

Nordic TCA on Responsible Internationalisation

March 25-27, 2026

Helsinki, Finland



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FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

Who we are?



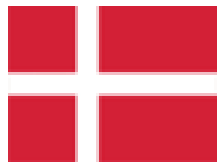
15 from Sweden



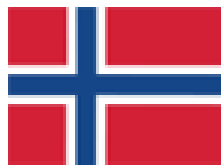
11 from Finland



7 from Iceland



8 from Denmark



12 from Norway



1 from
Belgium



2 from
Estonia

Thursday, March 26

9:00 - 9:15 Welcome and Introduction

9:15 -10:30 Keynote Session

10:30-10:50 Coffee Break

10:50 – 12:30 Workshop 1: Due Diligence

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch Break

13:30 – 15:00 Workshop 2: Mobility Practices and Implementation

15:00 – 15:30 Coffee Break and Family photo

15:30 – 16:00 Wrap-up of workshops 1 and 2

18:30-20:30 Dinner at Restaurant Kirsikka

Opening words

Maija Airas
Head of Unit
Finnish National Agency for Education

Keynote session

Moderated by Dr. Hege Toje,
Norwegian Directorate for Higher
Education and Skills

Dr. Bård Drange, Senior Adviser, Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills “Authoritarian states’ attempts to influence academia – the example of China”

Dr. Erik Mo Welin, analyst, Swedish National China Centre at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs “Education & responsible internationalisation”

Dr. Tommy Shih, Director Forum for Responsible Internationalization and Research Security, KTH Royal Institute of Technology and Associate Professor, Lund University

What world does academia have to deal with going forward?

Bård Drange

Senior advisors at the Norwegian Directorate for
Higher Education and Skills

Helsinki 2025



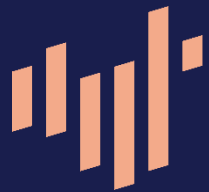
Focus

- «The challenge lies outside the West»
- «The challenge comes from within»
- Democratic preparedness/resilience: What is it? What should it be? Pre-requisites?
- Repercussions of developments in the US
- Transnational challenges
- Navigating amidst uncertainty

Thank you!

Bård Drange: bard.drange@hkdir.no





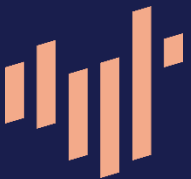
NATIONELLT
KUNSKAPSCENTRUM
OM KINA

Authoritarian states' attempts at influencing academia – the example of China

Erik Mo Welin, analyst, Swedish National China Centre, Swedish
Institute of International Affairs (UI)

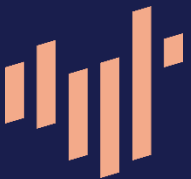
Background of study

- Research project financed by the Swedish Authority for Psychological Defense
- Research with restrictions: Authoritarian influence in Swedish-Chinese research relations (2025)



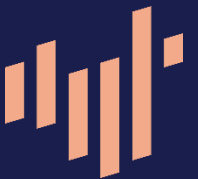
Background of study

- 1) Overview study of previous research
- 2) Two online surveys with scholars collaborating with China and China scholars
- 3) 16 interviews



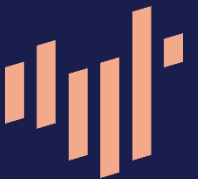
Why this research project?

- China is an increasingly important research nation and academic collaboration partner
- China's transnational repression is widespread and sophisticated compared to that of other countries
- Extremely severe repression against the Chinese diaspora (e.g., human rights activists, journalists, and ethnic minorities)
- Increasing signs of authoritarian influence on students, researchers, and universities outside China's borders ([Cold Crisis: Academic Freedom and Interference in China Studies in the UK, 2025](#); [“On My Campus, I Am Afraid” : China’s Targeting of Overseas Students Stifles Rights, 2024](#); [Greitens & Truex, 2020](#); [Lloyd-Damnjanovic, 2018](#))



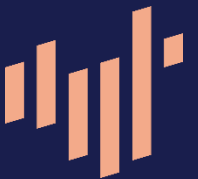
China's authoritarian system

- China is a Marxist-Leninist state in which the Communist party penetrates all sectors of society including universities
- China Press Freedom Index 178 out of 180 countries (only North Korea and Eritrea have worse press freedom)
- Universities are controlled by the CCP through party committees that exist parallel to the university leadership at all universities



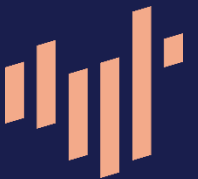
How does China exert authoritarian influence abroad?

