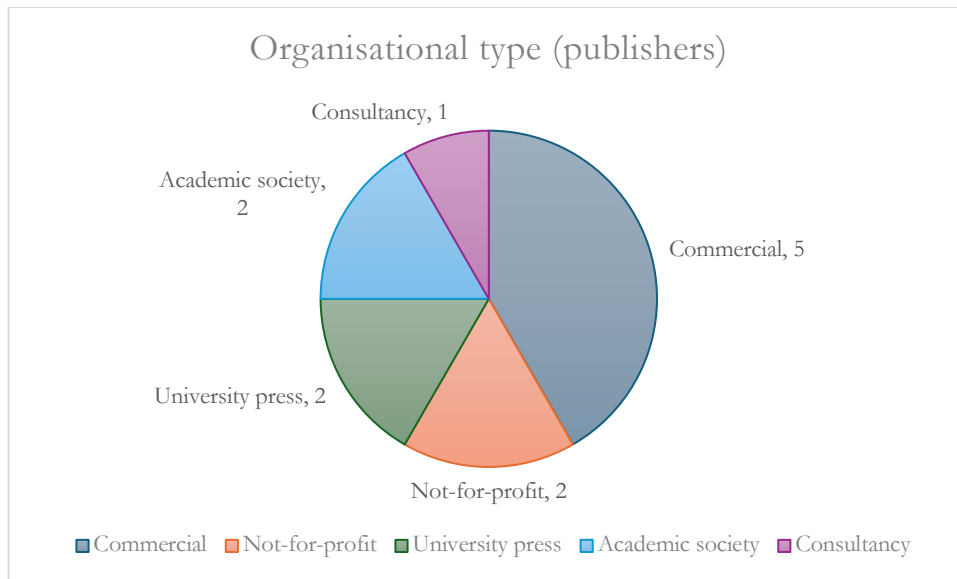


Figure 9: Organizational type of employers of publishing professionals participating in semi-structured interviews

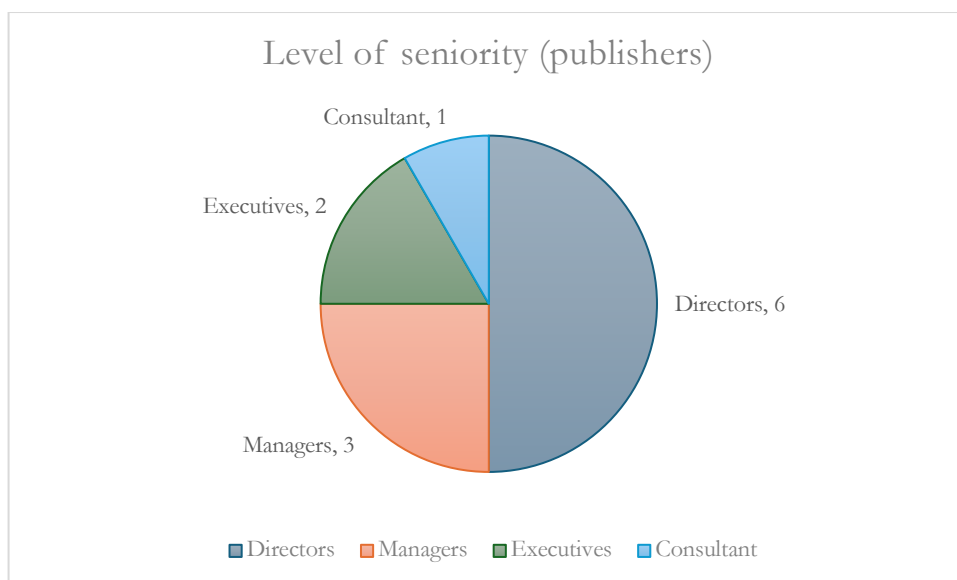


Figure 10: Level of seniority of publishing professionals participating in semi-structured interviews

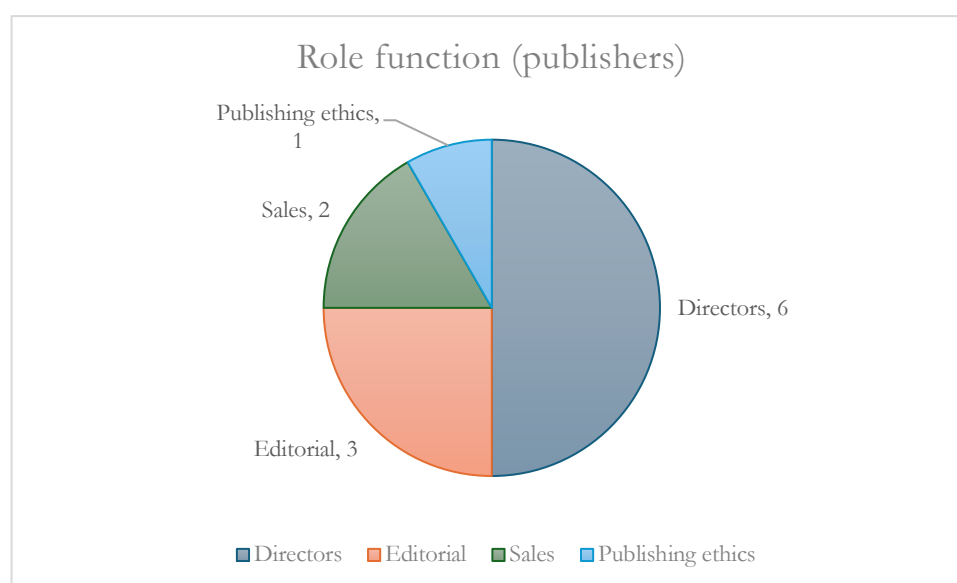


Figure 11: Role function of publishers participating in semi-structured interviews

The academics were identified using a combination of sources. The main source was a publicly available list of articles (Cambridge University Press 2017b) removed from the online platform of an academic journal, *China Quarterly*, by Cambridge University Press at the request of state regulators. Participants were also selected because they were the named editors or editorial board members of scholarly journals that have been publicly implicated in censorship concerns in China outlined in chapter 2 (p.29). Several academics based in China, Taiwan or Hong Kong were invited to participate; they all declined or did not reply (see limitations below). All academics were contacted via their publicly available institutional email address, or on the social media platform LinkedIn.

The publishing professionals were identified through personal recommendations from professional contacts in the scholarly publishing industry, or because they occupied relevant roles at companies that had publicly faced censorship concerns in China. As with the academics, all of the invited publishing professionals based in China, those based in Taiwan or Hong Kong declined the interview request or did not reply (see limitations below), although some did share

details of relevant policy documents (see p.50) or other potential interview participants. All publishing professionals were contacted via their publicly available organizational email address, or via the social media platform, LinkedIn.

4.4.1.c. Topic guide

The interviews were structured around three components: a) a topic guide with open question prompts; b) three statements, in relation to which the participants were asked to rate their level of agreement along a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree; c) a vignette in the form of a request from a Chinese content regulator, mediated through a China-based research importer, asking publishing staff to remove ‘illegal’ content from their platform in China or risk losing market access (see appendix p.371 for the full topic guide and vignette). The following topics were covered by open questions:

- participants’ awareness of the events outlined in chapter 2 (p.27);
- the impacts of the events on the participants;
- the different routes to censorship compliance taken by publishers;
- the extent to which participants’ views on scholarly publishing had changed;
- whether participants had changed their publishing behaviours as a result of censorship concerns;
- likely responses within the publishing industry and academic industry to future censorship concerns;
- emerging topics deemed sensitive in scholarly publishing in China, including likely keywords;
- the extent to which academics and publishers share the same values;
- definitions of censorship in relation to journal access;
- the efficacy of forms of resistance;
- unexplored options available to publishers when confronted with censorship demands.

The interviews largely followed this topic guide in the order presented, with some spontaneous questions based on that guide following participant responses—particularly in relation to unexpected or sensitive topics (Gorman et al. 2005, 131). In the discussion of the vignette, participants were presented with a sample censorship request and asked to consider three routes to compliance: removing articles from online journals, removing journals from wider sales packages, or amending the search function of an online platform. This vignette was designed to allow direct comparisons between individual participants and participant groups (Hughes and Huby 2004; Gorman et al. 2005, 128) regarding their conceptual understanding of censorship and ethical standpoints regarding censorship complicity.

The objective of the vignette was to encourage participants to consider the routes taken by publishers to comply with censorship requests in a decontextualized form (Hughes and Huby 2004, 39), so that individuals did not have to refer to the actions of specific publishers. Decontextualizing routes of compliance allowed the participants to consider the conceptual aspects of censorship complicity in abstract, mitigating against prior biases relating to the publishers in question and against wider pressures to give socially desirable, ‘public’ responses (ibid. 45).

4.4.1.d. Coding and analysis

Thematic analysis was selected as the method of analysis for the qualitative data because of its suitability for exploratory studies, like the present one, that aims to analyse ‘group-based variation and/or similarity across groups’ (Joffe 2011, 213) and ‘elucidat[e] the specific nature of a given group’s conceptualization of the phenomenon under study’ (ibid., 212). Moreover, thematic analysis is flexible, allowing for a mixed deductive/inductive approach: i.e. a combination of methods of data coding and analysis ‘with certain preconceived categories derived from theories’ (Joffe 2011, 210), i.e. deductive coding, while ‘also remain[ing] open to new concepts that emerge’ (ibid.), i.e. inductive coding. This approach is consistent with this

study's exploratory design and underlying epistemological framework, which involves an integration of 'both essentialist and constructionist paradigms' (Braun and Clarke 2006, 78-9).

The coding framework was constructed following two rounds of coding and is made of 76 codes (see Appendix 8). The first round of coding generated over 100 individual codes, which were consolidated in the second round of coding to avoid duplication and redundancy. Twelve themes were generated from clusters of codes covering common topics and patterns in responses related to the study's research questions. These themes were then organised under seven categories, which relate to the broader considerations of the primary question and the five secondary research questions: *conditions, definitions, impacts, responsibility, knowledge, resistance* and *values*. NVivo was used to code the transcripts, to construct the coding framework and to identify broader patterns in coded responses to allow for the progression from the codes to themes. The codes were largely inductive, generated from patterns of meaning in participant responses (ibid.), with some deductive codes involving theoretical concepts from the literature on censorship. Four types of qualitative data coding were used during the analysis (see appendix p.387 for the full coding schema):

1. Process coding: using gerunds to identify patterns of meaning in the form of repetitive or habitual processes, actions or activities (Saldaña 2021, 10), e.g. *distancing from bad actors*.
2. Concept coding: to capture and label patterns in the use of concepts, theories and "big picture" ideas' (ibid.) in the interview data often involving pre-determined concepts imported from relevant literature to aid the analysis (see above regarding deductive coding), e.g. *censorship is porous*.
3. Versus coding: identifying patterns and 'phrases that capture the actual and conceptual conflicts within, among, and between participants' (ibid. 42), e.g. *business ethics vs. business process*.

4. Beliefs and values coding: for ‘participant’s integrated value, attitude, and belief systems at work’ (ibid.), marked with a v:/b: accordingly—as for concept codes, they may be ‘determined *a priori*’ or ‘constructed inductively during coding of the data’ (ibid.), e.g. *v: censorship ought to be resisted*.

The form of academic censorship that is the focus of this research, involving state coercion of publishers to remove or block access to journal articles in China, has not been studied before and is, as a result, under-theorized in the present literature. Therefore, the aim of the thematic analysis is to surface shared and divergent perspectives on platform-based censorship complicity in scholarly publishing that are consistent (i.e. consistently shared/divergent) across the dataset to inform a novel set of research outcomes and theoretical concepts.

4.4.1.c. Limitations

As discussed under ethical considerations earlier (see p.115), it is not possible to guarantee complete confidentiality or anonymity in semi-structured interviews (van den Hoonaard 2003, 141), particularly given the limited pool of potential participants. Participants refusing to be included in the research because of this limitation (concerned by limited confidentiality) could cause a form of non-response error, whereby the group that refuse share common characteristics that this research aims to study; for example, participants who have direct experience of censorship complicity in academia and scholarly publishing. To mitigate this limitation, all personally identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts, which were approved by all participants, and pseudonyms are used, again with the consent and approval of participants (Grinyer 2002). Despite these safeguards, all individuals invited to participate from China, Taiwan or Hong Kong refused or did not reply, as described earlier. One of the central limitations of this study, therefore, is that it focuses primarily on the experiences and

perspectives of academics and publishing professionals based outside of China and surrounding territories, who have, in some cases, become enmeshed in China's censorship apparatus.

While this is a significant limitation, the study's primary motivation is to understand the conditions that lead to censorship compliance in the wider scholarly communication industry outside of China. Moreover, given that the implicated publications that form the focus of this study are published primarily in English (and in subject areas that cover topics that are considered politically sensitive in China) most of the affected journal authors and editors, linked to these publications, are likewise based outside of China. So, although this study is limited to Anglophone scholarship and scholarly publishing, this emphasis is consistent with the field of practice that it aims to study, concerning the dynamics of censorship complicity among implicated international scholarly publishers based outside of China.

Semi-structured interviewing as a method is vulnerable to bias through leading questions (Gorman et al. 2005, 126) and selective reporting (*ibid.*). Moreover, the use of vignettes in social studies has been criticised on the grounds that such studies fail to clearly demonstrate internal validity (Gould 1996)—i.e. a demonstrable relationship between cause and effect—and their artifice obscures the elements of reality under study, as highlighted in Hughes and Huby (2004) and Parkinson and Manstead (1993). To address these concerns, as recommended in McKeegan et. al. (1995), a pilot study was conceived to test and develop the topic guide and vignette involving interviews with four implicated academics. Their interview data is included in the final study, as the topic guide and vignette remained broadly consistent throughout. The aim of the pilot study was to ensure that the vignette was relevant, realistic and capable of generating focused, detailed and non-leading responses related to academic censorship complicity. The pilot study was useful in generating early themes and an initial coding schema and suggesting early conceptual categories, which are expanded further in the final thematic analysis, outlined in

chapter 6 (p.183). All participants (in the pilot and the full study) were asked to approve their transcripts, prior to coding and analysis.

4.4.2. Corpus analysis of 450 censored journal articles

The corpus analysis component of this research is the secondary (quantitative) method that follows from the primary (qualitative) interview-based component described above. Whereas the interviews address all the research questions (PQ and SQ1-5), this corpus analysis study only concerns SQ5, regarding changes to the conditions of censorship over time. As below, this component aims to build on early empirical investigations into the term-based conditions of censorship, originally affecting *China Quarterly* (Wong and Kwong 2019), now involving a larger dataset of 450 suppressed journal articles. This section will explain the study's rationale, data collection methods, sample selection criteria, the corpus analysis tools used to generate findings and their limitations.

4.4.2.a. Rationale

Consistent with the exploratory sequential design, early findings from the qualitative component of the research regarding the technical and text-based conditions of research censorship in China were followed up quantitatively, using corpus analysis tools. While this research concerns, primarily, the sociopolitical and economic conditions of censorship complicity, the interviews surfaced empirical claims about the technical and text-based conditions of censorship affecting publisher's online platforms in China. This second phase of the thesis' empirical research aims to explore these claims quantitatively in ways that may support or counter interviewees' own understanding of the extent and conditions of censorship.

The central claim that this corpus analysis study aims to explore is that censorship in China, relating to the online scholarly record, has moved beyond the typical targets that emerged in *China Quarterly* case (see p.267), namely the 'three T's' (Tiananmen, Tibet and Taiwan) and

other overtly sensitive subjects, like Falun Gong, Xinjiang and activist politics in Hong Kong. Interviewees described China's censorship efforts expanding to a range of broader social issues (p.185), for example, Chinese civil society, or LGBTQ+ and feminist activism. Moreover, during the research, reports emerged of constraints on the publication of research in China regarding the origins of COVID-19 virus (Cooper, 2020). Therefore, this corpus analysis study has three central aims: a) to determine the extent of journal platform-based censorship in China; b) to verify or counter claims that China's topics of concern have changed over time, beyond the topics present in the *China Quarterly* case (Wong and Kwong 2019); and c) to form initial hypotheses about these emerging topic-based conditions of censorship affecting English-language scholarly literature in China, to be explored further with a larger dataset of unavailable content.

4.4.2.b. Sample selection

To determine candidate journal articles for corpus analysis, this study began by comparing the availability of content via the UK-facing and China-facing versions of journal publishers' online journal platforms. This is consistent with the mechanisms of publisher-facilitated platform amendments, described in the context chapter (p.48), whereby publishers remove journal articles or amend search returns such that users accessing their platforms from China are unable to view journal articles and their associated metadata if they contain politically sensitive terms. (This study excluded *China Quarterly*, given the aim to explore newly emerging topic-based constraints.)

Using the Hotpoint Shield Virtual Private Network (VPN), the publicly available journal platforms of 10 publishers were compared via UK-based and China-based IP addresses, including the online journal platforms of 5 publishers that were initially involved in censorship concerns (Cambridge University Press, Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis, Brill and Sage) and 5 further publishers' platforms, including Wiley, Elsevier, Oxford University Press, De Gruyter

(before acquiring and with merging Brill in 2023) and Chicago University Press. These publishers were all selected because they a) publish prominent scholarly journals in subject areas known to face content restrictions in China, i.e. politics and international relations, China area studies, Asia studies, sociology, anthropology and history, b) they trade actively in China and/or they have a China-based office, which is consistent with the publishers that are known to have acquiesced to China's content constraints, and c), as a group, they represent a mix of organizational type that is broadly consistent with the segmentation criteria from the interviews, i.e. a mix of commercial, independent not-for-profit and university press journal publishers. Of these publishers, only one online platform displayed obvious content discrepancies when comparing the total number of journal articles and other content types available via the publisher's platform in the UK vs. China. As in the ethical considerations above, this publisher's identity is withheld in this thesis due to the author's acknowledged conflict of interest, as an employee of a competitor publisher.

The journal article data collection phase ran from 4th April 2021 to 7th November 2022, during which the full-text dataset of censored journal articles was compiled, followed by periodic IP-based comparisons until 19th September 2023 to track changes in the availability of content. By this point, 28,051 items of content were unavailable via the implicated publisher's platform in China, which is broken down by content type as follows: 538 journal articles, 20,314 book chapters, 4,656 conference papers and 3,421 reference work entries (Table 2 below). Each item of content was absent from search returns when accessing via a China-based IP address from 4th April 2021 to 8th August 2023. The publisher's webpages relating to this content returned a 'Page not found' message with no further information; therefore, content metadata was also inaccessible. The items of content were still listed in the contents of affected journal issues, books or reference works, although clicking the items would likewise return a 'Page not found' message. (From 19th September 2023, this error message was removed and the content metadata was visible when accessed via a link to the corresponding webpage, e.g. in an online journal issue, but the affected content was still absent from search returns.)

The IP-based comparison was repeated at 7 intervals during the data collection phase. The results are given in Table 3 and Figure 12 below. There was a significant increase in unavailable content between August and October 2022, from 11,578 to 28,051 items overall. This increase coincides with the fifth anniversary of the *China Quarterly* incident in August 2017, when scholarly publishers first faced demands to censor their journal platforms in China as a condition of market access. The *China Quarterly* case itself coincided with the run-up to the Chinese Communist Party’s 19th National Congress, 18-24th October 2017—a five-yearly event, with the 20th National Congress, 16th-22nd October, overlapping with the apparent surge in unavailable content below. As reported in other studies, the CCP’s National Congresses are associated with increased censorship online, for example on social media platforms in China like WeChat (Ruan et al. 2021b). The data collected for this study suggests a related correlation between the National Congresses and censorship in the case of online scholarly content.

DATE: 19/09/2023	UK IP	CHINA IP	DISCREPANCY
ARTICLES	8631012	8630474	538
CHAPTERS	5232083	5211769	20314
CONFERENCE PAPERS	1443529	1438873	4656
REFERENCE WORK ENTRIES	724363	720942	3421

Table 2: Details of content discrepancies (by content type) on the online platform of a scholarly journal publisher when accessed via a UK-based IP address and a China-based IP address

DATE	JOURNAL ARTICLES	BOOK CHAPTERS	CONFERENCE PAPERS	REFERENCE ENTRIES	TOTAL
13/04/2021	298	3654	114	1589	<u>5655</u>
21/03/2022	301	7677	152	1577	<u>9707</u>
04/08/2022	301	9548	152	1577	<u>11578</u>
27/10/2022	534	19440	4656	3421	<u>28051</u>
03/02/2023	536	19528	4656	3421	<u>28141</u>
04/06/2023	537	19528	4656	3421	<u>28142</u>
19/9/2023	538	20314	4656	3421	<u>28929</u>

Table 3: Details of unavailable content (by content type) on the online platform of a scholarly journal publisher when accessed via a China-based IP address between 13/4/2021 and 19/9/2023

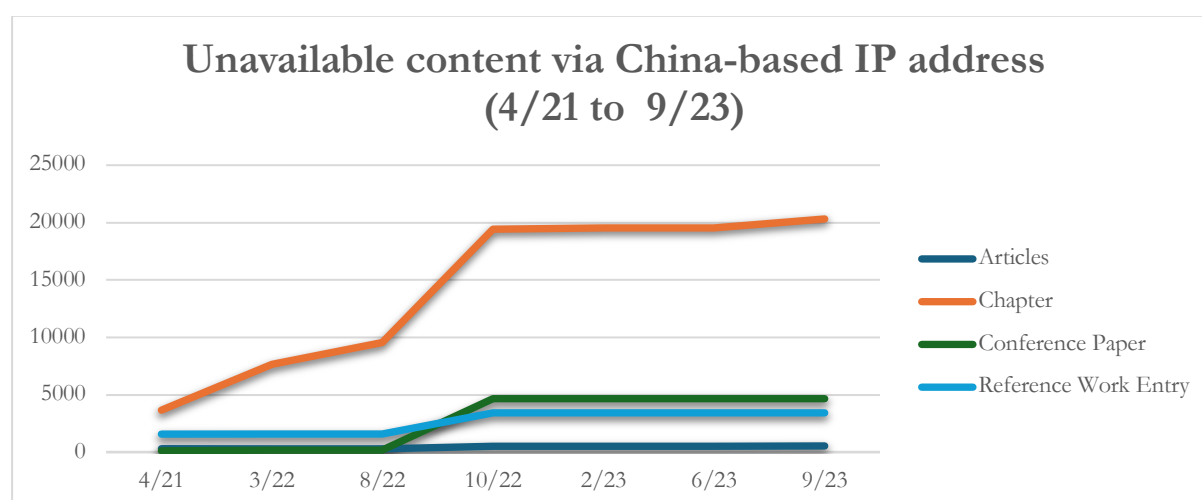


Figure 12: Line graph plotting unavailable content (by content type) on the online platform of a scholarly journal publisher when accessed via a China-based IP address between 13/4/2021 and 19/9/2023

During the data collection phase, a sample of 450 unavailable journal articles was extracted from the publisher's platform, representing 84.2% of all unavailable journal articles and 1.6% of all unavailable content. The publisher's platform was identical when accessed via a UK-based and China-based IP address—both presenting content in English—except for an apparent discrepancy in the total content available on the platform by content type and subject area, as charted above in Table 2. The specific English-language journal articles that were unavailable when accessed via a China-based IP address were identified by a) downloading publication records via the publisher's platform using a China-based and UK-based IP addresses; b) combining China-based and UK-based article-level publication data in Excel spreadsheets sorted by subject areas where discrepancies were present; c) deduplicating publication records in those spreadsheets, leaving only those items of content that were present via the UK-facing version of the publisher's platform and not the China-facing version (see corpus analysis chapter for breakdown of articles by subject area p.266).

4.4.2.c. Corpus analysis

The corpus analysis methodology involves four phases to address the three study aims outlined above. The first phase involves isolating articles within this dataset that do not contain any of the known keywords associated with censorship present in the China Quarterly case (Wong and Kwong 2019) (see Table 4 below), using top-down keyword frequency identification via Voyant Tools across the corpus of 450 articles. The results of this phase are reported in Chapter 7 (p.262).

PEOPLE	PLACES	EVENTS	IDEOLOGIES
Fang Lizhi	Taiwan	Tiananmen (Square Massacre)	Falun Gong
Wang Meng	Sinkiang/Xinjiang	Cultural Revolution	
Gao Xingjian	Hong Kong		
Mao Zedong	Tibet		

Table 4: Table 4: Terms associated with censorship of articles and book reviews in China Quarterly from analysis by Wong & Kwong (2019)—see also glossary of censored terms (p.333)

The second phase involves interrogating this smaller dataset of articles with term extraction Python scripts, namely term frequency inverse document frequency (TFIDF) tools, aimed at identifying salient terms and phrases that are present in these articles. In phase 3, the lists of terms and phrases that are present in each article are cross-referenced against other known sensitive terms or phrases from the scholarly literature on censorship in China. They are also cross-referenced against policy documents issued by China's General Administration of Press and Publications concerning 'major selected topics' that are subject to import controls (see p.50 in context chapter). Terms or phrases that were present in these articles and are known to trigger censorship in other contexts are flagged accordingly.

'MAJOR SELECTED TOPICS' AS DEFINED CHINA'S GENERAL ADMINISTRATION OF PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS

China's national security and social stability

'The construction of China's national defence and army

Internal documents relating to the Chinese state and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

Speeches, writing, articles on the work and life of current and former part and state leaders

'Major events' in the history of the CCP and the People's Republic of China (PRC), with special reference to the attempts to 'reflect and evaluate' the Cultural Revolution

Internal decision-making processes within the CCP or Chinese military, including the establishment of the CCP, government institutions, and the selection of 'leading cadres'

Important figures or events concerning the Kuomintang and other high-level 'United Front targets'

'Significant events' and the selection of major leaders in the Soviet union, Eastern Europe and 'other socialist periods'

Topics related to China's diplomatic work

Maps of China's borders

Discussion of 'special administrative regions', such as Hong Kong and Macao, and Taiwan's economy, politics, history, culture, and 'important social affairs'

Table 5: Definitions given by China's General Administration of Press and Publications of 'Major Selected

Topics' which determine the scope of regulations that limit the import and dissemination of publications originating outside of China (NPPA 2019)

Finally, in the fourth phase, all flagged terms and phrases are read in context. The articles are categorised and analysed qualitatively to determine their higher-order topics and arguments and whether they express pro- or anti-government sentiment, alongside any other noticeable patterns in relation to the flagged terms or phrases. Therefore, the overall corpus analysis design (phases 1-4) combines a mixture of quantitative corpus analysis tools and qualitative close reading of terms and phrases in context to form hypotheses about emerging censorship criteria affecting English-language scholarly journal articles. The results of these four phases of analysis are given in chapter 7 (p.262) and in chapter 9 (p.305) outlining recommendations for further research.

4.4.2.d. Limitations

There are four central limitations to the corpus analysis design. The first relates to the sample selection criteria. This study is observational and relies on publicly available information on journal publishers' platforms, available in the UK and in China. The selection and analysis are

therefore limited to only one publisher, which has made publicly observable amendments to their online platform in a way that suggests compliance with China's import controls on politically sensitive content. This study does not, therefore, capture all potential routes to compliance with China's import regulations, which cannot be determined via these means. These other routes could include amending journal subscription packages sold to Chinese research institutions such that politically sensitive material is inaccessible via those institutions, as opposed to platform amendments affecting publicly accessible information. Moreover, there may be other routes to compliance not captured by these three routes, for example, 'local loading', described in the research interviews, whereby scholarly content is loaded directly into local intranets or virtual learning environments for dissemination within a university setting, rather than administered via a publicly available content platform. These other routes cannot be studied via the corpus analysis methodology outlined here; therefore, this study only informs initial hypotheses regarding suspected criteria that apply to platform amendments affecting publicly available journal article data and search returns.

The second limitation is one that this study is based upon the presumption of publisher compliance with China's import regulations, rather than independently verifiable proof of their compliance. The nature of the content that is unavailable and apparent mechanisms by which this content has been suppressed is consistent with other verified instances of alleged censorship compliance, outlined in chapter 2 (p.47), involving blocking or otherwise suppressing content when accessing a publisher's platform via a China-based IP address. There is evidential support that this content has been selected due to perceived political sensitivity in China, based on the findings of the corpus analysis in chapter 7 (p.267). However, as this is an observational study, it cannot prove conclusively that all items of content have been removed due to censorship concerns, as opposed to other external considerations. Therefore, the findings are described as suspected, i.e. not definitive, censorship criteria.

The third limitation is that approach to term extraction and analysis is largely top-down, except for phases 3-4, which aim to establish hypotheses regarding previously unknown censorship criteria—and the study does not compare the dataset of censored material against a companion dataset of uncensored material to support hypothesis formation. Other approaches could allow for more sophisticated statistical inferences regarding the correspondence between specific terms or phrases in scholarly journal articles and censorship, as opposed to uncensored journal articles, as in Glenn Tiffert's work on the censorship of Chinese-language newspaper archives described in chapter 3 (p.76). (Tiffert 2017) However, a bottom-up methodology of this kind would require a far larger dataset of censored and uncensored content than was feasible within the time constraints of component of the PhD and the technical limitations of the article extraction method, which involved manually downloading and deduplicating batches of search return data, limited by 1,000 items per-download, in defined subject areas to identify a manageable sample size of unavailable content, as outlined above. For this reason, the outcomes of this study are described as initial hypotheses. A more methodologically robust, bottom-up design, involving automated IP-based platform comparisons for data extraction, and large-scale comparisons of censored and uncensored content is described later in this thesis, as part of the recommendations for further research (p.318).

Finally, while the sample size is large enough to form hypotheses regarding censorship criteria for journal articles via the publisher platform that forms the focus of this study (84.2% of all unavailable articles), this study is limited to this content type, rather than the wider corpus of all unavailable content of which 450 journal articles forms a sample of 1.6%. This limitation is returned to in the recommendations for further research, post-PhD, describing a bottom-up corpus analysis design that involves a larger sample drawn from all content types—book chapters (20,314 items) in particular, which represent 69% of all unavailable content via the publisher's platform.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter gives an account of the overall design, methodology and methods of the research that is reported in the chapters that follow. The research follows an exploratory-sequential mixed methods design that aims to uncover both qualitative and quantifiable insights about the conditions that enable or constrain the (self-)censorship of online journal platforms in China. The qualitative component is a semi-structured interview-based study that addresses this primary concern and the secondary research questions regarding definitions of censorship complicity, the barriers and potential advantages of collective action, and the longitudinal changes to censorship criteria affecting online scholarly journal articles. The interviews are semi-structured and held with 12 academics and 12 publishers, many of whom have direct or indirect experience of the events that form the primary research focus. They inform the secondary and (partly) quantitative component of the mixed methods design, which is a corpus analysis study of 450 journal articles that are inaccessible via China-based IP addresses due to suspected censorship concerns. This component supplements the interview study to address part of the primary research question and SQ 5, regarding the (term-based) conditions of censorship and changes to those conditions over time.

The research has been designed to address two gaps in the scholarship on censorship complicity in China. First, beyond Wong & Kwong's (2019) initial analysis of the *China Quarterly* case, there is no empirical research that deals in-depth with the involvement of non-Chinese scholarly publishers in censorship practices in China. Second, in the broader literature on censorship in China, there is an absence of qualitative studies that investigate the dynamics of corporate censorship complicity from the perspective of industry insiders, some of whom have actively dealt with censorship demands and handled the response of their employing organisations to those demands. The overall research design addresses the first gap, while the

interview-based component deals with the second, by exploring the perspectives of both the censored (academics) and the alleged (self-)censors (publishing professionals).

Finally, although this chapter has given a full description of the empirical components of the research, there is also a theoretical component of the research that relates to SQ2 and the circumstances under which disruptions in the availability of scholarship constitute censorship complicity. As outlined above, SQ2 is answered partly by the interviews, which aim to explore the extent to which interview participants share a common conceptual framework regarding censorship. As well as approaching this topic empirically, this research aims to offer a novel contribution to the theoretical literature on censorship and to define censorship complicity in the context of online journal distribution. These two approaches to answering SQ2—empirical and theoretical—are compared in the discussion chapter (p.280) and industry recommendations (p.320), having identified principles among the affected communities that align also with the established theoretical literature on censorship, the concept, and notions of self-censorship and/or censorship complicity, which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: Defining Censorship of the Online Scholarly Record

5.1. Introduction

As outlined in the preceding chapter, the primary objective of this thesis (see PQ p.110) is to identify the conditions under which academic publishers comply with or resist censorship demands in China. This objective encompasses a sub-set of secondary research questions (p.111), informing a mixed-methods (qualitative-quantitative) exploratory sequential research design. Before moving on to the empirical components of the research, this chapter situates the research focus (p.21) within the theoretical literature on (self-)censorship. The purpose of this discussion is to offer a novel theoretical contribution as part of an answer to secondary research question two (SQ2): ‘Under what conditions do platform-based interventions by English-language publishers constitute a form of censorship complicity?’ To answer this question, this theory chapter combines work in political theory and analytic philosophy on institutional self-censorship with the concept, from computer sciences, of the *hypertext*—human-authored, textual media that branches or performs on request (Nelson 1970; Wardrip-Fruin 2004). Some commentators reject the application ‘censorship’ in this context, where amendments to content platforms do not result in changes to the underlying text of online scholarly content. However, insofar as the scholarly record is a digitally integrated body of intellectual work—both a corpus and a text, or *hypertext*—constraints placed by publishers on access to individual items, for example, by amending metadata and blocking digital object identifiers (DOIs), are editorial interventions.

In some contexts, editorial interventions are justified in terms of research ethics concerns; in others, they are motivated by external pressures to suppress research that undermines political institutions and state-sanctioned ideologies. Under this theoretical model,

the actions of publishers to amend the publishing platforms in China to suit political interests constitute a form of institutional self-censorship, compromising its integrity of the online scholarly record. This chapter informs the empirical components that follows aimed at understanding the conditions under which scholarly publishers engage in this form of institutional self-censorship.

5.2. Competing notions of (self-)censorship in scholarly publishing

In March 2018, the Association of University Presses issued a joint statement of guiding principles for its membership, made up of the world's leading university-affiliated scholarly publishers (Association of University Presses 2018). In it, the AUP condemned 'any bowdlerization of a curated collection of scholarship (e.g., a journal issue, an edited volume)', claiming that such actions do 'damage to the editorial work invested in the construction of that collection' (ibid.). In January the same year, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)—a leading advisory body for ethics guidance and standards in scholarly publishing—issued a similar, albeit truncated, statement on censorship, reaffirming COPE's 'principles of academic freedom and editorial independence' in the face of 'requests' or 'practices' that 'interfere with and restrict the communication and distribution of scientific research results (COPE 2018).

The AUP and COPE statements followed reports of scholarly publishers tailoring their content platforms in China according to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) political sensitivities (see p.29). In 2019, China scholar Nicholas Loubere analysed publisher statements issued in defence of these platform-based interventions. Loubere takes issue with publishers' characterisation of their involvement, which Springer Nature described as 'not Editorial censorship' (Page 2017), or, in the case of Taylor & Francis, as a purchasing decision on behalf of importers—again, not censorship (Taylor & Francis 2018). Rather than accepting the narrative

given by publishers, that removing products from an overseas market is not akin to censorship, Loubere argues instead for a broader notion censorship complicity, which encompasses three forms of publisher response to censorship demands in China (outlined earlier in the context chapter p.47): 1) removing journal articles from the China-facing platforms of online journals (as in the case of Cambridge University Press and *China Quarterly*); 2. amending the search function of publishers' China-facing journal platform (e.g. Springer Nature); and 3) removing journals from sales packages sold to China-based institutions (e.g. Taylor & Francis). This third form of alleged (self-)censorship—removing journals that contain sensitive content from subscription-based journal collections—recurr elsewhere in Loubere's writing on the topic (Loubere and Franceschini 2017), whereby 'commercial publishers and their 'great paywall' are the primary impediment to public access to academic knowledge' (Loubere 2020, 248).

Loubere's central argument is that 'the ways in which we conceptualise and define the act of censorship in academia must be expanded to include [the] corporate censoring of content in the pursuit of profits' (ibid.). This expanded notion of censorship—whether it can be justified and sustained—is explored later in this chapter. For now, it is important to emphasise the lack of consensus regarding notions of censorship in the context of scholarly content distribution in China. Even in the case of publishers actively amending online platforms, debates continue over whether the publisher is 'the censor' in such instances and whether such amendments amount to a form of editorial censorship. The argument that, for example, amending search returns amounts to the 'bowdlerization of a curated collection of scholarship' (Association of University Presses 2018), as described by the AUP, has even faced criticism within the Asia studies community itself.

Michel Hockx, Professor of Chinese Literature at the University of Notre Dame, argues that academic publishers' mechanisms of journal content distribution are simply incompatible with China's regulatory framework, which requires a degree of article-level vetting and tailoring

of content collections (Hockx 2018). Referring to Springer Nature's platform amendments, according to Hockx, it is not the journal as an integrated body of intellectual output that has been censored or 'bowdlerized' but rather the publisher's search functionality (ibid.). This argument appears to support Springer Nature's own characterization of their intervention as 'not Editorial censorship' (Page 2017) *contra* Loubere's critique of this characterisation.

In contrast, the AUP's Statement of Guiding Principles, introduced earlier, broadly aligns with Loubere's position. It describes publisher compliance with requests from government agencies to 'restrict access to specific elements of a larger digital collection within a given market' (Association of University Presses 2018) as a form of publisher facilitated 'bowdlerization' affecting the scholarly record. The AUP statement also explicitly prohibits the removal of individual journal articles or book chapters from wider collections, among other practices that cause a disparity in access to records of publication due to geographical location (ibid.). The AUP statement does not say whether acquiescence to 'government requests to restrict access' includes limitations on the legal sale of content in a particular region, however, which would result in a paywall for certain journals within a collection, or the entire collection of content. Therefore, the statement remains agnostic about paywall-based constraints on journal access, which is the object of Loubere's critique.

The COPE position statement on censorship, also discussed above, is more expansive and less clearly aligned to any specific position regarding the nature of censorship or the scholarly record. It addresses all attempts to 'interfere with and restrict the communication and distribution of scientific research results' (COPE 2018), although the statement does not offer guidance on how to distinguish between a permissible amendment to the scholarly record and an impermissible form of interference or restriction. One way of adjudicating could be to refer to COPE's own retractions guidelines (COPE 2019). These guidelines concern amendments to the content of journal articles, including, in more extreme circumstances, the removal of articles

from online journal issues. However, even if these guidelines are considered, COPE remains agnostic on two of the routes to compliance outlined earlier: a) amending journal search returns and b) removing journals from sales packages. The scope of COPE's retraction guidelines covers article-level amendments to address research ethics concerns, usually involving either corrections to the underlying content of journal articles, retracted articles with accompanying statements of retraction, or the removal of individual articles altogether from the published scholarly record. Therefore, COPE offers no explicit guidance or frames of reference for handling pressures to amend the functionality of online content platforms or to remove journals from content package on political grounds. Censorship, in this context, remains undefined at the industry level.

The aims of the discussion that follows are threefold. The first is to define the scholarly record in its digital form. The second is to explore the conditions under which amendments to the scholarly record amount to an editorial intervention, as suggested by Loubere and the AUP's Statement of Guiding Principles. The third is to understand the sorts of motivations that distinguish institutional self-censorship, on the part of the publisher, from other forms of more benign editorial intervention. This discussion involves a theoretical reorientation of the scholarly record, away from a *corpus* ontology that is implied by the regulatory frameworks surrounding the scholarly record, concerned primarily with regulating amendments to discrete items of content (e.g. journal articles) (COPE 2019), towards a *hypertext* ontology that foregrounds the functioning of the scholarly record as an integrated and interlinked digital text. The closing sections relate this conceptual framework to the three routes that publishers have taken to navigate China's content constraints, outlined earlier (p.47).

5.3. Defining the scholarly record

In 1665, Henry Oldenberg published the first issue of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* (Hall 2002). With this nascent scientific periodical, Oldenberg initiated many of the

practices associated with the contemporary scholarly record: date stamping; quality certification; archiving authorised findings; and disseminating to peers and colleagues (Mabe 2012, 416). From its inception, this record was intended to unveil the ‘hidden colleges’ of natural philosophers ‘developed through personal contact and private written communication’ (Houghton 1975, 12). By expanding this informal network beyond linguistic and territorial boundaries, the *Philosophical Transactions* was the first attempt at an international medium of scholarly communication (ibid.).

Michael Mabe identifies four functions of the Early Modern scholarly record that persist in its current form: registration, certification, archiving and dissemination (Mabe 2012).

However, despite their persistence, these functions have been radically transformed by the emergence of digital communication technologies. The transition from print to digital scholarly resources solved problems of costly storage and access provision at the expense of a ‘highly distributed and highly robust material scholarly record’ (Lynch 1994). In its place, centralised, licensed access to digital books and journals has consolidated the role of publishers (profit and non-profit) and governmental agencies, acting as custodians of the digital scholarly record on behalf of the academy (ibid.).

Persistent identifiers, like the Digital Object Identifier (DOI), and standard electronic formats, like the portable document format (PDF), have been adopted throughout the publishing industry to ensure persistent linking and an interoperability framework across the digital scholarly literature (Warner 2005). Notwithstanding cross-publisher efforts to ensure preservation and persistent access worldwide to journal articles via publisher’s publishing platforms,¹⁵ many authors point to the lack of infrastructure to support the growing body of non-traditional scholarly outputs (Hahn 2008; Burpee et al. 2015). A 2014 Ohio College Library Centre (OCLC) report on the *Evolving Scholarly Record* lists five categories of scholarly output

¹⁵ These include non-profit digital infrastructure services such as Crossref and journal archiving and retrieval services like CLOCKSS and Portico, which are used by most scholarly publishers, including those that form the focus of this research.

beyond journal articles and books (Lavoie et al. 2014). The categories include materials relating to methods (computer programs, experimental protocols, survey instruments); evidence (data sets, survey responses, literature reviews); discussion (blog commentary, discussion lists, preprints); revision (supplementary data, additional findings, corrigenda or errata); and re-use (conference presentations, lay summaries, press releases) (ibid.). But despite the radical expansion in forms of scholarly output, published books and journals still represent the core units of research certification and career advancement worldwide (O'Neill 2016), including China (Tie and Wang 2022).

