

Philip Thai

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Academic Appointments

Northeastern University

Associate Professor of History and Asian Studies	2021–present
Director of Global Asian Studies Program	2021–22, 23–25
Associate Professor of History	2019–21
Assistant Professor of History	2013–19

Education

Stanford University

Ph.D., History	2013
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University of California, Berkeley

B.A., History (Highest Honors), Minor in Asian Studies	2000
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Publications

Books

<i>Front Companies and Red Capitalists: How China Circumvented Economic Containment during the Cold War</i>	In progress
<i>China's War on Smuggling: Law, Economic Life, and the Making of the Modern State, 1842–1965</i> . Columbia University Press, Study of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute. https://cup.columbia.edu/book/a/9780231185844	2018

Journal Articles

“Chinese Communist Front Companies and Sino-U.S. Legal Confrontations during the Cold War,” <i>Journal of Cold War Studies</i>	Under review
“Hong Kong in the U.S.-UK War on Drugs, 1970–1980,” <i>Diplomatic History</i> 47:1: 19–54. https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhac069	2023
“A Risky Business: The Tai Ping Insurance Company and Fire Insurance in China, 1928–1937,” <i>Enterprise and Society</i> 21.1: 239–76. https://doi.org/10.1017/eso.2020.47 *Winner, 2023 Business History Conference (BHC) Philip Scranton Best Article Prize	2022
“Introduction,” in “Binding Maritime China: Control, Evasion, and Interloping” (special issue guest editor with Eugenio Menegon and Xing Hang), <i>Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Cultural Review</i> 7.1, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1353/ach.2018.0000	2018
“Old Menace in New China: Coastal Smuggling, Illicit Markets, and Symbiotic Economies in the Early People’s Republic,” <i>Modern Asian Studies</i> 51.5: 1561–97. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X16000688	2017

"Law, Sovereignty, and the War on Smuggling in Coastal China, 1928–1937," *Law and History Review* 34.1: 75–114. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248015000668> 2016

Book Chapters

"Patriotism and Profit: The Red Capitalists of Cold War Hong Kong," in Tak-Wing Ngo, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Hong Kong History*. Under review

"Smuggling and Legal Pluralism on the China Coast: The Rise and Demise of the Joint Investigation Rules, 1864–1934," in Clara Wing-chung Ho, Ricardo K. S. Mak, and Yue-him Tam, eds., *Voyages, Migration, and the Maritime World: On China's Global Historical Role*: 165–85. De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110587685> 2018

Book Reviews and Review Essays

"The U.S. Secret War in China," review essay of *Agents of Subversion: The Fate of John T. Downey and the CIA's Covert War in China*, by John Delury. *Diplomatic History* 48.2: 310–12. <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhad098> 2024

Review of *China and the End of Global Silver, 1873–1937*, by Austin Dean. *Journal of Asian Studies* 80.4: 1056–58. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911821001650> 2021

Review of *Market Maoists: The Communist Origins of China's Capitalist Ascent*, by Jason M. Kelly. *Business History Review* 95.3: 601–04. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007680521000660> 2021

Review of *Inheritance of Loss: The Political Economy of Redemption after Empire*, by Yukiko Koga. *Enterprise and Society* 20.4: 1103–05. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eso.2018.76> 2019

Review of *Legal Lessons: Popularizing Laws in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1989*, by Jennifer Altehenger. *The PRC History Review* 13. http://prchistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Altehenger_review.pdf 2019

Review of *Empires of Coal: Fueling China's Entry into the Modern World Order, 1860–1920*, by Shellen Xiao Wu. *The Economic History Review* 69.3: 1048–49. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12412> 2016

"Japan in Maritime Asia: Security, Commerce, and Sovereignty," review essay of *Defensive Positions: The Politics of Maritime Security in Tokugawa Japan*, by Noell Wilson, and *Empires on the Waterfront: Japan's Ports and Power, 1858–1899*, by Catherine L. Phipps. *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Cultural Review* 17: 123–30. <https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-17/phipps-wilson> 2015

