

SOSC options (24 Sept. 06 +)

A. My starting point

Faculty: Take a China economist. S/he will want to impart his/her research knowledge on PG students. But any course with an econ content will have no students in SOSC (my experience in 1998, cited above and in the documentation of my full professor review). Alternatively, the China economist teaches the PG China economics course at sociology level, either voluntarily, or because s/he can't teach non-SOSC students only. In the end, the division is a prison. We won't be hired anywhere else because there aren't that many all-social-sciences-are-one divisions around, let alone with a China focus. We won't be hired by an Econ dept. if we haven't done hard core economics (possible but unlikely given all the incentives and all the talk in SOSC).

My feeling [in 06/07] is that we currently have general difficulty hiring across all disciplines. I would prefer to get a clear vision on track first, so that we can sell ourselves well and go for the people we need to create a coherent future. The hiring difficulty is a serious issue and will not go away easily because we want to compete with the best U.S. universities, and because candidates increasingly have alternative job opportunities in China business/ banking/ consulting/ international organizations/ journalism and eventually mainland "academia." We need to evolve, step by step, into an institution that good people find attractive. Continued half-baked things, I think, will lead nowhere.

Students: Suppose I am an incoming MPhil or PhD student with a UG econ degree, and suppose I want to (i) study China's economy, and (ii) write a thesis on China's economy that targets as readership China economists (my desired future peers). How am I to achieve this (study + thesis) if I am taught neither the economist's tools of analysis nor the content of economics? (We offer zero on both dimensions: 509/534 is intermediate UG econ, and we have zero econ tools-methods core courses.) For sociology in SOSC, one may get a close to 100% match.

B. What would I like SOSC to look like

I would like to see

(i) a PG program for students who do China econ; and PG students (to advise) who are capable of doing decent China econ research

(ii) a group of China econ researchers of sufficient size to have critical mass [group of people working on related topics with related tools]

(iii) frequent China econ seminars at all dimensions of analytics (where both frequency and dimension are a matter of inviting people, of having the money, and of having the China econ faculty that people will want to come and give seminars to)

(iv) plenty of possibilities to interact with non-econ China researchers

We have (iv), but (i) - (iii) is missing. Maybe we have all for sociology, and most for poli sci.

C. Options

At the university level, I think a rather rational option is to simply get rid of us / let us go as we gradually dissipate, and integrate the STS guys and perhaps a couple other faculty into the other three schools. Retain high-profile faculty as long as possible for the face they give HKUST. But all that HKUST needs in the area of social science is some high school teachers to teach an assortment of general interest courses. Otherwise:

(1) Continue as in the past, i.e., continue the current sociology+ PG program

(2) Cross-School program

Collect all China-related econ-related faculty across SOSC and B-School and build something around them (PG program, seminars, joint lunches, ?), perhaps getting the research methods/ analysis tools of the social science economics into place via some core courses in the Econ department. I went to the Academic Calendar [06/07] and could it be that there has been a recent exodus? Even the Hang Lung Center is currently without director. I expected to find about a dozen relevant faculty across departments, but I didn't even find half a dozen.

Beyond the study of the Chinese economy (which is at my hear): collaborate across schools in whatever field makes sense. Drop the dogmatism that everything has to be all-of-SOSC or even all-of-HSS.

Francis Lui has been running a development center in the Econ department on the order of 10+ years. Neither did I manage to become a member, when I tried many years ago, nor to get on an e-mail list of its events (maybe neither exists). Similar to the babies of our senior faculty, it seems, it's largely his baby supporting his Hong Kong research interests.

(3) Expand

Expand to the degree that we have critical mass in at least 3 if not 4 social science disciplines, with (i) - (iv) all in place. A serious combination of programs, interactive between disciplines. This could be an SOSC expansion (begins at 40 faculty?), which seems unlikely, or a bigger project of some China research institute / Intl.School. From a long-run univ.-level view, the latter could potentially be attractive, as the world's #1 and uncontested China center. But it requires a many-year concerted effort under a capable management/ leader, plus significant funding; chances for that to come forth I think are small. (Re funding: 20 faculty = minimum HKD 400 million endowment)

D. Strategic planning / improvements that can come out of SOSC

--- For the division's strategic planning exercise in spring 07 I wrote up another piece, now shortened (7 Sept. 08) to what follows ----

Starting point. The area studies concept is losing relevance for the case of China

There is no "[U.S.] American studies" program that looks at the economy of the U.S., the sociology of the U.S., the political system of the U.S., and the psychology of U.S. citizens. American studies programs do things like American film and history; it is a "culture-" oriented program. America's economy is dealt with in economics, America's political system is dealt with in poli sci, etc.