Given the persistence of journals and journal articles as the primary means of scholarly communication, the final, peer-reviewed, authorised, PDF journal article—the Version of Record (VoR)—remains the central component of the scholarly record (Hinchliffe 2022). Various organisations including Crossref, the Council of Science Editors, the International Council of Medical Journal Editors and the Committee of Publication Ethics have developed guidelines for amending VoR articles (Wager and Kleinert 2014; COPE 2019; Crossref 2023), via statements of concern, retractions, corrigenda or errata. Retractions may be warranted because of unreliable or misrepresented findings, data falsification, plagiarism, copyright infringement, unethical research design and biased or manipulated peer review (COPE 2019). In normal circumstances, a retracted article will be marked as such but will remain accessible, with an accompanying retraction notice (ibid.). In more extreme circumstances, VoR journal articles may be removed from the scholarly record altogether (although not the evidence of their publication) if the availability of the retracted article violates legal or ethical constraints regarding libel, defamation, copyright or participant confidentiality (ibid.).

Despite this growing body of guidelines, there is very little in the way of industry standards or research regarding amendments to VoR journal articles motivated by political concerns. Moreover, as we saw earlier, there is some disagreement over whether impediments to

access motivated by political concerns amount to a ‘bowdlerization’ of the scholarly record, or merely the means of distribution, manifested in the publisher’s platform functionality, i.e. the availability of metadata, the reliability of search functions, and so on. In the meantime, some publishers continue to sidestep accusations of (self-)censorship altogether, by claiming that such actions are the result of ‘local content access decision[s]’: i.e. ‘not editorial censorship’; not ‘affect[ing] the content [that publishers] publish or make accessible elsewhere in the world’ (Page 2017).

5.4. Defining censorship

In this section, the arguments outlined above regarding the applicability of censorship in the context of the scholarly record are brought into dialogue with the theoretical literature on censorship. In the section that follows, different notions of censorship are considered in relation to two ontological formations of the scholarly record in its digital form: a) a *corpus* of scholarly content distributed via digital content platforms, and b) an integrated and evolving digital text—or, *hypertext*.

In most definitions of censorship, we find two distinct ideas. One relates to the mass noun, censorship, understood as an effort to examine, delete, suppress or prohibit, for example, ‘speech or writing that is deemed subversive of the common good.’ (Encyclopedia Britannica 2024) From this idea the verb form *to censor* is derived: ‘the institution, system, or practice of censoring.’ (ibid.) The second idea or sense of ‘censorship’ relates to the count noun: *the censor*, and *the censorship*. This is the ‘office or function of a censor’ (OED, n.d.)—Roman magistrates ‘acting as census takers, assessors, and inspectors of morals and conduct.’ (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) This idea lends meaning to censorship via its Latin root *censere*, ‘to appraise, value, judge,’ (Harper, n.d.) and refers to the official power of the Roman censor to *censure* citizens with a *nota*, a mark against their name in the census, ‘which signified his exclusion from his tribe and

the removal of his right to vote.’ (Swithinbank 2012) This meaning extends to the role of any state official acting as censor by assuming an analogous set of responsibilities, i.e. an official ‘whose duty it is to inspect all books, journals, dramatic pieces, etc., before publication, to secure that they shall contain nothing immoral, heretical, or offensive to the government.’ (OED, n.d.)

The discussion that follows will explore attempts to define censorship in the first sense, as a system or practice prohibiting forms of communication. Before then, however, it is worth considering the official role of censor established in ancient Rome, not merely as an etymological curiosity, but as the prototypical censorship regime, which will be returned to in later discussions of the theoretical literature on censorship.

5.4.1. The Roman censorship

The Roman censorship was established in 443BC. It consisted of two magistrates, the censors, each elected to office by a *comitia centuriata* (Centuriate Assembly) typically every four or five years (Swithinbank 2012, 1408) and each assisted by an office of magisterial attendants—*scribae* (scribes), *praecones* (messengers), *nomenclatores* (announcers) and *viatores* (summoners). The explicit duties of the Roman censor were not tied to the prohibition or suppression of forms of communication. Foremost was the duty to compile the census: a record of every Roman citizen, their family, household and the value of their property, for the purposes of taxation, conscription and voting. (Suolahti 1963, 33) Over time, the scope and responsibilities of the censorship expanded to include control over the state economy (ibid. 32) and, from 367BC, the preparation of senatorial lists. (ibid. 24) In connection with the census, the censors had the power to punish citizens by downgrading their rank and removing their right to participate in civic life. (Astin 1988) This is known as the *regimum morum*, the regulation of public morality. As Alan Astin describes (ibid. 14), the variety of terms used in the work of Livy and other Roman historians—*cura morum*, (Suolahti 1963) *moribus praepositus*, *moribus praeuisse*, *magister morum* (Astin 1988, 14)—suggests that although *mores regere* in broad terms undoubtedly came to be regarded as a

responsibility of the censors, it was a responsibility which did not originate with a formal definition or a clear delimitation of its content. (ibid. 15)

This imprecision regarding the scope and origins of the *regimum morum* allowed a degree of flexibility in its application, with some censors appraising ‘the entire mode of living of the citizens.’ (Suolahti 1963, 49) Typical objects of appraisal included avoiding taxes or military service, neglecting public property, professional negligence, accepting bribes, electoral fraud and defying the authority of state magistrates. (ibid.) The censors’ judgment also extended to private conduct, such as living extravagantly, breaking one’s word, the misuse of the powers of *paterfamilias*, groundless divorce, or attempted suicide. (ibid. 52) Censors did not inflict corporal punishment, but public shame, or *ignominia*. (Astin 1988, 16) Reproaches were addressed to all citizens via edicts, speeches, and marks in the census, or *nota*. Punishments included fines, loss of property, relocation, dismissal from the Senate or an Equestrian Order, (Suolahti 1963, 52) or in more extreme cases, reclassification as *aerarii* (landless) (ibid. 43), stripping citizens of their property and voting rights.

Many aspects of the Roman censorship are historically contingent. The *regimen morum* was concerned primarily with the civic conduct of the upper classes, who were accountable to the public. It excluded women, who could not pay tax, enlist in the military or vote. (ibid. 50) It was a magisterial office in service of the public, with an expectation that public servants would live ‘entirely for the good of the state,’ (ibid. 49). On these grounds Rome’s citizens accepted the legitimacy of the censorship to monitor both their public and private lives. The censors themselves were, likewise, accountable to the public and to one another. They were elected with overlapping terms, with the power of veto over each other’s judgments, acting as ‘a check against party influence, which influenced each individual appointment.’ (ibid. 52)

As is explored in later sections, there are many examples of censorship regimes that run contrary to the public interest. Indeed, according to more restrictive definitions, censorship

necessarily acts in opposition to those interests. Nevertheless, it is important for this account of censorship's conceptual development to begin with the Roman censor, as it introduces one of the central dilemmas facing theorists of censorship: whether to restrict a definition only to forms of suppression that are politically repressive and anti-democratic. In the Roman context, the legitimate reach of the censor's powers is loosely defined and subject to change. Indeed, in attempting to define censorship across all historical periods and contexts, rarely does the set of behaviours in question involve direct, explicit injunctions against writing or speech (Tribe 1973, 47). For some theorists, therefore, the object of censorship is not the explicit prohibition of forms of communication, through top-down authority, but rather the maintenance of a set of power relations and the wider discourses through which they are enacted. This chapter's discussion of theories of censorship will turn, now, to this latter approach, dubbed 'new censorship theory' (Bunn 2015).

5.4.2. 'New censorship theory'

The Western canon on censorship and freedom of expression predates the Roman Empire, with defences of censorship in the writing of Plato, Plutarch, Augustine and Aquinas (Kemp 2014), and famous denouncements in John Milton's *Areopagitica*, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, and the essays of Isaiah Berlin (Berlin 1969), George Orwell (Orwell 1950) and J. M. Coetzee (Coetzee 1997). This literature is broad and nuanced and deals largely with the appropriate boundaries of state influence over the intellectual life of self-determining subjects. Yet despite its breadth, there is a comparatively slim corpus that grapples with issues of definition and ontology. What we have by way of a debate about censorship, the concept—as opposed to censorship, the institution, system or practice—belongs to a period of academic output in the late 1980s and 90s, continuing into the early 2000s. These decades mark a growth in 'censorship studies': in dedicated conferences, journal articles, special issues, journals, books, book series and reference

works¹⁶, including several multi-volume encyclopaedias of censorship. (Jones 2001; Foerstel 1997; Green and Karolides 2014; Phillips 2017)

Censorship as a field of study encompasses a wide variety of disciplines concerned with the history and dissemination of ideas, such as literary theory and criticism, law, social, political and cultural theory and philosophy. Its growth corresponds with the opening of state archives, revealing the extent of censorship operations across the ex-Soviet bloc, especially the German Democratic Republic. (Müller 2004, 1) In the United States, it also corresponds with growing tensions between the principles of the First Amendment and notions of public decency¹⁷ and a cluster of related concerns on university campuses, such as 'political correctness, 'hate speech', ethnic minorities, pornography, feminism, the canon, or the commodification of art.' (ibid.)

The theoretical scholarship of this period borrows extensively from the social theorists Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu and their notions of power and discourse. A split emerges between traditional accounts of censorship—the kind found in dictionary definitions of the term, outlined above—as a form of 'regulatory intervention by political authorities (mostly the state and the church)' (ibid. 4) towards a 'new' theoretical approach (Bunn 2015) that reflects Foucault's intuition that 'the state holds no monopoly of power.' (R. Post 1998, 1) Censorship ceases to be thought of solely in terms of a top-down, centralised political, judicial or regulatory bureaucracies, and instead as a nexus of power dynamics that constitute discourse. An emphasis is placed on specialised forms of communication, such as legal, corporate, scholarly or scientific writing and speech, that set the limits of what is expressible within a bound field or sub-field of human activity. For Bourdieu, discourses are shaped by a compromise between the desire to communicate and a desire to signal competency within a specialised field, allowing the formation internal structures and hierarchies, regulating membership, and invalidating the communicative

¹⁶ For an overview, see (Müller 2004).

¹⁷ Richard Burt gives as examples '[the] exhibitions of artists like Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano, on MTV videos, on rap music by 2-Live Crew and Ice-T, and on television advertisements as well as the FBI's seizure of works and equipment of photographers like Jock Sturges on the grounds that they are child pornographers' (Burt 1994).

potential of external parties. In this view, censorship is ‘constituted by the very structure of the field in which the discourse is produced and circulates’ (Bourdieu 1991, 137) and as such:

[t]he need for... explicit prohibitions, imposed and sanctioned by an institutionalized authority, diminishes as the mechanisms which ensure the allocation of agents to different positions... are increasingly capable of ensuring that the different positions are occupied by agents able and inclined to engage in discourse (or to keep silent) (ibid. 138)

While traditional accounts of censorship might draw a distinction between pre- and post-publication forms—between ‘the control of material before it is published’ (Müller 2004, 4) and ‘curbing the dissemination and reception of material after it has been published,’ (ibid.)—‘new censorship theory’, in the mould of Bourdieu and Foucault, aims to deconstruct this ontology. In place of a discrete pre- or post-publication intervention, censorship is reformulated as a set of *a priori* conditions of discourse and subjectivity.

Richard Burt displays this trend towards ontological deconstruction in his study of theatre censorship in Early Modern England. He questions whether *removal* and *replacement* are essential components of censorship and argues instead for *dispersal* and *displacement* (Burt 1998), processes involving a variety ‘of regulatory agents and practices, productive as well as prohibitive, cultural legitimation as well as delegitimation.’ (ibid. 17) He downplays the significance of book burning, ‘a symbolic rite of purification rather than an attempt to block completely access to forbidden books’ (ibid.) and performance bans, which in the case of Thomas Middleton’s play *A Game of Chess*, fuelled the notoriety of its political satire. Burt therefore rejects the idea of censorship as a discrete, subtractive intervention, relating it instead to an unbound social and political dynamic concerned with the regulation of cultural capital; a dynamic encompassing ‘state censorship, market censorship, and criticism, which would join obtrusive suppression to a continuum that also includes active support or patronage.’ (Burt 1998, 25)

This concept of censorship—as a bargaining between political, social and market forces—recurs throughout the ‘new censorship’ canon, such as the work of Sophia Rosenfeld, who writes of eighteenth-century France, ‘the business of censorship ... depended above all upon collusion between two supposedly opposing sides,’ (Rosenfeld 2014, 121) i.e. ‘the repressive, censoring Old Regime state and its rational, liberal, and ultimately successful challengers, eager for intellectual and political freedom.’ (ibid.) Like Burt, Rosenfeld describes an ineffective censorship regime with an incoherent central ‘bureaucracy, which involved several often hostile bodies with frequently conflicting goals.’ (ibid. 122-3) In her account, political and market forces combine, with some censors actively helping publishers to subvert the law, via *permissions tacites* (ibid. 122): legal assurances that authors and publishers would not be prosecuted for manuscripts that ‘could not, because of their content, officially be given a royal endorsement.’ (ibid.) Such imbalanced treatment of publishers, combined with the caché attached to unsanctioned works, allowed some publishers to profit at the expense of intensified cultural regulation, leading other historians of the period, such as Roger Chartier, to argue that the ‘flexibility of the censorship apparatus ultimately protected the economic interests of the French publishing industry.’ (ibid. 123)

These approaches to censorship signal a shift away from institutional power towards broader social and economic forces. As Rosenfeld writes, quoting Marx, ‘the market... exercise[s] its own kind of “material censorship,” simply replacing the state in stifling the expression of controversial or subversive ideas.’ (ibid. 124) Two consequences result from the reorientations of ‘new censorship theory’: a) an erosion of the boundary between internal and external forms of influence, and b) a radical expansion of censorship’s conceptual scope. For Sue Curry Jansen, censorship entails ‘all socially structured proscriptions or prescriptions which inhibit or prohibit dissemination of ideas.’ (Jansen 1991, 221)

Therefore, the study of censorship is not confined to external proscriptions on forms of communication, but also the internalised norms and principles that ground the communicative potential of subjects. Jansen describes this distinction in terms of regulative vs. constitutive forms of censorship, with the latter referring to unspoken principles, norms and taboo that constitute the boundaries of knowledge, allowing dominant social groups to ‘create, secure, and maintain ... control over the power to name.’ (ibid.) For many authors writing in this vein, incorporating the Foucauldian notion that ‘time, place, kin, class, and ego leave their imprint on ideas’ (ibid.), communication is likewise bound by norms that constitute subjects and their communities. Judith Butler draws a parallel with the psychoanalytic concept of ‘foreclosure’, whereby language has a generative (constitutive) function: a repressive tendency that ‘is not performed by a subject but, rather, whose operation makes possible the formation of the subject.’ (Butler 1997, 138) For Rae Langton, this idea underscores a feminist critique of the radical free-speech advocacy, as she confronts the power of sexually violent language and images to silence women. (Langton 1993)

If we take censorship to be constitutive of language and subjectivity, then, as Michael Holquist writes:

[t]o be for or against censorship as such is to assume a freedom no one has. Censorship is. One can only discriminate among its more and less repressive effects. (Holquist 1994, 16)

Indeed, the radical scope of the ‘new censorship theory’ has caused some to question its efficacy as an analytic device. Robert Post, for example, argues that

[t]he result seems to flatten distinctions among kinds of power, implicitly equating suppression of speech caused by state legal action with that caused by the market, or by the dominance of a particular discourse, or by the institution of criticism itself. (Post 1998, 4)

Or, as Beate Müller puts it more succinctly: '[a]nalysis of censorship does not become simpler if censorship is identified everywhere.' (Müller 2004, 10) This concern has consequences for the present study, involving allegations of censorship complicity on behalf of English-language scholarly journal publishers. By identifying censorship in all communicative activity and stripping the concept of its normative function, as Post and Müller describe, this flattens the distinction between actions on behalf of publishers to remove journal articles on political grounds from corrections or retractions due to research ethics concerns. Instead, under the 'new' theoretical model, the temptation is to invert this normative hierarchy and interrogate the sorts of unspoken proscriptions that constitute validity, novelty and quality in academic research, rather than the concerns of political elites operating in a specific cultural and political context.

Academic communities are international. Whether there are identifiable cultural divides (East vs. West) between support for and opposition against, for example, the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to regulate research dissemination on political grounds is an empirical, not theoretical, question. Indeed, one objection to 'new censorship theory' is that it is precisely by separating political and academic motivations to amend the scholarly record that we can begin to distinguish between censorship and other forms of proscription on the dissemination of research based on novelty, quality or ethics. While some have offered a taxonomy of censorship in the 'new' theoretical tradition,¹⁸ this literature lacks a substantive discussion of the underlying motivations behind different forms of censorship, which may be equally diverse. This theoretical blind spot forecloses any meaningful distinctions between politically motivated (self-)censorship from everyday omissions, falsehoods, lies, tact and euphemism.

In the last ten years, another approach has emerged within analytic philosophy and political theory, using conceptual analysis as a tool to distinguish self-censorship from more

¹⁸ Beate Müller, for example, uses a taxonomy rooted in communication theory and argues that (self-)censorship may exert an influence over the sender of a message, its receiver, the message itself, the code employed, the channel or medium, and the context. For a brief discussion, see Müller (2004).

benign or prosaic forms of self-restraint. This chapter will now turn to this literature and explore the application of analytic theories self-censorship in the context of online journal censorship.

5.4.3. Analytic theories of self-censorship

In a 2011 *Res Publica* article, political theorist, John Horton, offers an analysis of self-censorship in terms of its ‘conceptual structure and moral standing,’ (Horton 2011, 91) as a distinct category of self-imposed prohibition that is separate to related behaviours, such as self-deception, control or restraint. This analysis has important ramifications for the broader concept of censorship, which has likewise received relatively little attention within the analytic philosophical tradition. For Horton, censorship is a form of coercion and like earlier authors, such as Burt and Jansen, Horton’s analysis goes beyond the state to include powerful individuals and other institutions such as ‘churches, commercial enterprises and universities.’ (ibid.) Horton begins by defining censorship, loosely, as

some person or group of persons restricting some other person or group of persons from expressing thoughts, feelings or beliefs that ... they do not want to be heard, perhaps because the censoring group regard such expressions as a threat to them or to something that they hold to be valuable, or as giving voice to ideas, sentiments or opinions that challenge their judgement or authority. (ibid. 94)

This tentative definition is noticeably different from earlier postmodern theories of censorship that concern themselves more expansively with all socially structured proscriptions or prescriptions that impede communication and the dissemination of ideas (Jansen 1991). Horton narrows the scope to a specific set of motivations on the part of the censor to do with self-preservation and an effort to avoid public or political accountability. For censorship to become self-censorship, Horton introduces three necessary conditions: a) two distinct parties; b) one favouring censorship, the other that (at least privately) favouring ‘the option for people to say

whatever it is that the other group wishes to censor' (Horton 2011, 96); and c) the (partly) 'censored' party playing a significant non-coerced determinative role' (ibid. 98) in the proposed censorship: 'neither acting entirely out of [their] own volition nor being effectively coerced: [self-censorship] is the uneasy and variable combination of both.' (ibid. 99)

Horton considers Google's amended search engine in China and subsequent withdrawal as a potential example of self-censorship, although he is cautious about applying this concept at the institutional level, given the difficulty of mapping the psychological phenomenology of individuals across larger groups or organisations:

it is clear that Google were initially responding to pressure, both commercial and in the form of technical interference from the Chinese government. Moreover, there is little doubt that Google's initial decision was motivated not by any concern for the sensitivities of the Chinese government (and many would not have thought it at all appropriate if it had been), but by its own desire to take advantage of the potentially huge economic gains from penetrating the Chinese market. (ibid. 104)

Other authors have developed these ideas further to account for the complex motivations and dynamics involved in institutional self-censorship. Philip Cook and Conrad Heilmann construct a taxonomy of forms of both private and public forms of institutional self-censorship, with institutions that face censorship demands being able to occupy a multitude of positions that vary from private opposition to public acceptance of attitudes enforced by a censor (Cook and Heilmann 2013). For Cook and Heilmann, like Horton, self-censorship occurs when there is a misalignment between a person's or organisation's privately held and publicly expressed attitudes, varying from perfect non-alignment to perfect alignment; i.e. the wholesale adoption of an attitude, publicly and privately, or resistance. Also, like Horton, Cook and Heilmann's analysis emphasises the different motivations of the censor and the censee. Moreover, their account decouples the descriptive and normative elements of (self-)censorship

and allows for a distinction between public and private forms. Key to this distinction is the notion of a ‘censorship regime’: ‘a process by which censoring agents establish, justify, and enforce a goal of fit between a conception of permissible expressive attitudes and attitudes actually expressed by censees.’ (ibid. 180)

For Cook and Heilmann, different agents will react differently to censorship regimes. The extent to which the censor’s ‘goal of fit’ coheres with the censee’s values and epistemic commitments is core to any account of self-censorship. This is a complex interaction involving 5 components: (1) a goal of fit between a conception of permissible expressive attitudes and attitudes actually expressed; (2) the content of the conception of permissible expressive attitudes; (3) the enforcement of the fit according to the conception of permissible expressive attitudes; (4) the censor and censee; and (5) their interaction (ibid.). The content of these components can be given in an answer to 5 questions: (1) ‘Why is censorship established?’; (2) ‘What is censored?’; (3) ‘How and on what grounds is censorship enforced?’; (4) ‘Who is the censor and the censee?’; and (5) ‘How do censor and censee interact?’ (ibid.) Using these components, Cook & Heilmann present a model for censorship that incorporates a wide array of acts and actors, while narrowing the scope of their analysis to a specific dynamic of (self-)censorship: the achievement of a ‘goal of fit’ between censor and censee (ibid.).

Cook & Heilmann’s model takes into consideration (1) the establishment of ‘censorship regimes’ due to considerations such as national security, public order, or in the case of hate speech, freedom from harm; (2) it allows for a variety of censored topics or forms of expression, justified in terms of prudential benefit, or moral right and wrong; (3) it accounts for various means of enforcement, such as brute power, legal or constitutional authority, appeals to public decency, or the threat of *ignomy*; (4) the agents may include governments and other public, religious or education organisations and powerful individuals, so long as one organisation or individual has a means of enforcing a ‘goal of fit’ over another; and (5) it allows for different

form of interaction, as ‘the censee’ may respond to a censorship regime with various degrees of opposition or compliance. (ibid.)

This fifth component, relating to the interaction between censor and censee, is fundamental for Cook and Heilmann’s theory of ‘public’ self-censorship, i.e. ‘a deliberate effort on the part of an individual to resolve a conflict of attitudes between herself and [a censorship regime] by taking into account both idealistic and/or pragmatic concerns.’ (ibid. 13) Facing an effort on the part of a censor to prohibit forms of expression, a censee may acquiesce, actively oppose or remain indifferent. Moreover, their standpoint with respect to the ‘content of the conception of the goal of fit’, i.e. the prohibited topic and the justification for prohibition, may be one of ‘perfect alignment’, ‘non-alignment’, or ‘weak alignment.’ (ibid. 184) The censee may align with the censor for several reasons: fear of punishment; because they respect the authority of the censoring party; or because they agree with the censor’s motivation for regulating forms of discourse. Cook and Heilmann tabulate their model as follows:

Public Attitude Private Attitude	Public Opposition	Public Indifference	Public Acceptance
Private Opposition	Perfect alignment (1.)	Weak “pragmatic” alignment (4.)	Perfect non-alignment (8.)
Private Indifference	Weak “idealistic” alignment (6.)	Perfect alignment (2.)	Weak “pragmatic” alignment (5.)
Private Acceptance	Perfect non-alignment (9.)	Weak “idealistic” alignment (7.)	Perfect alignment (3.)

Table 6: Degrees of alignment between a censee’s privately held and publicly expressed attitudes from Cook and Heilmann (2013) © Philip Cook and Conrad Heilmann

Cook and Heilmann apply their model to the case of the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, which published a series of satirical caricatures of the Prophet Muhammed. The editors of *Jyllands-Posten* agreed to publish the caricatures despite public outcry and threats of violence from members of the international Muslim community; the editors had previously refused to publish

caricatures of Jesus to avoid offending Christian readers. Cook and Heilmann identify three distinct ‘censorship regimes’ in this case: a) Danish law, regulating the permissible attitudes expressed by newspapers (ibid. 184); b) the Muslim community, who oppose ‘publication of the caricatures and [aim] to regulate the expression of attitudes about Islam and Mohammed in the public sphere’ (ibid.); and c), the editors of *Jyllands-Posten*, who regulate the kinds of content they want to exclude from publishing and to fulfil their ‘moral, political, commercial, aesthetic and professional values.’ (ibid. 186)

Cook and Heilmann demonstrate how the interaction between censor and censee varies in terms of opposition or alignment, for example the alignment between the ‘content of the conception’ of the ‘goal of fit’ between Danish law and the editors of the *Jyllands-Posten*, i.e. ‘the moral, political, and social values of Danish society, such as freedom, equality, and democracy’ (Cook and Heilmann 2010, 9) and its enforcement ‘through section 77 of Denmark’s constitution which protects freedom of speech and the freedom of the press.’ (ibid.) By deciding to publish the caricatures of Muhammed, the editors of the *Jyllands-Posten* submit willingly to the ‘public censorship regime’ constituted in Danish law while opposing that of the Muslim community. Their interaction with the Muslim community is one of ‘perfect misalignment.’ In contrast, by refusing to publish caricatures of Jesus, despite legal guarantees in Danish law allowing their publication, Cook and Heilmann argue that the editors of *Jyllands-Posten* submit to a form of ‘private self-censorship’—i.e. self-censorship in the absence of a public censorship regime.

Cook and Heilmann’s example is relevant to the present thesis, not least because they include in their discussion of *Jyllands-Posten* related concerns among the editorial staff of a prominent scholarly publisher, Yale University Press (YUP), who likewise refused to publish the offending cartoons of Muhammed in Jytte Klausen’s *The Cartoons that Shook the World* ‘on the pragmatic ground of safety and security.’ (ibid. 11) Cook and Heilmann describe YUP as being in

a position of ‘perfect non-alignment between private opposition to the public censor prohibiting the publication and public acceptance of that attitude by not publishing [the cartoons].’ (ibid.) According to their taxonomy, ‘this non-alignment amounts to *public self-censorship*.’ (ibid.)

If we accept Cook and Heilmann’s definition of a ‘censorship regime’, the first and perhaps most important consequence of their taxonomy for the present thesis is that scholarly publishers that have suppressed journal articles to sustain access to the Chinese market have also engaged in public self-censorship. Defending the actions of publishers to restrict access to content in China because of a requirement to comply with the legal frameworks within which they operate is irrelevant to the definition of a ‘censorship regime’ offered here. As in the above example concerning the Danish legal system, a ‘censorship regime’ is any ‘process’ by which an agent—in this case, China’s General Administration of Press and Publications—establishes, justifies, and enforces ‘a goal of fit’ between ‘a conception of permissible expressive attitudes’ and attitudes actually expressed. As with the example of *Jyllands-Posten*, there are multiple ‘censorship regimes’, or processes by which the content and availability of scholarly journals are regulated. This concept could apply to, for example, a) the legal frameworks of the countries within which international publishers operate; b) industry standards regarding freedom to publish, freedom of distribution, and the maintenance of the scholarly record;¹⁹ and c) the editorial policies of academic journal editors and affiliated societies.

The analysis given here mirrors Cook and Heilmann’s insofar as it includes two ‘public’ censorship regimes, a) and b), and one ‘private’ (self-)censorship regime, i.e. c) the journal’s editors and their editorial policies. However, what is unique about the case of scholarly publishers operating in China, like CUP, Springer Nature and others, is that their decision to limit access to resources in China was not made by individuals directly responsible for the

¹⁹ Standards set by industry bodies like the International Publishers’ Association (IPA) and the Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE).

editorial policy of their publications, i.e. their academic editors and associated scholarly communities. Therefore, to this mapping of ‘censorship regimes’, it is necessary to add another, ‘private’ (self-)censorship regime: the management boards of the publishing companies, who unlike the editors of *Jyllands-Posten*, are one step removed from the editorial policy of the individual publications.

Each censorship regime has a ‘goal of fit’ (GoF), according to Cook and Heilmann. In this example, the GoF of China’s regulatory framework (like Danish law, as we saw earlier) might be to maintain social and political stability in China.²⁰ The ‘content of the conception’, i.e. the wider system of values and principles underpinning the GoF, could be Chinese ideals of political unity, and the desire of the CCP and Xi Jinping to suppress publicly available information that might erode public support. The next step is to identify the ‘agents’: the censor and censee. The censor in this example is China’s regulatory framework; however, another point of divergence is that the censee, rather than being individuals responsible for the editorial policy of the journal, is the publisher—specifically, those individuals on the management board of publishing companies who are responsible for sales and distribution policies in China.

In the example of Danish law and the *Jyllands-Posten*, Cook and Heilmann describe the ‘interaction between censors and censees’ in terms of ‘perfect alignment of acceptance.’ (Cook and Heilmann 2010, 9) The censees ‘accepted the political and legal framework of censorship that allowed publication of the cartoons [based] on acknowledgement of power, respect for authority [and] moral consensus.’ (ibid.) Cook and Heilmann contrast this dynamic with that of the *Jyllands-Posten* and the Muslim Community, which is of ‘perfect non-alignment.’ Above, it was suggested that the case of CUP and Springer Nature is analogous with that of YUP: in both cases, there is perfect non-alignment between the ‘content of conception,’ or justification for the

²⁰ China’s regulatory framework arguably diverges from that of Denmark insofar as the ‘enforcement of the fit’ includes extra-legal forms, such as detention or imprisonment without charge, travel bans, stripping of assets, blackmailing and state-funded disinformation campaigns.

public censorship regime and the censee. Unlike *Jyllands-Posten*, the non-alignment between the Muslim Community and YUP nevertheless resulted in acquiescence—or in Cook and Heilmann’s terminology, public self-censorship.

In the present case concerning CUP and Springer Nature, and others, the mutual alignment of each agent’s ‘content of the conception’—the values or motivations concerning permissible expressive attitudes—is unclear. In fact, based on the public statements of CUP and Springer Nature, there is public acceptance, given that both publishers publicly denied that their actions amount to censorship. (Cambridge University Press 2017a; Page 2017) Indeed, Springer Nature’s statement goes further and says that the publisher is ‘required to take account of the local rules and regulations in the countries in which we distribute our published content’ and that whilst being ‘deeply regrettable,’ complying with demands to restrict access in China to politically sensitive content is ‘in compliance with our published policy.’ (Page 2017) CUP subsequently reversed their decision to restrict access in China, facing backlash from their academic communities, signalling a shift from public acceptance to public opposition that may be consistent with private opposition. However, commercial advantages follow from a position of public acceptance and acquiescence to the demands of China’s regulatory framework. In the absence of knowledge about the conversations and motivations of each publisher’s management board, we are unable to pinpoint the position of CUP and Springer Nature on Cook and Heilmann’s table of alignment (Table 7 above) and the exact nature of the interaction between censor and censee is obscured.

This motivational ambiguity is reflected in the mixed response from the academic and publishing communities to CUP and Springer Nature’s involvement in censorship concerns. For some, the nature of this alignment has a bearing on whether the publishers censored, or whether the ‘censorship is with the customer.’ (van Zwanenberg and Lagan 2017) Horton makes a similar distinction when he presents the central dilemma of our perception of self-censorship as

whether we see the censoring self primarily as the author of the censorship or as merely the instrument through which ordinary censorship is being exercised; whether the censoring self is the initiator or the conduit.²¹

But for Cook and Heilmann, the degree of alignment is not what defines censorship in its broader sense. The fact that CUP and Springer Nature restricted access to published content to cohere with China's regulatory framework is constitutive of censorship, regardless of whether this compliance was willing, justified or consistent with the publishers' other commitments. This last point is significant, as one such commitment involves the member policies, statutes and industry guidelines set by the Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE) and the International Publishers' Association (IPA). In this sense, adopting Cook and Heilmann's terminology, academic publishers are subject to a competing 'public censorship regime.' COPE and IPA seek to regulate both the published academic output and the means by which the scholarly record is distributed and amended by publishers.

On 19th January 2018, three months following the *Financial Times* report regarding Springer Nature's involvement in Chinese censorship practices (Bland 2017b), COPE released their statement on censorship, discussed above. COPE's position mirrors the IPA's Statutes for the Freedom to Publish Committee, which state that that one of the central responsibilities of IPA members is:

to uphold and defend the right of publishers to publish and distribute the works of the mind in complete freedom, provided that in so doing they respect all legal rights attached to these works within their own countries and internationally. It is the duty of the Association to oppose steadfastly any attempt or threat to restrict that freedom. (Hegdal 2020)

²¹ (Horton 2011)

Publishers confronting demands from Chinese content regulators to limit access to politically sensitive research therefore have a choice: to oppose or to align with two mutually exclusive censorship regimes, either a) China's regulatory framework, or b) the COPE and IPA guidelines regarding the scholarly record and freedom of publication. Publicly aligning with the concerns of Chinese content regulators amounts to public opposition towards COPE and IPA and *vice-versa*. In either case, the potential commercial advantage of aligning with content regulators in China shrouds the degree of private alignment with these competing censorship regimes.

Up to this point, it has been argued that Cook and Heilmann provide an effective descriptive framework for the events concerning scholarly publishers self-censoring their online journal publishing platforms in China. This framework supports an analysis of regulatory processes associated with censorship by separating the motivations for restricting discourse, the content or type of discourse in question, the means of enforcement, the agents, and their interaction. It also allows for a distinction between different forms of self-censorship—public and private, i.e. self-imposed—and in the case of public self-censorship, for degrees of alignment or opposition with a censorship regime. Another advantage of this model is that it unpacks the descriptive and normative components of 'censorship'. By doing so, it incorporates the intuition of earlier postmodern theories of censorship that the power to regulate discourse is wielded by diverse individuals and institutions beyond the state and the church. However, as before, the danger remains that this flattens any normative distinction between 'censorship regimes' that may favour the interests of the censee (and democratic values more broadly), as with the Danish legal system, and those that do not.

5.4.4. Defining political self-censorship

As has been argued above, the actions of scholarly publishers to amend their online platforms to suit the interests of external political authorities does map onto some established theories of

institutional self-censorship. This line of reasoning can be expanded further to say that not only do these events align with theories of self-censorship, but there is also support from the literature to specify publishers' interventions as forms of *political* self-censorship. Political scientist Margaret Roberts' 2018 study on internet censorship in China opens with a definition of political censorship in precisely this context:

the *restriction* of the public expression or a public access to information by *authority* when the information is thought to have the capacity to undermine the authority by making it accountable to the public. (Roberts 2018, 37)

Political censorship is censorship motivated by a desire to avoid public accountability. The scholarly articles and journals that have faced import restrictions in China, since 2017, all contain keywords that are politically sensitive: for example, the 1989 Tiananmen Square student protests, the treatment of Uighur Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, the suppression of Falun Gong religious practices in China, and so on. The constraints laid out in China's General Administration of Press and Publications policy document on 'Major Selected Topics', covering these subjects, are motivated to ensure the correct 'political direction' and 'value orientation' of published works imported into China (NPPA 2019) and thereby control the public image of the Chinese Communist Party. From this, it seems that Roberts' definition maps faithfully onto the suppression of scholarly journal articles via publisher platforms in China.

As we saw above, the literature on self-censorship in analytic political philosophy offers some useful conceptual tools for describing the publishers' role in this censorship practice. Both Horton's initial account of self-censorship and Cook and Heilmann's extended version, map on to the disputed cases censorship we saw earlier of CUP, Springer Nature, and other scholarly publishers amending their platforms in China. There is a censoring party, the General Administration of Press and Publications, and another party, the publisher, that is coerced into adopting the former's version of 'publicly permissible attitudes' (Cook and Heilmann 2013).

There is a misalignment between the publisher's public stance with regards to academic freedom and their public suppression of material that conflicts with the censor's set of permissible attitudes, opinions, or public information. Moreover, there is an indeterminate degree to which publishers act on the censors demands out of their own volition or coercion—plausibly, there is an element of both.

There are also a variety of ways in which publishers could navigate the demands placed on them by Chinese content regulators, ranging from the three options outlined earlier (p.47) to outright refusal. In the case of CUP, despite reinstating politically sensitive articles on their journal platforms, the Press has not lost access to the Chinese market, which suggests that the ultimatum presented in publisher statements—the so-called 1% argument—was either misleading or false. Taken together, commercial incentives for compliance and diminished penalties for resisting suggest a degree of volition on the part of the publisher. This indeterminacy fits Horton's notion of self-censorship outlined above and also Cook and Heilmann's *institutional public self-censorship*, i.e. self-censorship characterised by a misalignment between an organisation's privately held and publicly expressed attitudes.

5.4.5. Editorial (self-)censorship and the online scholarly record: *corpus* vs. *hypertext*

Despite the alignment between theories of institutional and political self-censorship and the actions of publishers to suppress journal articles in China on political grounds, complicit publishers can still claim, as they have done, that complying with Chinese publication import regulations is not tantamount to editorial censorship (Page 2017). The tacit position is that, even in the more extreme examples of censorship complicity where publishers remove journal articles from journal issues at the request of Chinese authorities, the published, Version of Record (VoR) journal article remains unaltered and available via other means: institutional repositories, content aggregators (JSTOR or EBSCO), or the non-Chinese edition of publishers' platforms. In other

words, publishers are complicit in a form of post-publication censorship, affecting the distribution networks and access conditions of scholarly content, mediated via a governmental authority—but not editorial censorship, which would imply a more significant and insidious violation of publishing ethics guidelines and standards concerning amendments to the scholarly record. (Crossref 2023; COPE 2019)

In this final part of this chapter, two ways of thinking about the scholarly record are introduced. The first addresses the implicit ontological commitment in the argument outlined above—of the scholarly record as a corpus of published output, with the underlying items of that corpus being subject to strict post-publication amendment policies. The second way of thinking about the scholarly record foregrounds the digital manifestation of the corpus itself. This ontological model of the scholarly record is not in opposition to the first. Rather, it reflects the higher-order functioning, interlinking, editorial construction of the corpus in its digital guise. In this sense, the digital scholarly record operates *as a text*, incorporating both the published ‘Versions of Record’, alongside accompanying metadata, figures and images, supplementary data, audiovisual elements, and crucially, post-publication amendments, retractions, errata and corrigenda—together forming an evolving, collaborative, digital resource over which multiple stakeholders share editorial oversight.

In *Correcting the Scholarly Record for Research Integrity*, the philosopher and self-appointed anti-plagiarism vigilante, M. V. Dougherty, establishes a set of identity conditions that are common to each item of content that constitutes the scholarly record:

1. Appear under identifiable authorship (*Authorship Condition*);
2. Be issued through an academic publisher (*Publication Condition*); and/or
3. Be catalogued in university libraries (*Library Condition*); and/or
4. Be catalogued in curated research databases (*Database Condition*); and

5. Belong to at least one recognized academic discipline (*Discipline Condition*).

(Dougherty 2018, 20)

An item of scholarly output need not meet all of these conditions to be part of the scholarly record. Rather, for Dougherty, these six conditions are common to most, if not all, items that constitute it. In terms of the Publication Condition, this ‘indicates that a publisher has established a permanent or fixed instance of an item, which is usually designated as the “version of record.”’ (ibid. 37) Items that fail to meet the Publication Condition may still constitute a component of the scholarly record, albeit as a boundary case. Dougherty classes unpublished works as ‘boundary’ partly because of the wider entitlements and guarantees conferred by publication on the author, which are replicated imperfectly via other means, such as pre-print servers or institutional repositories. This is because the ‘version of record is the stable, citable version, in contrast to [unstable, unverified] pre-publication iterations such as a submitted manuscript, a manuscript under review, an accepted manuscript, or proof version’ (ibid.). In addition, there are various enhancements that publishers provide to published ‘Version of Record’ journal articles that pre-print servers do not (always) provide, including DOI registration, archiving in cross-publisher databases, like CLOCKSS, LOCKS, Crossref or facilities like CrossMark that ensure persisting linking between iterations of an item of the scholarly record, including subsequent corrections and retractions.

This argument for the centrality (if not necessity) of the Publication Condition as an identity condition for the scholarly record is significant, as it offers a rejoinder to the pragmatic position offered by Michel Hockx earlier. Hockx downplays the impact of publisher amendments to content platforms in China, given the persistent availability of suppressed content via other means. Hockx’s emphasises the publisher’s role as content distributor, perhaps at the expense of other functions, including certification, archiving, versioning and post-publication amendments to published content. In considering these additional functions or

entitlements conferred by the Publication Condition, a way of thinking is opened up about the body of published, certified ‘Versions of Records’—the published corpus—as a standalone digital resource, or *text*, with publishers sharing editorial responsibilities with their academic stakeholders. This approach goes beyond the identity conditions of the items of content that form the scholarly corpus, as outlined by Dougherty, to thinking about (and scrutinising) the role that publishers play in sustaining the integrated network of associations within the corpus. This ontological model for the scholarly record, therefore, is not solely one of a corpus, but of a *hypertext*.