Review of *Grounds of Judgment: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth-Century China and Japan*, by Pär K. Cassel. *Journal of Asian Studies* 74.2: 459–60. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911815000133> 2015

Review of *Contraband: Louis Mandrin and the Making of a Global Underground*, by Michael Kwass. *Enterprise and Society* 15.3: 593–95. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1467222700016001> 2014

Review of *Paths toward the Modern Fiscal State: England, Japan, and China*, by Wenkai He. *Journal of Asian Studies* 75.4: 975–77.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911813001241> 2013

Other Publications and Projects

“Chinese Legal History: An Overview,” Legal History Blog.	2021
https://legalhistoryblog.blogspot.com/2021/10/chinese-legal-history-overview.html	
“Influenza Pandemics and Global Health in the Cold War,” Northeastern University College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH) Pandemic Teaching Initiative Module. https://cssh.northeastern.edu/pandemic-teaching-initiative/disease-diplomacy-and-science-in-the-cold-war-lessons-for-future-pandemics/	2020
“The Proven Solution to Pandemics President Trump Continues to Reject,” <i>The Washington Post</i> . https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/05/19/prove-solution-pandemics-that-president-trump-continues-reject/	2020
“Comment les droits de douane ont aidé à construire la Chine moderne” (How tariffs helped build modern China), <i>Le Grand Continent</i> . https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/01/16/comment-les-droits-de-douane-ont-aide-a-construire-la-chine-moderne/	2020
“Xiandai Zhongguo jisi shi shuxie de licheng, wenti yu keneng” 现代中国缉私史书写的历程、问题与可能 (The course, problems, and possibilities of writing the history of anti-smuggling in modern China), <i>Guangzhou Daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)</i> 广州大学学报 (社会科学版) (Journal of Guangzhou University (social science edition)) 18.6: 108–12. http://xb-sk.gzhu.edu.cn/CN/volumn/volumn_1199.shtml	2019
“Tariffs and Unintended Consequences: The Case of China’s War on Smuggling,” Columbia University Press Blog. http://www.cupblog.org/2018/07/19/tariffs-and-unintended-consequences-the-case-of-chinas-war-on-smuggling/	2018
“Falü, zhuquan yu Zhongguo yanhai jisi zhi zhan” 法律、主权与中国沿海的缉私之战 (Law, Sovereignty, and the War on Smuggling in Coastal China), <i>Falü shi yiping</i> 法律史译评 (Legal history studies) 5: 333–62.	2017
“Overseas Chinese, Coastal Smuggling, and Legal Pluralism in the People’s Republic of China,” H-Net World Legal History Blog. https://networks.h-net.org/node/16794/blog/world-legal-history-blog/142600/overseas-chinese-coastal-smuggling-and-legal	2016

Fellowships and Awards

Post-doctoral

Korea Foundation (KF), Establishment of Tenure-Track Professorship in Korean Studies Grant (US\$444,499.44 awarded to Northeastern University over five years)	2026–31
Northeastern University Humanities Center Faculty Fellowship	2024–25
Business History Conference (BHC) Philip Scranton Best Article Prize	2023

American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Frederick Burkhardt Fellowship, for residence at Harvard Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study	2022–23
American Philosophical Society (APS), Franklin Research Grant	2019
National Central Library (Taiwan) Center for Chinese Studies (CCS) Research Grant	2019
Northeastern University Humanities Center Faculty Fellowship	2018–19
Association for Asian Studies (AAS) First Book Subvention Award	2017
Northeastern University Richard and Arlene Offenberg History Faculty Fund	2017
Northeastern University College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH) Dean's Research Development Initiative Award	2016
Northeastern University Asian Studies Research Award	2016
Henry Luce Foundation/ACLS China Studies Postdoctoral Fellowship	2015–16
Yale University Council on East Asian Studies (CEAS) Postdoctoral Fellowship (declined)	2015–16
Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library Fellowship (declined)	2015
J. Willard Hurst Summer Institute in Legal History Institute Fellow	2015
Northeastern University Asian Studies Curriculum Award	2015
National Central Library (Taiwan) Center for Chinese Studies (CCS) Research Grant	2014
Law and Society Association (LSA) Career Workshop Grant	2014
Northeastern University Humanities Center Program Award	2014