- **public actors** (affiliated with the state or the Communist Party)
- so-called **united front work**, in which organizations with no direct ties to the state are co-opted to serve the state's objectives (Almén et al., 2023, p. 28)
- **nationalist individuals in the diaspora** who do not necessarily have ties to the Chinese state or other related organizations but who are mobilized to serve the state's purposes (Wong, 2024)
- **Main methods:** repression and co-optation (carrots and sticks)



Who are targets of authoritarian influence?

- Academic institutions, publishers and organizations
- Chinese students abroad
- Researchers/scholars with a Chinese background
- Scholars in social sciences and humanities who study China (China scholars)
- Scholars who cooperate with China
- Other students and administrators (?)



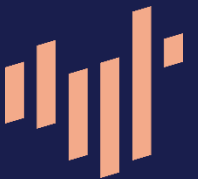
Forms of authoritarian influence

- **Pressure on universities, organisations and publishers**
 - Enforce censorship
 - Cancel academic events
- **Co-optation:**
 - Offers of financial benefits
 - Offers of paid trips or conferences
 - Often in the “grey zone”
- **Repression:**
 - **Surveillance/indirect threats:** “invited to tea”
 - Restrictions of access to material or locations (i.e denial of visa to China)
 - **Direct threats:** harassment or threats of violence
 - Physical detention or violence



What effects could authoritarian influence have?

- Self-censorship
- "Chilling effect": limiting academic freedom for certain groups
- "Exit" = less people in China, less people study China
- Defiance: becoming more critical against China, engage in various forms of activism



Examples: Pressure on universities, organizations, and publishers

- The aim is to restrict, censor material, or halt specific activities on campus
- Several U.S. universities have faced pressure from representatives of Chinese consulates or embassies in connection with visits by the Dalai Lama and representatives from Taiwan (Lloyd Damnjanovic, 2018, pp. 52–53).
- Incidents at European universities/conferences: EACS in Portugal in 2014; Sheffield Hallam University (2025)
- **Censorship:** Springer Nature restricted access to approximately 1,000 articles on its Chinese website and also removed politically sensitive material at the request of Chinese authorities (Loubere, 2018)

Sheffield Hallam University

This article is more than 4 months old

Counter-terror police investigate claim UK university halted research after Chinese pressure

Sheffield Hallam University ordered professor to cease human rights study into Uyghurs forced labour in China

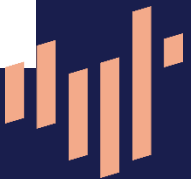
Nadeem Badshah
Tue 4 Nov 2025 01.08 CET

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Laura Murphy, professor of human rights and contemporary slavery at Sheffield Hallam University, was ordered to stop her research. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

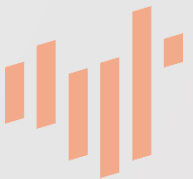


Examples: students under surveillance

Several examples of family members of Chinese students abroad being contacted by Chinese authorities after the student, for example, participated in protests or criticized the Chinese government (Amnesty, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2021; Hamilton and Oldberg, 2020).

Parents of a Chinese student at the Australian National University were visited and warned by Chinese authorities shortly after the student made a sensitive statement in a class (Hamilton and Oldberg, 2020)

Stanford student working on Chinese material approached and attempted at co-opted by likely MSS-agent for purposes of gathering intelligence (The Stanford Review, 2025)



Examples: repression and and co- optation of scholars

A lecture had been interrupted by individuals that the scholar assumed were representatives of Chinese authorities/embassy, which the scholar experienced as very threatening (Research with restrictions, 2025)

A scholar was threatened on the Chinese embassy's web page using wording that could be interpreted as a physical threat (Research with restrictions, 2025)

British researcher who was repeatedly harassed by a visiting researcher from China, who whispered "we're keeping an eye on you" into their ear and also questioned the researcher about their personal background in a threatening manner. This led to the researcher ceasing their teaching activities (China-UK Transparency, 2025, p. 19).