The *hypertext*, coined by computer scientist, Ted Nelson (Nelson 1970), is ‘a term for forms of hypermedia (human-authored media that “branch or perform on request”) that operate textually.’ (Wardrip-Fruin 2004, 126) This concept, of a branching and interactive text, has been taken up by countless authors working on both literary texts and their digital counterparts, for example, Marie-Laure Ryan, who writes that ‘[i]n hypertext... the reader determines the unfolding of the text by clicking on certain areas, the so-called hyperlinks, that bring to the screen other segments of text.’ (Ryan 2001, 5) This core component of the *hypertext*, of interaction, has been summarised elsewhere as ‘hypertext-as-interaction with information to build associations, and through associations to build knowledge.’ (Schraefel et al. 2004)

Considering the scholarly record as a *hypertext*, as opposed to (merely) a corpus of discrete items of content, has ramifications for the wider debate around the censorship of publisher platforms. The scholarly-record-as-*hypertext* foregrounds the function of the online scholarly record as a branching, unfolding, integrated and interlinked digital resource. The scholarly record builds knowledge through associations, for example, by drawing out the linkages between items of content, through authors, funders and associated institutions; figures, datasets, multimedia, metadata and research instruments (such as code, questionnaires, topic guides); and between authors, funders and institutions. These linkages are essential for maintaining the

integrity of the scholarly record, both in the traditional sense of ensuring the reliability and trustworthiness of its underlying content, but also in terms of the integration and internal coherence of the corpus itself. Moreover, the scholarly-record-as-*hypertext* offers a way of classifying amendments to publisher platforms motivated by censorship concerns as a form of editorial self-censorship—an alteration to the text (etymologically, the fabric) of the scholarly record—with empty pages, dead links, absent metadata constituting a deterioration and fragmentation of the text’s integrity, both in terms of its trustworthiness, its integration and internal coherence.

Twinned with this notion of the scholarly *hypertext*, as a branching, networked and interactive text, is an idea of a text that is unfixed or ‘fluid’ and unbound by the same regulatory constraints as its constituent parts. Writing in 2006, Kevin Kelly, founding Editor of *Wired* magazine, predicted that:

[o]nce digitized, books [will] be unravelled into single pages or be reduced further, into snippets of a page. These snippets will be remixed into reordered books and virtual bookshelves. Just as the music audience now juggles and reorders songs into new albums (or “playlists,” as they are called in iTunes), the universal library will encourage the creation of virtual “bookshelves” — a collection of texts, some as short as a paragraph, others as long as entire books, that form a library shelf’s worth of specialized information. And as with music playlists, once created, these “bookshelves” will be published and swapped in the public commons (Kelly 2006)

Taking this idea further, Gary Hall, advocates for a future where publishing formats are ‘open to being continually and collaboratively written, edited, annotated, critiqued, updated, shared, supplemented, revised, re-ordered, reiterated and reimagined.’ (Hall 2013, 490) More recently, scholars have situated this notion of the scholarly text within an explicitly emancipatory, post-capitalist framework, such as in Janneke Adema’s *Living Books*, which describes the future of

scholarship in terms of ‘a more experimental, ethical, and critical [scholarly text]’; a reaction against ‘anthropocentrism’ and the ‘fetishization of the rational, individual, original, liberal humanist author’; and ‘a recognition of the multiple forms and modes of authorship, taking into consideration the relationship between the author and the technologies or tools involved in knowledge production’ (Adema 2021).

While these notions of the scholarly record as a ‘living’ text are not central to the argument that platform-based amendments may constitute a form of institutional and editorial self-censorship, it is worth highlighting that this argument offers a rejoinder to the presumed emancipatory potential of such texts. The scholarly-record-*as-hypertext* already displays some of the proposed features of a ‘living’ text. While the individual items that constitute the scholarly-record-*as-corpus*—the items satisfying Dougherty’s six conditions—are constructed, certified, disseminated largely within a fixed paradigm of copyrighted versions, toll-access (or toll-publication), with strict pre- and post-publication editorial constraints, the scholarly *hypertext* operates as a far less stable or regulated digital resource, subject to continuous and collaborative editorial intervention across global scholarly publishing platforms. In this sense, the unbound, ‘living’ nature of the scholarly *hypertext*, constituted in digital publishing platforms, is evident in its indeterminacy with respect to editorial amendments, which are not governed by the same sorts of constraints as the items of content that constitute it. An outcome from this theoretical chapter, then, beyond the definition of editorial and institutional self-censorship offered, is that by placing an emphasis on the scholarly corpus, bodies like COPE—and pragmatist commentators, like Hockx—diminish the deeper functioning of the scholarly *hypertext*, through linkages and metadata, which nevertheless avoids many of the regulatory strictures that govern the scholarly corpus. Three forms of editorial amendment to the scholarly *hypertext* are returned to in what follows, drawn from the forms of intervention described in the research context chapter (p.47).

5.5. Defining self-censorship of the online scholarly record

Having considered the applicability of analytic theories of (institutional) self-censorship and definitions of political self-censorship in relation to the scholarly record as *hypertext*, the following definition of self-censorship is applied to the events that form the primary research focus (p.21):

an effort on behalf of a publisher to remove or suppress individual items of scholarly content or remove or suppress associated metadata on a publisher's platform to suit the political interests of an external authority.

This definition applies to the terms 'self-censorship', 'censorship' and 'censorship complicity' when discussing publisher interventions that correspond to this definition in the chapters that follow.

5.6. Conclusion and application of definition

Rather than embracing an all-encompassing definition of censorship, as described earlier with reference to Sue Curry-Jansen, covering all forms of 'suppression or prohibition' (Jansen 1991), the definition adopted in this thesis aligns with a more restricted notion of *political censorship*, as in Margaret Roberts' work on internet censorship in China. Roberts' notion of censorship has three conditions: a) an attempt to restrict the public expression or a public access to information by b) an authority when c) the information is thought to have the capacity to undermine the authority by making it accountable to the public. Efforts on behalf of China's media regulators, such as the General Administration of Press and Publications, to constrain the availability of scholarly content in China on topics sensitive to China's Communist Party meets these three conditions. In terms of the publisher's role, this chapter has introduced John Horton's notion of self-censorship and Cook & Heilmann's work on institutional *public* self-censorship. Under this

combined model, by removing individual items of content from their platforms due to political concerns (mediated through research importers), publishers like CUP and Springer Nature, and others, have engaged in self-censorship.

This chapter also offered two overlapping and complimentary ontologies for the online scholarly record: a *corpus* and a *hypertext*. The position adopted, tacitly, in Springer Nature's public statement (Page 2017) and in Michael Hockx's commentary (Hockx 2018)—that publishers have not engaged in 'editorial censorship' or 'bowdlerization' because the underlying content is intact—is true insofar as the scholarly record is thought of as a *corpus*. However, this chapter has argued that an emphasis on the items of content that instantiate this *corpus* occludes the supplementary functions of the scholarly *hypertext*, involving persistent linking, archiving and version control to ensure the integrity (trustworthiness and integration) of published scholarly content. This chapter argues that publishers share editorial responsibilities over the scholarly *hypertext* as well as the *corpus* and in both senses editorial amendments may be motivated by concerns extraneous to quality or reliability. Therefore, two forms of amendment discussed in the previous chapter may constitute a form of editorial self-censorship of the scholarly *hypertext* when imposed by an external authority to avoid public accountability:

1. Removing journal articles from the China-facing platform of online journals
2. Amending the search function of publishers' China-facing journal platforms

In both cases, the publisher is aiding an external authority by compromising the functioning of the scholarly *hypertext* in ways that prevent the public, in China, from accessing information about the scholarly *corpus*. In such instances, these publisher interventions constitute a form of political motivated institutional self-censorship, as defined above, regardless of whether the underlying content remaining intact. Finally, there is a third form of publisher intervention, which has to do with the availability of content purchasing options for China-based institutions:

3. Removing journals from sales packages sold to China-based institutions

For some academics writing on the censorship of scholarly content in China, such as Nicholas Loubere, publishers such as Taylor & Francis are engaged in a form of institutional self-censorship by allowing content paywalls to do the work of the Chinese state—dubbed the Great Paywall (Loubere 2018). Indeed, within the conceptual parameters sketched above, paywalls arguably constitute a constraint on the functioning of the scholarly *hypertext* insofar as publishers' toll-based access conditions prevent seamless access to components of the underlying scholarly *corpus*. However, two objections will be raised against the view that allowing paywalls to prevent access to politically sensitive content amounts to publisher complicity in censorship, or self-censorship, in the same sense as removing or suppressing articles wholesale from publisher platforms.

The first objection has to do with incentives for compliance. In Horton's analysis of self-censorship, there is an indeterminate degree of volition on the part of the self-censor, due to a plausible (if unverified) self-interested motivation to comply with externally imposed censorship. There is also a degree of agency, on the part of the self-censor, to engage in a practice of self-censorship that aligns with the motivations of the censor. In the case of publishers refusing to make article-level amendments to online scholarly journals, leaving research importers (and by extension, paywalls) to do the work of the Chinese state, the publisher has opted to take a route that, at least partly, goes against the self-interested motivation to comply in the way that is most commercially expedient, i.e. to tailor journals so that they can still be sold into China. Moreover, the publisher has decided not to comply with the externally imposed censorship request, albeit in the knowledge that journal paywalls will prevent China-based readers from accessing the implicated content. On a practical level, this route to navigate China's censorship demands does not compromise the scholarly *corpus* or *hypertext* to the same extent as article-level amendments or suppressed search results; in principle, it is a route that allows journal article metadata, versioning and persistent links to remain intact and accessible from China. Therefore, insofar as paywalls

constitute censorship, they do so only to the extent that paywalls are, in general, an impediment on information access.

Paywalls are censorship in the sense of all forms of ‘suppression and prohibition’, but not in the more the restrictive sense outlined above with reference to Roberts (2018), Horton (2011), Cook and Heilmann (2010; 2013). Only when situated within a broader critique of toll-access publishing models, as in Nicholas Loubere’s wider writing on the topic, is the charge of corporate censorship complicity salient. This chapter and thesis will remain agnostic on this point, as it strays beyond a the conceptual analysis of politically-motivated censorship complicity offered above, although the question of whether publishers’ broader business practices constitute censorship complicity, in a wider sense, will be returned to in the analysis of interview transcripts (p. 198), and in the recommendations for future research on this subject (p.315).

CHAPTER 6: Thematic Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews with China Studies Academics and Publishing Professionals

6.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the findings from a thematic analysis of 24 semi-structured interviews, following the rationale, selection criteria, interview topic guide, data coding and analysis protocol outlined in chapter 4 (p.119). In brief, this interview study aims to address the primary research question (PQ, p.110) and the secondary research questions (SQ1-5) by interviewing 12 China studies academics and 12 scholarly publishers, representing a mix of levels of seniority, roles, career stages and degrees of involvement in the events that form the research focus.

The topic guide (see annexe p.367) served as the basis for a series of open questions about participants' experiences and understanding of platform-based censorship complicity, combined with structured self-rating questions (p.374) asking participants to rate levels of agreement along a 5-point Likert scale to a series of statements about the degree to which publishers and academics share the same values, the best outcome for China-based scholars, and whether limiting access to a small proportion of content is justified to retain access to the majority of content distributed in China by non-Chinese scholarly publishers. A vignette was also used (see p.374), asking participants to put themselves in the position of a publisher responding to a sample censorship demand to explore, in a more structured and focused way, participants' conceptual understanding of censorship complicity and their own ethical position in relation to the dilemma facing publishers trading in China.

The sections that follow outline 12 themes that were generated during the thematic analysis of interview data (transcripts), which have been collected together under 7 categories (one for each section): *conditions*, *definitions*, *impacts*, *responsibility*, *knowledge*, *resistance* and *values*. Each of these categories relates to one or more of the research questions, which will be given in the section introductions, along with a description of how each theme addresses the relevant research questions and each theme's coverage in terms of participant responses (number of participants and the volume of research data contributing to the theme).

The pseudonym and segmentation criteria of each participant is given in the annexe. Participants are referred throughout using these pseudonyms along with attributed quotations from selected interviews, where appropriate. Two clarifications ought to be made before turning to the findings from the thematic analysis. The first is that the findings presented here do not presuppose the veracity of claims made by interview participants. The primary objective is to identify patterns in the ways that participants make sense of their own experiences, attitudes, values, beliefs and conceptual understanding of the research focus. This chapter does not aim to establish the truth of claims made or to pass judgment on the legitimacy or evidential basis of participants' views. Quotations are used here to illustrate the broader patterns—and outliers—among the participant data—again, they do not indicate support for the positions or opinions reported.

The second clarification is that, although the discussion that follows aims to give an account of significant patterns in the data, some participants will feature more heavily in the discussion than others by virtue of their outlier status. This is particularly true of Dr. Hawthorn, who occupies a unique position, as an editor of a journal with a large China-based authorship and readership and who diverges from many of the other academic participants in her pragmatism, having dealt first-hand with censorship concerns affecting the journal that she edits. Similarly, the perspectives of two academics of Chinese origin, Dr. Box and Dr. Cedar, are given

priority in the discussion, again because of their unique perspective on the interview topics. Likewise, the publisher participants who have had direct involvement in censorship concerns and the decision-making processes involved at a senior level, e.g. Oliver, Lenore, and others, are prominent in the analysis. The more frequent use of quotations from these participants does not represent greater emphasis or endorsement of the views and opinions that they share on the interview topics, but rather that their responses reflect more clearly the wider patterns observable across the interviews, or in the case of Dr. Hawthorn, some revealing points of divergence within and between participant groups.

6.2. Conditions

This first category, *conditions*, covers three themes that address the primary research question (PQ), regarding the conditions that enable platform-based (self-)censorship, and secondary question five (SQ5), regarding longitudinal changes to these conditions. The first theme (T1) concerns China's broader political objectives, constituting one of the central conditions of platform-based censorship. The second (T2) concerns the economic power and commercial draw of China's lucrative market for scholarly research. The third theme (T3) explores the comparative significance of these conditions for China-based scholars.

6.2.1. T1: Publisher self-censorship is a consequence of China's broader political objectives

This theme captures a tendency, more pronounced in the interviews with academics, to situate the events under discussion within a cluster of concerns and practices related to China's political objectives.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
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PUBLISHERS	10/12	8.5%
ACADEMICS	12/12	20.33%

Table 7: Theme 1 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

The most common tendency (13 participants) within this broader theme was to frame the events as a relatively small example of related tensions between the publishing industry and the interests of authoritarian governments, not limited to China (Balal): e.g. in Russia (Dr. Alder, Pierre), Brazil (Dr. Alder), Saudi Arabia, Middle East, India (Jada). These concerns also encompassed top-down governmental constraints within non-authoritarian states, like the US (Dr. Alder, Yazmin) and the UK (Prof. Birch). Many participants referenced more explicitly China's growing power on the world stage (Dr. Cherry) and the 'systematic', 'high conflict' and 'overt' way that China enforces censorship (Jada) within its borders. These discussions included the operations of non-Chinese corporations in China:

there has been a general trend of tightening political control in China so that . . . I think, not just international, but domestic media, publication all have a much tougher political environment, and the last space of academic debate or discussions—I mean so many topics have now become sensitive, quote-unquote, sensitive in China's domestic system. I think it's the overall trend. (Dr. Cherry)

For some, coercing publishers to self-censor is part of China's wider geopolitical objectives, particularly in terms of global power struggles and a clash of values and objectives with the US or the 'West', more broadly. 11 participants (4 pub, 7 academic) framed the events in this way. For 7 participants (6 academics, 1 publisher) the events were part of wider attempts

by the Chinese government to export the country's censorship regime and other subtle forms of political control. As Pierre described,

[L]ots of—unfortunately—lots of countries, which are totalitarian, restrict freedom of expression, etcetera. But China is kind of unique in that that discussion has also somehow avalanched outside of China, and that you and I are discussing this in free countries. I'm in Amsterdam, you're in London, we have complete freedom of expression, but we're discussing this issue—it's kind of interesting of its own. (Pierre)

In terms of the more general discussion of China's political influence, there were some observable differences between participant groups. For many (5) of the publishers interviewed, this discussion centred on the global infrastructures and policy frameworks surrounding scholarly publishing itself, often described in terms of China's attempts to wrest control of the system. Topics included efforts on behalf of the Chinese government to prevent Chinese scholars publishing in international outlets that don't adhere to China's content policies (Bala); shifts in China's research policy framework (Balal, Harris, Oliver, Tahir) to encourage the development of China's domestic scholarly publications and infrastructure; tightening political control over China's Open Access output (Yazmin); the flow of money out of China to overseas publishers via article publishing charges and journal subscriptions (Harris, Oliver); and more overt efforts to acquire overseas publishers like EDP (Harris, Oliver, Tahir) (see p.50).

One publisher at a commercial press (Tahir) described these trends as part of an overarching strategy on behalf of China's government to address the inherent power imbalance in the scholarly communications system, which disproportionately favours highly ranked, 'high-impact', non-Chinese outlets:

I suspect that the institutions will see more clamping down, that those individual researchers will see more restrictive behaviours, and indeed the new China policy that's come into effect sees the state more interested in controlling and owning those

publishing venues, which is entirely compatible with a world where more control of the content going upstream can happen. (Tahir)

Some of the publishers interviewed expressed a despondency and lack of agency to affect these wider trends (Lily), which will be returned to in later themes (e.g. T7, p.219). In contrast, of the 12 academics interviewed (and 2 of the publishers), the discussion of China's political objectives did not concern the scholarly publishing infrastructure, but rather the broader parameters of research and higher education. For 8 academics, for example, the events represented a clash between western principles of academic freedom and China's regulatory framework, aimed at narrowing the parameters of research following Xi Jinping's dominance of the Chinese Communist Party. Several of the academics interviewed also drew parallels between publisher self-censorship and the impacts of the Hong Kong National Security Law (HKNSL) (e.g. Prof. Elm and Prof. Sycamore), contributing towards a climate of self-censorship throughout China-related academia. This climate of fear was described as extending to higher education outside of China, particularly given the legislative reach of the HKNSL (Prof. Elm, Prof. Rowan, Prof. Sycamore) (see also p.62) coupled with concerns related to online teaching of Chinese students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Prof. Elm). The HKNSL, and the events under discussion, were described as a continuation of Xi Jinping's increased enforcement of regulations (Prof. Elm) to suppress political dissent Chinese higher education and overseas. Some reported a drop-off in collaborations in regions surrounding China because of these developments, including Hong Kong and Taiwan (Prof. Rowan), affecting access to information from these regions.

For other academics, this discussion of the tighter boundaries of research and scholarship encompassed university autonomy in China, increased surveillance in Chinese higher education and China's influence over the 'global research environment' through overseas institutional partnerships (Dr. Alder). These pressures were often historicised, with one

participant drawing parallels between the Chinese government withholding archive access to overseas scholars with earlier attempts to stymie international scholarly exchange due to political pressures, such as during and immediately following World War Two (Prof. Birch). Indeed, many of the academic interviewees gave detailed accounts of how the sorts of research topics that have faced censorship in China—in some cases, at the hands of non-Chinese publishers—have shifted in step with China’s evolving political objectives. Beyond the so-called ‘two T’s and the X’ (Dr. Hawthorn)—i.e. Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang—reports of typically censored topics included discussion of civil society (Dr. Box, R1), Hong Kong (ibid.), human rights (ibid.), territory disputes in general (ibid.), political activism (ibid.), Chinese foreign policy (Dr. Cedar), and EU trade deals (Dr. Hawthorn).

Five of the 12 academics held roles as journal editors and editorial board members. One of these participants, Dr. Hawthorn, edits a journal that faced article-level censorship at the hands of publishing staff based in Beijing, who were responsible for vetting content and administering access constraints. Dr. Hawthorn described many of these constraints as political ‘fads’ that would be censored for brief periods, then reversed, usually in alignment with the shifting priorities of Xi Jinping’s administration: terms like ‘innovation’, ‘public ethics’ and ‘public administration’ (Dr. Hawthorn). The regulations underpinning these access constraints were described as broad, all-encompassing injunctions tied to the ‘Chinese constitution’, forbidding ‘anything that harms the state; the state secrets; ethnic harmony’. (ibid.) This statement from Dr. Hawthorn aligns with earlier findings reported in this thesis of emerging regulations in China related to ‘Major Selected Topics’, again underscoring the political intent of China’s censorship rules, which have implicated non-Chinese publishers since 2017 (p.29). (This topic will be returned to in the discussion chapter (p.280), where these emerging constraints will be compared against the findings from the corpus analysis study, pointing to related topic-based constraints for English-language scholarship in China.)

6.2.2. T2: Publisher self-censorship is a consequence of China's economic power

This theme refers to China's economic power as one of the central conditions of censorship complicity in publishing. This theme was prominent among the publisher group (11), although it also includes discussions within the academic group (7), albeit to a lesser extent.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
PUBLISHERS	11/12	10.2%
ACADEMICS	7/12	2.2%

Table 8: Theme 2 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

Some interviewees (e.g. Carolyn) were keen to emphasise the importance of cultivating and maintaining relationships in the region, not due to purely commercial motivations, although most described censorship complicity in terms of publishers protecting their interests in the lucrative Chinese market. For some (e.g. Jada and Pierre), China was described as uniquely significant in terms of the scale of business interests involved and potential losses if market access is denied:

[o]ther countries, whether that's Saudi Arabia, lots of places in the Middle East actually, India, various countries in South America, you might have some of the same concerns. They tend not to be as overt. They tend to be something that you can... They're not as systematic. They're not as well organised on their end, so that it's much easier to have conversations about actually what you're prepared to do. They're not as black and white about it and, as you say, the commercial imperative at the end of the day—commercially, it's much easier to walk away. (Jada)

In terms of the conditions that lead to censorship complicity, most publishers (8) emphasised the importance of the size of China's market and, therefore, the strategic importance of maintaining a stake in that market. Several of the publishers interviewed (Balal, Harris, Carolyn, Lenore and Nathan) also emphasised that this dependency on China's market for scholarly research extended equally to non-commercial publishers, such as university presses:

China's a massive market. Regardless of whether you are a commercial publisher or a non-profit, ultimately you are working within the markets that we have. You are in some way incentivised to make profit or bring in revenue so that your non-profit entity is sustainable, and China's a massive market and you're going to want to have access to that. (Balal)

China's market was described not only in terms of subscriptions revenues, which would be compromised if publishers failed to comply with the government's research import regulations. Indeed, for some, the greater risk was a loss of submissions and citations from China-based scholars if publishers failed to comply with content import restrictions, which would impact journal citation metrics and Open Access revenues. As Carolyn described, speaking in a content sales capacity,

we have many, many Chinese-authored papers, and the balance is much more highly weighted to publishing on behalf of [Chinese scholars] than having access to a market where [Chinese institutions] buy subscriptions from us. (Carolyn)

Expanding on this point, Harris emphasised the significance of Chinese scholarship for citation metrics:

[i]f you start getting accessibility issues in China, you start, if life is made difficult for you reaching that audience, that has just a very direct, immediate impact on things like Impact

Factor, that everyone who uses your products will care about. I think there are larger anxieties that any sizeable company would face. (Harris)

Among the publishers interviewed, most recognised that a loss of China market access would significantly compromise content and revenue growth opportunities—but the scale and significance of potential losses varied. For some interviewees (Balal, Dr. Cedar, Lenore), this variance accounted for the different routes that publishers took, responding to China's content import restrictions, ranging from outright refusal to amended journals, platforms or content packages (see p.47). Some expressed this variance in terms of economic forecasting, 'on what the impacts of the various responses are available to you and you weigh them up and you pick one' (Dr. Cedar). For others, the incentive to self-censor was more 'technical or prosaic' (Balal): '[i]f you simply can't sell packages in a specific region because of 'x' reason, whatever that reason is, then you simply improve that package proposition to make it more saleable.' (ibid.)

Publishers appeared to be split over the significance of publishers' subject specialisms as a factor that may influence their vulnerability to censorship pressures. As above, Harris highlighted the relative importance of citations and Impact Factors for STEM journals and the risks associated with a loss in citations in China. As other interviewees explained, publishers are more vulnerable to censorship pressures if they have a) a large stake in subject areas likely to be affected by politically motivated content restrictions, i.e. in the humanities and social sciences (HSS), and b) operate in scholarly communities outside of China that are more aware of censorship concerns and represent a more significant business risk. This risk was manifested in non-Chinese HSS authors and societies boycotting publishers perceived as complicit with state censorship, as in the case of CUP. As Balal described, referring to another publisher, with a smaller business interest in China-studies:

[t]he section of their community that cares about this a lot for them is more of a drop in the ocean compared to CUP. CUP obviously have a very large social-sciences and

humanities portfolio. They have quite a few prominent Asian Studies and Chinese Studies journals, so for them, it's going to affect them quite badly, so I think there's likely to continue to be a divergence of responses. (Balal)

In conjunction with the pressure to comply with content import restrictions due to the scale of business in China's market, two other consequences were highlighted by the publishers interviewed. The first was the complex position this financial risk placed publishers who publish journals on behalf of scholarly societies, who may, in turn, be opposed to censorship compliance, on the one hand, but equally dependent on Chinese market access to achieve other (sometimes non-financial) objectives:

[t]he promises we'd made to learned societies and so on was that we would get them readership in China. And with China making up twenty five percent of the world's research, more or less, then stakes were pretty high. So, it was a very difficult situation to know how to deal with, with multiple stakeholders. (Oliver)

Another consequence of the highly competitive nature of publishers' positions in the Chinese market is an unwillingness to share information when concerns are raised about publishers' compliance with censorship pressures:

I think also that some publishers saw their approach on China as being a source of competitive advantage. So, particularly those publishers with a large office in China, and/or those publishers with a very close relationship with Chinese authorities, probably saw it as a competitive advantage to play their own game in China, rather than share what they were doing with other publishers. (Oliver)

This second order self-censorship of the extent of publishers' self-censorship was described as an obstacle for collaboration, not only between implicated publishers, but also among publishing industry trade bodies (Tahir, Oliver). The topic of how knowledge about

censorship was managed within and between implicated organisations is returned to below (under T9, p.230) as another obstacle to consensus and collaboration among publishers and their academic communities.

6.2.3. T3: Pressures to self-censor are more acute for China-based scholars

This theme captures the tendency, particularly among academics, to emphasize the relative risks faced by China-based scholars when attempting to circumvent or navigate censorship.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS DATA	
PUBLISHERS	3/12	0.7%
ACADEMICS	10/12	9.3%

Table 9: Theme 3 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

This theme is broken down further in terms of concerns about actively searching for and citing censored content, particularly in a university setting; the personal and career consequences for China-based scholars who fall out of favour with China's authorities; and the tendency of China-based scholars to change research direction, break off collaborations with overseas scholars or to use different terminologies to describe sensitive research. As a result of heightened risks and sensitivities, the interview data suggests that China-based scholars face more significant risks from publisher involvement in Chinese censorship practices in comparison to their overseas counterparts. This finding is returned to in a later theme, discussing the tendency among non-Chinese research participants to downplay the personal impacts, for the interviewees, of publisher censorship complicity (T5, p.204).

The most frequent concern raised, affecting China-based scholars, related to risks arising from surveillance of publishing and academic activities, both domestically but also abroad. This was described variously in terms of a broadly hostile ‘political environment’ and ‘sense of anxiety’ (Dr. Alder), sometimes due to state surveillance, but other times from Chinese students (Prof. Birch), not limited to teaching and research in China, but also in Australia (Dr. Pine), or Europe (Dr. Box), with some referring again to the global jurisdiction of the Hong Kong National Security Law, whereby, ‘if anyone anywhere in the world says something that the Hong Kong government regards as subversive, [Chinese state officials] can arrest them’ (Prof. Elm). Beyond the publishing activities of China-based scholars, participants also described surveillance in terms of conference presentations (Prof. Birch), articles cited (Dr. Alder), translated abstracts (Dr. Hawthorn) and searching and accessing censored material (Dr. Hawthorn, Dr. Pine, others). As Dr. Pine described, ‘since the onset of the pandemic that we’ve seen Chinese academics becoming much more fearful of state scrutiny and much more concerned about whether or not what they write or what they say will get them into trouble.’ (Dr. Pine)

Some interviewees disputed whether publisher involvement in censorship had meaningfully contributed to these wider issues, pointing to the relative ease with which China-based academics circumvent access constraints (Prof. Elm, Prof. Rowan and Prof. Sycamore): ‘if you need an article, you ask a Chinese PhD student and they’ll get you it, wherever it’s published and wherever it’s from, within 30 seconds’ (Prof. Sycamore). In contrast, other interviewees expressed far greater caution around the use of circumvention tools such as VPNs for China-based scholars. For example, Dr. Hawthorn, who has had direct experience working with China-based authors, stressed that use of VPNs is illegal in China, therefore not without risks—a point supported by others (Prof. Rowan, Prof. Elm). As an editor of a journal that has complied with censorship requests, Dr. Hawthorn discovered that asking authors to circumvent censorship to access journal articles—including their own published research—presented an ethical dilemma:

when you're passing content like that back and forth, depending on what it is, you create something that could be used in a court against that person. It's really challenging. I feel like, basically, what we're saying is, 'Well, because the censorship is coming from your country, if you want to work with us, you have to break the law and put yourself in danger all the time. (Dr. Hawthorn)

Two of the interviewees were Chinese academics based outside of China. One of these interviewees, Dr. Box, corroborated the second-hand testimonial of other interviewees, explaining that, for China-based and overseas Chinese scholars, the risks associated with publishing on sensitive topics were far more severe than for their Western counterparts. As Dr. Box explained,

I think, for them, their situation is a bit different from mine. Yes, I guess I'm the one who is most aware of what is not okay and, also, I'm most concerned if I cross the red line. For them, the most serious situation is that they cannot go to China for fieldwork, right? For me, that means I cannot go back home, so that's really different. (Dr. Box)

Given these heightened risks, coupled with first-hand experience of China's information controls, Dr. Box reported a more nuanced understanding of the so-called 'red lines' of acceptable academic discourse. As a result, the pressures to self-censor were described as more acute for Chinese and China-based academics, given a wider knowledge of topics that were known to be off limits. Moreover, as Dr. Box described, Western publisher's efforts to enforce censorship controls served to heighten awareness within Chinese scholarly communities of the parameters of academic censorship, thereby reinforcing a tendency to avoid these topics: 'I guess if I know that my article is censored in China, I would reconsider the red lines. I guess I would know the cage is even shrinking in this case!' (Dr. Box).

Dr. Hawthorn also reported concerns related to authors citing material that appears to be non-existent when accessed via China-based IP addresses, leading to accusations of fraud if those articles are included in applications for new academic posts or promotions:

I was having to write these certification documents saying, 'This is published. This is not showing up on this Chinese site for this reason, but it's here on the English one.' Then I was taking a screenshot to show what it looked like. So it was all of this work, but people then didn't want to submit their articles to us, because if they can't get credit for it in their annual reviews, they should publish elsewhere where they can get credit for it, without jumping through all these extra hoops. (Dr. Hawthorn)

Taken together, the more acute pressures facing China-based and overseas Chinese academics suggest concrete impacts resulting from publisher complicity in censorship practices, which do not apply uniformly across non-China-based or non-Chinese overseas scholars. (This will be returned to under Theme 5, p.204.)

Finally, the impacts for China-based scholars were not only described in terms of publisher censorship contributing to a wider culture of self-censorship, but also in terms of more extensive access constraints for individuals based in Chinese universities. As discussed earlier in the thesis (p.48), one of the routes taken by publishers to avoid having to remove individual articles from journals was to allow research importers to remove journals from sales packages sold to Chinese universities. As Dr. Pine described,

I would say that the bigger challenge when it comes to access is actually the paywall that these journals put up, and so for most of my colleagues in China that's the greater concern: how can they actually access an article that the university doesn't have a subscription to? Journal subscriptions, as you're more than aware, are extremely expensive. So for many of my academic colleagues in China it's just beyond their university's reach. (Dr. Pine)

For some interviewees, therefore, the consequences of raising a paywall barrier—and the costs associated with accessing the literature in general—were far more significant than platform amendments affecting individual articles, which could be found and accessed via VPNs (Prof. Birch, Prof. Sycamore, Dr. Pine).

6.3. Definitions

This category, *definitions*, captures a central theme arising from the structured component of the topic guide (p.374) where interviewees were presented with a sample censorship request and asked to identify the routes that constituted censorship complicity. This category is also informed by interview questions derived from the topic guide aimed at determining interviewees theoretical commitments regarding censorship and censorship complicity to see whether there were any individual or group-based patterns of consensus or divergence on this point.

6.3.1. T4: Publisher self-censorship is defined as active measures to enforce political access restrictions affecting published scholarship

All interview participants discussed their definition(s) of censorship in relation to the research focus. This was due in large part to the structured component of the interview—the vignette (p.374)—which presented four ways a publisher might respond to a censorship request. All participants were asked to determine the routes that constituted censorship, followed by probing questions to determine the specific role played by publishers in the cases under discussion, and whether certain routes to compliance amounted to censorship complicity on the part of the publisher.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
PUBLISHERS	12/12	8.6%

ACADEMICS	12/12	6.9%
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Table 10: Theme 4 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

All participant responses informed at least part of the statement given in the theme title: that publisher censorship complicity (or self-censorship) involves active measure, on the part of the publisher, to enforce access restrictions affecting published scholarship on behalf of an external political authority. In some cases, participants alluded to all components of this theme in a single response:

I guess there are a couple of parts to it. The removal of the content, so the fact that the content is no longer there, is no longer accessible. Not only is it not readable, you cannot find it, it's vanished completely. I also think that the act of compliance itself, the fact that the government office is asking for it to be done, and you're saying yes, is a part of what makes that censorship. (Carolyn)

Although not all participant responses captured all aspects of the theme in a single quotation, they each contributed at least one element of this definition—or, as a minimum, they did not offer an alternative (conflicting) definition. As will be illustrated below, however, participants did differ in their assessment of the extent of publisher complicity involved in certain forms of access restraint; therefore, the application of the concept of censorship was not uniform.

Most participants (9 academics, 6 publishers) mentioned restrictions on access to information while defining or applying censorship as a concept. In many cases, they discussed China-based scholars who (due to publishers' actions) would 'not be able to access [journal] articles' (Dr. Yew) because 'the search function is forbidding them' (ibid.) or 'the journals have been completely removed' (ibid.). The idea of content removal—not mere restriction—as a more obvious and drastic form of publisher-enforced censorship was common, with some describing this in terms of articles disappearing from the scholarly record: '[t]he removal of the content, so the fact that the content is no longer there, is no longer accessible. Not only is it not readable, you cannot find it, it's vanished completely.' (Carolyn)

Some suggested a hierarchy among the three routes to compliance presented to participants (p.47), whereby the more that information was restricted the more that publishers' actions constituted censorship. For example, Balal, when comparing removing individual articles from journals with removing journals from sales packages, emphasised,

a distinction because, with [the first option], people would not even be aware of their existence, whereas with [the second option], okay, they don't have access, and it's because the state doesn't want them to have access rather than some other reason. (Balal)

This distinction implies that removing content is worse—or least, more censorious—than simply restricting access to it, particularly when the existence of the underlying content is obscured. For constraints on information access to become 'censorship', as indicated above, most of the academics (7/12) and some of the publishers (4/12) mentioned political interference as a condition. This combination—access constraint and political interference—is given as follows:

[w]ell, I suppose the act of removal for political reasons, I think that's censorship. Under normal circumstances, would the affected journal articles be removed? If the answer is no, they'd just be left alone or their keywords would remain in searches and all that, then

yes. Any alteration to that normal state of affairs as a result of political influence I would count as an act of censorship. (Dr. Pine)

Whether publishers had bowed to political influence to the extent that they had themselves become censors, or agents of censorship, was disputed. For most academics (8), any form of compliance with a censorship request amounts to censorship complicity. As Dr. Alder described, ‘if they go along with it, and they agree, then they are complicit with censorship.’ Only 5 publishers explicitly endorsed this position, with statements like ‘the act of compliance itself, the fact that the government office is asking for it to be done, and you're saying yes, is a part of what makes that censorship.’ (Carolyn) Other publishers, however, were more cautious about describing themselves or their competitors as censors, precisely because the original instruction to censor was from an external, political authority. Instead, some described research importers—and by extension publishers—as conduits rather than agents of censorship:

They are very often the ones I believe that would flag the material and find it, but again, their intention is to follow an order, I guess, and the publishers, are they censors? I wouldn't—yes, it's a difficult one. They have, clearly they have a moral role and responsibility for responding to censorship but again, the impetus doesn't come from them. (Lily)

As this quote suggests, for some of the interviewees (3 publishers and 3 academics), censorship complicity is tied to agency. The central concern is whether publishers take active measures to remove or amend content on behalf of an external political authority. To expand on this point, some interviews suggested a conceptual and, in some cases, ethical distinction between different routes to complying with external censorship demands on this basis. In most cases, this amounted to a distinction between a) actively removing individual articles from journals and b) restructuring content sales packages such that an external party, such as a research importer, could opt out of receiving certain journals (see Figure 13 below). 3 publishers

out of 24 interviewees denied that b) amounted to censorship complicity on the part of the publisher.

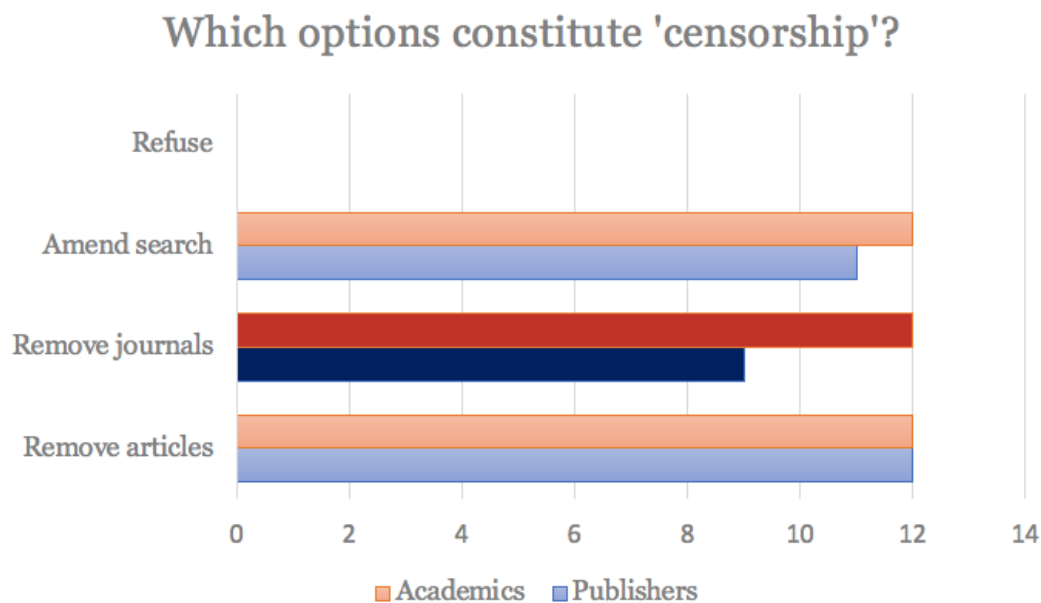


Figure 13: : Graph displaying the number of participants from each group (academics and publishers) who described each form of publisher response as a form of (self-)censorship

The interviewees who answered in this way emphasised that the publisher's role was different because removing journals from sales packages implies a commercial transaction with an overseas sales agent, with the publisher simply allowing a sales agent not to buy specific products at their customer's request. As Balal described,

[regarding option a), removing articles from journals] the publisher is actually having to take steps on their end to change the way that their platform is presented within China, whereas, with [option b), removing journals from sales packages], they're not having to do so. They're simply not completing a sale, as it were. (Balal)

Moreover, the fact that China-based readers would retain access to the records of publication was particularly salient when considering whether removing journals from sales packages amounted to censorship:

[i]f, for example, China-based scholars were able to go onto the platform of the publisher and they could still see that those journals exist but they simply don't have access to them, then I think that's less ... I wouldn't consider that to be censorship because they can still see that they exist. (Balal)

Among those who endorsed a conceptualisation of censorship complicity tied to active measures on the part of the publisher, however, some argued that actively removing journals from sales packages also fell under their definition. They compared this route to providing importers with the mechanisms to do so themselves to highlight the role played by publishers:

[w]ho is doing the deleting? Are you facilitating the deleting or are you doing the deleting? You could be censoring on behalf of the regulator, for example. If you're removing the affected journal articles, I think you're censoring. If you provide a platform in such a way that the regulators can remove the article or the regulators can block, then the regulators are the censoring body. I think in the way you've worded these it sounds like the publisher is taking the action and therefore I would say the publisher is doing the censoring. (Jada)

Jada's comparison suggests another route available to publishers, whereby content dissemination routes are provided in such a way that content collections are not actively tailored by publishers, but with options for intermediaries, such as importers or research librarians, to make necessary amendments to comply with content regulations. Others described this as 'local loading', although concerns were also raised about this route:

[t]he only other thing you could do is 'local loading', right? So, if you have a relationship that's not via an intermediary—a direct relationship with the academic institution that permits 'local loading', local content to be on-site, but then to me there seems to be even more risk because the State can intervene and censor in those academic departments, so doesn't seem to be an option that could be used. (Tahir)

But as illustrated in the Figure 13 above, most participants (21/24) agreed with the broad position that actively removing journals from sales packages to suit external political interests (as described in the vignette) constituted censorship complicity, regardless of whether other options are available to provide modular packages to sidestep active content amendments.

