

The Minnesota Contribution to China Studies in Sociology

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I joined the Department in Fall 1991 and officially left for my Hong Kong position last November, so I know a little bit about the most recent history of Minnesota Sociology. I'd like to offer a casual observation about the Minnesota contribution to China studies in sociology.

Throughout the 1990s, we observed in the American sociology community what I called "the China phenomenon" – (1) Flagship journals in our discipline stopped asking "why China" but went ahead to publish China studies; in the decade of 1990s, *ASR*, *AJS*, and *Social Forces* published some 40 articles on China, more than the cumulative total the Top Three published on China in their entire pre-1989 history. (2) All Ph.D. programs in the nation made serious efforts to recruit excellent grads from China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan; over the past years when I gave lectures in some of these departments, I talked to Chinese students there all the time. (3) Almost every top-30 department had some faculty actively doing research on a Chinese society; put this in context, in 1980 only three "China experts" were holding faculty positions in the Top 30: Izra Vogel at Harvard, Marty Whyte at Michigan, and Bill Parish at Chicago. (4) An impressive score of high-profile, "mainstream" sociologists began to study Chinese societies, some of whom already published significant works on China. Immediate examples are Craig Calhoun's *Neither Gods Nor Emperors*, which makes a theory-informed, non-participant observer's account about a 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy movement, and Phyllis Moen's numerous articles with Xueguang Zhou on China's stratification, education, and family.

In all these four dimensions the University of Minnesota's Department of Sociology was a significant part of this China phenomenon. Of the 40 articles published by *ASR*, *AJS*, and *Social Forces* on China in the 1990s, six came from the University of Minnesota's faculty and students, accounting 15%, although the University of Minnesota sociology faculty was about 4%

of the total faculty body in the top 30 departments whose faculty's works most frequently get published in the journals.

In terms of graduate training, the University of Minnesota was one of the very first sociology departments in the U.S. that recruited Chinese students as early as 1970s. I have yet counted how many graduated from us with a Ph.D., but I can mention the names of a handful whose scholarships have influenced China studies significantly and who consequently have occupied important academic positions in East Asia or elsewhere. Edie Kuo, a 1970's grad from our department, is dean at National Singapore University, which consistently ranks in the top ten among all universities in Asia (keep in mind that China alone has several hundreds' universities on the Mainland). Lau Siukai, who studied here in the 1980's, is the sociology department chair at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (another top Ten university in Asia) and he is Hong Kong's Andy Rooney or George Will appearing on televisions every week to comment on Hong Kong politics and social trends. CNN interviewed him frequently in his office; so his office is as large and professionally organized as Jeylan Mortimer's. Yi Qingchun, another 1980s grad, is a senior fellow at the world-famous Academia Sinica in Taipei and a well-known expert on Chinese family and marriages. Chen Dongsheng, who graduated in 1990, a year before I came, is already a leading economic sociologist in Taiwan, who has been doing original research about the island's international joint ventures; he is now the youngest person ever to chair Taiwan's oldest sociology department at National Taiwan University. Finally, our 1997 graduate Xiaoling Shu is in her fifth year as an assistant professor at UC-Davis, and with her articles on China's gender and social stratification appearing in *Social Forces*, *Social Science Research*, and *Research on Social Stratification and Mobility*, Xiaoling is clearly on the rise in China studies. The first graduate student from the PRC to study at Minnesota was in fact Deming Wang, who graduated with a Ph.D. in 1991 and went to teach at U of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. I am very happy to learn that our excellent grads Sara Dorow and Song Yang will take up tenure-track positions at Alberta

and Arkansas respectively, and I have every hope that they will continue to conduct China-related studies in their successful careers ahead.

Minnesota has long been in mainstream sociology, having its faculty do work central to sociological theories and methodologies, yet with an American or European context in mind. Anticipating the rise of China in the world, in 1988 the Department made a bold move to develop exchange programs with its counterpart at Nankai University, one of China's leading universities that also has had sister relationships with U of MN for decades. Thanks to John Clark and especially Joe Galaskiewicz for their able leaderships, that program was an immediate success, benefiting both departments and their faculty in many ways. Nankai benefited from sending their six young teachers to Minnesota since 1991, to teach courses on China here while taking advantage of their yearlong stay to widen and deepen their sociological knowledge, or basically to enrich and modify their sociological imaginations with gold and maroon colors. Back home, many of them developed new courses and new research projects, helping Nankai to retain and secure a spot in the top five among China's 30 plus sociology programs.