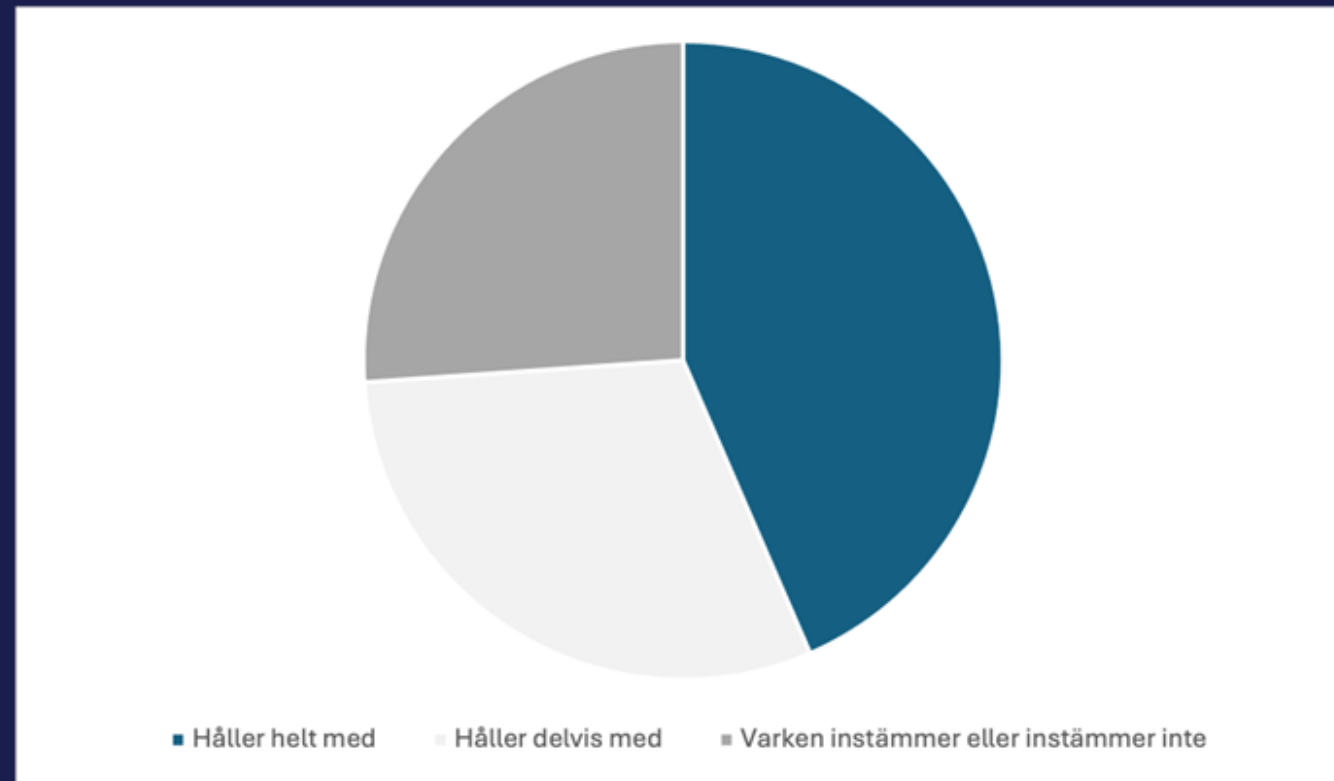
A researcher was offered 25,000 US dollars by representatives of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs during a visit to China to write a book about China's growing global influence (Lloyd-Damnjanovic (2018).