6.4. Impacts

This category, *impacts*, encompasses two themes that relate to both the primary research questions and secondary question 3, regarding the impacts of censorship complicity for the communities affected by it. The first theme in this section (T5) describes the limited impacts for individual publishers and academics outside of China, despite censorship complicity having entrenched divisions between and within the communities affected. The second theme in this section (T6) deals with a reassessment of values and codes of practice caused by public reports of censorship complicity within the participant groups and their respective fields of practice.

6.4.1. T5: Publisher self-censorship has minimally impacted individual scholars while entrenching divisions within and between affected communities

This theme covers participant opinions and sentiments regarding the impacts of publisher self-censorship for the participants and their associated communities. Of the 24 interview participants, 19 (11 academics and 9 publishers) gave responses that have contributed to this theme.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
PUBLISHERS	9/12	3.4%
ACADEMICS	12/12	17.9%

Table 11: Theme 5 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

The most prominent sentiment on this topic was that the instances of publisher self-censorship in China had minimally affected the individuals involved. This sentiment was given in relation to various potential impacts of censorship, which are described below. All the academics interviewed had first-hand experience of censorship with publisher involvement, typically involving a non-Chinese publisher removing journal articles from the publisher's online platform in China at the request of a Chinese import agent. Participants were asked to describe the personal impacts of these instances of censorship in terms of their own professional activities, including research collaborations or publishing behaviours. In many cases, the academics interviewed dismissed outright the suggestion that these issues caused any changes of this kind and, instead, regarded instances of publisher self-censorship as bewildering given the relative triviality of the content involved:

I learned with some amusement to be honest that my book review was part of the articles that was suppressed by [Prof. Birch's publisher]. The book review was published in [a prominent Asia studies journal]. I mean, in some ways it's almost like a badge of honour, if you have a piece that is it's like "yeah, that's something to mention." But otherwise, I generally felt bemused by that and think it had no massive effect on me. I don't think that at the time I felt any particular outrage either. (Prof. Birch)

The instances of self-censorship were described in very similar or identical terms by other participants, as, for example, 'stupid' (Prof. Sycamore, Prof. Willow) and 'ridiculous' (Prof. Willow), with Prof. Sycamore explaining, '[i]t's not as if a coal miner in Anhui province is going to suddenly read a book review in [a China studies journal] and decide to overthrow the Chinese government, which is why it's stupid.' (Prof. Sycamore)

Participants were asked to expand on the limited impacts of publisher self-censorship, particularly in terms of publishing behaviours—i.e. whether these instances of self-censorship would impact participants' willingness to publish on sensitive topics in future. Most of the academics interviewed (8/12) actively denied that these instances had impacted their own publishing activities, post-censorship. For some, this was because the participants interviewed were already in secure academic positions (Dr. Cherry), nearing retirement (Prof. Sycamore), or retired with an honorary post (Prof. Willow). These interviewees described themselves as insulated from impacts in terms of their own career advancement that might stem from limited publishing options or limited access to China:

I'm at a point now where I don't care. There's not a lot the university can do. If they do, and they want to pay me off, and I'll go and look after my granddaughter, then I'll go and do that. (Prof. Sycamore).

For others, their research topics were not generally sensitive (Dr. Pine) and/or they did not require routine access to China (Prof. Elm). Despite this, as under T1 (p.185), many participants contextualised instances of publisher self-censorship within a wider culture of fear and uncertainty following the introduction of the Hong Kong National Security Law, which limits access to research data in China:

it's a bit concerning that maybe even if you touch the ground in Hong Kong they might arrest you for something you might have said or done outside of Hong Kong, since there's an extra ...territoriality involved the law. That's a concern, but that hasn't necessarily stopped me from publishing what I want or researching what I want, but it does affect my way to get information. (Prof. Rowan)

Five of the academic interviewees occupied posts as journal editors or editorial board members and 2 of those participants denied that instances of publisher self-censorship had led to a reduction in submissions from China scholars on sensitive subjects (Dr. Alder) or caused them

to adjust their editorial policy (Dr. Pine). Only one of the participants, Dr. Hawthorn, said that they would self-censor or otherwise limit their publishing activities as a result of these instances of self-censorship. (This was in relation to the journal that Dr. Hawthorn edits, not their own personal publishing activities, which will be returned to below.)

The interview discussions also explored the impact of the events on participants' perceptions of the academic publishing industry. The publisher group tended to downplay or deny that the events had shifted their perceptions of the industry. For some, the involvement of publishers in censorship practices revealed more about the subject sensitivities within the disciplines they tended to publish, rather the business ethics of the publishers themselves:

[w]hat was very noticeable for me in the journals that were quoted and the publishers that were mentioned—off the top of my head it was CUP and Sage—they are of course much more associated in my mind, anyway, with publishers of social science content and political content. So again, I suppose you just associate that subject matter with things that the Chinese government might be sensitive to, but it was the discipline thing, that I associated it with discipline. (Lily)

For others, the events revealed more about the intentions of the Chinese state, rather than the industry or the publishers involved: i.e. the events had not 'harmed my perception of individual companies. I think it hardened my concerns about the Chinese state and what they were up to and what they've been up to both before and since.' (Oliver) Four of the academics interviewed also expressly denied that the events had harmed their perceptions of the publishers involved. In the case of Dr. Box, a Chinese academic based overseas, this denial was tied to a sense of pragmatism, having confronted more routine censorship practices in China:

I would say that I can understand because I grew up in a Chinese society so I can understand that this kind of journal would face this kind of censorship and so on so I

wouldn't have any judgement on the editor or anyone based on their action of this. (Dr. Box)

This attitude was found in other responses, with statements such as 'I think that unfortunately, this is the political environment' (Dr. Cedar)—an environment (for publishers and academics alike) 'where I think the current focus is much more on minimising risk than trying to take on risk.' (Dr. Pine) For some academics who had direct dealings with publishers, they expressed prior knowledge that 'publishers, understandably, didn't [have] much of an idea of the... this entity that they were dealing with, to be honest.' (Prof. Sycamore) Prof. Sycamore's perceptions of the industry did not change, therefore, when publishers responded in ways publicly that belied a lack of experience with censorship controversies in China. In addition, for some academics who had been disappointed by the initial response of the publishers involved, they expressed, paradoxically, an improved relationship with their publisher, having addressed the problems inherent in censorship complicity and arrived at an alternative solution:

I was very clear myself with our partner publishers that this couldn't be left as it was—that the deal had to change, that that decision had to be reversed—and when they did reverse it, I think they did the right thing, and I was very pleased with that. (Dr. Alder)

Despite a tendency to downplay the impacts of censorship complicity, not all participants dismissed these impacts outright—and in some cases, the same participants who initially downplayed later stressed other or related impacts. For example, Dr. Box, while initially offering a pragmatic perspective on censorship in China also expressed some surprise and dismay that the first journal to become publicly implicated in these concerns was the highly regarded *China Quarterly*:

I was quite shocked when I saw that *China Quarterly* actually removed the articles and so on. *China Quarterly* is really, among the China-related journals, it's one of the top journals.

It's really regarded prestigious if you can publish there and so on. Yes, I was really not expecting them to do something like this. (Dr. Box)

Internal contradictions like this are apparent in the responses of other academics, such as Dr. Cedar, who downplayed the impacts of the events on his perceptions of the implicated publishers while stressing the surprising and unprecedented nature of *China Quarterly's* involvement:

[w]hen they tried to censor *China Quarterly*, at that point we got to a new level in a sense that now they care about the international publications. I mean, the *China Quarterly* is so famous in the field, so I think ... You know, I was a little bit surprised, yes, when I heard about the news. (Dr. Cedar)

For others who expressed similar sentiments, the eventual outcome of the *China Quarterly* case with CUP reversing their initial acquiescence, provided an initial shock followed by a sense of reassurance that the industry would be better prepared for future concerns:

to the degree that it sensitised them to the fact that it's an issue, maybe it's had some positive effects as well. And I think the [Hong Kong] National Security Law is a bit like that too. It's helped to remind universities that their charters are not only there stating things like the protection of freedom of speech, but also promotion of freedom of speech. (Prof. Elm)

Overall, none of the academics or publishers interviewed expressed any significant impacts in terms of their perceptions of the publishing industry at large, although several expressed prior reservations about the scholarly publishing industry. Of those that did express concerns at the individual publisher level, they focused their attention solely on the *China Quarterly* case, given its unprecedented nature and the involvement of a respected, top-tier publication in the field. Of the three journal editors interviewed, one described—again,

paradoxically—a subsequent increase in submissions from China, despite the journal being unavailable in China due to censorship concerns, suggesting widespread use of circumvention tools to access and cite censored content:

[w]e've had more submissions from Chinese authors than ever before in the period since then, and many of them citing things that've been written in the [journal], which is good for our impact factor, of course. We like that. It's quite clear to me that people are getting hold of the things that they want to (Prof. Sycamore)

Prof. Sycamore denied any significant changes in terms of the content of these submissions, other than a 'much stronger confidence from a certain type of Chinese author about the superiority of what China's doing or China's winning and victories' (Prof. Sycamore). In contrast, Dr. Hawthorn, who edits a prominent China-studies journal, expressed concerns about continuing to publish politically sensitive material in the journal, following article-level access blocks by the journal's publisher in response to censorship demands:

[w]hen I'm publishing things, either as the editor approving these things, knowing that my name is listed on the editorial page, or whether publishing things on my own, or speaking out as a public intellectual about different things happening in China, there always was this idea that all these things are being noted and, when you apply for visas or things like that, there could be repercussions (Dr. Hawthorn)

Because of this increased scrutiny, coupled with uncertainty over the outcomes of non-compliance with censorship rules, Dr. Hawthorn committed to 'still publishing everything, but I don't take my family to China anymore. At least my responsibility is as an individual and I'm not subjecting my family to being detained in China for however long.' (Ibid.) Moreover, Dr. Hawthorn pivoted away from interview-based fieldwork to remote forms of survey-based research outside of China. In terms of the journal's editorial policy, while this had not officially changed, Dr. Hawthorn noticed significant changes in the content and levels of submissions

once the involvement of the journal's publisher in censorship concerns became publicly known, with non-Chinese scholars opting to publish elsewhere. Although this shift had not resulted from a coordinated author boycott, non-Chinese academics now face an opportunity cost, i.e. of submitting articles to a journal that may be censored in China and therefore limiting their exposure. For Dr. Hawthorn, limiting exposure in China for a mid-tier publication with a large China-based readership is a significant reputational risk when competing against top-tier international publications:

a lot of my colleagues who are very well respected who used to publish in [the journal] don't publish in [the journal] anymore. It's not even on their top four. Partially, it's just because they're going for the highest impact factor that they can get when they publish. Also, it's our comparative advantage, because our ranking is not as high as other journals, but what we had going for us is that we're widely used in China. (Dr. Hawthorn)

Dr. Hawthorn also reported less obvious but still evident impacts in terms of the types of subject matter submitted the journal, tending more towards 'big trends' like China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' or 'objective data analysis' pieces 'looking at the number of articles being published on a certain topic, or word counts of different ways of describing policies' rather than 'policy or political analysis' (Dr. Hawthorn).

By virtue of Dr. Hawthorn's outlier status among the interviewees, reporting both personal and publishing impacts of censorship complicity, the overall pattern of downplaying or disavowing these impacts is sustained. Dr. Hawthorn's somewhat anomalous set of responses also supports the second part of this theme, suggesting fragmentation between different communities implicated by censorship. In the case of Dr. Hawthorn's journal, this amounted to a severing of ties between the 'international' scholarly community and the China-based scholarly community. The ongoing ramifications of this aspect of censorship complicity will be returned to in the discussion chapter (p.280).

6.4.2. T6: Publisher self-censorship has caused some of the affected communities to re-assess their values and codes of practice

As we saw in the last theme, most participants tended to downplay the impacts of publisher self-censorship, particularly in terms of personal consequences, scholarly activities and publishing behaviours. However, some of the participants (4 publishers and 4 academics) described a reassessment of values and codes of practices following high-profile censorship concerns in China.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
PUBLISHERS	4/12	4%
ACADEMICS	4/12	2.9%

Table 12: Theme 6 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

The participants who gave responses coded under this theme tended to be closer to the events under discussion, due to the roles that they occupied in relation to implicated publications. For some, the catalyst for this reassessment was the public revelations surrounding CUP's involvement in censorship concerns in 2017 (p.32). They described the reputationally fraught sequence of events, from acquiescence to public condemnation and reversal, which initiated 'a public discussion, and hopefully a reset, or a reassessment of choices' (Carolyn). As Carolyn described:

where people have censored and then gone back on it, and made that content available, or changed the approach, I think that that's a good thing in that it's happened. If we don't see these things happening, if we don't read about it, or where we don't know

whether our content is being censored, then how we do start to change the conversation around it. (Carolyn)

For others, the public and reputationally harmful way in which CUP's *China Quarterly* case played out forced the publisher's competitors to simulate and to adjust their own internal processes proactively, rather than reactively to a live concern, as in the CUP case:

we were wondering ourselves: how do we react to—would we react in our publishing house if something like this happened? We even started to prepare statements in case it happened, just to be prepared for it, and that you don't react in a moment of panic that something is happening and you react and then it hits back on you. We wanted to think it through and wanted to do the right thing and you can better think through such cases if you are not directly confronted with it. (Yazmin)

Among the publishers for whom these events prompted organisational changes three categories were observed: changes to a) decision making processes, b) ethics review processes, and c) organisational values. Before public accusations of self-censorship, publishers described a siloed approach to decision making, whereby divisional heads would operate with greater autonomy from senior leadership, particularly in sales functions. They described risks associated with this approach, with time pressures and commercial targets contributing to poor ethical judgments in relation to censorship pressures overseas:

people are juggling a tremendous amount of work, they're getting through their day-to-day, they're looking at their targets, especially if they're on the commercial sales side, and they're looking at how they get there, and sometimes it's just a matter of, all right, look, let's just get this done and we'll carry on, without perhaps having the sort of ethical thinking through of it that they might need to do. (Carolyn)

In the wake of public revelations about selective access blocks for politically sensitive content in China, some publishers introduced a more routine escalation process for censorship concerns, and they centralised decisions that have an impact on content availability:

when a strategic decision about content availability is being made, it should be made at a senior level. I think one of the expressions I've come to think about quite a lot when thinking about China is it's the frog being put into cold water and gradually being brought to the boil. Those individual decisions might not, at a tactical level, have looked wrong. When looked at in the whole, you can see why they might not be consistent with an individual publisher's overall strategy or mission, but individually you can see why each individual decision was made. Whereas, as I say, if as a senior manager you step back and you think, what does this look like in the round? That's easier—that's the frog being put into hot water. You immediately see that, oh no, this doesn't feel right. (Jada)

This response was repeated by other interviewees, describing revised escalation processes process and shared accountability across management boards:

it's always escalation right away from the moment we see a Tweet or we receive an email or whatever... when you are confronted with censorship it could have a serious economic effect. You have to have the backing of everybody who is responsible. (Yazmin)

Although Yazmin described few obstacles when introducing this new process, she did suggest some ongoing ambiguity and complexities surrounding editorial vs. commercial decisions, especially in terms of the public perception of decisions that may, at the individual level, appear relatively routine or innocuous:

you need to make a distinction between what is editorial censorship that for example an editor of a journal is rejecting an article for certain reasons or making amendments to an

article for certain reasons. That this is not possible, that this is against our publication ethics, but that there is of course the other side of the medal and that's more difficult to explain to a broader public, which is a customer deciding to acquire certain publications and to not acquire certain publications. (Yazmin)

To help senior leadership teams to think through complex ethical concerns, both Yazmin and Jada described a review and reappraisal of ethics processes leading to the formation of a new 'publishing ethics committee which actually has a broad remit, but one of the areas that we look at are risks around censorship' (Jada); or, likewise, 'not just internal but also external experts where all the publication ethic cases are—in case they are not clear—they are brought to this committee and ...discussed' (Yazmin). Yazmin also described a new set of editorial principles, including 'full-fledged documentation' and revised 'contracts, meaning that authors just need to recognise that these publication ethics are there and they need to subscribe to these publication ethics.' (Yazmin) For Jada, these changes were framed as part of a wider reassessment of organisational values alignment with business practices and processes:

[o]ne of the things that my chief executive has said to me is, 'Will I be able to stand up and defend a position that we've taken?' You can defend it if it's in line with your values. Even if someone is critical of a position, if you can defend your position based on your values, then I think then you can stand up ... (Jada)

For some, a re-appraisal of organisational values was not only prompted internally, but also because of contractual negotiations with external partners. For example, as Balal described, publishers were increasingly pressed by external academic societies to shore up their own internal processes surrounding censorship concerns in China to win lucrative publishing contracts:

we've approached acquisition targets ... [and] they're asking about what our position is on censorship in China. I think there are some cases where they are potentially even

asking for contractual obligations on that, so statements about what would and wouldn't be done/how they would be consulted. (Balal)

This illustrates the commercial advantage for publishers that are perceived to be operating with integrity in China. On the one hand, public censorship concerns prompt greater internal scrutiny of organisational values and codes of practice. On the other, this new political environment creates a disincentive for publishers to share information and work together to resist censorship pressures. As Jada described, in response to censorship pressures, there have been 'cross-body, cross-publisher discussions' but 'the conversations in any detail become too commercially sensitive to have ... useful conversations' (Jada). The competitive disadvantage to share information is discussed further (see T9, p.230, and discussion, p.296) as one of the more intractable obstacles for industry collaboration. Nonetheless, one interviewee occupying a senior role at a prominent industry trade body described a reappraisal of values and practices at that body, following high-profile censorship concerns:

as a result, the [industry body] was kind of ... went through a revision of its statutes to reflect, actually, that ... kind of to sharpen all the processes and sharpen what we really stand for, and I was one of the many people involved in that process. And when I became president, that was under, say, new rules and regulations, so to say, and I was actually very happy because they made the [industry body] a more robust organisation and it really forced us to reaffirm what we stand for. (Pierre)

Beyond organisational values and processes at publishing organisations, some of the academics interviewed also described a more personal reappraisal of their approach to China-oriented scholarship and publishing. Some of the journal editors interviewed, for example, claimed to be 'far more careful about how I approach everything to do with the journal' (Dr. Alder) to counter any perceptions of a shift in editorial policy to attract more China-based scholars at the expense of editorial integrity. Prof. Elm, who sits on the editorial board of one of

the implicated journals, also described how the events had 'sensitised that Asia studies community to some of the complex realities of what they need to watch out for' in terms of censorship complicity.

While some journal editors may have become more cautious and overtly anti-censorship, others described a move towards a more pragmatic stance, having become more aware of the practical and ethical complexities involved in ensuring as much access to scholarship as possible in China. Dr. Hawthorn's described a process of challenging and scrutinising the route her journal's publisher had taken to comply with censorship demands. The editor and editorial board of the journal gradually moved to a position of reluctant acquiescence, having considered other options that would further limit the availability of scholarship in China:

our options, basically, seemed to be, don't try to publish in China at all and then hope that people in China get access to your content, have the publisher directly censor you, which is where we are right now, or let the affiliate in China censor your content. (Dr. Hawthorn)

In the end, Dr. Hawthorn and the journal's editorial board accepted an option where the publisher pre-emptively censors content in the journal, so long as the censored content is gradually made available with the approval of the China-based importers and content regulators:

what they have instituted is a review process. In the next month or two after the publication date, they go back through and they go line-by-line through every article, then they present their findings to the propaganda department saying, 'Yes, this keyword is in here, but it's being talked about in this way, which is favourable.' So then, the content will go up... as the months go by, more and more of that content is filled in, to the point where we sort of end up with full issues. That was the negotiation that we had with [the publisher], which is, 'Okay, we can't stop you from censoring this in the first

place, but can you at least then try to get all of that content back up there?” (Dr. Hawthorn)

This negotiation process highlights the complexity of advocating on behalf of the interests of scholars in China. This dilemma will be returned to under T12 (p.251). Arriving at a compromised position of mandated censorship and greater alignment with the publisher’s initial acquiescence was, again, an outlier case. For other academics interviewed, values reappraisal took a different form, with academics discovering a more significant misalignment between their own interests and those of the scholarly publishing industry:

[o]bviously China is a big market for them, they’re big subscribers; Chinese universities are big subscribers to these journals; there’s a huge amount of income from a Chinese market to these commercial publishers, so complying with certain expectations seems an obvious thing to do, because it might have implications on revenue for publishers... it has increased, certainly from my perspective, it has increased the reservations that, as an academic, of publishing with these publishing houses, I have to say. (Prof. Birch)

Whether this is a common concern among academic communities to the extent that they will actively boycott complicit publishers, now or in future, will be returned to under T10 (p.239).

6.5. Responsibility

This section covers two themes under the category of *responsibility*. This category relates to the primary question by addressing the underlying causes of censorship complicity in publishing, as well as the obstacles for collaboration within and across communities (SQ4). The first theme does this by examining the ways that the affected parties defer their agency to address censorship concerns, which both enables self-censorship and precludes collaborative forms of resistance.

The second theme explores the ways in which censorship complicity has become normalised within the affected communities, in the absence of a coordinated effort to resist.

6.5.1. T7: Affected parties deny, downplay or (re)distribute agency in response to self-censorship concerns

This theme describes how responsibility for censorship complicity is understood and distributed within the affected communities. Due to the nature of the questions relating to this theme, which tended to be directed more towards publishers than academics, there is a higher representation among the publisher group. This is because the patterns described were tied to a discussion of how decision-making operates within publishing organisations confronting censorship concerns.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
PUBLISHERS	10/12	9.31%
ACADEMICS	2/12	0.27%

Table 13: Theme 7 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

Ten of the 12 publishers interviewed gave responses that suggested a lack of agency at the individual or organisational level to affect the outcome of decisions in favour of censorship resistance. In 2 of the interviews with academics, the subject of responsibility to resist censorship also contributed to this pattern, which will be described below.

None of the interviewees took personal responsibility for decisions that led to alleged forms of censorship complicity. Among the 12 publishers interviewed, most tended to highlight the dispersed nature of decision-making processes within the affected publishing companies that had encountered censorship concerns. Interviewees tended to distribute agency in a way that

shifted the burden of decisions that had resulted in censorship complicity to individuals within the company occupying different roles and at different levels of seniority. For example, Nathan and Tahir, representing, respectively, lower-level (non-managerial) and mid-level (department-level managerial) posts within two commercial presses implicated in censorship concerns, both emphasised a hierarchy of decision-making, whereby decisions affecting the availability of content would be escalated to the most senior levels of the organisation. Nathan described this in terms of distributed decision-making, among a senior-level tier, which would dissuade lower-level individuals from operating autonomously, given the potential for adverse consequences that would be borne solely by that individual:

I think to make the changes that are described in the timeline, that would need to be elevated to a pretty senior level. I couldn't say with any specificity, but that's not an individual act we're working on there. In theory, it could be, there's nothing to prevent that, but that person would be doing that at great risk in terms of their job. (Nathan)

Later, Nathan continued:

[s]o my sense is that before doing anything like that, you would have to have instruction, the person that is pulling the lever is having instruction and support in making that action, because it just is too significant to place on a... "I have the individual agency over this." (Nathan)

Tahir likewise described a procedure of escalation for any content restrictions that could bear reputational penalties for the organisation he represented, despite occupying a more senior level management post with devolved decision-making capacity at the departmental level. Asked who would decide to limit the availability of content in China, Tahir replied:

I think it's exclusively senior management. I think these things are so sensitive that it has got to go to the most senior, usually ... I mean, I would suspect. Yeah, it would have to be. It would have to be, and the key decision taken by business heads. (Tahir)

Despite this characterisation of publishing organisations bound by a top-down, centralised decision-making processes, the interviewees who occupied the senior-most roles within these organisations also gave responses that tended to distribute and defer agency. For example, although Lenore occupied the most senior role within her organisation's leadership team, she distributed agency among a committee of senior-level staff: '[a]t that level, it's not a specific individual—although, I guess, if it came down to it, it would be the chair of the board—but I think they make a collective decision.' (Lenore) Other interviewees occupying senior roles within the organisations also distributed agency among lower levels and different departmental functions. In these cases, censorship complicity was framed in terms of tactical commercial decisions being made in lower-level sales teams that conflicted with broader strategic priorities at the senior level. For example, as Jada described,

I think, on a day-to-day basis, those decisions can, and I suspect often are not made at a senior level in that they can be quite tactical. I suspect that some of the situations that have been described here, they've started out as tactical choices made at maybe mid-level, and it's only once they've escalated that people in more senior positions have needed to make a decision. (Jada)

Some of the interviewees who occupied sales functions acknowledged a degree of tactical expediency that may lead to decisions being made without due consideration to reputational consequences, such as Carolyn, who said,

I think that if you're taking a sales perspective, I think that it can, if you are in a commercial context where you focus very much on targets, the idea that not complying with a customer might lead to sales not closing, is probably the major focus, rather than

necessarily being concerned that it would look like compliance with censorship orders from the Chinese government perhaps. (Carolyn)

To complicate this picture, however, some of the interviewees who initially allocated responsibility to higher levels of the organisation later gave responses that seemed to imply a level of devolved decision-making, further blurring lines of accountability and responsibility within the companies involved. For example, Tahir, who earlier suggested content decisions would be escalated to the most senior level, explained, '[i]f you simply can't sell packages in a specific region because of 'x' reason, whatever that reason is, then you simply improve that package proposition to make it more saleable.' For Tahir, although the decision to restrict content in China would have been made at a senior level, '[o]ften, it's sales driving the discussion.'

Among publishers interviewed, some of whom had no direct experience of the events under discussion, there was a more general denial or downplaying of agency to resist the sorts of pressures that might result in censorship complicity—particularly due to commercial constraints. Speaking of how they might deal with more senior staff responsible for decisions relating to content access, faced with the sorts of demands that had resulted in limited content availability in China, interviewees gave answers like, '[t]here's no way I would get them to refuse to make any amendments ... that's completely out of the question' (Eadie), and, 'the longer you look at the situation, the more you start getting, the more you start worrying about the commercial imperative.' (Harris).

For some, the commercial imperative led to a wall of silence between rival publishers because of related constraints tied to markets and competition legislation, whereby publishers could not be seen to be sharing commercially sensitive information and acting in consort: 'I'm not sure it would actually fall under anti-competitive, but people just don't want others to know exactly what they're ... It does become commercially sensitive.' (Jada) This commercial

imperative was also presented as a constraint on agency at the individual level, with interviewees expressing an inability to ‘believe that any one publisher would raise their head above the parapet’ (Tahir). Further, Tahir denied responsibility on the part of the publisher to insist that Chinese importers take sensitive content as part of wider content packages, echoing similar anti-trust concerns: ‘I can’t force anyone to buy anything’ (Tahir).

For Pierre, the fact that publishers had adjusted sales deals and found technical workarounds to accommodate China’s publications import regulations meant that a more coordinated response to resist was increasingly unlikely. According to Pierre, publishers’ collective agency was constrained, given that some individual publishers had ‘already taken action’ and ‘found some kind of new equilibrium’ (Pierre). Indeed, talking as a representative of a prominent publishing trade body, Pierre also resisted the notion that these bodies held collective responsibility to coordinate a response to resist censorship. Instead, their responsibility is to take a position, not to dictate to publishers their approach or forge consensus:

from an [industry body] perspective, we are against any type of censorship, so we feel that all these articles should be published—all ten ... [s]o, that’s a very clear position from [industry body]. It’s of course up to individual publishers to decide what they want to do, or not. (Pierre)

Like the publishers, some of the academics interviewed also deferred or (re)distributed agency to resist censorship to other actors in the system. In contrast to publishers, however, they tended to highlight the relative ability of publishers to affect change relative to academics, who face greater penalties, individually, when faced with the decision to comply with or resist censorship. As Dr. Hawthorn explained, referring to the way publishers have responded to content import restrictions in China:

[t]he publishers, maybe not individually, but definitely together, have agency. China’s whole economic growth is based on research, so they need access. There is power that

the publishers have, if they act collectively and not one-on-one. So there is power there, and the Chinese government, obviously, has power. (Dr. Hawthorn)

In contrast to this, Dr. Hawthorn described the academic community as facing more heightened personal risks, when resisting censorship, while lacking agency to affect change to the same extent as publishing communities who deal directly with China's research importers:

[f]or individual academics and individual editors, I just feel like a little bit of this is misplaced. We're not selling out and collaborating with the Chinese government. [...] I feel that, rather than asking regular Chinese academics who have no power and no agency in the system, that the publishing companies are the ones that can take these positions [...] It shouldn't be regular academics saying, 'Do I want my career, or do I want to be out of jail?' (Dr. Hawthorn)

This sentiment was supported by others, such as Prof. Birch, who argued that academics have limited agency to affect change at the individual level, although she suggested that academics could use their collective agency to forge effective forms of resistance:

[w]hat every individual does in response to [censorship pressures], I think is ... I guess there are also those who say it can't be down just to an individual to react to that or to take a decision on that. Subject associations should be taking a stand, or governments should be taking a stand. (Prof. Birch)

But for some publishers, this perception of academics as possessing limited agency at the individual level and limited capacities to organise and form a collective response was, itself, a reason why publishers had likewise failed to assume responsibility to resist censorship pressures. Asked about the relatively muted response among academics to later reports of censorship complicity, Harris explained:

I don't think there's been a groundswell of opinion. I suspect you might get a similar response from a lot of academics, that's a little bit like conversations about Impact Factor often go, where people understand all the things that are wrong with a certain situation, but there's no obvious way to change it. [...] I think if you asked most people in a corridor, over a coffee, what they thought, they'd be quite strongly anti-, but it's somebody else's fight, I think is often the case. (Harris)

The consequences of a deferral of responsibility to resist censorship in terms of the prospects of individual and collective forms of censorship resistance in the future will be explored further under T8, the next theme in this category, and the discussion chapter (p.280).

6.5.2. T8: Censorship complicity is becoming normalised

This theme deals with responses that either directly or implicitly suggested that, in addition to a deferral of responsibility, affected communities are normalising censorship complicity in scholarly publishing. The consequences of this normalising tendency will be explored, both as a facet of a wider inability or unwillingness to assume responsibility to resist censorship (individually) and as an obstacle for collaborative forms of resistance.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
PUBLISHERS	2/12	1.33%
ACADEMICS	8/12	3.02%

Table 14: Theme 8 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

One facet of normalisation was a lack of awareness of the extent of publisher censorship complicity among some of the participants. All interviewees expressed an awareness of the case

concerning Cambridge University Press. Often, however, interviewees revealed a lack of awareness of subsequent cases and publishers' ongoing involvement in censorship practices in China. Sometimes this lack of awareness was combined, paradoxically, with responses expressing stridency towards the responsibility to resist instances of censorship complicity. For example, when asked whether complicit publishers ought to be boycotted, Prof. Willow insisted that this would be an appropriate response while acknowledging that this was not something she had considered before, in relation to the examples given:

I think one ought to make a stand not to go with them until they reverse those policies. I never thought about this, but I never thought, "well, that's something to check out," really. I hadn't really thought about that. (Prof. Willow)

This form of response was repeated in other interviewees. Prof. Elm, for example, acknowledged a lack of awareness and responsibility to investigate whether non-Chinese publishers were among those who had faced censorship concerns in China, despite having followed the events closely enough to know it is an emerging concern:

I'm not ... I would say, at this point, I'm not aware of any ... I have to say, yeah, maybe I'm not thinking about whether the publishers that are based outside of China are a problem, and maybe I should be a little bit more careful about that, but honestly, I haven't been thinking about that. (Prof. Elm)

Some interviewees responded to both the CUP and later cases of censorship complicity with a lack of surprise, suggesting apathy or, as before, diminished agency, particularly when these events are considered as part of a wider pattern of state control over information in (and about) China. As Prof. Rowan described,

[t]here's what the Chinese Government does in terms of minimising or tailoring, censoring access to international publications in China. There's what the Chinese

Government does to force people outside of China who publish on China to conform to what it wants. Then there's what the publishers themselves do, or what the authors or the editors do to conform to China's expectations. All three of those are going in a certain direction. I mean, none of that surprises me to a certain extent. (Prof. Rowan)

Indeed, among the academics interviewed, two patterns of response to reported censorship complicity were identified, both suggesting a process of normalisation: a) an initial sense of shock and disapproval towards the CUP case coupled with a lack of awareness or attention paid to further events and their ongoing ramifications; and b) an awareness of the CUP and/or later events, combined with a lack of surprise and tendency to contextualise, or even to relativise, these events within a wider pattern of censorship pressure and complicity in China. Some of the publishers interviewed also identified this dual tendency among the academics they had interacted with:

[a]t the time, there were people who weren't surprised at all that this stuff was going on, and then there were some people who thought, "clearly, you're resisting it, aren't you?" And I think the response at the time was an honest one, "yes, we are, I haven't heard anything to the contrary", etc. etc ... So, yeah, that's it. Two groups. People who were surprised, people who weren't surprised, and it's just business as usual, and I think probably the latter group of people who spent time in China, who understand the situation there. (Tahir)

For some of the academics interviewed, this pattern of normalisation was a source of frustration, particularly given the scale of some of the later examples of censorship complicity that have garnered relatively little attention. Several of the interviewees identified the CUP case as a focal point for an organised and successful campaign to resist censorship, through open letters and boycotts, which failed to materialise in later cases. For example, as Dr. Cherry explained,

once the *China Quarterly* thing was out, it was gratifying to see the way in which the academic community stood up, but then I was puzzled and disappointed that no similar response came in the headlines about Springer ... in October that year. (Dr. Cherry)

Dr. Hawthorn recognised a similar pattern in the China-studies discussion forums and listservs, following the CUP case, which initially caused problems for the journal that she edits but also failed to gain traction in the same way:

[t]here were calls for people to sign petitions and to not publish with certain journals. We definitely felt the impact of that. So I had a lot of people who were in the queue to either publish research articles or book reviews, and they just pulled out and said, 'As long as you're censoring work for the Chinese government, we don't want to publish with you.' That happened for, probably, the first six months or so, when these stories were in the news and they kept popping up. After that, it sort of died down. (Dr. Hawthorn)

For Dr. Yew, this pattern suggested a lack of cohesion and collaboration among the communities that seek to resist censorship complicity in scholarly publishing: 'there's nothing particularly joined up, I don't think. These seem to be just randomly reported responses here and there, but no overall protesting voice.' (Dr. Yew) Some interviewees reflected on the consequences of censorship normalisation in terms of future instances of publisher complicity and the likely response from academic communities. Again, as before, interviewees expressed a sense of despondency within those affected communities, suggesting a diminished response in future: '[i]n some ways, [academics] might be tired. [They] might just be like, 'Of course.' (Dr. Hawthorn).

Beyond growing weariness within academic communities, faced with state pressures they cannot control, some interviewees also highlighted the overwhelming incentives for academics to continue to publish in highly regarded journals, even those accused of censorship complicity:

I suspect that the bigger, more important publishers will be able to get away with things that other publishers might not so easily get away with. Some of the stuff that's been pulled in terms of books and articles should already have raised the concerns that I don't think has really been ... Maybe it takes something like—I don't know—one of the bigger, highly cited journals to do something that would ... I don't know. You see, people would be indignant but still want to publish in it. That's the problem! So indignation combined with the desire to still publish. (Prof. Sycamore)

As Dr. Pine described, 'the normalisation ... of censorship and self-censorship ... goes both ways', in the sense that academics are faced with powerful incentives to accept the status quo alongside seemingly insurmountable barriers to affect change at the individual level. Likewise, with publishers facing increasing regulatory constraints in the Chinese market and diminishing scrutiny among academic communities regarding censorship complicity, Harris predicted:

I think it might stop being an issue that, for some publishers, it just becomes what they do. That stops being a consideration ... If your content is hosted in China, I think you just have to sign up to whatever terms and conditions come with the right to do that. If they say, 'Yes, you can host your content, but you can't host these 1000 articles', I think that is the way it is. I don't think you have any choice about it. (Harris)

Taken together, the two themes (T7 and T8) under this category (Responsibility) suggest a widespread tendency to defer responsibility to resist censorship. They also suggest that scholarly publishers have arrived at a new status quo in China, facing diminishing concerns among the academic communities they serve. Indeed, one interviewee shared feelings of guilt about this outcome, again couched in terms of restricted agency: [t]hat actually the censors are choosing not to subscribe to some content, so I don't ... Yeah, I feel some guilt, but I have the ability to hide from it as well.' (Tahir) For Tahir, this ability to suppress guilt—and

responsibility—stemmed from a sense that publishers have been acted upon by external forces, not that they and their associated academic communities have enabled censorship practices by failing to coordinate a successful form of resistance. This will be returned to in the discussion chapter (p.294).

6.6. Knowledge

This category, *knowledge*, frames one theme that encompasses several codes related to how information and uncertainty about censorship is managed by the affected communities. This category addresses the primary question (PQ) by suggesting that the motivations to withhold information strategically is one of the primary conditions of censorship complicity, related also to the normalising tendencies mentioned earlier under ‘Responsibility’. It also addresses secondary research questions 3 and 4 (SQ3-4) by pinpointing some key obstacles for collaborative action, particularly among the publishers involved, who manage and maintain uncertainty to avoid scrutiny both by the individuals and communities affected by censorship but also by the censors themselves, i.e. Chinese state regulators and government agencies.

6.6.1. T9: Self-censorship occurs within a climate of uncertainty, which is managed strategically by censors and self-censors alike

This theme deals with participants self-reported and implied levels of knowledge and understanding of the causes, consequences and extent of publisher self-censorship in China. Most participants expressed levels of uncertainty across all three areas. Coupled with this, several of the publishers and academics interviewed, who had first-hand knowledge of publisher self-censorship, gave answers that either implied or confirmed a level of strategic information management on behalf of the parties involved, which will also be discussed.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
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PUBLISHERS	9/12	8.06%
ACADEMICS	8/12	3.54%

Table 15: Theme 9 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

Several of the participants expressed a general lack of awareness of the events under discussion beyond CUP's initial involvement in censorship concerns. As Tahir noted, this lack of awareness was partly due to the level of discussion and scrutiny sparked by the CUP case, which obscured some more nuanced consideration of subsequent cases that occurred in the immediate aftermath:

I probably didn't know too much about the Springer issue because I think at a certain point in 2017 a lot of those issues became a bit of a mush. But CUP was the most—obviously we're not talking specifics of individual cases—but that seemed to me to be the most reported, because it was quite early on and definitely the first one, and indeed it's—you may get to this in your questioning—but it did spark off a lot of questions of me at the time as running a portfolio, so I was absolutely asked about that. (Tahir)

Some interviewees were asked to consider why CUP and other publishers became embroiled in censorship concerns that they hadn't faced before, affecting scholarly journals in China. Again, this was another source of uncertainty. For example, as Balal described, he was 'not certain as to whether they have paid attention previously in this way and it's just flown under the radar or it's not been significant enough to be covered' (Balal). In terms of the motivations of censors turning their attention to non-Chinese English-language journals, again Balal was uncertain, but speculated that

I don't know, maybe it's the case that there's this kind of rapid growth in output from China. There's more and more Chinese scholars that are publishing in English in

international journals. Perhaps, because of that, they've come to see the other types of content that's being published in these journals and are wanting to take action to prevent them from being seen in China. (Balal)

Beyond the causes and motivations, the source of the initial reporting was also unclear, i.e. 'whether there was a whistle-blower or whether there were people who had simply inferred from the fact that access was slightly different' (Tahir); and for academics who held editorial posts on the journals affected, the decision-making process and, therefore, the level of culpability borne by publishers was likewise murky:

we didn't know, is this a decision that has been made here the UK, or just been made in the Beijing office by somebody getting ... Because, you know, the Chinese government usually operates its censorship by making phone calls these days. They don't like to leave a paper trace, for whatever reason. And so, was it just somebody got a phone call and did what they were told? Who knew? (Prof. Elm)

This uncertainty extended to the enforcement of China's regulations by publishers, who had become implicated in censorship concerns. As Carolyn, a sales executive for an academic society publisher, explained, even for those working within publishing companies that may have actively suppressed content, the distinction between publisher-enforced content suppression vs. end-user content blocking (by a state-backed agency) is not easy to verify:

we don't necessarily have the capacity to look closely at where that content may be being suppressed on the user end. So we only, and perhaps larger presses do have that ability, or they've been approached by journalists who've analysed that content, and said, 'Look, your content is being, the access is being blocked,' or what have you, and that may very well be possible, and we don't know. We don't have a comprehensive analysis of whether there's certain content that's not actually reaching end users in China. (Carolyn)

As Dr. Alder explained, having worked closely with academics in China as an editor of a prominent China-studies journal, when subscriptions are no longer available via Chinese institutions, the cause is unverifiable without insider information. Either way, ‘published research that used to be available via subscription is now not available, possibly because subscriptions are no longer in place, but possibly because they are ‘four-o-four’d’—censored—directly, rather than indirectly.’ (Dr. Alder) Complicating matters further, publishers stand to gain commercially by offering tailored content packages and products in the Chinese market. For Dr. Alder, this contributes not only to a sense of uncertainty but also distrust about the causes of content unavailability in China and the stated motivations of the publishers involved, even when they publicly confirmed their level of involvement:

publisher 'x' who agrees to censor says that they're doing that in their press releases to protect the wider scholarly community that they publish. Who am I to disagree? Maybe they really mean it, I don't know. The only thing that I think would undermine the validity of a statement like that would be the fact that we publish for profit. So, I think it's very difficult to disaggregate. (Dr. Alder)

For Dr. Box, an overseas Chinese academic, another source of uncertainty was the extent of the impacts of different forms of censorship compliance for scholars accessing resources in China. Assessing this impact depends on an assumption of how ‘Chinese academics are doing their research. How do they get access to journals, journal articles, for example?’ (Dr. Box) Removing individual articles from journals may only impact academics if they depend on access to the journal records via the publisher’s website to discover content. Whereas, refusing to suppress articles and rendering entire journals as inaccessible via official routes—although it may appear to be the worst outcome for content availability—may also be insignificant if academics in China have other routes to access the underlying content, which is still recorded faithfully in the journal contents and metadata but inaccessible without an institutional subscription.