Pre-doctoral

Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation Doctoral Fellowship	2012–13
Freeman Spogli Institute (FSI) China Studies Dissertation Grant	2012–13
Stanford University Department of History Weter Fellowship	2012
Freeman Spogli Institute (FSI) China Studies Dissertation Grant	2011–12
Stanford University Department of History Graduate Student Fellowship	2006–11
Business History Conference (BHC) Oxford Journals Doctoral Colloquium in Business History Grant	2011
Social Science Research Council (SSRC) International Dissertation Research Fellowship (IDRF)	2010
Stanford University Department of History Distinguished Scholar	2009–10
Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) Fellowship	2009–10
Stanford University Graduate School of Humanities and Sciences Graduate Research Opportunity (GRO) Fellowship	2009
Blakemore-Freeman Fellowship for Advanced Asian Language Study	2006–07
University of California Berkeley Department of History Highest Honors	2000
<i>Berkeley Undergraduate Journal</i> Best Paper Prize for “The Quiet Revolution and the ICAC: The Search for Legitimacy in Hong Kong in the 60s and 70s”	2000
University of California President's Undergraduate Research Fellowship	1999–2000

Interviews

Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard on China Podcast https://soundcloud.com/fairbank-center/chinas-war-on-smuggling-with-philip-thai	2021
American Society for Legal History, Legal History Podcast https://legalhistorypodcast.podbean.com/e/episode-22-philip-thai/	2020
Northeastern University Library, What's New Podcast https://whatsnewpodcast.org/how-tariffs-made-modern-china/	2020
New Books Network (NBn), East Asian Studies Podcast https://newbooksnetwork.com/philip-thai-chinas-war-on-smuggling-law-economic-life-and-the-making-of-the-modern-state-1842-1965-columbia-up-2018/	2018
Columbia University, Weatherhead East Asian Institute (WEAI) Q&A http://weai.columbia.edu/weai-author-qa-philip-thai-chinas-war-on-smuggling/	2018
Northeastern University, Breaking History Podcast https://breakinghistorypodcast.com/2016/10/16/episode-7-history-of-smuggling-in-china-with-philip-thai/	2016

Select Presentations

Invited Lectures

“Patriotism, Politics, and Profit: The Red Capitalists of Hong Kong and Macau,” Wellesley College	2024
“A Hole in the Bamboo Curtain: Hong Kong in the Cold War,” Hong Kong History Centre, University of Bristol	2023
“The China Resources Company and Cold War Hong Kong,” Modern and Contemporary Chinese Culture Talk Series, Hong Kong Polytechnic University	2023
“Fighting Containment with Colonial Law: The Strange Career of Percy Chen in Cold War Hong Kong,” American Bar Foundation (ABF)	2023
“From Vice City to Valuable Ally: Hong Kong, Social Transformation, and the Anglo-American War on Drugs, 1970–1980,” University of Missouri-Columbia	2022
“Communist China’s Capitalist Front: The China Resources Company in Cold War Hong Kong,” Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University	2022
“Smuggling and State Power in Modern China,” Global China Humanities Lecture Series, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)	2021
“Disease, Diplomacy, and Science in the Cold War: Lessons for Future Pandemics,” College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH), Northeastern University	2021
“Vice City: Hong Kong in the Anglo-American War on Drugs, 1970–1979,” Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (HKIHS)	2021
“China’s War on Smuggling: Law, Economic Life, and the Making of the Modern State,” International Society for Chinese Law and History (ISCLH)	2020
“Tariffs, Statecraft, and Smuggling on the China Coast, 1842–1943,” Asian Studies Program and Department of History, Boston College	2020

