Relations between the universal and the particular are among the glorious, perennial issues that help to ensure continuing employment for academics. A shining example is offered by the study of places in the human world, as undertaken in the humanities, social science, and law. What is particular about China? Or, what is Chinese about China? And European about Europe? And so on. In scholarship, these places are variously defined, and contested, in terms of language, culture, geography, and (political) history.

Of these four, language is special in that it is an object of research itself—let’s take this broadly, to include both linguistics and literary studies—and simultaneously a means to the end of engaging with other objects of research, from philosophy to international relations. As such, it is no surprise that the notion of studying a place leads to immediate association with learning the language of that place. Not just in the conceptual terms used above, as both a goal and a method, but also in the sheer amount of time and effort that real literacy requires of non-native speakers.

This association can seem so self-evident, and the learning of the language so easy to imagine, that the image elides many other things that those studying places in the human world do in fact engage with. And of course, over time, among degree programmes in the study of particular places, there have been many in which language acquisition, linguistics, and literary studies take up most if not all of the time that students and teachers put in. Chinese studies, in the Netherlands as elsewhere in Europe and ‘the West,’ has tended to include a wider variety of disciplinary and thematic, topical perspectives—history, philosophy, society, religion, politics, law, etc—than, say, departments of English or Italian. This is because for European and Western cultures, these perspectives would be covered, on whatever level, in the departments of history, philosophy, and so on, reflecting worldviews that enabled the representation of European and Western visions as (implicitly) universal or all-encompassing, even if teaching and research did not travel beyond the West other than from the colonial point of view. Even today, it is by no means known to all in the Leiden University community, or in the Faculty of Humanities in which the Chinese studies community resides, how much more ‘studying Chinese’ means than learning the Chinese language. It’s the thing you patiently explain at parties, over and
over again: Yes, we do language—and yes, it's got characters and tones—but we do much more.

This takes us straight to the issue of the relation between the areas and the disciplines, and the universal and the particular, that permeates this book from start to finish. In the current higher education landscape of the Netherlands, while interest in China is ubiquitously on the rise, in the majority of universities this is embodied in a greater ‘China awareness’ in programmes and institutions that are otherwise defined along disciplinary and thematic lines. This is visible in things like China components in degree programmes, but also in personnel strategies and internationalisation, including student recruitment. Examples include the recent appointment of Jeroen de Kloet as professor of Globalisation Studies at the University of Amsterdam. De Kloet did a Master’s degree in communication studies and obtained his Ph.D. in anthropology / sociology with a dissertation on Chinese popular music, a substantial number of his publications are on cultural China, and his current remit is that of cultural globalisation, especially in the East-Asian context. There are many other examples, across all fields of science and scholarship, at all universities.

With regard to internationalisation, China is high on everyone’s list. This is, of course, a global phenomenon. It is visible in the recruitment of graduate students, national-level and university-level partnerships for collaborative research and student exchange, in-country internships, and the occasional fully fledged joint programme. Dedicated funding has progressively increased since the 1990s and especially the 2000s. Funding bodies include the China Scholarship Council, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, the Chinese Academy of Science and the Chinese Academy of Social Science, internationalisation units at individual universities, and the Ministries of Education of China and the Netherlands. Collaboration and exchange with institutions in Hong Kong—part of the People’s Republic since 1997, but still something of a world unto itself—and in Taiwan also continue, expanding and solidifying in many bilateral inter-university agreements, in scholarships administered through the Taipei Representative Office in The Hague, and so on. On the whole, then, the model is one where China content and China contacts are increasingly present, and sometimes prominent, in filling disciplinary and thematic institutional forms.

At the same time, there are a number of China-defined and (East-)Asia-defined institutional forms, that structurally hold and develop disciplinary and thematic content. These include the Asian Studies in Amsterdam MA programme and the Netherlands China Law Centre at the University of Amsterdam, the MSc program in Chinese Economy and Business jointly offered