This uncertainty was apparent in some of the publisher interviews also, with participants, like Pierre, initially stating that refusing to tailor content collections and thereby losing access to all underlying content in China is the worst option for Chinese scholars, while accepting a lack of first-hand knowledge about the impacts of those decisions for Chinese scholars:

[i]t's not in the interests of Chinese academics, because they don't have access to material, right? So, in that sense, no. But if you would ask the Chinese academics, which I've never done, but that would be an interesting question to ask. (Pierre)

This point will be returned to under T12 (p.251), exploring further this lack of alignment and uncertainty about the interests of China-based scholars.

The other significant source of uncertainty among the publisher group was the extent to which competitor publishers had become implicated in censorship concerns in China. As Balal described, this uncertainty may explain divergence in publisher responses, which implies a lack of information sharing and coordination between publishers that faced censorship demands: 'publishers aren't going to necessarily know whether all their competitors have been approached in the same way by the Chinese State' (Balal). Moreover, for Balal, this lack of information sharing and industry coordination may reflect a deliberate strategy on behalf of those publishers who have faced demands because the routes they have taken involve 'commercial sensitivities' that they are unable to share: 'it's a competitive market and it could be used potentially as a stick to beat you.' (Balal) Even with several publishers becoming publicly implicated, which ought to spur some level of coordination through trade bodies, 'there are probably some publishers that this will affect more negatively than others' (Balal), which again disincentivises information sharing and coordination across the industry.

Balal was not alone in pointing out the strategic motivations for publishers to withhold information from each other. Jada described the consequences of withholding information in this way, resulting in widespread divergence over how censorship is defined within publishing

organisations: '[c]ompanies will be justifying to themselves and to their shareholders what they're doing and will be wanting to say, 'We're not censoring, but this is the approach we're taking.'

(Jada) Asked whether there is a cross-industry body, which publishers could rely on to mediate between competing interests and arrive at cross-publisher consensus, Jada replied, plainly, 'no.' As Tahir explained, when asked why a cross-publisher committee that he was familiar with had veered away from direct discussion of the events occurring from 2017 onwards:

I think it was because a lot of it was on the record and hard to hide behind, if you admit in front of your competitors that you are taking certain actions, there is risk that those competitors can choose the moral high-ground and take a stand and say, "unlike other publishers, *wink* *wink*, we believe in academic freedom." I feel like there's nothing to be gained from sharing and there's everything to be lost from sharing, reputationally.

(Tahir)

Beyond reputational concerns, Oliver also described a strategic imperative to withhold information in response to censorship demands internally, within the organisation he led, because

there were several individuals who were loyal to the Chinese Communist Party—possibly Communist Party members. So, any broad announcements within the business could well have been reported up the line to the Chinese state. (Oliver)

In response to the initial reports of CUP's involvement in censorship concerns, Oliver advised senior management colleagues to 'keep our heads down and play this very, very quietly.' (Oliver) Other interviewees, occupying less senior roles and in some cases working for implicated companies, gave answers that support Oliver's description of strategic withholding of information. As Tahir described,

at the time, I knew very little about what was happening. There was very little detail, and I think that's a deliberate thing, I think, from everyone involved. I was aware that certain concerns about certain content had been reported internally, but I wasn't aware specifically that specific actions were taken by us. And when I asked for information around late 2017 it was actually very scarce, and no-one seemed to know. (Tahir)

As a result of this uncertainty, Tahir described some difficulty responding to questions from external academic partners about the extent of censorship demands and potential compliance within his own organisation. Tahir suggested that senior managers had strategically sustained a 'firewall between the editorial department and uncomfortable decisions like that. Because plausible deniability is a good thing.' Therefore, in the absence of 'any compelling evidence that we were doing anything, but only that we were talking about it', Tahir was able to advise external partners in good faith that they were not, to his knowledge, complying with censorship demands.

For the academic partners involved, as authors of affected content, or editors of affected journals, the outcomes of these forms of strategic uncertainty were often unsatisfactory. As Dr. Hawthorn described, describing the sequence of events for the journal that she edits,

[i]t was very much a discussion among academics that have published in the *China Quarterly* when the news first came out. Then, of course, our own journal was also pulled into this. So we were not informed by the company that publishes our journal, [name of publisher]. We were not informed of these new practices. So we read about them in the press, just like everyone else, and then had to have lots of conversations to figure out what exactly was happening. So that part was a little unfortunate. (Dr. Hawthorn)

Indeed, several of the publishers interviewed also reported backlash from their academic partners, due to 'grievances about what publishers had done, and particularly for societies and editors, that it had been done behind their backs without consultation' (Balal). Oliver added that

while the company he led had not actively censored content, they had been pressured to prepare the ground for that option while actively advising external parties that they were not intending to comply with censorship demands, which was a source of worry and discomfort:

we were preparing some of the ground so that if we were forced to censor content, then we could switch off individual bits of content from access from within China, which was not something that I was comfortable doing. But at least we were reserving the position. As to whether we actually activated it or not, it was preparedness rather than action, and it was uncomfortable not to be more open about that at the time with both staff and external academics. So, I guess ... whereas ordinarily, my instincts would be to be as open and inclusive as possible, this was an issue on which we were uncharacteristically cagey, which was an uncomfortable position to be in. (Oliver)

As Oliver described at other stages in the interview, this strategic withholding of information was, itself, a result of the same strategy employed by the intermediaries and state agencies that publishers were dealing with in China. As Oliver explained, ‘we never got any direct instruction, it was all strong encouragement’ and this encouragement was ‘mainly verbal, rather than written, and it was delivered either at face-to-face meetings in which our own Chinese staff were present as interpreters or delivered via our Chinese staff’ (Oliver). Again, in this instance, Oliver expressed concerns about the faithfulness of reporting from Chinese staff members, who may be ‘underplaying or overplaying the situation, themselves, based on loyalty to the Chinese government, versus loyalty to their own company’ (Oliver). Therefore, Oliver pursued an explicit strategy to ‘match ambiguity with ambiguity’, with the inevitable consequence that, until firmer facts were established, academic stakeholders would be kept in the dark while all potential routes to compliance were established:

I was really playing for time and trying to encourage firmer news from the Chinese authorities themselves, because then we could have gone out to our community with

something clear and positive to respond to. If I'd actually had a list of articles, or had a list of journals that were the problem- ...[a]nd if I'd had it in writing, then I could have gone to our stakeholders and said, "look, this is the situation which we find ourselves in. Let's work together on how to solve this." In the absence of that, I tried to put up a shield of ambiguity on our side and play along with the Chinese authorities, but without actually censoring any content. (Oliver)

One outcome of this strategy, described by journal editors who tried to gain information from their publishing partners, is 'asymmetric information' (Dr. Alder), with editors encountering a 'steep learning curve' and difficulty getting 'the full picture, how long it takes to get the full picture' (Dr. Alder). At the root of this asymmetry is a strategy on behalf of the Chinese state to withhold information regarding the severity, extent and consequences of censorship demands, constituted in 'implied discouragement' and 'veiled threats' and the possibility of being 'damaged in a way that you wouldn't even know how you were being damaged.' (Oliver)

Overall, the publisher perspectives reported in the interviews suggest a complex entanglement of information control in response to censorship demands, partly reflecting a state strategy and partly commercial sensitivities and constraints that mitigate against coordinated resistance within and between affected publishers. Therefore, this strategic ambiguity also serves to neuter coordinated resistance within and between the affected academic communities, which will be returned to in the discussion chapter (p.296).

6.7. Resistance

This section deals with the category *resistance*, which captures two themes that address part of the primary research question (PQ), regarding the conditions of censorship constraint, including active resistance to censorship demands in China (as opposed to the conditions of censorship

complicity, explored earlier p.185), and secondary research questions 3 and 4 (SQ3-4) regarding the obstacles and advantages of collaborative action to resist self-censorship in China. The first of these two themes (T10) addresses the conditions of author boycotting as a form of political activism to resist censorship complicity, and the second (T11) explores the conditions of collaborative resistance within the publishing industry.

6.7.1. T10: Authors will boycott complicit publishers if doing so will not hinder career advancement

This theme deals with the stated and implied willingness of authors to boycott publishers that are publicly accused of complying with censorship demands in China. Of the 12 academics interviewed, 11 discussed the circumstances under which they and their colleagues would boycott publishers. 5 of the publishers interviewed also discussed this topic, reflecting on their observations of the academic communities involved.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
PUBLISHERS	5/12	1.44%
ACADEMICS	11/12	13.51%

Table 16: Theme 10 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

The interviewees diverged in their stated willingness or preparedness to boycott. Of those that did advocate in favour of boycotting, they were prepared to do so because they faced minimal risks related to their academic careers. Some academics boycotted on grounds of principle, but more often, they did so out of pragmatic concerns about their own academic and professional standing if they published with a complicit publisher or journal. The publisher

interviewees supported this characterisation of the different factions within their own academic communities, split between more vocal opponents of complicit publishers and those that pursued a more pragmatic approach, who would either boycott or continue to publish with complicit publishers, depending on the more favourable outcome for their own career advancement.

Most academics interviewed supported efforts to boycott publishers that had been publicly accused of complying with censorship demands in China. This came in the form of statements like, ‘I think [academics] need to think very carefully about publishing with journals that are published by publishing houses that have agreed to censor’ (Dr. Alder), or ‘if there is a journal or a publisher which is known to be a bit problematic, I will steer away from it’ (Dr. Cherry), with some describing a groundswell of sentiments of this kind surrounding the early reported cases:

I had a lot of people who were in the queue to either publish research articles or book reviews, and they just pulled out and said, “As long as you're censoring work for the Chinese government, we don't want to publish with you.” (Dr. Hawthorn)

Of the interviewees who supported publisher boycotts, some described their motivation as a principled stand against censorship complicity. For example, before submitting a journal article, Dr. Cherry described efforts ‘to be sure of a journal's, I would say—what would you call it?—academic integrity.’ Referring to an effort to boycott a journal that did not meet this standard due to censorship concerns, Dr. Cherry added ‘I am glad to say that at the time I was not yet tenured, so I had no job security, so I still viewed it as essential to speak out.’ Similarly, others expressed reservations about partnering with a publisher suspected of actively censoring their own content. If this was done ‘proactively on behalf of the Chinese government, then we did feel there [would be] a real question about whether ...we would be comfortable working with them as a publisher.’ (Prof. Elm)

For other supporters of publisher boycotts, their rationale was rooted more firmly in how censorship might constrain their own academic and professional activities. For example, Prof. Rowan stated firmly that ‘any journal that acquiesces with the Chinese Government's censorship, I'm not really interested in anymore’, but when probed for an explanation, his motivation was tied to the opportunity cost involved in preparing submissions for a journal that may be censored, rather than submitting to another venue:

[j]ust as a matter of my time, I'm not interested in sending, having an article sit under review in a journal where they're not going to publish it for reasons that aren't related to the quality of the article. I don't have time or interest in that. (Prof. Rowan)

Following a similar line of argument, Dr. Hawthorn also raised concerns about wasted time and efforts for authors driving a loss of submissions, largely from international scholars, who would rather publish with other high-impact publications over her own because of censorship:

what I've seen more is just that, some of my colleagues who are getting published in journals that have higher impact factors, they're not publishing with us as much, just because, again, it's challenging to have to run around and get certifications for your annual reviews. They just don't want the hassle unless they need to have that hassle. If they can avoid it, they're going to avoid it. (Dr. Hawthorn)

Dr. Alder, another editor of a journal that faced an author boycott, was also firmly in favour of boycotting journals in this way. However, Dr. Alder also highlighted some of the complexities of gaining access to information about publisher involvement and the pressures to publish. Ultimately, the decision to boycott publishers was, for Dr. Alder, rooted in pragmatic concerns about the potential impacts on the perceived quality of the research output:

I can't imagine a scenario, which isn't to say that it doesn't exist, but I can't imagine a scenario where I would willingly publish through a publisher or with a journal attached to a publisher that has said, "yeah we're going to censor our work." This isn't just high moral grounding, or anything like that. It would undermine my research. No matter of the quality or what the research is saying, the fact that other authors are being censored undermines the research. I think that's very powerful reasoning. (Dr. Alder)

Not all interviewees unambiguously supported a publisher boycott. For some, the pressure to publish and the highly competitive nature of academia disincentivises boycotting, especially for emerging and early-career scholars. As Dr. Box described, when asked whether the instances of censorship complicity had impacted her willingness to publish with any of the implicated publishing companies,

I guess if I have the capital to choose freely, I might start to reconsider but, to be honest, I guess I'm not in a position to choose freely who I want to publish with. It's more about who will accept my book manuscript! (Dr. Box)

Other interviewees at a comparable career level as Dr. Box gave a similar response, such as Dr. Cedar, who admitted that censorship complicity 'typically is not a very significant factor when I decide where my manuscript should submit. I primarily consider the reputation of the journal, their citation impact factor [and] reputation in my field.' (Dr. Cedar) However, in contrast to Dr. Box, Dr. Cedar was reluctant to blame publishers for censorship, stating that 'for me, my complaint is about the censors, not the publishers' (Dr. Cedar). Moreover, Dr. Cedar expressed pragmatism regarding the extent to which censorship complicity had impacted the perceived academic value of the implicated journals: 'I still prioritise their long-term academic reputation, not how they cope with these challenges' (Dr. Cedar). Other interviewees supported this position, such as Dr. Pine, who stated that,

[i]f it's a publisher that publishes work that I otherwise draw upon and respect and like, and if it's somehow important to me to get published in that outlet ideally—and I am looking at the example of the *China Quarterly* here, right? It's a great outlet, most people want to publish in it. I probably wouldn't be too concerned. (Dr. Pine)

Although they are outliers in the sample, Dr. Box, Dr. Cedar and Dr. Pine do suggest a fragmentation within the Asia studies scholarly community about the appropriate form of resistance, if any, to instances of publisher censorship complicity. In all cases, they elaborated on the nature of this fragmentation, which Dr. Cedar summarised as constituting three broad, uncoordinated factions: '[s]ome might provide pushback, confrontational. Others might choose to be more diplomatic, more persuasive approach, persuading approach. Maybe the third are just silent, don't care or don't react at all.' (Dr. Cedar) For Dr. Pine, these factions are divided largely along lines of career-level, rather than ideology, as well as participants' (or their employers') dependency upon access to China and to high-profile publishing outlets to forge a career:

those who don't necessarily need access to China will be much more vocal. Similarly, senior Chinese academics who are known for being vocal about China will normally take—will lead the charge. But for the vast majority of mid-career/early-career China scholars, I feel like they tend not to speak out too much—at least not publicly—on said issues. (Dr. Pine)

This assessment was reiterated by more senior academics who were, themselves, supportive of publisher boycotts, but also observed an unwillingness among less senior colleagues to follow suit: 'I think it has much more significant implications for [academics] who are a lot younger than me and looking to develop their career, not finish it' (Prof. Sycamore) Indeed, of the academics who had either boycotted publishers or expressed support in favour of doing so, they were also eager to emphasise the limited consequences for their own careers because they occupied senior academic posts. As Prof. Rowan described,

[t]his is more of a personal issue, but I'm a full professor, I'm at a point in my career where I don't really care which journal I actually publish in. If some journal is going to be complying with Chinese censorship, I don't really have a need to publish any particular journal, so I wouldn't bother with that one. (Prof. Rowan)

Of the academics who supported boycotts and were not at an established or late stage in their career, they also tended to highlight limited personal risks due to the nature of the field within which they worked. For example, Dr. Cherry, who was one of the more vocal proponents of publisher boycotts, stated on the one hand 'I am glad to say that at the time I was not yet tenured, so I had no job security', while on the other, 'I didn't feel that this was really going to impact me personally, for various reasons' (Dr. Cherry). Taken together, the patterns that form this theme suggest that author boycotts only occur when a significant proportion of the affected community are a) aligned on the principle of boycotting as an effective response to censorship complicity and b) not likely to be adversely impacted in their careers if they boycott and take a public position to resist censorship. This will be returned to in the discussion chapter (p.285).

6.7.2. T11: Collaborative resistance to censorship complicity relies upon external pressures

This theme describes the conditions under which collaboration within and between the affected communities to resist censorship complicity may occur. The central thread through the participant responses contributing to this theme is that collaboration and collective power is necessary to resist censorship, but that this form of resistance will not occur spontaneously, without external pressures. A discussion follows of the likelihood and obstacles for external parties to coordinate this resistance, encompassing governments, trade bodies and pressure groups within academia.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
PUBLISHERS	11/12	10.11%
ACADEMICS	4/12	2.34%

Table 17: Theme 11 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

Most (11/12) of publishers interviewed discussed the likelihood and obstacles involved in collaborating, both together and with their academic stakeholders, to resist censorship. Publishers tended to be pessimistic about this form of collaboration occurring spontaneously, if at all, and certainly not without some form of external pressure. Of the academics who also discussed this topic, they tended to be more optimistic about the necessity and potential of this form of collaboration to force a change of approach with the Chinese state, regarding censorship compliance. For example, Dr. Hawthorn outlined the dilemma facing publishers and the potential solution, as follows:

because the publishers compete with each other in the China market, which is a big market, I think they're feeling pressure to work with the Chinese government and keep markets open. If they would work together and adopt some sort of a standard, like, "This is how we will work in places that have censorship. We'll follow the law, but maybe we don't do the work for them." So the censors can come back to us and say, "This breaks the law in this way, but we're not going to censor things." [...] So there's no comparative advantage in working with the Chinese government in that way, and say, "Look, you have your laws. We don't know how to enforce your laws because we're not Chinese."

(Dr. Hawthorn)

Dr. Hawthorn went on to add:

I think that the Chinese wouldn't like that approach, but I also think that, if all the publishers took that approach, to say, "We will follow the law; tell us when you see a violation," I feel like that would get us back to where we were before. Which wasn't perfect, but at least it wasn't publishers doing the work of the propaganda department, which doesn't have the manpower to do this level of censorship. What we're essentially doing is, censorship is being outsourced to Western publications and Western employees are doing the work of Chinese censors. It's such a weird market dynamic. I don't know how it happened! (Dr. Hawthorn)

The premise underlying Dr. Harthorn's argument, that close collaboration between publishers to form industry guidelines or standards or to otherwise resist censorship in China *en bloc*, was put to interviewees as part of questions about the apparent lack of cohesion within the industry. Interviewees were asked about what could help to bring about such an outcome. Several of the publishers interviewed, particularly those that occupied more senior posts, were keen to emphasise the constraints stemming from markets and competition law that might prevent coordinated action of this kind. As Harris explained,

if you get any topic which is commercial, and quite a few big publishers together and say to them, "You should all act in concert", they will all start becoming very uncomfortable about are we breaking antitrust regulations? I think those are quite genuine concerns. I think if they all turned round and said, "We're not dealing with this from China", all the lawyers would be saying, "Guys, you need to be very careful that you're not actually creating a cartel through this behaviour." (Harris)

For publishers to operate in a more aligned way to resist censorship, they would therefore need some form of 'legal protection ...[i]f they are going to stand up or say no to demands then they need to be confident that they're not going to be embroiled in legal battles

for years to come and all the expense of that.’ (Eadie) For 5 of the interviewees, another significant condition of collaboration was some form of ‘government protection’ (Lenore) to bring about a ‘unified approach across all publishers’ (Eadie) and ‘be protected from the consequences’ (Lenore) of doing so. Crucially, for these interviewees, this sort of approach would not come about spontaneously, without some form of external impetus from a governmental body. This type of intervention would, in turn, require censorship complicity in publishing to become enough of an issue to be escalated to a relevant governmental body. Without that ‘government pressure’ (Lenore), publishers would ‘do much the same as they’ve already done. Publishers want to do the right thing, but not at the expense of their business. It’s a matter of balancing the two, isn’t it?’ (Lenore) This was a sentiment supported by others, such as Nathan, who argued that,

the strongest steps that could be taken would probably start at government levels and then there are trickle downs from there because I don’t think industry, unless there is an impetus from another place where your bread is buttered, like your ability to operate and trade within a certain region, or market, or whatever. The only one that I can see outside of that that can compete with a very powerful block like that is the one that you are based in, or where you make the most profits. Then basically having publishers’ backs, in a sense, so that they’re not so inclined to kneel to any external pressure, and in a sense empower them. (Nathan)

However, while governmental intervention may be necessary to force publisher collaboration to resist censorship demands, one interviewee described attempts to persuade the government in the UK to take such a role, which proved unsuccessful. As Oliver described, reflecting on the events surrounding the involvement of his past employer in censorship concerns:

[t]here was some conversation at the time with government—UK government—but it was pretty clear that they didn't want to go anywhere near it either. So, they were pretty ineffectual as well. And again, bearing in mind this was twenty seventeen, foreign policy at the time was to cosy up to China. It's changed a little bit since, but perhaps not as much as it might have done. So, certainly the Department of Trade and Industry, or the Foreign Office, weren't really interested in taking on this particular issue. I think possibly because the numbers weren't big enough to get them agitated. (Oliver)

This perception of the government as largely uninterested in the issue of censorship complicity in scholarly publishing was supported by other interviewees describing different contexts, such as Tahir, who described the EU's and US government's ambivalence towards the issue relative to other trade concerns in China:

I just can't see academic freedom in China being something crucially important for the EU when it's got bigger fish to fry. Crucially important for the US, when actually it wants to compete with China and beat China. But in terms of where it wants to beat China it's in semiconductors, it wants Apple to have all semiconductors manufactured in the US, not China. It's not necessarily about, you know, some research that is critical of China's policy. (Tahir)

Given the likely (and first-hand reported) ambivalence of governmental bodies towards censorship complicity in scholarly publishing, attention shifted, instead, to the role that could be played by industry trade bodies to mediate a coordinated response. For some, this seemed like a more plausible recourse for publishers to address shared censorship concerns: 'once it's come out into the open, I see no reason as to why the professional bodies couldn't consult over this and come up with some generalised guidelines on how to deal with it.' (Balal) The intended outcomes of this collaboration in terms of '[a] binding policy' were deemed 'unlikely' but Balal and others held out hope for, 'some kind of guidelines around this and how it should be handled

from trade bodies and at least some kind of agreement amongst publishers as to what is acceptable and what is not' (Balal); in short, some agreement at the industry level about 'how to deal with certain types of governments that tend to be censoring of scholarship.' (Carolyn)

In terms of the bodies that might be involved in this effort, candidates ranged from the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), described as 'an outside body to help frame a sort of collective ethical response' (Lily); the STM Association and ALPSP, which could form 'consensus among the leading publishers and a herd effect' (Oliver); 'a consortia of libraries and librarians' such as the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) (Carolyn); or even trade unions, such as the NUJ, which could promote 'some engagement and some open discussion about this amongst lower-level folks in publishing.' (Balal)

For Oliver, having occupied a leadership role at one of the implicated publishers, any meaningful attempt to force industry coordination to resist censorship would rely on two conditions: a) 'a lack of ambiguity' in terms of the Chinese government's own position regarding 'what they wanted to censor' (Oliver); and b), consensus among publishers regarding an appropriate response, mediated by a trade body, whereby 'it would be much easier to be a face in the crowd, rather than sticking your neck out' (Oliver). When asked why this outcome did not emerge at the time of the first reported censorship concerns in China, Oliver replied:

I think at the time, some of those trade bodies ... to be honest, weren't as strong as they could have been. Certainly, [a prominent industry trade body] was going through a change in leadership around that time, or shortly afterwards. They'd had some members who resigned or cancelled their subscriptions, so they were a bit weakened as a trade body. (Oliver)

Oliver's response suggests that this lack of consensus within the industry about the appropriate way to respond, as a bloc, to censorship concerns is due to structural weaknesses within trade bodies, which ought to have assumed greater responsibility to tackle these concerns.

In such an environment, publishers may become embedded in a way of dealing with censorship that is hard to reverse, even if the basic principles for coordinated action are established at a later stage. As Pierre reflected, as a president of a leading trade body,

[i]f you were faced with this and you could collectively take a position, that would be great. But at the moment, one publisher or another has already taken its own individual position, it's really difficult to then say, "well we publishers, now, collectively ..." (Pierre)

Nonetheless, when publishers were faced with these concerns, discussion within the main trade bodies was minimal and, in some cases, entirely absent. As Tahir noted, describing a cross-publisher committee:

[t]hat had some of the decision-makers on it, like [senior staff member] from [rival publisher], and they were very powerful—obviously I wasn't—but they were all very powerful people in publishing at the time, and at the time of this stuff, this wasn't talked about, and I'm pretty sure I was on the committee at that time and it was not talked about. And there's some stuff that publishers are really afraid to talk about and this was the kind of stuff. (Tahir)

The interview data contributing to this theme therefore suggests that while cross-publisher resistance to censorship may depend on some form of coordination from government and/or a trade body, this coordination will not happen spontaneously; it requires pressure from other external parties. For Balal, these parties include the wider academic sector and in particular, the funding agencies that pay for research to be published, who have untapped influence to shift publisher policy regarding content sales and publishing ethics in China. However, concerns remain about the size of the academic sector that is knowledgeable and concerned about censorship complicity in China:

[i]f a lobby of academics outside of China were to arrange that their own institutions, their funders and the like were to have policies around censorship and what they expect of publishers, then I could see that having some impact in the same way that we're seeing it with OA at the moment. But I don't know if it's a big enough section. Is it just the Chinese Studies folks and some Asian Studies folks? (Tahir)

The absence of a powerful and motivated body or group external to the publishing industry that could influence the sector at large will be returned to in the discussion chapter (p.298) as a central obstacle facing coordinated action to prevent censorship in future.

6.8. Values

The final category, *values*, deals with the expressed and implied value-based judgments of participants in relation to the central dilemma posed by the research focus: whether limiting access to a small percentage of output at the request of Chinese importers and regulators is justifiable on the grounds of maximizing access to published (uncensored) English-language scholarship in China. The theme that falls under this category (T12) addresses the primary research question (PQ) and secondary research question 3 (SQ3) by exploring values alignment and divergence among the participant groups as both a condition of censorship enablement and an obstacle to collaborative resistance.

6.8.1. T12: Confronted with censorship demands, liberal values are balanced against the perceived interests of China-based scholars

This theme describes the ways in which the participants pitted their own liberal values, underpinning a critique of censorship, against the perceived interests of China-based scholars, who may be disadvantaged by outright resistance to censorship demands. The discussion that follows explores the various rationalisations given either in support or in opposition to forms of

compliance with censorship demands. In some cases, participants occupied a neutral position due to uncertainty over the likely outcomes of compliance or resistance. In most cases, participants argued in favour of the position that a) aligned with their own personal values and b) their own perception of the more favourable outcome for scholars in China. In some cases, there was misalignment between personal values and preferred outcomes, particularly when arguing in favour of compliance.

GROUP	PARTICIPANTS	DATA
PUBLISHERS	12/12	6.02%
ACADEMICS	12/12	9.26%

Table 18: Theme 12 coverage by number of participants from each group (out of a total of 12 per-group) who gave answers that were coded under the theme and the percentage of coded transcript data for each group

In most cases (14/24), interviewees described their own vehement opposition to censorship as unethical or otherwise inconsistent with their own academic or professional values. Only one of the interviewees described censorship compliance as consistent with their own values, which was limited to specific a case where a publisher refuses to make adjustments to sales packages in China in the knowledge that all of the publishers' content will be blocked as a penalty. As Lily described,

I think in a liberal publishing milieu, it would be very odd to ever imagine that that would get you anywhere. You would be taking a very, very strong stance on behalf of an entire swathe of authorship, and those authors may really, I would have thought, may really react against that kind of stance. We are about promoting as far as possible, and getting content out as far as possible, and not taking ideological stances. So again, difficult to

think why, what would be in somebody's mind other than it being a way to forge a negotiation, to push it that way. (Lily)

For Lily, forcing Chinese import agents to accept all the content that is included in a sales package, or to take none of it, is an illiberal approach to maximise content availability in China—and one that is likely to backfire. This argument seems to encompass a rejection of the stated course of action on two grounds. First, because it conflicts with a principle or set of principles tied to the interviewees own personal or professional values. The second rationalisation is a pragmatic one: that this course of action would be ineffective. Most of the interviewees indicated the extent to which compliance or resistance to censorship aligned with their values and their perception of the more favourable outcome for China-based scholars, albeit supporting different courses of action (see Figure 14).

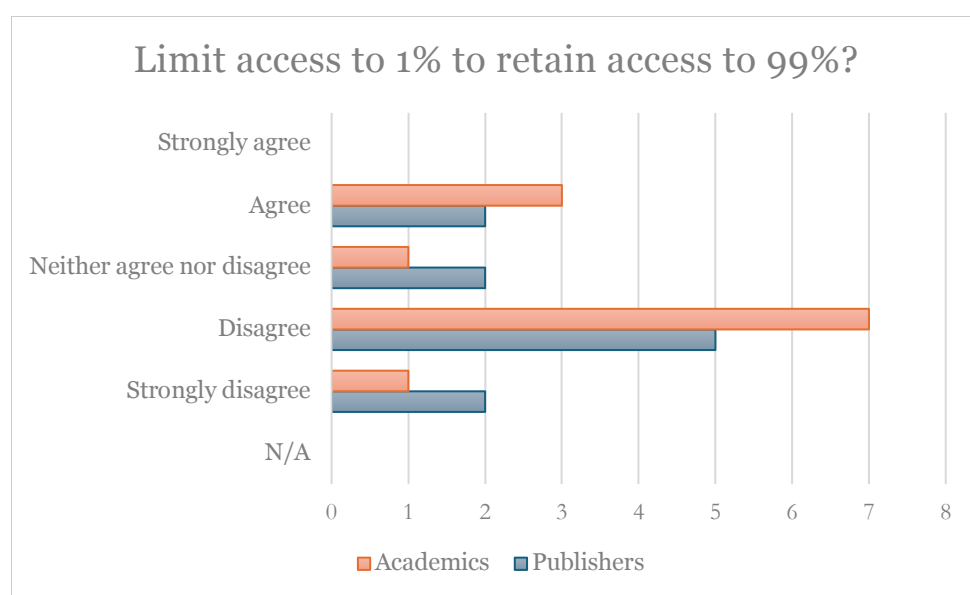


Figure 14: Levels of agreement across the participant groups: ‘publishers are justified in limiting access to a small percentage of output in China, if doing so enables China-based scholars to retain access to the majority.’

Of the other interviewees who supported some form of compliance with China’s censorship demands, this support was usually at the expense of their own personal or professional values. Arguments in favour of compliance typically hinged on calculations about

China-based scholars' interests regarding the availability of published scholarship, even if acting according to these perceived interests entailed forfeiting access to a small proportion of content on political grounds. Dr. Cedar personified this misalignment between principles and pragmatism. As he described in relation to the option referred to below as 'number two', i.e. to refuse censorship demands outright:

[it] isn't a perfect option either because number two, although the publisher might preserve their own reputation, in the academic community, "Oh, we are ... against the censors," but the readers also suffers from that option. If the Chinese regulator say, "Okay, we'll remove all these journals, eventually as a result." (Dr. Cedar)

Faced with the options of 1. refusing censorship demands, 2. suppressing content search returns, 3. removing individual articles from affected journals, or 4. removing the affected journals from sales packages, Dr. Cedar opted for the fourth option on pragmatic grounds: 'to minimise the negative impact'. Compared to outright resistance, he went on to explain, 'I think [this option] defends the reputation of the publish[er], but not necessarily always the most—how to say—the best option in a larger sense of scholarly community.' (Dr. Cedar)

Some of the publishers interviewed also framed their preferred route in terms of a compromise between their own principles and their sense of what is best for China-based scholars, balancing in favour of the latter. As Eadie described,

I think it's better to give researchers some access than to risk blocking it completely. I do think that there is that responsibility to maintain as much openness and access as possible and to block it completely actually doesn't help the researchers. It's harmful to the researchers. So it's a balance between upholding principles and trying to help the researchers. (Eadie)

However, at other points in the interview, Eadie appeared to roll back on this stance, stating that, in principle, ‘refusing to do anything is the best thing because you’re upholding your values and principles and that’s the right thing to do, but I do understand that actually that would have consequences which may not then serve the researchers very well.’ (Eadie) Indeed, several of the interviewees appeared to occupy more than one position while stating either their support or opposition to the compromise presented to publishers in the structured component. This underlines the uncertainty at play among the communities involved over the appropriate course of action. For some, this uncertainty led to a neutral position. For example, as Balal stated in response to the question of whether limiting a small proportion of content to retain access to the majority is justified,

I would prefer that limiting access to some content was done through—rather than bastardising journals that had been published would be done through simply the Chinese state deciding not to buy certain journals. I think that would be preferable. Yes, a thing that made me think there, with what you mentioned there is, who haven’t really been figuring in these conversations, well, what do China-based scholars think? There’s probably reasons as to why they’d be hesitant to talk about this topic, but I think we need to think about them as well. It may be the case that there’s scholars there who do want to retain as much access as possible, so I think that’s why I neither agree or disagree. (Balal)

In contrast, some interviewees challenged the assumption that retaining access to most content by censoring a small proportion was in the interests of China-based scholars. In these cases, interviewees leaned in favour of resisting censorship demands outright, expressing an apparent alignment between their value-based judgment and their assumptions about the best outcome for China-based scholars. Often this was presented as a principled stand against censorship representing a stronger negotiating position with the Chinese authorities, rather than immediately acquiescing. As summarised by Carolyn,

I guess you sort of hope that in the long run in taking a principled stance and not removing content, ultimately it best serves scholars everywhere because you're not censoring content and you do that in the hopes that ultimately researchers in China will have access to everything. (Carolyn)

As Oliver expanded, a negotiation with Chinese importers might follow this route, beginning with outright refusal, then exploring the least censorious alternatives:

I would start with [refusal], and then work back down the list depending on how the situation unfolded. But certainly, [refusal] would be my opening response to that. Just say no and see what the consequences were. (Oliver)

For other interviewees, refusing to comply would have other advantages for scholars in China. Dr. Box, speaking as an overseas Chinese academic, explained that self-censoring 1% of content to retain access to 99% would distort the scholarly record and impede Chinese academics' ability to do impartial research:

that means that the China-based scholars are able to access the not sensitive content but those kinds of content, I mean, I guess they—let's put it in a way that ... It's like the most juicy part out! Yes, I don't see much value for keeping like, yes, just keep those sensitive parts out and keep the rest. (Dr. Box)

Others supported this position, that losing access in the short term was a necessary consequence of resisting the creeping censorship of material that is critical of the Chinese government:

it might be in the short term bad for those Chinese researchers to experience that loss of content, but then is it not more egregious for them to go along a path that restricts their access to content that is critical of the state? To maintain a population that only has a

state-authorised way of thinking and acting? For me, that's more egregious than limiting access that may well be short term. (Tahir)

For some interviewees, however, the responsibility to resist censorship superseded any perceived outcomes for China-based scholars. This position amounted to a misalignment between the interviewees' values-based position and their assessment of the best outcome for China-based scholars, prioritising principles over pragmatism. As Dr. Cherry explained, reflecting on his own opposition to censorship:

[t]hat's my personal politics. That would help the individual in question, perhaps the topic of their research question and giving Chinese scholars access to certain knowledge, scientific knowledge, technological knowledge. One can uphold that but I would—these questions are for me always embedded in much larger questions. What is this for? In what kind of society is this taking place? Is this in order to enhance one's own career? Is it to advance Chinese science or is it to better the life of the Chinese community? I think that anything which complies with censorship is in fact doing more harm. Of course this is a value standpoint: some people may not share my views. (Dr. Cherry)

Several of the publishers interviewed did share Dr. Cherry's value standpoint while supporting a position of outright refusal. The publishers often expressed a residual pragmatic concern that by breaking the principle of resisting censorship, an incremental censorship creep would follow. But overall, the emphasis was on resisting censorship regardless of the outcome (short term or otherwise) for China-based scholars. As Jada described,

I'm going to go with strongly disagree because that is the nub of censorship. I have to say—and I do feel that I have to say, though, it also pains me because the idea that Chinese scholars miss out on this content is concerning and frustrating and feels wrong as well, but it's the slippery slope of, “oh well, it's okay, it's only one article. It's okay, it's only two articles. It's okay, it's only 20 per cent of our content.” Where's the line? Once

you've said yes once, where do you draw the line after that? I think I have to strongly disagree but not without understanding the consequences and difficulty of that. (Jada)

For the publishers, like Jada, who answered in this way, the sense of wavering between principles and pragmatics was evident. In some cases, refusal was framed as the best outcome for China-based scholars, as we saw with Tahir earlier. Then later, refusal was reframed as the best route because it sustained the principle of academic freedom, regardless of the outcome for China-based scholars:

I think freedom of speech is like democracy: you can't carve out bits to pick and choose. If you think about, in the US, voter restrictions, you can't say, "well yes you can vote, but as long as you queue up three or four hours without water and no right to go to the bathroom." It's kind of like, it's a binary thing. Freedom or not freedom. (Tahir)

In contrast, some of the academics disagreed initially with the 'justified compliance' option, whereby publishers limit access to some content to preserve access to the rest—then, later in the interview, they moved closer to a more pragmatic position. For example, Prof. Sycamore stated 'I in principle strongly disagree. I have sympathy with the idea of trying to help people who are trying to do things in a difficult environment but, as I said before, there are ways and means of them doing it.' (Prof. Sycamore) Then, later in the interview, when asked which of the four options (p.370) aligned best with his personal and professional ethics, he answered that

[t]he best is definitely [to refuse], although, ever the pragmatist, I wouldn't be offended by number one[, i.e. suppressing search returns via the publisher's platform]. I might tut but in a way that says, that's quite clever, really. (Prof. Sycamore)

This theme and the responses that inform it reveal a) a degree of alignment over the principle that censorship ought to be resisted, alongside b) widespread misalignment and uncertainty over whether refusing censorship demands is the best outcome for China-based

scholars. There also appears to be misalignment within and between the participant groups over whether the interests of China-based scholars are a salient consideration when deciding whether to comply with or to resist censorship demands. Finally, as in the cases of Tahir and Prof. Sycamore, the interviewee responses also suggest a degree of internal inconsistency regarding the extent to which principles or pragmatic considerations underpin their own position. This inconsistency may also reflect a degree of flexibility over participants' stated positions when presented with new information about the routes available to publishers, which will be returned to in the discussion chapter (p.299).

6.9. Conclusion

This chapter described the outcomes of the analysis stage of this thesis' interview-based study. The semi-structured interviews are the primary empirical method used to answer the primary research question (PQ), regarding the conditions of censorship complicity and resistance, and the five secondary research questions, regarding definitions of censorship in this context (SQ1), the consequences of complicity (SQ2), the barriers preventing collaborative forms of resistance (SQ3), the latent potential for collaboration within and between affected communities (SQ4), and the changes to censorship criteria over time (SQ5).

To answer these questions, 12 themes were generated from patterns in participant responses, which were, in turn, organised under 7 categories. The first category, *conditions*, captured three themes that dealt with the primary motivations for (self-)censorship, including China's political objectives (T1), commercial incentives for publisher compliance (T2), and the pressures facing scholars to self-censor, particularly those that live in China or depend on access to China to continue their work (T3). The second category, *definitions*, framed a single theme that offered a composite definition of censorship complicity drawn from participant responses to the interview vignette (p.370): that self-censorship involves active measures to enforce politically motivated access restrictions affecting published scholarship (T4). The third category, *impacts*,

described common threads in the interviews related to the consequences of censorship complicity. Participants claimed that individual scholars (based outside of China) had been minimally impacted, personally, by publisher interventions affecting access to scholarship in China, while there was evidence of deepening rifts between and within the participant groups over the ethics and implications of censorship compliance (T5). Moreover, following public and in some cases reputationally damaging instances of platform-based self-censorship in China, a subset of the participants who were close to the events reported a reassessment of values, processes and codes of practice to address future censorship concerns (T6).

Under *responsibility*, two further themes were described that suggest more deeply rooted, socially mediated conditions of censorship complicity within the affected communities. These included a tendency to deny, downplay or (re)distribute agency in response to reported cases of self-censorship (T7), particularly among implicated scholarly publishers, regardless of role function or seniority; and, among the affected academic community, a growing tendency to normalise and relativise self-censorship affecting published scholarship in China (T8). The fifth category, *knowledge*, covered a theme that described how uncertainty is managed strategically by censors and self-censors (T9), again serving as a contributing factor to the normalising tendencies described above and fragmentation within the affected communities preventing collaborative action. The sixth theme, *resistance*, also dealt with the conditions and motivations for collaboration, with two themes suggesting that, among the academics, author boycotting (as a form of resistance) is predicated on job security within academia (T10) and, among the publishers, industry collaboration or coordination to tackle censorship relies on pressures outside of the industry to force this approach (T11). Finally, under *values*, a central tension within and between participant groups was identified—pitting liberal values against more pragmatic considerations about information access in China—suggesting divergence and misalignment across the participant pool regarding a) the best interests and best outcomes for China-based

scholars, and b) whether a) ought to inform a policy of outright refusal or moral compromise to sustain market access and global scholarly dialogue (T12).