“China’s War on Smuggling: Law, Economic Life, and the Making of the Modern State,” The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington	2019
“China’s War on Smuggling: Law, Economic Life, and the Making of the Modern State,” Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan	2019
“Xin Zhongguo de yanhai zousi, feifa shichang yu gongsheng jingji (1950–1965)” 新中國 的沿海走私、非法市場與共生經濟 (Coastal smuggling, illicit markets, and symbiotic economies in new China), National Central Library (Taiwan) (in Chinese)	2019
“China’s War on Smuggling: Law, Economic Life, and the Making of the Modern State,” Center for East Asian Studies (CEAS), Stanford University	2019
“China’s War on Smuggling in Historical Perspective,” Department of History, Brandeis University	2019
“Trans-Asian Encounters and China’s War on Smuggling,” Asia Center, Harvard University	2018
“Legal Shades of Gray: Coastal Trafficking, Underground Markets, and Symbiotic Economies in Socialist China,” Legal History Colloquium, Vanderbilt University	2016
“Old Menace in New China: Coastal Smuggling and Illicit Markets under Early Communist Rule,” Institute for Chinese Studies, Ohio State University (OSU)	2015
“Illicit Economies on the Chinese Coast: An Historical Perspective,” D’Amore-McKim School of Business, Northeastern University	2014
“Falü, guojia jianshe yu Zhongguo yanhai jisi zhi zhan” 法律、國家建設與中國沿海緝 私之戰, (Law, state-building, and the war on smuggling in coastal China”), National Central Library (Taiwan) (in Chinese)	2014
“The War on Smuggling in Coastal China: Law, Policing, and State-Building,” Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University	2013

Conferences

“‘Domestic Petroleum’ for the Colonies: Chinese Oil Exports to Hong Kong and Macau in the 1970s,” Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Conference	2025
“Brokers of the Cold War: K. C. Wong, Henry Fok, and the Red Capitalists of Hong Kong,” “Hong Kong and Shenzhen: Border Crossings, Local and Global,” Council on East Asian Studies (CEAS), Yale University	2024
“American Technology for Chinese Communists: The Case of Antibiotics Exports in Cold War Hong Kong,” Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) Annual Conference	2024
“Patriotism and Profit: The Red Capitalists of Hong Kong and Macau in the Cold War,” Business History Conference (BHC) Annual Conference	2024
“Evading Embargoes: Chinese Front Companies in Cold War Hong Kong,” Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) Annual Conference	2023
“Circumventing Containment: Front Companies in Cold War Hong Kong and Macau,” Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Conference	2023

“Bypassing the Bamboo Curtain: Chinese Front Companies in Cold War Hong Kong,” American Historical Association (AHR) Annual Conference	2023
“New Directions in Chinese Business History and Economic Life,” American Historical Association (AHR) Colloquium	2021
“Vice City: Hong Kong in the Anglo-American War on Drugs, 1970–1979,” Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) Annual Conference (canceled)	2020
“Author-Meets-Readers: Philip Thai’s <i>China’s War on Smuggling: Law, Economic Life, and the Making of the Modern State, 1842–1965</i> ,” American Society for Legal History (ASLH) Annual Conference	2019
“Fire Sale: Retailing, Marketing, and Conceptualizing Property Insurance in Modern China,” Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Conference	2018
Roundtable on “Economic Life in Chinese History: New Research Directions,” New England Region Association for Asian Studies (NEAAS) Annual Conference	2017
“Smuggling and Legal Pluralism on the China Coast: The Rise and Demise of the Joint Investigation Rules,” American Society for Legal History (ASLH) Annual Conference	2016
“Old Menace in New China: Coastal Smuggling and Illicit Markets in the Early People’s Republic,” Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Conference	2016
“Smuggling and Legal Pluralism on the China Coast: The Rise and Demise of the Joint Investigation Rules,” “Voyages, Migration and the Maritime Silk Road: An International Symposium on China’s Role in Global History,” Hong Kong Baptist University	2015
“‘One Complementing the Other’: Legal Reforms, Illicit Businesses, and the War on Smuggling,” “Globalism and the Law in Historical Perspective,” Legal History Consortium Conference, Indiana University Maurer School of Law	2015
“Binding Maritime China: Control, Evasion, and Interloping,” Co-organized with Boston University and Brandeis University	2015
“Smuggling and Interdiction along Coastal China,” Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Conference	2013
“Legal Sovereignty and the War on Smuggling in Coastal China,” American Historical Association (AHA) Annual Conference	2013
“Law, Business, and the War on Smuggling in Coastal China,” Business History Conference (BHC) Annual Conference	2012
“Law, State-Building, and the War on Smuggling in Coastal China,” Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Conference	2012