Examples: Self-censorship

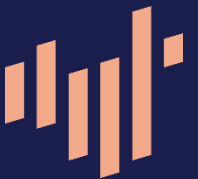
- 7/10 China scholars in our study believed self-censorship to be problem in the field
- Concerns about self-censorship among collaborating scholars also not insignificant
- Common reasons for self-censorship:
 - avoiding conflicts with Chinese students
 - Maintain the possibility of travelling to China
 - Worry about research respondents, partners or family in China
- Risk of "chilling effect" spilling over to other groups?

Sweden-based Chinese scholars who believes that self-censorship is a problem in the field.



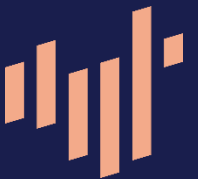
Questions to consider

- How to develop strategies and infrastructure to assist scholars and students that are targeted by authoritarian influence?
- How to prepare students and scholars who travel to China for academic purposes?
- How to disseminate knowledge about transnational repression from authoritarian states among different groups in academia?
- How to build and ensure resilience against pressure from authoritarian states like China on academic institutions?



Thanks for listening!

Erik.mo.welin@ui.se



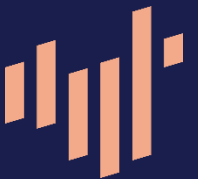
Relevant examples: Possible co-optation

- Both our interviews and survey data revealed how scholars had been offered money outside of their usual remuneration when cooperating with China
- Co-optation attempts where scholars were offered money or other benefits to write positively about China or “tell the China story well” were documented in previous literature
- Raises question how to deal with offers of financial benefits for scholars and students



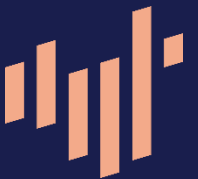
Vad kan man göra? (policyrekommendationer)

- *utveckla konkreta strategier och handlingsplaner för att hantera den auktoritära påverkan som forskare utsätts för.*
- *genomföra fler kunskapshöjande insatser riktade mot forskare som ger grundläggande information om Kinas och andra auktoritära staters politiska system och metoder för auktoritär påverkan.*
- *Utlysa riktade forskningsmedel med syfte att skapa bättre förståelse för Kinas akademiska miljö och forskningslandskap.*
- *utveckla nya administrativa roller på lärosäten med bredare kompetens, som ansvarar för både säkerhetsfrågor och internationaliseringsfrågor.*
- *inrätta nya roller som ansvarar för att informera om akademisk frihet, kartlägga politiskt motiverade hot mot forskare och studenter samt stötta de som utsätts.*



Pressure on universities: example

- The Confucius Institute has been involved in several notable incidents. In a European context, it is worth mentioning a conference organized in 2014 by the European Association for China Studies at the University of Minho in Portugal. The Confucius Institute was a co-sponsor, and on the first day of the conference, the institute's director, Xu Lin, ordered that pages in the conference program referring to a number of Taiwanese institutions be torn out (d'Hooghe et al., 2018, p. 31; Redden, 2014).