The themes summarised above will be returned to in the discussion chapter, where they will be combined with the theoretical component of this research (p.146), and key findings from the corpus analysis study (in the chapter that follows p.262) and from the empirical literature, summarised earlier in this thesis (p.75), to answer PQ and SQ 1-5 in a manner consistent with the exploratory sequential mixed-methods design (p.112).

CHAPTER SEVEN: Corpus Analysis of 450 Journal Articles Suppressed in China via a Publisher's Online Platform

7.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the outcomes of the text mining and corpus analysis study outlined earlier in this thesis under research design and methodology (p.135). It begins by reiterating the study's aims and rationale, related to the thesis' overarching methodology and theoretical considerations. This summary includes a description of the four phases of this study:

Phase 1: Top-down filtering of articles to exclude those that contain terms associated with the censorship of *China Quarterly* (Wong and Kwong 2019);

Phase 2: Generation of article terms and frequencies using term frequency inverse document frequency (TFIDF) tools across the remaining dataset;

Phase 3: Classification of terms to identify known censorship triggers (described interchangeably as red-flag terms);

Phase 4: Close reading and qualitative coding of broader topics or fields of inquiry to determine contextual markers associated with censorship.

The purpose of this study is to generate initial empirical findings regarding changes to censorship criteria affecting online journal articles following the *China Quarterly* case. First, articles containing known censorship triggers from that case are therefore excluded (phase 1). Phase 2 uses TFIDF tools to provide an index of terms and term frequencies to support analysis and identify suspected censorship triggers that were not present in the *China Quarterly*. Phase 3 aims to cross-reference these terms against the literature and wider reporting on term-based

censorship criteria in other contexts to form hypotheses about the new censorship triggers affecting published scholarship. Phase 4 aims to determine broader contextual patterns about the use of terms in articles, embedded in wider topics, arguments or fields of inquiry, to form initial hypotheses about the circumstances under which the use of a sensitive term triggers censorship.

These four phases form the structure of the chapter. They are followed by a discussion section, relating these findings back to the study and thesis aims. Four central findings are reported:

Finding 1: The suspected term-based censorship criteria in the *China Quarterly* case are not definitive;

Finding 2: The broader topics that are associated with censorship affecting English-language scholarship have expanded since the *China Quarterly* case;

Finding 3: The presence of a red-flag term is not a necessary condition of censorship;

Finding 4: Red-flag terms are associated with censorship in certain contexts that suggest nuanced censorship criteria and close reading.

The findings and discussion sections refer to the limitations of this study, introduced earlier in the thesis (p.141), and suggest approaches for future research. The chapter following this corpus analysis study (p.280) integrates the findings from the semi-structured interviews with those described here, as part of a discussion of the outcomes of the mixed-methods sequential design.

7.2. Aims and rationale

This study is the quantitative component of the thesis, which is following a mixed methods exploratory sequential, qualitative-quantitative design. The quantitative component is partly informed by the qualitative component that preceded it. In combination with the qualitative

component, this study aims to answer two of the research questions. One is the primary question (PQ): ‘Under what conditions are censorship practices enabled or constrained in the context of online research distribution in China?’. The other is secondary question 5 (SQ5): ‘How have the conditions that enable platform-based censorship in China changed over time?’. To answer the two questions above, the study is structured around three core aims: a) to determine the extent of platform-based self-censorship in China; b) to test the hypothesis that China’s censorship criteria are expanding, beyond the topics present in the *China Quarterly* case (Wong and Kwong 2019); and c) to generate some initial findings about the term-based conditions of censorship affecting English-language scholarly literature in China.

These aims and the literature supporting this approach are given in more detail in the methodology chapter (p.135), as is the extent of platform-based censorship using IP-based comparisons (see Tables 2, 3 and Figure 12, p.136). Several interviewees in the interview study referred to a rapid expansion in the scope of ‘sensitive’ research topics during the period of this research from 2018 to the end of the interviews in 2022. This study aims to explore the veracity of these claims by comparing the scope of sensitive terms included in a dataset of English-language content that is unavailable in China against the previously implicated content in *China Quarterly*. In their preliminary analysis of articles that were publicly known to have been removed from *China Quarterly*’s online platform in China, Wong & Kwong (2019) identified 11 terms that appear to be associated with the censorship of English-language scholarly articles in China. These are *Tiananmen*, *Tibet*, *Taiwan*, *Xinjiang* (or *Sinkiang*), *Hong Kong*, *Cultural Revolution*, *Falun Gong*, *Fang Lizhi*, *Wang Meng*, *Gao Xingjian* and *Mao Zedong*. (See Table 4 in the design, methods and methodology chapter, p.136.)

Phase 1 of this corpus analysis study identifies and exclude from further analysis those articles that contain terms identified in the Wong & Kwong (2019) study present in censored *China Quarterly* articles. This first phase contributes to aims a) and b) regarding the extent and

potential expansion of censorship concerns affecting English-language scholarship in China. To achieve aim c) to identify potential censorship triggers, phase 2 of the corpus analysis involves term and frequency identification using term frequency inverse document frequency (TFIDF) Python scripts. The purpose of these corpus analysis tools is to generate lists of salient terms within the remaining corpus of unavailable journal articles that did not contain a term present from the *China Quarterly* case. In phase 3 of the study, all the terms that were present in the analysis were then cross-referenced against lists of known and suspected censorship triggers from either a) policy documents released by China's General Administration of Press and Publications, concerning 'major selected topics' that are subject to import controls (p.50), and b) the scholarly literature on related forms of media and internet censorship. The salient terms present in the sample that were known to trigger censorship in other contexts but not in relation to online journal articles (i.e. not present in the *China Quarterly* case) were recorded and are given in full below (see Table 21).

The fourth and final phase of this corpus analysis study involved reading suspected red-flag terms in context. This phase aims to form more general hypotheses about the potential censorship criteria for articles that did not contain one of the terms present in the *China Quarterly* case or a known red-flag term from the policy documents or literature on censorship in China. This phase determines qualitative or discursive patterns in the use, context and overall argumentation of the articles within which these terms featured, coded as 'topics' and given in full later in this chapter. Particular attention is paid to whether the articles are overtly critical of China as well as the general topical concern of the article itself, which may or may not correspond with the sensitive terms.

7.3. Data collection

The data and findings presented here relate to an English-language publishing platform that displayed content discrepancies when accessed via a China-based IP address. This was the only platform that displayed obvious and quantifiable discrepancies of this kind, as detailed in the design and methodology (p.135). A sample of 450 journal articles were downloaded from the publisher's platform, following the identification process outlined in this earlier chapter. The sample represented 84% of the total number of articles (538) that were unavailable via a China-based IP address at the point of data collection. The content discrepancies were mostly mapped against subject areas, although not exhaustively due to the limitations of the platform taxonomy. This mapping of 512 discrepancies is given here. Table 9, below, reveals both the highly dispersed nature of suspected journal censorship across different subject areas combined with an apparent (and unsurprising) concentration of content discrepancies in political sciences and international relations.

SUBJECT AREA	UK	CHINA	DIFFERENCE	DATE OF COMPARISON
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	19288	18973	315	02/11/2022
SOCIAL SCIENCES (GENERAL)	112116	112015	101	01/11/2022
PHILOSOPHY	86809	86787	22	27/10/2022
EDUCATION	85852	85838	14	27/10/2022
PUBLIC HEALTH	2196783	2196771	12	02/11/2022
ECONOMICS	104362	104350	12	31/10/2022
CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE	8818	8830	12	22/09/2022
LITERATURE	6077	6071	6	19/09/2022
LAW	26477	26473	4	28/04/2021
MEDICINE	840	837	3	18/09/2022
SCIENCE, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (MULTIDISCIPLINARY)	17736	17735	1	27/10/2022
CULTURAL AND MEDIA STUDIES	3974	3973	1	18/09/2022

Table 19: Journal publication record discrepancies measured by comparing the volume of available items in each subject area on a publisher's platform using a UK-based and a China-based IP address

The sample of 450 articles, drawn from this wider dataset, was subject to the four phases of analysis outlined above and in the following section.

7.5. Phase one findings

The first phase of the study involves a top-down term frequency analysis of the sample, using Voyant tools as a filtering mechanism to exclude articles containing suspected term-based censorship triggers from the *China Quarterly* case. This involved using Voyant's term frequency analysis tool to count the occurrence of a pre-defined list of terms that were identified in Wong and Kwong (2019) and summarised in the methodology chapter (p.135). Of the 450 articles that formed this sample, 30 (7%) did not contain (in their title, abstract or text) any of the suspected censorship trigger terms from Wong and Kwong's analysis (ibid.). The consistency of topics with earlier reported cases of censorship was interpreted as an indicator of data quality and reliability, ahead of subsequent phases of analysis. As will be outlined below in subsequent phases, of the remaining 30 articles, 24 contain at least one known censorship trigger from other contexts (not previously known to affect English-language scholarship), again suggesting censorship and reliability of data in this study. These findings suggest that Wong and Kwong's list of terms associated with the censorship of English-language scholarship in China is not exhaustive. They also suggest that, assuming the censorship criteria are largely term-based as in earlier research on censorship in this and related contexts (Wong and Kwong 2019; Ruan et al. 2016), the terms that trigger the censorship of scholarship have evolved over time (following the *China Quarterly* case).

Phase one therefore partially addresses aim a) regarding the extent of censorship affecting scholarship in China and b) regarding the hypothesis that censorship criteria have changed over

time, as reported in the interviews, by demonstrating a gap in knowledge about the scope of censorship criteria affecting the present sample of 450 English-language scholarly journal articles in China. To generate some early findings potential censorship criteria for the remaining 30 articles, this smaller sample is used for phases two and three of the corpus analysis.

TERM	ARTICLES
TAIWAN	233
TIANANMEN	221
HONG KONG	169
CULTURAL REVOLUTION	135
TIBET	113
MAO ZEDONG	107
XINJIANG	77
FALUN GONG	26
FANG LIZHI	12
GAO XINGJIAN	4
WANG MENG	2
SINKIANG	1
NO TERMS FROM WONG AND KWONG (2019)	30

Table 20: Number of articles that include at least one of the suspected censorship trigger terms from Wong and Kwong (2019) including the number of articles that do not contain a term from the *China Quarterly* case

The results from phase one of this study therefore support the following finding:

Finding 1: 30 (7%) of the 450 censored articles did not contain a red-flag term present in the previous CUP sample, suggesting an expansion of censorship criteria affecting scholarly literature.

There are a few possible explanations for Finding 1: a) that the terms proposed in Wong & Kwong's (2019) analysis of the *China Quarterly* case were (at least in some outlier cases) incorrect, i.e. they overlooked other terms in the articles that were the real censorship triggers, which may feature in some of the 30 articles identified in the present case; b) that the terms proposed by Wong & Kwong were correct in the *China Quarterly* case but they did not capture

the full scope of censorship concerns in all cases (beyond this initial sample) and/or c) that the censorship concerns, affecting scholarly literature in China, have changed over time. This is because the sample in the present study encompasses both journal articles that were published after those in the *China Quarterly* case and articles that have become unavailable later than those in the *China Quarterly* case. Regardless of the outcome, it is worth highlighting that despite the non-exhaustive nature of the terms proposed by Wong & Kwong, there is an overwhelming degree of alignment between the supposed censorship trigger terms in the *China Quarterly* case and those present in the of the present sample (93% of articles), reinforcing their validity as likely term-based censorship triggers.

7.6. Phase two and three findings

The second phase of analysis involved running term-frequency inverse document frequency (TFIDF) Python scripts on the text data (title, abstract, full-text) of each of the remaining 30 articles to generate an index of terms and associated term frequencies for each article. In phase three, each of the lists of terms was read and tagged according to whether the terms present in the articles were known to trigger censorship in other forms of media or mentioned in China's policy document regarding the control of imported publications, introduced earlier (p.50). 24 out of the 30 articles contained at least one term that was flagged as a known censorship trigger. The terms that fell under this category are tabulated below, categorised according to people, places, ideas and events, and ranked according to the number of articles in which they featured out of the sample of 30. (See the glossary of censored terms, appendix p.362, for a description of each term and the corresponding examples of censorship.)

PEOPLE	ARTICLES	PLACES	ARTICLES
XI JINPING	9	TIANJIN	4
DENG XIAOPING	9	TAIPEI	1
HU JINTAO	5	DIAOYU ISLANDS	1

JIANG ZEMIN	4	WENZHOU	1
LI KEQIANG	4	IDEAS	ARTICLES
BO XILAI	3	MAOIST/ISM	7
LIU XIAOBO	2	UMBRELLA MOVEMENT	1
ZHANG GAOLI	2	EVENTS	ARTICLES
ZHOU YONGKANG	2	COVID-19	1
ZHAO ZIYANG	1		
GUO JINLONG	1		
WEN JIAOBAO	1		
PI QIANSHENG	1		
XU CAIHO	1		
AI WEIWEI	1		

Table 21: Number of articles (out of 24) containing a red-flag term identified in phase three of the corpus analysis

As this table demonstrates, the most common type of red-flag terms present in this sample related to political figures, dissidents or activists. After that, there are also articles that include references to political movements that are routinely censored. Some articles include references to places that are censored due to their association with politically sensitive events, such as the local government's handling of the Tianjin Binhai New Area explosion in 2015. Finally, one of the articles included a reference to the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, which is also routinely censored in Chinese media, social media and blogs. Sixteen of the 30 articles in this sample contain two or more red-flag terms, which makes isolating a single censorship trigger more difficult using a top-down keyword identification methodology, which will be returned to in the recommendations for further research (p.318). Eight of the articles contained only one red-flag term, with no other obvious sensitive topic, including *Xi Jinping*, *Jiang Zemin*, *Deng Xiaoping*, *Maoism* and *COVID-19*. Six of the 30 articles in the sample did not contain a red-flag term from the literature and primary sources outlined earlier.

Two central findings will be discussed related to phase 2 and 3 of this study: The first is as follows:

Finding 2: 24 (80%) of the remaining 30 articles contain at least one red-flag term not mentioned in the *China Quarterly* case

As described under phase 2 of the analysis above, of the 30 articles that did not contain one of the suspected censorship triggers from the *China Quarterly* case, 24 contained at least one red-flag term that is firmly associated with censorship in other contexts. These terms include mention of sensitive political figures, activists and intellectuals; sensitive locations, due to their association with political scandals or disasters; sensitive political movements; and, in one case, discussion of the suspected origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It ought to be emphasised that while these red-flag terms represent potential censorship triggers—offering further evidence of the expansion of concerns affecting scholarly literature in China—they are neither definitive nor are they formally verified due to the limitations inherent in the study design. This effort to identify potential censorship triggers using term-based extraction and identification tools is top-down, i.e. it uses pre-determined lists of likely censorship triggers, from data in other contexts, to profile and determine patterns of term usage in the sample as a means of generating early hypotheses about the likely censorship triggers in this specific sample. Nonetheless, this study demonstrates a clear knowledge gap regarding the breadth of censorship concerns affecting scholarly literature, which go beyond the list proposed by Wong & Kwong (2019). The lists of other red-flag terms presented here (Table 21), in this sample, represent a first step towards mapping this expansion of censorship concerns following the *China Quarterly* case.

Finding 3 (tentative): Presence of a red-flag term is not a necessary condition of censorship

Beyond the articles that contain a plausible censorship trigger in the form of a red-flag term, 6 of the 30 articles did not contain a term that is firmly associated with censorship in this or other contexts. Again, this finding points to a few possibilities. The first relates again to the limitation of the top-down approach, outlined above, of coding terms according to known instances of censorship in this or other contexts. It may be that these 6 articles were censored because of term-based criteria, but these evolving criteria are not given comprehensively in the wider literature or reporting on censorship in China. Again, it is possible that the term-based criteria have changed over time and these 6 articles represent examples of censorship according to the new term-based criteria. One example is a book review of a comparative history of labour and class relations in revolutionary Russia and China. Among the terms identified as potentially sensitive in some contexts but not routinely associated with censorship was *feminism*. Discussion of feminism and women's rights activism was also mentioned as an emerging focus of censorship in some of the interviews with censored academics (Prof. Willow). This term was present in 5 of the 32 articles. It may be that this is one example of an emergent censorship trigger, perhaps itself a red-flag term in specific contexts, but in the absence of wider research or reporting drawing a consistent link between mentions of the term 'feminism' (in contrast to, for e.g., 'Tiananmen Square'), it has not been flagged as such.

Another possibility is that these 6 articles may not have been censored solely due to term-based criteria—i.e. the presence of a red-flag term is not a necessary condition of censorship. Some of the examples point in this direction, such as a book review that deals with broad topics that recur in other instances of censorship, e.g. trade unions, migrant workers and labour and employment law, but without any references to specific people, places, or events that are typically subject to term-based censorship restrictions. Other examples include an article dealing with China's resettlement policy, following controversial hydropower infrastructure projects as an example of 'adaptive authoritarianism', or a theoretical article offering a conceptual analysis of power in Chinese context with reference to the South China Sea, territorial integrity,

nationalism and the concept of ‘hegemonic war’. Again, in both cases, there are references to broad topics that recur throughout the sample, such as authoritarianism or nationalism, but no specific red-flag term within these broader topics that serve as an obvious term-based criterion for censorship.

7.7. Phase four findings

In phase four of this study, each of the 30 articles was read in full and annotated according to a) further contextual considerations surrounding either red-flag terms, b) the central subject matter and argument of the article and c), in the absence of a red-flag topic, any other potentially sensitive material or negative sentiments towards China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), or CCP figures. Attention was paid to patterns in these higher-level topics, occurring in two or more articles. The full breakdown of common article-level topics (in two or more articles)—as opposed to terms used in the text of the articles themselves—is given below (see figure x).

TOPIC	ARTICLES
AUTHORITARIANISM	10
LIBERAL ECONOMIC REFORMS (POST-1978)	10
XI JINPING'S LEADERSHIP/IDEOLOGY	9
LOCAL/MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT	9
CIVIL SOCIETY	5
CHINESE MIGRATION /EMIGRATION/IMMIGRATION	5
CCP PARTY APPOINTMENTS	5
(ANTI-)CORRUPTION	4
ENVIRONMENTAL/GEO-POLITICS	4
CENSORSHIP	3
HUMAN RIGHTS	3
NATIONALISM	2
OUTLIER (NO COMMON TOPIC)	1

Table 22: Number of articles (out of 30) that share a common topic of study or contextual framing under each topic area

Of the 6 articles that did not contain a red-flag term, some common topics were identified, including discussions of social issues relating to Chinese migration/emigration (4/6), authoritarianism in relation to the CCP and senior party officials (2/6), nationalism (2/6) and forms of local non-CCP self-governance (2/6), e.g. via trade unions. The lack of a clear or obvious term-based trigger in these articles suggest that a) they contain previously unidentified terms that are censorship triggers, perhaps in some of these more sensitive contexts and/or b) that sensitivity has been determined by a more nuanced, close reading of these articles, rather than relying solely on term-based identification tools or methods to determine article sensitivity.

Of the remaining 24 articles that include a red-flag term, some observable patterns emerged in the process of reading the articles in full regarding the contexts and framing of these terms in relation to the subject matter of the articles. This was particularly true for the terms ‘Deng Xiaoping’ and ‘Xi Jinping’. As above, 9 of the 30 articles in this sample contained reference to Xi Jinping. The common contexts for these references included authoritarianism (3/9), Xi Jinping’s leadership style and legacy (4/9), and prominent speeches (3/9), including discussion of Xi Jinping’s ‘China Dream’ political slogan and ideology (2/9). Six out of 30 articles mentioned Deng Xiaoping and in all cases these references were made in the context of Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms, 1976-1989. Two of these articles drew explicit comparison between Deng Xiaoping’s reforms and leadership with the Xi Jinping era.

As indicated earlier, other articles also dealt with sensitive political figures beyond Xi Jinping. In some cases, the contextual considerations of these figures were similar, such as another CCP General Secretary, Zhao Ziyang, who was embedded within a discussion of China’s legacies of authoritarianism in contrast with periods of liberal reform and their figureheads. At least two of the censored articles feature discussion of political figures tied to high-profile corruption scandals, such as Pi Qiansheng and Zhou Yongkang (see glossary of censored terms p.362)—and in both cases, they feature in articles that also discuss the Tianjin region, which is

itself a target of censorship due to association with the Tianjin Binhai New Area blast (Jenkins 2015). Tianjin is a term that features in 4/30 of the censored articles and in one case, is the only sensitive term that features in an article, suggesting that it is itself a red-flag term, as indicated in Table 21.

Other sensitive terms appear in articles with no other obviously sensitive terms or material, including *Xi Jinping* and *COVID-19*, suggesting a higher likelihood that these terms act as censorship triggers even in seemingly non-sensitive or neutral contexts. The same may also be true of the artist Ai WeiWei and dissident activist and intellectual Lu Xiaobo, who both appear in footnote in a legal theory article that contains no other overtly sensitive terms or topics, nor any content that deals directly with issues pertaining to China. The topic of this article is the presumption of innocence as a universal human right in legal proceedings. The footnote mentions, in passing, the arbitrary detention of Ai WeiWei and Lu Xiaobo by Chinese authorities, indicating a break with this principle.

Search results across the affected publisher's platform at the time of data collection revealed articles that are available in China and feature references to both to Ai WeiWei (30 uncensored articles) and Lu Xiabo (43 uncensored articles), despite the seemingly heavy-handed treatment of the article analysed earlier in the list of unavailable articles. One explanation is that articles are selected somewhat at random and non-exhaustively according to sensitive search terms. Another is that the specific context surrounding the mention of these terms determines whether the articles are censored or not. A third possibility is that, in this case, the terms *Ai WeiWei* and *Lu Xiaobo* are used by China's content regulators as a shorthand to find potentially sensitive material, which is then read in full. In the case of this article, perhaps the argument that it presents—in favour of the presumption of innocence as a universal right, *contra* arbitrary detention of political activists—determines whether it is censored.

This final phase of the study supports the following (tentative) finding:

Finding 4 (tentative): Red-flag terms accompany censorship in certain contexts that suggest nuanced censorship criteria, beyond solely term-based criteria

Within the sub-set of articles (24/30) that do feature a red-flag term, in some cases, there are only one or two mentions of the term. One example is the article referred to above on the presumption of innocence in public law proceedings as a human right. This article features one mention of the dissident artists and intellectuals Ai WeiWei and Lu Xiaobo in a footnote, as instances of arbitrary state detention that appear to flaunt the principle of the right to be presumed innocent in China. This finding suggests that a single mention of a red-flag term may be sufficient to trigger censorship, but only in certain contexts, e.g., in this case, in the context of a wider critique of the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to arbitrarily detain political dissidents and activists. Other examples were given in the analysis above, relating to Xi Jinping, in the context of authoritarianism, and comparisons with other political figures, such as Deng Xiaoping, and earlier periods of liberal-economic reform.

While this tentative finding does appear to conflict with the previous one, which suggested that a red-flag term may not be necessary in all cases, some support for the claim that red-flag terms in specific contexts are associated with censorship can be found in the interview discussions described in the previous chapter. For example, in the interview analysis chapter (p.183), Dr. Hawthorn described a process of broad application of keywords, followed by more granular decisions and negotiations over the application of censorship criteria, at the article level. This interpretation is also consistent with elements of the literature on, for example, social media censorship described in the literature review (King, Pan, and Roberts 2014). The presence of red-flag terms in specific contexts is that this suggests a degree of close reading involved in the process of identifying and flagging scholarly content that may be inadmissible in the Chinese market. Again, as suggested in the interviews, this process may involve multiple parties, for example research importers and, at the publisher end, sales or editorial staff, with pre-vetting and

negotiation over individual access restrictions, which may lead to inconsistent and piecemeal censorship efforts. On the publisher's platform that is the subject of this study, content can be found via a China-based IP address that contains at least one mention of all of the red-flag terms identified, even the more obviously sensitive terms from earlier cases, like *Tiananmen Square*, *Tibet*, *Taiwan* and *Xinjiang*. This finding supports Margaret Roberts' notion of 'porous censorship' in relation to Chinese internet censorship (Roberts 2018), outlined in the literature review (p.83), which will be returned to in the following chapter (p.283).

7.8. Conclusion

This study partly answered two of the research questions, regarding the conditions of censorship affecting English-language scholarship in China (PQ), and whether and to what extent these conditions have changed over time (SQ5). The sample of this study was 450 English-language journal articles that are unavailable on a publisher's platform when accessed via China-based IP addresses. Four phases of analysis were conducted on the sample: 1) term-frequency analysis, using pre-existing red-flag terms from the previous *China Quarterly* case; 2) term-frequency inverse document frequency (TFIDF) tools to generate indexes of terms and their frequency for each article; 3) flagging politically sensitive terms present in the remaining 30 articles that did not contain a red-flag term from the *China Quarterly* case; 4) close reading and annotation of the 30 remaining articles, with attention paid to broader article topics and contexts to understand the application of suspected term-based censorship triggers.

From these four phases of analysis, four findings emerged, relating to conditions of censorship and changes to these conditions over time:

Finding 1: 30 (7%) of the 450 censored articles did not contain a red-flag term present in the previous CUP sample, suggesting an expansion of censorship criteria affecting scholarly literature.

Finding 2: 24 (80%) of the remaining 30 articles contain at least one red-flag term, not mentioned in the *China Quarterly* case.

Finding 3: (Tentative) Presence of a red-flag term is not a necessary condition of censorship.

Finding 4: (Tentative) Red-flag terms accompany censorship in certain contexts that suggest nuanced censorship criteria, beyond solely term-based criteria.

Findings 1 and 2 suggest several possible outcomes. The first is that the previously proposed red-flag terms in relation to the *China Quarterly* case were not comprehensive and generalisable to all cases of censorship affecting English-language scholarship in China. The second is that the scope of concerns appears to have expanded to encompass a wider nexus of sensitive political figures, events and societal concerns in China. Moreover, with findings 3 and 4, sensitive terms appear to correlate with censorship in specific contexts, such as discussions of authoritarianism, nationalism and civil society—in some cases aligning with findings from the interviews, which will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Findings 3 and 4 are tentative because of some limitations inherent in the study design. This study relied on a top-down approach to determine the sensitivity of terms and their frequency in the affected articles by rating term sensitivity according to existing information sources regarding Chinese censorship in other contexts. As such, the findings offered here are preliminary and exploratory. A more methodologically rigorous approach would verify the proposed findings using structured comparisons between censored and uncensored articles. This approach would involve building a corpus of uncensored articles in equivalent journals within subject areas that are typically subject to censorship controls via the implicated publisher's platform, then using parallel corpora analysis techniques to identify observable patterns in the frequency, occurrences and contextual framing of suspected censorship terms in censored vs.

uncensored articles. The potential for a 'bottom-up' comparative approach to identify term-based censorship criteria will be returned to in the recommendations for further research (p.318).

CHAPTER EIGHT: Discussion and Integration of Theoretical Contribution and Empirical Findings

8.1. Introduction

In this discussion chapter, the central outcomes from the theory chapter (p.146), the semi-structured interviews (p.183) and the corpus analysis study (p.262) are combined to answer the primary and secondary research questions. This chapter includes discussions arising from the research findings related to the conditions of censorship complicity affecting online journal distribution in China (PQ), how censorship is understood and defined in this context (SQ1), the consequences of censorship complicity (SQ2), the obstacles preventing collaborative action to resist journal censorship (SQ3), the extent to which collaborative action is advantageous for the communities affected and implicated by censorship (SQ4), and the ways that term-based conditions of censorship have changed over time (SQ5).

The research questions inform the content of this chapter as well as its structure, beginning with the primary research question (p.110), then the five secondary research questions (p.111). Under each question, the relevant outcomes from the three phases of the research are described and compared, with particular attention paid to points of alignment and discontinuity between the different phases of the research. This approach is consistent with the exploratory sequential, qual-quant design and pragmatist paradigm outlined in chapter four (p.114). The answers to each question given in this chapter are summarised again in the final concluding chapter that follows (p.306) alongside industry recommendations arising from the thesis and recommendations for further research.

8.2. Conditions of journals censorship in China: enablement and constraints

This section of the discussion chapter summarises and integrates the outcomes from the thesis to answer the primary research question:

PQ: Under what conditions are censorship practices enabled or constrained in the context of online research distribution in China?

The focus of this thesis is a specific set of censorship practices that were described in the context chapter (p.29) and defined in the theory chapter (p.179). To answer the primary question, boundary cases are also included in the discussion, including the removal or amendment of journal sales packages to suit political sensitivities, even when the underlying content of those packages remains unaltered. There were divergent perspectives regarding the extent to which amendments to journal sales packages constitute censorship in the interview component of this research (p.198). Indeed, whether this conceptual divergence within the communities affected by the censorship of online research journals is itself a condition of censorship enablement will be returned to under later discussions of the secondary research questions (e.g. SQ1 below), as will the barriers to collaborative action (SQ3-4), which are among a set of factors that enable the defined censorship practices under discussion.

8.2.1 Structural conditions of censorship: political interests and economic influence

Before turning to questions of conceptual divergence and fragmentation within the communities affected, this first section summarises the key outcomes from the interviews relating to the more deeply rooted, structural conditions of censorship enablement in the context of research distribution in China. These conditions fall under two interrelated categories: a) China's—or rather, the Chinese Communist Party's—political objectives (p.185), and b) China's economic

power (p.190). These two conditions can be described jointly as the use of economic power and incentives as a tool to exert political control over the dissemination of scholarship.

This thesis has shown how censorship is enabled in scholarly publishing when publishers encounter demands from a political authority that wields significant economic power. China was not the only state that was mentioned in the interviews as occupying a position of both political and economic power to influence scholarship—interviewees mentioned related dynamics enabling censorship in Russia, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, India, even the United States. However, the size and strategic importance of China's market for scholarly publishing was marked out as a key condition of censorship compliance, given the more significant commercial consequences of resisting censorship demands in comparison to the other countries mentioned. As was described in the interviews, China's political objectives and economic influence as conditions of censorship complicity encompass a broader set of dynamics beyond scholarly publishing. These include a more general clash of values between China and 'the West' regarding freedom of speech and inquiry; efforts on behalf of China to export censorship and political control in international politics and media; and the so-called trade wars between China and Western nations, particularly the US, of which censorship concerns in scholarly publishing form a small part.

The interviews also highlighted some structural conditions of censorship complicity specific to scholarly publishing, related to China's political objectives and economic influence. These objectives included a deliberate effort on behalf of the Chinese government to address power imbalances in the scholarly publishing system, which is weighted in favour of high-impact, English language (non-Chinese) outlets. Participants framed these trends within a wider set of concerns regarding Chinese higher education, aimed at encouraging self-censorship among Chinese or China-based academics and suppressing political dissent: for example, the introduction of the Hong Kong National Security Law; shutting down access to state archives;

and the use of Confucius Institutes as forms of coercive soft power to advance China's political interests.

In terms of economic influence over non-Chinese scholarly publishing, the interviews with publishers highlighted several conditions that motivate censorship compliance, including publishers' widespread reliance on journal sales deals, subscriptions revenues, submissions and citations from China to sustain business growth. Again, interviewees highlighted the scale of the market and the potential impact of, for example, a large loss in submissions and citations arising from censorship resistance, which would significantly compromise revenues tied to Open Access fees and journal citation metrics. Non-commercial publishers are just as vulnerable to political and economic pressures to censor as their commercial counterparts, particularly for those that publish widely in the humanities and social sciences, which may be more likely to face concerns over politically sensitive content. Nevertheless, science, technical and medical publishers could also face pressures, given the need to secure large volumes of citations from China-based researchers to sustain and grow journal Impact Factors and other citation-based journal metrics and rankings.

8.2.2. Term-based conditions of censorship

Aside from political and economic concerns, the desk-based component of this research given in the context chapter (p.27), the literature review (p.75) and also the empirical components—the interviews (p.183) and corpus analysis study (p.262)—examined the term-based conditions of censorship pressure, which can lead to censorship compliance in scholarly publishing and related sectors. At the outset of this research, some of the term-based censorship constraints were already known and examined in the scholarly literature on censorship in China. For example, Wong and Kwong (2019) identified several terms that were associated with the censorship of *China Quarterly*, such as *Tiananmen*, *Tibet*, *Taiwan*, *Falun Gong*, *Mao Zedong*, *Xinjiang* and *Cultural Revolution*. In some cases, articles appeared to have been censored due to only one mention of

one of these terms in the title or abstract of an article; in other cases, the term-based censorship criteria appeared to be applied in selective, context-dependent ways that suggest close reading and human adjustments (ibid.).

As was outlined in the context (p.29) and research design (p.135) chapters, little is known publicly about the specific article or journal-level censorship requests and the term-based conditions that publishers have encountered in China. However, some clues can be derived from publicly accessible policies issued by China's General Administration of Press and Publications in 2019 regarding import controls on publications relating to 'Major Selected Topics' (MSTs) (NPPA 2019). This policy document refers to a broad set of topics of concern, consistent with the term-based conditions of censorship complicity identified by Wong & Kwong (2019) and described in full in the context chapter (p.50). The ways that the term-based conditions of censorship affecting scholarly literature have changed over time are given below, under secondary question 5 (p.111), returning to the central outcomes from the interviews and corpus analysis study related to this sub-topic.

In terms of the enforcement of the regulations surrounding MSTs, some observable dynamics in the case of the state coercion of scholarly publishers appear to corroborate findings from earlier studies, for example Roberts's notion of 'porous censorship' (Roberts 2018). This is the idea that Chinese censorship is often partial and circumventable, and circumventions often go unpunished (ibid. 2). But by 'increasing the costs, either in time or money, of access or spread of information' (ibid. 6) the Chinese government can conceal information from the public, while avoiding overt and 'widespread repressive policies' (ibid. 7) that are conspicuous and risk backlash.

The interviews support this view of term-based censorship constraints affecting scholarly literature, whereby the enforcement of term-based censorship demands affecting individual journal articles involves requests relayed to publishers by their intermediaries in China, not written down (Oliver), that were both broad and all-encompassing while also, in some cases,

open to negotiation (Dr. Hawthorn). The enforcement of term-based censorship was reported as involving a combination of agencies external to the publisher in China, for example import agents, but also, in one reported case (Dr. Hawthorn), publisher employees in China actively amending journal platforms on behalf of these agencies. Therefore, while censorship of scholarship in China is porous, the breadth and inconsistency of application also reflects a deliberate strategy on behalf of China's censors to coerce other agencies (including publishers) to self-regulate and self-censor journal content in China. Key to this strategy of coercion is the uncertain scope of the relevant regulations—the MSTs—which also carry severe penalties for China-based publication importers that are perceived as failing to properly screen for inadmissible content (p.50).

8.2.3. Author boycotts as a constraint on censorship compliance

There are complex obstacles facing the stakeholders involved in scholarly journal publishing to effectively resist censorship pressures in China. However, as in the first reported case involving Cambridge University Press in 2017, under certain conditions scholarly communities will threaten to boycott complicit publishers, which can act as a constraint on censorship practices (p.32). In terms of the conditions of censorship resistance through boycotting, the findings from the interview component of this research suggest that, beyond principles of free enquiry, pragmatic concerns motivate boycotting for some academics while acting as a constraint on censorship resistance for others.

Four positions were identified among the interview participants (p.251): a) principled resistance, b) principled acquiescence, c) pragmatic resistance and d) pragmatic acquiescence. Most interviewees supported resistance, either on grounds of principle or pragmatic considerations. In terms of pragmatic motivations to resist censorship through boycotting (p.239), these included author concerns about the opportunity costs—i.e. the missed opportunities due to misspent time and effort—involved in submitting manuscripts to journals

that may curtail their dissemination on political grounds. Interviewees also raised difficulties faced by China-based academics when citing censored articles for performance reviews; concerns about publishing in journals that are perceived as less valuable for reaching target audiences in China; and concerns about the impact of censorship on the perceived quality of published research output in censored journals.

The interviews revealed how pragmatic considerations cut both ways, especially for early-career researchers (ECRs) who are more dependent on journal publication to advance their careers and are thereby constrained in their avenues for boycotting. The ECRs interviewed continued to uphold the prestige of censored journals, like *China Quarterly*. Factions were apparent within the affected scholarly communities, with some occupying a more confrontational stance towards the implicated publishers, whilst others (such as journal editors) occupying a more diplomatic, bridging function. Some of the interviewees were either unaware or unconcerned by reported cases of censorship complicity (p.225). Career level and dependency on access to China were the two most significant determiners with regards to outward censorship resistance, versus acquiescence or silence on the issue of publisher involvement.

Although the interviews highlighted a tendency among certain factions of academia to boycott complicit publishers, the corpus analysis component of this research points to an escalation of affected content following the first reports and public boycotts, rather than a decline (p.136). This trend suggests that, while author boycotts may be effective in raising awareness of specific cases of censorship complicity and applying public pressure on implicated publishers, these methods may be ineffective in bringing about a wider change in online journal content dissemination practices across the publishing industry—particularly when those practices go unnoticed. Moreover, as explored further below, the impacts of boycotting are limited by the absence of wider external or internal pressures to resist (self-)censorship in China.

8.3. Defining censorship of the scholarly record

To support this thesis's primary focus on the conditions that enable and constrain censorship complicity, affecting online scholarly journals in China, five secondary considerations were outlined in the research design. The first of these is given as follows:

SQ1: Under what conditions do disruptions in the functioning of the online scholarly record constitute (self-)censorship?

This thesis answers this question in two ways. The first is by describing and defining the types of publisher intervention that constitute censorship complicity, involving the dissemination of online scholarly journals in China. The second is by understanding empirically how censorship complicity is defined by the communities affected. The first approach aims to fix the parameters of the research focus; the second, to determine whether the conceptual frameworks brought to bear on Chinese research censorship in the affected communities are aligned—and whether alignment or misalignment serves to enable or constrain those censorship practices.

Starting with the first approach to this question, in chapter 5, censorship complicity was defined as an effort on behalf of a publisher to remove individual items of scholarly content or otherwise curtail the availability of publicly accessible information about scholarly content on a publisher's platform to suit the political interests of an external authority (p.179). This definition does not apply to cases where content is removed from a publishers' platform, or where public metadata about that content is made inaccessible, due to research ethics concerns as described in the Committee on Publications Ethics' retraction guidelines.

This definition applies to two of the three forms of alleged censorship complicity affecting online journals in China: 1. removing journal articles from the China-facing platform of online journal; 2. amending the search function of publishers' China-facing journal platforms. It does not apply to route 3. removing or allowing external sales agents to remove journals from

sales packages at the request of a content purchaser—so long as the underlying content and publisher’s platform is unaltered and the publisher’s platform includes the same public-facing information as in other geographies, including article titles, authors, abstracts, dates and place of publication, and so on.

The theory chapter also gave an account of the type of censorship that routes 1 and 2 constitute, as in the cases of Cambridge University Press (p.32) and Springer Nature (p.37)—namely, institutional self-censorship—that is, censorship enforced by publishers on behalf of an external authority for reasons that are plausibly misaligned with the publisher’s own interests and values (publicly or privately held) (p.162). These two forms of censorship complicity are further described as politically motivated editorial censorship. They are political in the sense described earlier by Roberts (2018) that the reported cases all involve a) an attempt to restrict the public expression or a public access to information by b) an authority when c) the information is thought to have the capacity to undermine the authority by making it accountable to the public (ibid.). The publishers’ interventions on behalf of an external authority—in this case, China’s media regulators—are editorial in the sense that they compromise the integration and internal coherence (or, integrity) of the scholarly record, understood both as a corpus and as a *hypertext* (p.173).

Turning to the empirical approach to SQ1, the interview study explored the commonly held conceptual frameworks for censorship and censorship complicity in the affected communities. A composited definition was offered, which captured elements of the definitions given by most of the interview participants (p.198): that publisher censorship complicity (or self-censorship) involves active measures, on the part of the publisher, to enforce political access restrictions on behalf of an external political authority affecting published scholarship. Here there are some important points of alignment with the definition offered in the theory chapter as part of this thesis, suggesting some common intuitions regarding (self-)censorship in the

academic literature, in the argument presented above, and in the answers given by interview participants.

The extent and exercise of agency on the part of the publisher is significant in the interviews, as it is in Horton's definition of self-censorship, explored in the theory chapter (p.162), i.e. that publishers play a 'significant non-coerced determinative role' (Horton 2011, 98), while also 'neither acting entirely out of [their] own volition nor being effectively coerced' (ibid., 99). As in Roberts's definition (Roberts 2018), the motivation of the censor is key—in this case, Chinese media regulators enforcing censorship constraints through import agents—involving an external authority coercing publishers to amend their content collections and publishing platforms in China to suit political interests (p.171).

Unlike the application of the definition of censorship complicity given above, however, interview participants did differ in their assessment of whether this definition applies in the case of amended journal packages. For a minority of the publishers (3 out of 12), this did not constitute censorship complicity, so long as the amendments were made by an external party, i.e. an import or sales agent, rather than proactively by the publisher. Again, this finding underlines the extent to which the exercise of agency, on the part of the publisher, determines the degree of perceived complicity with censorship. Overall, the interviews suggest significant alignment and consensus over a) a definition of platform-based censorship complicity in scholarly publishing and b) the application of this definition, particularly in relation to two of the three routes to compliance with censorship demands: 1. removing journal articles from the China-facing platform of online journal; 2. amending the search function of publishers' China-facing journal platforms. This finding is returned to in the concluding chapter under recommendations for industry (p.320) and further research (p.315).

8.4. Consequences of platform-based censorship complicity

Another of the secondary considerations that informed the research design concerns the consequences of censorship complicity:

SQ2: What are the consequences of platform-based censorship complicity in China for the communities that are affected by it?