In the meantime, several distinguished professors from Minnesota crossed the Pacific to teach at Nankai, and their one-time seminars and semester-long course offerings have been greatly valued and appreciated by Chinese students. Joe Galaskiewicz gave a seminar on urban sociology where he talked about social networks, and his Chinese students and colleagues understood him perfectly, simply because networking is all that everyone does everyday in China; his Chinese students were deeply confused, however, about why American sociologists wanted to develop theories about Chinese way of life. George Donahue gave a fresh air by lecturing on rural sociology, when up until that point China cared mostly about rural economy. Bob Fulton seriously talked about the American sociological perspective on death, and in the early 1990s when Chinese government was far from accepting anything about post-modernism, Bob was so brave in openly anticipating about the country's rising trends of AIDs, prostitutes, and the lesbian and gay population in the years to come; in retrospect, he was damn right about every trend he

predicted. Joel Nelson offered for the first time in Nankai's post-1981 sociology history a course on social stratification, and that course became a standard offering. Not directly associated with the Nankai exchange program but still very exciting is Ron Anderson's successful project of publishing his grandfather's photographs taken in China at the turn of the 20th century; the photo exhibition and book were one of the momentums of the 90th anniversary of China's 1911 Revolution, one that overthrew the Qing Dynasty and founded the Republic. In addition, Jeff Broadbent was invited very early to lecture at Nankai about Japan's environmental movements; Jeylan Mortimer gave a paper at Beijing's International Conference on Marriage and Family, while also taking time to meet sociologists from the Beijing area; and Joe Galaskiewicz lectured on social networks at Academia Sinica in 1991 and returned to Hong Kong and Shenzhen in 2000, while in addition to giving lectures, he also took photo pictures to document the change of China's urban landscapes in the 1990s.

In the 1990s, I was probably the most active sociology faculty in the Department doing research on China. I was not hired as a China scholar, so I got only one chance to offer a seminar on Chinese society over the years I was here. But China is where I grew up, so my cultural awareness and local and national resources offered me some immediate assistance in conducting research there. And I indeed conducted a few, with the tremendous amounts of support from and through the Department. To any future new hire who desires to do China studies in the Department, I can ensure him or her this is a professionally rewarding place. Here is a sample of my own experiences: Jeylan read and improved my very first grant proposal, when I had no idea how to formulate and present myself in order to win money that every other competitor also believes deserving to get. My very first articles, before they were in print, were read and commented by many colleagues – Joe, Joachim, David, Ron Anderson (those are my 9th floor neighbors), and Ron Aminzade, Bob Leik, Barbara, Jeylan, Jeff – to name a few from 10th and 11th floors. And all four chairs (Knoke, Ward, William, Candace) and all the staff were so supportive of the activities I organized and so helpful to the many visitors I invited from other

institutions, U.S. or China. For me personally, this Department has turned an immature researcher with a Chinese hardworking soul into a young sociologist with a Midwest hardworking spirit.

I've taken that spirit to my new Hong Kong job. As funding director of the Survey Research Center at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (or otherwise known as Hong Kong's MIT, ranking in the top ten of Asia's universities), I had the opportunity to do something that I believe is significant for the sociological studies of China. My Hong Kong colleagues and I are in a unique position to mobilize resources to initiate and conduct first all-China General Social Survey, a longitudinal data collection project similar to NORC's GSS. The data archives will be open to social science researchers of China worldwide.

Minnesota sociology is still alive in Hong Kong. On my office door's window is a small but cute photo picture of Minneapolis, and on the backside of the picture is the roster of Minnesota sociology faculty – virtually I have brought everyone to Hong Kong! Moreover, Ron Aminzade's article on Time and Historical Sociology is a standard reading in sociological theory course there, and I am not the instructor of the course. But in my graduate statistics seminars I still use that famous textbook, *Social Data Analysis* by David Knoke and George Bornstadt. If David and George have had lots of royalties because of the sale of that text in East Asia, and they want to take me to dinner sometime, I won't decline their invitation.

It is very nice to return to this year's Sociological Research Institute to celebrate Minnesota Sociology's 100 Years. My very best wishes for Minnesota's continuing contribution in China studies in sociology.