Responsible internationalization

Tommy Shih, Professor, Director

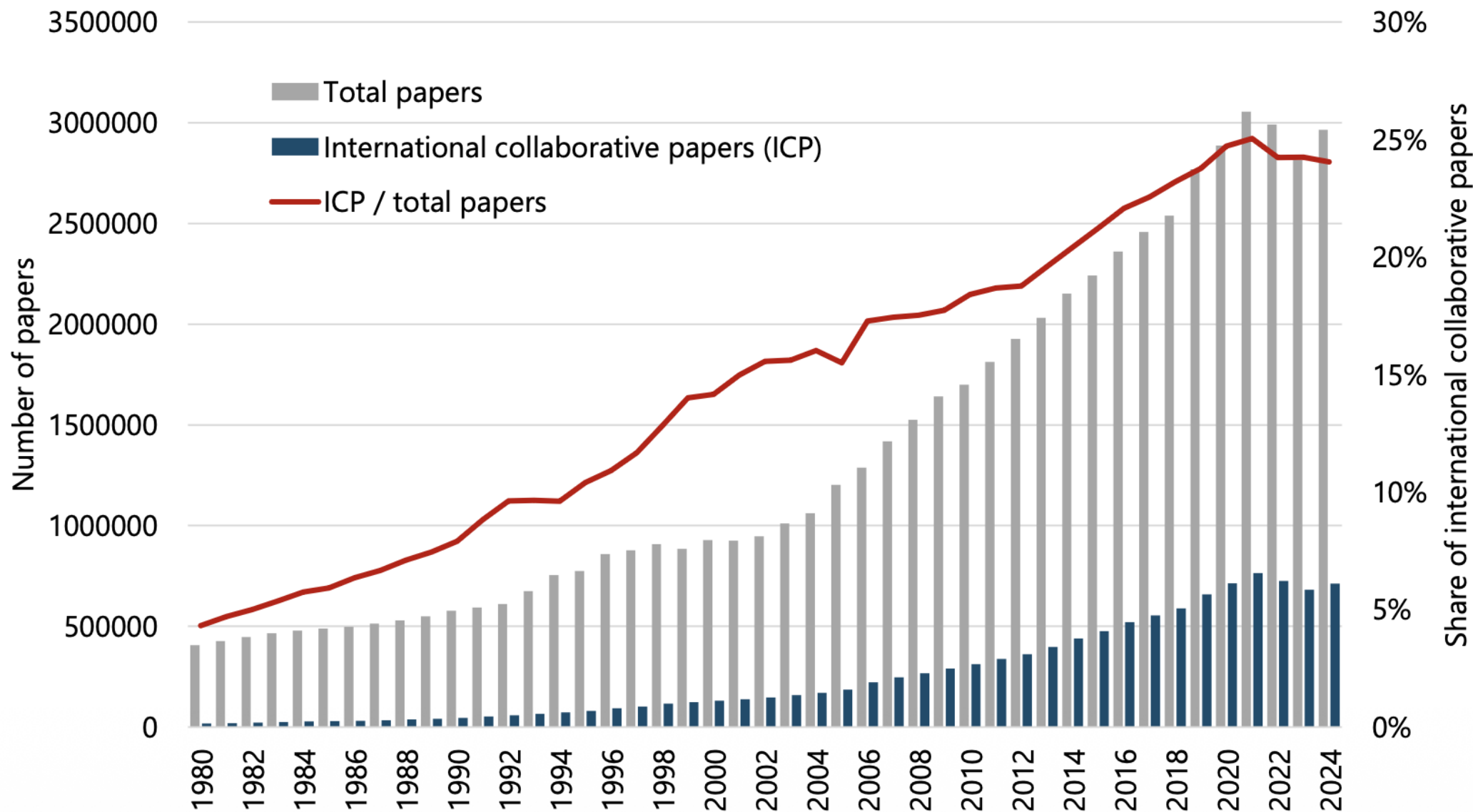
Forum for Responsible Internationalization and Research
Security



Profound changes

- The world is undergoing profound transformations at the geopolitical level. The social license of universities is being redefined.
 - Towards serving national interests.
 - More political influence, wanting less “ideology”.
 - Internationalization is becoming increasingly questioned.
- Trends:
 - Erosion of academic freedom
 - An emerging multipolar world
 - Reprioritization of interests (toward scientific nationalism)

Global research outputs and international collaboration





Nordics and EU

EU	Sweden	Denmark	Norway	Finland
Open strategic autonomy (2021) Export controls - Regulation (2021/821) Tackling foreign interference (EC, 2022) Economic security package (2024) Research security (Council of EU, 2024) ERA Act (proposal 2026)	Responsible internationalization (STINT, 2020) SUHF checklist (2023) National guidelines (VR, 2026)	Guidelines for International Research and Innovation Collaboration (URIS) (2022/2026)	Responsible international collaboration (HK-Dir, 2023)	Recommendations for responsible international cooperation (2024)



Why international collaboration

- Quality
- Impact
- New ideas
- Combining resources
- Science diplomacy
- Intercultural understanding
- Job opportunities

Responsible internationalization

- Uses of the term:
 - Raise awareness of a changing world.
 - Heuristic approach to drive behavioral changes.
 - A catch all term that signals that universities are doing something.
- A term with no clear definition. Often associated with different goals such as:
 - Promoting open and inclusive collaboration, grounded in globalism, equity, and science as a human right.
 - Ensuring that international partnerships are conducted with high standards of integrity and responsibility.
 - Safeguarding collaborations to address economic and national security considerations.
- Reminder that internationalization is broader than security.