This question can be answered, partly, by analysing the events that occurred in the aftermath of the first reported cases of censorship complicity, which coincided with the timescale of this research, from 2018-2024. These included public reports regarding the acquiescence of several prominent publishers to censorship demands in China, involving the removal of articles from journals, amended search results, content databases and journal sales packages (p.29). These events were followed by author boycotts, which in some cases pressured publishers to change their approach to content distribution in China while others doubled down and resisted calls to reverse platform-based self-censorship (p.37). As the research progressed, this study coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which gave rise to regulations constraining the publication of results and data in China on the origins of the virus (Cooper, 2019). Moreover, the data collection component of the corpus analysis study revealed that the scale and scope of affected content expanded rapidly between 2017 and 2022, encompassing book chapters, conference proceedings, reference works and journal articles—in some cases published under Open Access mandates (Cooper, 2022).

The interview study was designed to investigate the consequences of this escalating trend of censorship complicity along several themes: for example, research practices (including international research collaboration), publishing practices and personal career development (p.130). The analysis of interview transcripts found that the personal consequences of platform-based censorship complicity for most of the participants (and their associated research and

publishing communities) were minor except for intensifying pressures for Chinese interviewees and China-based colleagues of interviewees to self-censor (reported second hand) (p.194). The consequences of these pressures included concerns about searching for and citing censored content; changes to research focus, moving away from sensitive areas, terminologies or methodologies; and pressures to break off collaborations with non-Chinese collaborators. Most of the academic participants also described a culture of anxiety around publishing and researching sensitive topics in China, particularly given the heightened risks posed following the introduction of the Hong Kong National Security Law.

Moreover, participants highlighted the risks facing Chinese or China-based scholars related to circumventing research censorship using VPNs, which are illegal in China; the possibility for overseas Chinese academics being denied re-entry into China and cut off from close relations if they publish on sensitive topics; the expanded content access constraints faced by Chinese academics, following cases of publisher censorship complicity; and the problems faced by Chinese academics when citing censored publications for institutional performance reviews when that content has been removed or otherwise hidden on publisher platforms.

While most interviewees denied that censorship complicity had affected them personally— e.g. in relation to the topics mentioned earlier, for example publishing or research practices—there were some outlier cases that suggest a degree of fragmentation in the communities affected. This included some direct consequences for one of the journal editors interviewed (p.204), who reported a significant drop in submissions from non-Chinese scholars and in papers dealing with public policy or political analysis, which had, in turn, led to a loss in competitive advantage over higher impact journals. Several of the academics interviewed also expressed dismay at the acquiescence of prestigious publishers and publications, such as CUP's *China Quarterly*, and a hardening of attitudes towards the publishing industry at large. In contrast, for some, the process of negotiating with their publisher and arriving at a more mutually

acceptable outcome with respect to the handling of censorship demands had improved their working relationship and perception of the publishers involved.

Beyond personal consequences, some participants also described a wider reassessment of values and codes of practice, for example, among some of the affected academic communities and implicated publishing organisations (p.212). For the publishers, this process was initiated by the reputational harm that CUP suffered as the first reported publisher to comply with censorship demands. Publishers reported greater centralisation of decision-making processes regarding censorship concerns following; the introduction of new or more clearly stated escalation protocols relating to censorship demands; establishing new ethics boards to deal specifically with censorship concerns; and a re-statement and codification of organisational values and codes of conduct, formalised also in author and editor contracts.

Among the academics interviewed, journal editors reported greater editorial caution to avoid accusations of complicity following the public reporting on the early cases, e.g. CUP and Springer Nature; a more widespread sensitivity and awareness of issues surrounding censorship; a greater sense of misalignment between so-called academic interests and the commercial interests of academic publishing; tempered by, in one outlier case, greater pragmatism when it comes to balancing the interests of editorial freedom with information access and exchange in China, having considered all available routes to comply with or to refuse censorship demands.

Taken together, the results from the quantitative and qualitative components suggest that the personal impacts for many of the affected authors have been relatively minor. However, the events have contributed to a wider set of challenges regarding international scholarly dialogue within the China studies communities. These events have also caused affected publishers and academics to reassess the ways in which they engage with one another over issues of academic freedom in the region. Despite these changes, however, the scale and scope of affected content has risen significantly, suggesting that a widespread cessation of self-censorship has not followed from the changes in business practices reported by interview participants.

8.5. Constraints and opportunities for collaborative action

In this section of the discussion chapter, two secondary questions are considered that relate directly to the primary research question. They both deal with the opportunities and constraints surrounding collaborative action, considered as a sub-set of conditions that may enable or constrain censorship complicity in China. These are:

SQ3: What are the constraints that prevent collaborative action within and between affected communities to resist censorship complicity in China?

SQ4: To what extent is collaborative resistance advantageous for the communities that are affected by censorship complicity in China?

These questions are answered together with reference to the findings from the interviews that suggest barriers or latent potential for collaborative action. One set of findings relating to this concern has already been discussed above but is worth highlighting here, suggesting a degree of convergence over the definition and application of censorship in some of the more apparent cases of censorship complicity; for example, publishers removing content or otherwise amending their content platforms at the request of Chinese content regulators. As above, there also appear to be some communities of scholars within the fields of China and broader Asia studies who are willing to publicly denounce and boycott publishers who are seen to be complicit, although this form of coordinated action appears to be determined by the career status of the individuals involved, i.e. whether they occupy relatively secure academic positions and whether they depend on access to China to conduct research and advance their careers (p.239). Beyond these pockets of resistance, however, the interviews surfaced some of the more persistent obstacles for broader, coordinated efforts to resist censorship within and across the affected publishing and research communities, which will be discussed in what follows.

8.5.1 Perceived lack of agency to affect change

The first of the obstacles for collaborative action is a consistent tendency among the publishers interviewed (and two of the academics) to deny, downplay or (re-)distribute agency to affect the outcome of censorship demands (p.219). This was true of publishers operating at a variety of levels of seniority within implicated publishers. At the lower to middle management levels, participants described escalation procedures to senior staff when encountering censorship concerns, which if not adhered to could present job risks for lower-level staff. Some participants argued that these procedures dissuade autonomous decision making among lower levels. On the other hand, the most senior director-level interviewees described decentralised decision-making structures— example, management committees or executive boards—that limited their individual agency to respond to censorship demands. In some cases, they also described lower-level managers making tactical decisions without consulting senior management and in ways that may not align with broader strategic priorities.

Senior managers also reported external constraints on their agency, including concerns about falling foul of anti-trust laws (if they coordinate with other publishers to influence the outcomes of sales negotiations); commercial imperatives, which dissuade information sharing with rival publishers; and in some cases, outright denial of responsibility to refuse requests to amend content packages to suit a customer's requirements, even if those requirements are politically motivated. Both representatives of individual publishers and of wider industry trade bodies gave responses that reflected this trend by denying responsibility to enforce a way of dealing with censorship demands or even to form a consensus on the issue.

By contrast, some of the academics interviewed insisted that publishers have untapped collective agency and power to affect change. They highlighted publishers' ability to gatekeep access to resources that are needed in China, which they could use as a negotiation tool to dissuade censorship practices; whereas academics lack this kind of collective bargaining power and face greater personal risks for publicly resisting censorship. While these responses offered an

alternative perspective, they also confirmed a more general trend of denying, downplaying or (re-)distributing agency—in this example, from the academic community to the publishing industry.

8.5.2. Normalising censorship complicity

While many of the interview participants expressed a degree of shock or outrage towards the first reported cases of censorship complicity affecting English-language journal articles in China, these responses were also combined with a tendency to contextualise or relativise these events (p.225) and despondency about the prospects of a coordinated and effective campaign of resistance (as above). The academics described a lack of cohesion or collaboration in the affected communities, alongside powerful incentives to continue to publish in affected journals and to accept the status quo. (This aligns with the set of findings, reported above, regarding the conditions of resistance related to career (in)security and variable requirements to sustain access to China.)

The tendencies reported above with reference to the interview discussions are corroborated by the data collected for the corpus analysis study. The scale and scope of affected content has grown significantly since the start of this research in 2018, while the public reports of publisher censorship complicity have diminished since 2019 and the reported cases involving Taylor & Francis (p.41) and Brill (p.43). These findings appear to support early perspectives on censorship complicity from within the China studies community (Carrico 2017), comparing the events surrounding CUP's and Springer Nature's public acquiescence to censorship demands.

With CUP, the publisher faced a concerted backlash, and they reversed their position within a matter of days; Springer Nature, on the other hand, faced relatively little opposition among the China studies community in the form of coordinated author boycotts and has not publicly reversed their platform amendments since they were introduced (p.37). At the time of these events, Carrico hypothesised that this difference reflected an early normalisation of

censorship complicity, given also a) the less academically prestigious reputation of the affected Springer Nature titles and b) a more pragmatic approach to censorship among the journals' editors and authors, many of whom have closer ties to China's domestic research community (Carrico 2017). The findings from the interviews offer an evidential basis for some of these claims by highlighting the factional nature of attitudes towards censorship, reported above (p.251); a greater awareness of the issues surrounding *China Quarterly* than later cases; and the gradual absence of wider reporting and boycotting in relation to later cases, following Springer Nature, including the findings from the corpus analysis study, despite press engagement during the course of this research to highlight the escalating nature of censorship complicity in China (Cooper 2022).

8.5.3. Uncertainty and strategic withholding of information about censorship complicity

One of the more consistent findings across the interview study was the widespread and varied uncertainty surrounding the events that form the focus of this research (p.230). This included uncertainty about whether the first reported case, involving CUP, was indeed the first, or whether other publishers had simply concealed their involvement before; the uncertain motivations of China's content regulators and import agencies turning their attention to scholarly content available in English; uncertainty surrounding the initial sources of information regarding CUP and other cases and the timelines surrounding the events; and for the journal editors involved, uncertainty over what their publishing contacts knew, when they gained any knowledge of the events, and the nature and outcomes of their internal decision-making processes.

The publishers expressed difficulties distinguishing between publisher-enforced content suppression and end-user content blocking, i.e. censorship at the publishers' or the users' end in China; scepticism about the veracity of publisher statements regarding their involvement in alleged (self-)censorship; the extent of competitor involvement, given commercial incentive to

comply and tailor content collections; and uncertainty regarding the impacts of censorship complicity (or alternative routes to comply or to resist) for China-based scholars, as outlined earlier.

Many of the interviewees—again, largely publishers—described this climate of uncertainty in terms of a deliberate strategy on behalf of implicated parties and their intermediaries to shroud their own involvement. For these interviewees, commercial sensitivities and imperatives created a major obstacle for information sharing to support a more coordinated response to censorship demands in China. These dynamics of information withholding also occurred within the companies involved. In some cases, publishers withheld information from staff due to concerns about CCP loyalties among China-based staff members. In others, information was withheld to allow for plausible deniability across departments and functions with a customer-facing role, who may be more likely to be asked questions by academic stakeholders about publishers' dealings in China.

Above all, strategic withholding of information was used by censors and their intermediaries alike, with publishers reporting veiled threats and demands from Chinese officials, often verbal, which some interviewees countered by matching ambiguity with ambiguity. Frustration and alienation among academic stakeholders were common consequences of this strategy, with academics (journal editors especially) reporting significant obstacles to gain reliable information about the extent of censorship affecting their publications, while publishers reported a lack of communication and coordination across the publishing industry, including industry trade bodies. These dynamics have hamstrung collaborative efforts to resist censorship within and across participant groups and their associated communities because they lack a shared understanding of the nature and extent of publishers' existing encounters with Chinese research importers and regulators, and the concessions that have been made to retain market access.

8.5.4. Absence of external pressures to force collaborative censorship resistance

While many interviewees expressed support for collaborative forms of censorship resistance (in some cases as a necessary pre-condition for bringing about outcomes that are favourable for the academic communities involved), there was little alignment between the publisher and academic groups over whether collaboration within and across the communities was advantageous or whether collaboration was practically possible without pressures or interventions from external parties (p.244).

Overall, the publishers tended to be more pessimistic about the prospect of cross-community and industry-level collaboration to resist censorship. For publishers, collaborative resistance is constrained by several factors, including competitions and market laws, preventing industry coordination regarding journal sales agreements in China; apathy among government bodies, for example in the UK, to force collaboration and prevent censorship compliance; the entrenchment of individual publishers regarding existing forms of censorship compliance, having gained a competitive advantage in China by maintaining a close relationship with Chinese authorities; structural weaknesses at trade bodies that were undergoing organisational changes at the time of the first cases of censorship complicity; and conflicting interests among the members of those trade bodies, dissuading information sharing as outlined above.

Some of the publishers described the conditions of industry collaboration, which are not currently met, included legal protection to ensure a lack of penalties under competitions and market laws, if publishers share information about sales agreements in China and resist pressure to amend content packages; direct intervention from a governmental agency outside of China, for example the UK's Department of Trade and Industry or the Foreign Office, to force industry-wide coordination; industry guidelines to prevent censorship complicity and establish a 'level playing field', for example, via the Committee on Publication Ethics or STM Association; concerted pressure from the academic sector in ways that would impact publishers' commercial

incentives for compliance, for example, through funder agencies that could place constraints on the types of publication venues that are compliant with their own policies regarding academic freedom; and, as described above, a lack of ambiguity regarding the Chinese government's own position regarding the term-based and legal constraints of research dissemination in China. With these conditions unmet—and a lack of pressure among groups external to the publishing and China-studies research communities to affect change—interviewees were largely sceptical that collaborative resistance would be possible or mutually advantageous.

8.5.5. Lack of consensus regarding the interests of China-based scholars

As above, one of the central pre-conditions of cross-community and publishing industry collaboration is a degree of consensus over the best course of action for publishers to take when confronting censorship demands in China (p.251). There was clear consensus throughout the interviews that complying with censorship demands in any form is inconsistent with participants' own personal values. However, the courses of action that participants tended to support were also dependent upon their assessment of the more favourable outcome for China-based scholars, which was a source of divergence and misalignment within and across participant groups.

The focal point of divergence in the interviews was whether publishers have sound ethical or pragmatic justifications (at all or in certain defined circumstances) to limit access to a small proportion of content in China to preserve access to the majority. In some cases, participants supported outright resistance as a pragmatic negotiation strategy, which may be tempered if this strategy is ineffective. In other cases, hardline resistance was supported again on pragmatic grounds, as a means of preventing creeping censorship demands and content losses. Some interviewees supported this route even if China-based scholars lost access to all published output in the short-term, based on a calculation that the risk to China's research economy would be so great that governmental regulators and importers would be forced to change approach. Other interviewees argued that censorship demands ought to be resisted outright on grounds of

principle, superseding any pragmatic considerations or concerns about the best outcome for China-based scholars. Regarding the so-called 1% vs. 99% bargain (Millward, 2017), four separate positions were identified:

1. Pragmatic compliance
2. Principled compliance
3. Pragmatic resistance
4. Principled resistance

The lack of consensus about the position that best supports the interests of China-based scholars, along with the other outcomes from the interviews regarding barriers to collaborative resistance, are returned to in the recommendations section below (p.316).

8.6. Changing conditions of censorship

The final research question, addressed in this section, centres around the changing conditions of censorship relevant to this thesis:

SQ5: How have the conditions that enable platform-based censorship in China changed over time?

There are three routes to answering this question. The first is to account for the wider contextual changes that have occurred since the start of this research. These are summarised in the context chapter (p.29) and the review of empirical literature regarding censorship in China (p.76). The second set of answers to SQ5 comes from the interview study, which also informed the corpus analysis study (p.262). In the interviews, participants reported first-hand some of the observable trends mentioned above; for example, that the focus of censorship demands in China had moved beyond some of the typical targets, such as Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, among others, to encompass broader social and political issues in China such as discussion of civil society, human

rights, territory disputes, political activism and foreign policy. Participants also reported the capricious and inconstant nature of term-based censorship demands, whereby certain concerns could be considered inadmissible for brief periods, then changed, and new censorship targets introduced without warning.

In terms of the changing context surrounding China's publishing and research culture, some of the publishers interviewed also described dwindling attention on platform-based censorship. For some, these events were overshadowed by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on scholarly publishing, occurring shortly after some of the later reported cases, including emerging concerns regarding the (mis)treatment of Uighur ethnic minority groups in Chinese research; for example, using data gathered from Uighur participants without their consent and for purposes that run counter to their interests (Marcus 2020). While publishers scrutinise research ethics concerns such as this, one publisher interviewee suggested that this change in focus could constitute a newly emerging condition of censorship enablement, diverting attention away from platform-mediated self-censorship (implicating non-Chinese publishers) to China's domestic publishing ethics concerns.

As outlined earlier, this thesis follows an exploratory-sequential, qualitative-quantitative design (p.112). The early findings from the interviews relevant to PQ and SQ5, summarised above, informed a corpus-analysis study to determine whether the term-based conditions of censorship had changed following the *China Quarterly* case, analysed by Wong & Kwong (2019), and to offer some further hypotheses regarding a) newly emerging term-based conditions and b) the contextual markers (if any) associated with term-based censorship. This corpus analysis study generated four central findings, which largely align with and support the findings from the qualitative analysis of interview transcripts.

For the most part, the corpus analysis study suggests that the term-based conditions of censorship affecting English-language scholarship in China have changed, although most articles (93%; 30/450) contained at least one of the red-flag terms that were present in the earlier *China*

Quarterly case. Of the remaining articles, again, the majority (80%; 24/30) contained at least one term that has reportedly triggered censorship in other contexts; typically, terms relating to CCP leaders or controversial political figures and activists, territorial disputes, political movements, or, in one case, the origins of COVID-19.

The sample of 450 articles used from this study was from a total possible dataset of 538 articles (Table 2, p.136); therefore representing 84% of all articles that were suppressed in China via the publisher's online platform. In all cases, the remaining 8,630,474 (as above in Table 2) of available (and suspected uncensored) content included articles that mentioned at least one of the terms present in the CUP case (based on term-based searches on the publishers' platform). This finding supports the interviewees characterisation of research censorship as capricious and inconsistent—also supporting Roberts' (2018) theory of 'porous' censorship, applied in this new context, regarding the (self-)censorship of English-language scholarship.

While the corpus analysis study suggests that the presence of a so-called red-flag term may be neither a necessary or sufficient condition of censorship, some contextual patterns suggest that content may be censored if these terms are used in certain contexts. The findings from the corpus analysis study suggesting, in some cases, close reading and nuanced censorship criteria had been used. In some cases, common contexts aligned with some of the terms and topics that were identified by interviewees as newly (and broadly) sensitive in China, for example, discussion of civil society. Other common contexts suggest broader concerns that were not raised by interviewees, such as discussion of issues relating to local or municipal government and Chinese migration, emigration and immigration (p.273).

Despite areas of convergence and mutual evidential support, between the qualitative and quantitative components of the research, there are also some other points of divergence in some areas. For example, several participants expressed either a lack of knowledge of the extent of censorship or gave answers that implied that they were unaware of cases beyond the first cases involving CUP. In contrast, the scale of content that is unavailable in China due to suspected

self-censorship, as recorded as part of the corpus analysis study, suggests an escalating trend at least for one publisher, which participants did not acknowledge—affecting books and book chapters, which were not discussed by participants as a target for platform-based self-censorship. While this oversight suggests a degree of discontinuity between the findings from the interviews and the corpus analysis study, it does provide further support for the findings reported above regarding uncertainty, normalization and strategic withholding of information. It also offers support for a claim made in one of the interviews, with a senior executive-level publisher, that with the emergence of new ethics concerns in China and dwindling press reporting on censorship concerns following COVID-19, the underlying issues have largely been ‘hushed up’ (Lenore).

8.7. Conclusion

This chapter integrated the outcomes from three components of the research—the theoretical component and the two empirical (qualitative and quantitative components)—to answer the primary research question (PQ) and five secondary research questions (SQ1-5). This chapter also gave an account of the points of convergence and divergence within and across the three components, consistent with the exploratory sequential design and pragmatist paradigm (p.114). Several points of convergence were identified, including a degree of latent consensus regarding both academic notions of censorship and self-censorship and the folk understanding and applications of these concepts in the interview transcripts—understood, broadly, as politically motivated constraints on information access involving active measures, on the part of a publisher, to enforce those constraints. Several points of divergence were also identified, particularly regarding the known extent of suspected publisher involvement in censorship—a point of divergence between interviewees and between the reported extent of censorship and the observable trends from the corpus analysis study—and the best outcome for both China-based

scholars and the global scholarly communication industry, rooted to a greater or lesser extent in principles or pragmatic considerations. The overall findings from the thesis are summarised in the final concluding chapter that follows, alongside a series of recommendations for further research and publishing industry-oriented applications and outcomes.

CHAPTER NINE: Thesis Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1. Introduction

This final chapter of the thesis summarises the central findings and outcomes of the research.

The first section recaps the aims and knowledge gaps motivating the research questions and design. The second section summarises the combined finding from the theoretical and empirical components of the research. In third and final section of this chapter, six recommendations arising from the research will be given in two sub-sections dealing with recommendations for further research and for publication industry applications, followed by concluding statements regarding the wider outcomes and implications of this doctoral research.

9.2. Recap of research gap and design

This is the first in-depth study using predominantly qualitative methods to investigate the involvement of English-language scholarly publishers (headquartered or based entirely outside of mainland China) in Chinese censorship practices affecting online research journals. There are five aims motivating this research, each relating to one or more of the research questions (p. 22). The first is to understand the conditions that enable or constrain censorship in this context (relating to PQ, p.110). The second is to explore the conditions under which disruptions in the dissemination of scholarship in China, by scholarly publishers, constitute censorship or self-censorship (SQ1, p.111). The third is to identify and describe any known impacts of censorship complicity for the communities affected by it (SQ2). The fourth is to understand the constraints and potential advantages of collaborative forms of resistance (SQ3-4). The fifth is to explore how and the extent to which China's censorship criteria, affecting online scholarship, have

changed following the first reported case implicating Cambridge University Press and the *China Quarterly* (SQ5).

This thesis answers these questions through three phases of research. The first of these is the theoretical component, which aims to define censorship in the context of online research distribution, addressing SQ1. This component was followed by one of two empirical studies, as part of a mixed-methods exploratory sequential design (p.112): an interview-based study involving the participation of 12 publishing professionals and 12 academics, segmented by their level of involvement in the research focus, their seniority, career level, gender, geography, role function and (for the publishers) the organisational structure of their employer. This interview-based study is the primary empirical component that addresses all of the thesis research questions (PQ and SQ 1-5), using a semi-structured topic guide and a vignette—reproduced in the annexe (p.370)—and thematic analysis to generate findings from the transcript data. This qualitative component precedes and informs the quantitative component: a corpus analysis study of 450 journal articles that are unavailable in China due to suspected censorship concerns. Together with the interviews, this quantitative component addresses SQ5 regarding the evolving censorship criteria affecting online scholarship in China. The integrated findings from these three components (given in the preceding chapter, p.280) are summarised in the section that follows.

9.3. Summary of research findings

The central findings from the combined theoretical and empirical components of this research are given here and structured according to the primary and secondary questions (PQ and SQ1-5, p.22). Each finding is numbered and linked to the full narrative in the preceding chapter for an explanation of the underlying evidence.

9.3.4. Enabling and constraining censorship of online research journals (PQ)

1. China's political interests and economic influence (combined) are the primary conditions of censorship enablement affecting online scholarship (p.281).
2. Term-based conditions of censorship are applied broadly, inconsistently and may be circumvented without punishment, while aiming at widespread self-censorship on behalf of scholarly publishers (and their intermediaries) operating in China (p.283).
3. Journal authors will boycott complicit publishers if doing so will not adversely impact job security and career progression (p.285).
4. Resistance to publisher-enforced self-censorship may be motivated by pragmatic concerns about opportunity costs and academic reputation, rather than purely values-based considerations (p.285).

These findings suggest that the structural conditions of censorship complicity in China are deeply rooted and likely to cause further instances of self-censorship in future. China's research economy is rapidly expanding at a time when publishers are facing significant economic constraints and competition in more mature markets. At the same time, China's research and higher education environment is subject to strict political constraints that are increasingly exported overseas via forms of economic and political coercion. The willingness of some publishers to self-censor their publishing platforms under such conditions suggests that similar pressures and dynamics may result in self-censorship in other lucrative, emerging research economies—for example, in India or South America. Nonetheless, the ability of some publishers, like Cambridge University Press, to continue to trade and distribute research publications in China after reversing their initial decision to self-censor *China Quarterly* points to a degree of flexibility and leverage among the larger players in scholarly publishing in their dealings with Chinese research importers. Circumvention of censorship constraints does not necessarily

come with strict penalties, but uncertainty over the likely outcome contributes to a climate of self-censorship. Academics may be motivated to boycott complicit publishers, acting as a constraint on self-censorship, but only when those instances of self-censorship are publicly known and affect communities of authors who face limited personal or career-based consequences when boycotting implicated journals.

9.3.5. Defining censorship of the online scholarly record in China (SQ1)

5. The efforts of publishers to take active measures to enforce politically motivated constraints on information access affecting journal articles and metadata are consistent with established theories of institutional self-censorship (p.179).
6. Affected academic and publisher communities are broadly consistent in their understanding and application of the concepts of censorship, self-censorship and censorship complicity, as applied to publishers removing articles from journals or suppressing journal articles in platform search functions (p.198).
7. The thesis defines the removal and suppression of journal articles and associated metadata as editorial self-censorship affecting the online scholarly record as an interlinked *hypertext* (p.173).
8. This thesis and three of the interview participants consider the use of amended sales packages containing only those journals that research importers request to purchase a boundary case of censorship complicity that can be distinguished, conceptually and ethically, from the removal or suppression of journal articles and associated metadata (p.179). The majority of participants (21/24) gave responses that suggested no difference, ethically or conceptually, between amending sales packages, journal articles or platform search returns.

This set of findings, regarding definitions of censorship, suggests consensus within the academic literature on censorship and the affected communities that removing or suppressing journal articles (and associated metadata) to suit political interests is a form of self-censorship. As will be returned to below, this consensus could form the basis of an industry definition of platform based self-censorship of the scholarly record. Differences of opinion about the course of action that align best with the interests of China-based scholars are not rooted in different conceptions of self-censorship; although there was some disagreement about whether amending journal sales packages is also a form of self-censorship—a position that does not appear to be supported by industry consensus, which would be necessary to establish shared guidelines to prevent this outcome in response to censorship demands.

9.3.6. Consequences of censorship complicity affecting the online scholarly record in China (SQ2)

9. Despite concerted backlash forcing CUP to change its position in China, the lack of scrutiny of other (mostly commercial) publishers has enabled an escalation of self-censorship practices affecting over 28,000 items of academic content (Cooper 2022; see p.136), with limited reputational penalties or public acknowledgement.
10. Instances of censorship complicity have minimally impacted authors of affected content, while entrenching divisions within and between affected communities about the best course of action to sustain access to China (p.204).
11. Censorship complicity disproportionally affects China-based scholars, who face personal risks when accessing or citing censored journal articles (p.194).

As with PQ, this set of findings suggest a strong likelihood that self-censorship practices affecting the online scholarly record will persist—in China, possibly elsewhere—given the limited

reputational, financial and personal consequences for the implicated parties beyond the threat of author boycotting, which will only occur under specific conditions outlined above. Both the publishing and academic communities are divided over the appropriate compromises to sustain access to China, entrenching divisions within and between the affected communities. Meanwhile, the forms of self-censorship that some publishers have enabled are actively preventing China-based scholars from participating in global scholarly communication on a par with non-Chinese peers, who do not face penalties (real or perceived) by publishing, accessing or citing censored scholarship.

9.3.7. Barriers and advantages of collective action to resist censorship complicity in China (SQ3-4)

12. Affected communities deny, downplay and (re)distribute agency to resist censorship in ways that prevent collective action (p.219).
13. Affected communities are increasingly normalising censorship complicity, which also curtails resistance (p.225).
14. Knowledge (and uncertainty) about censorship is managed strategically by censors and self-censors alike, causing further fragmentation within the affected communities (p.230).
15. Industry-wide collaboration to resist censorship in scholarly publishing relies on external pressures and financial penalties for non-compliance (p.244).
16. The affected communities are divided over their perception of the best outcome for China-based scholars (p.251).

Overall, the thesis and findings suggest that collaborative action is necessary to effectively prevent self-censorship, given the competitive advantages that are available to publishers if they are not required (through some form of industry-level enforcement) to resist censorship pressures. However, there are significant barriers preventing industry-level coordination and

collaboration between publishing and academic communities. None of the affected parties or their associated organisational bodies has assumed responsibility to mediate censorship resistance, either at the individual publisher level or across the industry. A wider climate of strategic information withholding, uncertainty, and normalisation of self-censorship has stymied cross-publisher efforts to share information and best practice when encountering censorship demands, including concerns about anti-trust regulations preventing industry coordination related to regional sales strategies. To bring about greater coordination, the reputational and financial costs of compliance with censorship demands would need to be more acute, perhaps through pressure and mandates from external parties acting as a coalition, including government agencies or legislators, research funders and institutional librarians (and their associated trade bodies). As it stands, the affected scholarly communications industry is divided over the best course of action for China-based scholars, acting as a constraint on spontaneous forms of collaboration or coordination to resist censorship, while also facing strong financial incentives and limited penalties to self-censor.

9.3.8. Changing conditions of censorship affecting online scholarship in China (SQ5)

17. The majority of term-based conditions affecting journal articles (93%) are consistent with the first-reported case concerning *China Quarterly* (p.269).
18. The focus of censorship affecting online scholarship has shifted from narrow term-based constraints to broader social and political issues in China (p.269).
19. The presence of a so-called red-flag term is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of censorship in all cases (p.273).
20. Red-flag terms accompany censorship in certain contexts that suggest nuanced censorship criteria, beyond solely term-based criteria (p.273).

The findings under SQ5 illustrate both the consistent term-based criteria that recur in most instances of censorship affecting scholarship in China—territorial concerns, the contested legacy of Chinese communism and key political figures, forms of social unrest, alleged human rights abuses—while also suggesting an expansion in their scope and application. With this greater breadth of censorship criteria comes the greater diversity and scale of affected content, now and in the future, beyond political science, encompassing the full range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and (with the censorship of COVID-19 research) disciplines in core scientific and medical fields. This trend raises the level of risk posed to the scholarly communications industry by censorship in China, with the potential to implicate far more publishers beyond those that have market share in China area studies or political science. The corpus analysis study has also revealed significant variance and a lack of consistency in the application of suspected censorship criteria, applied in some contexts but not others, and in ways that suggest a degree of contingency and human intervention, rather than purely mechanical, blanket application using automated term identification tools. This presents challenges for predicting the types of content that may face content restrictions in China, which may reflect a deliberate strategy on behalf of China’s media regulators to promote broader vetting and self-censorship at the point of distribution by non-Chinese publishers and Chinese research importers.

9.4. Contributions to new knowledge

As outlined above, this is the first in-depth study using predominantly qualitative methods to investigate the involvement of English-language scholarly publishers (headquartered or based entirely outside of mainland China) in Chinese censorship practices affecting online research journals. As outlined in the literature review (cross-ref), there is also a lack of qualitative studies in the wider literature on censorship complicity in China that investigate the conditions of complicity

from the standpoint of complicit intermediaries. The research therefore contributes new knowledge in the study of censorship complicity in journal publishing and other sectors China. The qualitative component of this study revealed that journal authors will boycott complicit publishers if doing so will not adversely impact job security and career progression; that resistance to censorship is often motivated by pragmatic concerns about academic reputation; that there is a widespread tendency among journal publishers to deny, downplay and (re)distribute agency to resist censorship in ways that prevent collective action; that both publishers and academics have begun to normalise censorship complicity in China; that both communities share broadly similar conceptions of censorship and censorship complicity; and that both communities are divided and misaligned about the best course of action to counter censorship demands in the interests of China-based scholars. These findings support novel industry recommendations outlined below.

This is also the first study of censorship affecting scholarly journals to use structured IP comparisons and corpus analysis tools as an observational method to analyse and identify suspected censorship criteria. Up until now, the potential scale of this form of censorship was not known. This thesis has revealed for the first time that over 28,000 items of content have been suppressed on one publisher's online platform in ways that suggest censorship complicity. Although the censorship criteria appear to be broadly consistent with earlier studies (Wong & Kwong 2019), as detailed above, at least 7% are censored according to criteria that have not been previously reported. These new criteria appear to signal a shift from narrow term-based constraints to broader social and political issues in China and, in some cases, suggest close reading of articles and nuanced censorship criteria, as opposed to blanket application of term-based criteria.

Finally, Chapter 5 of this thesis presents the first attempt to combine work in political theory, analytic philosophy and theory of the text to provide a novel theoretical contribution to the study of the scholarly record. This includes a novel argument that the scholarly record functions as a *hypertext* and that amendments to journal content platforms constitute editorial interventions;

therefore, removing journal articles and suppressing metadata to serve political interests is a form of editorial self-censorship on the part of the publisher, affecting the online scholarly record as an interlinked *hypertext*.

9.5. Thesis recommendations

In this section, a series of recommendations are given regarding the central (and combined) findings from the theoretical chapter that defines censorship affecting the online scholarly record, alongside the interview study and corpus analysis study. Each of these recommendations is intended to advance the theoretical and empirical study of censorship in this context and to provide some guidance on suggested routes for implementing changes in publishing practice from this exploratory study of platform-based censorship complicity affecting online scholarly journals in China.

9.5.1. Recommendations for future research on platform-based censorship complicity in China

As described in the introduction (p.21) and research design (p.109), the scope of this thesis is the censorship of online scholarly journals in China by scholarly publishers operating in the region. While this scope informed the theoretical and empirical components, both the theory of censorship and the empirical findings have implications for the more general study of platform-based censorship complicity; i.e. self-censorship by publishers on behalf of an external authority affecting publishing platforms in China, encompassing the full range of scholarly content, not limited to journals. This section explains the ways that this broader subject of study could be advanced, building on the research findings and limitations.

9.5.1.a. Exploring broader applications and expanded definitions of platform-based (self-)censorship

In the theory chapter and the discussion above, censorship was defined as any activity to remove content or to prevent access to information that would otherwise be publicly accessible (i.e. article metadata) on behalf of an external authority. This definition was applied to two reported cases of censorship complicity: 1. Removing journal articles from publisher platforms and 2. amending platform search functionality to prevent journal articles from appearing in search results. It was not applied to cases where publishers allow sales agents to remove journals from sales packages at the request of a content purchaser, assuming the underlying content was unaltered, and all article metadata (including records of publication) remained accessible via the publisher's platform.

There are some objections that may be levied against this restrictive notion and application of censorship. The first is that it is at odds with the common conceptualisations and applications in the interview study, which stressed the significance of 'active measures' on behalf of publishers to amend (or to allow others to amend) content collections—i.e. subscription packages for paywalled journals, purchased on behalf of Chinese institutions—in ways that pander to political interests, regardless of the impacts on information access in China. There were other routes to comply with censorship demands that likewise sidestepped the narrower application offered that were not known in advance of the interviews, for example, 'local loading' whereby publishers provide bespoke platform solutions for Chinese institutions that may also involve tailored collections of content based on the political acceptability of the underlying scholarship. This thesis therefore remains agnostic on the question of to what extent the tailoring of sales packages and content delivery mechanisms constitute censorship, beyond the proprietary platforms that publishers use to distribute scholarly content globally.

Further research ought to test and to critically examine the definition given here in relation to broader notions of, for example, commercial censorship (Loubere 2020),

particularly when considering the set of related concerns raised by some interviewees regarding the unavailability of scholarly content in regions like China, and others, due to financial constraints. **Future theoretical work in this area may benefit from embedding a theory of platform-based political censorship, given here, within a higher-order theory or taxonomy of related forms of censorship and withholding of access to information,** as one among other examples of knowledge inequity resulting from commercial models of scholarly content production and dissemination. Such a study would need to also account for the inequities and censorship dynamics brought to bear on Open Access (OA) models, as well as subscription-access models. As this thesis has highlighted, OA does not preclude censorship concerns and content unavailability. Under either model, publishers may face external pressures to amend their platforms in ways that prevent access to content. Moreover, the imperative for publishers to amend their platforms in more drastic ways and remove evidence of published scholarship is arguably stronger in the case of OA, as the paywall cannot be used as a ‘soft’ mechanism of gatekeeping to comply with China’s regulations, without having to remove wholesale article metadata as in some of the reported cases (p.41).

9.5.1.b. Establishing generalisable findings with larger sample sizes within communities of interest

This thesis follows a largely qualitative approach that allowed for further exploration and triangulation of findings with a follow-up quantitative study (in this case, involving corpus analysis methods). The interview component, as a standalone empirical study of the conditions and consequences of censorship complicity, identified some emerging patterns in the data that could benefit from a quantitative survey design, aimed to determine generalisability across the communities affected. **It would be valuable for future empirical work on this under-studied subject to establish whether these patterns are representative, for example, with a follow-up survey of scholarly publishers and academics working in some of the fields that have been affected and implicated by platform-based censorship complicity.**

This thesis recommends further empirical investigation into the following findings from the interview study. The first is the claim (supported by the qualitative analysis given here) that there is broad consensus regarding how the concept of censorship is understood and applied, suggesting latent consensus over the types of publisher interventions that constitute censorship complicity (p.198). **The vignette used (p.300) in this study to establish whether and what types of actions constitute censorship complicity, out of the publicly reported actions and possible routes of compliance and resistance, could be adapted for a quantitative survey drawing on a larger sample.** This survey could be distributed by some of the professional organisations tied to the communities of interest. The purpose would be to establish whether this latent consensus is representative across the two communities of interest and at a scale that would influence industry bodies to revise or establish new guidelines, such as the Committee on Publication Ethics.

Beyond shared concepts of censorship, the interviews and thematic analysis suggested some patterns in terms of the positions adopted by academics in relation to author boycotting and censorship resistance. These were given in four categories (p.299). These categories were associated with career status and security, with academics in a more established position in their careers being more likely to outwardly boycott publishers that were perceived as enabling research censorship in China. Again, **the validity and generalisability of these findings could be supported by a larger scale quantitative survey, which could focus on known cases of censorship complicity and structured questions about the extent to which these reported cases have influenced participants' willingness to continue to publish with implicated publishers.** If coupled with structured demographic data about participants and segmented by career level, these early findings could be confirmed or refuted—and doing so would help to establish both the dynamics, conditions and potential risks of author boycotting if publishers comply with censorship demands in future.

Moreover, this study involved interviews with two China-based academics, which offered some unique perspectives on the issue both of author boycotting (p.239) but also the supposed interests of China-based scholars, when deliberating over an appropriate way of dealing with censorship demands levied at publishers (p.251). Given the widespread misalignment and uncertainty over the best outcomes for China-based scholars, and the relative absence of China-based or Chinese participants in this study (for reasons outlined in the design, p.133), **a follow-up study ought to explore the research themes in greater depth within the China-based scholarly communities that have been affected by platform-based censorship complicity.** Such a study would aim to determine, using qualitative and/or quantitative social science methods, the patterns and factions within this broad community—particularly in China area studies or political science—related to the conditions of censorship resistance, publisher boycotting, and the outcomes that align best with participants’ personal and professional values, along with more pragmatic considerations regarding personal safety and career development.

The findings from a study of this kind would enable publishers to make evidence-informed decisions about the interests for China-based scholars when considering the ethics of wholesale censorship resistance versus more pragmatic solutions that allow for content limitations in some areas to preserve access to a larger majority of content in China. This evidence could also support industry discussions aimed at brokering a more collaborative effort to prevent censorship compliance, even if doing so results in widespread access obstacles in the short term.

9.5.1.c. Bottom-up corpus analysis study that aims to identify new term-based censorship criteria using a comparative dataset of uncensored material

The corpus analysis study presented four central findings, summarised above (p.277), from a sample of 450 articles that are unavailable in China via a publisher’s platform, regarding the term-based conditions of censorship complicity. This study showed that these term-based

conditions have changed over time (p.267) and the scale and variety of content affected has increased (p.136). The study was inconclusive as to the exact terms that have triggered censorship in each individual case, but it highlighted some likely candidates that are known to trigger censorship elsewhere (p.269) alongside topic-based patterns that suggest nuanced censorship criteria. The design for this corpus analysis study was largely top-down, i.e. it involved counting term frequencies across a corpus of censored literature using a pre-determined list of terms that are associated with censorship. The analysis of the contexts within which the terms featured was interpretative; it involved close reading of articles to form initial hypotheses about the likely conditions of censorship.

Other studies from the literature on censorship in China take a more statistical, bottom-up approach to term identification (Tiffert 2017) as described in the review of empirical literature (p.76). What sets these studies apart is a comparative dataset of uncensored material against which the censored material may be compared, according to the usage, frequency and context of terms that are in the text data. This approach allows for more sophisticated statistical inferences about the likelihood that terms in certain contexts account for censorship due to their inverse frequency or lack of certain contextual markers in the comparative dataset.

The present study did not use a comparative statistical approach due to the limitations of the research design (p.141). The corpus analysis component was exploratory, aiming to first establish whether and to what extent the term-based conditions had changed over time, before suggesting routes for later research. Such a study ought to account for the variety of censored content types beyond research articles, as indicated by the data collection (p.136), encompassing conference proceedings, reference work entries and book chapters. Future research ought to involve a representative dataset of censored content from each content type, segmented by subject area, with a comparative dataset for each content type drawn from uncensored material in the same subject areas to allow for direct comparisons of publications within the narrow fields of specialism they relate to.