Twenty years ago, China may have been a country that relatively few people studied. Sinologists could teach a everything-Chinese-all-in-one-course. Today, the academic (as well as non-academic) volume of literature on China has become very large, and in my experience there is no way to keep up with much except a subset of one discipline working on China. In academia, China is becoming a field of discipline-based study just as the U.S. is. People with specialized discipline knowledge are taking over the analysis of China topics. The area study “everything-Chinese” academic without disciplinary ideas and tools is an anachronism.

For the only-disciplinarian I see a danger of missing out on “Chinese characteristics.” The “everything-Chinese” academic, on the other hand, can’t capitalize on his/her China-strength because s/he can’t communicate with the discipline (and the area studies club is in danger of becoming irrelevant to China research?).

What we can do is bank on three pillars:

critical mass in disciplines [“critical mass” = a group of people working on related ideas with related tools; ability of this group to run a PG course of study],

the option of cross-discipline work, and

the broad China knowledge / intelligent China application.

Plus, in comparison to mainland China, a degree of somewhat more academic freedom.

Critical mass probably translates into 8-10 faculty in sociology, 8-10 faculty in poli sci, and 8-10 faculty in econ (or slightly fewer in econ, if we finally get our act together to cooperate with the econ dept which can provide the core econ courses), with most faculty working on China. This is a near-doubling of faculty strength to around 40. Psychology, anthropology, geography and STS could have equal claims to critical mass and the above is simply my cut, given what we have today.

Hong Kong studies: Hong Kong is small enough to be a traditional area studies subject, or good for an occasional application of disciplinary thinking; it’s never going to be a key area of discipline study such as the U.S. or China. Being located in Hong Kong, I think we should have a strong Hong Kong element. But a focus on China will take the division to a different level than a focus on Hong Kong.

PG program: three discipline-based core programs. For China-applied economics, I could see 50% core econ (in Econ dept.), 20-40% China econ (in SOSC), and 10-30% China non-econ (other disciplines). In sociology and in poli sci, the proportions could be very different. The key is to bank on the three pillars: a clear grasp of one discipline (soc. or polisci or econ), other-discipline China elements, and intelligent China application. In terms of numbers: three programs with a close to 20-student intake in each every year. I don’t see any need to limit the number of PG programs. If some faculty comes up with a program that they think makes sense (say, STS) and can be built on what we have, or with minimal expansion (that could be argued for with a VPAA), why not? I would go for maximum flexibility with near-everything-goes but every program must be built around something substantial, whether the substantial part is in SOSC or elsewhere.

UG program: significantly different from the PG case. For the UG program, we are mostly limited to HK students (a narrow clientele). Basic discipline training has to be put in place, possibly through a wide range of discipline courses, where HKU and CUHK are likely to have an advantage in terms of faculty numbers. I am not sure if a complete UG discipline-based training is our comparative strength.—A serious UG program could parallel the structure for the PG program, or we could resign ourselves to the currently planned general

entertainment option that I think may be popular for those with their primary major in the other schools.

My preference: we are supposedly a research university and this is where, when in doubt, my preference is; I would also rather spend a fair share of my time teaching university than high school. (Teaching first-year UGs is good, but that's not what I want to focus on.)

If asked to think big: Try to go for a big donation. That would require putting together a serious proposal (one year's work...). With a 300-400mio endowment, we would look at, say, 6 senior visiting scholars, 8 junior visiting scholars, and 5-10 postdocs, ongoing, every year. The overarching vision is to make this the one place in the world to study social science issues in China. The University Service Center for China Studies (USC) at CUHK has managed to achieve that in terms of being the one top China library, but not in terms of scholars (they are a library).

There has to be a fair-sized contingent of permanent faculty to build on, and the whole project has to be big enough that people want to come here and join because we are the one place to be. There has to be the students to support this structure, and I think that would best be in form of serious PG programs / Graduate School. This includes but goes beyond the research PG programs, and this is where the proposal would have to spend quite a bit of time on, looking at relevant graduate schools in the U.S. Just from browsing around a bit, the trick appears to build a large number of flexible, almost tailor-made programs/variations on just a very few core programs. The objective is to become the one place where people go to for China-focused social science. SOSC would become bigger and open up significantly, with joint programs across the university, and double-appointments of faculty in two departments.

We have all the necessary peripherals: a library with a decent stock on China, USC as supreme library at CUHK, a core start-up group already in place, geographic proximity to the mainland. We have been slugging around below critical mass point for long enough to understand what needs to be done? The long run can go further: locally edited journal; regular and significant exchange programs with universities around the world (China will only become more relevant, not less); conferences and serious seminar series; association of other Hong Kong-based relevant faculty. I can see limitations: absence of firmly enshrined academic freedom (no tenure); inconveniences for the university leadership, with part of the university operating in China, when China social scientists speak out; competition; a to me often horrific lack of understanding by government and(?) university administrators as to how a proper university functions.

I am not worried about competition from the U.S., because no university in the U.S. can afford critical mass in discipline-application to China. Mainland China has no academic freedom. The only competition I would think of is CUHK. They have the library, USC, and China studies (or something like that) as one of their seven(?) areas for development.—I would not be afraid of competing with CUHK.

