

## **Dialogue among Swedish research organisations on China**

On 17 September 2025, Swedish research organisations specialising in China convened for a meeting at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI). Sweden hosts a substantial body of high-quality research on contemporary Chinese politics, the economy, society, and global affairs. The purpose of the meeting was to promote information sharing and networking among organisations active in this field.

Participants included universities, research institutes, think tanks, and knowledge-producing government agencies that publish open research and analysis on contemporary China within the social sciences and humanities, broadly understood.

The first part of the meeting focused on discussions of possible scenarios for China's future, taking as its starting point a report by the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), [When the People's Republic turns 100: An assessment of China's development and relations with the U.S. towards 2050](#).

This was followed by presentations from representatives of participating organisations, outlining their areas of expertise, ongoing projects, and future initiatives.

### **The University of Gothenburg, The Department of Languages and Literatures**

Elena Pollacchi, representing the Department of Languages and Literatures at the University of Gothenburg, explained that the group consists of sinologists working across a range of areas, including the analysis of traditional Chinese texts and Chinese culture from imperial times to the present. The Department also studies discourse in order to better understand China's propaganda system and how its political structure interacts with society at large.

Much of the research is multidisciplinary in nature. The Department seeks to broaden student perspectives by encouraging them to view Chinese society from multiple angles. The Bernhard Karlgren Seminar serves as a forum that, from a sinological perspective, explores broader theoretical and methodological questions in the humanities, bringing together leading international and in-house research.

### **Stockholm China Centre at the Institute for Security and Defence Policy (ISDP)**

Fatoumata Diallo, from the Stockholm China Centre at the ISDP, described the institute's work as non-partisan and non-profit. The Centre pursues a threefold mission: first, to disseminate knowledge about China in Europe, particularly how domestic politics shape the country's foreign policy; second, to foster academic exchange with Chinese institutes; and third, to support the next generation of China experts in the EU.

Ongoing initiatives include building long-term cooperation with Chinese institutions and inviting policymakers to participate in the guest researcher programme. The Centre's internal research focuses primarily on defence and security, China–EU relations, domestic governance, and foreign

policy. ISDP is a member of the Horizon Europe project European Hub for Contemporary China (EuroHub4Sino).

### **The National Board of Trade**

The National Board of Trade (Kommerskollegium), represented by Hannes Lenk, is a governmental agency responsible for matters relating to foreign trade, the EU's internal market and trade policy. The agency works to support free markets and trade liberalisation, while also conducting research relevant to trade organisations. Some of this work is published openly, while other parts are provided to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Lenk also noted that the Board has undergone an organisational change, including the introduction of a renewed focus on trade and security.

The Board pursues inquiries it deems of strategic interest, with China resurfacing regularly as a topic of focus. This has recently led to a decision to adopt a more regional focus. A report examining on China's trade policy and its implications for Sweden's and the EU's broader trade strategies is underway.

### **The Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (RW)**

Malin Oud presented the work of the RWI. In recent years, the institute has been engaged in a global China programme focusing on China's role in the Global South and its involvement in the global climate transition.

Oud is also a member of the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), which recently published an anthology on China as an aid actor. In addition, she is part of the team behind the Decoding China Project, an open-access handbook aimed at policymakers and others seeking a deeper understanding of how key international relations concepts are interpreted in the Chinese context.

### **Research Institute of Industrial Economics**

Fredrik Sjöholm, from the Research Institute of Industrial Economics (Institutet för Näringslivsforskning, IFN), presented the institute as a private research organisation comprising around 30 researchers. Its work includes producing academic articles and books, as well as research-based reports for ministries and government officials. A recently launched programme focuses explicitly on geoeconomics. Current China-related research areas include Chinese acquisitions of Swedish firms and Sweden's dependence on rare earth elements.

### **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)**

Jingdong Yuan, from SIPRI, presented the China and Asia Security Programme. Key thematic areas include geoeconomics and global politics, with particular attention to critical minerals, the green transition, and fossil fuels in the MENA region and beyond. The programme also examines U.S.–China technological competition, particularly in green technology, artificial intelligence, and semiconductors.

Additional areas of focus include China's export regulations and how they are leveraged to influence other countries; China's global role in development finance and South–South cooperation; and traditional defence policy and emerging technologies, including space policy, nuclear risks, and conventional military capabilities. The programme also devotes significant attention to the Indo-Pacific region, covering the Korean Peninsula, Iran–North Korea dialogue, and issues related to weapons of mass destruction.

Recently, the programme has placed increased emphasis on open military conflicts, the use of grey-zone tactics, and developments in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. The dynamics of military coercion between the United States and China are also under examination.