Symposia and Workshops

“‘Close to Britain, Friendly with America, and Distant from China’: The Hang Seng Bank in Cold War Hong Kong,” “Cold War in Hong Kong, Asia, and Beyond,” Nanyang Technological University, Singapore	2026
Discussant, Hong Kong History Workshop, Hong Kong History Centre and the Richard Charles Lee Library, University of Toronto	2026

“Bandit Goods and Petty Commerce: Taiwan in the Cold War Shadow Economy,” Carroll R. Pauley Symposium on “The Legacy of Republican China,” University of Nebraska	2024
“Formal Barriers, Informal Commerce: Economic Connections in Greater China during the Cold War,” International Society for Chinese Legal History (ISCLH) Research Workshop, Yale Law School	2018
“Anti-Smuggling Campaigns and the Expansion of State Authority on the China Coast,” “Maritime Asia: Securitization of the China Seas in the 19 th and 20 th Centuries,” Institute of East Asian Studies (IEAS), University of California, Berkeley	2018
“Things Fall Apart? State Re-Building and New Geographies of Coastal Smuggling in Civil War China,” “New Perspectives on the Chinese Civil War,” Council on East Asian Studies (CEAS), Yale University	2016
“Smuggler, Peddler, Patriot, Spy: Illicit Coastal Trade in the Early People’s Republic,” “Doing Business across Borders,” Hagley Museum and Library	2015
“Unscrupulous Merchants, Illicit Joint Ventures, and the Business of Smuggling,” “Rethinking Business History in Modern China, 1839–1937,” Institute of Chinese Studies, Freie Universität Berlin	2014
“‘Smuggling is a Business’: Regulations, Sovereignty, and Markets,” “Rethinking the Market in Modern China,” Joint Center for History and Economics, Harvard University	2014
“Law, State-Building, and the War on Smuggling in Coastal China,” “International Workshop on Chinese Legal History, Culture, and Modernity,” Columbia University	2012

Discussant and Chair

Discussant, “Markets and the State in 20 th Century China,” Business History Conference (BHC) Annual Conference	2024
Chair, “Legal and Intellectual Constructs of Empire,” “Law and Empire in the Sino-Asian Context” Workshop, Co-hosted by American Society for Legal History (ASLH), International Society for Chinese Law and History (ISCLH), and Harvard Law School Program in East Asian Studies	2019
Discussant and Chair, “Smuggling, Violence, and State in East Asian Maritime World,” Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Annual Conference	2019
Discussant and Chair, “Reading Legal Texts in Chinese History: Sources, Materiality, and Authority,” American Society for Legal History (ASLH) Annual Conference	2018
Chair, “The Chinese Question: Gold Rushes and Global Politics,” talk by Mae Ngai (Columbia University), Harvard University Asia Center	2017
Chair, “Revolution at the Canteen: Food and Labor Politics in Industrial China, 1910s–1950s,” talk by Seung-joon Lee (National University of Singapore), Harvard-Yenching Institute	2014
Discussant and Chair, “Riots, Rights, and Radicals: Social Movements and Memory,” Northeastern University World History Conference	2014
Discussant and Chair, “Comparative Studies of Tax Policy Regimes,” Social Science History Association (SSHA) Annual Conference	2013