Time frame: get SOSC on track with enlargement / focusing and development of programs within a 5-year time frame (by 2012). Start working on proposal for donations around 2008/09 and, if successful, try to get everything into working order by about 2015. (Become the established world leader on China social science studies by 2020.)

Programs (17 May 07)

Start from what we have and evolve step by step, program by program if need be. Take as guideline something that's already out there, time-proven.

One example of what's possible (and plausible) is the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in D.C. Their program, to me, is either poli sci with some econ added, or basic econ with a lot of poli sci added --- I can't decide what they are doing because their individual program variations are so numerous (in what can be combined how) that I can't figure it all out easily. This seems an ideal model to me because it builds around econ and poli sci cores and then makes possible a very large number of almost tailor-made variations, presumably to attract a wide variety of students. For us, we may want a third core, sociology. Any program that faculty want (I want "economic development"), can build around these cores. Programs can and will change over time as faculty change. Programs can make do with a small number of faculty specializing in the program application courses (rather than cores).

The SAIS homepage: <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/>; their degree programs: http://www.sais-jhu.edu/degree_programs/index.html; their MA requirements (if you understand this): <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/marequirements>

Mission statement (17 May 07)

The mission statement provided by a colleague does not strike a chord with me. What arrives at my end sounds esoteric, maybe Marxist; a narrow concept of what science "has to be" concerned about (and what sociologists may dabble with more than any other social science).

I like the plain three goals of SAIS (JohnsHopkinsUniversity, School of Advanced International Studies) --- searching their website, I can't find anything labeled "mission statement" (for SAIS):

- To provide a professional education that simultaneously adheres to the highest standards of scholarship and takes a practical approach to training students for international leadership.
- To conduct scholarly research related to the concerns of public and private institutions of the United States and governments of other countries and disseminate that research to a broad audience concerned with foreign relations.
- To offer mid - career educational opportunities for those already working in international affairs.

If I try to adapt these goals for SOSOC, and at this moment I do it quickly:

- (1)To provide a professional education that simultaneously adheres to the highest standards of scholarship and takes a practical approach to training students for leadership and engagement in China's future development.
- (2)To conduct scholarly research related to the concerns of public and private institutions of China and of institutions engaged with China, and to disseminate that research to a broad audience concerned with China.
- (3)To offer educational opportunities for those wishing to broaden their disciplinary education and for those with a professional interest in China at any stage of their career.

Program/field in Economic Development (China) (26 June 07)

At the faculty retreat on 8 June 2007 we decided to further explore a matrix arrangement for SOSC, where we present ourselves in terms of fields/ areas/ concentrations rather than disciplines, with each field then drawing on one or more disciplines as backbone(s). Faculty were invited to design and propose programs that they would like to see. The field matters for hiring in that it would be nice to have critical mass in a field for research and teaching. The field otherwise matters mainly for teaching (which in turn also affects hiring).

I propose an “Economic Development (China)” field. The implications for teaching are in a separate file. The proposal incorporates feedback from the other two economists in the division, and I have invited all colleagues to comment. The proposal has

a hard core in one (or two) discipline(s)

and is augmented by our strength in applied China economic development courses, as well as by the availability of China courses across all disciplines.

Division cleavage. I perceive two opposing views among faculty re PG program. One group of faculty (which includes me) favors the U.S. model of coursework, or coursework and thesis, the other group favors the European model with a focus on prof-student co-operation. In the European model, there is little need for fields, except perhaps for marketing purposes. Faculty privately find/hire RPg students; the taught MA program is not important and could be kept small or phased out. The planned UG major appears to conform to the European model: nice sounding program titles with any list of courses and no gradation of courses (i.e., all courses could be taught at 100 level).

My proposal for programs in the “Economic Development (China)” field is largely based on the U.S. model.

The MPhil is by necessity more closely associated with the European than with the U.S. model.

I think the cleavage has strong explanatory power for what is happening in the division; there probably needs to be room for both camps.

At the MPhil and PhD level both sides could be accommodated if an “open” field were available for students apart from the more clearly defined fields. Exception rules could be strengthened for cases where individual faculty only want a student to work with/for them and think that student needs little coursework. Quality control, for example in terms of serious outside examiners at the defense, may then also have to be strengthened. Since the adherents of the European model have no interest in taught programs, the taught MA program could switch to coherent coursework soon.

I have an interest in the UG major as currently planned to start soon. If it’s not attractive, then we can change it sooner rather than later. (If it’s attractive, great.)

As of 7 Sept. 08, more than a year later, nothing has happened re the strategic plan. I have not seen anyone give any concrete thought to any field (with fields being the core of the strategic plan). Compare my design proposal for the field of “Economic Development (China)” [as mentioned above, in a separate file].