Responsible internationalisation: Guidelines for reflection on international academic collaboration

Shih, Gaunt & Östlund, 2020



Responsible internationalization and education

- Has primarily been used in the context of research.
- In education responsible internationalization is often framed in the context:
 - Equity
 - Intercultural competence
 - Decolonization
 - Global North – Global South dynamics
 - Internationalization at home
 - Addressing global challenges



Knowledge security

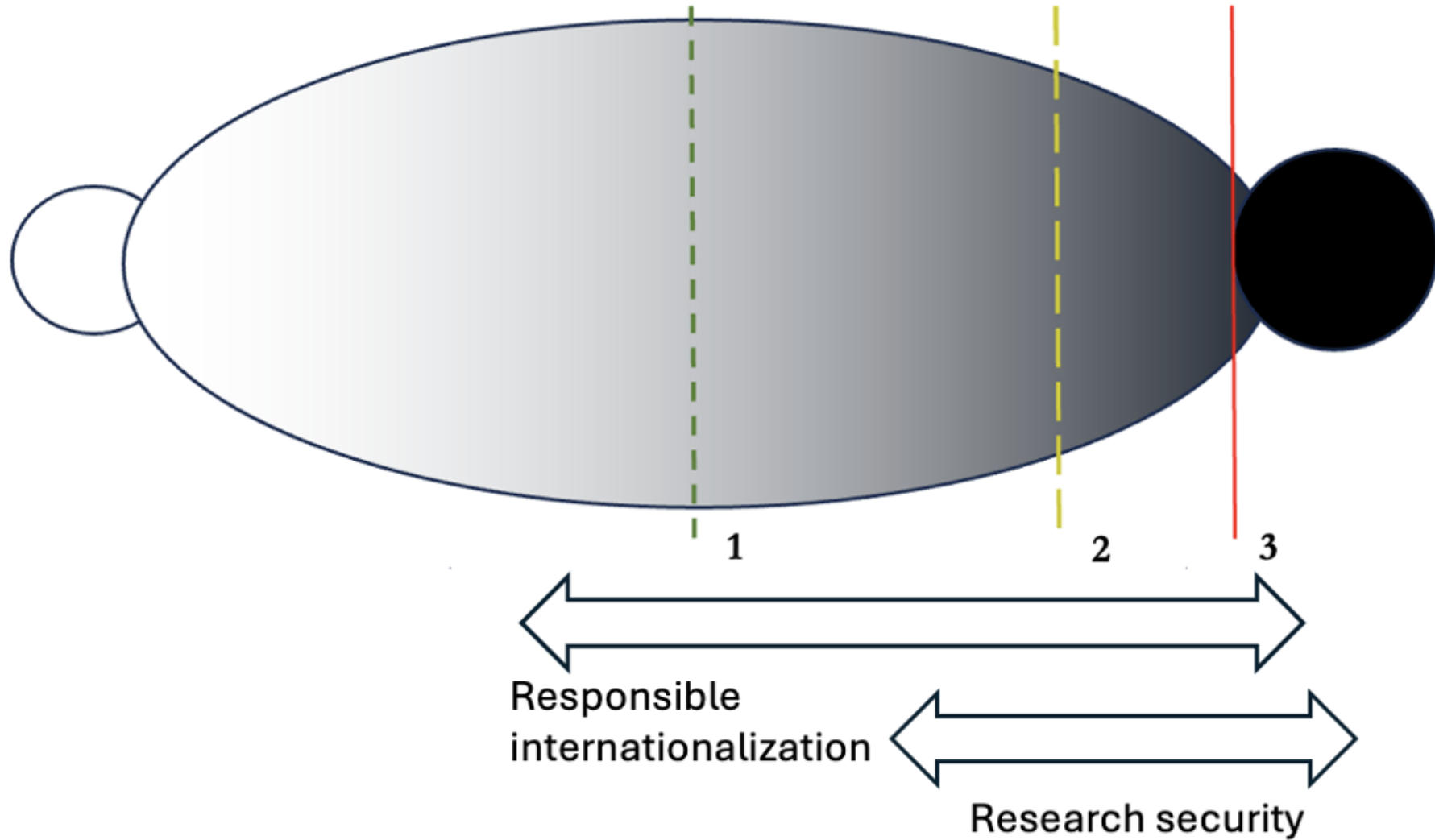
In higher education the term "knowledge security" often used to