### **Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)**

Guoyi Han presented SEI as an international and independent research institute established in 1989 by the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag). Headquartered in Stockholm, SEI operates eight centres worldwide, including three regional centres in the Global South – in Asia (Bangkok), Africa (Nairobi), and Latin America (Bogotá).

In line with SEI's vision and mission, China has long been a strategic focus of its work and engagement. Over the past decades, SEI's research in and on China has spanned a wide range of themes, with a common objective of monitoring and understanding China's transition and its environmental, resource, and climate implications – both domestically and globally.

SEI has also been an active partner in advancing bilateral cooperation between Sweden and China, as well as EU–China collaboration on environment, climate, and sustainable development. In recent years, SEI's engagement with China has become increasingly integrated with its Global South regional initiatives, including China–ASEAN and Lancang–Mekong cooperation.

### **Stockholm Free World Forum (Frivärld)**

Anna Rennéus Guthrie, director of the think tank, outlined its liberal vision, centred on free societies, free individuals, and free markets. Core focus areas include security and defence, the rule of law, business and trade, and the future of Europe. The think tank produces reports and books and organises a range of activities, including briefings, seminars, podcasts, and international speaker engagements.

With regard to China, it monitors China's relations with Sweden and the EU more broadly, its technological dominance, the use of soft power and information influence in democratic countries, security risks linked to dependencies, its involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine, and the evolving transatlantic relationship, among other issues.

## **Stockholm University, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies**

Monika Gänsbauer, Head of the Department, outlined the department's current research focus, which includes Sinophone literature, translation studies, memory culture, and religious studies. The Department offers first-, second-, and third-cycle courses. Its foundation courses aim to equip students with the ability to understand, read, write, and speak modern Chinese, as well as to acquire a basic understanding of Chinese culture in both historical and contemporary contexts.

The Department also offers an MA programme in Asian Studies, a regionally focused multidisciplinary programme grounded in the humanities.

## **Stockholm University, Stockholm Centre for Global Asia**

Johan Lagerqvist represented the Centre, explaining that it is part of the Department of Political Science and currently consists of two staff members. Its core areas of interest include China's relations with Southeast Asia and its broader periphery, including engagement with Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand, an emphasis partly shaped by a recent influx of guest scholars from the region.

In collaboration with several departments at Stockholm University, the Centre will offer an International Master's Programme in Political Science with a specialisation in Global Asian Studies from the autumn semester of 2026.

## **Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI)**

Oscar Almén outlined the agency's structure, noting that it comprises approximately 1,600 employees, many of whom are trained in engineering and the natural sciences. He belongs to the Division of Defence Analysis, which consists of around 300 staff members, and heads the Asia Programme, currently comprising eight researchers, seven of whom focus on China. In addition to the Asia Programme, researchers elsewhere in the agency also occasionally study China.

Recent and ongoing research includes China's military power, the Chinese diaspora in Sweden, China's innovation system, technology transfer, and China's strategic positioning in the Indo-Pacific region. Most research is published in the form of research reports, though shorter briefs and memos are also produced. FOI is externally funded, primarily by the Swedish Armed Forces, but also by other government agencies, with a small share coming from the private sector. Funding for the Asia Programme is provided by the Ministry of Defence.

## **Swedish Defence University**

Sofia Ledberg, Senior Lecturer at the Department of War Studies, described the Swedish Defence University as a civilian institution under the Ministry of Education (Ledberg has since joined UI). The University is the primary site for Swedish military education and maintains close links with the Swedish Armed Forces. Research at the University focuses on narrative perspectives, in particular how political leaders use history to legitimise and shape foreign relations, including with China.

Other recent research includes China–Serbia relations, Chinese security policy, and the evolving role of the Chinese military within society.

### **Swedish National China Centre at UI**

Björn Jerdén introduced the Centre (Nationellt kunskapscentrum om Kina), which was established in 2021 at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs. The Centre receives core government funding and is mandated to support the Swedish government, as well as the parliament, municipalities, academia, the private sector, trade unions, and civil society, in strengthening their knowledge of China.

The Centre produces policy-relevant research on China, with a particular focus on issues of importance to Sweden. Its outputs include Swedish- and English-language newsletters and reports, such as the annual *Kina i återblick* (China–Sweden in retrospective) and *Kina i korthet* (China in brief). The Centre also hosts the annual *Kinaforum* conference.

NKK is a member of the European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC), the European China Knowledge Network (ECKN), and the Horizon Europe project ReConnect China, and co-hosts the China–Russia Dashboard.

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