Academic Service

Profession

Member, Scranton Prize Committee, Business History Conference (BHC)	2024–present
Member, Finance Committee, American Society for Legal History (ASLH)	2019–present
Member, Early Career Global Legal History Fellowship Selection Committee, American Society for Legal History (ASLH)	2025–present
Member, Nominating Committee, American Historical Association (AHA)	2022–24
Book Review Editor, Modern China Section, <i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>	2020–22
Chair, Development Committee, International Society for Chinese Law and History (ISCLH)	2014–21

Institution

Member, Northeastern University College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH), Department of Cultures, Societies and Global Studies (CSGS) Department Chair Search	2025–26
Member, Northeastern University College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH), Global China Search	2024–25
Chair, Global Asian Studies Postdoctoral Fellowships Review Committee	2024–25
Chair, Korean Studies Student Award Scholarship Review Committee	2023–25
Chair, Hong Liu China Studies Student Award Scholarship Review Committee	2023–25
Member, Northeastern University Presidential Council on Belonging	2021–22, 23–25
Member, Northeastern University College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH), Visiting Instructor in Korean Language and Culture Search	2023–24
Chair, Northeastern University College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH), Asian American Studies Search	2021–22
Member, Northeastern University College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH), Civic Sustainability, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Council	2021–22
Member, Northeastern University College of Social Sciences and Humanities (CSSH), Tenure and Promotion Advisory Committee	2020–22
Member, Executive Committee, Northeastern University Asian Studies Program	2014–present

Department

Member, Northeastern University Department of History, Faculty Affairs and Development (FAD) Committee	2025–present
Member, Northeastern University Department of History, Faculty Advisory Committee on Salaries (FACS)	2015, 25
Chair, Northeastern University Department of History, Teaching Professor in Modern Japan/East Asia Search	2023–24
Member, Northeastern University Department of History, Undergraduate Curriculum Committee	2014, 17–19
Member, Northeastern University Department of History, Graduate Admissions Committee	2016–19

Other Education

Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), Yale-China Chinese Language Center (CLC)	2009
Tsinghua University (Beijing, China), Inter-University Program (IUP) for Advanced Chinese Language Studies	2006–07
University of California, Berkeley Extension, Certification in Corporate Finance with Distinction	2001–02
Peking University (Beijing, China), University of California Education Abroad Program (EAP)	1998–99

Manuscript Reviewer

Business History; Law and History Review; Modern Asian Studies; Modern China; Twentieth-Century China; Cambridge University Press; Columbia University Weatherhead East Asian Institute (WEAI); University of Hawai'i Press

Tenure Case Reviewer

Boston College; University of Nevada; University of Washington

Courses Taught

ASNS/HIST 1150: East Asian Studies
HIST 1500: Modern China
HIST 2308: Law, Justice, and Society in Modern China
HIST 2360: History of Capitalism in East Asia
HIST 3330: The Global Cold War

Languages

Mandarin: Advanced fluency
Cantonese: Native speaker
Japanese: Reading knowledge

Technical Skills

Geographic Information System (GIS), SPSS, and Excel (advanced statistical functions)
Oracle Certified Programmer for the Java 2 Platform
Passed Level I Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) Exam

Professional Affiliations

American Historical Association (AHA)
American Society for Legal History (ASLH)
Association for Asian Studies (AAS)
Business History Conference (BHC)
Harvard University Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies Associate in Research
Historical Society for Twentieth-Century China (HSTCC)
International Society for Chinese Law and History (ISCLH)
Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR)

References

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