A comparative corpus analysis would use statistical tools to determine censorship criteria, using uncensored content both as a means of establishing inverse frequencies and contextual markers, but also as a form of validation data to determine whether and to what extent the terms that are suspected to trigger censorship feature in the dataset of uncensored material. Doing so would allow for a more empirically robust set of hypotheses regarding the terms that trigger censorship in all cases, or only in certain contexts, and what those contexts are. To scale up the study in this way, **it would also be advisable to use automated IP-comparison and data scraping tools**. The manual processes involved in building a dataset of censored material for the present study (p.136) was one of the limitations preventing a larger scale, comparative approach.

9.5.2. Recommendations for industry guidelines to address platform-based censorship in scholarly publishing

This section will now turn to the recommendations for new industry guidelines and practices arising from the combined research findings, summarised above, under the primary and secondary research concerns. These recommendations presuppose a critical stance towards censorship complicity in scholarly publishing, notwithstanding the pragmatic considerations given above. Therefore, these recommendations stem largely from the findings that relate to the primary conditions of censorship complicity in scholarly publishing (p.281); they aim to address both the known consequences (p.290) and the barriers to collaborative action (p.293).

9.5.2.a. Using shared concept of censorship complicity as a basis for an industry definition

As outlined in the research context (p.27), two publishing bodies issued statements following publicly reported instances of platform-based censorship in China: the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the Association of University Presses (AUP). In neither case did the publishing body offer a formalised or agreed industry definition of censorship or censorship

complicity in relation to online journal platforms. The definition offered in this thesis and the composite definition from the interviews align with the AUP statement. This thesis argues that efforts to remove articles from the online editions of journals or amend platform search functionality in such a way that articles appear to be non-existent—at the request of Chinese research importers, acting under the instruction of China’s content regulators—constitute a form of censorship complicity.

The common notion of censorship given in the theory chapter and the interviews is that these actions involve active measures on the part of a publisher to limit the availability of information about scholarly content on a publisher’s platform to suit the political interests of an external authority. The definition offered in the theory chapter did not include in its scope content access (as opposed to public metadata) limitations resulting from a sales negotiation between a content provider (publisher) and purchaser (research importer), even when the purchaser deliberately opts to not purchase content due to political considerations. The interviews suggested differences of opinion on this point, although most (21/24) defined efforts on behalf of a publisher to remove journals containing politically sensitive articles from sales packages sold in China at the request of importers as another example of censorship complicity.

To move the industry closer towards coordination on the issue of censorship pressures and complicity in China, **this thesis recommends that the definition and application offered here is used as a basis for a minimally acceptable definition at the industry level, ideally adopted by COPE or another ethics body in scholarly publishing.** This industry definition would set out objections to the types of activity it applies to, i.e. efforts on behalf of publishers to prevent China-based platform users from accessing journal article metadata, for example, by removing records of publication from journals, or amending a platform’s search functionality, or also, in the case of the publisher involved in the corpus analysis study, introducing IP-based page access blocks for implicated journal articles when accessed in China.

The interviews suggested unanimity, among the represented communities, with regards to the application of the concept of censorship and censorship complicity in this specific context, aligning also with the intent of the COPE and AUP statements and the definition offered in the theory chapter. This shared concept and application of censorship and censorship complicity could be used as the basis for coordinated action to constrain censorship practices involving scholarly publishers operating in China, as outlined in the recommendations that follow.

9.5.2.b. Form a coalition of external stakeholders aimed at encouraging industry coordination, including librarians and funders

As was described in the interview study (p.185), the conditions of censorship compliance within scholarly publishing are largely structural, having to do with the wider commercial pressures publishers face (for-profit, not-for-profit, and university presses) to continue to trade in the world's largest market for scholarly output (Zhu and Liu 2020; Lu 2022) without falling foul of China's content regulations. Faced with these structural dynamics, this study suggests that not all publishers will change their rules of engaging with the Chinese market when faced with censorship concerns, even if those concerns are made public, without additional pressure from external parties—encompassing governmental bodies, academic societies, or groups of potential authors who are motivated to boycott. The interviews also highlighted the unwillingness of governmental departments to engage with this issue at the time of some of the more high-profile instances of censorship complicity, particularly in the UK (p.244). Academic groups and authors, including those working in areas affected by China's content restrictions, are not uniformly motivated to boycott or resist censorship. For many—especially those who occupy more precarious positions in academia, or who occupy a more pragmatic stance to maximising knowledge access in the region—the risks of resistance are too great and publisher compliance is endorsed, tacitly, by the absence of dissent among academic stakeholders (p.295).

To move the publishing industry towards a position of collaborative resistance, this thesis **recommends expanding the parameters for the communities of interest beyond academics and publishers to also encompass research librarians and funders.** These two categories of stakeholder in the scholarly publishing ecosystem have proved pivotal in changing industry dynamics, such as Open Access business models (Bordons, González-Albo, and Moreno-Solano 2023). On the issue of censorship complicity, these stakeholders have remained conspicuously absent from the wider industry discussion and commentary, despite the clear impacts on the availability of scholarly resources in China—typically the domain of research librarians. As this research has shown, there are emerging implications for Open Access journal articles and book chapters that are also becoming increasingly hard for China-based scholars to access due to politically-motivated content constraints, enforced by publishers.

Research funders ought to consider whether geographic content access constraints amount to an infringement of Open Access mandates, which publishers are required to comply with under funder, institutional and consortia-level agreements. Likewise, research librarians ought to consider that publisher-mediated access constraints have led to the unavailability of core metadata concerning the scholarly record in China, including DOI links leading to empty pages in ways that fall below the standards set by bodies such as the Committee on Publications Ethics retractions guidelines (COPE, n.d.) (given the unacknowledged removal of components of the scholarly record) and also of those set by the DOI Foundation (DOI Foundation 2023).

In the event of further public reports of platform-based self-censorship involving publishers who are bound by the terms and guarantees of Open Access agreements and membership of the various bodies listed above—and in the absence of spontaneous cross-publisher initiatives to counter these practices—a wider coalition of interested parties ought to be formed. This coalition could encompass academic groups and societies within the affected fields, research librarians and associated bodies, and funders of affected humanities and social sciences scholarship. It could effect change through a coordinated boycott

of complicit publishers' services combined with clear policies, at the funding level, regarding the geographic universality of Open Access including content metadata hosted on publisher's online platforms. This coordinated external pressure on the publishing industry could form the basis of a galvanising principle to force collaborative action in ways that will be outlined in the following recommendation.

9.5.2.c. Create level playing field for China-market engagement with clear rules and procedures for cross-publisher initiatives to counter platform self-censorship

This third and final industry recommendation from the thesis is predicated on the preceding two.

Having established a common conceptual framework for censorship complicity and facing coordinated external pressure from academic, librarian and funder stakeholders to affect change, this recommendation sets out the ways that publishers could work together to tackle platform-based censorship demands and what a common set of objectives might look like. The first step is to establish a way of engaging in industry-level discussions—in the open, or through confidential channels, mediated by industry trade bodies—about the outcomes of sales negotiations in China that have resulted in censorship concerns without falling foul of anti-trust legislation. As it stands, there are public sets of guidelines that aim to establish rules of conduct for industry-level discussion, from organisations like the Association of Learned and Society Publishers (ALPSP).

For example, at ALPSP events and meetings, publishers may not

discuss with any competitor any future intentions or proposals relating to the level of costs, prices or components of costs and prices such as discounts; disclose to any competitor individual sales figures or market share data less than two years old; discuss with any competitor the timing of any price changes; discuss specific business policy changes intended to deal with competitive challenges; discuss with any competitor your relationship with an individual customer or author.²²

²² Registrant information received via email ahead of the ALPSP annual conference in Manchester, UK, 11-13th September 2024

While these rules appear to prohibit the type of information exchange that would be required to mediate a coordinated response to censorship concerns, they do allow for de-contextualised and anonymized discussion of industry trends without naming specific partners, sales deals or (above all) pricing strategies. As the same set of guidelines stipulates, publishers may

discuss general experiences and historic price information, provided that it does not allow your competitors to predict your future behaviour; discuss lessons you have learnt, possible solutions to industry-wide problems and "best practice" approaches—but not if they involve discussion of the prohibited issues mentioned above; exchange through an appropriate third party previous year cost, price and sales figures for circulation in aggregated and anonymised form.²³

This thesis has shown that there is an urgent need for publishers to explore and establish best practice approaches to censorship concerns in China. Coordinated campaigns of boycotting and funding mandates could minimise the competitive advantage for publishers to comply with China's censorship demands; the disincentives for sharing information at the industry level could likewise be mitigated. By establishing a level playing field whereby publishers face financial, reputational or regulatory disincentives to comply with censorship demands, e.g. through loss of submissions, subscriptions or Open Access revenue from outside of China, the industry could find renewed incentives to establish guidelines and codes of practice to counter these demands.

The next step would be for publishers to share examples of best practice from within their own organisations of how they have adapted their own business practices and ethics guidelines to counter censorship, as reported in the interviews (p.212), for the benefit of other publishers who may face similar concerns in future—particularly given the expanding censorship criteria demonstrated by the corpus analysis study (p.269). These reported organisational changes

²³ See previous footnote

included tracking and escalation of censorship concerns across business functions to senior leadership, contractual obligations on behalf of authors and editors to mitigate censorship compliance, and expanded ethics boards and guidelines to counter censorship, encompassing also sales negotiations, beyond editorial decision making.

For publishers who have already made compromises in terms of the availability of content in China on political grounds, there are still unexplored topics for industry-level standards that could determine how (if at all) geographic content restrictions due to censorship concerns should be flagged and implemented, if publishers are unable to arrive at an alternative route to preserve wider content access in China—particularly when Open Access content is actively constrained by publishers to comply with content regulations. This could include some form of platform-mediated flag or content disclaimer to explain to China-based users the cause of the unavailability of underlying content, e.g. the article html, XML or PDF, while preserving access to the core metadata (for example, authorship details, titles, abstracts, references, DOI, date and place of publication). The ability of some publishers to navigate China's content regulations without redacting this core information regarding the scholarly record suggests that platform alterations resulting in the loss or suppression of article metadata may not be necessary, from a regulatory perspective, while they may be more commercially advantageous or technically expedient. Greater industry-level alignment and cooperation through best-practice guidelines could help to dissuade these more egregious examples of censorship complicity in the publishing industry.

Finally, in terms of the monitoring of publisher compliance with industry standards and enforcement of (at least reputational) penalties, the scholarly publishing industry could look to other sectors that have encountered parallel concerns in the Chinese market. For example, as outlined in the literature review, there are parallel concerns in the tech sector that led to the formation of the Global Network Initiative (GNI) and a corporate social responsibility framework for global information access (p.92). The ability of US tech sector to coordinate in

such a way, through a body like GNI, suggests that a similar route is in principle possible for the scholarly communications industry notwithstanding the relative apathy that the industry faces from governmental bodies in the countries where many of the industry leaders are headquartered. For the industry to work together in this way, however, it will take a coordinated coalition of other communities of interest, beyond scholarly publishing, in the face of growing instances of publisher-mediated censorship in China.

9.6. Concluding remarks

This research has uncovered the escalating scope and scale of censorship constraints in China affecting online scholarly content. The persistence and expansion of these concerns suggests that self-censorship will continue to be a price that must be paid to secure access to the country's rapidly expanding research economy. Unless a more robust coalition is formed to resist censorship pressures in the region, powerful structural motivations will push individual publishers ever more deeply into an entanglement with the Chinese state. While many scholarly publishers operating in China have found ways to navigate the country's expansive and opaque content restrictions without engaging in active measures to self-censor their online platforms in the region, others appear to be actively engaged in forms of digital self-censorship that represent a bifurcation in the global scholarly record along political and ideological lines.

This thesis has given an account of why and how these trends could be reversed. Prominent trade bodies in scholarly publishing could adopt a shared concept of self-censorship that explicitly addresses the removal of journal content and metadata to suit political sensitivities. An industry body could establish common frameworks, standards and channels for information sharing to combat censorship concerns in ways that do not fall foul of anti-trust legislation (comparable to the Global Network Initiative). Academic stakeholders could collaborate more actively with research funders, librarians and government agencies in the countries where

scholarly publishers are headquartered to apply external pressure to resist censorship demands. Above all, as a bloc, the global scholarly communications industry could realise its collective strength as custodians of the record of scholarly and scientific knowledge upon which China's research and development agenda relies.

Shared understanding, knowledge, responsibility and trust are preconditions to any form of coordinated action, within or external to the scholarly communication industry. As it stands, the actions of some scholarly publishers to undercut their competitors and their own stated values has actively eroded trust within the industry and its associated academic communities. Nevertheless, in pursuit of these preconditions, this research offers fresh insight into the scale of the challenges facing the industry and the potential for constructive dialogue to counteract self-censorship tendencies in China's lucrative research economy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Glossary of Censored Terms

TERM	DESCRIPTION	CENSORSHIP SOURCE
AI WEIWEI	Chinese contemporary artist and activist—openly critical of Chinese government’s human rights record.	(Weiwei 2017)
BO XILAI	Former Chinese Communist Party chief in the Chongqing municipality, who was the subject of a public scandal involving the expulsion of the city’s police chief, Wang Lijun, after Bo’s wife was named by Wang as a suspect in the murder of British businessman Neil Haywood.	(BBC News 2012b)
COVID-19	The infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus—the first reported cases emerged in a wet market in Wuhan, China.	(C. Chen 2022)
CULTURAL REVOLUTION*	Ideological movement in China, lasting from 1966 until Mao Zedong’s death in 1976, leading to widespread political and social upheaval and violence.	(Wong and Kwong 2019)
DENG XIAOPING	Former Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, from 1978 to 1983, leading China through a period of transformative reforms towards a socialist market economy.	(Bury 2013)
DIAOYU ISLANDS	An archipelago of uninhabited islands that are the subject of an ongoing territorial dispute between China, Japan and Taiwan, also known as the Senkaku or Tiaoyutai Islands.	(Cairns and Carlson 2016)
FALUN GONG*	A spiritual movement founded in China by its leader Li Hongzhi in 1992, which has faced a campaign of suppression and religious persecution by the Chinese Communist Party since the late 1990s.	(Wong and Kwong 2019)
FANG LIZHI*	Chinese astrophysicist and political activist who played a pivotal role in China’s pro-democracy student movement in the 1980s, culminating	(Wong and Kwong 2019)

	in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.	
GAO XINGJIAN*	Chinese-French writer, painter and Nobel laureate, who left China following the Cultural Revolution, and whose works were censored during and after this period.	(Wong and Kwong 2019)
GUO JINLONG	Chinese politician and former mayor of Beijing (2008-2012), whose name became a censored keyword on Chinese social media during the Beijing floods of 2012.	(BBC News 2012a)
HONG KONG*	Special administrative region of China and focal point of significant pro-democracy protests since 2014 due to growing CCP influence over political appointments and the erosion of civil rights and freedoms.	(Wong and Kwong 2019)
HU JINTAO	Former President (2003-13) and General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (2002-2012), whose name became a censored keyword in 2022, following widespread speculation and media attention surrounding the 20 th National Congress of the CCP, where Hu was escorted out of the congress hall during the closing ceremony.	(Radio Free Asia 2022)
JIANG ZEMIN	Former President (1993-2003) and General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (1989-2002), whose name became a censored keyword following Jiang's death in 2022, which coincided with protests in China against the CCP's 'zero-Covid' policy.	(BBC News 2022a)
LI KEQIANG	Former premier of China (2013-23), who became the focus of censorship efforts when, in 2023, Li died of a heart attack, prompting a public appraisal of his political legacy and comparisons with Xi Jinping.	(Knockel and Dirks 2023)
LIU XIAOBO	Chinese intellectual, human rights activist and Nobel laureate, whose death, in 2017, and legacy is the subject of widespread censorship in China.	(BBC News 2017)
MAO ZEDONG*	Chinese communist revolutionary, founder of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and leader, as Chairman Mao, until his death in 1976.	(Wong and Kwong 2019)

MAOIST/ISM	The branch of Marxist-Leninist political thought associated with Mao Zedong and China's official ideology during Mao's rule.	See Mao Zedong (Wong and Kwong 2019)
PI QIANSHENG	Former secretary of China's Tianjin Binhai New Area, who faced corruption allegations in 2008, when he was placed under house arrest and subsequently dismissed from the CCP.	(Lai 2008)
SINKIAN/ XINJIANG*	Northwestern autonomous region that is home to China's Muslim Uyghur minority population, who have faced political repression from the CCP including arbitrary detention and alleged forced sterilisation and cultural genocide through Han Chinese 're-education' camps.	(Wong and Kwong 2019)
TAIPEI	Capital of Taiwan.	See Taiwan (Wong and Kwong 2019)
TAIWAN*	Officially the Republic of China, Taiwan split from communist China in 1949 and discussion of the country's sovereignty and independence is routinely censored in the PRC.	(Wong and Kwong 2019)
TIANANMEN*	Refers to the pro-democracy student protests that took place in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, in 1989, culminating in a violent government crackdown: the Tiananmen Square massacre; or, euphemistically, the 'June 4 th incident'.	(Wong and Kwong 2019)
TIANJIN	A series of chemical explosions in the port of Tianjin in 2015 became a focal point for criticism of the local government online, resulting in social media censorship.	(BBC News 2015)
TIBET*	Autonomous region of China with contested historical claims to sovereignty and independence from the PRC.	(Wong and Kwong 2019)
UMBRELLA MOVEMENT	Refers to Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement from 2014 onwards.	See Hong Kong (Wong and Kwong 2019)
WANG MENG*	Chinese author and former Minister of Culture (1986-89).	(Wong and Kwong 2019)
WEN JIAOBAO	Former premier of the People's Republic of China (2003-13), who wrote an article that was the subject of widespread censorship ahead of the 100 th anniversary of the party's founding.	(Reuters 2021)

WENZHOU	City of China's Zhejiang province that was the site of a fatal train crash in 2011, prompting public outcry about a lack of government transparency and accountability for the incident.	(BBC News 2011)
XI JINPING	China's General Secretary of the Communist Party (2012 to present) and President (2013 to present)—often associated with censorship in critical contexts on social media.	(BBC News 2018a)
XU CAIHOU	Former Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (2005-2013), who was accused of taking bribes in office and expelled from the CCP in 2014.	(South China Morning Post 2014)
ZHANG GAOLI	Former First-ranked Vice Premier of China (2013-18) and Communist Party Secretary of Tianjin (2007-2012), Zhang became embroiled in public scandal in 2021 involving Chinese women's tennis player Peng Shuai, who disappeared after accusing Zhang of sexual assault.	(BBC News 2022b)
ZHAO ZIYANG	Former Premier of China (1980-87) and General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (1987-89), who was a vocal supporter of the 1989 Tiananmen Square student protesters.	(Reuters 2009)
ZHOU YONGKANG	Former Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission (2007-2012), who, in 2015, was convicted of bribery, abuse of power and leaking state secrets, and sentenced to life in prison.	(J. Ng 2014)

Table 23: All red-flag terms that were found in sample of 450 unavailable journal articles used for the corpus analysis study in Chapter 7, including term, description and source indicating known instances of censorship associated with each term

Appendix 2: Participant List

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Involvement</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Career level</u>
Eadie	Indirect	UK	Publisher (Independent)	Mid-level
Pierre	Indirect	Netherlands	Publisher (Director)	Late-career
Balal	Direct	UK	Publisher (Executive)	Early-career
Nathan	Indirect	UK	Publisher (Executive)	Mid-level
Tahir	Indirect	UK	Publisher (Manager)	Mid-level
Oliver	Direct	UK	Publisher (Director)	Late-career
Lily	Not involved	UK	Publisher (Manager)	Late-career
Harris	Not involved	UK	Publisher (Director)	Late-career
Jada	Direct	UK	Publisher (Director)	Late-career
Yazmin	Direct	Netherlands	Publisher (Director)	Mid-level
Carolyn	Not involved	USA	Publisher (Manager)	Mid-level
Lenore	Indirect	Canada	Publisher (Director)	Late-career
Dr. Alder	Direct	UK	Academic (Editor)	Mid-career
Prof. Birch	Direct	UK	Academic (Author)	Mid-career
Prof. Willow	Direct	UK	Academic (Author)	Late-career
Dr. Yew	Direct	UK	Academic (Author)	Mid-career
Prof. Elm	Direct	UK	Academic (Editorial Board Member)	Mid-career
Dr. Hawthorn	Direct	US	Academic (Editor)	Mid-career
Prof. Rowan	Direct	Australia	Academic (Author)	Mid-career
Prof. Sycamore	Direct	UK	Academic (Editor)	Late-career
Dr. Cherry	Direct	Israel	Academic (Author)	Mid-career
Dr. Cedar	Direct	US	Academic (Editor)	Early-career

Dr. Pine	Direct	Australia	Academic (Author)	Mid-career
Dr. Box	Indirect	Czech Republic	Academic (Author)	Early-career

Table 24: Pseudonym and segmentation criteria for the interview study reported above in chapter 6

Appendix 3: Participant Topic Guide (Publishers)

Conditions of compliance

Preamble: I'm going to start with the timeline of events that I shared ahead of our interview. I'm not going to ask you to comment on specific publishers and their involvement, but I do have some broader questions about these events as a whole.

To what extent were you aware of the events and reporting that I shared, ahead of this interview?

How (if at all) have these events impacted your day-to-day work (then and now)?

Why (in your opinion) did different publishers take different routes in relation to censorship concerns in China?

Prompts: Why did some organisations remove articles and continue to sell, whereas others removed entire products from the market, for e.g.?

These routes are all the result of different decisions by individuals working for these companies.

Who is responsible for making these sorts of decisions, do you think?

What are the primary considerations of the people making these decisions?

What motivates them to comply?

Conditions of refusal

What would it take for publishers to respond differently in future?

Optional follow-up: *will* they respond differently in future?

Whose responsibility should it be to make these decisions (if different from above)?

Prompt: trade/international bodies?

What consequences will publishers face if they refuse to comply?

What consequences would you face, do you think, if you advocated for a different course of action (internally or externally)?

Optional follow-up: How could you and your colleagues bring about a different course of action (assuming you wanted to)?

Relationship with academic community

What's your view regarding the response of academic communities to the events listed in the timeline?

Follow-up: Why did CUP receive more press attention than other publishers? Likewise the backlash?

To what degree were you or have you been in personal contact with academics over these issues?

What impact (if any) have these events had on your working relationships with academics?

Impacts on publisher's perceptions of publishing

To what extent (if at all) have these events changed your perspective on the companies involved?

(Again, you can answer this in general terms, if you'd rather.)

To what extent (if at all) have these events changed your perspective on academic publishing, as an industry?

To what extent (if at all) have these events changed your perspective on your day-to-day work?

Future concerns

What direction do you see the industry moving in, in terms of censorship concerns in China?

Optional follow-up: What other compromises (if any) could access to China's market bring about?

Optional follow-up: To what extent are these compromises/challenges unique to the Chinese market?

Alignment between compliance (CUP, Springer Nature) and academic publishers' values

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements:

Publishers share (broadly) the same values as their scholarly communities

Publishers are justified in limiting access to a small percentage of output in China, if doing so enables China-based scholars to retain access to the majority of that output

When responding to demands from Chinese content regulators, publishers act in the interests of their scholarly communities

Options:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Vignette

An employee at an academic publishing company receives a letter from the company's research importer in China informing them, on behalf of a central government regulator, that a large number of research articles published in several of the publisher's academic journals are 'illegal' in China. The articles concerned include keywords such as 'Tiananmen', 'Tibet', 'Taiwan', 'Hong Kong', 'Xinjiang', 'Uighur', 'Mao Zedong' and 'Cultural Revolution'.

The letter lists the articles and explains that unless the publishers' content collections can be tailored such that these articles are no longer available in China, the publisher will be unable to continue selling journal subscriptions in China. Therefore, all individuals based in Chinese universities will lose access to all research articles contained in the publisher's journals, unless they comply in some form.

Please consider four potential responses to this request:

Remove the affected journal articles from the publisher's online platform in China

Amend the online platform's search function, such that the affected journal articles do not appear in relevant keyword searches in China

Remove journals that contain affected journal articles from sales packages sold to Chinese research importers

Refuse to make any amendment to the journals, the online platform, or the content packages that the affected articles are included in

Discussion of vignette

- Which of these actions (if any) constitutes ‘censorship’? **Why?**
- **Which, if any, of the parties involved is ‘the censor’**—the publisher, the importer, or the governmental regulator?
- What, if at all, are the significant differences between options 1, 2 and 3?
- What’s likely to happen, if you take the fourth route?
- Which option best serves the scholarly community? [Consider access consequences of 3]
- Which option best serves publishers? [Consider reputational consequences of 1-3]
- What other options are available to publishers facing this request?
- What would you do, faced with this request, in your current role?
- Which option aligns with your professional values? Why?
- Which option aligns with your own personal values? Why?

Final question: Is there anything that we haven’t discussed that you feel is relevant to this study?

Appendix 4: Participant Topic Guide (Academics)

Conditions of compliance

Preamble: I’m going to start with the timeline of events that I shared ahead of our interview. I’m not going to ask you to comment on specific publishers and their involvement, but I do have some broader questions about these events as a whole.

To what extent were you aware of the events and reporting that I shared, ahead of this interview?

Anything that surprised you in that document?

How (if at all) have these events impacted your day-to-day work, as an Asia studies academic and [author/editor/editorial board member]?

[Prompt terms of

- a. Willingness of you or colleagues to publish on sensitive topics
- b. Ongoing research projects
- c. Institutional partnerships
- d. Collaboration with other researchers

e. Personal safety/security]

Consequences of compliance

What impact (if at all) have these events had on your ability to do research in China?

Follow-up: How easy is it to get around access blocks in China?

What about for Chinese scholars (and/or collaborators)?

Do they use VPNs for general browsing?

What are your views on the different routes taken by the implicated publishers?

Prompts: Some organisations removed articles and continued to sell, whereas others removed entire products from the market, for e.g.

- The decision of Cambridge University Press (CUP) to remove individual articles from their platforms in China
- CUP's reversal, allowing free access internationally to all 'illegal' articles, following backlash from the Asia studies scholarly community
- Springer Nature's decision to prevent the search function on their platform in China from returning details of articles marked as 'illegal'
- Taylor & Francis' decision to refuse to sell subscriptions to journals in China that contain 'illegal' content, rather than remove individual articles from them or amending their platform's search function
- CUP's decision to release the details of all articles removed from *The China Quarterly*, including author names and article titles
- The pledge by the *Index on Censorship* to publish the details of censored articles, translate them into Mandarin and make them freely available online

How (if at all) have these events shaped your view of the implicated publishers?

What about the wider academic publishing industry?

Follow-up: To what extent are you satisfied by the response of the academic publishing industry to these issues?

What would a more satisfactory response look like?

How likely would you be to publish with one of the implicated publishers in future, either as a book or journal author?

What (in your view) are the primary motivations of the people making these decisions?

Who should be making these decisions, if different from the above?

Conditions of resistance

What's your view regarding the response of the Asia studies scholarly community to these events?

Follow-ups:

Why did CUP receive more press attention than other publishers? Likewise, the backlash?

What sorts of communications have you had with colleagues on these issues (if any)?

To what extent is your academic community aligned in terms of your response to these issues?

Future concerns

How is the scholarly community likely to respond to similar events in future?

Follow-ups:

What might prompt a stronger response in future, e.g. a publisher boycott, or some other form of coordinated resistance?

What topics will be off limits in future?

Values alignment between publishers and academics

To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements:

Publishers share (broadly) the same values as their scholarly communities

Publishers are justified in limiting access to a small percentage of their published content in China, if doing so enables China-based scholars to retain access to the majority of that content

When responding to demands from Chinese content regulators, publishers act in the interests of their scholarly communities

Options:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Vignette

An employee at an academic publishing company receives a letter from the company's research importer in China informing them, on behalf of a central government regulator, that a large number of research articles published in several of the publisher's academic journals are 'illegal' in China. The articles concerned include keywords such as 'Tiananmen', 'Tibet', 'Taiwan', 'Hong Kong', 'Xinjiang', 'Uighur', 'Mao Zedong' and 'Cultural Revolution'.

The letter lists the articles and explains that unless the publishers' content collections can be tailored such that these articles are no longer available in China, the publisher will be unable to

continue selling journal subscriptions in China. Therefore, all individuals based in Chinese universities will lose access to all research articles contained in the publisher's journals, unless they comply in some form.

Please consider four potential responses to this request:

Remove the affected journal articles from the publisher's online platform in China

Amend the online platform's search function, such that the affected journal articles do not appear in relevant keyword searches

Remove journals that contain affected journal articles from sales packages sold to Chinese research importers

Refuse to make any amendment to the journals, the online platform, or the content packages that the affected articles are included in

Discussion of vignette

- Which of these actions (if any) constitutes 'censorship'? **Why?**
- **Which, if any, of the parties involved is 'the censor'**—the publisher, the importer, or the governmental regulator?
- What, if at all, are the significant differences between options 1, 2 and 3?
- What's likely to happen, if you take the fourth route?
- Which option best serves the scholarly community? [Consider access consequences of 3]
- Which option best serves publishers? [Consider reputational consequences of 1-3]
- What other options are available to publishers facing this request?
- Which option aligns with your professional values, as an [author/editor/editorial board member]? Why?
- Which option aligns with your own personal values? Why?

Final question: Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you feel is relevant to this study?

Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet (Publishers)

Participant Information Sheet (Interview)

UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: 14673/001

Title of Study: Censorship of Online Research Journals in China

Research Centre/Department: Centre for Publishing, Department of Information Studies

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):

George Cooper (Principal Researcher)

Dr Samantha Rayner (Supervisor)

Email: george.cooper.18@ucl.ac.uk

Email: s.rayner@ucl.ac.uk

Telephone: +44 7568138413

Telephone: +44 (0) 20 7673 2473

Invitation to Participate

You have been invited to participate in a research interview. This form details the background, aims and focus of the project and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read this in full and feel free to contact us if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for considering this invitation.

The Project

This interview is part of a five-year PhD research project on the censorship of online research journals in China. Primary research will include interviews with journal authors, editors, and publishing professionals. It will also involve text mining and analysis of the Asia studies scholarly literature. This research is intended to inform a set of industry guidelines regarding amendments to publisher's online platforms in China.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been selected because of your professional background and expertise in academic publishing, which are relevant to the aims of this study.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. There is no penalty for refusing to participate. You may withdraw from the project at any time. If you refuse to participate, or if you withdraw within four weeks following the interview, any data gathered will be deleted unless you request otherwise.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to complete a participant consent form. After that, you will be asked to attend an online interview via Microsoft Teams. The interview will last for approximately one hour. It will be held by the primary researcher. The focus will be participant's personal views regarding the academic publishing industry's response to censorship concerns in China, notions and definitions of censorship in academic publishing, and the conditions and impacts of compliance with requests to limit the availability of journal content in China.

Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

With your consent, the discussion will be recorded using an audio recording device. The audio file will be transferred securely to UCL's encrypted and password protected 'Data Safe Haven' research data repository, then deleted from the audio device. The primary researcher will transcribe the discussion. Anonymised excerpts from the interview will be used for analysis and may be used in conference presentations, lectures and research publications. The recording will be deleted from UCL's 'Data Safe Haven' as soon as the transcription is complete within six to twelve months following the interview.

Will my participation in this project be kept confidential?

Confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines.

Identifiable or commercially sensitive information will not be included in any transcripts or publications. Participants will be asked to read and approve transcripts following the interview to ensure that personally identifiable or commercially sensitive information is not included in them.

No use will be made of the interview transcript without your written permission.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, due to the limited size of the participant sample, although every effort will be taken to ensure confidentiality, as above. The organisations that the participants work for will not be named. These organisations will be described as ‘commercial’, ‘independent’, ‘not-for profit’, etc., and whether they are ‘Western’ organisations or China-based. This is to ensure and demonstrate wide participation across different organisational structures in academic publishing. Given the limited number of organisations that are relevant to this study, it is not possible to guarantee that the organisations will not be identifiable in the transcripts or outputs, although all reasonable efforts will be taken to remove identifiable information, as above.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot guarantee any immediate benefits for participants. However, it is intended that this interview will be an opportunity for you to share your views on practical and ethical concerns related to content distribution in China, including the role played (current and potential) by academic publishers and the communities they interact with, which may inform industry policy.

How do I raise a complaint?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your treatment by the principal researcher, or if you become distressed during the course of this research, you are encouraged to contact the

principal researcher's supervisor, Dr Samantha Rayner, samantha.rayner@ucl.ac.uk. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction by the principal researcher or their supervisor, please raise this matter with the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee at ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The principal researcher is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) via a London Arts and Humanities Partnership (LAHP) doctoral studentship. The principal researcher is also a part-time employee of an academic publisher, Taylor & Francis. The research was initiated and is organised by the principal researcher and supervisor, who are editorially independent of Taylor & Francis.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

Notice:

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this notice. The legal basis that will be used to process your personal data will be the provision of your consent. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we can anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide, we will do so, and we will minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

UK data protection law is regulated by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, you may wish to submit a complaint to them. Contact details, and details of data subject rights are available on the ICO website at:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/>

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering this invitation to participate in our research.

Appendix 6: Participant Information Sheet (Academics)

Participant Information Sheet (Interview)

UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: 14673/001

Title of Study: Censorship of Online Research Journals in China

Research Centre/Department: Centre for Publishing, Department of Information Studies

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):

George Cooper (Principal Researcher)

Dr Samantha Rayner (Supervisor)

Email: george.cooper.18@ucl.ac.uk

Email: s.rayner@ucl.ac.uk

Invitation to Participate

You have been invited to participate in a research interview. This form details the background, aims and focus of the project and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read this in full and feel free to contact us if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for considering this invitation.

The Project

This interview is part of a five-year PhD research project on the censorship of online research journals in China. Primary research will include focus groups, surveys and interviews with journal authors, editors, and senior publishing professionals. It will also involve text mining and analysis of the Asia studies scholarly literature. The intended output is an industry protocol on research censorship.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been selected because you have a relevant subject expertise and publication record in Asia studies.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. There is no penalty for refusing to participate. You may withdraw from the project at any time. If you refuse to participate, or if you withdraw within four weeks following the interview, any data gathered will be deleted unless you request otherwise.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to complete a participant consent form. After that, you will be asked to attend the interview, which will be conducted via Microsoft Teams. The interview will last for approximately one hour. It will be held by the primary researcher. The focus will be the consequences of publisher compliance with demands to limit the availability of politically sensitive publications in China, both in terms of participants' willingness to publish on sensitive topics and the perceived quality and credibility of affected academic publications.

Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

With your consent, the discussion will be recorded using an audio recording device. The audio file will be transferred securely to UCL's encrypted and password protected 'Data Safe Haven' research data repository, then deleted from the audio device. The primary researcher will transcribe the discussion. Anonymised excerpts from the interview will be used for analysis and may be used for illustration in conference presentations, lectures and research publications. The recording will be deleted from UCL's 'Data Safe Haven' as soon as the transcription is complete within six to twelve months following the interview.

Will my participation in this project be kept confidential?

Confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines.

Identifiable or commercially sensitive information will not be included in any transcripts or publications. Participants will be asked to read and approve transcripts following the interview to ensure that personally identifiable or commercially sensitive information is not included in them.

No use will be made of the interview transcript without your written permission.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Total confidentiality may not be guaranteed, due to the limited size of the participant sample.

However, every effort will be made to conceal identifiable or commercially sensitive information, as above.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot guarantee any immediate benefits for participants. However, it is intended that this interview will be an opportunity for you to share your views on the distribution of scholarly outputs in China, and the role played (current and potential) by academic publishers, which may inform industry policy.

How do I raise a complaint?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your treatment by the principal researcher, or if you become distressed during the course of this research, you are encouraged to contact the principal researcher's supervisor, Dr Samantha Rayner, samantha.rayner@ucl.ac.uk. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction by the principal researcher or their supervisor, please raise this matter with the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee at ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The principal researcher is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) via a London Arts and Humanities Partnership (LAHP) doctoral studentship. The principal researcher is also a part-time employee of an academic publisher, Taylor & Francis. The research was initiated and is organised by the principal researcher and supervisor, who are editorially independent of Taylor & Francis.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

Notice:

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this notice. The legal basis that will be used to process your personal data will be the provision of your consent. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we can anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide, we will do so, and we will minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

UK data protection law is regulated by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, you may wish to submit a complaint to them. Contact details, and details of data subject rights are available on the ICO website at:

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/>

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering this invitation to participate in our research.

Appendix 7: Participant Consent Form

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Censorship of Online Research Journals in China

Research Centre/Department: Centre for Publishing, Department of Information Studies

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):

George Cooper (Principal Researcher)

Dr Samantha Rayner (Supervisor)

Email: george.cooper.18@ucl.ac.uk

Email: s.rayner@ucl.ac.uk

Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Office: data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee. Project ID number: 14673/001

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from

the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick Box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in the interview.	
2.	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to four weeks after the interview.	
3.	I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me in the information sheet. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with all applicable data protection legislation.	
4.	I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University for monitoring and audit purposes.	
5.	<p>Use of the information for this project only</p> <p>I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure I cannot be identified, except as required by law.</p> <p>I understand that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, due to the limited size of the participant sample.</p>	

	<p>I understand that it is not possible to guarantee that the participants' employer will be unidentifiable in the transcripts or outputs, given the limited number of organisations that are relevant to this study, although they will not be named in any of the transcripts or outputs.</p> <p>I understand that my data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely. It will not be possible to identify me in any publications.</p>	
6.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw within four weeks following the focus group, any data I have provided up to that point will be deleted unless I agree otherwise.	
7.	I understand the potential risks of participating and the support that will be available to me should I become distressed during the course of the research.	
8.	No promise or guarantee of benefits have been made to encourage me to participate.	
9.	I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher(s) undertaking this study.	
10.	I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.	
11.	I agree that my anonymised research data may be used by others for future research.	
12.	I understand that the information I have submitted may be published as a report and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No	
13.	I consent to the interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed immediately following transcription.	

14.	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
15.	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	
16.	I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.	

If you would like your contact details to be retained so that you can be contacted in the future by UCL researchers who would like to invite you to participate in follow up studies to this project, or in future studies of a similar nature, please tick the appropriate box below.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, I would be happy to be contacted in this way	
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, I would not like to be contacted	

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 8: Thematic Analysis Coding Schema

Categories	Themes	Codes
Conditions	T1: Publisher self-censorship is a consequence of China's broader political objectives	(b) the issues are bigger than the events listed; academic freedom vs. Chinese regulations; exporting censorship; narrowing parameters; taking control of the system; West vs. China

	T2: Publisher self-censorship is a consequence of China's economic power	(b) content topics drive censorship (not sales); (b) routes determined by commercial loss; (b) volume (of content) drives censorship complicity; market size = censorship compliance; protecting interests in China
	T3: Pressures to self-censor are more acute for China-based scholars	(b) censorship is easily circumvented; (b) circumventing censorship is dangerous; censorship causing self-censorship; citation anxiety; emphasising risks for China-based colleagues; surveillance = self-censorship
Definitions	T4: Publisher self-censorship is defined as active measures to enforce political access restrictions affecting published scholarship	(b) all routes to compliance are forms of censorship; (b) different routes are not all equal; (b) paywall is not censorship complicity; (b) removal different from paywall censorship; censorship = politics; censorship = preventing access (to information); compliance = censorship complicity; complicity = 'active steps'; publisher = censor; state = censor
Impacts	T5: Publisher self-censorship has minimally impacted individual scholars while entrenching divisions within and between affected communities	(b) censorship polarises communities; (b) complicity has not harmed perceptions; (b) not surprised by publisher compliance; (b) surprised by publisher complicity; censorship backfire; downplaying impacts of censorship; downplaying personal impacts
	T6: Publisher self-censorship has caused some of the affected communities to re-assess their values and codes of practice	reassessing process (post-censorship); reassessing research direction (post-censorship); reassessing values (post-censorship)
Responsibility	T7: Affected parties deny, downplay or distribute agency in response to self-censorship concerns	(b) bad actors too deeply enmeshed; (b) senior management hold responsibility; distancing from bad actors; distancing

		from decision makers; distancing from intermediaries; distributing responsibility
	T8: Censorship complicity is becoming normalised	normalising censorship complicity; suppressing guilt
Knowledge	T9: Self-censorship occurs within a climate of uncertainty, which is managed strategically by censors and self-censors alike	‘a bit of a mush’; ‘asymmetric information’; ‘nothing to be gained from sharing’; ‘veil of ambiguity’; (b) not in a position to know full facts; constructive ambiguity; don’t know the source (of events); doubting knowledge of the system (publishing); plausible deniability; uncertain consequences (of censorship)
Resistance	T10: Authors will boycott complicit publishers if doing so will not hinder career advancement	(b) resistance is not coordinated; (b) resistance would be ineffective; apathy vs. resistance; boycotting complicit publishers; career concerns
	T11: Collaborative resistance to censorship complicity relies upon external pressures	(b) collaboration is important (for resistance); (b) industry bodies drive collaboration (to resist); (b) non-industry actors drive collaboration (on censorship); (b) publishers are afraid to talk to each other; (b) publishers need academics to resist censorship; (b) resistance is not coordinated; collaboration = resistance; strategic moralising (for commercial gain)
Values	T12: Confronted with censorship demands, liberal values are balanced against the perceived interests of China-based scholars	(b) pragmatism in the interests of China-based scholars; (b) resistance serves the interests of scholars in China; (v) censoring 1% to preserve 99% is justified; (v) censorship ought to be resisted; (v) censorship should be challenged; (v) reject 99% vs. 1%

Table 25: Categories, themes and codes generated from the thematic analysis of interview transcripts informing the results in Chapter 6. (b) indicates a reported belief and (v) indicates a reported value.