- Undesirable transfer of sensitive knowledge and technology
- Foreign interference and restriction of academic freedom
- The use or misuse of technology and knowledge for malicious and/or unethical purposes.

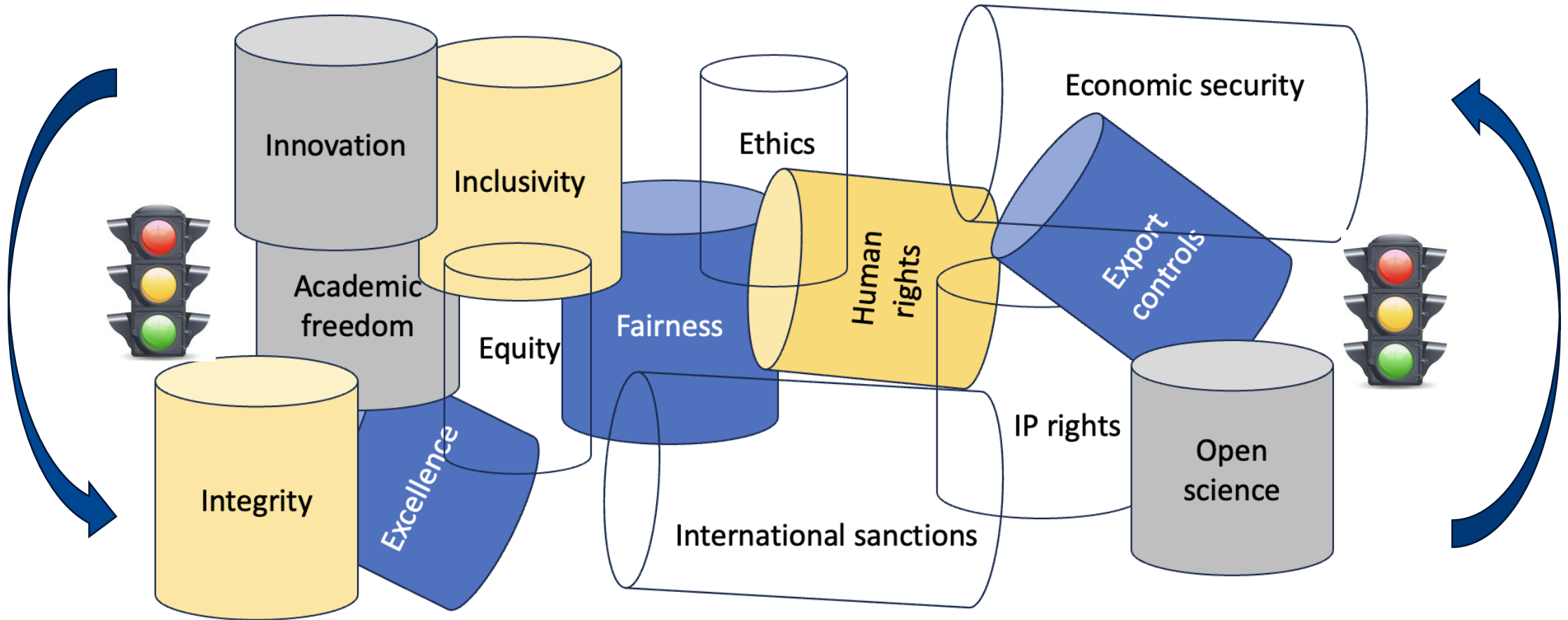
Source: <https://www.kuleuven.be/knowledgesecurity>

