

Interview with Dr. Rida Ga, visiting scholar at Huamin Research Center, Rutgers University

Di Sun, Huamin Research Center

Dr. Rida Ga is a visiting scholar at Huamin Research Center in the School of Social Work at Rutgers University from December 2014 to May 2015. He visited and did research during his stay at Rutgers. Dr. Rida Ga is a professor and Master instructor at Beijing Administrative College.

Huamin Research Center was established by Huamin Foundation in China and Rutgers University. It is affiliated to the School of Social Work at Rutgers University. The mission of the Huamin Research Center is to develop and disseminate knowledge through research and exchange that promotes professional development of nonprofit organizations and strengthens individual, family, and community well-being in China. The director of Huamin Research Center, Dr. Chien-Chung Huang actively facilitates the collaboration and exchange between nonprofit sectors and social work in the US and in China. By writing and publishing a series of research reports and operation manuals related to public services and social welfare, he dedicates to the development of nonprofit organization and social work in China, and trains both China's and international next generation of leaders in the nonprofit sector and social work areas.

The following is a brief summary of Dr. Rida Ga's visiting experiences interviewed by Di Sun from Huamin Research Center.

a. Why did you choose to be a visiting scholar at Rutgers University?

I went to Huamin Research Center by chance. My friends introduced it to me and I also searched information online. Rutgers University has a high rank, and long history and cultural heritage, which I indeed felt after I arrived. I have visited UC Berkeley before, but did not have a chance to study in the east coast. Rutgers University ranks about thirty online and the school of social work was established very early. As I know, social work training class in the school of social work at Rutgers University was launched very early as well. As we have same amount of funds for our visit, we should try to find the best school. My friends introduced Rutgers to me. Huamin Research Center does comparative research of China and the US. Because I only have a short time of visit, if I choose a US national research topic, the visit may not help me a lot during my half-year visit. The advantage of Huamin Research Center is that I can conduct comparative research between China and the US and understand an issue from both China's perspective and the US academic perspective. I think this comparative research is the most inspiring and provides new thoughts to me during my visit.

b. Please tell us about your research status prior to your visit at Rutgers

I have two research focuses in China. The first one is social research methodology. I have published a book about it, entitled *qualitative and quantitative researches: comparison and dispute*. The other research focus is population sociology. Beijing Municipal Party School is also the population research institute and population development center in Beijing. It has done many researches on population in Beijing. Many topics focus on migrant population in Beijing, related social issues, the model of governance and service for migrants, and the methods to adjust the size of

migrant population. I did not have lots of knowledge accumulation and in-depth research experiences about elderly care before. After I came to Rutgers, by Dr. Huang's recommendation, I took the *Aging and Gerontological Services* class, which focuses on aging, elderly care, transportation issues of elderly, and emergency assistance, which fit my research interests very well.

c. How is your study and research process at Rutgers now?

I brought a research topic to Rutgers, which is the comparative study of pension and social service system for elderly between the US and China. Under the instruction of Dr. Huang, I narrowed this topic and decided to use *the role of NGO's participation in elderly care – a comparative study between China and the US* as the title. We formed a research team on this topic at Rutgers. Some members of the team dedicate to the research about NGO's participation in China. Some members do research about NGO in the US. Through comparison, it would help to improve pension system in China. We will hold discussion about this topic and will definitely be inspired from this process. At Rutgers, it is easier to access to literatures through making full use of information resources from school and center and electronic materials from library. Dr. Huang also led us to conduct field research. We visited the senior center of Highland Park Borough and had discussions with mayor and councilor. Through discussions, we established some new connections, which facilitated the collection of materials. We are working on this topic and expect to complete it by the end of this semester. After I come back to China, it will be a great help to both my teaching and researching. The aging issue is serious in China. As the people born in 1950s and 1960s are about to retire and the family planning policy led to fewer children in family, the family function of supporting elderly is greatly weakened. Therefore the government and social organizations should collaborate to improve the capacity to support elderly. As our students are leaders and cadres in China, our lecture may help with dealing this issue. There are many successful experiences in the US. The US has a very comprehensive legal system. Back to 1930s, US government enacted the Social Security Act. The Older American's Act enacted in 1960s has relatively complete administrative system for elderly care from federal government to local governments. In addition, a large number of NGOs and volunteers participate in elderly services. The comprehensive system is worthy our study about future development in China. I mainly want to discuss the trend of elderly care and answer a series of questions, including: what are the proportions of the government and NGOs in elderly care? How much should they devote to it? How NGOs collaborate with government? Should the elderly be supported by government, NGOs, or agencies? All above have profound significance to the elderly care system in China.

