

**An Interview with Silai Yi,  
A Graduate and Visiting Scholar at Huamin Research Center, Rutgers University**

Shuang Lu and Jiaqi Guo, Huamin Research Center

Silai Yi, originally from Changsha, Hunan Province in China, earned her bachelor's degree in management from the Capital University of Economics and Business, China, in 2008. She received her master's degrees in Nonprofit Management from Northeastern University in Boston in 2012 and from the School of Social Work in the Rutgers University in 2014. In 2007, she served as a member of the preparatory group for the establishment of the Huamin Charity Foundation in Beijing, China. Silai became the Assistant Director of the Research Center at the Huamin Charity Foundation in 2008. During her studies in the United States, Silai volunteered with organizations such as Boston Cares, a nonprofit organization that facilitates volunteer service projects. In 2013, she was an intern and a research assistant at the Huamin Research Center, conducting comparative research on social welfare and foundations between the United States and China. At the same time, she served as the North American liaison for the Huamin Charity Foundation. Silai returned to China in July, 2014, and visited the Huamin Research Center at Rutgers University in November 2014. At present, she is the Assistant Chairperson of the Huamin Charity Foundation and assists with funding and management of research programs.

Since the social work system in the United States is well-established, Silai set a goal to understand the comprehensive social work system and nonprofit organization management in the United States. Silai's interest in social work derives from her family background and her personality of enjoying communication with and helping others. The first university she enrolled in was the Northeastern University. She learned the Western system and methods of nonprofit organization management while there. Then she studied the concepts and approaches of social work and its application in nonprofit management at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

During her time at Northeastern University, the adjustment to a new environment in the United States was hard. Silai felt that she did not fully comprehend the professional knowledge taught in the classroom. In addition, though various exchange programs and volunteer activities in Boston, Silai sought further opportunities for professional growth, particularly in field experiences. On her visit to Rutgers University in 2011, she was impressed by the pleasant university environment, the integrated setting of university and town, and diverse student activities. Moreover, she was further impressed by the wide range of courses and field placements that are offered. The balance of academic research and professional field placement in the School of Social Work was particularly attractive to her. As a result, she chose to come to Rutgers University for further study.

During her first year at Rutgers, Silai worked as an intern at the Center for Leadership and Management and as an outreach volunteer at the Huamin Research Center. There were various international exchange programs, such as international conferences, scholar exchange project, and training programs for senior nonprofit organization directors and managers from China.

These programs offered opportunity for Silai to connect theories she learned in class with practice in the real world.

Silai was an intern at the Huamin Research Center from 2013 to 2014. During that time, she was involved in research projects, including: the comparison of charitable trusts between China and the U.S., domestic violence research in the United States, the comparison of social work education between the United States and China, and the evaluation of the College Student Employment Program in China. She also helped with translation projects, grant proposals, and newsletters. In addition, she attended the East-West Forum in Hawaii, the International Symposium on Labor Security and Social Welfare, and the 2013 American Association for Chinese Studies Annual Conference. For her, the Huamin Research Center is a large, warm family. Though the tasks were heavy, the close group dynamics and supportive work settings supported her greatly. Silai applies her experience accumulated in field placement to her practice in China. For example, when Beijing Kuaifoul Corporation initiated the Children University program, she shared nonprofit organization management and strategic planning knowledge and skills that she learned from Professor Bill Waldman's class with Kuaifoul team members.

The internship at the Huamin Research Center has had a huge impact on Silai. She visited different types of nonprofit organizations and learned their management and culture first hand. She said, "The things I've learned are practical and make me understand the importance of social work as a profession." The exchange programs with China, meanwhile, opened Silai's eyes to the great change and support brought by social work and philanthropy. She also noticed there was a great need for social work and philanthropy in modern society. This experience strengthens her determination of fulfilling her dreams of social work and philanthropy.

Of course, there are challenges when applying knowledge into practice context. "I think the most difficult part is the transition from knowledge into practice. In the United States, I acquired empirical findings from research. When I went back to China, I find that it is hard to apply my knowledge into work. Sometimes, research settings and practices are not exactly the same in China. And sometimes the context in China is different and needs to be handled differently, that is, it requires adjustment in accordance with actual situation and environment. Taking volunteer activities as an example, I would like to say, compared to activities at Rutgers, some activities in China are really poorly organized. I want to promote the development of volunteering with my knowledge learned in the United States."

After graduation, Silai returned to China and started to work at the Huamin Foundation. She believes the knowledge that she learned in class can be the foundation for practice in the real world. More importantly, she helps others with the dedication and passion she has learned from her co-workers in the field placement. "Helping others benefits me as well, brings me lasting happiness. It is a great benefit for my life."

"I really love philanthropy and have dreamed of being a philanthropist since I was young. I will work hard to achieve my dream," Silai said. Silai aims to establish a modern philanthropy with Chinese characteristics. As the first step, she starts to gain first-hand experience from working at China's nonprofit organizations. As the Assistant to Chairperson at the Huamin Foundation, Silai

also attends domestic and international conferences and workshops for idea exchange and learning of systematic characteristics of modern philanthropy.

Given that the Huamin Research Center has established close relationships with Chinese and U.S. universities that are well-known for their research on philanthropy and nonprofit sector, Silai thinks that the center indeed plays an important role in promoting the communication of the nonprofit sector in the United States and China. For the future direction of the center, she has three suggestions. First, the center can hold more exchange programs with China, such as international conferences and scholar visits, which will strengthen the relationship of philanthropy and the nonprofit sector in the United States and China. Second, the center can offer more opportunity for international students to study in the United States. This way, they can make a valuable contribution to their own nations as well as the world by studying an advanced social work framework and management techniques. At the same time, the center should encourage U.S. students to study in China, therefore promoting the two-way exchange. Last but not least, Silai points out that the center has a unique advantage of analyzing social problems in China from American perspectives: “I expect more outstanding research and distinctive activities out of the center’s initiatives, and anticipate center’s growing global influence.”



Silai Yi (right fifth) and colleague at Huamin Research Center, birthday party, January 2013



Silai Yi, Shuang Lu, and migrant children at Blue Sky Elementary School, Beijing, China, June 2013



Silai Yi at Global Philanthropists Circle, April 2014



Graduation Ceremony at Rutgers University, Silai Yi with father (Dr. Dezhi Lu, Chairperson of Huamin Charity Foundation) and mother (Xianghong Yi), June 2014.



Graduation Ceremony at Rutgers University  
From left to right: Dr. Dezhi Lu, Professor Ronald Quincy,  
Silai Yi, Chancellor Richard Edwards, and Xianghong Yi, June 2014.