Discretionary responsibility

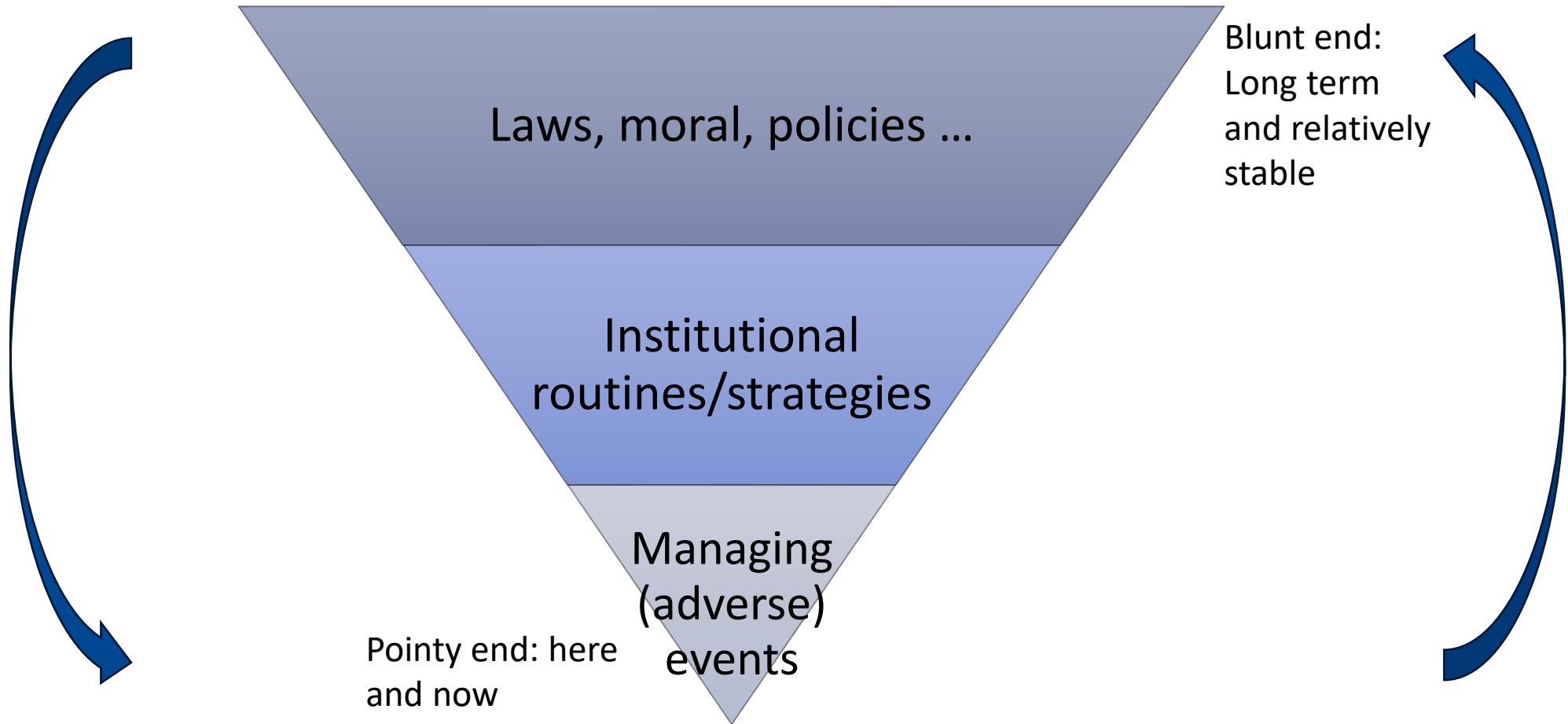
Compliance



A simplified view



The work needed





Thank you!

Coffee Break

Let's be back at 10:50