d. Please talk about your experiences and feelings at Huamin Research Center

I have participated in various researches and activities at Huamin Research Center. I follow the normal working hours on weekdays and have many communications with other visiting scholars, teachers, and students at center, which have inspired me. Everyday conversations with colleagues also provide me deeper understanding of the US and academic insights. The most important thing is research. Doing research with Dr. Huang and group discussion with research team members make this topic clearer and more focused to me, and help me to understand it more deeply. Center also provided me many conveniences to conduct research on elderly care. In the research team that Dr. Huang built up, some people are good at English and some people are good at collecting China's literatures. We discussed together and conducted literatures review, which provided great supports to my research. Dr. Huang helped me to improve in theory perspective as well. The research experience at center means a lot to my future research.

- e. Please tell us about the influences of this visit experience at Rutgers and Huamin Research Center on you.

My visit at Rutgers and Huamin Research Center is a happy and earning time in my life. Every day goes very quickly here. The biggest impact is that it helps to improve my research ability. It provides me an international perspective. I can conduct international comparative analysis in my future research and analyze China's problems with frontier knowledge and perspective. I also selected English class, and I think my English has been significantly improved from this half-year visit. At the beginning, I was only able to understand twenty percent of spoken English. Now, I can understand fifty to seventy percent. Also, I can gradually adapt to everyday communications. The improvement of English is a great help to my research now and will help more in the future. The friendships with Dr. Huang, visiting scholars from China, Master students, and PhD students are also a great fortune in my life. In the future, I can always communicate with them to consult the US issues. It is very convenient. I also built close friendship with the councilor of Highland Park Borough, who is also my landlady, and other teachers in the school of social work. We will collaborate and hold some training programs together in the future.

- f. Please tell us your plans and ideas after the visit.

I would like to continue work on the research topic Dr. Huang selected and continue my in-depth discussion with Dr. Huang and other research team members. I can write more articles in NGO area and conduct comparative research on legal system and government's role in promoting NGOs. *Frontline*, a China's journal, asked me to write a paper about elderly care in the US. If our paper can influence the academic and political changes in China, the visit would be very meaningful. In China, aging would always be a problem, which cannot be solved in one or two years. It is a big pressure on the government. Academia should offer some ideas about how to deal with the problem of aging.

- g. Do you have any expectations for Huamin Research Center?

I hope the Huamin Research Center would continue to keep in contact with visiting scholars from China. We can be invited to some important academic activities. I also expect to work together with center to hold research conference, write academic articles on topics that are studied in both the US and China, and share our research outcomes. Because academic research is a long-term process, which is not short, easy, or fast, keeping and expanding the benefits from this visit are particularly important. Huamin Research Center has its unique advantage, which is its focus on key research topics in China's context. I hope Huamin Research Center can continue to use this unique advantage and play a role as a link for China and the US's cultural and academic exchange.



Dr. Rida Ga, at the Old Queens Campus, which was built in 1809



Dr. Rida Ga, at College Ave Campus, Rutgers



Dr. Rida Ga, at College Ave Campus, Rutgers



Dr. Rida Ga and Dr. Jeff Wang, director of Rutgers China Office



(Left to right): Dr. Rida Ga; Elsie Foster-Dublin, councilor of Highland Park; Dr. Xiaoxia Xie, visiting scholar at Huamin Research Center; Gayle Brill Mittler, mayor of Highland Park; and Dr. Chien-Chung Huang, director of Huamin Research Center

